

Thesis Title:

Bravery and Participation: centring young adult voices to redesign relationships and sex education

Amy Hodson

Masters of Research

The Glasgow School of Art

The Innovation School

December 2023

Content Notice: This thesis contains discussions of sexual harassment and assault. The intent is not to cause harm or distress but to explore and analyse the reality of lived experiences as part of this research. Reader discretion is advised. If you believe that you might be adversely affected by such content, you may choose to skip sections that you find uncomfortable or refrain from reading it altogether. Please prioritise your emotional well-being at all times.

Abstract.

The age at which many young people enter Higher Education (HE) is significant in exploring sexual identities, behaviours, and practices. High proportions of young adults in HE are reporting that they are left feeling unprepared for the reality of sex and relationships. Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) policy continues to be updated but often excludes the perspectives of the young people that it impacts the most.

This research aims to centre young adult voices to reimagine RSE. By adopting participatory methods to work with young adults who are currently studying in or about to begin studying in HE, I investigate how they feel about their experiences of RSE. Together, they identify specific weaknesses, inequalities, and opportunities, and further engage with key educators and university welfare staff to propose actions to prompt the development of future educational practices and pedagogy.

Due to the ethically complex nature of the subject, a key focus of this research is to create brave spaces to support young people in authentically sharing experiences. The study aims to facilitate research through participatory design as a social innovation process. Creative practice was utilised to engage young people, and participatory design methods empowered participants to propose preferable futures informed by a critique of their collective experiences.

Findings identified that participatory design approaches can help facilitate connective spaces, mediate power dynamics, and ease stigma and discomfort, which in turn assists in critique and productive debate, challenging existing norms and actively confronting oppression. This work advocates for participatory design to facilitate brave spaces for research, which is particularly valuable in research around relationships and sex, and may have value in other ethically complex fields.

It actively proposes action driven by young adults to improve RSE and outlines opportunities for educators to enact change in recommendations for more frequent, thorough, and normalised RSE, more inclusive RSE, and most significantly, the use of participatory approaches in RSE, which can engage and empower students as well as contributing to inclusion and normalisation. Furthermore, it identifies the potential benefit of creating brave spaces in RSE where young adults can feel empowered, address social norms and oppressions, and develop their critical thinking skills.

Acknowledgements

I'd like to express my sincere appreciation to my supervisors, Dr Marianne McAra and Sneha Raman, who have guided and supported me through this process. Your advice and patience have been invaluable.

Matt, thank you for your encouragement, and for helping me believe I could do this in my moments of doubt. I'm grateful for your understanding and patience with the kids whilst I finished writing.

Thank you to my family for their support, with a special mention to Sally, not only for your encouragement as my sister, but also as a critical friend.

To my friends, thanks for sticking around during the thesis marathon. Fran, your enthusiasm as a fieldwork test subject was so valuable. Roxanne, the 'walks and talks' were treasured in the early parts of this project.

To my fellow students, thank you for sharing the highs and lows along the way.

Most significantly, I would like to thank the participants in the study, who generously contributed their time and demonstrated bravery in sharing their experiences and perspectives in this research.

Declaration

I, Amy Hodson, declare that this submission of full thesis for the degree of Master of Research meets the regulations as stated in the course handbook.

I declare that this submission is my own work and has not been submitted for any other academic award.

Amy Hodson

The Innovation School

The Glasgow School of Art

December 2023

Preface.

To begin this thesis, I start with a personal reflection on the experiences that brought me to this field of research. Including this information is an important factor in situating me, the researcher, within this study and acknowledging my positionality in relation to the research context. There is growing recognition of the importance of reflexively responding to positionality within design research (Öz and Timur, 2023) and that attending to positionality is particularly relevant to design research relating to health equity (Sutherland, 2023).

I found navigating the world as a young woman was difficult. I experienced an absence of safety, protection, and comprehensive education on my personal well-being. These experiences were enhanced by a profound sense of shame surrounding my developing body, sexual desires, and a lack of understanding of the agency I should have had over my own body. I have vivid memories of standing in the hallway of my family home, probably aged 9, whilst my mum made me practice screaming and self-defence techniques in case I was 'grabbed by a strange man' in the street. The regular harassment endured by my older sisters from strangers in our neighbourhood became an unfortunate norm. Stories of young women, including my friends, being forcibly pulled into vehicles by groups of men were frequent.

I grew up in the nineties, surrounded by sexualised images of young women in advertising and popular culture. Images of topless women made their way into my school classrooms, pasted onto many of the boys' technology folders. These experiences shaped my perception of what it meant to transition into womanhood. Teen films, such as *American Pie* (1999), *Coyote Ugly* (2000) and *Cruel Intentions* (1999), were my favourites, heightening my awareness of sexuality and my own sexual feelings. However, this awareness was distorted by the framing of women's agency in culture at this time.

By the time I was 19, my life had been marked by a series of distressing experiences that further underscored the challenges faced by young women in navigating sexual landscapes. I experienced years of bullying targeted at my body. I grappled with the complexities of love, desire, and heartbreak amidst moral ambiguity. Street harassment had become a reality in my daily life, with experiences of stalking, unwelcome advances and derogatory comments shadowing my sense of safety and dignity. A 'friend' even suggested I gave him oral sex as a reward for shielding me from some of this persistent street

harassment, a testament to the warped power dynamics that permeate societal interactions between young people.

Sexual assault was pervasive. Strangers violated my personal boundaries and touched my body without consent, with crowded bars as an opportune setting for these unwelcome advances. On more than one occasion, friends disregarded my autonomy, waking me with uninvited touching. The burden of sexual coercion led me to engage in acts that contradicted my own comfort and desire in order to please others. Similar experiences were commonplace among my friends and peers. I supported a close friend navigating a traumatising court case after enduring years of sexual abuse, only to face a justice system that failed to hold the abuser accountable.

I shared a brief encounter with a television actor whilst underage in a bar, resulting in persistent calls at 3 am most weekends, begging me to engage in sexual activities with him. I fell victim to online grooming, which left me struggling with an overwhelming sense of violation. Upon reporting it to the police, the officer I had turned to for support began sending me unsolicited texts filled with explicit and inappropriate content, fixating on my lip piercing as a 'turn-on' and offering me money to go on a date with him. I changed my phone number. These experiences demonstrate the gendered power imbalances and objectification that young women often face, particularly in their interactions with those in positions of influence. This dynamic became a formative influence during my adolescence.

Still, in navigating my own personal traumas, I feel empathy and compassion towards the individuals who perpetrated these acts of harm. They have also been let down by a system that has failed to provide sufficient education, protection, or the centring of values of respect and consent. We all existed within the same society that perpetuated misogynistic, patriarchal, and sexist norms. These harmful norms foster cultures of silence, invisibility, and ignorance, where educational experiences can neglect and ignore the crucial teachings necessary for navigating healthy, consensual relationships.

On entering my career, teaching in further education, it became evident that young people's experiences with relationships and sex education hadn't improved. The expansion of social media and the availability of online porn appeared to only exacerbate these problems. Young people were experiencing online violence before research or policy changes could (or would) catch up. While it was beyond my professional role, many students sought my

support for issues connected to their challenging experiences with relationships and sexual health. Many sought to create change by taking on independent art projects to explore topics like navigating the use of pornography, challenging the binaries of gender, contesting expectations surrounding body image, celebrating female sexual empowerment, and discussing issues surrounding consent. I learned of the many ways that individuals can use creative practice to tell stories of their experiences and connect with others as a therapeutic way of making sense of the situation.

Nevertheless, these combined experiences further highlighted the urgent need to shift to a comprehensive and empowering approach to sex education. An approach that fosters safety and addresses the multifaceted, ever-shifting challenges young people face. The prevailing silence and stigma surrounding these issues perpetuate a cycle of victimisation, failing to reach those who engage in harmful actions. The UK needs an approach to progress towards a society in which everyone can navigate their sexual lives with agency, confidence, and dignity.

I am a creative practitioner, an educator and now also a mother. Working in art and design education and practice has taught me that nothing is inevitable. There are always opportunities and possibilities to make changes. I now feel compelled to take action in response to my reflections on personal experiences and young people's calls for a more inclusive and relevant education. Due also to an overwhelming desire to contribute to a better future for my children, I have embarked on this research, aiming to further understand the failures of current Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) approaches and advocate for a comprehensive framework that meets the needs of today's youth.

These experiences have made me an advocate for comprehensive RSE and fuelled this research to promote healthy relationships and dismantle oppressive and damaging societal norms. I hope my research will be a meaningful inquiry that can contribute to developing impactful education, support systems and advocate for systemic change. I am committed to equipping future generations with the knowledge, skills, and support necessary to navigate the complexities of relationships in our ever-evolving world.

I'd like the reader to experience my thesis with empathy, criticality and care. I hope it can be useful to researchers, educators and policymakers in guiding them to create brave spaces for both RSE research and teaching.

Contents.

3	Abstract
6	Preface
12	List of Figures
15	List of Tables
16	Glossary of Key Terms
17	Chapter 1: Introduction
17	1.1 Introducing the Broader Landscape of RSE in England
19	1.2 Brave Spaces
19	1.3 Research Questions, Aims and Objectives
20	1.4 Overview of the Research Design
20	1.5 Thesis Structure
22	Chapter 2: Scope of Context
22	2.1 Introduction
24	2.2 Foregrounding Youth Voice in RSE Research
25	2.3 Participatory Approaches in RSE Research
27	2.4 Creative Approaches in RSE Research
30	2.5 Making and Handling Artefacts in RSE Research
34	2.6 Participatory Design and Artefact-based Approaches Beyond RSE Research
35	2.7 Summary
37	Chapter 3: Methodology
37	3.1 Introduction
39	3.2 Reflexivity
39	3.3 My Epistemological and Theoretical Perspective
39	3.3.1 Social Constructivism
40	3.3.2 Feminism and Participatory Action Research
40	3.4 Methods
40	3.4.1 Method 1: Workshops
44	3.4.2 Method 2: Focus Groups
44	3.5 Participant Sample and Recruitment
45	3.6 Modes of Analysis

47	3.7 Ethics
49	3.8 Summary
50	Chapter 4: Fieldwork
50	4.1 Introduction
52	4.2 Scoping
52	4.3 Introducing the Participants
53	4.4 Workshop 1
55	4.4.1 Activity 1: Establishing Participation Principles
56	4.4.2 Activity 2: Mind-mapping to Critique
61	4.4.3 Activity 3: Critiquing RSE Teaching Resources
67	4.4.4 Activity 4: The Design Challenge
73	4.5 Workshop 2
76	4.5.1 Activity 5: Proposing Actions to Bridge the Present and Preferred Future
79	4.6 Focus Group to Validate Findings with Young Adults
81	4.7 Feedback Conversations with Expert Stakeholders and Beneficiaries
92	4.8 Summary
93	Chapter 5: Analysis
93	5.1 Introduction
93	5.2 Process of Analysis
100	5.3 Emerging themes
100	5.3.1 Brave Spaces
102	5.3.2 Respecting Differences to Foster Connections
103	5.3.3 The Impact of Participation: Learning, Empowerment and Activation
103	5.4 Emerging RSE Themes
104	5.4.1 More RSE
106	5.4.2 Inclusive RSE
108	5.4.3 Participatory RSE
110	5.5 Framing the findings
111	5.6 Summary
113	Chapter 6 Discussion:
113	6.1 Introduction
113	6.2 Insights for Education: Schools and Universities

113	6.2.1 More RSE (More Frequent. More Thorough. More Visible)
114	6.2.2 Inclusive RSE (LGBTQIA+ inclusion. Gender Equalities)
114	6.2.3 Participatory RSE (Curriculum Development. Active Participation in Sessions)
115	6.2.4 More Guidance and Training for Educators
115	6.3 Insights for Research
118	6.4 Summary
119	Chapter 7: Conclusion
119	7.1 Introduction
119	7.2 Summary of the Findings
121	7.3 Key Reflections: on personal practice and my role as the researcher
122	7.4 Limitations and Constraints
125	7.5 Future Research
126	7.6 Closing Summary
127	References
134	Appendices
135	Appendix A: Example Consent & Participant Information Forms
140	Appendix B: Rationale for Recruitment Criteria
141	Appendix C: Ethical Approval Process
142	Appendix D : Workshop Resources
163	Appendix E: Visual Outcomes from Workshops
191	Appendix F: Miro Boards for Sharing, Discussing & Identifying Actions
210	Appendix G: Booklet for RSE Educators
211	Appendix H: Testimonial from Split Banana

List of Figures

- 20 Figure 1. Diagram illustrating three phases of the research process
- 23 Figure 2. Diagram to show the fields of research for projects that sought to foreground youth voices and apply creative methods to explore experiences and perspectives on sex and relationships
- 28 Figure 3. Renold, E. 2018. *Runway of disrespect*. [Marker Pens on Paper]. ‘Feel what I feel’: making da(r)ta with teen girls for creative activism on how sexual violence matters.
- 29 Figure 4. Senior & Chenhall 2017. *Body Map from Our Lives Workshop*. [Pen on Paper]. ‘Our Lives’ and ‘Life Happens’, from stigma to empathy in young people’s depictions of sexual health and relationships.
- 31 Figure 5. Renold, E. 2018. *Shame Chain*. [Pen on Paper]. ‘Feel what I feel’: making da(r)ta with teen girls for creative activism on how sexual violence matters.
- 32 Figure 6. Renold, E. 2018. *Graffiti Ruler*. [Marker Pens on Plastic]. ‘Feel what I feel’: making da(r)ta with teen girls for creative activism on how sexual violence matters.
- 32 Figure 7. Renold, E. 2018. *Ruler Skirt*. [Marker Pens on Plastic]. ‘Feel what I feel’: making da(r)ta with teen girls for creative activism on how sexual violence matters.
- 33 Figure 8. Renold, E. 2018. *heart activism*. [Pen on Card]. ‘Feel what I feel’: making da(r)ta with teen girls for creative activism on how sexual violence matters.
- 38 Figure 9. Visual summary of research participants within scoping and fieldwork
- 51 Figure 10. Diagram showing how Phase 2 Workshops fed into Phase 3 Validation, and how they collectively contributed to the insights
- 54 Figure 11. Workshop 1 Room Layout for introduction and writing participation principles.
- 55 Figure 12. Photograph showing Workshop 1 materials table and available materials
- 56 Figure 13. Photograph of Students Co-Written Participation Principles
- 57 Figure 14. Workshop 1 Room Layout for mind mapping activity
- 58 Figure 15. Image showing a selection of participant-sourced artefacts introduced during the mind mapping and associated participant testimonies

- 59 Figure 16. Photograph of the Mind Map including some of the participants' artefacts, post-its and the who, what, where, and how prompts.
- 62 Figure 17. Image to show questions outlined on each proforma used to critique the teaching resources
- 63 Figure 18. Workshop 1 Room Layout for critiquing case studies and the design challenge
- 64 Figure 19: Photograph of a partly completed dot-to-dot, which is part of the Bish Guide to Genitals, one of the learning resources chosen for critique.
- 67 Figure 20. Photograph of the notes from the end of morning reflection showing emerging themes and patterns from young adults experiences and critiques
- 68 Figure 21. The speculative design brief, used to initiate the Fantasy Phase of the future workshop, and begin the participatory design of preferred RSE futures
- 69 Figure 22: Photograph showing the Map of the Proposed 'Sexy Haunted House', including whole rooms for sexuality, gender, harassment and violence, genitals, intimacy, consent, relationships, STIs and contraception , a vulva entrance and penis slide
- 70 Figure 23: Photograph showing some of the group visualisations of the sexy haunted house including STI character actors who'd act as hosts and answer your questions
- 71 Figure 24: Photograph of idea generation in progress, further focusing on ideas surrounding increasing education about relationships
- 72 Figure 25. Photograph showing the working progress of their immersive theatre and discussion experience
- 72 Figure 26. Photographs to visualise a selection of the scenarios presented for discussion in the immersive theatre experience.
- 74 Figure 27. Photograph of the workshop space, with tables laid out to bridge the past and present with the future designs.
- 75 Figure 28. Workshop 2 Room Layout to bridge the past and present with the preferred futures.
- 80 Figure 29: Validation Focus Group Presentation Slides, showing emerging themes after the first round of reflexive thematic analysis
- 83 Figure 31: Overview of the Miro Board used during the feedback conversations to present young adults' preferences and recommendations for the development of RSE

- 84 Figure 31A: Zooming in on Figure 31 to see details of the Miro board used during the feedback conversations to present young adults' preferences and recommendations for the development of RSE – 'More RSE'
- 85 Figure 31B: Zooming in on Figure 31 to see details of the Miro Board used during the feedback conversations to present young adults' preferences and recommendations for the development of RSE – 'More Inclusive RSE'
- 86 Figure 31C: Zooming in on Figure 31 to see details of the Miro board used during the feedback conversations to present young adults' preferences and recommendations for the development of RSE – 'Participatory RSE'
- 87 Figure 31D: Zooming in on Figure 31 to see details of the Miro board used during the feedback conversations to present young adults' preferences and recommendations for the development of RSE – 'Brave Spaces'
- 91 Figure 32. Overview of the Miro board, shared during the feedback conversations, showing Matilda's process of proposing action in response to young adults' preferences for improving RSE
- 94 Figure 33. Diagram to demonstrate the loops of analysis, both during workshops with young adults, independent analysis outside the workshops and through the validation focus group and feedback conversations.
- 95 Figure 34. Mapping emerging themes and codes surrounding RSE and their overlaps
- 96 Figure 35. Mapping emerging themes and codes surrounding participatory design workshops and brave spaces
- 99 Figure 36. Diagram of Emerging Themes, taken from the Miro Board Presented to Key Stakeholders
- 106 Figure 37. One of Patty's Artefacts, a sheet of paper that centrally states, 'Heterosexual couples and male pleasure' and the associated testimony
- 124 Figure 38. Diagram showing participant engagement across the workshops and validation focus group.

List of Tables

- 42-43 Table 1. Planning and Rationale of Workshop Activities
- 46 Table 2. Outlining the Process of Reflexive Thematic Analysis
- 47 Table 3: An example of the table used to analyse data
- 52 Table 4: Young Adult Participants Pseudonyms and Pronouns
- 97 Table 5. Mirroring between the critiques of RSE experiences and the experiences of participating in the workshops, focussing on opportunities for discussion
- 97 Table 6. Mirroring between the critiques of RSE experiences and the experiences of participating in the workshops, which identified participation as the enabler

Glossary of Key Terms

Cisgender – denoting or relating to a person whose gender identity corresponds with the sex registered for them at birth; not transgender.

DfE – Department for Education

FE – Further Education

HE – Higher Education

HEPI – Higher Education Policy Institute

Heteronormative – denoting or relating to a world view that promotes heterosexuality as the normal or preferred sexual orientation

LGBTQIA+ - an abbreviation for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, asexual, and more.

PAR – Participatory Action Research

PD – Participatory Design

RSE – Relationships and Sex Education

RTA – Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Chapter 1: Introduction

I will begin by introducing the context for this enquiry before moving on to my research questions, aims and objectives. This is followed by an overview of the research, which outlines the structure of the fieldwork, and concludes with an outline of the structure of the thesis itself.

This research explores how participatory design (PD) can create brave and connective spaces for young adults to reshape relationships and sex education (RSE). The findings reveal that PD in fostering brave spaces, can help to identify gaps and inequalities in current RSE, indicating a need for more frequent, visible, inclusive and participatory approaches. The project focusses on education in England and fieldwork took place within a specialist arts institution. The reason for selecting this context for the research is based on my previous experience as a design educator in England and valuing the potential of creative activities to facilitate critical dialogue. This thesis aims to contribute to the development of RSE, emphasising the imperative for braver approaches, and addressing wider implications for practice and policy in the field.

1.1 Introducing the Broader Landscape of RSE in England

The role of RSE is to keep people safe and to support mental and physical well-being, not just in school but throughout their lives. Sex and sexuality are highly individual and complex human factors; as such, the discourse surrounding them is constantly in flux. Society has experienced notable shifts in sexual culture and behaviours over the past 25 years, largely in response to growing digital cultures (Massey et al 2021). The National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles (Johnson, 2021; Macdowall et al., 2005; Wellings et al., 1995) and Young People's RSE Polls (Sex Education Forum 2022, 2023) have found that young people in the UK are consistently reporting feeling let down by their RSE experiences. Policy in England continues to be updated but often excludes the perspectives of the young people whom it impacts the most, resulting in outdated content (Pound et al., 2016).

The development of RSE policies requires an exercise of power by those in authority, where both policymakers and educators must determine what is taught, how it is taught, and the boundaries of acceptable knowledge in this context. These regulations can have a significant impact on the lives of young people, shaping their experiences and perspectives.

In 2019, the Department for Education (DfE) in England published guidance on Statutory RSE, outlining legal duties that schools must comply with and expectations for delivery from September 2020. The current DfE guidance document (2019) outlines that the curriculum should be 'in line with pupil need, informed by pupil voice and participation in curriculum development and in response to issues as they arise in the school and wider community' (p. 40). There is, however, a great deal of flexibility in this guidance. It states schools should 'tailor their curriculum to meet the needs of their pupils' (2020: 40) and 'retain freedom to determine an age-appropriate, developmental curriculum which meets the needs of young people' (2020: 41). Whilst a degree of flexibility gives schools agency to react appropriately to specific community and public health issues (such as prevalence of specific STIs), such flexibility means that decisions over much of the content, its delivery and appropriateness is being made by individual schools, leading to variation and inconsistency across provisions. LGBTQIA+ youth, in particular, are not currently experiencing inclusive or comprehensive RSE (O'Farrell et al. 2021), and the DfE found that LGB young people were significantly more likely to say that their school's RSE was 'not at all useful' (DfE, 2021).

The age at which many young people enter Higher Education (HE) is significant, as at 18 years old, young adults tend to be exploring their sexual identities. However, in the UK, high proportions of young adults in HE report that they are left unprepared for the reality of sex and relationships (Natzler & Evans 2021). This research focuses on current or prospective HE students, advocating for democratic research to ensure individuals influence their communities. Foucault's view on the interplay of power and knowledge (1981) underscores this divide between those in authority and the people impacted by these policies, which uphold a set of norms, values, and expectations which don't necessarily align with the perspectives of young adults.

This inquiry employs research through design (Frayling, 1993) and PD as a democratic social innovation process (Bannon & Ehn, 2013; Björgvinsson et al., 2010). Creative practices, including PD activities, enabled young people to envision desirable futures in response to critique of their experiences. Together, they identified commonalities and opportunities for RSE development. Subsequently, responsive actions were proposed in collaboration with key stakeholders and beneficiaries to enhance educational practices and pedagogy. Due to the ethically complex nature of the subject, I identified a need to create

brave spaces (Arao & Clemens, 2013) to support participants in making courageous contributions.

1.2 Brave Spaces

There is a need to push beyond 'safe spaces' in order to foster 'brave spaces' within this field of research. In this inquiry, I draw on the work of Brian Arao and Kristi Clemens (2013) to theoretically underpin conditions of 'brave spaces', to allow for risk, difficulty, and controversy, which are incompatible with definitions of safety. While a safe space emphasises emotional safety and support, a brave space encourages intellectual and emotional growth through courageous dialogue and engagement with challenging topics. Brave spaces foster open, honest participation, including risk-taking, addressing oppression, and confronting challenging themes. Recognising courage over the 'illusion of safety' helps us achieve learning goals and authentically engage in genuine dialogue on challenging topics (Arao and Clemens, 2013: 142).

1.3 Research question, aims and objectives

The overarching aim of this research was to use PD methods to gain an understanding of young adults' perspectives on their RSE experiences, and to identify opportunities for change. The research questions guiding this inquiry underwent a process of iteration based on input and collaboration with participants.

RQ: How can young adults participate in the redesign of relationships and sex education?

Sub Q1: How can participatory design approaches foster brave spaces for young adults to reimagine and shape relationships and sex education?

Sub Q2: What are the implications for practice and policy surrounding the future of relationships and sex education?

The objectives of the research are:

i) Test and evaluate ways to foster brave spaces for young people, drawing on participatory design approaches.

- ii) Develop experiential insights into young adults’ experiences of RSE and preferred futures.

- iii) Engage with expert stakeholders to identify challenges in RSE delivery and opportunities for change in practice and policy.

1.4 Overview of the Research Design

This research utilises a Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodology, positioning young participants as co-researchers to inform and drive the research direction and outputs. The research took place over a two-year period between January 2022 and December 2023 in three phases:

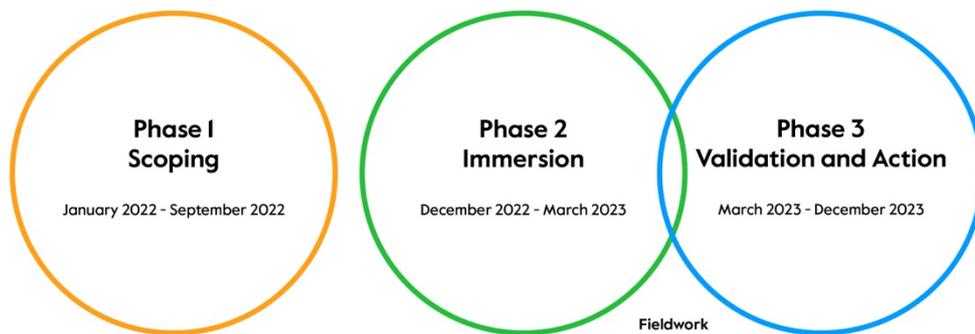


Figure 1. Diagram illustrating three phases of the research process

The scoping phase (Figure 1) aimed to identify a suitable context for the fieldwork. Scoping the research context revealed that amidst the diverse research opportunities, the voices and perspectives of young adults should be central in the research, recognising their unique expertise as crucial in addressing pertinent issues within RSE.

1.5 Thesis Structure

This thesis comprises seven chapters documenting the research process:

Chapter 2: "Scope of Context" explores key debates in RSE and Sexual Health literature, emphasising youth voice, adopting a youth-centred approach, the value of creativity, and making and handling artefacts.

Chapter 3: "Methodology" outlines the Social Constructivism theoretical position and Feminist Participatory Action Research methodology, detailing research methods, modes of analysis, and ethical considerations.

Chapter 4: "Fieldwork" provides an overview of engagement with young people, including perspectives from sex educators and university welfare workers.

Chapter 5: "Analysis" presents and discusses the process of analysis and unpacks key findings

Chapter 6: "Discussion" discusses key insights and makes connections with existing literature

Chapter 7: "Conclusion" closes the research with a summary of findings, a critique of the study's limitations, a reflection on my role as a researcher and identifies opportunities for future research.

Chapter 2: Scope of Context

2.1 Introduction

My research questions ask how young adults can be empowered to redesign future sex education, exploring how participatory design approaches can foster brave spaces for young people's contributions and working to identify the potential impact of reimagining sex education with young people. When carrying out this scope of context, it became evident that RSE in the UK is an under-researched area, with the majority of studies positioned in the fields of Social Sciences, Education and Health (Figure 2).

I began by reflecting on studies outlined in my introduction (See Section 1.1), which highlighted the weakness of current RSE provisions in England alongside challenges in RSE research, which reflected a lack of young people's voices. As a contemporary social issue, I focused my search on papers from the past five years (since 2017) and focused on 7 key projects (Figure 2). I selected research that sought to foreground youth voices and apply creative methods to explore experiences and perspectives on sex and relationships with young people. I explored and evidenced the value of creative methods for engaging young people in RSE, as well as identified how processes of making and the resulting artefacts embodied participants' experiences and fostered authentic perspectives. I critique the limited inclusion of young people in RSE research, noting a disconnect between adult-centric agendas and youth voices and identifying a need for more participatory methods in RSE research. Additionally, I recognise a lack of diversity and heteronormativity in these examples.

Research which foreground young peoples voices and applies creative methods to explore perspectives on sex and relationships

Project: Can you design the perfect condom? 2022
Simon M Cook, Laura Grozdanovski, Gianni Renda, Devy Santoso, Robert Gorkin, Kate Senior

Project: 'Our Lives' and 'Life Happens', 2018
Kate Senior, Laura Grozdanovski, Richard D. Chenhall, Stephen Minton

Project: Making, Mapping and Mobilising in Merthyr, 2020
Emma Renold

Project: 'Understanding Sexual Consent, A Participatory Approach with Young People, 2019
Elsie Whittington

Project: 'The Trouble with Normal' 2018
Leanne Coll, Mary O'Sullivan, Eimear Enright

Project: Attitudes to sexting amongst post-primary pupils 2021
Leanne York, Alison MacKenzie, Noel Purdy

Project: Sex and History, 2017
Rebecca Langlands, Kate Fisher, Jen Grove, Alice Hoyle

Fields of the research projects

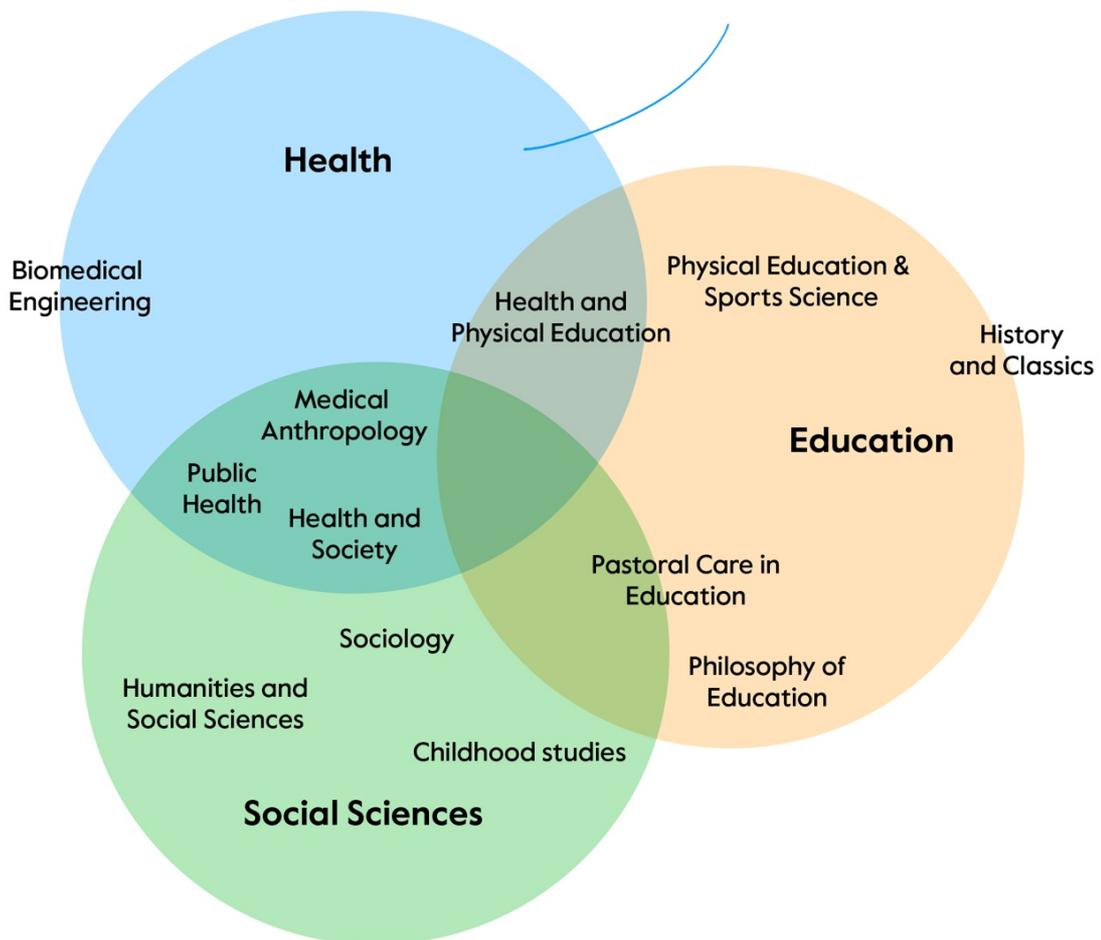


Figure 2. Diagram to show the fields of research for projects that sought to foreground youth voices and apply creative methods to explore experiences and perspectives on sex and relationships

2.2 Foregrounding Youth Voice in RSE Research

Although the field recognises the value of including young people in research relating to RSE, studies that actively engage ‘with’ students rather than ‘for’ them are limited (Allen, 2005, 2008, 2011; Coll, 2018; Scott et al., 2020; Whittington, 2019). There is little research that directly draws upon young peoples’ lived experiences, (Robinson, 2012; Hadfield & Haw 2001), influenced by ethical complexities (such as lengthy ethics applications, power imbalances and concerns over age-appropriateness), risks and barriers in participation (such as a potential negative impact on emotional well-being, and methodological challenges in engagement). To better understand the shortcomings of RSE in the UK and to develop more useful strategies for young people, there is a need to shift away from adult-centric agendas and prioritise the experiential insights of young people. Creating space for youth voice recognises participants’ agency and autonomy in sharing their perspectives and experiences (Woodgate et al., 2020).

