

Priming Pubescent Sexualities; Sex and relationship education, without the relationship education?

Abstract:

This is a research project carried out in conjunction with Respond Academy, based in the Hastings and St Leonards region. The project attempts to discover if the sex and relationship education delivered within schools is failing young women; exploring the ideas laid out within the sex and relationship education guidelines and what they mean in real terms for young women. An analysis of the sex and relationship guidelines was carried out followed by a focus group with young women, the results were then analysed using Grounded theory from a feminist standpoint. This project concludes that young people would benefit from a greater emphasis on confidence, self-esteem and relationship aspects of sexuality, suggesting consideration should be given for more varied approaches to sex and relationship education.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Community University Partnership Programme (CUPP) for giving me the opportunity to carry out this research and the Action learning sets for the support given. A special thank you goes to Jc Mcfee and all the staff and service users at Respond Academy. And finally I would like to thank the young women that participated in the focus group, for the honesty and insightful comments they offered me, without whom this project would not have been possible.

Contents

Introduction4

Exploration of relevant literature6

The sex and relationship education guidelines8

Methodology11

Focus Groups12

Findings14

Discussion of findings19

Conclusion21

Limitations and future recommendations22

References23

Appendix25

Introduction

Sexuality is, more often than not, socially constructed and language is a 'tool' which can be used for control. Sexist and abusive language is being used everyday, verbally, in text, within the media, and advertising imagery. This creates sexism, reinforces stereotypes and may even create misogyny; institutionalized, organised and normalized hostility and violence against women. Laville (2011) found that verbal intimidation and abuse were treated as the norm in many school playgrounds and according to Keir Starmer, the director of public prosecutions, teenage girls between 16 and 19 are now the group most at risk of domestic violence. While there are fears that many young women's needs are not being met in the provision of domestic violence services, which are traditionally aimed at adults.

Schools are the sites where sexual identities are developed, practised and actively produced, having lasting ramifying consequence. There is considerable concern that our young women are not safeguarded, and are exposed to sexual harassment whilst in the school environment. Being called slags, sluts, skets, hoes and frigid, is an experience that some young women have to deal with on a daily basis, these experiences reinforce submissive and harmful gender roles. Too often this kind of abuse is not taken as seriously by those in authority as other types of abuse: Racial, disabled, religious or homophobic.

Effective sex and relationship education is essential if young people are to make responsible and well informed decisions about their lives. Sex and relationship education currently places its emphasis upon sexual health; promoting the absence of sexually transmitted diseases and the avoidance of teenage pregnancy (Allen 2006). Sex and relationship education is taught as part of Personal, Social and Health education (PSHE), within this discourse of sex education female sexuality is often portrayed as problematic, due to menstruation, pregnancy ect. In a liberal society young women are misguided into believing they have freedom of expression and choice, however societies morality often lays shame, blame and disgust upon females.

The evolutionary psychology approach can be tied in with biological determinism, which presents male sexual needs as biologically predetermined, a necessary

uncontrollable urge, which as Tyler (2008) points out has historically, in part, justified men's sexual violence towards women. Under this approach women are positioned as the problem which requires change while male preferences continue to be validated as biologically driven and women's deviating sexual preferences are seen as dysfunctional.

This piece of interpretive research attempts to answer the question; is sex and relationship education in schools failing our young women? As an exploration of young women's experience of Sex and Relationship education programmes in local schools (Hastings and St Leonards) this project plans to discover how relevant this was in helping them to deal with their relationships and sexual lives.

This research will be used in conjunction with Respond Academy and Women's Voice¹. The research may be used to ascertain what is missing from sex and relationship education and what needs to be included. The information may also be used to apply for funding for a workshop project or other types of funding which are beneficial to young women.

There is a possibility that the female participants of the focus group will have had quite similar experiences, as they will all have been based in the same county council. I am already assuming that there will be perceptions of institutionalised sexism felt by the women involved. There is a possibility that feelings of injustice or of being 'let-down' by the schooling system, may arise and procedures were put in place in case this did occur.

1. Respond Academy is an Alternative Education provider and a youth led community group offering a safe, friendly and unique environment to deliver their creative arts programme. Based in St Leonards, East Sussex.

Women's Voice is an all female, mixed cultured group, who follow the International Women's day ideology to help local families. Based in St Leonards, East Sussex.

