Doctorate in Educational Psychology (DEdPsy)

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"Schools are supposed to be preparing us for life, they're not preparing us by just sweeping this under the carpet" - Sexually Explicit Media, Sex and Relationship Education and Adolescents – an Exploration of the Views of Young People

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I am grateful to all the people who have made this research possible and for the support and guidance I have received during the process of completing this study.

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Abstract

The way in which adolescents access online sexually explicit media (SEM) today is fundamentally different to the experiences of previous generations due to the advent of smartphones and internet enabled tablets (Berelowitz, Edwards, & Gulyurtlu, 2012). Accordingly such unrestricted availability of SEM has led to an increasing awareness that SEM is becoming a commonplace occurrence for many young people within the UK (Martellozzo et al., 2017; Parker, 2014). Adolescence is identified as a time of heightened vulnerability and a critical developmental period for social and emotional health and wellbeing. Literature suggests mixed, and somewhat limited, findings regarding the impact of SEM on adolescent development, and recent and balanced qualitative studies regarding UK adolescents' experiences of SEM are few(Lester & Allan, 2003; Weber, Quiring, & Daschmann, 2012). There is an associated lack of clarity as to how adolescents may be educated or supported in their experiences of SEM, with a lack of clarity regarding the role of sex and relationship education (SRE) in making such a provision (particularly within Wales). This research aimed to provide a balanced account of the views of a sample of young people in the education system within South Wales regarding SEM and SRE. Eight adolescents aged sixteen to eighteen years old were interviewed via a semi-structured interview process and data was analysed using the process of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Results suggest that adolescents are dissatisfied both with the widespread accessibility of SEM, particularly to early adolescents, and with the lack of discussion or education regarding SEM within both SRE, the education system, and wider society. Implications for educational psychologists and professionals are considered alongside future direction for further study.

Summary

This thesis is in three parts: a literature review, an empirical study, and a critical appraisal.

Part I, the literature review, provides amplification of the title and a rationale for the research study. Key theoretical and research literature is presented and critically reviewed, leading to the identification of a research gap regarding the in-depth views of adolescents in South Wales regarding sexually explicit media (SEM) and sex and relationship education (SRE). A rationale for the empirical study and research questions are provided.

Part II, the empirical study, provides a brief overview of the literature discussed in Part A in order to provide a succinct background to the research study. It goes on to describe the methodology of the research study in investigating the views of a sample of adolescents regarding SEM and SRE. Qualitative data was gathered via semi-structured interviews with nine participants, aged sixteen to eighteen years attending mainstream educational settings in South Wales. Interview data was analysed through a process of thematic analysis and key themes and sub-themes, alongside supporting quotes, are provided. Key findings are summarised and discussed in relation to existing literature. Strengths and limitations of the study, along with suggestions for further research are also provided.

Part III, the critical appraisal, is further divided into two parts. The first part provides a critical account of the research practitioner and the research process. The development of the research is discussed and contextualised within the research paradigm. Critique of the ethical issues, research design and analysis is further provided. The second part considers the contribution to knowledge that the study provides; its impact on professional practice within the educational psychology (EP) profession; and also upon the researcher's professional development and practice. Future directions for further study are also provided.

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Meaning
EP	Educational Psychologist
EPS	Educational Psychology Service
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
SEM	Sexually Explicit Media
SRE	Sex and Relationship Education
SS	Sexual Subjectivity
TA	Thematic Analysis
TEP	Trainee Educational Psychologist

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Part I: Introduction and Literature Review

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1. Introduction

1.1 Amplification of the title and Rationale for the Research

Recent and balanced qualitative studies regarding UK adolescents views on sexually explicit media (SEM) and sex and relationships education (SRE) are limited (Lester & Allan, 2003; Weber, Quiring, & Daschmann, 2012). There is an according lack of clarity regarding the breadth and depth of SRE within schools and the extent to which SEM may be included within this. This project aims to investigate the views of a sample of young people to gather their thoughts and feelings regarding SEM, how they feel about the SRE that they have received, and what they feel has, and has not, supported them in navigating the complex waters of this area of adolescent development. The purpose of this investigation is to further inform educational psychologists and educational professionals on the experiences of adolescents resultantly making them better placed to work with both adolescents and educational settings in relation to SEM and SRE.

1.2 Structure of the Literature Review

This review aims to provide an appropriate and sufficient critical discussion of a range of theoretical and research literature. This broadly covers the topic areas of adolescent development and adolescents' involvement with SEM and SRE within the UK education system. The review begins with a description of what is meant by the term 'sexually explicit media' to inform the reader of the nature of the central topic. A brief overview of the relationship between SEM and adolescents is also given to provide context for the research study and to highlight the place of SEM in the lives of young people.

There follows an overview of a number of key theoretical models of adolescent development which subsequently inform more focused discussion regarding sexual and relationship development in adolescence. Such insight underpins the psychological reasoning behind the research and is key to informing later discussion of the results.

A critical discussion of existing literature and research regarding SEM and adolescents is provided, focusing on UK based research to maintain focus and context. This leads in to an overview of SRE within UK secondary schools, focusing on current legislation regarding SRE in Wales in particular. Given the geographical scope of the study, and the differences in governance of education between Wales and the rest of the UK, it is deemed important here to identify the specific context of SRE which participants in the study will have experience of. The current role and purpose of SRE is given and a brief discussion of SEM within this is provided.

The review goes on to discuss the role of adults and schools in relation to SEM and SRE. The aim of the research in informing and advancing practice in the educational psychology (EP) profession is also given to provide a grounding and justification for the direction of the research. The literature review concludes with a set of research questions formed in line with the literature discussed and identified gaps in current research.

1.3 Key sources of information

Information was gathered and reviewed from a variety of online academic search engines including Web of Science, PsycINFO and the British Education Index. Preliminary searches via more generic search engines, such as Google Scholar and Taylor Francis online, additionally provided some initial reading (as suggested by Creswell, 2014). Articles were scanned by title and abstract, with reference lists and article descriptors of appropriate articles also scanned to identify further papers of interest. Refining search terms helped to narrow the literature search and identify the most appropriate and relevant literature. A table of search terms, number of papers found, and refinement of the literature search can be seen in Appendix P.

Relevant and, where possible, recent, hard copy material is also referred to, particularly in reference to developmental psychology. Relevant information from government or charity led reports is additionally reviewed alongside discussion from the UK media - referred to in order to provide the reader with an understanding of the wider context and positioning of the topic in the public arena. The substantive literature review was completed prior to

January 2018 and therefore literature published after this time is not included. An exception to this is through reference to an announcement from Welsh Government in May 2018 regarding SRE provision as this is regarded as key information relevant to the focus of the study.

1.4 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

It is recognised that the author's own experience and stance as a psychodynamic psychologist will influence the inclusion and exclusion criteria in the initial stages of the review (see section 3), with a broad overview of theoretical positions provided in line with an inductive research methodology. In line with Willig (2008), this may also be referred to as 'big Q' qualitative research, being research that is concerned with exploration of meanings and open-ended, inductive methods of research. Due to the exploratory nature of the study it is not the intention of the research to be theory driven, therefore denoting that a range of theoretical perspectives is broadly considered in order to widen the theoretical gaze (Willig, 2008).

The main developmental areas of adolescence are provided as relevant and useful background to inform more focused discussion regarding adolescent sexual and relationship development. It is additionally recognised that much of the theoretical discussion is grounded in Westernised culture, acknowledging that development (and perception of adolescence) may vary in differing cultural contexts. Given the focus of the study in the UK it is noted that, whilst findings may be relevant across a range of ethnicities, they are grounded in a cultural context where the age of sexual consent is sixteen years of age.