Increasingly, research shows how young people have expressed a desire for education that acknowledges their social contexts and lived experiences, allowing them to actively participate in decision-making regarding what and how they learn (Allen, 2005). There is tension between the guidance written by adults and young people’s perception of what is important (Allen, 2008). For example, Coll (2018) discovered that discussions about sex education largely overlooked how young people’s lived experiences aligned or diverged from the content delivery.

There are limited examples that have supported young people to directly reflect on and share their own lived experiences. York (2021) and Whittington (2019), in trying to engage with young people in discussions about sexuality, found navigating ethical protocols hindered participant recruitment and participation. In examples that do engage with young people, it could be argued that some approaches are biased towards the researcher’s own respective understanding of sexual cultures. In projects such as ‘Our Lives’ and ‘Life Happens,’ hypothetical situations were used to create a sense of critical distance. However, distanced approaches were challenging for young people to connect to (Senior et al., 2017). The same was found in York et al. (2021), where a vignette entitled ‘Megan’s Story’ was used to prompt discussion about sexting, and was identified as being unrealistic. While hypothetical situations can be helpful in ethically complex fields to protect personal disclosure, the intentional creation of distancing can, arguably, hinder participants from fully connecting with the research, limiting the depth of engagement and degree to

which a young person may explore their own perspectives (Senior et al., 2017; York et al., 2021). Failure to connect with participants' real-world experiences highlights a disconnect in research, such as the use of unrealistic hypothetical situations that do not reflect young people's realities.

Through their study, York et al. (2021) also found that this disconnect exists within education, preventing young people from openly connecting with the complex and nuanced subject of sex and relationships. Young participants in the study identified that there was a lack of opportunities to learn about sexting, even though they were eager to discuss such subjects. They found that RSE regularly shames young people for their sexual interests and behaviours, with teaching typically risk-averse and promoting abstinence, which the young participants said was unrealistic, ineffective and subsequently unsafe. The study identified that teachers need access to appropriate training to ensure they feel confident discussing these subjects concluding that there is a need for collaborative approaches that involve young people in the planning and development of educational resources to ensure RSE is relevant and effective (York et al., 2021b).

Therefore, it is crucial to foreground youth voices in the development of approaches that seek to acknowledge their lived experiences. York et al. (2021) and Whittington (2019) worked to address this disconnect through support from Young Persons Advisory Groups (made up of young people as active partners advising researchers on developing research questions, designing trials, and improving communication) to consult on the design of the research.

2.3 Participatory Approaches in RSE Research

A growing body of research recognises the importance of adopting a youth-centred approach in sex education development (Allen 2001, 2005, 2011; Coll, 2018; York et al. 2021; Scott et al. 2020). Examples of participatory approaches demonstrate ways participants can situate the research within their own world and chosen context, using their language, agendas, and stories and by actively engaging participants in analysis, they can correct inappropriate conclusions, participants' perspectives and experiences can be better understood (Allen, 2011; Coll, 2018; Whittington, 2019).

The 'Trouble with Normal' project (Coll, 2018) is an example where young people were encouraged to become active co-researchers, undertaking participatory action research to reimagine RSE. It included creative participatory methods, along with focus groups and concept mapping. Coll et al. (2018) recognised that having conflicting ideas in RSE provided opportunities to think differently and identified the importance of young people critically engaging with an assemblage of norms, privileges, and power relations. In centring on participants' experiences, Coll (2018) found that participants were empowered to situate the research within their world, using their languages, perspectives, and experiences. Subsequently, such collaborative co-investigations helped participants connect to both the process and findings where inclusive RSE was something that the young people spoke passionately about.

The 'Our Lives' (Senior & Chenhall 2017) and 'Life Happens' (Senior et al. 2018) projects also sought to redefine RSE and position young people as experts. 'Life Happens' initially involved participants taking control over the design of characters and creating backstories for them, then randomly drawn cards would play out positive and negative scenarios for them (such as a condom breaking or finding a soulmate). Participation offers young people an opportunity to examine the complexities of a subject and to explore different perspectives, and the collaborative nature of the game fostered a sense of ownership and connection among participants, leading to deeper reflection. However, the game's narratives were predetermined by adult researchers, only partially acknowledging the expertise of young participants and had limitations in fully assisting them in recognising and prioritising their specific concerns in alignment with the realities of their lives. The narratives also lack diversity and are predominantly heteronormative.

In the 'Co-producing and Navigating Consent' project (Whittington 2021), a range of participatory methods were employed to develop an understanding of sexual consent with young people. Seeking to prioritise their rights, desires, and capabilities to speak on matters of concern, the project included interactive workshops, discussion groups, film projects and the co-development of educational resources to explore understandings of consent with young people. Whittington found that engaging participants throughout the entire research process, including analysis, subsequently fostered a better understanding of participants' perspectives. Through the process, participants actively learned and expanded their vocabulary, constructing more nuanced definitions of consent. Furthermore, the participatory nature of the project connected the participants, encouraged critical

debate, and made space for topics that participants identified were not often discussed elsewhere, which contributed to participants' learning and safety awareness. Whittington reflected on ways to support 'difficult' discussions as a key life skill for staying safe and developing healthy relationships, citing Lee and Renzetti (1990): 'We cannot safeguard people by avoiding sensitive or controversial research' (2019: 252). This example highlights a key characteristic of fostering a 'brave' space through facilitating challenging conversations that support participants' own awareness around self-protection and safeguarding. Whittington (2019) concluded that including young people in research around relationships and sex can make meaningful contributions to safeguarding and calls for participatory approaches in youth-focused research to nurture young people's competence and agency.

2.4 Creative Approaches in RSE Research

Creative approaches in research can foster a relaxed and productive atmosphere, breaking down taboos and power inequalities, thus creating safer spaces to effectively amplify youth voices and reduce the likelihood of researchers imposing languages and perspectives onto participants (Punch, 2002). Value has been found in creative activities, which can offer distance and depersonalisation of discussion (Cook et al., 2022; Fisher et al., 2017; Senior et al., 2018). Senior (2018) found that the hypothetical nature of scenario-driven body mapping activities facilitated reflection whilst supporting participants to explore issues speculatively in ways that protected them from disclosing detailed information about their personal behaviours and experiences. Cook et al. (2022) built upon this by facilitating workshops to co-design condoms. Cook et al. (2022) found that designing together proved effective in generating conversational information, where they worked through and developed ideas together rather than just having individual thoughts. Cook et al. (2022) identified a useful interplay between conversation and visual representation, finding that participants could exert greater agency in articulating their personal values and viewpoints through engaging in dialogue whilst visually depicting information. Participants enjoyed the process. It destigmatised the condom as an object, leading to more revealing conversations about contraception.

Creative methods can thus assist in destigmatising discussions about sensitive subjects by offering a perceived distance, facilitating more comfortable interaction and reflection. Whittington (2021) noted similar observations where creative methods, such as mind mapping, body mapping, and cake decorating, encouraged a relaxed atmosphere and

enabled both researcher and participants to connect through the creative activities. In a further example, Renold et al. (2020) utilised creative methods to mobilise collective knowledge in the 'Mapping, Making, and Mobilising in Merthyr' project. This included facilitating 'Make Relationships Matter' lunch clubs, which provided young women with a space to engage in art-making inspired by their experiences of harassment and everyday sexism. Participants used a long roll of paper to visually represent their experiences of harmful cultures, creating an extended mind-map (Figure 3) visualising participants' experience of harassment. The roll of paper grew each week, visibly evidencing the scale of the harmful cultures the participants experienced. The impact of making the creative outcomes, or 'd/artaphacts', helped alleviate feelings of heaviness and shame (Renold 2018).

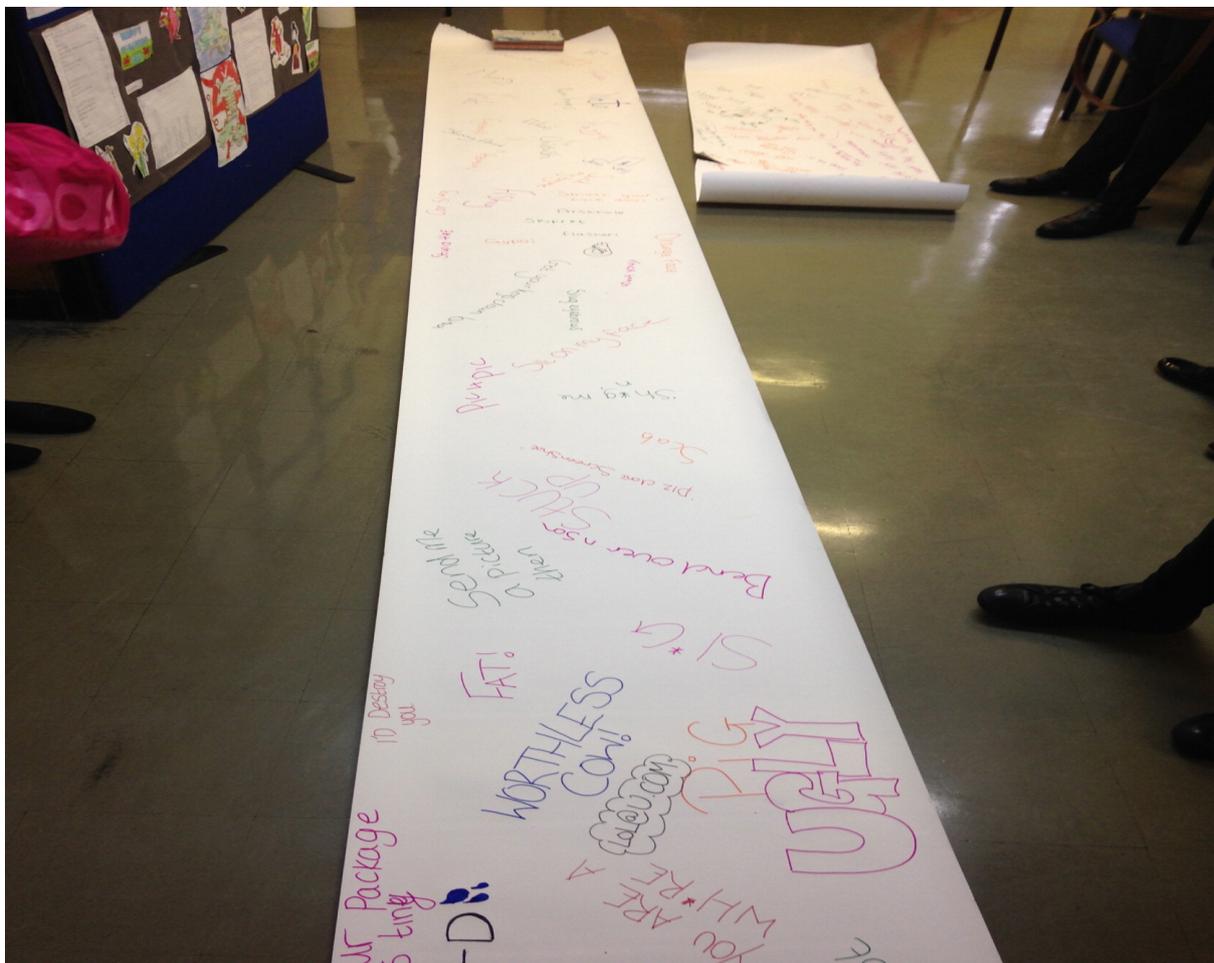


Figure 3. Renold, E. 2018. *Runway of disrespect*. [Marker Pens on Paper]. 'Feel what I feel': making da(r)ta with teen girls for creative activism on how sexual violence matters.

Furthermore, Renold (2020) and Fisher et al. (2017) recognised how creative approaches offer dialogical opportunities for young people to express their perspectives, fostering

empathy and critical thinking skills, with the potential to make tacit knowledge explicit. In the visual mapping activities in Senior's 'Our Lives' and 'Life Matters' projects (2018) (See section 2.2), participants drew and labelled a body map while engaging with hypothetical narratives, capturing profound reflections (Senior et al., 2018). Senior observed that the visual depictions reflected stigmatised and sensationalised narratives, serving as a form of distancing from stigmatised sexual situations (see Figure 4), giving insights into the stigma and shame perceived by the youth participants.

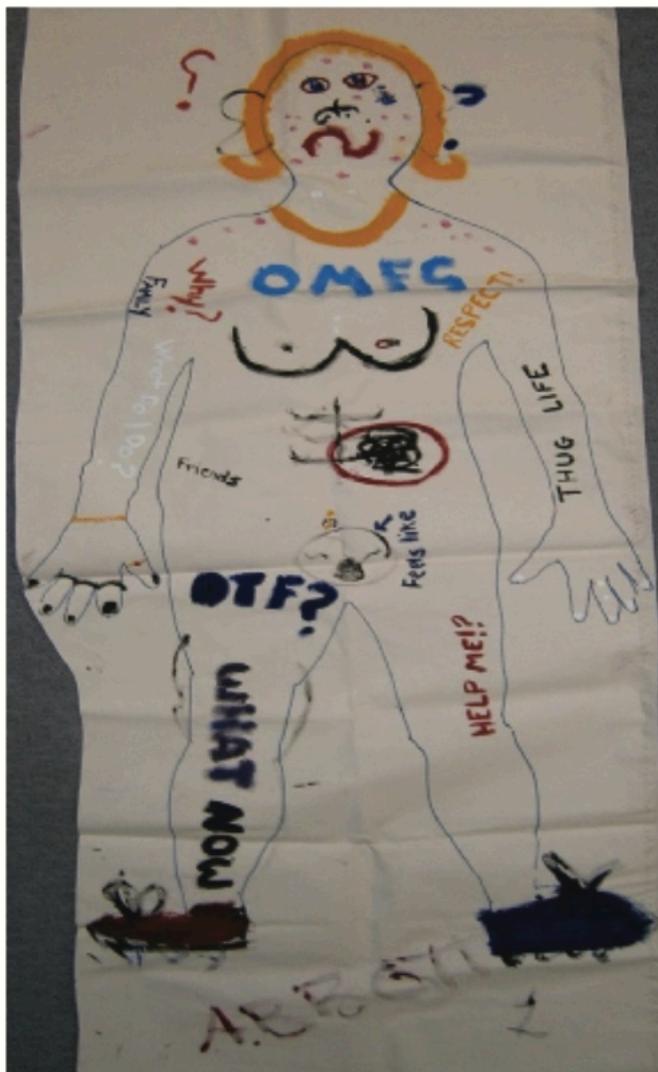


Figure 4. Senior & Chenhall 2017. *Body Map from Our Lives Workshop*. [Pen on Paper]. 'Our Lives' and 'Life Happens', from stigma to empathy in young people's depictions of sexual health and relationships.

2.5 Making and Handling Artefacts in RSE Research

John Berger (1990) outlined that ‘seeing comes before words’. Images can communicate meaning, emotion, and ideas, inviting viewers to interpret and engage with the world directly without the need for the interpretation and mediation of language, thus influencing our understanding of reality (Sontag, 1978). Visual data created by participants through creative methods can, therefore, offer powerful perspectives, allowing for a visualisation of experiences that are often hidden or hard to access. These experiences can become tangible and can be engaged with beyond their original context, facilitating deeper understanding and meaningful dialogue (Brandt et al. 2013).

The ‘Sex and History’ project (Fisher et al. 2017) aimed to facilitate debates with young people, using museum objects as a catalyst for discussions around RSE subjects. The objects introduce young people to different perspectives and cultural attitudes towards sex, prompting them to re-evaluate their own assumptions and question previously accepted ideas. The historical context and cultural diversity depersonalised discussions and facilitated critical distance. Conversations about the history of sexuality were always implicitly about contemporary issues. For instance, a nineteenth-century mirror-box was unfolded to display painted couples engaged in various sexual acts, leading to conversations about intimacy and commitment. Similarly, a carved clamshell revealed a woman reading a book with an illustration of an erect penis, prompting lively discussions about pornography consumption and gendered notions of pleasure. The object-based discussions revealed the value of historical, visual, and material culture to inspire debates which re-examine contemporary models of sex and relationships. The historical uncertainty of the objects prompted curious investigation where participants were reflective rather than looking for definitive answers. Furthermore, the value in framing the objects as treasured artefacts helped to recontextualise the corresponding conversations as insightful as opposed to ‘offensive, inappropriate or in need of being censored’ (Fisher et al. 2017: page 34). Participants noted that the novelty of discussing the objects served as a catalyst for further discussions about the objects at home.

Fisher et al. (2017) expressed an intention to broaden their work by incorporating a more diverse range of objects that embrace sexual and gender diversity, recognising that using objects could prevent the marginalisation or exclusion of LGBT experiences and address

heterosexual privilege. However, the objects used in this study fell short in representing diversity in gender or sexuality.

In the aforementioned 'Mapping, Making, and Mobilising' project (Renold, 2018), 'd/artaphacts' was shared in various settings, enabling the stories and experiences of young participants to transcend the workshop context to reach a wider audience, including other young people, RSE practitioners, and policymakers.

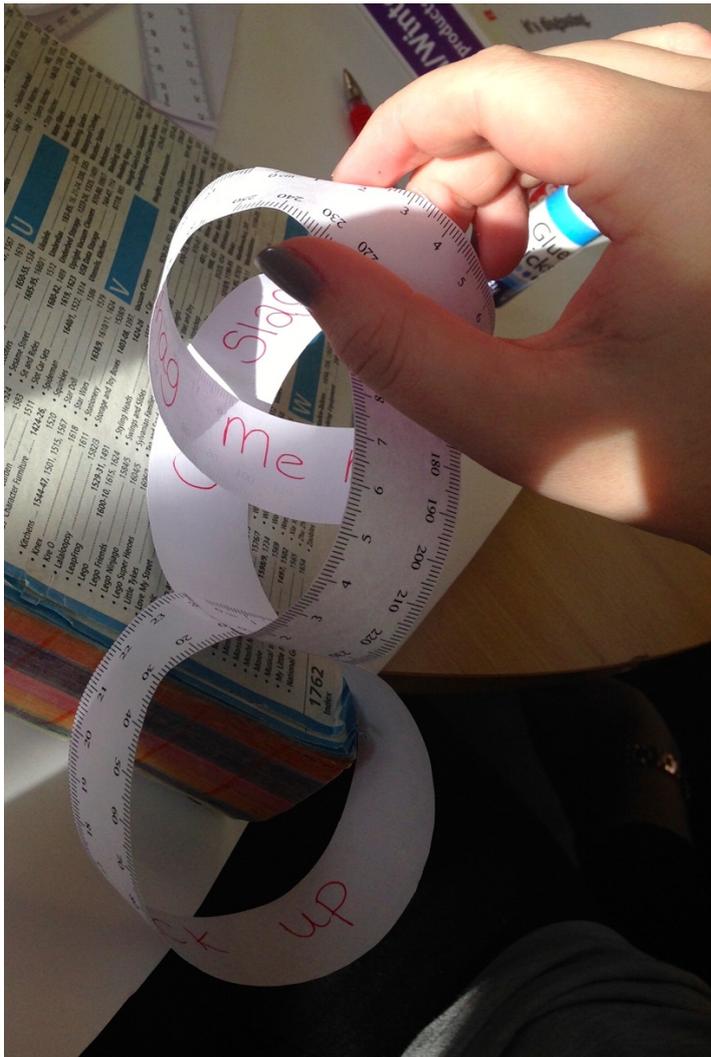


Figure 5. Renold, E. 2018. *Shame Chain*. [Pen on Paper]. 'Feel what I feel': making da(r)ta with teen girls for creative activism on how sexual violence matters.

The 'd/artaphacts' made previously concealed sexual cultures visible and tangible through the objects (as seen in Figure 5-7), yielding an 'extra-beingness', drawing the audience nearer to the participants and allowing their narratives to resonate with authenticity Renold (2018: 50)

The d'artefacts later became part of a campaign called 'Relationship Matters'. The young people involved in making and delivering Valentine's Day-like cards (Figure 8) to Welsh Assembly Members, which included handwritten comments on why young people need healthy relationships education. This public action was successful in supporting educational amendments to include young people's needs, a new practitioner guide and mandatory healthy relationships training in the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Bill, effectively impacting policy that was previously failing to respond to the experiences of young people (Renold et al., 2020).



Figure 8. Renold, E. 2018. *heart activism*. [Pen on Card]. 'Feel what I feel': making da(r)ta with teen girls for creative activisms on how sexual violence matters.

From these examples, it is evident that personal visualisations can evoke a depth of awareness, speaking of the individual's experiences and transporting policymakers into spaces that they cannot easily access. Visual data has a unique ability to communicate, facilitating compassionate engagement and provoking thought without forcefulness.

2.6 Participatory Design and Artefact-based Approaches Beyond RSE Research:

Looking outward into other contexts, participatory design (PD) and artefact-based approaches are valuable to engage participants in knowledge co-creation. Rooted in design thinking principles, PD methods can enhance understanding of complex subjects and offer more inclusive perspectives (Sanders and Stappers 2008; Simonsen and Robertson 2013). PD invites users and other stakeholders into the design process. Researchers become mediators and facilitators of collaborations and co-creation between different participants and stakeholders (Kjærsgaard and Boer, 2015; Simonsen and Robertson, 2013), and it has value in minimising distances between designed outcomes and users of the design. PD activities have been recognised to foster relaxed atmospheres and reduce power imbalances (Punch, 2002) and can help establish safe spaces for meaningful engagement in areas which are complex or ethically challenging. For example, Bustamante Duarte et al (2021) worked with young forced migrant to co-design mobile applications for forced migrants on their arrival into Germany. In this case, the PD workshops included design activities, such as card sorting exercises, paper prototyping, and group reflections. They were found to promote open communication and knowledge exchange, uncovering insights alongside upholding ethical standards and ensuring participant well-being throughout the research (Duarte et al., 2021).

Artefacts have been recognised as valuable in establishing a common ground and enabling social relations. They have value as cultural probes to gather experiential insights from participants (Gaver, Dunne and Pacenti, 1999), and are used to provoke and challenge, fostering reflection on assumptions and provoking debate (Andersen & Mosleh, 2021), facilitating diverse perspectives, which is essential for brave spaces. Critical Design Artefacts are characterised by their ability to challenge norms and assumptions and explore alternative perspectives (Kjærsgaard and Boer, 2015). They could be a result of a critical or speculative design process, with the intention to provoke thought and stimulate reflection rather than provide practical solutions. Critical design artefacts are typically displayed at academic conferences or in contemporary design galleries and as such may not reach their

intended audience—the individuals in the specific context whose reflections are needed for meaningful impact (Koskinnen et al, 2011).

Provotypes, a type of prototype that is intentionally designed to be provocative or challenging (Mogensen, 1992), have evolved from concepts rooted in critical design artefacts, created to disrupt existing ideas about how a product is used, with the aim of gaining a more detailed understanding of the complex relationships between end-users, products, and the broader contexts, and can serve as inspiration for subsequent prototyping activities (Boer, 2012; Mogensen, 1992). Provotypes stimulate discussion and draw attention to real-world issues and possibilities in a way that may be unexpected or thought-provoking and often focus on tensions and controversies (Boer & Donovan, 2012). They make perspectives visible and tangible, encouraging participants to talk about differing viewpoints, and fostering a deeper understanding of diverse viewpoints (Andersen & Mosleh, 2021). For example, Boer et al. (2013) identified that provotypes could serve as tools in critical design. Their use of a lamp provotype aided the understanding of varied stakeholders' perspectives on indoor climate, enabling a discussion about a tension that might otherwise be overlooked or challenging to articulate. This drew attention to opposing perspectives and facilitated the negotiation between participants, leading to speculation about potential opportunities for further development. The researchers' roles here were not as the experts on the topic, but as mediators who could take a step back, analyse the tensions and ideas at play, and respond to these.

Critically examining provotypes engages with tensions where diverse perspectives can be brought into the research space for collaborative analysis, creating a space for reflection and dialogue among participants, which is recognised as particularly effective in generative design research (Boer & Donovan 2012). A challenge in using provotypes can be that participants can see them as potentially deployable (Wild, 2020), causing friction with engaging them as objects for provocative discussion, highlighting the importance of framing provotypes as discussion objects rather than as prototypes.

2.7 Summary

In this chapter, I have examined contemporary studies in research around RSE, focusing on the inclusion and creative engagement of young people. Despite being under-researched due to legal and ethical challenges, there has been progress in recognising young people's desire for education that reflects their social contexts. Progress has been made to actively

engage with young people, however, I identified the notable disconnect between the languages, narratives, and resources employed by adult researchers, which commonly result in youth voices being influenced or constrained. This presents an opportunity for this research inquiry to explore, methodologically, ways to foreground the lived experiences of young people.

Examining research in the field has highlighted that participatory approaches can connect with the lived experiences of young people, showcasing examples like the 'The Trouble with Normal' project, where young people became active co-researchers, fostering a sense of value in active participation and ownership over research outcomes. Participatory approaches recognise young people as experts of their own lived experience, ensuring relevance, and leading to more meaningful impact.

Creative approaches, such as the codesign condom workshop, are seen to foster relaxed atmospheres and reduce power imbalances, where creative practice was found to destigmatise discussions and provide a perceived distance for comfortable interaction and reflection. Creativity is flexible, therefore offering greater agency for participants to guide the research directions. The value of artefacts was explored to prompt discussion in the 'Sex and History' project. Making visual artefacts was found to give form to tacit knowledge in the 'Mapping, Making, and Mobilising' project, where this visual data became instrumental in involving various stakeholders and influencing policy.

The value of PD and artefact-based approaches beyond RSE research was explored, identifying their ability to engage participants in knowledge co-creation, foster relaxed atmospheres, and reduce power imbalances. Prototypes were recognised as particularly valuable to stimulate discussion, facilitate critical thinking, and make diverse perspectives tangible and prompting debate. In response to the challenges and gaps identified in this chapter, in the next chapter, Methodology, I will be outlining how I used PD, creative and artefact-based approaches due to their potential to facilitate 'brave spaces' for young people.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I detail the methodology guiding this inquiry, encompassing the foundational epistemology, research methods, analytical approach, and ethical considerations. My investigation revolves around the question of how young adults can actively contribute to the redesign of RSE. Recognising the invaluable insights young adults possess regarding contemporary sexual cultures and recent experiences with RSE, I particularly sought the participation of individuals identifying as LGBTQIA+ to address the prevailing lack of representation in this research domain, which I elaborated upon later in this chapter.

To ensure the alignment of findings with participants' realities, I commence the chapter by emphasising the significance of reflexivity. Employing a Feminist Participatory Action Research methodology, I underscore the pivotal role of participants as co-researchers. Subsequently, I elaborate on my chosen methods, drawing inspiration from Participatory Design techniques to cultivate inclusive and empowering brave spaces, where young people can actively contribute to the reimagining of RSE.

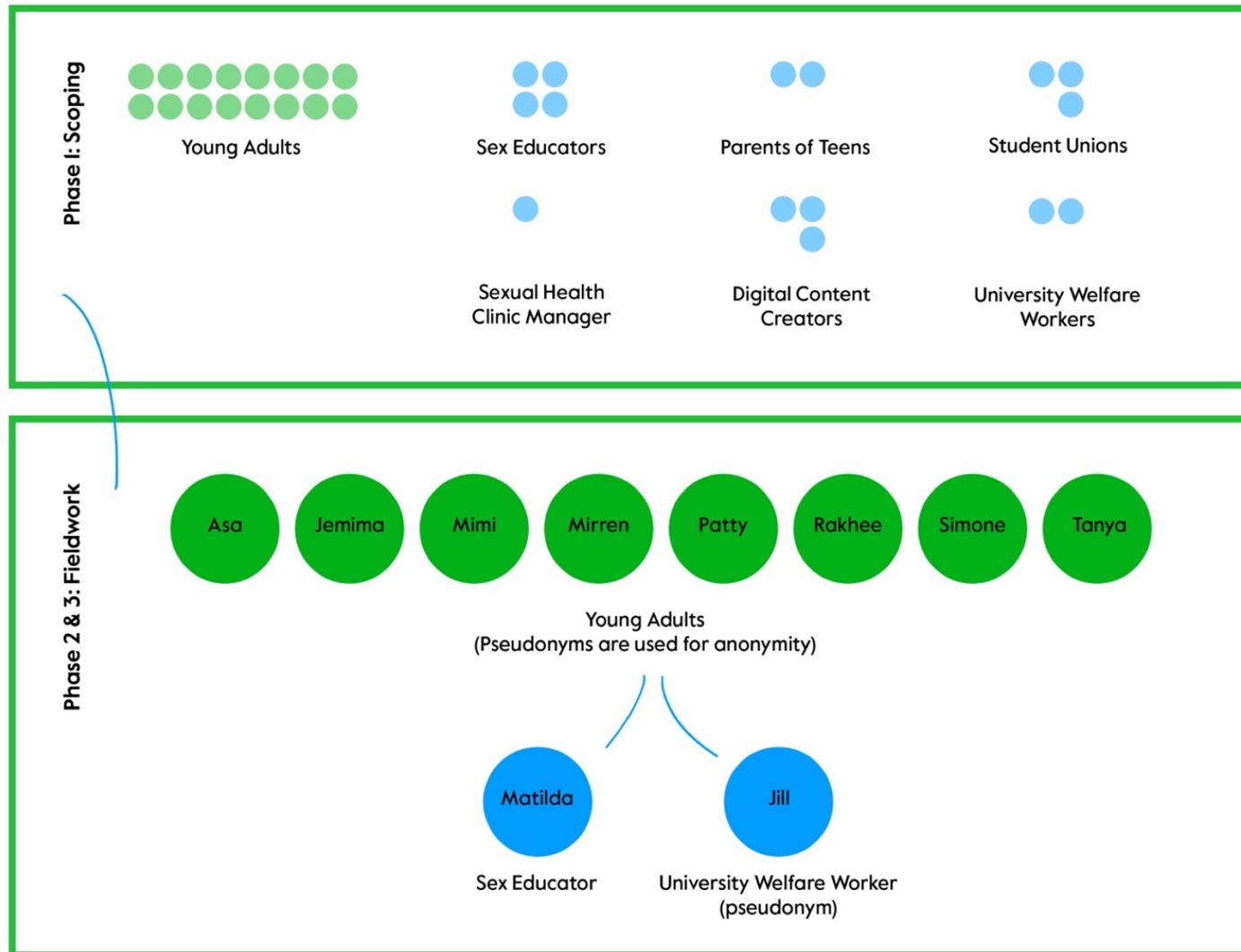


Figure 9. Visual summary of research participants within scoping and fieldwork

3.2 Reflexivity

Reflexivity plays a significant role in critically examining how my subjectivity and social position intersect with the research. By engaging in ongoing self-reflection and actively addressing the potential impact of my positionality, I strive to mitigate biases, promote inclusivity, and foster a more nuanced understanding of the experiences and perspectives of the participants. As an outsider, I need help to set the agenda and draw conclusions. I must listen attentively, respond to my participants' experiences, and recognise their potential for self-discovery.

Reflexivity is an ongoing journey where perspectives are not fixed and evolve in response to knowledge and experiences. Embracing a participatory approach, I remain open to learning, personal transformation, and conscientisation (Maguire, 2008). My chosen methods align with this perspective, acknowledging the co-construction of knowledge through community and social processes. Reflexivity ensures that research aligns with participants' realities and needs (Maguire, 1987). My methods centre the knowledge and experiences of the young people involved, positioning them as experts of their own experiences. The methodology also offers space and flexibility for my learning and growth.

3.3 Epistemological and Theoretical Perspective

3.3.1. Social Constructivism

Following social constructivism (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Vygotsky, 1978), this inquiry seeks to develop an understanding of collective experiences and values, highlighting the relational nature of knowledge-building and how meaning is shaped socially. This inquiry is subjective experiential, and insights are socially constructed. Recognising the situated and constructed nature of knowledge allows for an exploration of the complexities of individual and shared human experiences and diverse ways of making sense of the world. The focus of this inquiry is informed by social and cultural factors that shape knowledge and its impact on understanding sex and relationships beyond the contexts of RSE. It aligns with a social constructivist framework that explores individual learning and development and the creation and sharing of knowledge. I agree with Fine et al. that 'knowledge is deeply rooted in social relations and evidently most powerful when produced collaboratively through action' (2001: 173).