Relevant literature

Boys tend to dominate the statistics in regards to problems within schools, recently one of the most dominant educational discussions has been focused around the issues of the underachievement of boys within the school environment, creating a 'moral panic' amongst general society in that it is seen as a threat to societal values and interests (Maynard 2005). It is understandable, with the overall underachievement of boys that there is concern for this group, however a major concern for female pupils is that if the majority of literature and research is surrounding young men and their needs, this may contribute to lacking to fulfil the needs of and offer provision to our young women.

Research carried out by the Centre for Citizenship Studies in Education, university of Leicester, found that girls are generally not a priority in schools as they are often over-shadowed by the difficulties of managing the greater number of boys with behavioural issues. They also found that there was an 'invisibility' of girls problems, which in turn means difficulty in finding the resources to get them the appropriate help needed. Girls problems are seen as small in comparison to the extent of boys with problems so that resources are targeted to the latter. Girls, in general, were found to be allocated fewer hours of support and less expensive forms of support (Osler et al 2002).

Measor (2000) found within her observations of sex and relationship education programmes in schools that pupils considered the information they were given to be lacking in emotional content. The programmes were reported to have a lack of dealing with the actual experience of sexuality and objections were raised regarding the clinical way it was delivered.

Contemporary political position

We are currently in an era where the right winged conservative party have taken over from the more liberal labour party, a time of change for many aspects of social living and the consequences of the governments rapid deficit reduction programme are becoming visible. Individual lives are shaped by co-determining social, economic, cultural and psychosocial factors, the onset of which begin during our school years. With the recent political change we have seen politicians

voice new and radical opinions for example Kenneth Clarke, the justice secretary, put forth plans to halve the sentences for rapists that plead guilty to their crime. This caused outcry amongst many women's groups who feel that sentences against crimes of a sexual nature are already far too lenient.

Regarding sex and relationship education, of the opinion that abstinence education for girls could help tackle child abuse, Nadine Dorries (MP) stated that;

'...if a stronger 'just say no' message was given to children in school there may be an impact on sex abuse. Because a lot of girls, when sex abuse takes place, don't realise till later that was the wrong thing to do....I don't think people realise that if we did empower this message into girls...in schools, we'd probably have less child abuse.' (4/5/2011)

Dorries put forward her bill which demands that girls between the ages of 14–16 have additional abstinence classes to learn to 'just say no' the bill won marginal support in parliament of 67:61, however at the time 522 MPs were not present. The Bill has been labelled as shameful victim blaming according to Ditum (2011), which should have no place in modern politics. A child can not give informed consent, therefore, is this bill suggesting that a child who does not say no is giving consent to sexual abuse? And what will boys be learning while girls are being 'empowered' to say no? This bill may have many potentially dangerous ramifications.

Following this in May 2011 The Life Organisation, a group which is opposed to abortion in all circumstances and also favours an abstinence approach to sex and relationship education, has been appointed to advise the government on sexual health. This group is highly critical of literature around contraception and were invited to join a new sexual health forum set up to replace the Independent Advisory Group on Sexual Health and HIV. The British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS) has been omitted from this forum, they were uninvited and replaced by the Life Organisation. As the group is opposed to the current policy of pro-contraception and of abortion being personal choice this imposes a moral framework and can prevent the advisory panel from having frank and open discussions,. All of these possible changes that will effect sex and relationship education lay heavily on the shoulders of young women.

Sex and relationship education guidelines

As Epstein and Johnson (1998) point out there is responsibility for schools, as institutions, to not only produce academically achieving young people, but 'upright, moral citizens'; Neo liberalism is used as the ideal model within sex and relationship education in schools, promoting procreation, the family, traditional gender roles and protection of the child's innocence.

For the purpose of this research a critical discourse analysis of the Sex and Relationship Education Guidance (SREG) as laid out in the new Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) framework has been carried out, from a post modern feminist approach. These guidance notes are relevant due to the importance of the institution of schools to the majority of people in Britain, as it is mandatory to attend school in this country, or to at least follow the National Curriculum. Therefore it is an appropriate text considering the heavy influence it may have over young people and their following sexual culture. Crawford (2006) points out that that which is learnt in our early years shapes our entire life, it is expected of us to put our knowledge into practice; when we become gendered that gender becomes part of the self.