Given the geographical focus of this study and its relation to UK SRE much global research is deemed to be beyond the scope for effective generalisation or relevance of data. Additionally, given the nature of technology use with the topic base, research is consulted primarily within the last five years in relation to adolescents' use and views of SEM and within the last ten years for views on SRE or wider impacts of media. An exception to this is Lester & Allan's 2003 study (published in their 2006 report) which is the only existing report regarding children and young people's views in Wales regarding SRE and is thus referred to

as an existing knowledge base here. There is also a focus on adolescent use of and views of SEM; rather than adults. Whilst adult involvement in SEM may be widely discussed within academic literature; the focus of this study is solely on adolescents and the literature review accordingly reflects this.

There is an additional focus on SRE within Wales, rather than the UK as a whole. Whilst England and Wales may follow similar national curriculums; the governance of education is separate with each country falling under different legislation in terms of SRE provision. The geographical scope of the sample for this study deliberately focuses on Wales as an area which is under-researched with regards to both SEM and SRE and thus the literature review accordingly reflects the appropriateness of relevant legislation and guidance for the geographical area.

2. **Literature Review**

2.1 Arrangement of the literature review

The literature review is structured into three main parts. The first part (chapter 3) provides an overview of SEM and theories of adolescent development. This incorporates the theoretical underpinning to the research with discussion regarding social cognitive learning and how this may be linked to adolescents' experiences of SEM. This section then leads on to look at the development of romantic and sexual relationships in adolescence, again drawing links between psychological theory and the role of technology and social media in this development.

The second part (chapter 4) focuses in more depth on the impact of SEM on adolescents. This provides a review of existing and relatively recent literature, discussion of which is underpinned by the theories of development discussed in chapter three.

The third part (chapter 5) introduces the role of SRE for young people within the UK as a whole, and specifically within the context of Wales. It is acknowledged from the existing literature that SRE is a key tool for providing information and education to adolescents regarding SEM, but that it is not currently fit for purpose. Therefore, SRE is discussed in light of its importance and its fitness for use at the present time. The importance of SRE in relation to this research is highlighted.

It is argued that these three parts interlink and overlap. SRE and SEM are being increasingly linked through education policy (House of Commons: Women and Equalities Committee, 2016; Hughes, 2016). It is identified that SRE may be used to facilitate appropriate discussion and / or education around SEM for young people. Further, theoretical theories of adolescent development provide the psychological underpinning to support in the understanding of how and why SEM and SRE may impact upon the modern-day experiences of adolescents. This relationship is visually represented in Figure 1 below.

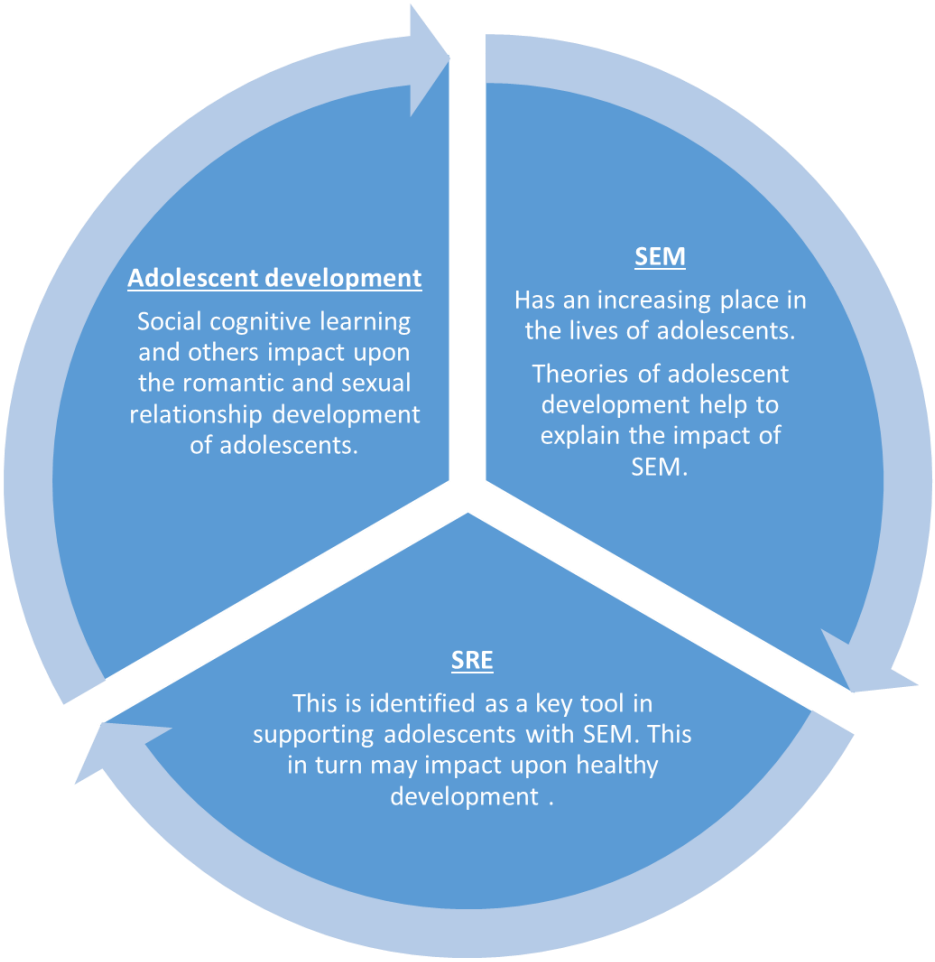

Figure 1 – Visual representation of the relationship between the three main parts of the literature review

3. Adolescent Development

3.1 *Theoretical Overview of Adolescent Development*

Adolescence is a key developmental period of adjustment and vulnerability characterised by changes in psychological, physical and social development (Ernst, Pine, & Hardin, 2006; Steinberg, 2005). It is seen as a transitional period between late childhood and the beginning of adulthood when individuals begin to examine and explore psychological characteristics of the self to discover who they are, and how they fit in the social world (Choudhury, Blakemore, & Charman, 2006; Steinberg & Morris, 2001). Adolescents are defined by the World Health Organisation as individuals between 10 and 19 years of age (World Health Organisation, 2014).

3.1.1 Theoretical models of development

There are numerous theories of developmental psychology which may be applicable to adolescent development, and these differ in perspective and focus. These theories may be broadly grouped according to the developmental areas that they focus on, as shown in Figure 2.

Whilst it is recognised that a number of such theories are relatively historical in nature and may not have their primary focus as adolescence, they are generally regarded as providing key perspectives regarding adolescent development and as having a wide influence on modern psychology (Muuss, 1996). Their inclusion here intends to provide an overarching critical framework within which this study is grounded; and a balanced overview and theoretical background to development during adolescence. Due to the complexity of development during adolescence it is deemed important to reference such a range of theoretical literature as each is considered pertinent to the study of adolescent development, and particularly when investigating possible change in such development (Spano, 2004).

Aspects of these developmental areas are taken to inform more focused discussion regarding romantic and sexual development in adolescence (as more relevant to the focus of this study) in section 3.2 as follows. A particular focus on social cognitive learning development is additionally provided as deemed most applicable to this research. As it is not within the remit of this study to discuss all aspects of adolescent development in detail, a brief overview of the main focus of each other developmental area is provided in Figure 2 with additional information in relation to each provided in the appendices to this paper for further reference (Appendices A – D).