3.3.2 Feminism and Participatory Action Research

Participatory Feminist methodologies challenge dominant narratives, promote social justice, empower participants and contribute to inclusive knowledge production (McGuire, 1987). Feminist standpoint theory (Hartsock, 1983) aligns with Participatory Action Research (PAR) in valuing the knowledge and perspectives of marginalised groups, involving them as active participants and collaborators in the research process. I centre this study on lived experiences, aim to challenge power dynamics, and am driven by a desire to create a more inclusive and equitable society by valuing the experiences and perspectives of those who have traditionally been marginalised or silenced.

PAR is a cyclical process of planning, action, observation, and reflection that collaboratively involves participants as contextual experts (McGuire, 1987; Reason & Bradbury, 2008). PAR challenges traditional research hierarchies and power dynamics to generate socially relevant knowledge (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). Through collective action and participatory decision-making, PAR empowers individuals and communities to address social injustices (Maguire, 2008; Reason & Bradbury, 2008). Participants are involved as co-researchers, where knowledge is co-constructed through collaborative relationships and dialogues that promote inclusivity, equity, and social change. In the case of this inquiry, this research aims to create change by amplifying the voices and experiences of young people to develop knowledge that can inform future practices and policy interventions.

Fine and Torre highlight PAR's transformative nature (2012, 2019, 2021), which can contribute to positive social change and more equitable research outcomes. Furthermore, equitable control over the research process and outcomes, shared between researchers and participants, requires a flexible and responsive research design (Reason & Bradbury, 2008), reflected in the methods used in this inquiry.

3.4 Methods

3.4.1 Method 1: Workshops

The workshop approach in PD, rooted in Dewey's philosophies (1927, 1934), emphasises experiential learning, democracy, and mutual learning (Bannon & Ehn, 2013). Creative workshops engage young people, fostering dialogue, learning, and ideation (Nicholas et al.,

2012; McLean et al., 2016). By dismantling hierarchies and promoting equitable involvement, PD follows feminist principles, and empowers participants for inclusive, user-centric, and inventive outcomes (Brandt et al., 2013).

I facilitated two workshops with young adult participants, which took place in the University building. To assist in dismantling power structures and-facilitating participants' bravery, I selected a neutral space within a familiar environment, offering some-familiarity yet distanced from their typical studios with associated hierarchies and rules.

I adopted a 'Futures' approach to both workshops (Jungk and Müllert 1987). Future workshops are characterised by their visual nature, playfulness, and diverse modes of communication, and they are known for developing responsible participative communities, building group dynamics, and promoting democracy (Alminde & Warming, 2020).

They are structured around 3 phases:

1. **Preparatory Phase:** Participants decide on topics, coordinate logistics, reflect on lived experience and identify problems
2. **Fantasy Phase:** Participants outline utopian ideas to creatively address identified problems, suspending reality to enhance creative and imaginative thinking
3. **Implementation Phase:** Visionary ideas are explored to identify realisable changes.

The first day-long workshop facilitated the Preparatory and Fantasy phase. Workshop two was a half-day workshop which facilitated the 'implementation stage'. Workshops were structured by the following activities:

WORKSHOP 1: RSE Reflections & Speculative Future Visions

Preparatory Phase	Activity 01: Establishing Participation Principles
	Participants collaboratively crafted participation principles that collectively outlined rules and a shared ethos for the research space. Arao and Clements (2013) identify the re-framing of ground rules as a valuable strategy for creating brave spaces, in equipping participants to engage authentically in challenging dialogues.
	Activity 02: Mind-Mapping to Critique
	This mind mapping activity was used as a visual and verbal tool for open-ended interaction. Visual mapping methods are useful for physically getting ideas out in the open, making them easier to discuss (Kesby et al 2007). They enable participants to see and reflect on wider systems, that they may previously have only seen a part of and can subsequently build empathy between participants (Teal and French 2020). Visual mind mapping was used to begin the critique phase of the future workshop and to discuss experiences of RSE.
	Activity 03: Critiquing RSE Teaching Resources
	Using RSE teaching resources as artefacts for cultural probes and analysis provided both direction and flexibility in discussions. I drew on the use of artefacts to provoke reactions and responses which can be analysed for insights. Critical dialogue and collective reflection are valuable within PAR (McIntyre, 2008). Using artefacts offers opportunities to offer deeper insights into the research context. It aims to begin actively involving participants in the design process, in identifying flaws in current resources and gets them to collaboratively start shaping ideas for development.

Fantasy Phase	Activity 04: The Speculative Design Challenge
	<p>Prototyping challenges offer a space for teamwork, promote open communication, and cultivate playful atmospheres that reduce inhibitions and intimidation (Brandt et al, 2013; Nicholas, 2012). Design processes are inherently critical, using iterative reflection to respond to flaws and respond with better versions. Drawing upon critical and speculative design (Dunne & Raby 1999, 2013) I sought to facilitate critical discussions. Critical and speculative design are inherently optimistic, believing that change is possible (Dunne & Raby, 2013) and underrepresented minorities benefit from creative frameworks to envision liberated futures where oppression is not a permanent condition, acknowledging the potential for change (Noel, L 2022). Reality is suspended and creative thinking makes way for the participants' hopes for the future, avoiding overly pragmatic solution. In speculative design even impractical alternatives hold value and to conceive new possibilities, fostering hope and a sense that more is possible (Dunne & Raby, 2013). Visualising fantasies can be empowering and enables brave and original ideas. Speculative design can make 'possibilities tangible and available for consideration' (Dunne & Raby, 2013, p161), and participants materialised their critical thoughts, using the process of making to externalise and embody their ideas into physical artefacts (Brandt et al, 2013).</p>
WORKSHOP 2: Bridging the Gap from Vision to Action	
Implementation Phase	Activity: Proposing Actions to Bridge the Present and Preferred Future
	<p>Through a process of back casting, the participants' future visions are turned into actions by exploring realistic, practical steps that move forward towards the future vision. This was used as a moment to pause and collectively reflect, to debrief on the first workshop and to take stock of emerging themes.</p>

Table 1. Planning and Rationale of Workshop Activities

3.4.2 Method 2: Focus Groups

Focus groups draw upon respondents' attitudes, feelings, beliefs, and experiences and elicit a multiplicity of views within a group context (Gibbs, 1997). They are recognised as useful for validity checking and are particularly useful when there are power differences between the participants and decision-makers and reflect the relevant use of the language and culture of a particular group (Gibbs, 1997). Focus groups are identified as useful in examining and evaluating artefacts in design research (O'Raghallaigh et al. 2012). The primary feature that differentiates focus groups from other methods is the extensive interaction among participants and the collaborative dynamics within the group (Gibbs, 1997). A 90-minute focus group took place three months after the workshops as a form of feedback loop to collectively analyse key outputs from the workshop and to evaluate and validate the emerging findings. This provided space for iterative cycles of reflection and co-analysis essential to PAR methodology.

3.5 Participant Sample and Recruitment Strategy

Recognising the rapid evolution of sexual cultures, I prioritised gathering perspectives from young adults to ensure responsiveness to contemporary needs. Due to ethical complexities and higher risks associated with researching sex with individuals under 18, I recruited a sample of 8 young adults aged 18-22 who had recent experiences of RSE, alongside a more experienced understanding of contemporary sexual cultures. The choice to collaborate with university students was prompted by research from the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI), revealing that a significant number of higher education students feel inadequately prepared for the realities of sex and relationships (Natzler & Evans 2021). The small sample size was selected to allow for depth and richness in the data coupled with considerations around ethical sensitivity. To ensure rigour in the study, I then engaged with an RSE educator and a University Welfare worker to triangulate findings and facilitate the proposal of actions to ensure broader applicability of the research.

I collaborated with a Student Union for recruitment, excluding current or former students, to avoid conflicts. Young adults were invited via email. Young Adults were invited to volunteer through email communication initiated by the Student Union. Inclusion and exclusion criteria were discussed with interested volunteers. While the research was open to all students, I actively encouraged those who identified as LGBTQIA+ to participate. This decision was informed by a review of recent research (O'Farrell et al. 2021), which suggests

that LGBTQIA+ youth are currently not experiencing inclusive or comprehensive RSE despite the inclusion of LGBTQIA+ issues being identified as having a positive effect on all sexualities (Gegenfurtner & Gebhardt, 2017) (See Appendix B for an extended rationale).

Prior to the sessions, participants were introduced to me via email, and I shared a participant information sheet and consent form (see Appendix A). Two group meetings, both in-person and online, were held to address any questions before the sessions. Additionally, participants were offered opportunities for individual email inquiries before participating, establishing a foundation of trust before the fieldwork.

3.6 Modes of Analysis

Data has been collected through transcribed audio recordings, reflective writing on researcher observations, annotations on designed engagement tools and participant-made artefacts. I used an iterative process of Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) (Braun and Clarke 2019) to analyse the data. RTA is valuable for analysing qualitative data in PAR due to its flexibility, reflexivity, and focus on capturing rich and nuanced meanings. Through undertaking cycles of RTA, I was able to identify and interpret patterns, themes, subthemes, and nuances, allowing for the development of a comprehensive and deep understanding of the research topic.

Outlining my RTA Process:		
1. Familiarisation with Data	I spent a significant amount of time familiarising myself with the data through repeated listening to audio recordings, checking and validating the digital transcripts and doing multiple readings of transcripts, reflections, and analysis of visual outcomes.	<p>Reflexivity</p> <p>In adopting a reflexive approach, I consistently acknowledge and critically examine my assumptions and potential biases throughout the research process. This self-awareness is foundational for ensuring the validity of my interpretations. I reflected on my positionality, beliefs, and experiences, to guide me in navigating potential biases. Before engaging in the fieldwork, I conscientiously acknowledged my preconceptions and assumptions about RSE to approach the research with openness and receptivity. Throughout data collection and analysis, I engaged in regular iterative reflections and sought participant validation, actively involving them in the analysis process.</p>
2. Initial Coding	Through the initial coding process, I identified patterns and labelled the data, allowing codes to emerge from the data	
3. Searching for Themes	I then used Table 3 (below) to group related codes into potential themes, and used this process to identify subthemes and overlaps	
4. Reviewing Themes	I examine and refined themes by reviewing these data tables, ensuring that each theme accurately represented the coded segments, carefully considering the relationships between themes	
5. Participant Validation	I then sought feedback from participants to ensure the accuracy and validity of the findings.	
6. Re-reviewing Themes & Defining and Naming Themes	I then re-reviewed the themes in response to the participants comments, feedback, and discussion. At this point, I defined and named each theme, articulating its meaning in relation to the data.	
7. Reporting on the data	I reported the findings to stakeholders and beneficiaries, making a visual Miro Board to convey the identified themes as a visual diagram to show the connections and overlaps. I also included supporting data (quotes and photos of visual artefacts) to illustrate key points (See Appendix F1).	

Table 2. Outlining the Process of Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Codes / Emerging themes: <i>This was used to identify prominent emerging themes</i>		
Subthemes: <i>This was used to map frequency and consolidate sub-themes from the column below</i>		
Notes: <i>This was used to map frequency of cross overs amongst themes and connect together reflections from the column below</i>		
Data	Subtheme	Crossovers & Reflections
<i>Eg: Selected Quotes / Conversations</i>		
<i>Researchers Reflections</i>		
<i>Analysis of Artefacts</i>		

Table 3: An example of the table used to analyse data

Using a PAR approach, analysis was ongoing throughout the fieldwork, including collaboration with participants, where emerging patterns from the mind-mapping, critique of RSE resources and design challenges were explored together. Involving participants in the analytical process continued their active engagement, empowering them and enabling participants' perspectives to be more accurately represented (Braun & Clarke 2019). The iterative nature of RTA provides multiple opportunities for researchers to reflect critically and acknowledge their biases and assumptions.

3.7 Ethics

Research into RSE with young adults poses ethical challenges that demand careful consideration. Key ethical considerations have been considered including ongoing informed consent, power dynamics, potential harm, diversity inclusion, and the responsible handling of sensitive information. The objective was to navigate these challenges thoughtfully, ensuring participant well-being, respecting autonomy, and adhering to established ethical conventions throughout the research process.

Using PAR participants became research partners, valuing their knowledge and perspectives, actively engaging them in decision-making and analysis. PD is ethically motivated but has challenges, including navigating consent, minimising harm, and considering power balances (Kelly, 2019). It has been described as democratic innovation

(Erlin et al., 2010), which can support people in shaping their own worlds (Robertson & Wagner 2013). There has been a negotiation of research objectives, participation structures, and project outcomes (Smith & Iversen, 2018) with the aim of fostering ownership and empowerment throughout and beyond the research process. Initially, participants co-authored research principles (see section 4.4.1), enabling them to co-shape the research space and establish shared expectations. This approach embodied a genuine 'brave space' concept, with young people leading the process, promoting collective ownership and challenging traditional knowledge hierarchies (Arao & Clemens, 2013, p. 142).

In preparation for fieldwork, an enhanced ethical assessment was conducted and approved by the University's Research and Ethics team at both The Glasgow School of Art and the University where participants attended (See Appendix C). Information sheets and consent forms emphasised the benefits, risks, and freedom of expression, emphasising strict adherence to confidentiality (see Appendix A for example consent forms and participant information sheets). Participants were given pseudonyms, and data was carefully anonymised to protect identities.

Throughout the activities, ongoing consent was sought, enabling participants to opt out of activities. I did not ask direct personal questions, instead sensitive topics were disclosed as participants felt comfortable. I aimed to ensure that all voices were heard and valued through a dialogue that recognised and respected differences. I prompted participants to consider power imbalances which reflected broader social contexts, prompting discussion about power relations and consent. The flexibility of methods, such as workshops and focus groups, fostered an environment where participants could freely express opinions, share experiences, and construct understandings.

For the purposes of safeguarding, a member of the University Welfare team was present during all fieldwork activities with young adults, to provide additional support and address arising concerns. My own self-care has been considered within this project, being mindful that by confronting other people's challenges, I may unveil and re-explore the challenges I have faced myself (Rager, 2005).

3.8 Summary

In this chapter, I have set out the design research for this inquiry. Aligned epistemologically to social constructivism, embracing the notion that knowledge is socially constructed and shaped by collective experiences and values. Central to this methodological framework is PAR, which positions participants as active contributors and co-researchers. Feminism frames this inquiry with a commitment to challenging dominant narratives, amplifying diverse perspectives, and contributing to a more inclusive and equitable understanding. Carefully selected methods, including workshops and focus groups, collaboratively shape the inquiry. Workshops rooted in participatory design principles foster creativity, inclusivity, and user-centric outcomes aiming to facilitate a 'brave space' where traditional knowledge hierarchies, and social norms are critiqued and challenged.

Ethical considerations underpin the research methodology, supporting a collaborative and empowering experience for its participants and positioning this inquiry as a catalyst for positive social change. The iterative process of RTA enables reflexivity and participant collaboration, actively involving participants in analysis aligned with the principles of PAR. By embracing reflexivity, researchers can foster an environment of trust, respect, and inclusivity whilst allowing space for uncertainty and discomfort, which aligns with the principles of creating brave spaces in research. By acknowledging and addressing the potential impacts of my positionality, I aim to create a research space that authentically captures the voices of young adults.

In the next chapter, I will present the fieldwork and demonstrate how these methods were applied in the field.

Chapter 4. Fieldwork

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the fieldwork as it occurred chronologically. I describe how I applied my methods in the field to explore my research questions, to examine how PD approaches can foster brave spaces, and work to identify implications for practice and policy surrounding the development of RSE. The chapter begins to outline emergent discussions.

Figure 11 illustrates the stages of the research, and how engaging young people has been prioritised. These interactions and feedback loops have then informed subsequent sharing and reflective feedback process with educators and welfare staff, where they outline opportunities to improve RSE based on young adults' experiences. These engagements have informed a series of insights and actions, which will be comprehensively discussed in the forthcoming Analysis chapter.

I will begin by briefly outlining my scoping phase, followed by a detailed look at the workshops and focus groups with young adults, followed by feedback conversations with educators and university welfare staff.

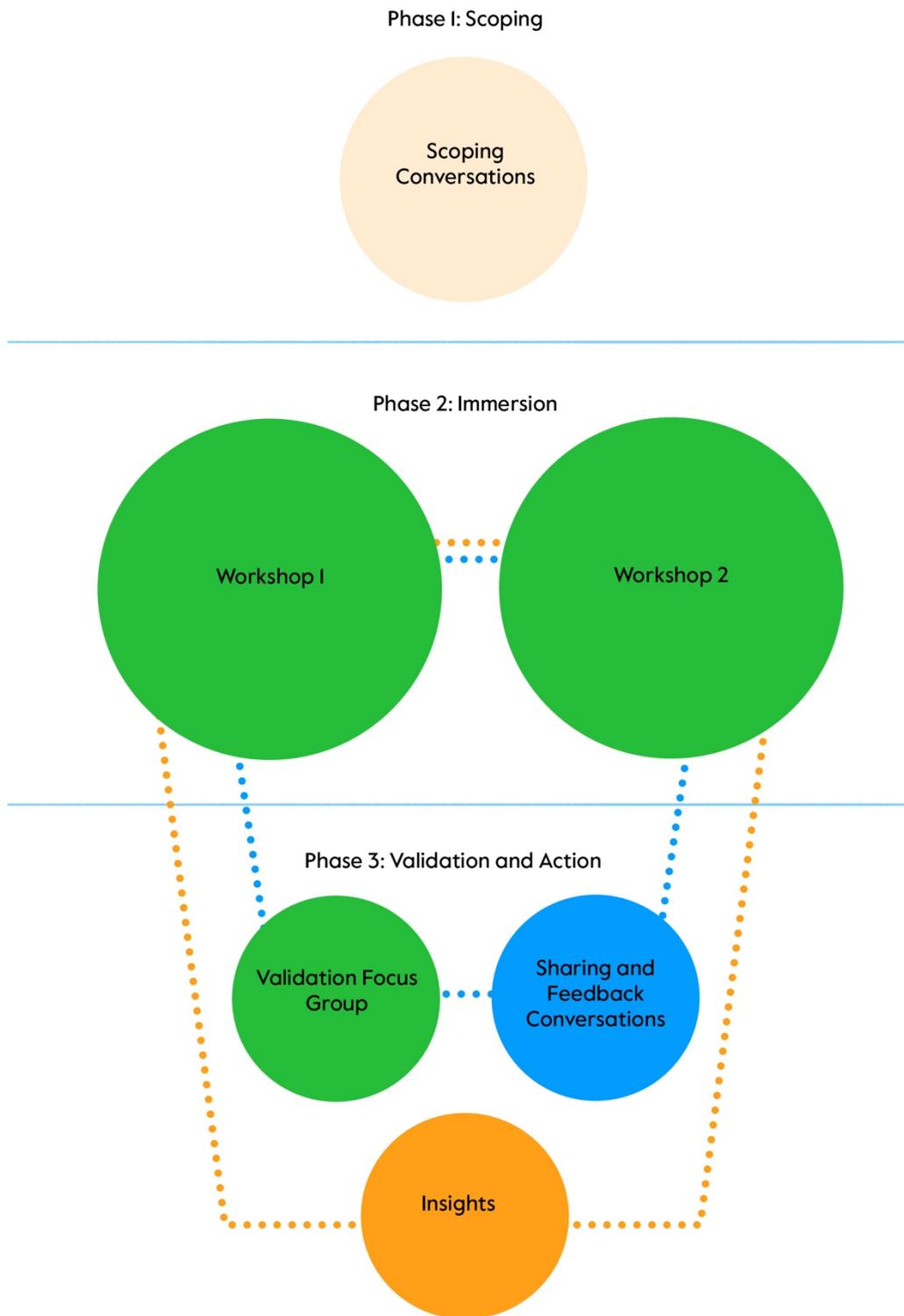


Figure 10. Diagram showing how Phase 2 Workshops fed into Phase 3 Validation, and how they collectively contributed to the insights

4.2 Scoping

Before commencing the fieldwork, I undertook a review of the surrounding literature (See Section 1.1 and Chapter 2) to narrow my focus and to identify a suitable context to frame the study. Young people in the UK had reported feeling let down by their RSE experiences with high proportions of young adults in HE reporting that they are left unprepared for the reality of sex and relationships. LGBTQIA+ youth, in particular, are not experiencing inclusive or comprehensive RSE. There is disconnect between the languages and narratives employed by adult researchers in this field, resulting in youth voices being constrained, which informed decisions to foreground the lived experiences of young people using participatory design approaches to engage participants in knowledge co-creation.

Additional scoping began with personal reflections on my experience in supporting students in further education, followed by informal, non-recorded scoping conversations with stakeholders. This included four sex educators from schools and universities, three digital content creators, two parents of teens, one manager of a sexual health clinic, three student unions, and two staff from university welfare. The meetings were unstructured with the intention of finding out about their work and perspectives in the field. I encountered a breadth of compelling stories, highlighting complex and diverse issues across the field. Scoping the research context revealed that amidst the diverse research opportunities, the voices, experiences, and perspectives of young adults should guide the research direction (as outlined in Section 3.5).

4.3 Introducing the Participants

Participants Pseudonym	Pronouns
Asa	They/Them
Jemima	She/Her
Mimi	She/Her
Mirren	She/They
Patty	They/Them
Rakhee	She/Her
Simone	She/Her
Tanya	They/Them

Table 4: Young Adult Participants Pseudonyms and Pronouns

All eight young adult participants attended the same University and studied across both FE and HE provisions. All participants had some experience in the English secondary education system. Participants identified as female, non-binary, or gender-expansive, none of the volunteers identified as male, raising concerns about gender diversity representation. The group encompassed individuals identifying as straight, lesbian, queer, bisexual, and asexual, providing valuable insights into a range of under-represented voices and diverse experiences. Mimi, Patty, Rakhee and Simone knew each other socially before the fieldwork. Patty and Tanya had attended the same sixth-form college.

Matilda Lawrence-Jubb - Split Banana RSE Educator

Matilda Lawrence-Jubb is a co-founder of 'Split Banana'. Split Banana is a group of RSE specialists who deliver RSE workshops, train RSE educators and consult with schools and community organisations on their RSE provisions.

Jill (Pseudonym) – A member of a University Student Welfare Team

Engaging with beneficiaries was important for obtaining further first-hand insights and lived experiences, enriching the research with nuanced perspectives of challenges and opportunities from those directly impacted by the research findings.

4.4 Workshop 01: RSE Reflections & Speculative Future Visions

The university building itself was familiar to most participants. However, I aimed to challenge prevailing power structures of educational spaces by ensuring this was not anyone's usual teaching space. I aimed to create an informal, social and relaxed atmosphere by providing drinks and snacks. The space was set up to feel convivial and actively creative, a space for play and new ideas. Central tables were arranged with paper, pens, and post-it notes (Figure 11), while a diverse array of flexible and ambiguous materials, such as playdough, comic templates, Lego, and a puppet, were presented at the back of the discussion area (Figure 12). Flexible, creative media can encourage the generation of innovative and original ideas (Vidal, 2006), supporting the facilitation of bravery.

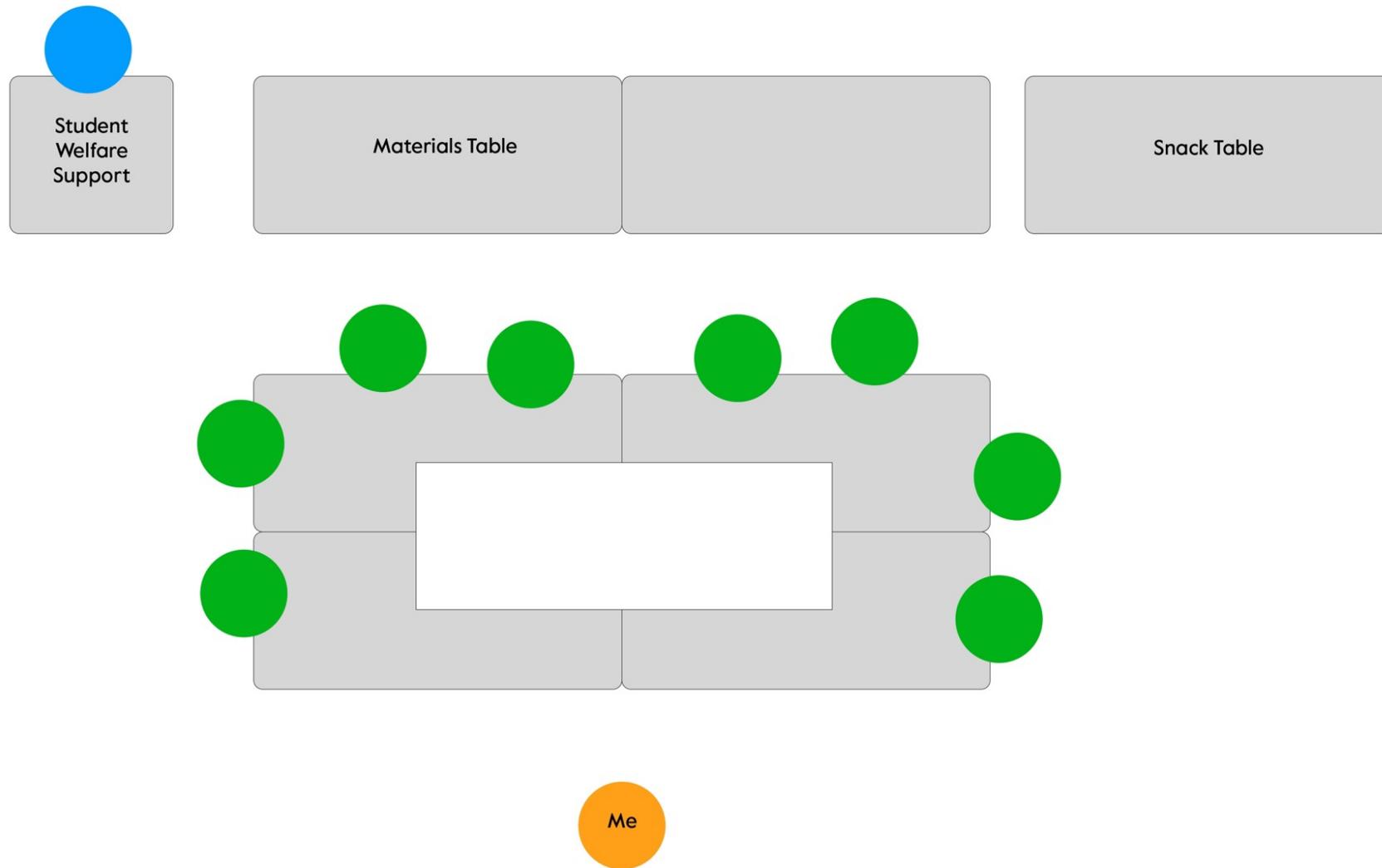


Figure 11. Workshop 1 Room Layout for introduction and writing participation principles.



Figure 12: Photograph showing Workshop 1 materials table and available materials

The Morning's Workshop was divided into four activities, an introduction to the research project, writing participation principles, visual mind-mapping, and critiquing RSE teaching resources, concluding with a reflection on recurring themes.

4.4.1 Activity 01: Establishing Participation Principles

I began the workshop by introducing myself and prompted participants to do the same. I provided an overview of the project, including the principles of PAR to celebrate participants' value in the research space. I chose to sit among the participants, positioning myself as an equal member of the group rather than a figure of authority, aiming to disrupt and decentralise any existing hierarchy.

I facilitated a conversation in which participants generated a list of shared expectations from each other during the research. I prompted the group to think about confidentiality and valuing everyone's voices, building on the principles of PAR (3.3.1). Participants wrote and agreed on the following 'participation principles' (Figure 13).

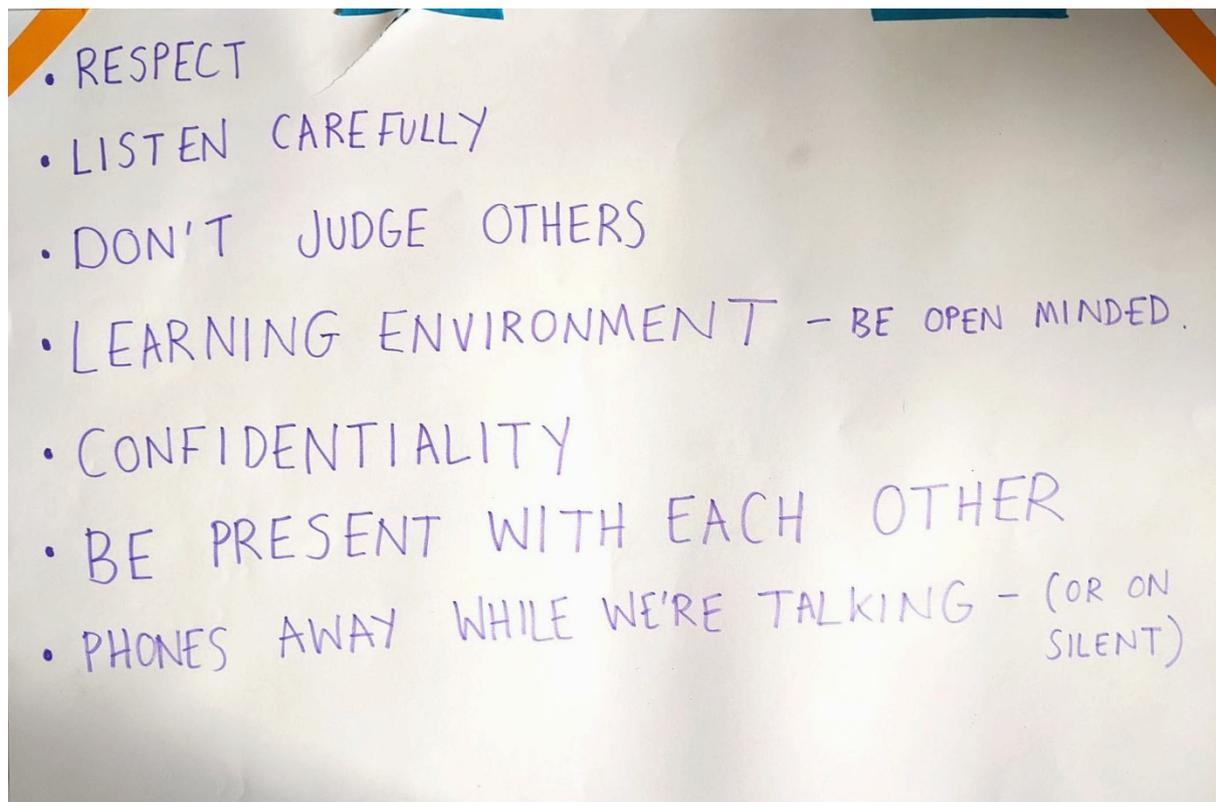


Figure 13: Photograph of Students Co-Written Participation Principles

To foster a brave space, I asked participants to expand on the concept of '*judging others*', prompting a discussion around the importance of respecting diverse perspectives. While emphasising the need to avoid personal attacks, the participants agreed that differences would be respected and that opposing viewpoints should be openly discussed. They acknowledged the potential for mistakes and unintentional offence, emphasising that everyone is learning and growing. These principles were drawn up and prominently displayed in the space (Figure 14) I referred to the group expectations at the start of each activity to establish continued verbal consent before continuing.

4.4.2 Activity 02: Mind-Mapping to Critique

To prepare for the next workshop activity, prior to the session, participants were invited to select three artefacts that held personal significance in relation to their RSE experiences from both formal and informal educational encounters. The participants introduced their chosen artefacts in turn by placing them on the table and telling the group the story behind their artefacts. Diverse artefacts were brought to the session (Figure 15), including a tea bag (to represent the Consent is as simple as a cup of tea video by Blue Seat Studios, 2015), flyers, books, an example bracelet-making activity and quotes from social media.