The SREG are a framework for offering guidance which is then interpreted and applied according to the schools individual programmes, incorporating the values of parents, governors and the wider community. It replaces the Circular 5/94, taking into account the revised National Curriculum (Sep 1999) and arising out of the new Personal, Social and Health Education framework (PSHE).

The guidance is set out in point form, with each point ranging in length from one sentence to a paragraph, there are 9 chapters and within each chapter there are many points i.e. 1.1–1.32, 2.1–2.22 and so forth. The SREG was read in full then each point was looked at separately, the guidelines consist of an introduction and then 103 points/paragraphs.

Sex and relationship education (SRE) ideally teaches the emotional, social and physical aspects of growing up: Relationships, sex, human sexuality and sexual health and should equip children and young people with the information, skills and values to have safe, fulfilling and enjoyable relationships and to take

responsibility for their sexual health and well-being.

The texture rather than textual content of SREG appears very acceptable, with an expected emphasis on community, responsibility and contraception; these 'catch-all' phrases can give a comforting veneer to inadequate policies. Upon closer examination on individual points/paragraphs certain terms and ideals were repeated more often than others stressing their significance, those were parental and community wishes, delaying sexual activity, consequence and responsibility and morality (mentioned 13, 9, 8 and 7 times respectively). Subjects shown as medium relevance (mentioned 3, 4, 5 times) were confidence, marriage, contraception, teenage pregnancy and puberty, while those rarely mentioned were control/management (of conflict within relationships), respect, reproduction (am aware this ties in with teenage pregnancy), and difference. There appears to be very heavy emphasis on citizenship, morality and responsibility. This follows a citizenship model from a neo liberal/Christian fundamentalist standpoint and has an importance attached to delaying sexual activity (Kavanagh 2009).

Sex and Relationship education has long since placed more emphasis upon female pupils than on males, on the grounds that it is women who actually physically reproduce and the morality placed upon women's behaviour. On page 10 of these guidelines they state the importance of a 'focus on boys as much as girls' however the guidance notes do not support this statement; whereas teenage pregnancy is mentioned several times, with very negative connotations, and is directed towards the female pupils, paternity is mentioned only twice in the entire booklet and then it is linked to contraception; 'risk of infection, and unwanted pregnancy or paternity.' (Pg 17) and also mentioned on page 10 'use young people as peer educators, e.g. teenage mothers and fathers.' not dealing constructively with this issue lays the place of blame, regarding the issue of teenage pregnancy, firmly at the door of the female, legitimating male dominance in this issue.

There is very real and actual consequences attached to the exposure to these guidance notes for sex and relationship education, as they offer authentication and validation of identity, reflect what is expected for societal acceptance, and they are firmly rooted in the building blocks of identity construction of sexual development physically, emotionally and morally. The guidance notes given are

offered as an established authority of the subject matter and are open to interpretation by individual schools and institutions, they place heavy emphasis on the importance of responsibility, morality and citizenship, within these terms (Kavanagh 2009).

These guidelines, the way they are interpreted and how they are delivered within schools places great emphasis upon sexual activity and sexual health, although these aspects are very important, there is concern that it is to the detriment of relationship education.

Methodology

Feminist Methodology

All feminist approaches agree that western rational knowledge is androcentric; focused upon issues, institutions and topics which are of greater concern for men. Interpretations of male dominated life experiences are regarded as representative of our population, influencing the social order to favour a patriarchal society and create a host of inconsistent stereotypical assumptions, which cause inequalities to become normalised (Smith 1998). Therefore we are locked in a dominantly male discourse which impacts upon policy reinforcing prejudice within society and institutions.

Feminist methodology is defined as being 'on, by and for' women, but this definition is problematic. Feminists claim that traditionally the social and natural sciences have neglected the issue of gender and therefore women, among other social groups, have become marginalized. Feminist methodology attempts to adopt a non-sexist research practice, women are co-producers within society and therefore should be treated as 'Knower's' creating an ontological understanding *for* women. Therefore there is no unified body of feminist thought and the positions overlap, the intricate diversity of feminism resists being placed within the 'maleness' of categorization. It is widely felt that patriarchal relationships within western societies, cause women to become marginalised and ensures the inequalities suffered by women become normalized.