Developmental Area	Primary Theorists	Main Focus
Biological	G. Stanley Hall, Arnold Gesell, James Tanner	Focus of the period is physical and sexual development determined by genes and biology. (Additional information – appendix A)
Cognitive	Jean Piaget	Focus is on formal operational thought; moving beyond concrete, actual experiences and beginning to think in logical and abstract terms. (Additional information – appendix B
Psychological and Psychosocial	Sigmund Freud, Anna Freud, Erik Erikson	Focus is on adolescence as a period of sexual excitement and anxiety, identify formation and the struggle between achieving identity and identity diffusion. (Additional information – appendix C)
Social Cognitive Learning	Albert Bandura, Lev Vygotsky	Focus is on the relationship between social and environmental factors and their influence on behaviour. Children learn through modelling. (Additional information below)
Ecological and Cultural (interaction between individual and environment)	Urie Bronfenbrenner, Margaret Mead, Carol Gilligan	Focus is on the context in which adolescents develop; adolescents are influenced by family, peers, religion, schools, the media, community, culture, and world events. (Additional information – appendix D)

Figure 2 - Main Developmental Areas of Adolescence

(Adapted from (Muuss, 1996; Rice & Dolgin, 2002); cited in Spano (2004)

3.1.2 Social Cognitive Learning and Adolescent Development

Social learning theory asserts that socialising agents, which include parents, peers, teachers and the media, convey messages about gender, relationships and sex which subsequently influence adolescent behaviour (Gross, 2004). Adolescents therefore may learn behaviour from a process of modelling and observing others. Eysenck (2004) describes this process as vicarious reinforcement, a term used to describe imitation of behaviour which is viewed as being rewarded. Bandura argues that through this process of vicarious reinforcement adolescents will experience relative continuity and stability, in opposition to psychosocial theories suggesting conflict through development (Bandura, 1964; Bandura & Walters, 1969).

Through a process of social learning, it is argued that adolescents will experiment with new behaviours, some of which may result in risk-taking behaviour designed to shape identity; try out decision-making skills; and gain peer respect and acceptance (Bonino, Cattelino, & Ciairano, 2005; Dryfoos, 1998; Ponton, 2008). Long (2011) further suggests that adolescent individuals may also experience 'cognitive dissonance', that is conflict between the behaviours, beliefs and values of peers compared to one's own. This may lead to issues of conflict and confusion about one's self and identity.

Such conflict may be linked to developmental changes in self-concept during adolescence. Smetana & Villalobos (2009) summarise the findings of earlier research to suggest that adolescence sees a transformation from trait-like understanding of the self to abstract and psychological notions, with different role-related selves emerging alongside increasing evaluation of the self. As adolescence progresses, Harter, Bresnick, Bouchey & Whitesell (1997) propose that there is increased recognition of a process of contradictory self-description, that is awareness of discrepancies between what one really feels and what one says and does. This 'false-self' behaviour is seen as being increasingly influenced by online technology and social media, such as in the development of 'false-self presentation' online (Wright, White & Obst, 2018).

Such findings may be linked to the concept of 'fear of missing out' (FOMO), something which is increasingly discussed in wider literature and the media regarding social media use in young people (Oberst, Wegmann, Stodt, Brand & Chamarro, 2017). FOMO refers to a pervasive apprehension that others are having rewarding experiences from which one is missing out, leading to a desire to stay continually connected to what others are doing (facilitated through online social media or technology) (Przybylski, Murayama, DeHaan, & Gladwell, 2013).

The extent to which social cognitive concepts such as FOMO or false-self behaviour may be associated with SEM exposure is unknown. As an exploratory study, it is not the aim of this research to identify or investigate any one particular social theory, but such concepts are included here as the basis for generating initial thought around the topic and theoretical underpinnings which may be relevant to the findings of the study.

Accordingly, social learning theory underpins the research aim and questions of the study to investigate adolescent views of SEM as an online technology in the lives of young people today, and to what extent adolescents feel that SEM impacts on their social (and associated emotional) wellbeing. The research questions may be found in section 6.4.

3.2 Romantic and Sexual Relationship Development in Adolescence

The above provide an overview of numerous aspects of development which are relevant to the study of adolescent development today. A number of these theoretical principles may additionally be applicable to the study of relationship development within adolescence.

3.2.1 **Romantic relationships**

The term 'romantic relationships' may be used to refer to mutually acknowledged, ongoing and voluntary interactions. In the context of adolescence, romantic relationships differ from peer relationships as they may typically have a particular intensity which is often characterised by current or anticipated sexual behaviour and expressions of affection (Collins, Furman & Welsh, 2009).

Romantic relationships are identified as a key component of the western adolescent world (Bouchey & Furman, 2005) and *"central to young people's day-to-day lives"* (p.130, Berger, McMakin, & Furman, 2005). Despite this there has, historically, been very little research regarding how romantic relationships may change over the course of adolescence or how such relationships may impact upon well-being and mental health (Berger et al., 2005; Steinberg & Morris, 2001).

Whilst it is accepted that developmental research has amassed a great deal of data regarding the quantification of adolescent sexual activity – such as how often protection against pregnancy is used or youth pursue sexual activity – in-depth qualitative studies are lacking. Such lacking led Savin-Williams & Diamond (2004) to propose that we know very little about how adolescents develop their ideas about sex; how they deal with conflicting motivations regarding sexual activities; how the meaning of sexuality is shaped by culture or how they experience and interpret sexual thoughts and fantasies.

Of the existing research, there is evidence that romantic relationships in adolescence may produce strong, largely positive, emotions; although they may also bring disruptive and negative emotions, including seeing relationships as stress inducing (Bouchey & Furman, 2005; Larson, Clore, & Wood, 1999). Flick's (2009) discussion of behavioural principles of constructivism - that reality is formed through producing social constructs - lends itself to theories that gender-related role expectations intensify during adolescence. Such ideas are supported by Balk (1994) and Unger & Crawford (1992) who suggest that such principles feed in to the complexity of emotions and expectations experienced in the formation of relationships. The impact of technology and social media is increasingly recognised as impacting upon adolescents' social emotional experiences, how they interact, learn about others and form connections (Wood, Bukowski, & Lis, 2016). Social media is a term which may be used to describe a number of technologies that allow for instant communication and social networking amongst individuals (Wood, Bukowski, & Lis, 2016). In the context of this study this may refer to social networking sites or applications such as (but not limited to) Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube and Twitter.

Theories of ego and identity development, such as those developed within both psychosocial and social cognitive developmental theories (Choudhury et al., 2006; Elkind, 1967; Erikson, 1963b), may account for the intense and often all-encompassing experience that romantic relationships may bring to adolescents. Drawing upon the theorisation by Erikson (1963) of the crisis stage of ego identify vs role confusion said to take place during adolescence, Larson et al., (1999) describe the battle to find one's identity as often causing magnification and skewing of romantic emotions, alongside providing an avenue through which to inflate one's ego. Taking such sentiment further, from a psychosocial standpoint the search for identity in adolescence is oft subordinated to sexuality (Muuss, 1996). Accordingly, where an adolescent experiences doubt or confusion over their sexual identity, Erikson (1963b) would argue that 'delinquent' and risk taking behaviour will follow alongside low self-esteem and an inadequate sense of personal identity. The extent to which such arguments are substantiated with robust research remains uncertain however.

Late adolescence may be regarded as the life period most associated with social development (Meier & Allen, 2008) and it is argued that as an individual progresses through adolescence they will develop the necessary relational skills necessary to form intimate romantic relationships (Raymond, Catallozzi, Lin, Ryan, & Rickert, 2007). Theories of egocentrism and the development of the social self in adolescence (Choudhury et al., 2006; Elkind, 1967) (see Appendix B), alongside neurological evidence (Steinberg, 2005) would support such notions that the individual must develop the cognitive ability to be able to successfully navigate romantic relationships.

3.2.2 Sexual Relationships

Adolescence is identified as a critical period within which norms around sexual activity are established (WHO, 2007). Whilst the role that hormones and neural development may play in impacting upon behaviour and sexual interest are recognised, adolescent sexual development is additionally associated with interactions with social and psychosocial factors (Fortenberry, 2013). Accordingly 'biosocial' models are generally considered to provide more robust elucidations of change in adolescent sexual behaviour and relationships rather than social/psychosocial or biological models alone (Susman & Rogol, 2004; Udry, 1990).

Accordingly, it is widely recognised that there are a number of influences which must also be considered (Bouchey & Furman, 2005; Moore & Rosenthal, 2006; Sieving, Oliphant, & Blum, 2002) (see Appendix A).