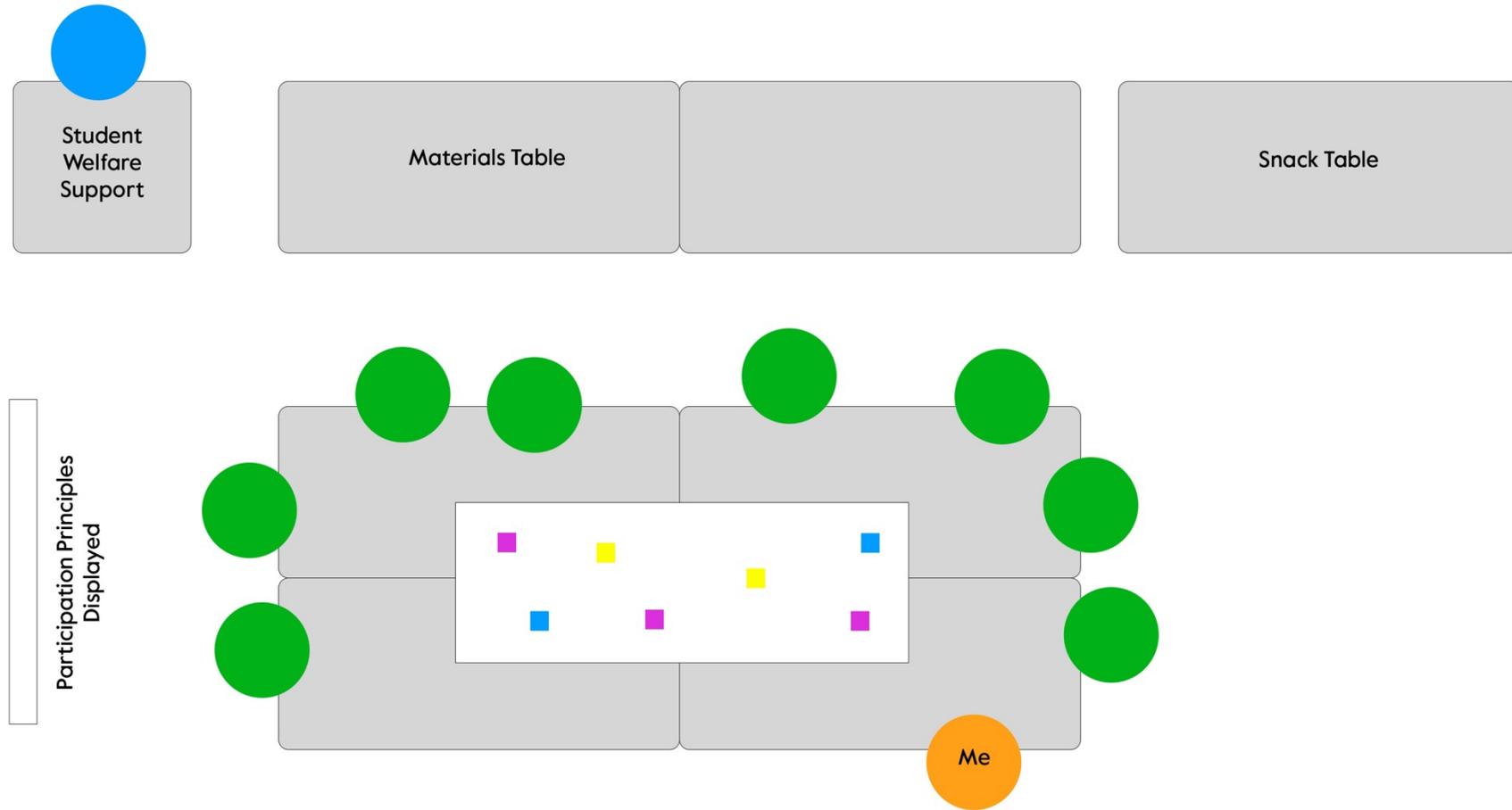


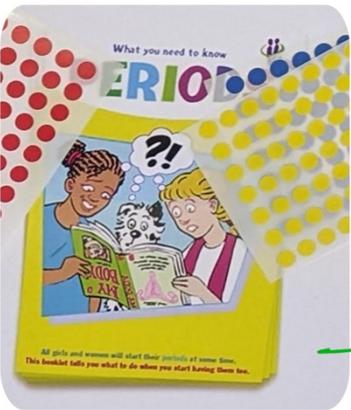
Figure 14. Workshop 1 Room Layout for mind mapping activity

JEMIMA: So in secondary school we made these bracelets that like show your cycle, which I actually thought was quite good, it was the whole class so the boys did it as well. And we all like had these bracelets to take away.



PATTY: They only ever talked about heterosexual couples and male pleasure. it was always presented that a female was there for reproductive purposes and a male was there for pleasure.

ASA: It kind of became more of a joke than anything... I think the problem with it is it's kind of indirect. It was like, 'let's talk in metaphors' and that just made it into a really taboo subject that people feel like they can't talk about.



PATTY: Girls didn't want to be seen holding them or putting them in a bag or even reading them. The moment that sex came up at school it was made a taboo to talk about it... It was just always sort of perpetuated in our mind not to talk about this kind of stuff

Figure 15. Image showing a selection of the participant-sourced artefacts introduced during the mind mapping and associated participant testimonies

Participants took turns discussing their artefacts while the others took notes on post-its, capturing key themes from the experiences to begin constructing a mind map (Figure 16). Although not everyone brought artefacts, each participant contributed to the discussion and the mapping.

I then used visual Who? What? When? Where? And How? prompts to facilitate continued conversations, around the educators (Who), the content (What), the context or setting (Where) and the methods of delivery (How) (Appendix E1). This helped to cluster emerging themes, highlighting individual and collective experiences and challenges. Presenting the mind-map on the wall provided a common point of reference, which was referred to in the subsequent activities.

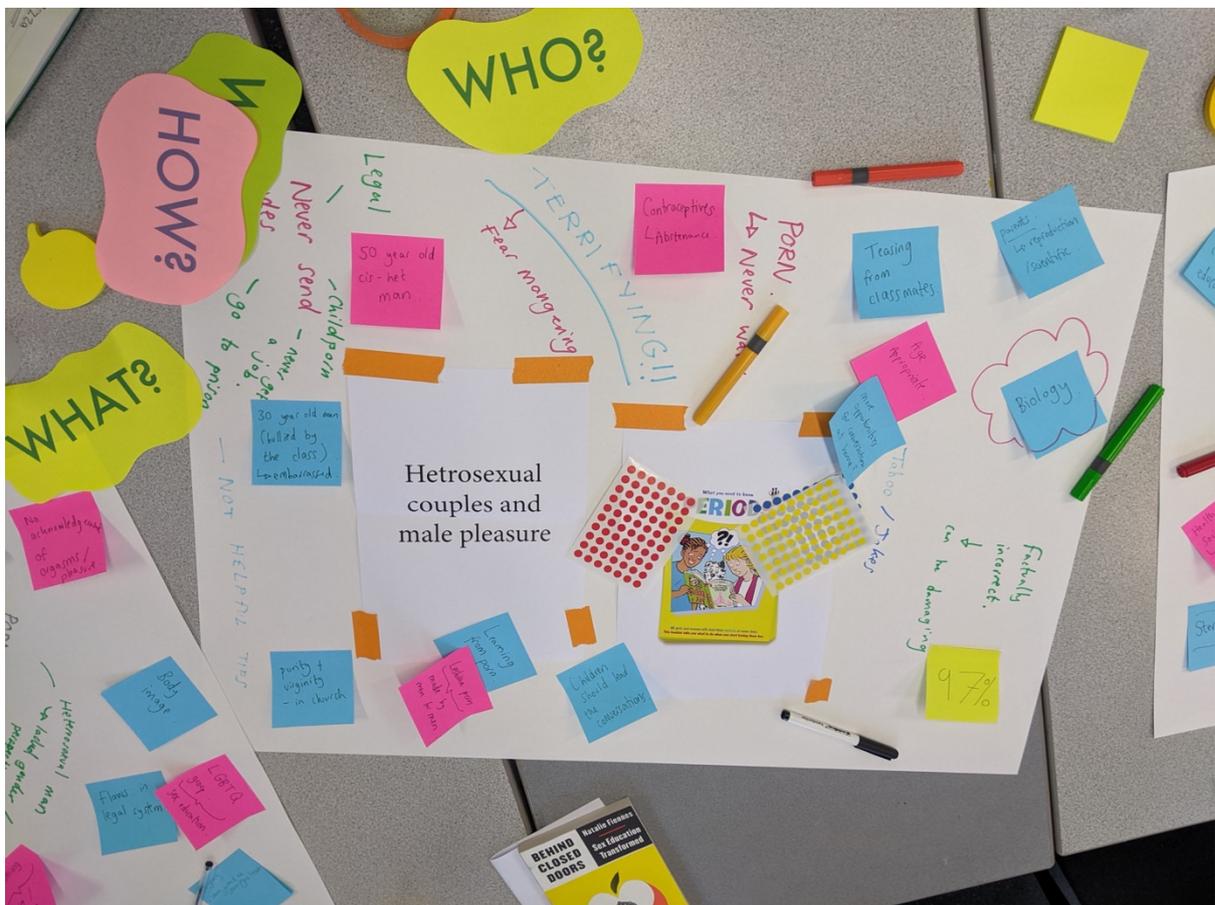


Figure 16: Photograph of the Mind Map including some of the participants' artefacts and the who, what, where, and how prompts.

The map encompassed a breadth of sources, including social media, pornography, and television, though the critique mainly focussed on school contexts. Participants identified

the impact these knowledge gaps had on their lives already, as well as their apprehensions for the future.

Participants spoke of teachers' evident discomfort leading sessions. Young people's questions were unanswered: In one example, Simone said, *'Someone asked what an orgasm was, and the teacher just didn't answer it, and we had to just move on, with no more question'*. In another, Asa said, *'We were asked to write down questions, and I wrote down, can you get STI from gay sex? Because I didn't know... the teacher read that one out, and everybody laughed ... And then it just wasn't answered.'*

Participants noted the absence of queer experiences from their RSE. Patty brought a page that simply said 'heterosexual couples and male pleasure' explaining, *'It was always presented that a female was there for reproductive purposes and a male was there for pleasure'*. Tanya added that teachers *'only ever talked to us about how heterosexual people have sex instead of anyone in queer society'*. I asked if anyone's RSE made reference to sex other than heterosexual sex, and all participants said no. Asa also noted implicit heteronormativity in narratives centring on virginity, and in the absence of any education on queer sex, sought it out independently: *'I ended up learning about queer sex from porn, which is not reliable. I thought lesbian porn was like how it was supposed to be. But obviously, it's not because it's, it's created by men for men. But I was having to use that as, like, a learning resource, cos there wasn't anything else.'*

There was no content which included trans experiences or non-binary identities.

Asa: *'Being Trans was included in, like, the categories of what people might be discriminated against for, like you might be discriminated against, if you're trans, that was it. No mention anywhere else.'*

Participants spoke of vague and inaccurate information delivered carelessly. Patty's RSE experiences in a faith institution didn't offer perspectives of other beliefs, and actively discouraged contraception, inaccurately promoting the 'pulling out' method as '97% effective', which had resulted in coercive behaviours amongst their peers.

The group identified an emphasis on purity, which they found unhelpful and unrealistic. The content was perceived to be dated, focusing on the law and not in line with contemporary sexual cultures, including very little about pornography despite its prevalent use amongst

young people. Participants identified shaming narratives within resources around sexting, which particularly degraded women for image-sharing rather than any productive guidance on how to safely engage in these practices, which were perceived as normal behaviours in young adult relationships.

Most content focussed on sex, whereas other aspects of relationships were missing. Tanya was keen for more discussion about intimacy, not just physical relationships, saying, *'in order to have trust and that bond with someone, we need to have that first basic step, which is intimacy or romance. It can be affectionate and not just physical.'*

RSE was described as primarily fact-based, focussing on 'right and wrong' and lacking nuances, which was disconnected from personal experiences. Mirren, Asa and Simone identified an excessive reliance on stereotypes, including gendered stereotypes, resulting in narrow and unrealistic perspectives. Victim-blaming narratives were implicit in presentations about staying safe. Asa shared a personal experience of abuse in a previous relationship, expressing the inability to connect their experiences at the time with what they had learned abuse looked like.

4.4.3 Activity 03: Critiquing RSE Teaching Resources

For the next activity, I prepared envelopes containing contemporary sex education teaching resources (Appendix D3). The inclusion of diverse resources aimed to bring a variety of perspectives into the discussion space, enriching the overall exploration of RSE. Each envelope included the resource itself or a series of photos presenting it, a resource card providing details, and a worksheet (Appendix D2) containing questions to guide the critical analysis, which asked:



What is your first impression of this resource or activity?

What is successful about this activity/resource?

(Consider: content, language, design, whether it is engaging, inclusivity)

What is unsuccessful about this activity/resource?

What can we learn from this to take into the design of sex education activities and resources in the future?

Figure 17. Image to show questions outlined on each proforma used to critique the teaching resources

The group was divided into two subgroups (Figure 18), taking turns to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of a resource to inform future sex education practices. The use of concealed envelopes added playfulness, resembling a game-show atmosphere, and the groups collectively prioritised topics important to them. The groups appeared to enjoy the experience, and although they were only instructed to critique two each, they kept choosing additional resources to discuss.

Participants actively engaged with the resources, completing activities such as a dot-to-dot (Figure 19) and taking turns reading aloud to the group. Participants engaged in dialogue, sharing insights and learning from each other's perspectives. Critical discourse reinforced the participants' role as experts in the research process. Participants worked collaboratively to critically analyse these educational resources' strengths, limitations, and implications. They considered the content of the resources and evaluated their presentation, level of engagement, and alignment with their own experiences of sex and relationships (See Appendix E3 for completed proformas). Through discussion, they connected on shared experiences and began to inform each other of their perspectives. The 'Under the Influence Awareness Kit' (Appendix D3) included items that simulated impaired vision (to replicate intoxication) and condom application. Though it was credited for being an interactive resource, the participants were highly critical of the implication that the challenge with intoxicated sex is the ability to put on a condom, as opposed to your ability to give consent. Jemima and Patty's observations were commended by peers who had not considered this perspective.

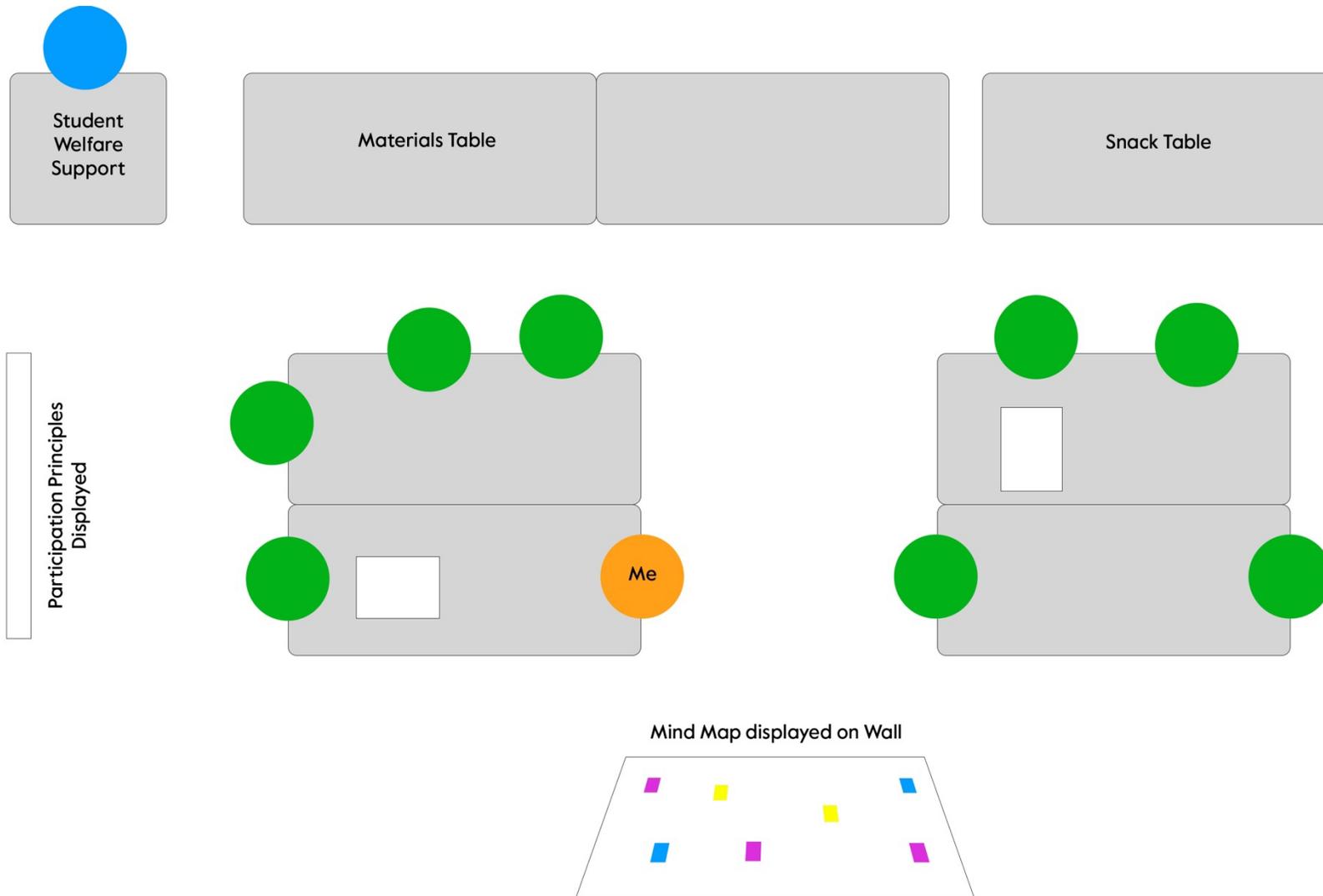


Figure 18. Workshop 1 Room Layout for critiquing case studies and the design challenge

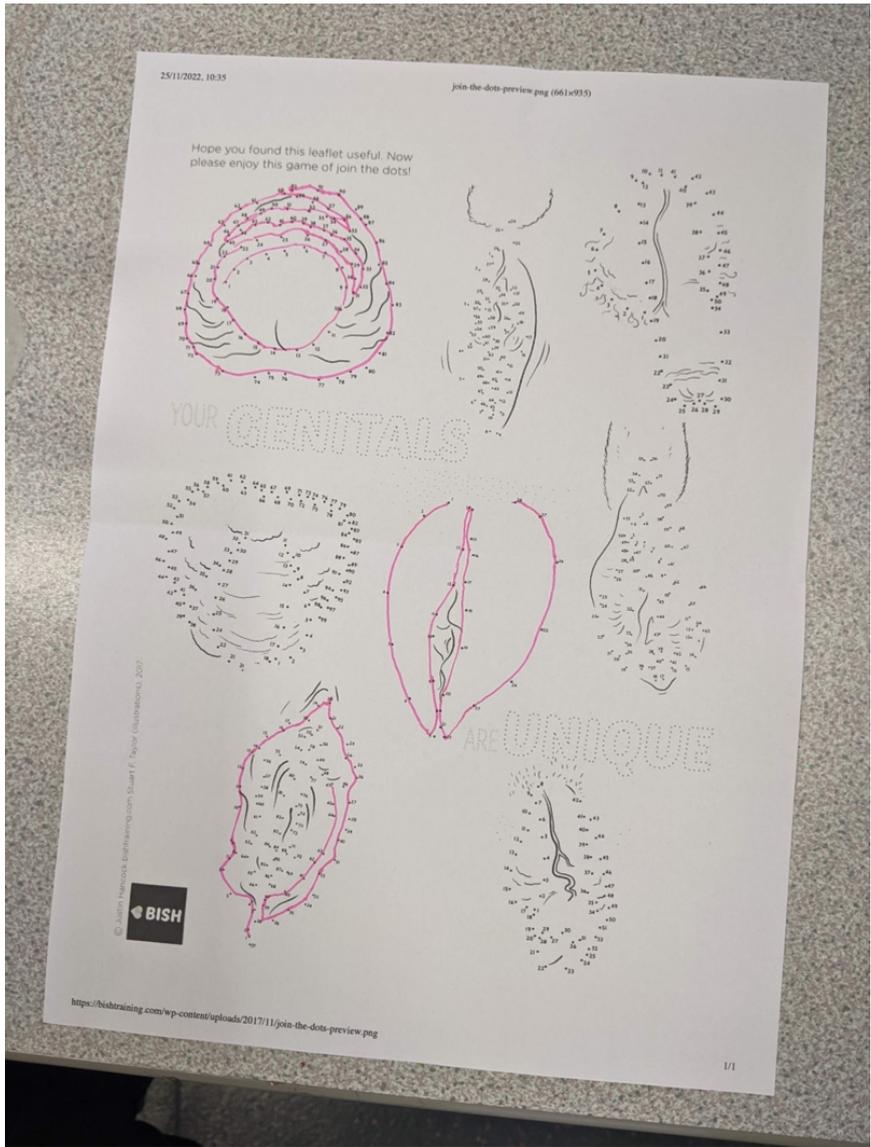


Figure 19: Photograph of a partly completed dot-to-dot, which is part of the Bish Guide to Genitals, one of the learning resources chosen for critique.

Some resources were received positively as being engaging, memorable, inclusive and effective in establishing a conversation. Others were noted for their lack of relatability, vagueness, and outdated perspectives. The 'Bish Guide to Genitals' (Appendix D3) was commended for being sensitive, inclusive and normalising a breadth of experiences, specifically referencing subjects where there is an existing stigma in an attempt to normalise such experiences:

ASA: I like how it includes, like, bits about like, sex isn't just intercourse like, even if you're like a hetero couple, like, you don't have to do that.

MIRREN: Yeah, me too. I never got anything like that in my sex ed.

TANYA: I liked that too.

MIRREN: *It talks about how genitals can look different over time. And how some people might want to change them or they might not.*

ASA: *Yeah, like it's your body, so you can change it if you want to. There's no stigma around that.*

Other resources were found to be disengaging due to bias, negativity and fear-mongering. 'The Potential Dangers of Oral Sex' display (Appendix D3) was felt to be shaming, judgemental, and not constructively educational if you did contract an STI.

MIRREN: *This poster is shaming. It says, 'some symptoms of STDs transmitted to all are just plain disgusting. See for yourself'*

ASA: *NO! (Said in shock)*

MIRREN: *It's really not nice,*

SIMONE: *It's so shamey*

MIRREN: *if I'd had an STI, that would not make me feel better... I wish people would talk about STIs in a way that was more empathetic... like, 'That sucks, but it's okay. Here's what you can do.'*

ASA: *Yeah. Or 'I hope you feel better soon. Now it's important to tell your partners.'*

Additionally, the visuals of this resource and the 'Contraceptives Display Kit' (Appendix D3) were seen as scary, unpleasant and gory, making participants uncomfortable. The 'Contraceptives Display Kit' was also criticised as being concealed, secretive and unrelatable:

JEMIMA: *The suitcase seems a bit business-like,*

PATTY: *Like we're doing like a drug deal or something.*

JEMIMA: *It's hidden and concealed, like again, it's taboo.*

PATTY: *Like a man with a trench coat is gonna walk in with this.*

JEMIMA: *Yeah *laughs**

MIMI: *Yeah, it doesn't make it feel like a subject that you can then go and talk about afterwards.*

PATTY: *It doesn't make it seem like this is going to be part of my life. It must be someone else's life.*

Similarly, the 'Consent, It's as Simple as Tea Video' was criticised for using metaphors implying sexual consent isn't a subject to discuss openly or directly.

After reviewing the 'Contraceptives Display Kit', the group engaged in a discussion about the gendered emphasis on women's responsibilities for preventing pregnancies,

highlighting the inequalities and double standards they had personally encountered. The group members shared their frustrations and experiences of oppression stemming from a lack of inclusivity and sensitivity. Mimi spoke about a challenging experience when school staff discovered her experience as a victim of assault through another student's disclosure. She described being forced to tell her mother and put on a course for risk-taking behaviour, rationalised by the school as safeguarding, whilst there were no consequences for the perpetrator. This disclosure was unsettling, identified as victim-blaming, but was sadly not surprising to the wider group.

There was also a reference to economic disparities. Mimi recognised her privilege of having received more comprehensive and empowering sex education in private education compared to her experience in a state school.

Participants acknowledged the value of learning from some of the learning resources. After the critiques, participants shared personal stories and experiences, fostering peer learning. The first group vulnerably discussed a lack of knowledge about their own bodies, and in the second group, discussions centred around the complexities of navigating social norms, gender and sexuality labels.

As a researcher, I demonstrated an openness to learning from participants, genuinely acquiring new knowledge through Jemima's insights on IUDs, and Mirren and Tanya's discussions about identifying as asexual and aromantic.

Both groups recognised the value of participation and identified the benefit of having a space to talk openly about their perspectives and experiences.

Jemima: It's funny, like, I've never met anyone here before, and suddenly like, we're talking about really personal stuff. I feel like I've told you more stuff than I've ever told my friends...It's kind of nice though

Mimi: To just have that space,

Rakhee: Yeah.

Patty: Yeah, it is nice.

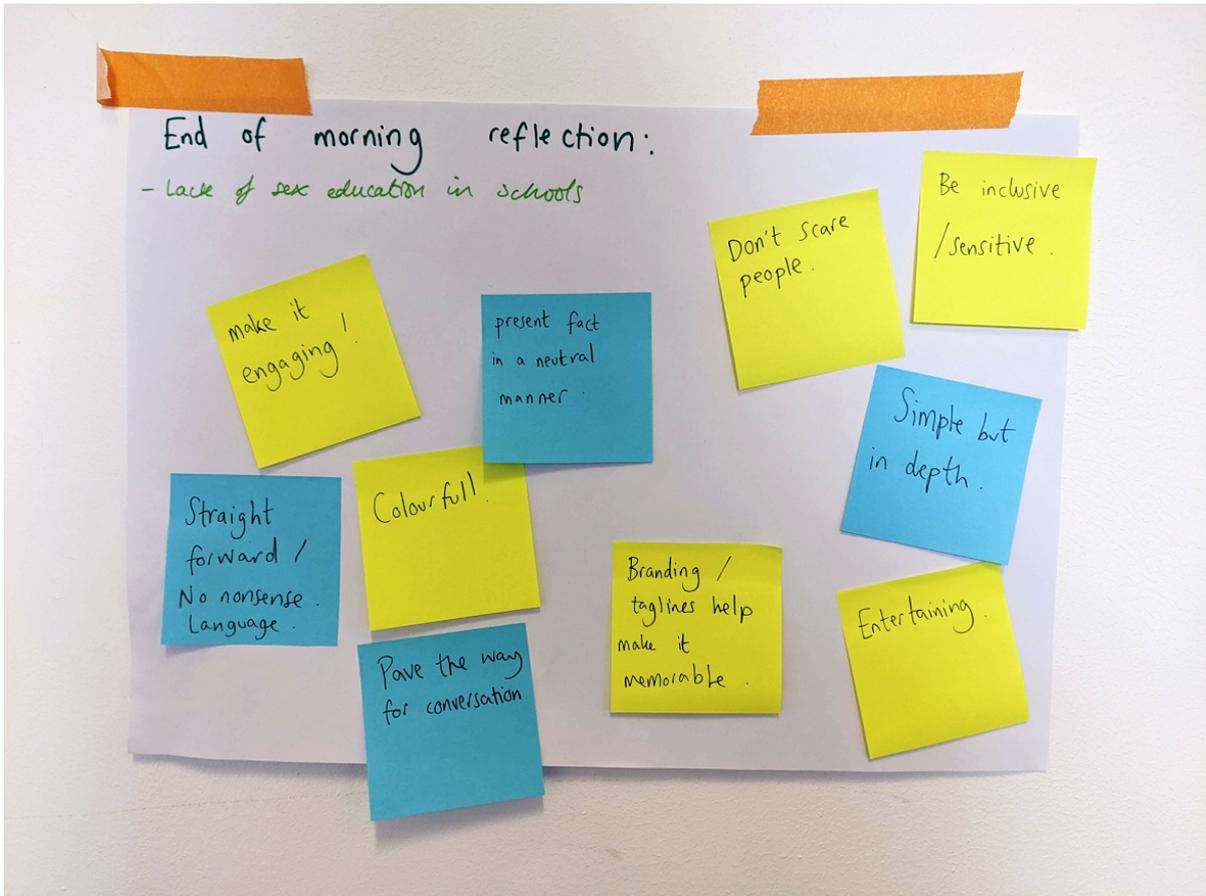


Figure 20. Photograph of the notes from the end of morning reflection showing emerging themes and patterns from young adults experiences and critiques

The morning activity concluded with the participants reflecting to identify common themes, narratives and patterns across the mind map and critique of resources (Figure 20).

Unanimously the participants agreed there was a significant lack of RSE, it was largely unengaging, unrelatable, and heteronormative, often lacking sensitivity or inclusion of varied experiences, and it was loaded with shame and fear. Again, these insights were displayed on the wall with the intention of giving further value to the group's collective perspectives, observations, and experiences.

4.4.4 Activity 04: The Speculative Design Challenge

For the afternoon activity, participants were presented with a brief (Figure 21) that asked them to collaborate to design a preferred future of sex education. The brief prompted them to draw upon the insights and discussions from the morning session, focusing on key aspects such as the content (What), timing (When), context or setting (Where), the educators (Who), and methods of delivery (How).

Brief:



Design an ideal future of relationships and sex education (RSE). We want you to imagine what a utopian RSE will look like in 2040. (You will be working in the same groups as this morning and this will take the rest of today, stopping at 3.30 pm to pitch your ideas to the other group.)

There is no 'one way' of visualising this. You may use drawing, writing (this could be a script, a description, a dialogue), you could use performance (with a puppet – to remain anonymous in your contribution). You could draw a quick comic, design, or make a resource, you could build something out of Lego or play dough, or you may be identifying the use of language or preferred narratives using speech bubble post-its.

These don't have to be polished outcomes. What is important here are the ideas, conversations, proposals and purpose. It is fine if this appears lo-fi or scrappy. Notes, thumbnails, quick drawings, and rough models are all good.

Remember this is **blue sky thinking and future gazing**. Don't worry about the practicalities of delivery. Don't think about the expenses or budgets. **This doesn't have to be realistic or practical**. We are being speculative, looking for **big ideas and brave thinking**.

Figure 21. The speculative design brief, used to initiate the Fantasy Phase of the future workshop, and begin the participatory design of preferred RSE futures

The reflective cycles of PAR facilitated throughout the workshops focused the design project on addressing reflections of participants' lived experiences, centring their expertise and actively proposing solutions to relevant issues. Participants collaborated in two subgroups, initially reflecting on previous activities to identify the significant shared themes such as fearmongering, stigma, vagueness, and heteronormativity. The first group connected to fear-mongering narratives present in RSE (Appendix E4). Within this, the group reflected on the significant areas not covered in RSE, voicing frustrations in not knowing where to access such information. They used drawing, plasticine and paper props to construct a metaphorical 'Backwards Haunted House' representing the initial fear but subsequent enlightenment surrounding sex and relationships (Figure 22-23).

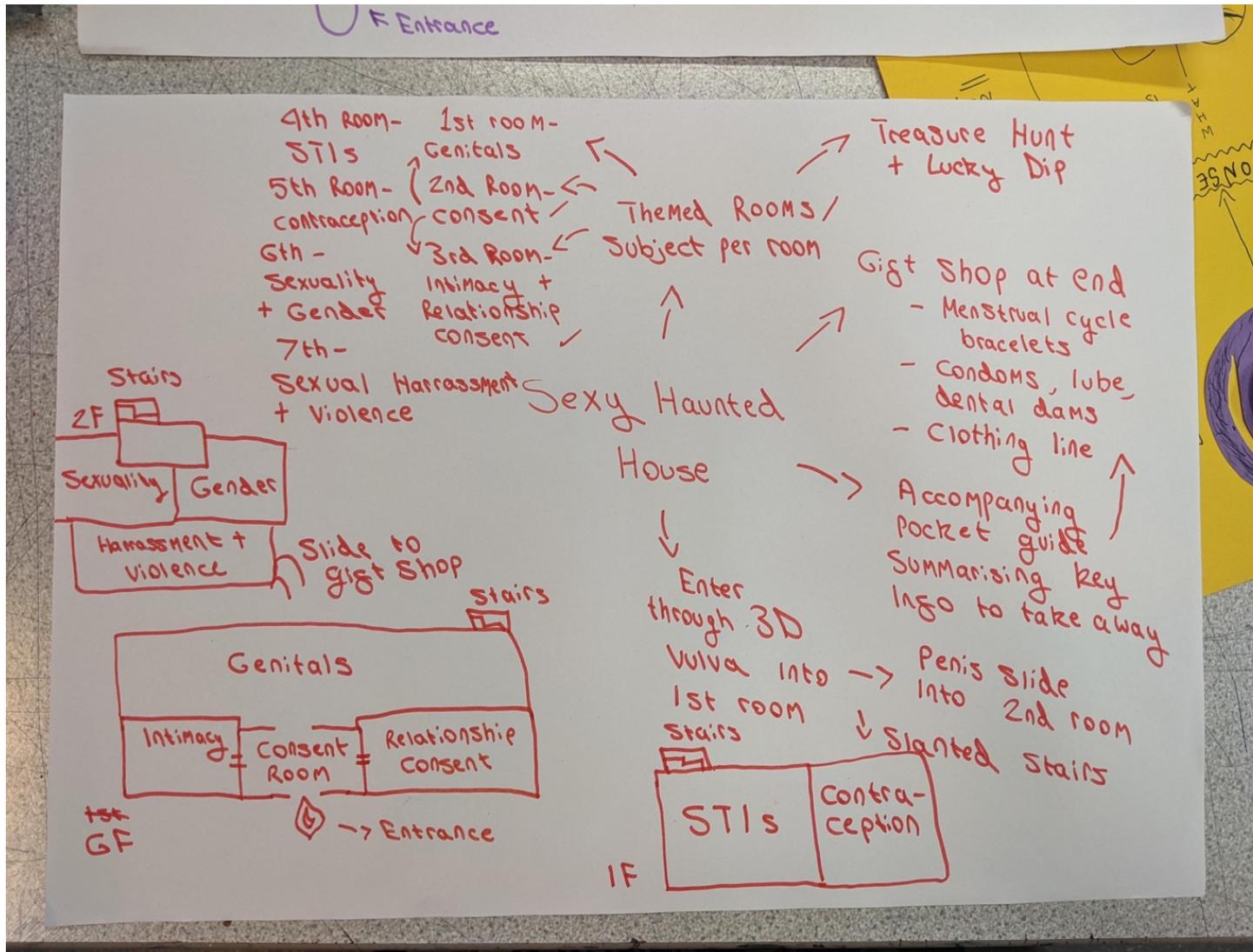


Figure 22: Photograph showing the Map of the Proposed 'Sexy Haunted House', including whole rooms for sexuality, gender, harassment and violence, genitals, intimacy, consent, relationships, STIs and contraception, a vulva entrance and penis slide.