Standpoint theory

One's individual standpoint dictates what one sees and how its understood. Standpoint feminism holds strong emphasis on the relationship between social structures and the way we think and act within them. A re-invention of Marx's notion of standpoint derived from Hegels master-slave relationship, it identifies the oppressive and exploitative social structures which need to be changed for an outcome of transformation, as the oppressed perceive and recognise aspects of social relations, which the privileged may not. Standpoint feminists feel social science should take the 'standpoint' of oppressed and marginalised groups, as

they offer a more objective account of social life and give voice to the universal experience for all women (Smith 1998). Standpoint feminists feel that female knowledge is not only different from that produced by the dominant masculine science, but better, as it encompasses knowledge not only from the oppressed but from the oppressor and holds that feminist research provides a new 'successor' science.

The above approaches depend heavily on the insights and intuition of the researcher interpreting the data and therefore there may be difficulties with verification. This study does not expect nor plan to find universal truths, however it hopes to find some meaningful genuine reality taken from the researchers own standpoint, aware that lived experiences, both gendered and socially constructed perspectives; as a female, parent and mature student, will influence the interpretation of the material.

Grounded theory was used in this research along with its associated techniques. Grounded theory emphasizes the importance of not starting with too many preconceptions, concerned with the development of theory out of data, the collection and analysis proceed together, referring back to each other (Bryman 2004). There are different phases within grounded theory; concepts, categories, properties, hypothesis and then theory, this approach is very different, almost opposite, to quantitative research.

For the purpose of this research discourse analysis and a focus group have been used. These methods are both interpretativist and subjective therefore there is an awareness of a danger of bias.

Focus Groups

A group of 6 young women were invited to participate in a focus group. The age group chosen was to be over 18 but under 21, so that they have recently left school and hopefully their experiences of Sex and Relationship education will still be fresh in their minds. Respond Academy were involved in an introduction to the participants, also offering the use of a venue and supplying recording equipment.

Ethically It is the researchers responsibility to explain individually to the focus

group members what the research is about, why it is being carried out and how the information gathered is intended to be used. The researcher has a responsibility to safeguard those involved, to be aware of group dynamics, take care of self-esteem issues and to report the findings accurately and truthfully. Group work and interviews are confidential and all participants had the commitment that their privacy will not be violated.

A focus group is essentially a unstructured group interview, typically the researcher emphasizes a specific topic or theme which is to be explored in depth. The researcher guides rather than controls the discussion, so as to not be too intrusive as it is the interaction between the individual group members which contributes to the theory arising from the research. Focus groups offer the opportunity of allowing the members to probe each others reasons for holding particular views, ideally bringing to the forefront individuals true thoughts and feelings in a relaxed atmosphere.

Focus groups are popular as a feminist method as they are considered less artificial and emphasise group interaction which reflects social life. Focus groups also avoid the possible exploitive power relationship between the researcher and the participant and allows the voices of marginalised groups to surface, which, in turn, offers empowerment to the group members.

The focus group was recorded and transcribed. The transcription was then analysed. The way, in which a response is made; tone of voice, Body language, hesitation, facial expression etc can provide valuable information which written word can conceal in other research methods (Bell 2005).

Findings

The focus group was carried out in a private area of Respond Academy with no access allowed to staff members or other service users. Three young women attend the session, for the sake of this paper and to respect the promise of anonymity they have been given pseudonyms and for the purpose of this study are called Jo, Kay and Meg. Jo is a nineteen year old who attended mixed sex catholic primary and secondary schools, Kay is 21 and attended a local grammar (state maintained secondary) school and Meg 21 attended a different local grammar school, both mixed sex.

The environment at the time of the focus group was relaxed and comfortable, the participants had their feet on the seats, were eating biscuits and drinking tea. They appeared at ease with each other and the situation. The session was begun by explaining to the participants what we would be discussing and the reasons for carrying out the research. For the purpose of this paper I shall generally be referring to young women as 'girls' and to young men as 'boys' as this is better suited to the terminology used by the participants.

The focus group began by discussing the individual participants experience of sex and relationship education in their respective schools. Despite their differing experiences all the participants reported that there was an emphasis of biology, warning and threat. All the approaches were seen as extreme by all the participants; either of a severe lack of sex and relationship education or far too much. While Jo reported having just one day of sex education being taught about puberty and biological sex Meg had a completely different experience which she found horrifying;

'I was like scarred by sex education at secondary school, they came in with like these big blown up pictures of STI's and stuff and said, you know, if you have sex and stuff this is what will happen to you. It was horrible. Like, and that was about it, we used to get it every year in PSE....they even spoke to us about foreplay and stuff, like just explained what it was and how it happened and....I felt it was a bit too much myself.'