Sieving et al. (2002) for instance propose that sexual behaviour in adolescence may be widely regarded as being influenced by a complex set of interactions between a number of factors including biology, individual perceptions, personality development, and sociocultural influences. Moore & Rosenthal (2006) additionally advise that to understand the significance of sexuality during adolescence, it must be considered within the biological, psychological and social aspects of adolescent development.

Such understandings draw from behaviourist and social cognitive learning stances, which would suggest that sexual development will be linked to early experiences, cultural influences and sex differences (male/female, heterosexual/homosexual for instance) (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Nolen-Hoeksema, Fredrickson, Loftus, & Lutz, 2014; Smetana, Campione-Barr, & Metzger, 2006) (see Appendix D). Bouchey & Furman (2005) would support such behaviourist notions, suggesting that previous relationship experiences will influence future behaviour and that behaviour is set within an environmental and cultural backdrop.

This may lead us to also consider the concept of sexual subjectivity. Sexual subjectivity (SS) refers to sexual body-esteem, sexual self-efficacy, beliefs regarding entitlement to self-pleasure and pleasure from a partner, and also reflections about sexual behavior (Boislard & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2011).Herdt & McClintock (2000) summarise that whilst SS may be intrinsically driven by hormonal forces, it is additionally informed by social roles and cultural norms. Whilst some have proposed that communication with the opposite sex in early adolescence may not usually have a sexual or romantic intent (Berger et al., 2005), Herdt & McClinktock (2000) assert that the age of 10 is now often referred to in Western society as the age at which sexual attraction may begin to develop. Despite sexual intent perhaps not being acted upon at this age, it may be assumed that individuals will start to develop attraction of a sexual nature at this early stage of adolescence. Such assertions may be before the biological basis which may traditionally have been referenced as the age at which

sexual interest develops (that is the final maturation of testes and ovaries, or *gonadarche* (McClintock & Herdt, 1996), with external influences deemed to impact greatly before this biological maturation.

Taking a focus on social influence, DeLamater & Friedrich (2002) suggest that sexual development is also influenced through progression through 'socially defined' stages of life. McClintock and Herdt (1996) similarly argue that sexuality develops over the course of childhood and adolescence, influenced by social and erotic experiences. The role of the media is also referenced with Savin-Williams & Diamond (2004) expanding further to suggest that sexual behaviour will be socially mediated through social cues from both parents and the media determining when the adolescent individual is *supposed* to seek and desire sexual activity. Given the nature of SEM within modern society it could be deemed that these social cues will be even more prominent in adolescent life today.

Pringle et al., (2017) suggest that the social and cultural pressures regarding sexual practice change rapidly from one generation to the next. Indeed Janssen (2015) suggests that it is the current Western culture which has constructed sex as adult, with modern childhood described as being viewed as a stage where sexuality may only develop and never assume a valid form. Whilst it is accepted that sexual representations and expressions may now be common place in society, open constructive discussion of sex and sexuality has not developed alongside this (Moore & Reynolds, 2018a). In line with this, the impact of elevated levels of general sexually explicit content within today's society, or the 'media effect', on young people's genders and sexual identity earlier receptive sexualised behaviour are unknown but much debated within Western society at the current time (Bryant, 2009; Moore & Reynolds, 2018a).

3.2.3 **Changing Relationships and Sexual Development**

There has been a significant interest and debate regarding increased sexualisation of Western culture over the past 10-20 years, with the term 'sexualisation of culture' used to refer to Western societies which have become saturated with sexual discourses and pornography (Gill, 2012). Accordingly, there are associated concerns regarding the

increased sexualisation of children (Egan, 2013), with the UK government highlighting national concerns surrounding increased pressure on young people to take part in sexualised life 'before they are ready to do so' (Bailey, 2011).

For instance, the UK Home Office commissioned an initial review regarding the sexualisation of teenage girls in 2009 (Papadopoulos, 2010), followed by a further enquiry launched in 2010 to identify measures to protect children from premature sexualisation (Bailey, 2011). This was also accompanied by a review of sexualised goods aimed at children undertaken by the Scottish Parliament between 2008 and 2010 (Bragg, Buckingham, Russell, & Willett, 2011).

The sale of sexualised goods, for instance thong underwear or makeup for young girls, is also referenced in contributing to blurring the boundaries between adults and children (Bragg, Buckingham, Russell, & Willett, 2011) with sexualised media viewed as contributing to intense pressure on adolescents to conform to certain ideals (Papadopoulos, 2010).

Whilst it is recognised that the reviews by Bailey (2011), Papadopolous (2010) and Bragg et al (2011) may have been influenced by governmental pressures, it is evident that there are ways in which the concept, and the onset, of sexualisation has changed for today's generation of young people, as exemplified in the appearance of recently published books with their focus on the topic of sexualisation, and sexual education, within childhood (Allen & Rasmussen, 2017; Gunter, 2014; Moore & Reynolds, 2018a; Ringrose, Renold, & Egan, 2015).

There are those, such as Faulkner (2010), who pertain we should not, or are not able to, 'let children be children' and that sexual desire and sexual development should be discussed with children before puberty so that they are better placed to avoid harm than if they were sheltered from such sexually explicit material. Such a viewpoint is supported by Thompson (2010) who proposes that teaching critical thought and the development of reflexive thinking to children and young people is key to minimising the impact of external sexualised media.

It appears that, in many ways, the perceived infringement of the 'adult' world upon childhood is now a fact of life within many Western societies. Faulkner (2010) taking a psychoanalytical view proposes that childhood 'innocence' and the associated sexualisation of society is an adult construction and that, accordingly, we must adapt to equip children to deal with this new culture alongside reflecting upon our own understanding of what constitutes 'childhood' and what is appropriate in terms of sexual development and understanding throughout childhood and adolescence. Such views may be supported by an ecological and cultural theoretical perspective, assuming that a changing culture and environment will impact upon the development of individuals, particularly during adolescence as a critical developmental period (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Muuss, 1996; Steinberg, 2005).

Moore & Reynolds (2018b) propose that the common assumption of such sexualisation is that it is inherently damaging for young people, with a focus on physical attractiveness compounding young people to become adult before socially accepted definitions of what it is to be adult. Despite such concerns from adults it is evident, however, that the voice of young people may often be underrepresented in discussion of such sexualisation, with Renold, Egan, & Ringrose (2015) suggesting that young people's own experiences of doing, being, and becoming sexual are often silenced, sensationalised or undermined. Subsequently, the impact of such a changing cultural and sexualised landscape on adolescent sexual or relationship development is also unclear. This literature review will suggest that this is also true regarding the representation of young people's views of, and the impact of, SEM and SRE. The present study therefore aims to contribute towards increasing awareness and understanding of young people's views.

4. Impacts of SEM on adolescent development

4.1 What is sexually explicit media?

The term online sexually explicit media (shortened here to SEM) is used to refer to websites or apps that either describe people having sex, show video/audio of people engaging in sex acts or show clear images of graphic nudity (Baker, 2015; Braun-Courville & Rojas, 2009).

In existing literature SEM is a term that may be used interchangeably with the term 'pornography' or 'erotica' (Attwood, 2005; Baker, 2015; Ofcom, 2016). For the purposes of this project, and for clarity, it will be referred to as SEM and will specifically refer to online SEM as opposed to hard materials such as magazines or video tapes. This is in keeping with recent literature regarding SEM and young people which suggests that SEM as a phrase may be more 'literal' and therefore more neutral than the word pornography, which may have traditional connotations or present certain beliefs or attitudes (Owens, Behun, Manning, & Reid, 2012; Owens & Gowen, 2012).

Use of the phrase online SEM may be typically used in reference to 'new technology' (Rosser et al., 2012); that is online technology such as laptops, smart-phones and tablets. Whilst it is accepted that 'pornography' has long been a feature of much of westernised society in various guises (Buckingham & Bragg, 2004), it is argued here that SEM in this technological sense is a different entity to that which may have been perceived as pornography or erotica in the past.