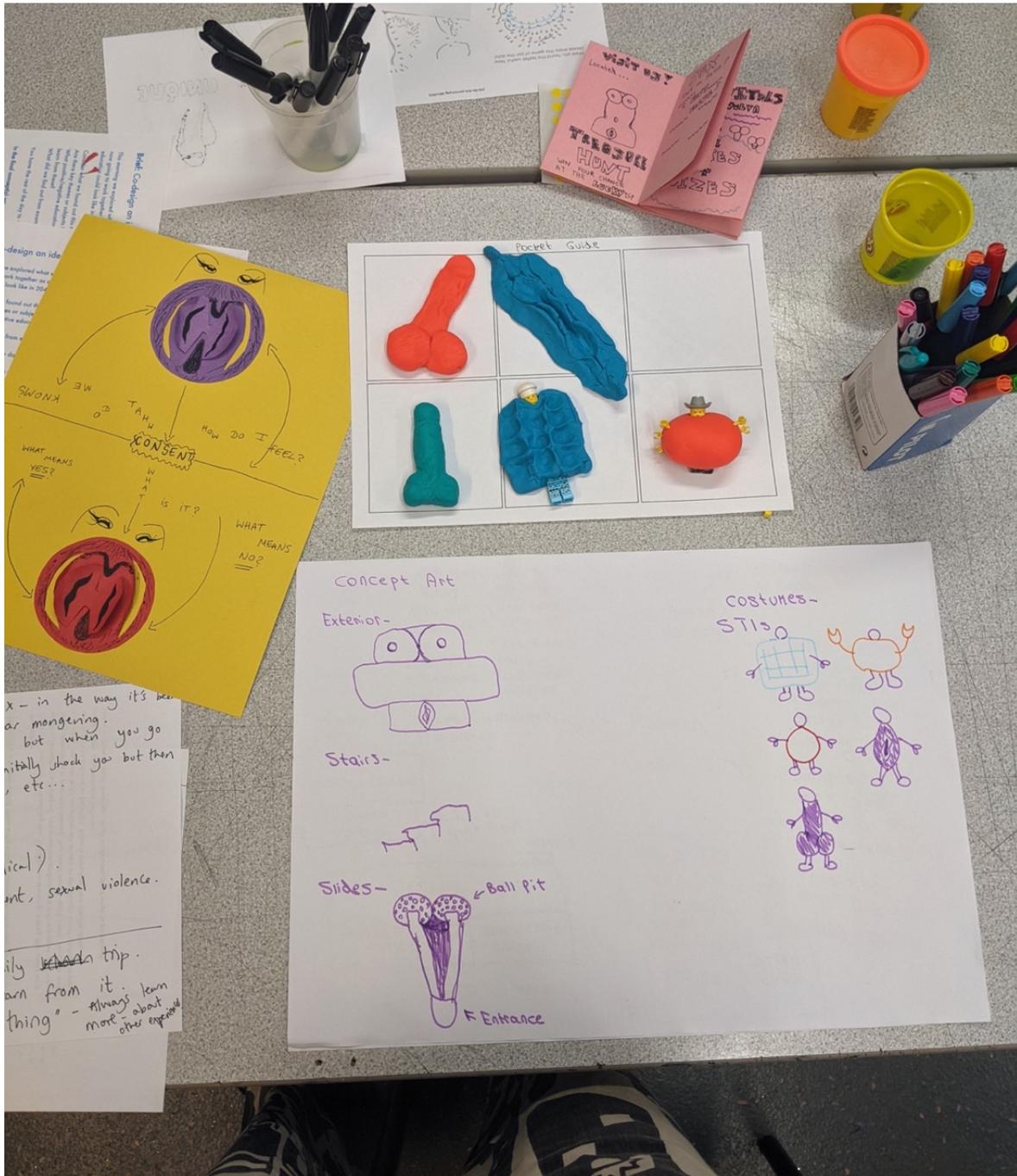


Figure 23: Photograph showing some of the group visualisations of the sexy haunted house including STI character actors who'd act as hosts and answer your questions

The second group also mind-mapped broad knowledge gaps (Figure 24) and continued to reflect on the challenges of having inadequate RSE. Conversations were candid, including Mimi talking about using porn to learn about oral sex and discussing her experience of an unwanted pregnancy, where she had been unable to recognise the symptoms of her pregnancy due to lack of education. The group chose to focus on the lack of education around relationships and navigating challenging situations, such as discussing sex,

navigating consent, experiencing miscarriage, and abusive relationships. They connected these ideas to the emphasis RSE had put on protection during childhood and the lack of information provided to prepare them for adulthood. The group designed an immersive walk-through performance (Figure 26), imagining a building where school groups progress through various rooms depicting challenging moments in relationships. They proposed that after each scene was performed, the school group would discuss different ways to navigate the scenario presented. The central focus of this prototype was to foster empathetic dialogue and collective learning, which felt like a familiar reflection of the workshop itself.

The creative process of enacting scenes with playdough characters, puppets, and Lego figures enabled ongoing reflection. During a Lego depiction of the immersive theatre experience, Patty noted the importance of representing diverse sexualities and relationship dynamics, leading to the inclusion of same-sex and polyamorous couples in the scenes.

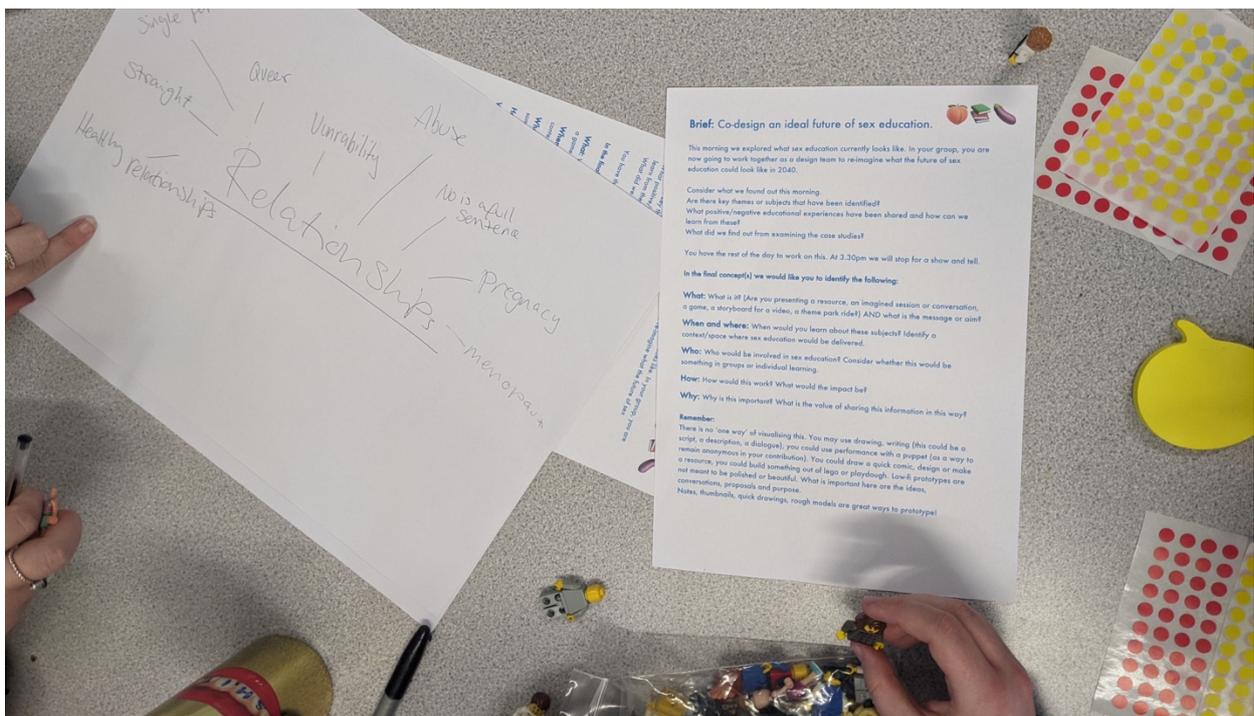


Figure 24: Photograph of idea generation in progress, further focusing on ideas surrounding increasing education about relationships

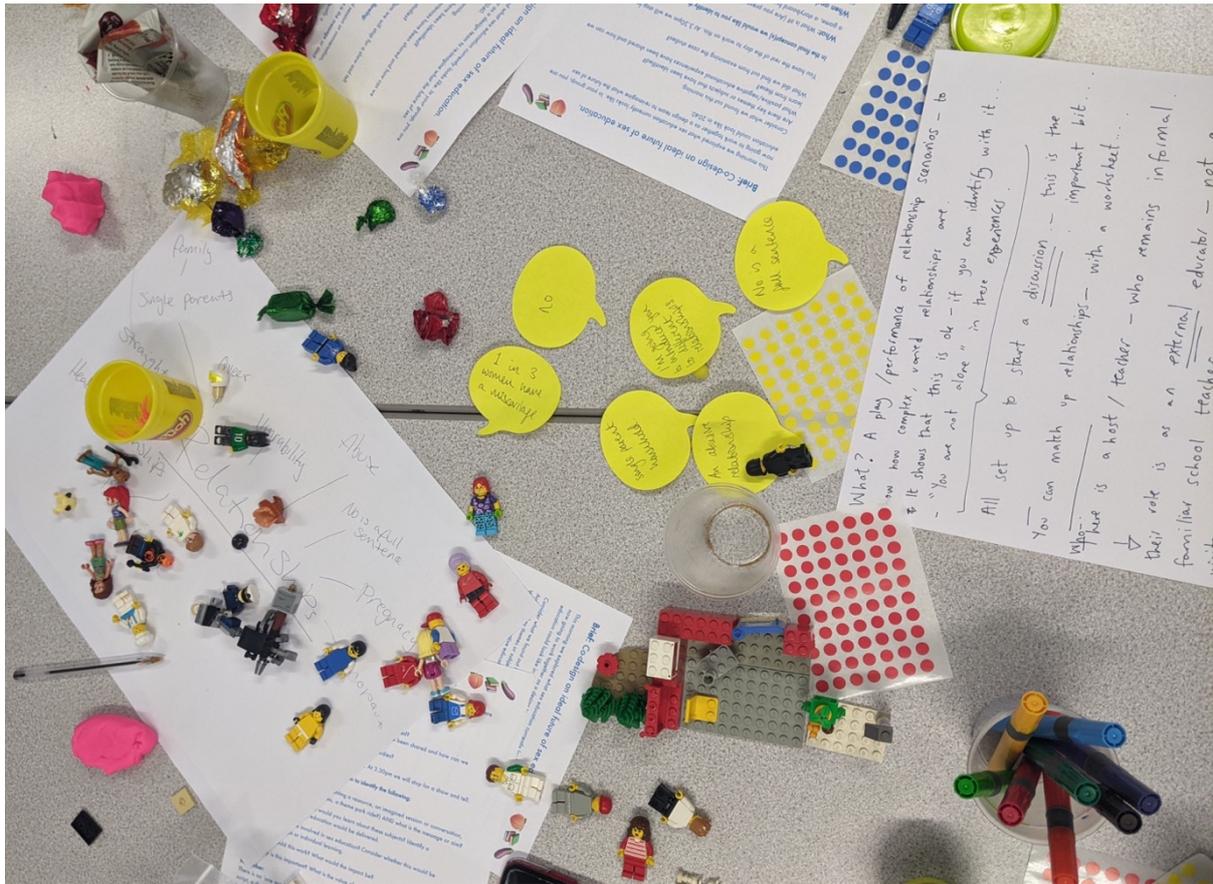


Figure 25: Photograph showing the working progress of their immersive theatre and discussion experience



Figure 26: Photographs to visualise a selection of the scenarios presented for discussion in the immersive theatre experience.

The activity concluded with presentations from both groups, providing an opportunity to reflect on the ideas presented:

Patty, on the immersive theatre: 'So all the scenarios are set up to start discussions; the discussion is the important bit. It would offer a space and people you could speak to, especially about difficult topics that you don't get to talk about anywhere else.' (Full transcript in Appendix E4)

Asa, on the backwards haunted house: 'You could go in with your school or just go in with your mates or your family. There's always something new that you can learn. Learning doesn't stop when you finish school...Sex education should be a lifelong thing.' (Full transcript in Appendix E4)

There was a supportive atmosphere for the presentations where participants cheered for each other. They attentively listened and applauded, with both groups praising each other's responses to the brief. The preferred future designs were seen as better representing the curiosities and knowledge young people require.

The session was closed with reflections on the day, discussing key themes and observations. It was clear that previous RSE fell short in meeting participants' needs, impacting their self-identities and hindering their ability to express desires or boundaries confidently. The lack of LGBTQIA+ content has left some feeling confused, excluded and disengaged. Negative narratives, shame, and the inability to have their questions answered contributed to the feeling that this wasn't a subject to talk about, even when they needed to.

4.5 Workshop 2: Bridging the Gap from Vision to Action

Workshop 2 was a half-day session the following week at the same location. Five of the original eight participants returned (Jemima, Patty, Tanya, Mimi, Simone). The focus of the workshop was to explore bridging the past and present with the future. The arrangement of the room was strategically designed to serve as a metaphor, visually representing this transition in time. At one end of the room, the past and present elements were exhibited, including participants' mind maps, the learning resources, and their reflections from Workshop 1 (see Figure 27).



Figure 27. Photograph of the workshop space, with tables laid out to bridge the past and present with the future designs.

On the other side of the room, the future designs were showcased. Participants sat along a central table (Figure 28), which symbolically bridged the past and present with the future.

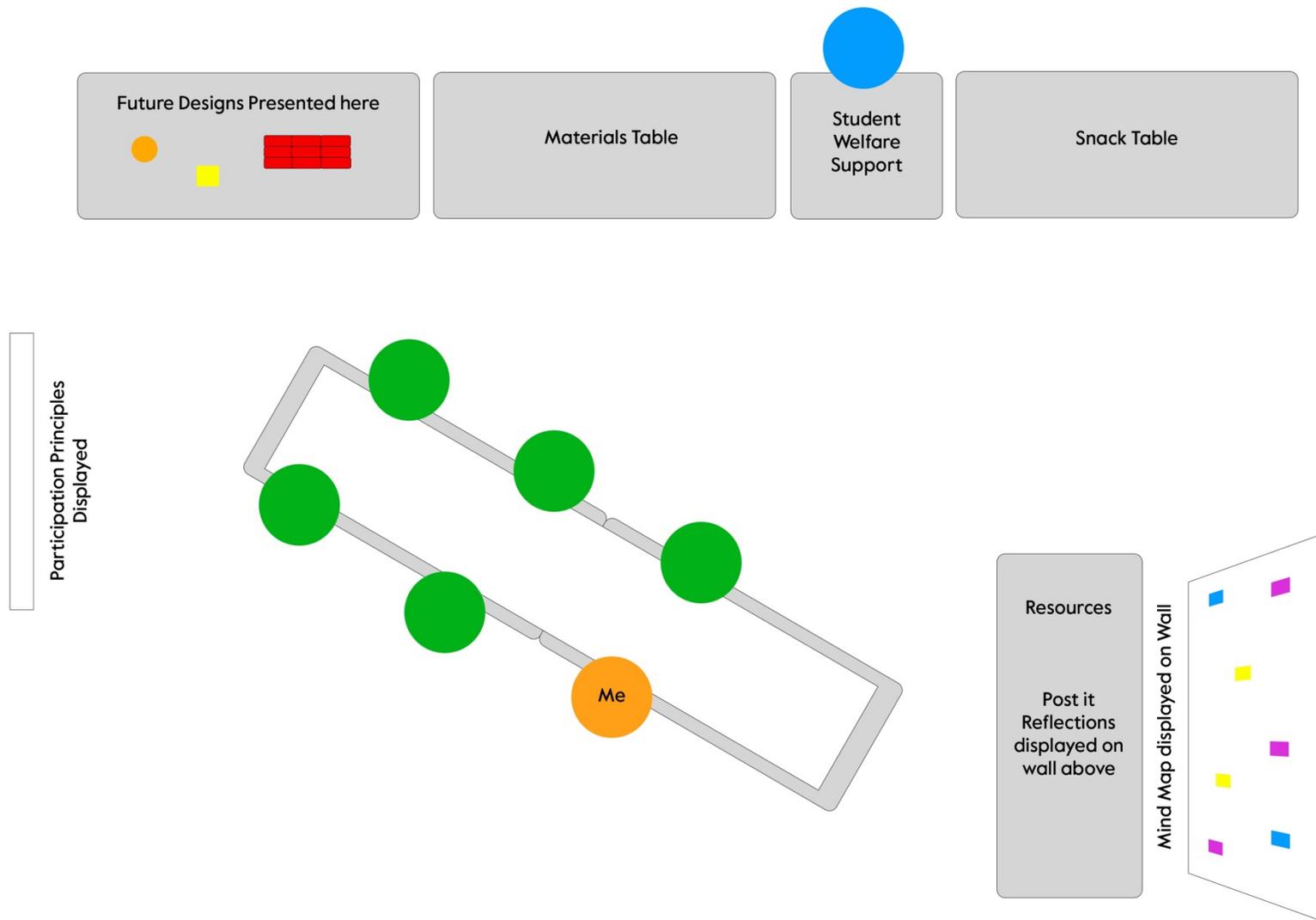


Figure 28. Workshop 2 Room Layout to bridge the past and present with the preferred futures.

4.5.1 Activity 05: Proposing Actions to Bridge the Present and Preferred Future.

I introduced the session as building upon last week's activities, aiming to identify opportunities and propose actions to bridge the present with their desired futures. The session followed the 'Who,' 'What,' 'When,' 'Where,' and 'How' structure from Workshop 1. Participants were encouraged to lead the conversation, reflecting collaboratively to identify emerging themes and patterns. They recognised the lack of male participants, identifying a need for further research. This iterative reflective process allowed for a deeper exploration of the findings and informed subsequent actions.

Participants highlighted that RSE was often delivered as a novelty subject, which informed the matter in which young people engaged with it. They noted that teachers appeared unprepared and uninvested in the delivery of RSE, citing its interdisciplinary nature and lack of a specific subject designation. Tanya said: *'Why are they [teachers] not trained properly on this very serious, real topic, something that's going to be part of everyday life... There's that big, massive gap... that's where the stigma is coming. They should be planning for it... how do we make tasks for these kids that are engaging? Or how do we talk to them in a way that they can understand, and so they don't feel uncomfortable? Or how can we stop them feeling silenced about it?'* Tanya expressed a desire for student consultation on the content of RSE, emphasising that this approach would enable education to centre on relevant and necessary topics.

They expressed a desire for much more RSE, continuing into 6th form, college and university, suggesting that ongoing sessions could help normalise the subject. Patty noted missed opportunities to discuss RSE topics when discussing poetry in English or bodily relationships in PE, which could help to remove the sense of novelty and isolation of the subject. *'We need to do more active learning, so you create safer spaces, and then you can have kids within whatever lesson ask a question.'*

Discussion dominated during this session, with less emphasis on visualisation than initially envisioned. While I considered prompting these activities, I prioritised the valuable discussions and refrained from exerting control over the session. Participants were engaged throughout, and discussions continued into the break. Realistic problem-solving proved more challenging for participants than speculative design activities, particularly

when conversations looped back to underfunding in education and perceived indifference from individuals in positions of power.

A significant point of disagreement arose concerning gender-segregated RSE lessons, with varying perspectives on the topic. Simone and Mimi expressed concerns that in their experience of mixed-gender conversations, male peers' lack of maturity hindered open discussions, making female students feel uncomfortable. Simone expressed her own personal discomfort in discussing common issues, such as discharge, thrush, and bacterial vaginosis, with males present. There was agreement that in RSE lessons, male students were particularly unengaged and behaved with immaturity. Simone recalled male students laughing, joking, and teachers not challenging misogynistic behaviours in discussions around harassment. However, Patty raised counterarguments regarding the limitations of gender binaries and the importance of fostering empathy across diverse experiences. Patty drew attention to both groups' designs from the previous week, where these ideas had been central. Ultimately, the group agreed on fostering empathy and open discussions for all students, regardless of gender, to address taboo subjects collectively.

I noted that both designed futures were highly interactive and inquired about the significance of this. Participants emphasised its critical importance to the designs.

Patty: It makes people feel ok asking questions

Mimi: Yeah, because [in RSE] it was very daunting to ask anything

Patty: It was very structured and very rigid. Sitting in a classroom and listening, that's it.

Mimi: The interaction here, in these workshops, was so good.... It has made me more likely to discuss these issues with other people.

The group participants expressed a desire for more interaction, space for curiosity, and discussion in RSE. Patty said with more interaction, '*Teachers might learn something too*', recognising the potential of providing opportunities for educators to gain new insights into the reality of young people's lives.

Participants highlighted the need for RSE that fosters critical thinking, seeing this as crucial for navigating and engaging with sexual cultures, inequalities and online content. In pursuit of participant-led research, I actively involved the group in proposing the next steps for the research, aligning with the principles of PAR (3.3). Together, we explored potential avenues, such as hosting an exhibition, but participants collectively agreed that a more direct approach was necessary.

Simone: *I think talking to people who actually teach this for a living would be a good idea, like specialists and school teachers,*

Jemima: *Yeah, teachers in schools, 6th form, colleges and universities...*

Patty: *Ultimately, it comes down to them to make changes happen.... I also think it needs to be shown in a conference with lots of important people, like the head of education for England, so they fully understand how important RSE actually is for young people.*

We put together a plan, which included engaging with sex educators to share the group's perspectives, reaching out to universities, and contacting individuals involved in government policy development.

Finally, I prompted participants to reflect on their experience of the research process. They noted their enjoyment of the workshops and acknowledged the benefits of a dedicated space for open discussion. Tanya, Patty and Mimi talked about how they'd found the experience empowering. All participants said they'd learned a lot from participating in the research, with Mimi saying, *'I even learned a few things about my own body that I didn't know before.'*

Jemima reflected positively on the experience of writing participation principles together at the start of day one: *'I think that really helped. I felt like we all got in the right frame of mind to be open, and to talk honestly'*. Tanya spoke to the mind mapping activity as being particularly connective. *'I really liked how we just spoke about all of our experiences together. And it's like, we started to understand the different environments and experiences are all part of one'*. Jemima and Simone said that designing together made these things easier to talk about and Patty said the collaborative design process connected the group. Jemima reflected on the impact participation had beyond the workshop *'if anyone starts talking about it now, I'm immediately like, I'm getting involved in this. I don't feel embarrassed about things anymore. I probably wouldn't have been like that or spoken up without this [research experience].'*

Patty asked about my research expectations. I reflected that while some aligned with my expectations, some had been different. I explained I was surprised that topics seemed relatively 'mild' compared to the discussions in contemporary media on young people's sexual behaviours. The group agreed that sexual cultures were constantly changing and recognised that they had become 'kinkier', normalising activities like power play, choking,

hair pulling, and anal sex across all sexualities, and not warranting categorisation as 'other'.

In preparation for the next phase of research, I carried out a stage of RTA on the workshop data to identify emerging themes, which is further outlined in Chapter 5. This process identified overlaps between the participants' preferred futures of RSE and their reflections on the research workshops. These themes were presented back to the participants for validation.

4.6 Focus Group to Validate Findings

Three months later, I re-engaged with the participant group to share emerging insights from my initial analysis. Four out of the original eight participants (Mimi, Patty, Jemima, Rakhee) were able to attend. This process of validation was to ensure accuracy in my analysis, ensuring the themes accurately aligned with their perspectives and experiences.

I spoke about the process of analysis I had been through and presented the most prominent themes (Figure 29). Participants agreed on the overall accuracy. However, inclusion and making RSE sessions engaging and participatory were highlighted as being particularly important, whereas the need for playfulness would be a bonus but less crucial.



Figure 29: Validation Focus Group Presentation Slides, showing emerging themes after the first round of reflexive thematic analysis

I discussed my goal of fostering a Brave Space that goes beyond safety to encourage debate, address oppression, and embrace honesty, even in vulnerability. The group agreed that the workshops had successfully achieved this. They'd felt empowered to approach the tasks with an open sincerity, even when that was exposing, and that they could speak out against social norms and challenge power in critiquing learning resources and educational experiences. Patty said, *'I knew these two [gestures to Mimi and Rakhee], but I don't know*

you [gestures to me and Jemima] but I'm talking about the most intimate moments of my whole life.'

We reflected on the research experience. Participants acknowledged that they had gained valuable knowledge through their participation. Jemima reflected on this, saying, *'There was a whole range of things that I had no idea about that was discussed...I was learning things that I felt that I should have learnt a while ago.'* While some learning emerged from their interaction with teaching resources, the majority of their newfound knowledge was derived from the collective discussion and reflection. Patty identified that they'd *'learned a lot from other people, 'cos when you have friends, you're kind of in your little bubble really. So, learning about other people and their perspectives, it's been good.'*

Sharing their stories was perceived as a means of validating their experiences and reducing the stigma they had previously felt. Rakhee emphasised the personal value, whereby through disclosing her personal challenges, she'd realised she wasn't alone. The participants cited the reflective nature of the workshops as a catalyst for personal development, recognising their own need for further learning. Jemima spoke of how she had conducted further online research, while Mimi shared insights from a book she had been reading about the contraceptive pill. She was eager to tell us of her discoveries and frustrations regarding gender inequalities within contraception. All participants spoke of continued discussions around RSE with friends following the workshops, fostering further valuable conversations that extended beyond the research space. Patty expressed a desire to continue to contribute to the development of RSE independently beyond the research, and Jemima had considered using the idea of RSE improvement as a theme for a university project.

4.7 Feedback Conversations with Expert Stakeholders and Beneficiaries

To ensure rigour in the research, I looked to triangulate findings and identify challenges and opportunities to implement change through engaging with educators and welfare workers. Specialist educators and welfare teams had been identified by the participants as being crucial to feed forward to in the hope that it would inform action. I conducted feedback conversations firstly with Sex Educator Matilda and secondly with University Student Welfare worker Jill (pseudonym). Through these conversations, I aimed to pinpoint

opportunities and challenges and identify realistic actions that could be taken to improve RSE experiences. The feedback conversations took place over Zoom.

I began by sharing the journey of the workshops through a Miro Board which displayed the visual outcomes alongside key quotes (Appendix F1). I shared the participants' mind map, then the resource critiques and finally, the designed futures. Matilda and Jill were empathetic to the participant's experiences, acknowledging them as concerning but familiar.

I then shared my diagram of themes and recommendations (Figure 31) for:

- More Sex Education (More frequent, more thorough, more visible)
- More inclusive RSE (LGBTQIA+ inclusion, Challenging perceptions of difference between genders experiences)
- Participatory RSE (To Prepare Taught Sessions and Ongoing Participation within sessions)

I stated that each should be delivered with more bravery across our RSE spaces and provisions. Themes are outlined further in the following chapter, Analysis and Key Findings.