Jo reported being visited by 'Chastity People' at her catholic school, she couldn't

remember too much about them but felt they wasn't trying to 'brain wash' her.

The participants all showed concern that sex and relationship education was taught to children that were too young and felt that this contributed to girls being promiscuous at young ages and led to the belief that it was considered to be acceptable by their peers and by adults;

Kay 'but the thing is, more and more and more now, like, the next generation of young people, its getting lower and lower for sex to be acceptable like, girls just have no shame no more, like young girls like 12 year olds or 13 year olds.'

Meg 'its acceptable for under ages as well like between their peers like. Older people think that where their growing up in school and stuff, its acceptable.'

Upon asking the group members if they felt that they were taught about relationships and boundaries in sex and relationship education they all answered no;

Jo 'Just sex....you never get told about relationships do you?, I never did, just the sex bit.'

Meg 'No. they just advised us like, you know, that erm the legal age to do it, when its acceptable and what to, you know like, then they did also say that people do have sex under age, but to be safe and that if its not with somebody that's older, then they did say about the law, you know.'

This shows that within sex and relationship education there seems to be a considerable lacking in relationship education, teaching children about good healthy relationships and how to protect themselves physically, mentally and emotionally. It is also necessary for young people to have boundaries and to know how to implement them. All the participants felt that, in their local area, people were needed to enter schools and give advice or offer workshops to teach young people in the areas of relationships and boundaries. This point arose several times throughout the session;

Kelly Kavanagh: Priming Pubescent Sexualities.

Jo *'well you do need people going into schools to tell girls, because there's so many girls who only learn stuff from people already having sex, you know what I mean.'*

Meg *'yeah if you could be taught it, you know what I mean, taught at a younger age instead of having to make all those mistakes to find out.'*

Kay *'I think relationship education should be the most important part of it, because its actually the biggest thing, it actually messes with your head.'*

Meg *'All relationships effect your future relationships, it effects you for the rest of your life. They (children) should be taught morals and respect and to treat each other well.'*

When the group were informed of Nadine Dorries's (Ditum 2011) plans to introduce abstinence lessons for girls there was disagreement amongst the group as to whether or not this was a good idea, however all the participants felt that if lessons were to be delivered to girls then it was necessary to deliver them to boys too;

Meg *'so they're gonna teach girls to say no but they're not gonna teach boys anything? So basically these boys, these teenage boys will be pushing girls to have sex....you know what I mean, I mean if only girls are taught to say no, the boys are still around trying to do it'*

Kay *'yeah exactly , and if you try saying no to a boy they will probably to do it even more won't they. They should both get taught it then.'*

Kay *'I think relationships and morals and respect need to be put back in place, for everyone, not just males or females, and I don't believe in the saying no thing (abstinence teaching) because I think if everybody was to turn around to me and be like, your not doing this, your not doing that, I'd do it...I'd rebel.'*

All the young women in the group agree that sex is not a bad thing and that it can

be special, however they felt the young people should be taught respect, self-respect, self confidence, consequence, consent and informed choice. They felt that young girls are unaware of what they are doing and that they just need to be loved and therefore work was needed on female self-esteem;

Kay 'what you do, you just go out and get pissed up and just do whatever and erm...that's self abuse I suppose, but now your older you kind of think...now I understand about sex.'

Jo 'yeah I think a lot of girls who do have a lot of sex, that are like very promiscuous, I don't think they actually have any self confidence whatsoever and were they are having sex with someone...'Oh they do love me!' see what I mean....like somebody really does like me, but I think girls have to work on their self-esteem more to prevent...being slags basically. If people did actually, like, value themselves, they'd know that their far too precious to give away to just anybody.'

One of the most unsettling things to come out of this research was that all the participants felt that most boys and men are manipulative and that all they cared about was having sex, regardless who with. They also felt that boys lacked self control and needed to be taught respect. The group members even considered this to be the case amongst their male friends;

Jo 'if a boy wants to sleep with you and you do, after the boy will never ever speak to you again...never contact you again, some girls are just dumb to it that they'll do it, and then just get known like as a whore and they'll think I thought he actually liked me, but boys are just so manipulative.'