4.2 Adolescent access to sexually explicit media

Whilst there has been significant debate regarding exposure to SEM through television or magazine media for some time (Buckingham & Bragg, 2004), the prevalence of online SEM has really come to the fore in the UK over the past few years. In UK society today almost all young people aged 6 or above are reported to have access to the internet (Frith, 2017); 44% of 5-15 year olds own a tablet, 41% of 5-15 year olds (and 79% of 7-15 year olds) own a smartphone (Ofcom 2016). In many ways this has led to an 'internet generation' who may

have an instant source of words, images and videos at their fingertips 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

This new way in which adolescents access information online has led to new ways in which they are also able to access SEM (Martellozzo et al., 2017; Richmond, 2012). Accordingly, adolescents' access to SEM today may be described as 'fundamentally different' from previous generations (Berelowitz, Edwards, & Gulyurtlu, 2012). SEM is accessible to a vast majority of adolescents with an internet enabled device at any time and at any place – sometimes whether they have deliberately looked for it or not (Häggström-Nordin, Sandberg, Hanson, & Tydén, 2006a; Horvath et al., 2013).

It has been reported that around 56% of 11- 16 year olds, and 28% of 11 – 12 year olds, in the UK have accessed SEM online (Martellozzo et al., 2017). Such findings are similar to those of Parker (2014), who found that 81% of 18 year olds surveyed felt that most young men look at pornography, with 40% agreeing that most young women view it. Just over 10% of those surveyed reported it being typical to see SEM aged 11-12 years and 45% reported it to be typical aged 13-14 years old. Caution must be made in interpretation of such statistics however, particularly in relation to what those participants surveyed think that others are doing. Further statistics are not available at the current time and the way in which SEM is accessed or shared is additionally an area lacking in research.

4.3 Overview of literature

Given the degree of change and growth associated with adolescent development, adolescents have been identified as one of the most susceptible audiences to SEM (Owens et al., 2012). Research regarding SEM and adolescence tends to suggest worrying changes for adolescent development, particularly with regards to gender roles and sexual attitudes (Martellozzo et al., 2017; Parker, 2014; Peter & Valkenburg, 2006; Rallings, 2015).

Much research into the impact of viewing SEM generally reports negative impacts on young people's sexual activities, moral values and attitudes towards sex – as summarised in the review articles of Flood (2009) and Greenfield (2004). The most recent review of the

literature by E. W. Owens et al., (2012) goes on to claim that proliferation of SEM (or in their words, 'internet pornography') has influenced adolescents in "unprecedented and diverse ways" (pp.2, E.W. Owens at al, 2012). This is linked to beliefs that adolescents learn behaviours and shape their value systems based on media consumption (Vilanni, 2001), drawing parallels with behaviourist and ecological developmental theories.

Whilst it generally appears that there is too little balanced and reflective research based within the UK regarding impacts of SEM on adolescents, there is a growing body of global research coming to the fore. The purpose and directional influence of much of the recent research is discussed in further detail later, but it is noted here that, in interpretation of the research in this area, a critical eye is taken in line with the validity and generalisation of reported findings. Much of the available research is focused in Western cultures and describes 'adolescent participants' as those aged 16 plus - as such this narrow stance may not be representative of adolescence as a whole. Nevertheless, available research and findings are provided here as a contextualisation of the current state of available literature.

The following intends to provide a balanced summary of current literature regarding various identified impacts, although it is recognised that much of the literature reports on negative influences of SEM.

4.3.1 Sexual attitudes and behaviour

There are numerous studies involving adults which report on negative behavioural impacts of SEM (or 'pornography'), including increased aggression (Wright, Tokunaga, & Kraus, 2016), negative impacts on family units (Manning, 2006) and relationships (Bridges, Bergner, & Hesson-McInnis, 2003). Drawing some similarities with adult research, Bryant (2009), writing for the Australian Institute of Criminology and reviewing available global literature, provides a useful overview of concerns regarding the impacts of SEM use on adolescents (Table 1).

Table 1 – Concerns of SEM impact in adolescence

Concern
➢ Interference with 'normal' sexual development (e.g. encouraging early sexual activity) ➢ Fostering of 'open' sexual lifestyles (e.g. acceptance of casual and extramarital sex, multiple partners, etc.) and other sexual practices that may not be considered appropriate by particular elements of the community (e.g. anal and oral sex, homosexuality) ➢ Undermining of physical, emotional and psychological wellbeing (generates shame, guilt, anxiety, confusion, poor social bonds, and addictions) ➢ Undermining of relationships and fostering sexual violence

(Bryant, 2009)

Despite such concerns Bryant (2009) notes that opinion regarding the impact of SEM is divided and it is evident that there are studies which have reported positive impacts and contradictory findings for many commonly held beliefs about the negative impacts of SEM (Hald & Malamuth, 2008; McKee, 2007; Padgett, Brislin-Slutz, & Neal, 2010; Short, Black, Smith, Wetterneck, & Wells, 2011).

Indeed in Peter & Valkenburg's (2016a) review regarding the predictors, prevalence and implications of adolescents' use of SEM (or 'online pornography') over the 20 years previous: with regards to implications mixed responses were found in the research in respect of the impact of SEM on adolescents sexual attitudes and behaviour. Whilst further reviews by Bloom & Hagedorn (2015), Springate & Hatim (2013) and E. Owens & Gowen (2012) generally report studies which feature negative associations between SEM use and attitudes and behaviour, some studies have found no such association. A study by Luder et al., (2011) for instance involving manipulation of data from a 2002 Swiss health survey with adolescents aged 16-20 found no association between risky sexual behaviours and SEM exposure. Given the historical nature of the review however it is appreciated that SEM exposure may be very different in 2018 in comparison to 2002, meaning that generalisation of such data to the current day is difficult.

Such reviews cover a wide range of global research and thus such inconclusive findings may be linked to many differences in both research design, cultural attitudes, and exposure to SEM. Accordingly it is difficult to generalise any assumptions to the UK context. Given the pace of technological change associated with SEM and the way in which it is accessed online

it is not deemed beneficial to review more historical research – given that the context of this study involves individuals as they are experiencing technology and SEM access now.

It is evident that research regarding the impacts of SEM on sexual development is mixed and inconclusive. This may in part be due to a widening acceptance that the impacts of viewing SEM will not manifest uniformly and will be dependent upon many personal and individual factors (Bryant, 2009). It is noted that causality within correlational research is uncertain and it may be that people predisposed to certain sexual practices are more likely to use SEM, and vice versa, thus adding to the caution to be used when making firm conclusions regarding SEM use.

Nevertheless, Owens et al., (2012), provide the most recent, and somewhat comprehensive, review of available global literature from 2005 – 2012 regarding the impact of internet pornography (here termed SEM) on adolescents. Whilst many contradictory studies are highlighted, the majority of research studies reviewed were found to suggest that increased exposure to SEM is linked to an increase in risky and problematic behaviours. Once such study quoted by E. W. Owens et al (2012) was conducted by Braun-Courville & Rojas, (2009) in an online survey of 433 adolescents in a health centre in New York City. The authors found that adolescents who reported visiting sexually explicit websites displayed higher sexual permissiveness scores compared to those who reported never having been exposed to such material. Whilst such a correlation may be significantly significant, it may be significant that those participants who were willing to report that they had seen such SEM may accordingly have provided more honest or explicit information regarding their sexual practices.

A similar American based online study by Kraus & Russell (2008) also found that those with internet access reported a younger age of first sexual encounter than those without internet access, leading the authors to conclude that the internet may be accelerating the age at which sexual intercourse and activity occurs. Given the changes in internet access since 2008 if we were to accept such claims then surely the age of first sexual intercourse would be much lower than the reported average age of 16, a statistic which has stayed fairly constant over the past decade (Hagall, Coleman, & Brooks, 2015; Mercer et al., 2013).

Taking a broad overview of the available literature and global reviews, it would appear that generally there is a consensus that higher exposure to SEM will impact upon adolescent sexual behaviour and attitudes through fostering more open and relaxed attitudes to sex. Whether this is reported as negative or positive is debatable and perhaps influenced by moral and cultural positioning more so than anything else.