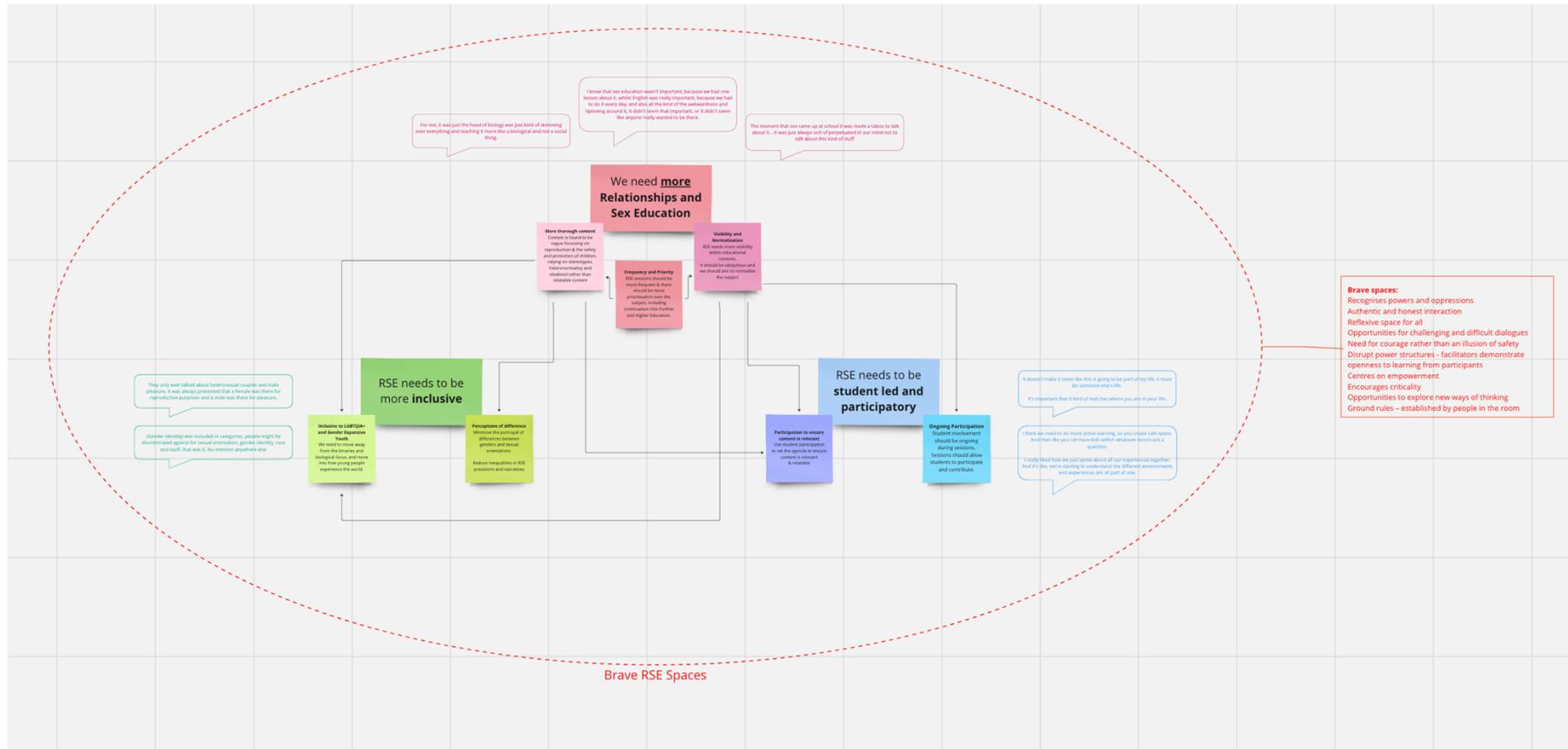


Figure 31: Overview of the Miro Board used during the feedback conversations to present young adults' preferences and recommendations for the development of RSE (the following few images show the details of each section)

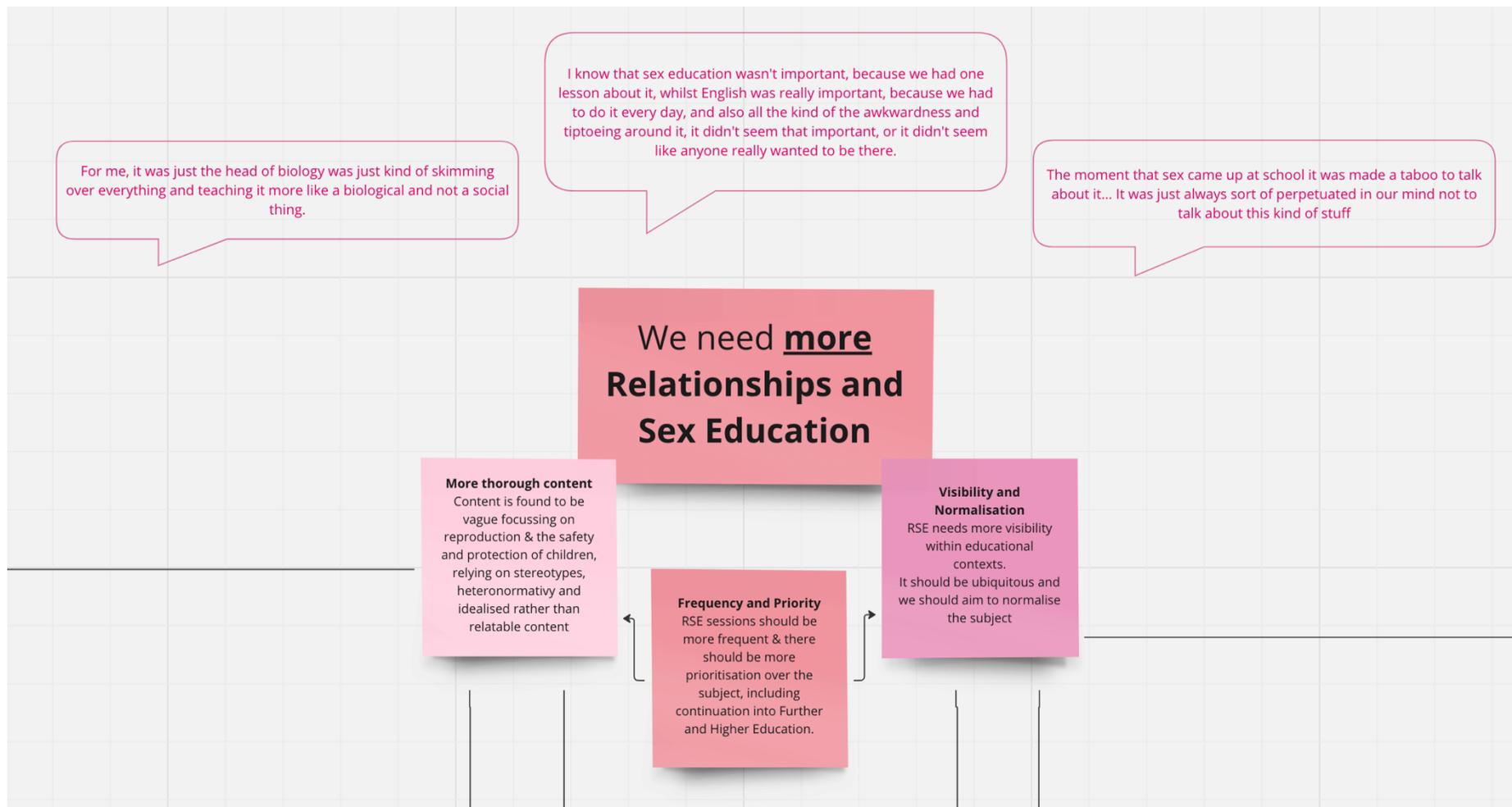


Figure 31 A: Zooming in on the Miro board used during the feedback conversations to present young adults preferences and recommendations for the development of RSE – ‘More RSE’

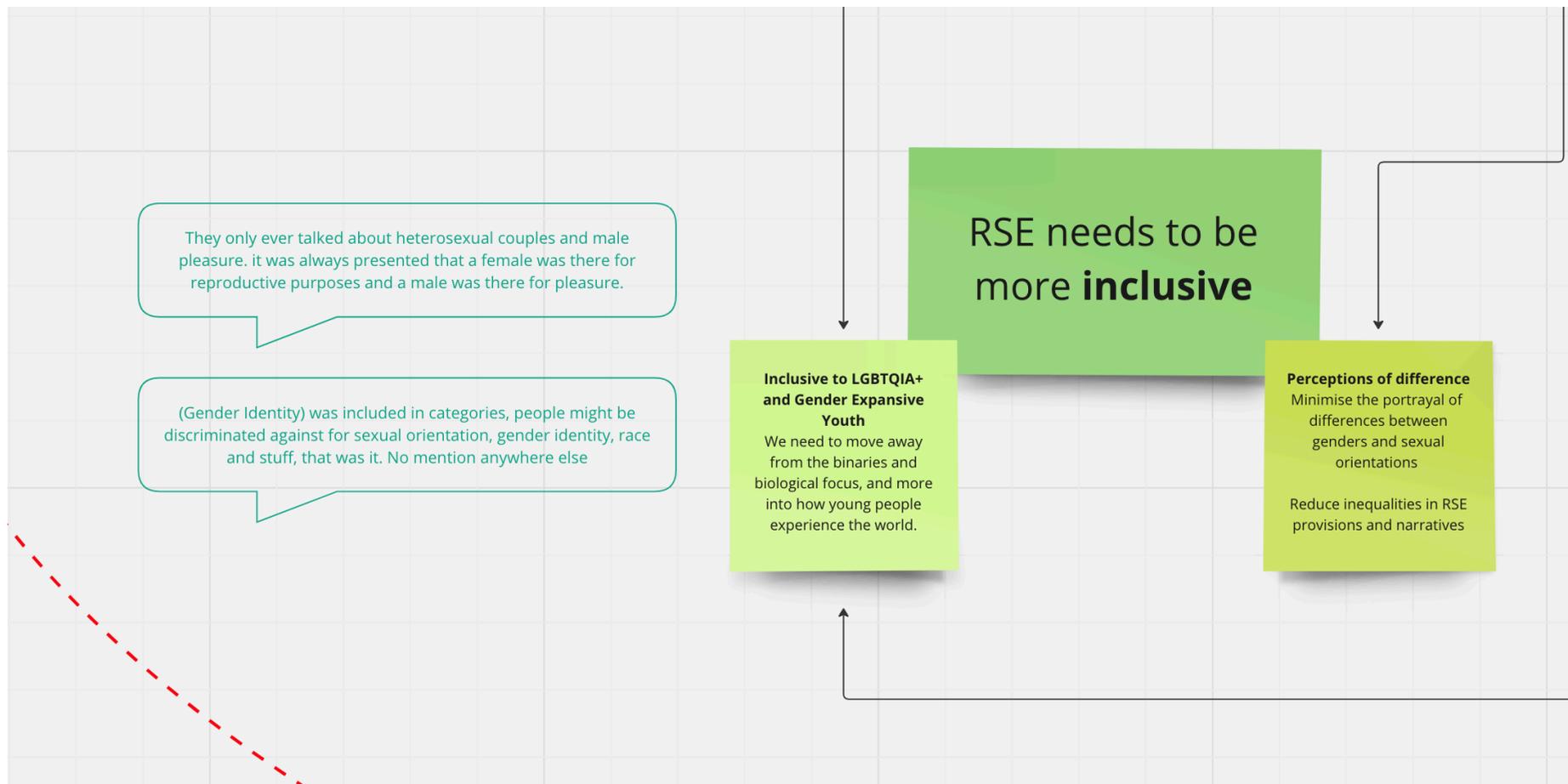


Figure 31 B: Zooming in on the Miro Board used during the feedback conversations to present young adults preferences and recommendations for the development of RSE – ‘More Inclusive RSE’

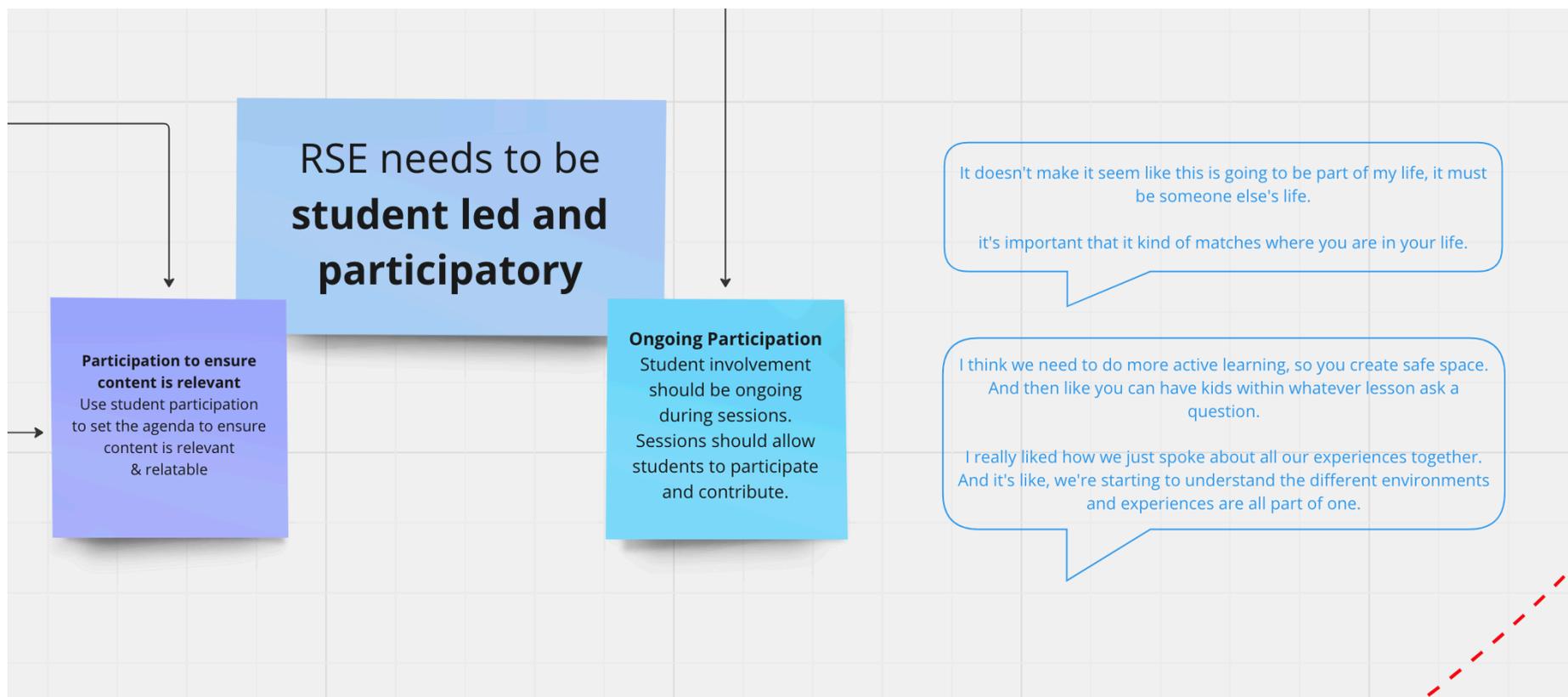


Figure 31 C: Zooming in on the Miro board used during the feedback conversations to present young adults' preferences and recommendations for the development of RSE – 'Participatory RSE'

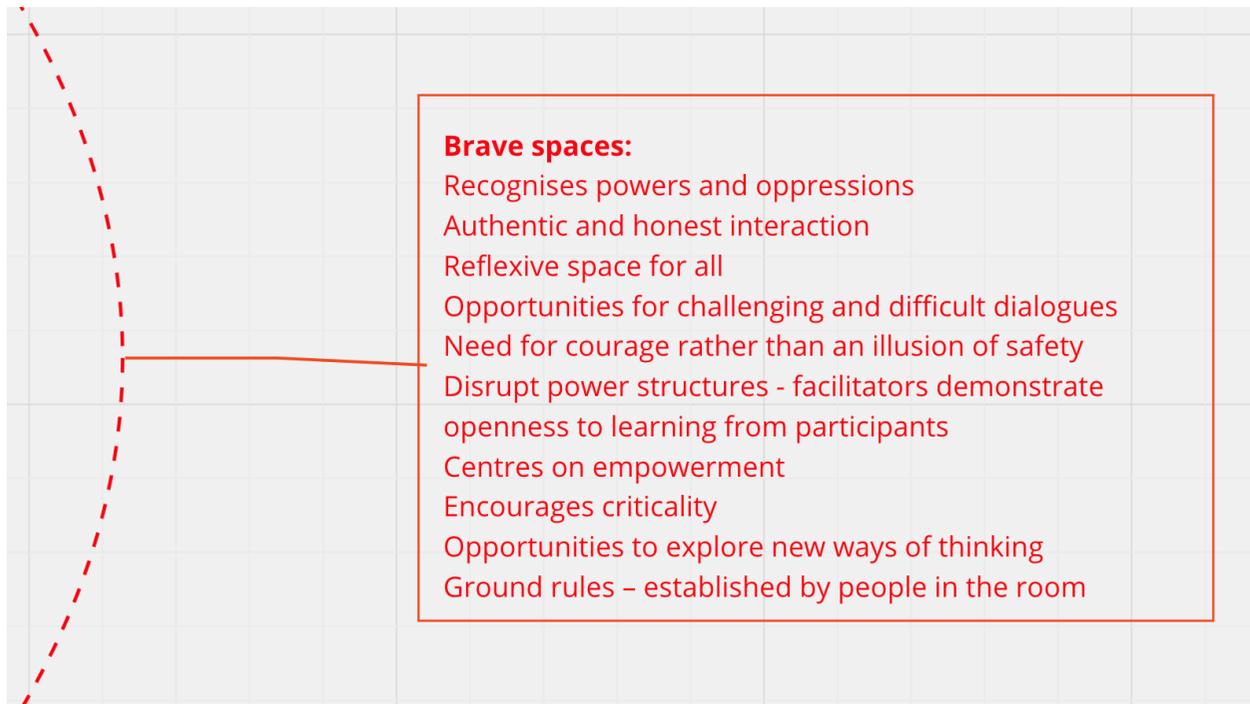


Figure 31 D: Zooming in on the Miro board used during the feedback conversations to present young adults' preferences and recommendations for the development of RSE – 'Brave Spaces'

First, I spoke with Matilda, a sex educator and co-founder of *'Split Banana'*. Split Banana are RSE specialists who deliver workshops, train educators, and consult with schools and community organisations on RSE provisions. Matilda celebrated the young adults' approaches and particularly connected to the haunted house, referring to it throughout the conversation and emphasising the critical need for normalising and increasing the visibility of the subject.

Matilda has observed disparities in RSE implementation, often due to limited capacity and time for those leading the subject. She underscored the importance of both school-based and external facilitators and emphasised the need for more guidance on the *'whole school approach'* outlined in the DfE's guidance (2019, p40, with more clarity and direction for schools. She advocates for a whole school approach given that RSE topics permeate various aspects of students' lives beyond designated classrooms. She envisions cross-curricular implementation, reviewing school policies to address anti-LGBTQIA+ language and sexual harassment, and ensuring staff model good behaviour related to consent and pronouns.

She acknowledged a *'generational and technological gap'* between teachers and students and highlighted the fear teachers have of getting RSE discussions wrong due to unfamiliarity with students' experiences. *'They're not aware of the things young people are seeing, exposed to, using the language of... there's a fear from teachers of getting it wrong.'*

Discussing LGBTQIA+ inclusivity, Matilda said she hears a lot about RSE *'being heteronormative and the lack of representation... not even just through the resources and materials, but also through the teacher's level of knowledge and comfort'*. She expressed the need for more communication on the importance of inclusive RSE. Split Banana's efforts in combating this include language use, representation, and celebration of diverse bodies and sexualities. Matilda emphasised that, in her experience, LGBTQIA+ discrimination from students most often stemmed from a lack of exposure to queer identities rather than an active intent to discriminate, highlighting the need to *'lead with empathy'*. Matilda recalled experiences where children were taught about heteronormativity and parents had misunderstood, complaining that their children were being told it was unacceptable to be heterosexual.

Recognising the need for bravery and critical thinking, particularly in the context of online influencers, Matilda emphasised the importance of participation, *'I totally agree that there needs to be more open discussion, there needs to be more hearing each other's positions, beliefs, opinions and much more open conversation. The guidance doesn't really allow for that or doesn't give any guidance around how you can do that, and teachers don't feel confident enough to facilitate those kinds of conversations. They feel a lot safer with a standard lesson plan or video or resource'*.

She identified engaging young men as an ongoing challenge, calling for more guidance for educators and approaches involving the entire school community. Matilda emphasised the significance of avoiding gender-specific framing of negative behaviours, discussing the danger in creating an *'us and them'* dynamic, which can lead to further disengagement and radicalisation, and stressed the importance of finding ways to engage young men.

She strongly advocated for centring young people's perspectives, believing it would make education more relevant, inclusive, and effective, and highlighted the effectiveness of peer-led education in prior experiences. She acknowledged the study's findings as valuable evidence of young people's RSE needs and pledged to act within Split Banana to implement participatory activities in future teaching.

Next, I spoke to Jill, a member of a University Student Welfare team. She emphasised the urgent need for comprehensive RSE in the digital age. She resonated with the need for bravery to empower and develop critical thinking skills, noting the struggles students have in navigating unrealistic expectations of social media and porn. Jill resonated with the participants' aspirations and acknowledged that the themes connected with her own experience of supporting students. *'I absolutely agree with everything.'*

She emphasised a particular need to educate students about navigating toxicity in romantic and non-romantic relationships and underscored broader challenges for young people grappling with a lack of confidence, feeling voiceless, and struggling to comprehend their agency, compounding these overall issues. She discussed the profound implications on mental health coming from an ongoing consent crisis, *'If you look at the wider picture with sexual assaults, rapes, lack of consent, coercion, toxic relationships, you're looking at huge implications on mental health'*. She connected this to Patty's contribution to the mind-map - *'heterosexual couples and male pleasure'*, *'Reinforcing the idea of male pleasure whilst not*

talking about the female experience is so damaging and disempowering'. She commented that the ongoing idea of *'pleasing the man'* significantly impacts women's understanding of their own agency.

Echoing Matilda, Jill addressed the challenge of engaging young men in RSE and the imperative to combat toxic masculinity currently being fuelled by misogynistic influencers. During past experiences in FE colleges, she encountered immaturity and sniggering when RSE content was delivered, which she believes reinforces the need for RSE to extend into colleges and universities. Although, when she'd tried to arrange recent sessions on consent, nobody attended. Discussing barriers of a university context, she highlighted an assumption from management that students had received RSE in school and would no longer require it. *'We have been told because of the age group, they should be encouraged to take responsibility for those things themselves'* and expressed frustration over the lack of guidance from regulatory bodies. She said, *'There is a real fear of giving inaccurate or inappropriate advice and losing students' trust'*. She thought participation could lead to conversations that teachers don't feel prepared for, referencing the lack of training and LGBTQIA+ inclusive knowledge and recognising the generational and technological gap identified by Matilda.

I had prepared further diagrams for us to collectively work on to propose realistic actions in response to young adults' needs (Figure 32, for details, See Appendix F2 & F3). Matilda and Jill both identified opportunities and challenges connected to these proposals, identified actions to address these and added them to the map (See Appendix F2 & F3).

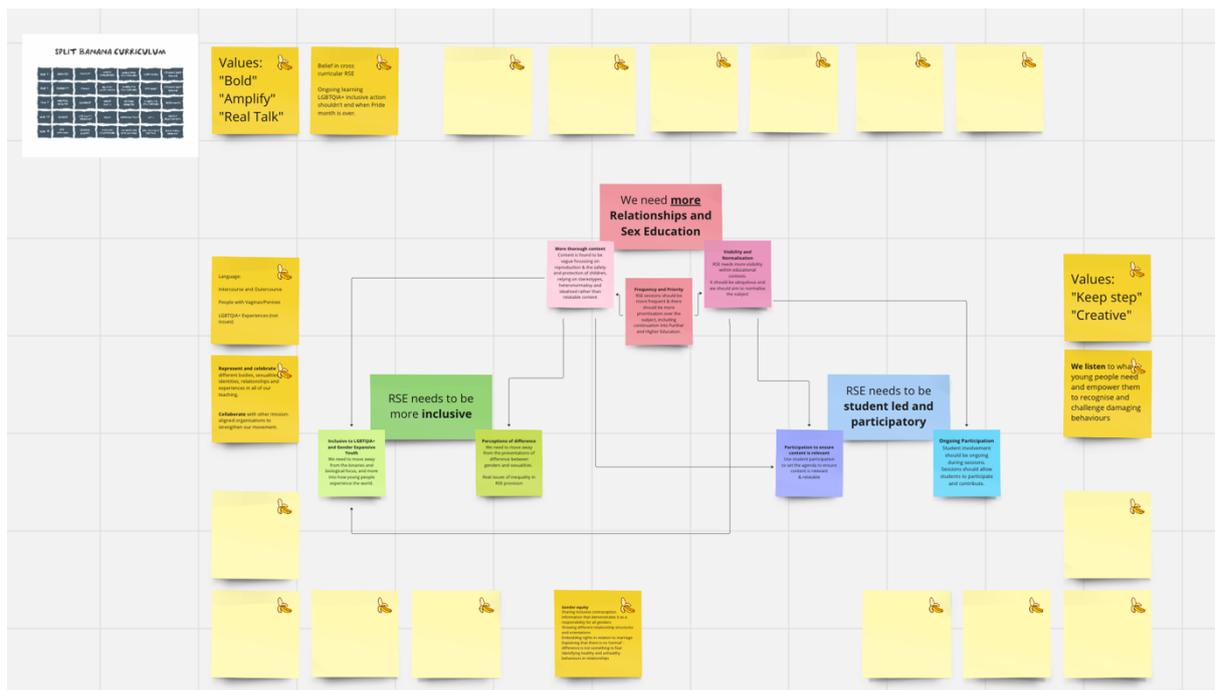


Figure 32. Overview of the Miro board, shared during the feedback conversations, showing Matilda’s process of proposing action in response to young adults’ preferences for improving RSE, (for further detail See Appendix F2&F3)

Actions included:

- Using inclusive language such as ‘people with vaginas’ and ‘people with penises’, LGBTQIA+ ‘experiences’ not ‘issues’.
- Discussing both intercourse and outercourse as sex
- Representing and celebrating different bodies and relationships
- Increased student participation
- Leading with respect and modelling good practice
- Openness to learning and empathy with young people’s experiences
- Blended approaches with expert RSE educators
- Opportunities for cross-curriculum delivery

Requirements were identified for:

- Increased staff training
- Further research into new ways to engage young men
- Increased time for curriculum development
- Further guidance on a ‘whole school approach’
- University policy guidance on the duty of care
- Extended Funding

4.8 Summary:

The chapter detailed the fieldwork, centring around two workshops with eight young adult participants. Activities included mind mapping to critique RSE experiences and teaching resources. Participants identified RSE shortcomings, leading to a speculative participatory design challenge envisioning a preferred future of sex education. Emerging themes appeared when exploring their prior experiences, such as infrequent sessions, lack of inclusion, fear-mongering, and the need for more engaging content and interactive teaching resources. Participants validated the emerging themes and commented on the workshops' positive impact, fostering open discussions and personal development. Some expressed a desire to contribute to RSE beyond the research. Expert stakeholder engagements further emphasised the need for frequent, normalised and inclusive RSE. They identified challenges such as a lack of training, gaps in guidance and difficulties in engaging young men, whilst Matilda strongly advocated for a 'whole school approach.' Actions were proposed based on study findings, highlighting the importance of inclusivity, participation and braver approaches to teaching. In the following chapter, I will present the analysis and further outline the findings.

Chapter 5: Analysis

5.1 Introduction

Having presented the fieldwork in Chapter 4, I will begin this chapter by presenting the analysis before discussing the insights. Several iterations of the coding process supported me in identifying themes and their overlaps. Data was analysed in response to my research questions to examine both how PD approaches can foster brave spaces and to identify implications for practice and policy surrounding the development of RSE. This chapter outlines insights into both the creation of brave spaces within research practices and the insights and implications for RSE practice and policy.

5.2 Process of Analysis

Reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) served as the primary analytical method. The analysis unfolded through iterative cycles, as illustrated in Figure 33, with a focus on identifying and refining emergent themes. Participant involvement in the analysis process was integral, aligning with the PAR methodology. Collaborative analysis with participants happened through reflection in Workshop 1 and in Workshop 2 with an in-depth discussion of emerging themes. Initial analysis with the group grounded the need for more thorough content going beyond biology and reproduction to include relationships and more inclusive content. The removal of fearmongering was regularly revisited.

This next stage in the analytical process included listening, transcribing (using digital software before manual editing), reading, and note-taking for data familiarisation. Following this, I developed an initial set of codes and organised these into preliminary themes that revealed patterns in the data. With continued engagement, I identified relationships between emergent themes and mapped them to locate overlaps and connections (see Figure 34).

Alongside this, I examined insights relating to bravery and participation (Figure 35), drawing upon feedback from participants regarding their research experience, as well as insights gleaned from my own observations and reflections.

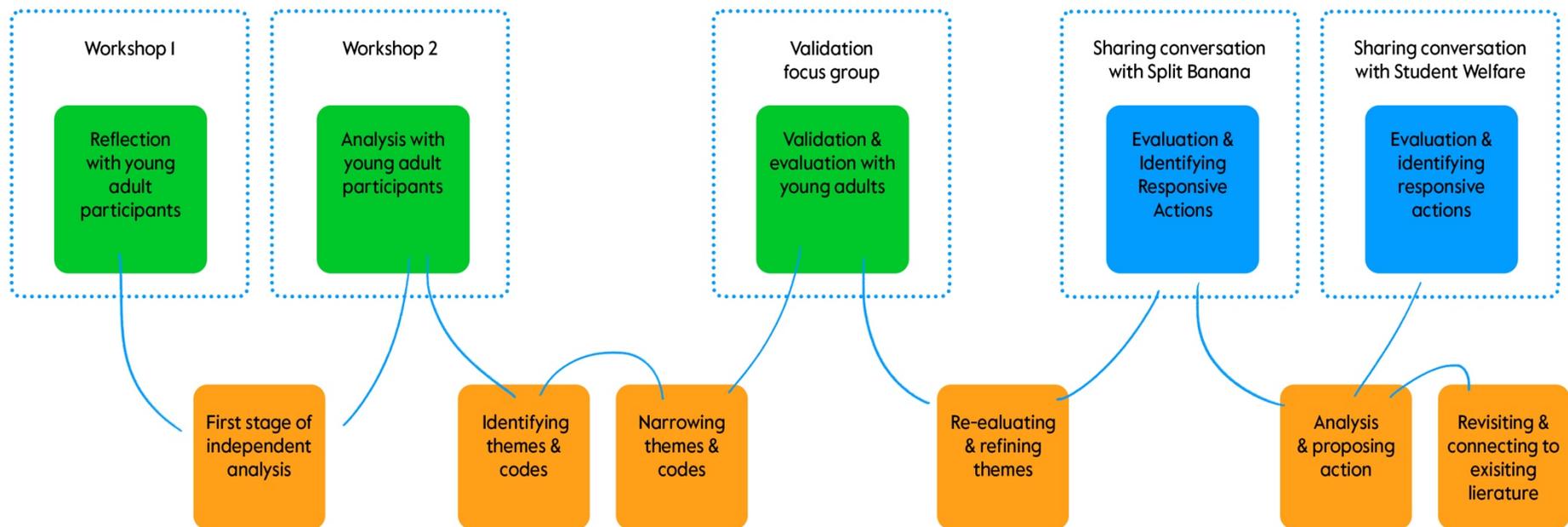


Figure 33. Diagram to demonstrate the loops of analysis, both during workshops with young adults, independent analysis outside the workshops and through the validation focus group and feedback conversations.

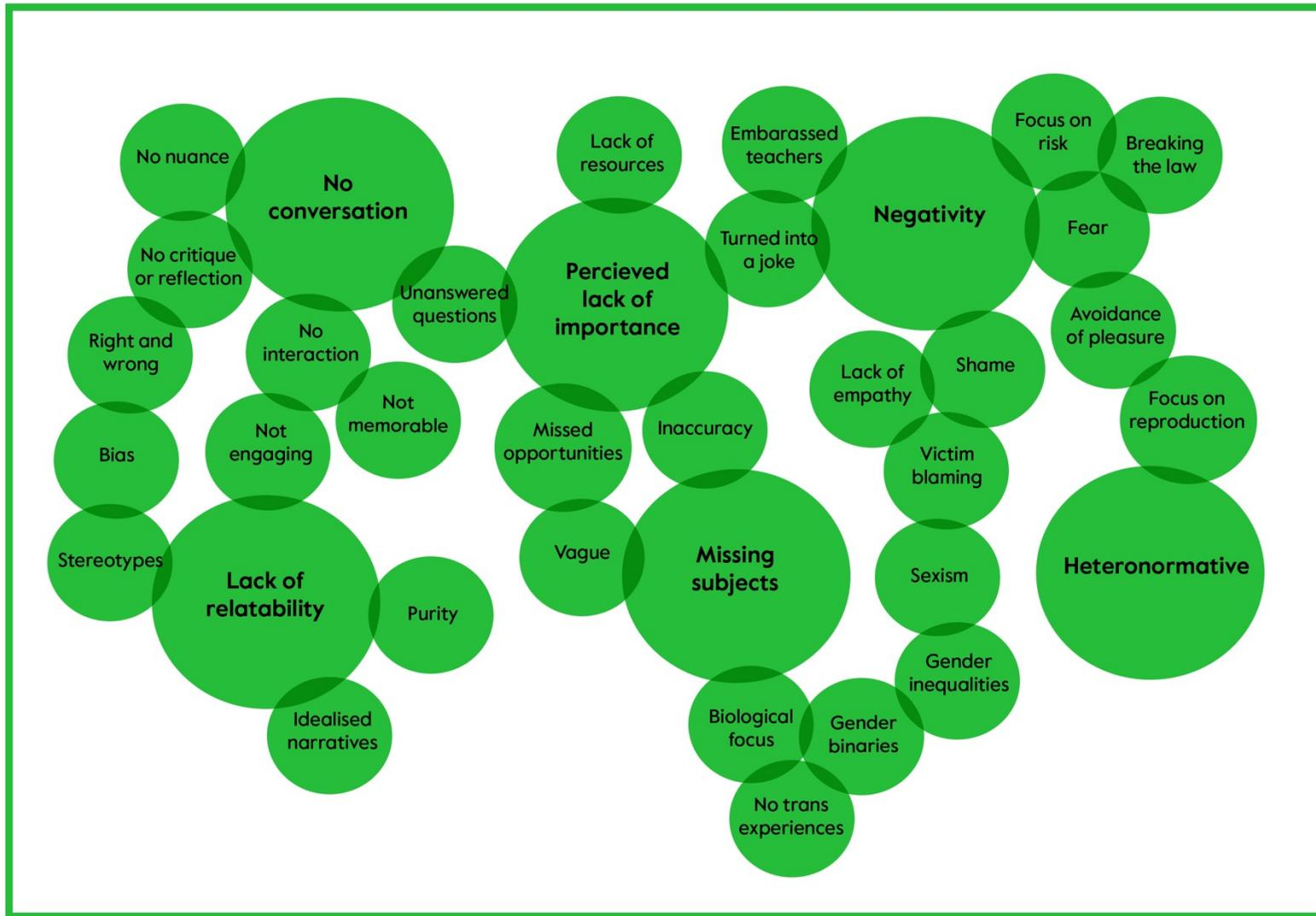


Figure 34. Mapping emerging themes and codes surrounding RSE and their overlaps



Figure 35. Mapping emerging themes and codes surrounding participatory design workshops and brave spaces

By working across these data sets, symmetries could be traced to identify what the young were seeking from RSE, with what they inherited from participating in the research process (See Table 5 and Table 6). This included, for example, RSE shutting down questions, stifling conversations and reinforcing taboos as opposed to the research space, which they felt encouraged questions, conversation and removed the stigma.