Meg 'boys are not taught morals and don't know about what's right and wrong....I've got boy mates that do just go out, like, for , just for sex. They don't go out to party, they don't dance, they look for someone easy, someone that's on their own.'

Kay 'my boyfriends don't even have any morals, they will just have sex with anyone with a heartbeat, just like whoever, or they'll go to brothel houses.'

Jo 'I know like 9 times out of 10 like if a boy was lying in a bed and a girl got in next to him, even if they were best friends like, he would try it on, they cannot help themselves, but to try it on, its like natural instinct, its like they cannot actually help it.'

This was a constant theme throughout the session. All the participants felt boys were simply 'desperate for sex' and there is concern that this attitude of males sex drives being natural instinct makes excuses for, and justifies, males sexual and sometimes violent behaviour. This has become so normalised for these young women that they have come to think of it as natural and could be seen as the successful influence of evolutionary psychology and biological determinism, which suggests that male sexual needs are biologically predetermined. The participants do, however, offer reasons for this behaviour, they explain that due to the breakdown of families many boys lack a father figure for teaching morality. They also feel that boys often see their own mothers treated badly by men, so it becomes normalised to treat women in this way;

Meg '...and a lot of them haven't even got dads to look up to, so they haven't got a dad to say 'you don't hit girls, you don't do this to girls blah blah' like, they've got mums, mums that are in untold relationships and they think that's the way you treat women....yeah because they haven't got a family unit...if your dad beat your mum and took drugs and whatever and left....you see your mum having sexual relationships with endless people, that treat her like rubbish, don't respect her, if its okay for them to do it to my mum its okay for me to do it to girls, their just not taught morals.'

Sadly all three of the young women participating in this research had personal first-hand experiences of domestic violence and abusive relationships, I do not feel that I would be able to do their personal experiences justice by delving into them within the scope of this paper. However I must point out that the participants suggested that in their experience it was the norm for young women.

Discussion of findings

The opposing treatment of the young people in differing yet geographically close schools regarding events of a sexual nature, shows just how diverse sex and relationship education can be, Jo's school took a zero tolerance line;

'I remember this boy, at our school, kinda blew up this condom in the playground and he like got excluded for it, and for like having a condom in school.'

While at Meg's, perhaps more liberal, school they had a counsellor to hand out advice and condoms. It seems such an extreme disparity that young people of the same age group would attend schools with such differing sexual policies, that one would hand out free condoms while another expels children for having them.

Although concern was shown by the participants regarding the young age of children receiving sex and relationship education they felt that young children should be taught the relationship aspects at an early age;

Meg '...like if you was taught rightly, moralistically how to treat each other and the respect of what's right and what's wrong, that wouldn't happen, you wouldn't be 16 and get a boyfriend who's that treats you like shit for the rest of your life and thinks your ugly and clingy and stuff, you know what I mean like. I think if you only get taught about sex....'

Jo 'they shouldn't just learn it from their own experiences and mistakes, they should actually be taught that its not all right....to like beat up your girlfriend.'

It was felt, by the members of the focus group, that if children were taught relationship education at school which included self respect and esteem training, then children would be less vulnerable and therefore would be less at risk from experiencing domestic violence in the future.

The group participants all voiced concern regarding the lack of a father figure in many young males life's. This reflects what has previously been published both

academically and in the press. Compatible with Maynard's (2005) statements that young boys who do not have a male presence in their lives may take their ideas about masculinity from the often stereotypically male characters they see on television. However it is not within the scope nor the rationale of this research to delve into this subject here.

The scaremongering techniques used at Meg's school consisted of showing children blown up pictures of genitals infected with STI's. This completely horrified Meg at the tender age of thirteen. It has previously been reported that schools use images of genitalia covered in angry pustules that students are exposed to, to frighten them by using danger, warning and threat to curtail sexual activity (Allen 2006).

All the participants felt that any kind of abstinence training should be delivered to boys as well as girls. otherwise it reinforces sexual stereotypes and portrays boys as sexual predators who lack self control, educating them into believing their role is to push while girls role is to resist. Educating young people in this way could have an extremely negative impact on abuse and sex crime statistics.

All the participants did feel the relationship education was completely lacking in their sex and relationship education in their respective schools. It was suggested that relationship education should not only be used to warn of threat and abuse but also to educate in healthy, happy relationships.