4.3.2 Gender roles

In their review of SEM literature, Horvarth et al (2013), concluded that the impact of SEM on adolescents is contributing to "less progressive attitudes towards gender roles" (p.11 Horvarth et al, 2013) – that is, those viewing SEM tend to lean towards seeing males as dominant and females as submissive. The extent to which such a finding may be a negative impact could well be debated however: just because in a modern day Western society gender roles are viewed by some as more fluid or interchangeable does not necessarily mean that more traditional roles of male provider and female carer are incorrect for young people today to take on. Although perhaps this point becomes more pertinent if thought of in relation to gender expectations, rather than gender roles. None-the-less, additional reviews of existing research support such findings, with increased SEM use generally found to be associated with stronger 'gender-stereotypical' sexual beliefs (Peter & Valkenburg, 2016).

Leading on from more generalised correlations; Martellozzo et al's (2017) follow on study from Horvarth et al's (2013) review revealed that the majority of girls felt that SEM may negatively affect the way in which boys view girls, reporting anxieties that they may feel pressure from boys to behave in ways they were not comfortable with due to the increasing view of certain sexual behaviour being seen as 'normal'. Research by Parker (2014b) additionally reported that 77% of girls within this study felt that SEM puts pressure on girls to *look* a certain way, with 75% of girls and 56% of boys revealing they feel it puts pressure on girls to *behave* in a certain way.

There are additional concerns that the freely accessible, and often graphic, nature of SEM is 'warping' young men's understanding of their own, and of young women's, sexuality (Rallings, 2015). Whilst the validity of such findings may be questioned, as discussed further in section 5, such reports may not be surprising if viewed in relation to cognitive and psychological theorisation that the behaviour of others, and that viewed in the external environment, may shape behaviour and thinking.

4.3.3 Body image and sexual expectations

It is argued by Steinberg & Morris (2001) and Usmiani & Daniluk (1997) that appearance is most important for self-esteem during adolescence, particularly among females. Accordingly, body image comparison is widely reported to be linked to negative connotations regarding self-esteem and self-confidence, especially so within adolescence (Fardouly et al., 2015; Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2004; Krayer, Ingledew, & Iphofen, 2008). In particular, Hargreaves & Tiggemann's (2004) research involving exposure to appearance based TV commercials suggested a negative correlation between body-image satisfaction and media use in adolescents.

Subsequently Fardouly et al's (2015) research involving the social media platform Facebook, found that use of the site correlated with negative mood and appearance comparison. Whilst there is a lack of UK based research regarding body-image satisfaction and SEM use it could be argued that SEM provides another platform through which adolescents may be exposed to images and scenes of the 'ideal'.

Such argument is validated from research involving Swedish adolescents, with SEM often seen as a frame of reference for body ideals and sexual performance (Häggström-Nordin, Sandberg, Hanson, & Tydén, 2006b; Lofgren-Mårtenson & Månsson, 2010). This may accordingly impact upon the sexual expectations of young people and upon ideas of what sex and sexual relationships 'ought' to be like.

4.3.4 Social and emotional development

In terms of SEM exposure and social and emotional development, the children's charity ChildLine have reported an increasing rise in counselling sessions within the UK for children and young people with worries about online SEM (NSPCC, 2015). Whilst it could be argued that the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children may have a vested interest in reporting on such findings, there is support from other UK literature suggesting that some children and young people may struggle to manage their thoughts and feelings regarding exposure to SEM (Flood, 2009; Martellozzo et al., 2017; Parker, 2014). Although again a critical eye should be taken as much of the available literature may have a political or vested interest.

Psychosocial and cognitive perspectives on adolescent development would suggest that such struggles contribute to the crisis and turmoil which may be experienced as adolescents struggle with identity development and validation of the social self (Choudhury et al., 2006; Erikson, 1968). It may be hypothesised that SEM could contribute to such struggles, as concluded by Peter & Valkenburg's (2010) survey of Dutch adolescents which found that increased SEM use was linked to increased sexual uncertainty.

Furthermore, within the UK Martellozzo et al., (2017) suggest that some adolescents may become desensitized to SEM after repeated exposure. The implications that this may have on adolescents and their future relationships or sexual attitudes is an unexplored avenue of research but it may be assumed that such over-exposure may impact in some way.

Associated debates regarding exposure to violence or aggression – through movies or games for instance – show a significant amount of research reporting negative correlations between mental and emotional wellbeing and repeated exposure to such materials (Boxer, Huesmann, Bushman, O'Brien, & Moceri, 2008). It is not possible to make similar assumptions regarding exposure to SEM but it is noted that repeated exposure to media which may be deemed 'inappropriate' may be typically reported adversely (although the purpose of such research should be taken into consideration in critically reviewing the validity of such claims).

Some of those in Martellozzo et al's (2017) study additionally reported feelings of nervousness (21%), disgust (23%), confusion (24%) and shock (27%). This can be contrasted however with feelings of happiness (reported by 19% of respondents) and excitedness (23%). Similar findings have been shown elsewhere in Europe with (Häggström-Nordin et al., 2006b) study of Swedish adolescents reporting contradictory feelings between arousal and shock and guilt; which the authors feel may lead to insecurity in one's own sexuality. It is evident that adolescents may experience a range of emotions with regards to SEM, in keeping with literature regarding adolescents' experiences related to romantic and sexual relationships (Bouchey & Furman, 2005; Larson et al., 1999). The extent to which adolescents are able to accurately articulate their emotions, that is their emotional competency (Shaffer & Kipp, 2013), is referred to here however and a critical stance may therefore be taken in interpretation of such studies.

4.3.5 The role of technology

It is recognised that continued engagement with media, particularly online, may significantly shape dispositional attitudes, knowledge, tastes and behaviours (Bryant & Zillmann, 2002; Pariser, 2012). For adolescents, during the vulnerability of physical, cognitive and social development this is particularly influential (Ernst et al., 2006; Escobar-Chaves et al., 2005) and it has been argued that there can often be little or no separation between the 'real' and the 'virtual' existence for adolescents immersed in online media (Carr, 2011).

In the digital arena clear social norms, quality information and the opportunity to redress misinformation or give clear explanations may be less present than can exist offline and this can cause issues for adolescents accessing SEM, particularly in relation to sexual and relationship development (Berger et al., 2005; Bouchey & Furman, 2005; Parker, 2014). This has important implications for adolescent development, particularly in relation to behaviourist theorists that adolescents will learn behaviour through observation and modelling (Bandura & Walters, 1969) and ecological theories of the influence of mass media within an individual's exosystem (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994).

Brown (2000) has argued that some adolescents are able to resist the dominant sexual ideology that may be present in pornography. Stern (1999) further asserts that they may be able to critique images and produce their own ideas about sex and sexuality (Stern, 1999) - although this was found to be the case with teenage girls only. Such views are in keeping with theoretical models such as the Media Practice Model, suggesting that the impact of media is a dynamic process between the media content and the lived experiences of the adolescent (Steele & Brown, 1995). Accordingly, discussion regarding causal effects is tentative. Bleakley, Hennessy, Fishbein, & Jordan's (2008) study for instance found that sexually active adolescents are more likely to expose themselves to SEM, and that those exposed to SEM are more likely to progress in their sexual activity.

Caution may be exercised when interpreting results from such historical studies given the immense advances in technology and how SEM may now be accessed online. Whilst adolescents may previously have had the ability to select and filter SEM, or perhaps been provided with 'media-literacy' support – such as suggested by Brown (2000) – given the ease with which adolescents are now able to access, and be bombarded with, SEM such suggestions require reviewing in line with modern technological uses.

Additionally is has been argued that adolescents may lack the risk attenuation required to be able to discern and manage online content (or 'risky' content) in healthy and safe ways (Delmonico & Griffin, 2008). There is little evidence regarding the ways in which SEM specifically through an online medium may differ in impact from other platforms, though it has been hypothesised that increasing use of online social media may have a more intense impact upon adolescents than any other platform (Boyd, 2015; Lenhart, 2015; O'Keeffe, Clarke-Pearson, & Media, 2011).