Critiques of RSE	Reflection on participation
Patty: <i>The moment that sex came up at school it was made a taboo to talk about it. It was just always sort of perpetuated in our mind not to talk about this kind of stuff</i>	Patty: <i>It was just a space for just talking. I've not had that before.</i>
	Mimi: <i>It has made me more likely to discuss these issues with other people.</i>
Asa: <i>I think the problem with it is it's kind of indirect. It was like, 'let's talk in metaphors' and that just made it into a really taboo subject that people feel like they can't talk about.</i>	Jemima: <i>It was nice to have that space to talk to people.</i>

Table 5. Mirroring between the critiques of RSE experiences and the experiences of participating in the workshops, focussing on opportunities for discussion

Critiques of current RSE		Reflecting on the research
Negativity, Shame, Fearmongering,	PARTICIPATION	Enjoyable, Empowering, Connective, Normalising conversations about sex
Lack of Inclusion		Inclusive / Safe Space to be Open
Not Engaging		Engaging, enjoyable, interactive
Not enough / Vague		Learning from the workshops
No Space for Conversation or Input		Space for Conversation (first time they'd had that) Further conversations beyond the research
Dishonest / Unrelatable		Honest, sharing real experiences, Critical

Table 6. Mirroring between the critiques of RSE experiences and the experiences of participating in the workshops, which identified participation as the enabler.

What appeared to be an enabler in this shift from current to preferable RSE experience was a participatory approach, evident within the research but missing from RSE sessions themselves (Table 6). A validation session involving participants (outlined in section 4.6) was conducted to collectively deliberate on and critique the emerging themes, ensuring the accuracy of my understanding of participants' perspectives.

Subsequently, a third round of analysis ensued, where I re-evaluated and refined these themes by responding to the reflections that emerged during the validation meeting. This iterative process culminated in the emergence of three overarching themes, as depicted in Figure 36. These themes were shared with Matilda (educator) and Jill (student welfare professional), seeking the perspectives of experts to identify challenges and opportunities to implement change.

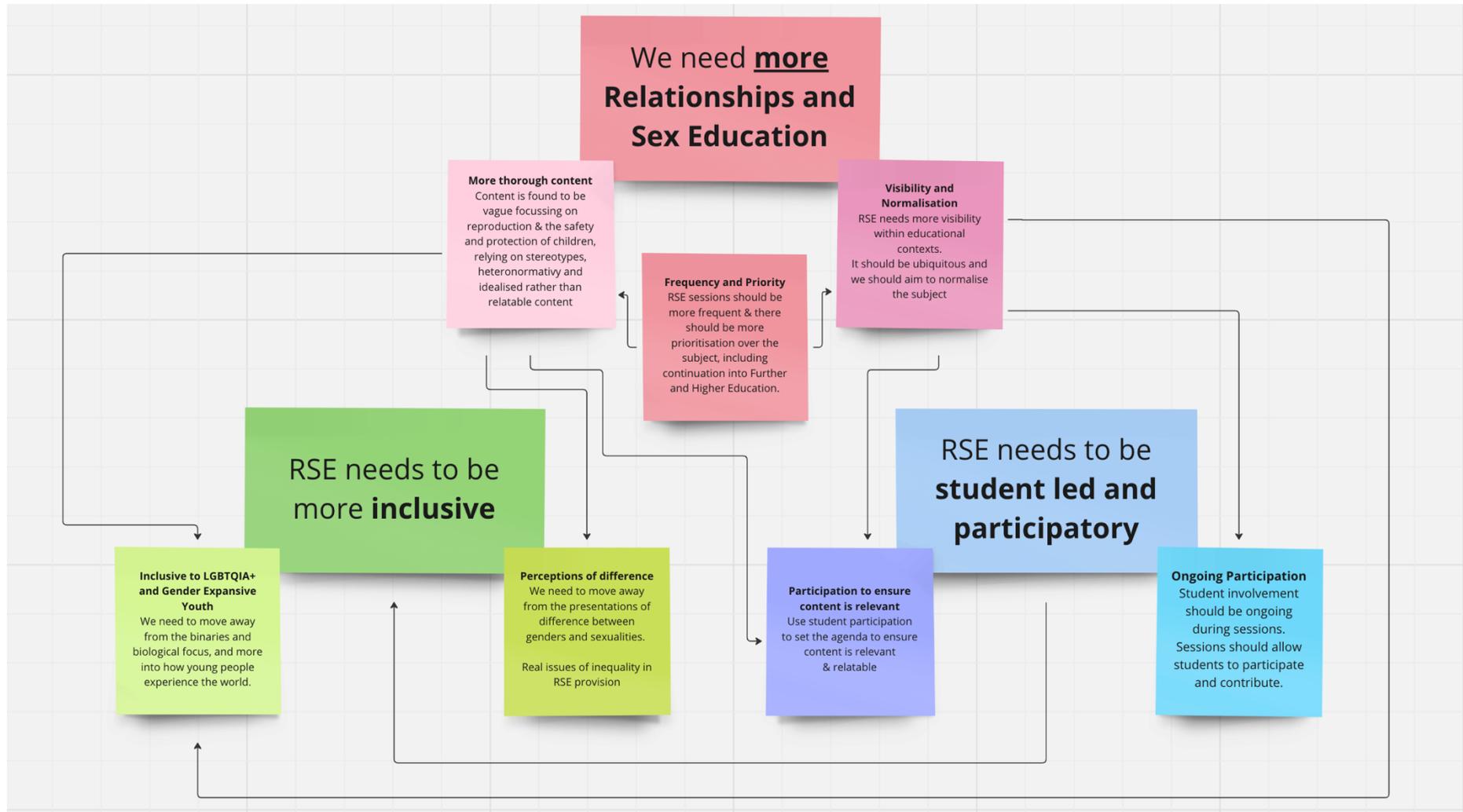


Figure 36. Diagram of Emerging Themes, taken from the Miro Board Presented to Key Stakeholders

5.3 Emerging Themes

This section presents a detailed account of the concepts and themes that emerged from the data, beginning with an exploration of the impact of participation, extending into PD's relationship with brave spaces, before exploring extended themes for the context of RSE. My first sub-question asked how PD approaches could foster brave spaces for young adults to reimagine and shape sex education. First, I am going to unpack the way PD methods created brave spaces before analysing the impact of participation in this study.

5.3.1 Brave Spaces

The PD approach went beyond social sciences and educational norms in research. Designing together was recognised by Jemima and Simone to help remove the stigma, playing a pivotal role in encouraging brave dialogues. PD cultivated a collaborative learning environment, fostering the co-creation of knowledge. This aligns with Arao and Clemens' (2013) concept of brave spaces, emphasising active listening, dialogue, and mutual learning.

The PD helped centre young voices by collaboratively establishing participation principles themselves, highlighting their own agency in the process and enabling bravery. Unpacking the idea of 'not judging others' got the group thinking critically from the outset and aligns with Arao and Clemens's perspectives on reframing ground rules as a valuable strategy for creating brave spaces. Jemima said writing these principles '*got [participants] in the right frame of mind, to be open, and to talk honestly*'.

Including participant-sourced artefacts also supported bravery. It fostered a genuine investment in the investigation and put their experiences at the heart of the research. Through sharing ethnographic reflections and contributing to collaborative analysis, artefacts granted access to rich personal narratives. Patty described how it helped them feel comfortable discussing subjects which are often considered taboo, saying the approach '*really helped encourage everyone to open up*' and '*it didn't take long for everyone to feel comfortable talking about their personal experiences.*' Visualising these experiences and mapping them at scale normalised discussions about RSE.

The display of co-created artefacts (Participation Principles, Mind Map, Reflections, and Future-Designs) encouraged bravery, physically centring and celebrating participants' brave contributions. Positioning participants physically between the past and their desired futures in the second workshop again highlighted their central role, where they were ambitious in decisions regarding the direction of the research. Engaging participants throughout the entire research process, including analysis, fostered a better understanding of participants' perspectives and balanced powers, which is essential for brave spaces.

RSE teaching resources served as valuable artefacts enabling brave and critical discussion. These artefacts were provocative, bringing multiple perspectives and approaches into the room and reflecting the diverse realities encountered outside the research space. Participants actively engaged with the material, analysing and discussing their experiences through the resources. Engaging participants in critique enabled the exploration of different viewpoints and interpretations. They provided opportunities for individuals to demonstrate bravery and challenge the dominant powers and authoritative voices within RSE. They revealed discrepancies and biases, such as shaming language and missing ideas around consent. Ideas that may be unquestioningly accepted as the 'correct' perspective due to the perceived power of educators and resources were criticised, debated and created opportunities to bravely share alternate perspectives.

Findings reveal that speculative design is particularly valuable in facilitating bravery, granting participants the freedom to envision bold futures. It amplified flaws in RSE, sparked debates on inequalities and silenced topics. The designed future visions were inherently brave. They were confident, bold, public, and confrontational, fostering conversation and not shying from challenging topics such as sexual violence. Speculative design enabled critical responses, disrupted dominant narratives, and challenged societal norms and stigma. The playful exaggeration of the backwards haunted house ridiculed the shame they'd previously experienced, reclaiming more positive, empowering and less shameful narratives. This noticeably boosted the wider group's confidence in articulating their critiques. The critical engagement extended beyond the workshops, where Mimi, prompted by her experience in the research, sought out further critical reading.

Working through design enabled bravery in articulating values and viewpoints both visually and verbally. Using open-ended materials, such as playdough and Lego, facilitated playfulness and reduced stigma. These materials are difficult to 'make perfect', so ideas

and reasoning were more important than polished outcomes, and the flexibility of materials enabled missteps and active negotiation, where participants reflected and made responsive adjustments, such as the ongoing critique and amendments made to the immersive theatre scenes.

Where designing preferred futures had been hopeful, and participants were brave in challenging existing powers, the opposite was felt in workshop 2. This suggests that identifying practical solutions can be more challenging, and the group circled back to funding challenges and perceived apathy from those in power. However, the future designs were useful to reflect on to identify where progress could be made. Conflict is important in brave spaces, and the future designs were useful in mediation. Where participants voiced diverse opinions on gender segregated RSE lessons, they drew upon the inclusive designs they'd made in the previous week to collectively discuss the limitations of gender binaries.

In the stakeholder feedback conversations, the future designs became provotypes communicating brave perspectives through both their content and form. Jill and Matilda reflected on them, empathising with the young adults' perspectives, and demonstrating an openness to learning from their experiences, thereby balancing the power.

5.3.2 Respecting differences to foster connections

Co-writing the participation principles for the research space initiated collaborative negotiation. They created a brave space that recognised and respected differences in perspectives, and subsequently, participants carefully listened to each other's perspectives and worked together to find democratic resolutions.

The study found that visual mind-mapping connected the group despite participants' experiences being different from each other, which enabled bravery. There was a shared familiarity between some of the artefacts, and participants recognised parallels between their own experiences whilst empathising with perspectives different to their own. Bringing Participants' experiences together on one collective mind map was unifying. Tanya noted that all their experiences were 'part of one'. Participants' bravery became contagious; where one participant made a particularly vulnerable contribution, others followed.

Designing together empowered participants, and they cooperated in imagining preferred futures that responded to both their individual and collective challenges. The PD approach facilitated an interplay between conversation and visual representation and acted as a mediator between participants, where collective resolutions were enacted physically through the developing designs.

5.3.3 The Impact of Participation: Learning, Empowerment and Activation

The study found that participation empowered participants, where the sharing of personal stories validated their experiences, reducing the shame and stigma. Participants comprehended the inadequacy of their own RSE and acknowledged gaining valuable insight through their participation in the workshop. The study revealed that designing future visions helped participants reclaim narratives, which was particularly empowering. Jemima said she was less embarrassed about discussing RSE topics outside the research as a result of her participation. Patty expressed a desire to continue to contribute to the development of RSE independently beyond the research, and Jemima had considered using RSE improvement as a starting theme for her independent university project.

Centring participants' experiences situated the research within their world, using their languages, perspectives, and experiences and subsequently helping them to learn. The participants found the workshops enjoyable, educational, and impactful. The collective discussion played a significant role in their learning, evidencing learning through participation.

5.4 Emerging RSE Themes

My second sub-question asked about the implications for practice and policy surrounding the future of relationships and sex education. Despite the variety of data and the differences in the participants' experiences, the analysis revealed several strong and congruent themes across the data. The three key themes that emerged were a desire for More RSE, Inclusive RSE, and Participatory RSE, which I will unpack in more depth.

5.4.1 More RSE

Findings evidence a need for more frequent RSE, advocated for by participants and echoed by Jill and Matilda. The participants highlighted the inadequacy of infrequent RSE in secondary schools, noting that teachers are often unprepared and unsupported. Matilda commented on the disparities of implementation across differing schools, which Mimi supported by referencing her positive RSE experience in private education. Findings identify a lack of training for educators as a key challenge.

Participants recognised teachers' embarrassment and fear in delivering RSE. Participants reported the active discouragement of discussions around sex and relationships, alongside unanswered questions, and no intervention from authority figures during pupils' mockery of harassment. Staff fear was recognised as a challenge by Jill and Matilda. These findings evidence the need for more guidance, staff training and opportunities to collaborate with external providers.

Findings identified that there are significant gaps in young adults' knowledge, and Jill referenced the impact of inadequate RSE on the well-being of young adults. Participants proposed an extension of RSE into colleges and universities, with shared concerns amongst participants about feeling unprepared for the future. According to the HEPI report summary (Hillman, 2021), HE institutions play a crucial role in filling knowledge gaps left by schools. However, universities lack policy, guidance, training, and funding for this. Jill had attempted to run sessions about consent in HE, but students didn't attend. Findings indicate a need for policy and guidance reviews to better safeguard young adults.

The study identified the prominence of negative narratives in RSE. Participants described the use of shame-driven and fear-mongering content focusing heavily on disease, risk and lawbreaking with an emphasis on avoidance. The use of nonsense language and metaphors, such as in the 'Consent, it's as simple as tea' video, was seen to create distance from the reality of sex. Participants found that using these tactics reinforced stigma, perpetuating an idealised and desexualised notion of sex, which obscured realities and exacerbated shame narratives. Although conversations about sex may be socially or culturally uncomfortable, participants discussed how crucial transparency and open conversation were. The designed futures actively addressed this. In developing content that recognised sex and relationships as potentially positive experiences, participants felt it

would help to remove the stigma around these important conversations and make them both relatable and engaging. The backwards haunted house was a metaphor to emphasise and ridicule these ideas of fear, where you playfully enter through a giant vagina door. Both designed futures were imagined as huge and visible, taking up whole buildings and demonstrating the preference for significant visibility of RSE with opportunities for active engagement. These findings identify both the preference and importance of normalisation and visibility of RSE.

Matilda drew particular attention to this and referenced the '*whole school approach*' cited in the current RSE policy. She envisions cross-curricular implementation, including interrogation of school policies and staff modelling good behaviour. A whole school approach was alluded to by Patty, who noted missed opportunities to discuss relationships and sex within other subjects in school. She suggested that such an approach could address the perceived novelty and isolation of RSE. Findings indicate a need for more guidance on a whole school approach.

Findings identify challenges in engaging students, particularly males, which was referenced as a significant challenge by both Matilda and Jill. These findings evidence a need for more guidance for educators in approaches to engage young people, particularly men. Again, Matilda advocated for an approach involving whole school communities.

Findings evidence a need to expand RSE curricula beyond a biological and reproductive focus, requiring content on intimacy, pleasure, healthy relationships, and navigating relationship challenges. Current RSE was described as scientifically fact-driven, disconnected from personal experiences, resulting in oversimplified and unrelatable content. Participants' critiques cited dated content with a lack of education on pornography, image sharing or navigating contemporary sexual cultures. The future visions for RSE aimed for depth and nuance, reflecting how sexual cultures and practices evolve over time. Findings evidence the need for RSE to offer opportunities to critique contemporary attitudes around relationships and sex and opportunities to consider the breadth and differences in people's values and preferences.

In summary, the participants highlighted the need for a more comprehensive and normalised approach to RSE with increased frequency, thorough content covering a variety of topics, and a positive, engaging learning environment which contributes to

empowerment and validation. Findings indicate a need for more guidance from policymakers and more training for staff planning, delivery and implementation.

5.4.2 Inclusive RSE

The need for more inclusive and equal RSE was repeated at every stage of the fieldwork. RSE had centred around biological aspects and reproduction, which excluded trans and asexual identities, reinforced gender binaries, and excluded LGBTQIA+ experiences. One of Patty's artefacts, a sheet of paper which simply said 'heterosexual couples and male pleasure' (Figure 37) encapsulated the group's concerns regarding the lack of inclusive RSE.

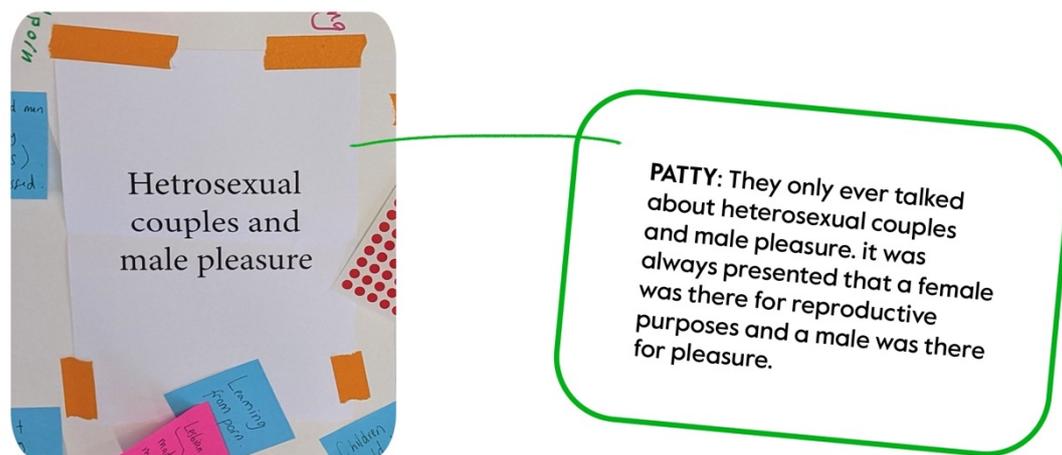


Figure 37: One of Patty's Artefacts, a sheet of paper that centrally states, 'Heterosexual couples and male pleasure' and the associated testimony

Arguably, and in cases reported by the participants, a bias exists in RSE towards cis heterosexuals. This is evident in the focus on biological sex and reproduction, which marginalises many other experiences and can be viewed as homophobic, queerphobic, transphobic, discriminatory and in conflict with the Equality Act (2010) and the guidance for schools (DfE, 2014). Participants unanimously agreed that RSE was heteronormative, lacking representation or education on non-heterosexual relationships. While some of the teaching resources were praised for inclusivity, participants noted that these resources didn't reflect their experiences in RSE. Due to the absence of inclusive education, Asa

relied on pornography to learn about queer sex, resulting in distorted perspectives. Regardless of their sexuality, all participants expressed a shared desire for education encompassing healthy and safe sexual experiences beyond penetrative and reproductive aspects. These insights were embodied in the participants' co-created 'haunted house' concept, which highlighted the need for inclusivity with dedicated rooms to represent the scope of gender identities and sexualities.

Trans identities were only mentioned in the context of discrimination, and there was no reference to non-binary identities. Findings indicate an urgent need for more explicit inclusion of LGBTQIA+ experiences in both policy and in schools. Matilda recognised that in her experience teaching RSE, prejudiced comments around LGBTQIA+ content typically came from a lack of exposure to queer identities rather than being intentionally offensive and recommended more inclusion of LGBTQIA+ experiences as part of the whole school approach.

Findings evidence gender imbalances across RSE. Participants discussed prominent gender stereotyping, where an unchallenged emphasis on women's responsibilities to prevent pregnancies created inequalities and double standards. Participants discussed videos that were shared in RSE sessions that shamed and punished women who participated in image-sharing. They also identified victim-blaming narratives that had been implicit in presentations about staying safe. Mimi's experiences of forced disclosure and punishment after assault provide further evidence of victim-blaming and demonstrate the impact of wider school policies on young people, underlining the need to take a 'whole school approach'. Jill identified that ignoring or devaluing female pleasure, where male pleasure is acceptable, negatively impacts women's sense of agency.

Differing opinions emerged regarding mixed-gender RSE, but participants subsequently agreed on the need for more inclusive approaches. Matilda spoke of the dangers of dividing gendered experiences and creating an '*us and them dynamic*', which can lead to further disengagement and radicalisation.

Findings identify a need for increased communication from policymakers regarding the importance of inclusive RSE, which was explicitly stated by Matilda, alongside the need for staff training to break down barriers to LGBTQIA+ inclusive education. Matilda outlined useful practices such as inclusive language use, diverse representation, and promoting

gender equity, stressing the importance of setting an example by leading with empathy and respect.

In summary, findings evidence a need for more inclusive education, which ensures that everyone has opportunities to comprehend their rights and achieve their potential, fostering improvements in confidence, self-image, and relationships. The active provision of LGBTQIA+ education acknowledges and respects the existence, diversity, and experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals, with educational institutions playing a role in contributing to a more equitable and inclusive society. Evidence in this study provides an argument for a whole school approach to inclusion, where learning environments reflect the diversity of all identities and relationships, ensuring that every student is safe, advocated for, and supported in reaching their full potential, both educationally and socially.

5.4.3 Participatory RSE

A key insight within participants' future visions for RSE was the preference for more participatory RSE, which resonated with the research design of this study. The impact of participation in the research has been outlined in section 5.3.3, including its ability to facilitate engaging learning experiences and empower participants, both of which would be invaluable in RSE.

Findings indicate that young people's RSE does not reflect their social contexts and lived experiences, acknowledging the rapidly evolving nature of sexual cultures. Tanya expressed a desire for students to contribute to the topics covered in RSE, emphasising that this approach could enable relevant learning opportunities and respond to these shifts. Matilda emphasised the importance of centring young people's perspectives in RSE, to make RSE more effective in addressing the needs and concerns of students. She highlighted the lack of involvement of young people in the RSE guidance review and expressed a desire for opportunities to share valuable insights gained from students' questions with other educators and policymakers to help bridge the 'generational distance' between perceived necessities and actual experiences of young people. Matilda reflected on previous successes of peer-led education, citing its effectiveness in reflecting students' lived experiences.

The current DfE guidance (2019) outlines that the curriculum should be 'in line with pupil need, informed by pupil voice and participation in curriculum development' (p40), although it lacks guidance on how to engage students in this development. Matilda identified that subject leaders often have little time to plan RSE and receive little support in doing so. Findings suggest that guidelines on student participation in the development of curriculum would ensure RSE is relevant and fit for purpose.

Findings identify the need for active participation beyond the development of content and into pedagogy and delivery methods. For this group of participants, RSE had not been an engaging experience. The participants emphasised that there was a lack of open discussion, where they were asked to sit, listen and not contribute. Content was delivered in what felt like in a 'right or wrong' manner with no space to debate the nuances or contribute individual perspectives. Conversely, common across examples of positive RSE experiences shared by the participants, were those which were interactive activity-based (such as making 'period bracelets' to map menstrual cycles with coloured beads).

Building on this, the participants identified the need for active learning and where students could ask questions and debate nuances. The visions for preferred futures involved interaction and active conversation rather than screens and flyers, facilitating open debates and spaces to ask questions. The Immersive Theatre Experience designed by young adults (Appendix E4) provided opportunities for reflection and critical thinking, facilitating empathy with others' experiences and collective thinking about ways to respond to real-world challenges. It was designed as a place for students to take ownership of their learning and for peers to problem-solve together, actively identifying difficulties and differences in perspectives. Furthermore, building critical thinking skills was recognised as crucial for navigating inequalities, online content and shifting sexual cultures. Matilda and Jill both emphasised the necessity and importance of increasing participatory practices in RSE to enhance student engagement but acknowledged the challenge of navigating this within the constraints of current education systems and policies. Matilda pointed out a conflict with the DfE's curriculum guidance, which lacks advice on interactive and participatory approaches. Jill noted that a lack of training, as well as a generational and technological gap between educators and students, led to a lack of confidence among teachers regarding sex and relationships. Patty had previously recognised that open conversations with pupils about contemporary sexual cultures offered an opportunity to support staff in gaining insights into the reality of young people's worlds, allowing their needs and concerns

to be identified, and could subsequently enable more effective teaching, learning, and safeguarding.

Active participation in this research offered the participants opportunities to recognise the breadth of perspectives surrounding relationships and sex, both individually and socially. Findings suggest that engaging in conversations about sex and relationships normalises these topics and equips young adults with improved confidence and abilities to communicate. Drawing on design-led approaches to support critical, independent thinking skills have value in contributing to more effective safeguarding.

5.5 Framing the Findings: Proposed Actions

Reflecting across the findings, I identified a need for braver RSE, which I discussed with participants in the validation session as well as with Jill and Matilda. Participants recognised the importance of brave spaces in RSE, highlighting the need for the development of critical thinking, with an aim to empower young adults with the knowledge and skills to engage in consensual, safe, and respectful relationships that reflect their individual preferences. Matilda and Jill agreed that there is a crucial need for bravery in RSE and a significant need for more critical thinking. Matilda recognised that merely shutting down conversations is ineffective, and instead, broader discussions are essential.

This research asserts that fostering active participation creates brave spaces, empowering students to assume control of their learning journey, cultivate critical thinking skills, and enhance their overall well-being. It underscores the importance of providing young people with brave skills they can apply to continuous engagement in learning throughout their lives as they navigate the complexities of relationships, the impact of diverse experiences, the management of ongoing changes in their bodies, and the navigation of cultural shifts.

I propose the following for the development of brave spaces in RSE, which I argue will have value for educators, for educational policymakers such as school subject leaders and headteachers, and for government policymakers such as those at the DfE:

- More RSE (More Frequent. More Thorough. More Visible)
- Inclusive RSE (LGBTQIA+ inclusion. Gender Equalities)
- Participatory RSE (Curriculum Development. Active Participation in Sessions)
- More guidance and training for educators in these areas

These recommendations for RSE educators and in-school policy development have been packaged up and disseminated in the form of recommendations included in Appendix G. The content has been developed and validated with Matilda at Split Banana, with the intention of distributing this to educators and schools. It highlights the need for more visible RSE, outlines the importance of inclusive RSE, provides guidance for the development of curriculum and pedagogy, and prompts a whole school approach. The recommendations are designed to offer actions to address the identified shortcomings in the participant's educational experiences and offer a starting point for future research and testing.

5.6 Summary.

In this chapter, I have explored the analysis and outlined key findings. The process of RTA involved iterative cycles and participant involvement, followed by listening, transcribing, note-taking, and code development. Collaborative analysis with participants, including validation sessions, contributes to refining themes and ensuring accuracy.

The PD approach was recognised for creating brave spaces, fostering dialogue, removing stigma, and encouraging openness. In this case, evidence suggests ways speculative design supported bravery, allowing participants to envision bold futures and critique existing norms. The active participation of designing future visions enabled them to reclaim narratives, validate their experiences and contribute to their own learning.

Participants expressed a need for more frequent and comprehensive RSE, addressing inadequacies in current delivery methods and content. Negative narratives, shame-driven content, and fear-mongering in RSE were criticised, outlining the importance of transparency, open conversation, and normalising discussions about sex. The study identified gaps in educators' training and advocated for policy reviews to safeguard young adults' well-being. The findings evidence a need for more inclusive RSE to address the often excluded LGBTQIA+ experiences that reinforce gender binaries and biases in RSE towards cis, heterosexual perspectives.

The study recommends the value of involving students in curriculum development and promoting interactive teaching methods. The participants expressed a preference for more participatory RSE, aligning with the study's approach. Active participation is identified as

beneficial for engagement, learning, and critical thinking and could help reflect young people's contexts and subsequently become more relevant.

The chapter underscores the significance of fostering brave spaces, providing young people with skills for continuous engagement in RSE learning, and navigating the complexities of relationships and cultural shifts. In the next chapter, I will discuss these key insights in relation to the surrounding literature before pointing towards opportunities for future research in Chapter 7.

Chapter 6: Discussion

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss insights into the use of PD methods to facilitate brave spaces and consider their implication for broader practice and policy surrounding the development of RSE by returning to the literature. As I introduce these insights, whilst acknowledging the scope and scale of this research inquiry (limitations and constraints are also set out in section 7.4), I point towards the ways in which key findings will be informative for educators, educational institutions and policymakers, as well as methodologically for design researchers working in similar, ethically sensitive, contexts

6.2 Insights for Education: Schools and Universities

6.2.1 More RSE (More Frequent. More Thorough. More Visible)

The findings emphasise the need for more frequent and comprehensive RSE, inclusive content, visibility, and normalisation. They provide evidence for taking a participatory approach, incorporating student input into curriculum development, and facilitating brave spaces that encourage open discussions about challenging topics. Findings indicate the importance of diverse and comprehensive content, staff training, and taking a whole-school approach. Findings also suggest a need for further investigation into the potential of extending RSE beyond secondary education into colleges and universities.

Participants in this study identified a need for RSE which more accurately aligns with young peoples' experiences of sex and relationships, exploring contemporary sexual cultures, diverse aspects of relationships, and recognising sex and relationships as potentially positive experiences. This aligns with York et al.'s study on Young people and sexting (2021), who found education doesn't allow young people to meaningfully or openly connect with many of the challenging and nuanced issues connected with relationships. York et al. (2021 b) also found that RSE regularly shames young people for their sexual interests and behaviours, with teaching typically being risk-averse and promoting avoidance of engaging in sexual activities. Participants in this study echoed York's in arguing that simply advising avoidance or abstinence is unrealistic, ineffective and unsafe (2021 b). Findings provide an argument for the normalisation and visibility of RSE in schools, moving away from fear-mongering and negative narratives to include the potential positives in relationships and the possibilities of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, actively promoting agency in relationships and teaching communication skills to navigate this.

6.2.2 Inclusive RSE (LGBTQIA+ inclusion. Gender Equalities)

Similar to Coll et al. (2018), young people spoke passionately about the need for RSE to be inclusive. As suggested in the findings, there is a need for further representation of LGBTQIA+ experiences and relationships. There is a strong case for implementing a mandate on inclusive RSE, recognising and educating on diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and trans experiences, thereby addressing an arguable bias towards cisgender, heterosexual perspectives. Findings evidence the need for guidance that emphasises the importance of inclusive RSE and provides practical strategies for implementation. Building on suggestions made by Fisher et al. (2017), who indicated objects may be useful in challenging contemporary heteronormativity, visual resources were seen to offer a representation of varied experiences and both exposure and empathetic responses to experiences beyond participants' own. Findings suggest the potential of using visual resources to challenge heteronormativity, gender norms and existing dominant narratives.

6.2.3 Participatory RSE (Curriculum Development. Active Participation in Sessions)

York found that empowering young people to shape the development of RSE could significantly enhance relevance, authenticity and impact. I further identified that there is potential for participation not only in the development of the content but also in the sessions themselves, such as interactive activities or facilitating discussion. Participation facilitates engagement, normalises the subject, offers opportunities for understanding the perspectives of others, and actively identifies nuances. Participation offers opportunities to develop criticality, which is crucial for navigating and engaging with sexual cultures, inequalities and online content. It removes generational distances, which can be effective in addressing the needs and concerns of students.

Active participation boosted participants' confidence, critical thinking skills, and empowered them. This aligns with Whittington's (2019) findings, which similarly observed participants' learning, and acknowledged that critical discussions in education can be safely managed where participating in challenging conversations develops awareness, competence, and capacities for self-protection, contributing to effective safeguarding. In addition to this, findings suggest that participation contributed to a more holistic understanding of relationships and sexuality and offered an understanding of perspectives and experiences beyond their own.

This study recognised RSE as a designed experience. Both visual content and participatory activities, including videos and bracelet making, were identified as more engaging and memorable. It was also central to the learning, which took place informally through watching music videos, TV shows and between peers. Participants designed futures that were visual, bold and interactive. Findings evidence that visual artefacts can help facilitate participation through collective critique, which helped normalise and mediate discussion, as highlighted by Fisher et al. (2017) in the Sex and History project.

6.2.4 More Guidance and Training for Educators

This study identifies the need for more RSE, moving on from novelty one-off lessons to more of a whole school approach and that schools would benefit from more practical guidance on the implementation of such an approach. This study echoes York's findings that teachers need access to appropriate training to ensure that they feel confident in talking about these subjects (York et al., 2021 b). There is a clear argument for prioritising training for educators in this field, ensuring they are well-prepared to navigate diverse topics effectively. The study also identifies the potential for further collaboration with specialist RSE facilitators outside schools.