Kay 'but do you know what it all boils down to relationships because even that if girls were to be taught how to deal with your friend who's in an abusive relationship they might learn something from it.'

Jo 'or to be taught about nice relationships, like to appreciate how nice relationships are, they are not supposed to be psycho things that people control or you just have sex constantly, they're supposed to be like friendship, like a nice thing.'

Measor (2000) found the same within her observations of sex and relationship education programmes, where the pupils reported that they were not taught how to have good relationships.

Conclusion

This research shows undoubtedly that there is a gap in Sex and Relationship education with a lack of an emphasis on relationship education, of course it is not suggested that this is the case this is across the board in all schooling establishments, however this appears to be the case in Hastings and St Leonards. Young people would benefit from a greater emphasis on confidence, self-esteem and relationship aspects of sexuality and consideration should be given for more varied approaches to sex and relationship education.

The participants experiences have shown that there is little or no provision made for dealing with emotional elements within sex and relationship education and have made it obvious that they would have personally benefited from a larger emphasis on relationship education. Also there was suggestions that positive sex and relationship education could have an impact on domestic violence and sex crimes.

Abstinence training as suggested by Nadine Dorries has been shown to be deficient in the battle against child abuse, teenage pregnancy and domestic violence and would only support the evolutionary psychology approach which depicts males as having biological needs with a lack of control, teaching young men that it is a societal norm to take on the role of a sexual predator.

The sex and relationship education guidelines do not deliver what they propose; 'a focus on boys as much as girls', the guidance notes do not support this statement. As suggested earlier, sex and relationship education offers teaching in the emotional, social and physical aspects of maturing sexually. This study has found this to be lacking in relationship education and safeguarding our young people, these findings correlate with the findings of Measor (2000).

Limitations and future recommendations

This research project was carried out with three young women, from similar socio-economic and environmental backgrounds, the research tells their experiences and should not be taken as 'truths' for all young people. The research is only a small contribution, it is hoped however that that it will add to the conversation/debate to build upon theory regarding positive sex and relationship education for our young people.

Awareness needs to be offered to young people which will empower them to make better choices for themselves. It would be helpful to: Teach the causal effects of sexist behaviour and language, explain the commercial representation of sexuality and reveal the truth behind it, show how our popular culture is shaping individual relationships, question the concepts of personal choice and freedom and encourage growth of self-respect and confidence.

This research is extremely relevant to contemporary society and therefore its highly recommended that this research is continued, it is important not to waste the information the has materialised from the focus group. It could be suggested that further focus groups are conducted with females of different age groups, from different areas and from differing socio-economic backgrounds. It also would be beneficial to the research subject to resolve to analyse the subject matter from a male perspective this would have offered greater understanding from differing gender standpoints. It could also be suggested that a large scale, anonymous, questionnaire may be useful to attain a broad understanding, regarding particular aspects of the research, from a larger section of young people, this would also offer validity to the work.

There is a responsibility to equality and a need for safeguarding from domestic violence and sex crimes, this responsibility lies partially in the educational needs of both young women and men.

References

Allen, L. 2006. *Beyond the Birds and the Bees: Constituting a discourse of erotics in sexuality education*. In the 'RoutledgeFalmer Reader in Gender and Education'. Edited by, Arnot, M and Mac an Ghail, M. Routledge. London.

Bryman, A. 2004. *Social Research Methods: second Edition*. Oxford University Press. Oxford.

Ditum, S. 2011. *Nadine Dorries's abstinence bill is a definite no-no*. Guardian Society.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/may/05/nadine-dorries-abstinence-bill-girls-sex?INTCMP=SRCH>

Epstien, D and Johnson, R.1998. *Schooling Sexualities*. Buckingham. Open University Press.

Howorth, D. 2000. *Discourse; Concepts in the Social Sciences*. Buckingham. Open University Press.

Kavanagh, K. 2009. *An exploration of Heterosexual Institutionalisation and the construction/reinforcement of sexual desires*. (Unpublished paper).

Laville, S. 2011. *Teenage domestic violence: 'No one did anything to stop it'*. Guardian Society. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2011/apr/16/domestic-violence-teenage-girls?INTCMP=SRCH>

Lloyd, G. 2005. *Problem Girls: Understanding and supporting troubled and troublesome girls and young women*. RoutledgeFalmer. Oxon.