4.3.6 Positive impacts

Lee & Jenkins (2002) report that there is a tendency, especially within wider media in the UK, for there to be a 'sensationalist' aspect to reporting on SEM and young people, with much of the widely reported research linking SEM to negative impacts. Within the global research base however, many of the more recent reviews identify a selection of research

which has shown possible positive or educational benefits of SEM for adolescents (Flood, 2009; Owens et al., 2012; Peter & Valkenburg, 2016). For example a further Swedish study by Wallmyr & Welin (2006) which surveyed eight hundred and seventy six individuals aged fifteen to twenty five found that the majority of males (62.7%) responded positively to pornography (accessed on the internet or on TV) describing it as 'exciting', 'cool' or 'stimulating'. This is in comparison however to 61% of females who described it negatively.

Another Swedish based study additionally found a link between greater exposure to pornography (internet or TV based) within adolescent males and perceptions that it is entertaining and can lead to a better sex life (Svedin, Åkerman, & Priebe, 2011). It is worth nothing however that the social acceptance of sexual culture, particularly within adolescence, is identified as being significantly greater in Nordic countries compared to most other Western cultures (Træen, Spitznogle, & Beverfjord, 2004).

It may be that adolescents' attitudes and behaviour are impacted positively in that they are more educated about sex and relationships through the use of SEM and that it may foster a culture of openness (Buckingham & Bragg, 2004). Findings in relation to this are inconclusive however and more research regarding the impact of SEM on adolescent development, and particularly causally based research, is needed to reach firm conclusions.

5. Sex and Relationship Education (SRE)

5.1 Current legislation regarding SRE in secondary schools

SRE can be defined as learning about the social, emotional and physical aspects of relationships, sex and sexuality, sexual health and growing up (FPA, 2011). As control over education policy is devolved from UK parliament, legislation regarding the requirements for SRE within schools across the UK differ.

In Wales (as is the geographical focus of this study), all secondary schools must include provision for SRE within their basic curriculum, which is generally placed within the wider Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) curriculum. Schools are expected to base their SRE provision on guidance produced by the Welsh Assembly Government in 2010 (FPA, 2011; Welsh Assembly Government, 2010a).

Legislation in England has recently changed to state that all maintained secondary schools are now obliged to teach age-appropriate SRE; and there is ongoing consultation prior to implementing a new phase of Relationship and Sex Education (RSE) in England in September 2019 (Greening, 2017; R. Long, 2017).

5.2 Concerns regarding SRE and SEM

It is notable that there are, and have been for some time, concerns that the standard, effectiveness and appropriateness of SRE in UK secondary schools is inconsistent and not fit for purpose (Department for Education, 2017; Department for Education & Greening, 2017; Greening, 2017; Lee & Jenkins, 2002). There has also been a lack of clarity as to what such education should look like; and to what depth and breadth schools should be responsible for teaching this; prompting some, such as Baker (2015) to propose that 'modern day' SRE can be a minefield of uncertainty for many schools.

With regards to the role of education regarding SEM, a recent report ordered by the House of Commons suggests that *"most schools are not currently offering good quality SRE"*

(pp.49) and that *"there is widespread consensus that better education about sex and relationships is needed in order to mitigate the effects of pornography on children and young people"* (pp.49) (House of Commons: Women and Equalities Committee, 2016) . In addition to this report Maria Miller, MP and Chair of the Women and Equalities Select Committee, speaking in (Hughes, 2016), reports that:

> *"The Government needs to prioritise action to ensure sex and relationship education reflects the realities of the 21st century rather than the pre-smartphone age"* (Maria Miller cited in Hughes, 2016)

It is evident that there is a consensus, amongst adults at least, that there is a requirement for some form of education for young people regarding SEM (Estyn, 2007). There has been much debate, however, over who should take the responsibility for this education (Blake et al., 2014).

Livingstone, Vincent, Mascheroni, Haddon, & Olafsson (2014) propose that all young people should receive education to support them as digital citizens, and that this education should include technical competencies in managing online interfaces of sexual, emotional and social education.

At the current time SRE in England and Wales does not include a requirement to teach about online SEM, relationships or consent (DfEE, 2000; House of Commons: Women and Equalities Committee, 2016; Learning Wales, 2013). It is expected that the reforms to SRE education in England may move to include such topics but it is understood that similar changes are not currently expected under the Welsh curriculum.

5.3 SRE in Wales

A focus group study into teenage sexual health and sexual education needs was carried out for the National Health Service for Wales in South Wales in 2003 (Lester & Allan, 2003). Findings from four focus groups across three secondary schools found that SRE varied considerably in both content and quality both between and within schools. Delivery was reported to be didactic and lacking in discussion largely due to feelings that teachers were

embarrassed about delivering the content. This study concluded that teenagers required SRE of a more comprehensive nature, delivered at an earlier age and by 'experts' in the subject who are comfortable in its delivery, suggesting that information alone is not enough (Lester & Allan, 2003).

A later study, utilising surveys and focus groups with four hundred and one 12-19 year olds across three schools and six youth settings in South Wales, similarly found reports that SRE lessons were mostly unimaginative and uninformative with a sense of dissatisfaction with SRE provision (Selwyn & Powell, 2007). Interestingly participants in this study also perceived a 'diminishing commitment' to SRE from teachers as they progressed through secondary school.

In keeping with the above findings, an Estyn report for Welsh Schools in 2007 suggested that 'only a minority' of schools were, at the time, teaching SRE to a high standard (Estyn, 2007). The Welsh Assembly Government SRE guidance in 2010 was developed partly in response to such findings. Whilst this guidance touches upon the importance of an awareness of media pressure, this still does not set out clear or structured guidelines for teaching which addresses SEM (Welsh Assembly Government, 2010a). The closest relation to SEM in the guidance proposes that good quality SRE will support learners regarding 'social influences' (Table 2) but does not set out a requirement or compulsion for its inclusion within school SRE programmes.

Table 2 - Guidelines relating to teaching about social influences within SRE

Quality SRE within Welsh secondary school will help learners to: • make sense of the sexual messages and imagery they experience in their everyday lives; • explore the difference between fictional and accurate, factual information; • develop the skills and understanding to challenge negative or distorted media messages about relationships, gender roles, body image and sexual experimentation; • use the media as a tool to support their learning.

(Welsh Assembly Government, 2010)

5.3.1 Making the SRE provision in Wales fit for purpose

Following the Welsh Assembly Government guidance in 2010, the subsequent Sexual Health and Wellbeing Action Plan for Wales 2010-2015 (Welsh Assembly Government, 2010b) emphasised further the importance of high quality SRE provision in schools. Subsequently, the Welsh Government set up the Sex and Relationships Education Expert Panel in March 2017 to further review SRE in Wales.

Findings from this review suggest that little has changed overall in terms of the efficacy of SRE in Welsh schools with 'significant gaps' still present and too little emphasis placed on relationships and emotions (Welsh Government, 2017). This includes a lack of information on domestic violence, gender identity and sexual orientation. This report also highlights significant research gaps in Wales in relation to SRE (Table 3).

Table 3 – Identified gaps in the research literature relating to SRE in Wales

- No robust quantitative or qualitative research on:
  - What SRE is provided in Welsh schools, how it is delivered, in what contexts and with what aims/objectives;
  - The quality of the SRE experience for students and teachers;
  - SRE provision and quality in faith schools; early years; primary schools; special schools and mainstream schools for students with disabilities;
  - Identifying *what* professional training is currently delivered for teachers;
  - Identifying *the quality* of professional training for teachers, health professionals and community workers involved in delivering SRE;
  - What children, young people, parents, carers, and wider communities in Wales think about school-based SRE provision.