Aside from participant impact, highlighted in the analysis, there is an additional impact of this research within RSE as cited by Matilda (November 2022), included in Appendix H. She said, *'this research has huge value'*, particularly considering the ongoing review of RSE, where insufficient efforts have been made to engage with the perspectives of young people or young adults. It was insightful to hear that the findings of this research have already had an impact on Split Banana's practice. *'It has encouraged me to think about how we might bring in more opportunities for challenging dialogues in our sessions with young people... We have made our sessions more interactive with more opportunities for participatory learning and discussion.'*

6.3 Insights for Research

The findings underscore the positive impact of participation, revealing how it empowered participants through validation, creative engagement, and personal development.

Employing a PAR methodology facilitated the centring of young people's voices. Unlike approaches that intentionally create critical distance, such as those employed by Senior (2018) and Fisher (2017), PD sought to reflect and include participants' experiences.

Centring participants' experiences empowered them and situated the research within their

world, using their language, perspectives, and subsequently helping them connect to the process and findings. Engaging participants throughout the entire research process, including analysis and a process of validation, fostered a better understanding of participants' perspectives, which resonates with findings by Whittington (2019). Whittington (2019) also found that respecting young people's informed decision-making capacity in research enhances their safety whilst empowering them to explore sensitive subjects, and my findings echo her observations that participants were prepared to interact more confidently and competently in challenging dialogues, with some participants prompting brave conversations with peers beyond the research. In addition to this, participation prompted further independent reading and motivated some participants to actively consider how they could contribute to the development of RSE beyond the research space through peer discussions and independent projects.

Findings outline the methodological potential for future work in using PD to facilitate brave spaces to help navigate stigma and ethical complexities, such as balancing power, ease of discussion and participant empowerment. This is reflected by Renold (2020), who identified that creative collaboration reduced shame and fostered relaxed atmospheres; Cook et al (2022), where the process of designing together reduced stigma, enabling participants to articulate personal values and viewpoints both visually and verbally; and Whittington (2021) who highlighted the benefits of creative methods in destigmatising sensitive topics, fostering comfortable interaction and reflection.

Senior et al. (2018) and Whittington (2021) found the use of participatory creative methods to be connective. I further identify PD methods as effective in respecting differences to foster connections, enabling the sharing of diverse experiences and often conflicting perspectives. Collective mind-mapping to critique helped participants to recognise overlaps in experiences whilst respecting differences, creating a sense of togetherness between participants even within a short timeframe. Designing together mediated conflicts and reflecting on artefacts helped to identify democratic solutions. Coll et al. (2018) recognised the value of conflicts as important to create opportunities to think differently, engage critically and reflect on the assemblage of norms, privileges, and power relations. Participatory design, as employed in the study, cultivated a critical and collaborative learning environment, fostering the co-creation of knowledge and aligning with Arao and Clemens' concept of brave spaces. Both critiquing RSE learning resources and the

speculative design brief offered opportunities to develop critical thinking skills, which then extended to seeking further critical perspectives beyond the workshops.

The use of participant-sourced artefacts played a pivotal role in grounding participants' experiences at the heart of the research, further valuing their contributions, bringing diverse experiences together and fostering a sense of ownership. Similar to Fisher et al.'s (2017) utilisation of historical objects, the introduction of diverse perspectives through both participant-sourced artefacts and RSE resources added depth to the conversations. I recognised the value of the learning resources as embodying diverse perspectives and bringing these into the research space, and aligning with Andersen and Mosleh's (2021) findings in recognising the value of artefacts for encouraging participants to talk about differing viewpoints, fostering a deeper understanding.

Cook et al. (2022) found that designing together gave young people the ability to engage and workshop their ideas in a safe group environment, and the use of co-design methods proved effective in generating conversational information, where they worked through ideas together rather than just individual thoughts. Similarly, in this study, PD facilitated a valuable interplay between conversation and visual representation where the group collectively reflected during the making process which facilitated discussions around diverse experiences, identifying oppressions in social norms.

The speculative design brief proved valuable in facilitating bravery, granting participants the freedom to envision bold futures and amplifying areas in RSE in need of improvement. Dunne and Raby (2013) outline the value in speculative design, where even impractical alternatives, so long as they are creative, hold value and act as a source of inspiration to conceive new possibilities, fostering hope and a sense that more is possible, which was invaluable in this context. These future visions made issues surrounding inequalities and silenced topics visible and tangible, fostering a power balance where participants were empowered to create artefacts that spoke loudly about the experiences that had previously felt silenced and shameful.

In Renold's 'Mapping, Making, and Mobilising' project (2018), participant-made visual artefacts proved to offer authentic and potent perspectives, visibly and tangibly revealing previously hidden sexual cultures and subsequently impacting policy development. Similarly, in this project, the participant-made future designs became prototypes, serving as a reflective focal point for both young adult participants and stakeholders,

communicating participants' perspectives through both their content and form. Comparable to Boer and Donovan (2012), I recognised these provotypes' value in drawing attention to real-world issues and possibilities in a way that was thought-provoking, creating a space for reflection and dialogue.

This study suggests that PD methods not only empower young adults but also foster collaborative learning environments, encourage critical thinking, and mediate healthy conflict among participants. These findings offer valuable insights for researchers aiming to facilitate brave spaces for research in ethically complex areas.

I build on Whittington's conclusions (2019) that shying away from delicate research subjects like relationships and sex limits the chances to collaboratively generate knowledge with young people that can make meaningful contributions to their safeguarding and further endorse her call for youth-focused research to prioritise participation that nurtures young people's competence, agency, and rights regardless of topic sensitivity. I further identify the value of brave participation within RSE classrooms as a means to centre young people's experiences, to validate their curiosity and reaffirm their agency.

6.4 Summary

In employing reflective thematic analysis to analyse the fieldwork, a number of themes emerged. Participation offers opportunities to focus education on young people's needs for more engaging, empowering, and relevant experiences which address the evolving nature of sexual cultures. The data revealed inequalities and gaps between current RSE and young people's experiences and identified opportunities to address this.

The findings contribute to discussions on improving RSE for inclusivity, engagement, and empowerment. I proposed actions, such as more comprehensive and visible education, LGBTQIA+ inclusion, and encouraging active student participation, underpinned by creating braver RSE. Implications for educators include updating content, seeking training, and adopting a whole-school approach. The study suggests PD methods are effective in facilitating brave spaces, empowering participants, and fostering collaborative learning and critical thinking. Recommendations for researchers include utilising PD for brave spaces in ethically sensitive fields of study.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

This research aimed to develop an understanding of RSE through the participatory design of RSE with young adults. It reflected on the use of PD methods in this context to facilitate brave spaces. Through analysis, findings identified implications for RSE practice and policy in England and recognised insights about the use of PD methods.

7.2 Summary of the Findings

The overarching research question aimed to examine how young adults could participate in the redesign of RSE. Centring young adults' voices through a PAR methodology and drawing on techniques from PD empowered participants, enabling brave contributions. I will unpack this in more depth by individually looking at each of my sub-questions.

The first sub-question sought to explore how PD approaches could foster brave spaces for young adults to reimagine and shape RSE. Findings identified that PD approaches can help facilitate brave spaces through empowering young adults to discuss challenging experiences, challenging existing powers and norms, and actively confronting oppression. PD offered the framework, methods, and tools for exploring this ethically complex subject, respecting differences to foster connections, destigmatising the subject, and facilitating situations where conflicts can be unpacked and discussed productively.

PD balances power relations, centring participant experiences and nurturing competence and agency. Involving participants in every research stage, including analysis and validation, enabled foregrounding of their perspectives. The research space, where participants wrote the principles for participation and sourced artefacts for discussion, played a pivotal role in establishing their centrality within the research.

Artefacts played a key role in navigating stigma. For example, the RSE teaching resources acted as critical artefacts embodying diverse perspectives and adding depth to the conversations. Participatory design provided a valuable interplay between conversation and visual representation, offering space for criticality and empathetic understanding of other people's experiences. The speculative design approach facilitated bravery,, enabling participants to envision bold futures and amplifying key areas for development. Through PD, participants created new artefacts which embodied democratic future visions and were

central in discussions with stakeholders, enabling empathy and resulting in actions to improve RSE.

Participation had a positive impact on the young adults. Participants enjoyed the workshops, learned from the experience, and felt empowered, enabling self-empathy and lessening feelings of shame. Participation further activated some of the group to seek out further critical perspectives, fuelled inspiration for future projects and improved their ability to discuss RSE subjects beyond the workshop.

The second sub-question aimed to identify the implications for practice and policy surrounding the future of RSE. Findings highlighted a need for more RSE, more inclusive RSE and participatory RSE, underpinned by a need for braver spaces and approaches. Findings also suggest a need for extending RSE beyond secondary education into colleges and universities. More comprehensive RSE should cover diverse aspects of relationships, recognising the positives of sex and relationships and promoting agency. Key to this is the visibility and normalisation of RSE, requiring a 'whole school approach' and identifying a need for more guidance on this. Additionally, there is a strong case for implementing a mandate on inclusive RSE.

This research shows that visual artefacts can be effective learning resources, provide more inclusive representation and challenge heteronormativity. They have value in facilitating critique and in mediating and destigmatising discussion.

A participatory approach should incorporate student input into curriculum development. Collaboratively developing RSE with young people could significantly enhance relevance and contribute to their safeguarding. Additionally, ongoing participation in sessions could improve engagement and increase the applicability of their learning to young people's worlds. Participation provides opportunities to understand perspectives beyond your own, offering opportunities for empathy and more inclusive understanding. Active participation boosts participants' confidence, and critical thinking skills, and empowers them, which would contribute to more effective safeguarding.

Providing appropriate training and guidance to educators delivering RSE was seen as critical to addressing these issues effectively. A booklet with key findings and opportunities has been created as part of this work to share with educators and subject leads to support future practice and training. Additionally, I have reached out to local university teams and

government policymakers to discuss findings and explore ways to enable translation of research findings to support action. Findings shared with Split Banana have already begun to inform RSE delivery by Split Banana around the UK.

7.3 Key Reflections: on personal practice and my role as the researcher

Entering the MRes program, my initial expectation was to rekindle my own creative practice. However, during the scoping phase, I identified many areas of potential study and realised that this wasn't the space for personal perspectives; instead, I identified the need to centre the viewpoints of young people. Drawing on my background as an educator, I embraced shifting roles that are adopted in this context. In my capacity as a design educator, I facilitated a research-through-design approach for my participants. Reflecting on this, my evolving practice took on multiple dimensions:

1. Shepherd: Bringing together underrepresented voices in the research.
2. Research designer: Reflecting on the use of physical space to centre participants' experiences. Identifying the use of artefacts to foster democratic discussion and selecting educational resources to offer diverse perspectives in the research space.
3. Facilitator: building on my role as a design educator to facilitate critique, speculative design and ongoing reflection. Creating engaging, empowering, and motivating spaces.
4. Activist: Advocating for the voices of young adults and sharing perspectives with stakeholders for realistic action proposals.

In my experience, participation disrupted power structures; as a facilitator, I demonstrated an openness to learning from participants and found their experiences to be enlightening and informative. I initially arrived at the research with the intention of exploring consent in RSE or identifying other specific topics for development. However, by empowering participants to steer the research, unforeseen and valuable insights came to light. Reflexively, I recognised familiar stories in participants' experiences and was conscious of not holding them as more valuable than others. I recognised my position and have been reflexive throughout the analysis which prompted me to reflect on my own understanding of relationships, sex and potential biases. This self-reflection revealed how I'd passed off the 'girl crushes' throughout my life as part of a heterosexual identity rather than accepting my own bisexuality. With this research seeking to be participant-led, participant evaluation was key to testing the validity of the data. I was concerned that in embracing my bisexuality, I may lean on the theme of LGB inclusion too heavily, but on returning to the group for validation of themes, this remained critically important to all participants.

Despite challenges in following a PAR methodology, such as uncertainty, and a need for flexibility and responsiveness, the benefits, including observing the empowerment of young people, outweighed such challenges. Ongoing collaboration was both grounding and motivating, fuelling my determination to advocate for young people's aspirations in RSE development. Bravery in the workshops was contagious, fostering an ambitious research expansion beyond the scoping of the field to include engagement with government policymakers (although initial connection with these groups did not lead to contributions to the thesis due to limitations of the research timeframe). I plan to continue and expand this work, developing established collaborations and seeking new connections.

7.4 Limitations and Constraints

Although there was careful consideration when recruiting participants, it is important to acknowledge that not all voices are represented in these findings. The context-specific Arts University recruitment strategy means findings may not be representative of the diverse perspectives and experiences within the wider population. All participants had experience in the English secondary education system. The research lacked any male voices and did not extend to students in any other educational provisions or young adults not in education. International student voices were not represented, despite their significance in HE contexts.

Due to ethical limitations, it was out of scope to work with anyone under the age of 18, and I see value in revisiting this with a younger demographic in the future, during their RSE experience. I identified barriers to this area of research, with some educators unable to contribute to the fieldwork even in anonymised contributions due to management direction, fears over showing the vulnerabilities of provisions, and time constraints of overstretched educators, which has limited the scope of the research.

It was beyond the scope of the study to spend additional time on the recruitment of missing voices due to time constraints of the MRes, but I have identified areas for further research in Section 7.5. Time constraints also impacted engagement with policymakers, where initial connections with these groups did not lead to contributions to the research due to the limitations of the research timeframe.

The use of workshops meant that the group size needed to be small enough to enable meaningful participation and resulted in a small sample size of eight young adult participants. Working in a group means that certain societal norms may prevail and can

restrict the space for expressing alternative perspectives. However, I aimed to alleviate any discomfort by using PD to facilitate brave spaces and drawing on future workshops to facilitate a space which was inclusive and democratic. Careful facilitation aimed to reduce power imbalances within the group to ensure equitable distribution of influence and input among participants. Participants' engagement in the research was informed by their knowledge and experience as students studying creative subjects, which meant there was familiarity with creative approaches and the format of critique used within the workshops. This could have potential implications on the transferability of the research, where more time may be needed to introduce and practice these techniques with people with other backgrounds and experiences.

Although care was taken to ensure active engagement and commitment of the participants, this was not without challenges. Although the first workshop had 8 participants, this reduced to 5 for the second, with four of the original eight returning to validate findings (Figure 38).



Figure 38. Diagram showing participant engagement across the workshops and validation focus group

While acknowledging the limitations and constraints, the study's findings remain valuable for addressing the research questions by illustrating the role of PD in fostering a brave space and the insights from the perspectives of young adults will enrich future practice and policy in the realm of RSE, shedding light on potential avenues for improvement and innovation in this critical area.

7.5 Future Research

The study has identified several areas that warrant further exploration, extending beyond the scope of this MRes. One crucial avenue for future research involves scaling up the project demographically. While the methods were tested in a specific context, broadening the study to encompass diverse settings, involving more researchers, and particularly incorporating the perspectives of male participants, those from other educational settings, or not in education, would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding.

Engagement issues, especially with male students, emerged as a significant challenge in RSE. Future investigations should delve deeper into strategies to enhance the engagement of male students in RSE, looking at tailored approaches to address their specific needs and preferences.

There is a need for research focused on identifying practical ways to actively involve students in the development of the RSE curriculum. The study also points towards a promising direction for critical and participatory pedagogies within the context of RSE. This could include examining successful models of student participation in curriculum development, assessing their impact, and providing guidelines for implementing similar approaches in diverse educational settings. Future research endeavours could aim to test the effectiveness of participatory pedagogy in fostering critical thinking and active learning within RSE, offering valuable guidance for educators and policymakers.

Additionally, considering education as a designed experience, there is an opportunity for further exploration of how RSE is designed, particularly regarding bravery, power balances, engagement, and inclusion. Investigating the intricacies of how RSE is designed, delivered, and experienced could yield insights into optimising the learning environment for young adults.

Finally, the research has underscored the connections between PD and the creation of brave spaces. Future research could delve into these links more deeply, exploring the mechanisms through which PD contributes to the facilitation of brave spaces and identifying opportunities for refining and expanding the integration of PD in other ethically complex fields of research, such as working with young people to discuss knife crime, street violence, pornography and drug use.

I am keen to continue my research journey, and hope to further investigate the democratisation of knowledge creation through PD practice, with particular interest in enabling the inclusion of young voices.

7.6 Closing Summary:

RSE is significantly under-researched, and this research captures a specific time and set of conversations. The aims of this research were to investigate young adult participation through PD, gain experiential insights into RSE experiences, and identify opportunities for the development of RSE Practice and Policy in England. To create more impactful, equitable and inclusive RSE experiences throughout education, it is essential to consider the diverse experiences and needs of all students and to provide accurate, respectful, and relevant information that empowers young people, promotes healthy relationships, criticality and promotes sexual health and wellbeing for all students. Young adults in this study have spoken powerfully and bravely about their experiences of RSE and have outlined why it is so important to get this right. I now call on policymakers and educators to respond and work hard to facilitate more RSE, more inclusive, more participatory, and braver RSE.

References :

- Abbott, K., Ellis, S. and Abbott, R., (2015). "We don't get into all that": An analysis of how teachers uphold heteronormative sex and relationship education. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 62(12), pp.1638-1659.
- Allen, L. (2001). "Closing Sex Education's Knowledge/Practice Gap: The Reconceptualisation of Young People's Sexual Knowledge." *Sex Education* 1 (2): 109–122.
- Allen, L. (2005), "Say Everything: Exploring Young People's Suggestions for Improving Sexuality Education." *Sex Education* 5 (4): 391–406.
- Allen, L. (2008). "They Think You Shouldn't be Having Sex Anyway": Young People's Suggestions for Improving Sexuality Education Content. *Sexualities*, 11(5), 573-594.
- Allen, L. (2011). *Young People and Sexuality Education: Rethinking Key Debates*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Alminde S, Warming H. (2020). Future workshops as a means to democratic, inclusive and empowering research with children, young people and others. *Qualitative Research*. 20(4):432-448.
- American Pie. 1999. [Film]. Paul Weitz & Chris Weitz. Dir. USA. Universal Pictures
- Andersen, PVK. & Mosleh, WS. (2021) Conflicts in co-design: engaging with tangible artefacts in multi-stakeholder collaboration, *CoDesign*, 17:4, 473-492
- Arao, B. and Clemens, K., (2013). From safe spaces to brave spaces. *The art of effective facilitation: Reflections from social justice educators*, 135, p.150.
- Bannon, L & Ehn, P (2013) Design: Design Matters in Participatory Design, in Simonsen, J., & Robertson, T. (Eds.). *Routledge International Handbook of Participatory Design* (1st ed.). Routledge.
- Berger, J. (1990). *Ways of Seeing*. London: Penguin Books.
- Berger, P.L. and Luckmann, T. (1966) *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. Doubleday & Company, New York.
- Björgvinsson, E., Ehn, P. and Hillgren, P.A., (2010). Participatory design and "democratizing innovation". In *Proceedings of the 11th Biennial Participatory Design Conference* (pp. 41-50).
- Blue Seat Studios and May, E. (2015). *Tea Consent*, [online] Blue Seat Studios. [Accessed: July 2023] Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oQbei5JGiT8>
- Boer, L. Donovan, J. & Buur, J. (2013) Challenging industry conceptions with provotypes, *CoDesign*, 9:2, 73-89
- Boer, L., and J. Donovan. 2012. "Provotypes for Participatory Innovation." Paper presented at the *Designing Interactive Systems Conference*, Newcastle, UK, June 11–15.

- Brandt, E, Binder, T. & Sanders. E B.N. (2013). Tools and techniques. Ways to engage telling, making and enacting, in Simonsen, J., & Robertson, T. (Eds.). Routledge International Handbook of Participatory Design (1st ed.). Routledge.
- Braun, V & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology, *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3:2, 77-101
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on Reflexive Thematic Analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 11(4), 589-597.
- Bustamante Duarte, AM., Mahrnaz, A., Degbelo, A., Brendel, N. & Kray, C. (2021) Safe spaces in participatory design with young forced migrants, *CoDesign*, 17:2, 188-210
- Coll, L., O’Sullivan, M. and Enright, E. (2018). ‘The Trouble with Normal’: (re)imagining sexuality education with young people. *Sex Education*. 18(2), pp.157-171.
- Cook, S., Grozdanovski, G., Renda, G., Santoso, D., Gorkin, R. and Senior, K. (2022). Can you design the perfect condom? Engaging young people to inform safe sexual health practice and innovation, *Sex Education*, 22(1), pp.110-122.
- Coyote Ugly. 2000. [Film]. David McNally. dir. USA. Buena Vista Pictures
- Cruel Intentions. 1999. [Film]. Roger Kumble. dir. USA. Columbia Pictures
- Department for Education. (2019). Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education Statutory guidance for governing bodies, proprietors, head teachers, principals, senior leadership teams, teachers. London: DfE.
- Department for Education. (2021). Experiences of Relationships and Sex Education, and sexual risk taking: Young people’s views from LSYPE2. London: DfE.
- Department for Education. (2014). The Equality Act 2010 and schools Departmental advice for school leaders, school staff, governing bodies and local authorities. London: DfE.
- Dewey, J. (1927). *The Public and Its Problems*, New York: Henry Holt.
- Dewey, J. (1934). *Art as Experience*. New York: Perigee Books.
- Dunne, A & Raby, F (2013) *Speculative Everything: Design, Fiction, and Social Dreaming*, The Mit Press, London
- Epps, B., Markowski, M., & Cleaver, K. (2023). A Rapid Review and Narrative Synthesis of the Consequences of Non-Inclusive Sex Education in UK Schools on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning Young People. *The Journal of school nursing : the official publication of the National Association of School Nurses*, 39(1), 87–97.
- Equality Act 2010. London: HMSO
- Fine, M., & Torre, M. E. (2019). Critical Participatory Action Research: A Feminist Project for Validity and Solidarity. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 43(4), 433–444.

- Fine, M., & Torre, M. E. (2021). *Essentials of critical participatory action research*. American Psychological Association.
- Fine, M., M. E. Torre, K. Boudin, I. Bowen, J. Clark, D. Hylton, and D. Upegui. (2001). *Changing Minds: The Impact of College in a Maximum Security Prison*. New York: Lesley Glass Foundation.
- Fisher, K., Grove, J. and Langlands, R. (2017). 'Sex and History': Talking Sex with Objects from the Past. In: Allen, L. and Rasmussen, M.L. *The Palgrave Handbook of Sexuality Education*. London (UK): Palgrave Macmillan; Chapter 2.
- Foucault, M. (1981). *The History of Sexuality*. Vol. 1. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Frayling, C (1993). Research in Art and Design. Royal College of Art Research Papers 1(1).
- Freire, K, Borba, G & Diebold, L. (2011). Participatory Design as an Approach to Social Innovation, *Design Philosophy Papers*, 9:3, 235-250
- Gaver, B., Dunne, T. and Pacenti, E. (1999) 'Design: Cultural probes', *interactions*, 6(1), pp. 21–29
- Gegenfurtner, A. and Gebhardt, M. (2017). Sexuality education including lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) issues in schools. *Educational Research Review*, 22, pp.215-222.
- Gibbs, A. (1997). Focus groups. *Social research update*, 19(8), pp.1-8.
- Hadfield, M., & Haw, K. (2001). 'Voice', young people and action research. *Educational Action Research*, 9(3), 485-502.
- Hallgarten, L. 2021 *Relationships and Sex Education must go further*. Available at <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2021/04/30/brook-relationships-and-sex-education-must-go-further/>
- Hartsock, N.C., (1983). The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism. *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science*, pp.283-310.
- Hillman, N. (2021). Sex and Relationships Among Students: Summary Report, Higher Education Policy Institute, [Accessed: July 2023] Available from: <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Sex-and-Relationships-Among-Students-Summary-Report.pdf>
- Johnson, A., University College London, Centre for Sexual Health and HIV Research, (2021) *National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles, 2010-2012*, [data collection], UK Data Service, 2nd Edition
- Jungk, R & Müllert, N. (1987). *Future workshops: How to Create Desirable Futures*. London, England, Institute for Social Inventions

- Kelly, J. (2019). Towards ethical principles for participatory design practice, *CoDesign*, 15:4, 329-344
- Kesby, M & Gwanzura-Ottmoller, F (2007) *Researching sexual health*, in Kindon, S., Pain, R. & Kesby, M. (2007). Participatory action research approaches and methods: Connecting people, participation and place
- Kjærsgaard, M. G. and Boer, L. (2015) 'The speculative and the mundane in practices of futuremaking – Exploring relations between design anthropology and critical design', in Research network for design anthropology seminar: 'Collaborative Formation of Issues'. Aarhus.
- Macdowall, W., et al. (2006). Learning About Sex: Results From Natsal 2000. *Health Education & Behavior*, 33(6), 802–811.
- Macdowall, W., Nanchahal, K., Fenton, K., Copas, A., Carder, C., Senior, M., Wellings, K., Ridgway, G., Russell, M., National Centre for Social Research, McCadden, A., (2005). *National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles, 2000-2001*, [data collection], UK Data Service
- Maguire, P (1987). "Doing Participatory Research: A Feminist Approach" *Participatory Research & Practice*.
- Maguire, P. (2008). The possibilities and challenges of arts-based research. In S. N. Hesse-Biber & P. Leavy (Eds.), *Handbook of emergent methods* (pp. 423-447). Guilford Press.
- Massey, K., Burns, J. & Franz, A. (2021). Young People, Sexuality and the Age of Pornography. *Sexuality & Culture* 25, 318–336 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-020-09771-z>
- McIntyre, A., (2008). *Participatory Action Research*. Qualitative Research Methods. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- McLean, K. C., Syed, M., Pasupathi, M., & Adler, J. M. (2016). Arts-based methods in the study of development. In D. L. Miller, M. J. Chandler, & T. L. Harter (Eds.), *Handbook of research methods in developmental science* (pp. 145-166). Guilford Press.
- Mogensen, P.H., (1992). Towards a Prototyping Approach in Systems Development. *Scandinavian Journal of Information Systems*, 4, 31–53
- Natzler, M & Evans, D. (2021). Student Relationships, Sex and Sexual Health Survey, Higher Education Policy Institute, [Accessed: July 2023] Available from: https://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Student-Relationships-Sex-and-Sexual-Health-Survey_Report-139_FINAL.pdf
- Nicholas, M., Hagen, P., Rahilly, K. & Swainston, N. (2012). Using Participatory Design Methods to Engage the Uninterested, Proceedings of the 12th Participatory Design Conference 2012, August 12 – 16, 2012, Roskilde, Denmark

- Noel, L (2022). "Dreaming outside the boxes that hold me in: Speculation and design thinking as tools for hope and liberation against oppression". *Journal of Future Studies*
- O'Farrell M, Corcoran P, Davoren MP. (2021). Examining LGBTI+ inclusive sexual health education from the perspective of both youth and facilitators: a systematic review. *BMJ Open*.
- O'Raghallaigh, P., Sammon, D. and Murphy, C. (2012). Using focus groups to evaluate artefacts in design research. In *The 6th European Conference on Information Management and Evaluation University College Cork* (pp. 251-257).
- Öz, G. & Timur, Ş. (2023). "Issues of Power and Representation in/of the Local Context: The role of self-reflexivity and positionality in design research", *The Design journal*, vol. 26, no. 2, pp. 252-269.
- Punch. S., (2002). Interviewing strategies with young people: the 'secret box', stimulus material and task-based activities, *Children in Society*, 16(1):45–56
- Rager, KB. (2005). Self-Care and the Qualitative Researcher: When Collecting Data Can Break Your Heart
- Reason, P & Bradbury, H. eds. (2008). *The SAGE Handbook of Action Research*. 2nd: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Renold, E. (2018). 'Feel what I feel': making da(r)ta with teen girls for creative activism on how sexual violence matters. *Journal of Gender Studies*. 27(1), pp. 37-55
- Renold, E., Ivinson, G., Thomas, G. and Elliott, E. (2020). The making, mapping and mobilising in Merthyr project: young people, research and arts-activism in a post-industrial place. In: McDermont, M., Cole, T., Newman, J., & Piccini, A. (2020). *Imagining regulation differently: Co-creating Regulation for Engagement*. (Connected Communities). Policy Press. pp. 127-144
- Robertson, T. & Wagner, I. (2013). Ethics; Engagement, representation and politics-in-action, in Simonsen, J., & Robertson, T. (Eds.) *Routledge International Handbook of Participatory Design* (1st ed.). Routledge.
- Robinson, K. H. (2012). 'Difficult citizenship': The precarious relationships between childhood, sexuality and access to knowledge. *Sexualities*, 15(3-4), 257-276.
- Sanders, E. B.-N., & Stappers, P. J. (2008). Co-creation and the new landscapes of design. *CoDesign*, 4(1), 5-18.
- Scott, R. H., et al. (2020). What and how: doing good research with young people, digital intimacies, and relationships and sex education. *Sex Education*, 20(6), 675-691.
- Senior, K. and Chenhall, R. (2017) More than "Just Learning About the Organs": Embodied Story Telling as a Basis for Learning About Sex and Relationships In: Allen, L. and

- Rasmussen, M.L. *The Palgrave Handbook of Sexuality Education*. London (UK): Palgrave Macmillan; Chapter 5.
- Senior, K., Grozdanovski, L., Chenhall, R. & Minton, S. (2018). 'Our Lives' and 'Life Happens', from stigma to empathy in young people's depictions of sexual health and relationships. *Journal of Applied Arts and Health*. 9(1), pp.9-23.
- Sex Education Forum. (2022). Young People's RSE Poll 2021. [Online] England: Sex Education Forum. [Accessed: July 2023] Available from: <https://www.sexeducationforum.org.uk/sites/default/files/field/attachment/Young%20Peoples%20RSE%20Poll%202021%20-%20SEF%201%20Feb%202022.pdf>
- Sex Education Forum. (2023). Young People's RSE Poll 2022 [Online] England: Sex Education Forum. [Accessed: July 2023] Available from: <https://www.sexeducationforum.org.uk/sites/default/files/field/attachment/Young%20Peoples%20RSE%20Poll%202022%20-%20Report.pdf>
- Sex Education*, 2019, Netflix. Laurie Nunn. Creator.
- Simonsen, J., & Robertson, T. (Eds.). (2013). *Routledge International Handbook of Participatory Design* (1st ed.). Routledge.
- Smith, R.C. and Iversen, O.S., (2018). Participatory design for sustainable social change. *Design Studies*, 59, pp.9-36
- Sontag, S. (1978). *On Photography*. London Great Britain: Allen Lane : Penguin Books.
- Sutherland, S. (2023). "Motherhood, COVID-19, and the postgraduate research experience: personal practice-based design insights", *Design for health*, vol. 7, no. 3, pp. 1-12.
- Teal, G. & French, T. (2020). *Spaces for Participatory Design Innovation*. In *Proceedings of the 16th Participatory Design Conference 2020 - Participation(s) Otherwise - Volume 1 (PDC '20)*. New York, NY, USA, 64–74.
- Torre, M. E., Fine, M., Stoudt, B. G., & Fox, M. (2012). Critical participatory action research as public science. In H. Cooper, P. M. Camic, D. L. Long, A. T. Panter, D. Rindskopf, & K. J. Sher (Eds.), *APA handbook of research methods in psychology, Vol. 2. Research designs: Quantitative, qualitative, neuropsychological, and biological* (pp. 171–184). American Psychological Association.
- Vidal, R.V.V., (2006). The future workshop: Democratic problem-solving. *Economic analysis working papers*, 5(4), p.21.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Wellings, K., Wadsworth, J., Field, J., Senior, M., (1995). *National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles, 1990*, [data collection], UK Data Service

- Whittington, E. (2019). Co-producing and Navigating Consent in Participatory Research with Young People. *Journal of Children's Services*. 14(3), pp.205-216.
- Whittington, E. (2021). Rethinking consent with continuums: sex, ethics and young people. *Sex Education*. 21(4). pp.480-496.
- Woodgate, R. L., Tennent, P., & Barriage, S. (2020). Creating Space for Youth Voice: Implications of Youth Disclosure Experiences for Youth-Centered Research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*.
- Wild, C (2020) *Knitting in the round – Prototyping to explore innovation in Fair Isle knitting*. MRes thesis, The Glasgow School of Art.
- York, L., MacKenzie, A., and Purdy, N. (2021)a. Attitudes to sexting amongst post-primary pupils in Northern Ireland: a liberal feminist approach, *Gender and Education*, 33(8), pp.999-1016
- York, L., MacKenzie, A., and Purdy, N. (2021)b. Sexting and institutional discourses of child protection: The views of young people and providers of relationship and sex education. *British Educational Research Journal*, 47 pp.1717-1734
- York, L., MacKenzie, A., and Purdy, N. (2021)c. 'The challenges and opportunities of conducting PhD participatory action research on sensitive issues: Young people and sexting', *Citizenship, Social and Economics Education*, 20(2), pp.73–83