Maynard, T. 2005. *The Context: a problem of gender*. In Topping, K and Maloney, S. The RoutledgeFalmer Reader in Inclusive Education. RoutledgeFalmer. Oxon.

Mcfee, jc and Mcfee, P. 2010. *Respond Academy: Methodology and Ethos 2004-2010*. (Unpublished paper).

Kelly Kavanagh: Priming Pubescent Sexualities.

Measor, L. 2000. *Young People's views on Sex Education: Education, Attitudes and Behaviour*. RoutledgeFalmer. London.

Measor, L and Sikes, P. (1992) *Gender and Schools*. Cassell. London.

Osler, A et al. (2002) *Not a problem? Girls and school exclusion*. The National Children's Bureau.

Smith, M. 1998. *Social science in question*. London. Ch 7. Situated knowledge's: rethinking knowledge and reality.

Sex and Relationship Education Guidance. July 2000. Department for Education and Skills; Curriculum and Standards, Good Practice. DfES 0116/2000.

Quinn, B. 2011. *Anti-abortion group drafted in as sexual health adviser to government*. Guardian Society.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2011/may/24/abortion-sexual-health-coalition?INTCMP=SRCH>

Participant Information Sheet

I would like to invite you to take part in an exciting piece of research. Please take the time to read this information sheet and decide if you would be interested in participating.

This research project is entitled *Priming Pubescent Sexualities; Sex and relationship education, without the relationship education?* and its purpose is an exploration of what the sex and relationship education means to local young women, its effectiveness and what it lacks to offer. As a female, over the age of 18, you are invited to participate in a focus group. This will consist of up to 6 participants getting together and informally discussing, chatting and reminiscing of all your experiences of sex education classes from your own perspective.

Depending on the outcome this may lead on to some one to one interviews, to go into more depth of your positive, negative or meaningful experiences. The focus group and possible interviews are to be held at Respond Academy. The focus group will last for no longer than two hours and the interviews will last for no longer than an hour. An audio recording will be made in order that I may review what has been discussed and type up the information gathered.

Participation in this research is entirely voluntary and if you do decide to take part I will request that you sign a consent form, but please be assured you are free to leave the project at any time, without having to give reason. If you do decide to take part then a convenient time for all will be arranged at Respond Academy. After the focus group you will be offered the opportunity to read the material gathered and give feedback and may also withdraw at this time if you wish.

It is possible, however unlikely, that some of the topics discussed may cause you distress. If this does occur, the focus group or interview will be stopped and a member of Responds staff will be found in order to provide support.

The benefits of taking part in this project are to share and compare your experiences with young women of a similar age, this may be fun and you may make new friends as I intend it to be very informal. It is also possible that the information gathered could be used to improve the experiences of other young

women in your area and may show evidence that workshops safeguarding our young women are needed. Another benefit of talking part in this project is the opportunity to speak up and have your voice heard.

Confidentiality will be strictly adhered too. All your personal information will be removed from recordings during the transcribing process, you will then be given coded names and only myself and my supervisor will have access to the original information. Please be aware that while every effort is made to keep you anonymous, when entering the respond building certain staff members will be aware of the study we are conducting, however they will not be privy to the discussions in the focus group nor any subsequent interviews.

The only circumstances in which information provided, during this project, would be passed on is if one member of the group were to raise an issue which would suggest considerable harm to themselves or to others, if this situation did occur I would be compelled to take this up with my supervisor and would inform you of this.

Contact Information:

Kelly Kavanagh: Researcher:
kellykavanagh@hotmail.co.uk

Thank you for considering taking part in this project.

Consent form.

This is a focus group/discussion regarding whether or not sex and relationship education in schools failing our young women? An exploration of young women's experience of sex education programmes in local schools (Hastings and St Leonards) to discover how useful the sex and relationship education was in helping them to deal with their future relationships and sexual life's.

To be used in conjunction with Respond Academy. This research may be used to ascertain what needs to be included in workshops for young women. The information may also be used to apply for funding for a workshop project or other types of funding which are beneficial to young women. Please be aware that you are free to leave the discussion at any time.

I give permission for the content of this discussion to be used for a research project and to apply for funding. I understand that the information will not be used in any other manner and is completely confidential:

Signed.....

Date.....