(Adapted from Welsh Government, 2017)

Following recommendations from the SRE expert panel, the Welsh Government have since announced major reforms to SRE provision in Wales, with SRE becoming a statutory component of the new curriculum set to be in place by 2022 (Welsh Government, 2018). With acknowledgment that SRE is no longer fit for purpose, SRE provision is set to be re-named as Relationships and Sexuality Education, placing a much larger emphasis on the importance of teaching young people about the formation and maintenance of healthy and happy relationships. Encompassed within this are proposals to enhance provision to more fully reflect the identified importance of supporting children and young people in

understanding themselves, others, their community and wider society, which is increasingly accessed online.

In order to facilitate the proposed reforms, the Welsh Government has provided funding to both support the training of teachers in the delivery of SRE and to organisations such as Welsh Women's Aid in developing resources for the curriculum. Providing appropriate training to teachers in particular was identified as a gap in provision at many levels by the SRE expert panel (Welsh Government, 2017), with SRE deemed particularly ineffective if not delivered appropriately.

Although the reform also states that topics within SRE, such as aspects of SEM for example, will be delivered to learners when they are 'developmentally ready', how this 'readiness' will be ascertained is, at present, unclear. It is hoped that this exploratory research may in some way contribute to identifying how this provision may be made fit for purpose, particularly regarding the place of SEM within this.

5.4 Adolescents' views of SEM and SRE

5.4.1 UK research

As discussed, SRE across England and Wales has been rated as inconsistent, with positive and useful experiences of SRE being the minority rather than the majority in the published literature. Typically, SRE is identified as didactic and lacking in understanding of adolescents' wants and needs (House of Commons: Women and Equalities Committee, 2016; Lester & Allan, 2003; Selwyn & Powell, 2007).

Whilst UK based research investigating adolescents' views of SEM is beginning to emerge, up-to-date studies are scarce and few gather corresponding views on how SEM is approached within schools through SRE or otherwise (Baker, 2015; Martellozzo et al., 2017; Parker, 2014; Rallings, 2015). A review of available literature reveals only three current and relevant UK based studies which focus on the dual influence of SEM and SRE, all of which follow a relatively similar online methodology. A summary of the three studies is provided in

Table 4, with each further discussed in turn to provide an in-depth review of current understanding of the views of UK adolescents.

Table 4 - Summary of key UK research studies regarding adolescents and SEM/SRE

Author(s)	Title	Date	Sample size	Methodology	Key Findings
Martellozzo, E., Monogham, A., Adler, J., Davidson, J., Leyva, R., & Horavth, M.	"I wasn't sure it was normal to watch it" – A quantitative and qualitative examination of the impact of online pornography on the values, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of children and young people.	2017	1001 (aged 11-16 years old)	- Online discussion forum and 4 x online focus groups (34 participants), to inform design of survey; - Online survey (1001 participants); - Six online focus groups (40 participants)	- 65% of 15-16 year olds reported seeing pornography; - A mixture of emotions including curiosity, shock and confusion were reported upon first viewing pornography. Shock and confusion was reported to subside on repeated viewing; - Some older children (39% of 13-14 year olds and 42% of 15-16 year olds) reported wanting to emulate pornography they had seen; - 14% had taken naked or semi-naked images of themselves, 7% of the sample had shared such photos with others; - 53% of boys and 39% of girls agreed that pornography is realistic; - Older boys (15-16 year olds) were more likely to report using online pornography for pleasure and were less likely to report negative impacts of use than girls of any age or younger boys.
Parker, I.	Young people, sex and relationships: The new norms	2014	500 (all 18 years old)	- Online survey	- 66% agreed that people are too casual about sex and relationships; - 61% agreed that adults are out of touch with friendships and relationships of people aged 18; - 65% agreed that adults worry too much about what happens online; - 46% agreed that sending sexual or naked photos or videos is part of everyday life for teenagers; - 70% felt that pornography can have a damaging effect on young people's views of sex and relationships; - 86% agreed that sex and relationship advice should be taught in schools; - 68% thought that sex and relationship education should be taught by a trained expert; 40% per cent thought it should be taught by an external visitor, 19% thought it should be taught by a teacher from the school.

					(see Table 5 for full summary)
Baker, K.	Online pornography – Should schools be teaching young people about the risks? An exploration of the views of young people and teaching professionals	2015	218 young people (173 female, 45 male, aged 16-17 years old) 23 members of school staff	- Online survey (completed by 218 16-17 year olds) - Three face-to-face focus groups with 23 staff members in total	From online survey (young people): - 65.9% reported seeing pornography online; - 83% of boys and 56% of girls reported first viewing online pornography aged 14 years of younger; - 37.1% (majority) agreed that viewing online pornography aged 11-14 years old was a bad thing; - 34.3% (majority) disagreed that 15-18 year old viewing online pornography was a bad thing; - 76.8% reported that online pornography was not realistic; - 62.3% felt that schools should be teaching about risks associated with viewing online SEM. From focus groups (adults): - Young people would view online pornography for information, out of curiosity, or by accident; - Young people viewing online pornography was generally felt to have more negative than positive effects; - Normalising of certain behaviours was a main concern resulting from young people viewing online pornography; - Mixed responses regarding whether young people could be critical of the reality of pornography; - All participants in favour of schools address issues of access to online pornography in some way.

5.4.2 Martellozzo's (2017) study

One of the key studies which has sought young people's views on SEM and SRE within the UK is the study by Martellozzo et al conducted in 2016 (with minor revision in 2017) (Martellozzo et al., 2017). This study was commissioned by the NSPCC and the Children's Commissioner for England and was undertaken by Middlesex University. The study gathered the views of a sample of 11-16 year olds in the UK regarding their attitudes and feelings about online pornography.

The report followed on from a previous report, also carried out by Middlesex University and commissioned by the Children's Commissioner for England (Horvath et al., 2013). This report reviewed existing literature on the effects of access and exposure to pornography on

young people. This concluded that a 'significant proportion' of young people worldwide aged ten to seventeen years have accessed, or been exposed to, pornography and that this exposure affects both sexual beliefs and engagement in risky behaviours. They were unable to conclude in what ways exposure may impact upon relationships or sexual expectations. This research has been criticized due to its lack of primary research and review of some dated literature (Chalabi, 2013), reflecting a frustration that there has been a lack of accurate data regarding pornography/SEM.

Many of those surveyed by Martellozzo et al (2017) reported being concerned about their exposure to SEM, with the report suggesting that some adolescents may require more proactive support and advice than is currently provided by educators. Several points from individual accounts in this study relate to feeling 'judged', 'embarrassed' or 'ashamed' in relation to SEM and speaking to adults or others about it.

The majority of boys in the study (53% or 127/241) and over a third of girls (39% or 76/195) reported that they think SEM is realistic, suggesting perhaps worrying signs for the impact that this may have upon body image and comparison. Additionally, findings suggest that only 11% of boys and 24% of girls felt that SEM portrays positive images about consent. Such figures are linked to participants disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the statement that online SEM led people to believe that 'sex should be agreed to by everyone involved'. Agreement or disagreement with such statements however appears to ask participants what they feel others may think, rather than their own views, which may perhaps make such answers rather projective. Whilst this study cannot therefore say that individuals stated explicitly that SEM teaches negative ideas about consent, such a finding may still highlight some concerns in the realm of relationships and sexual consent. Further investigation of the impact of SEM on this aspect of relationship education would be helpful to establish if this is something which may warrant addressing within SRE.

Around half of participants felt that SEM helped them to feel that sexual activity should be enjoyable, safe and agreeable. This suggests some positive impacts of SEM, which may often be overlooked in wider research. Tentative links are made between these positive attitudes and associated discussion of pornography in a classroom setting – with

'somewhat' of a link suggested – though further investigation would be required to establish firm links.

With regards to SRE, Martellozzo et al (2017) found that those surveyed want SRE that is private, safe and credible, and with age appropriate content. Whilst the report asked what kind of *online* materials individuals may like to support their education of SEM (short videos being the response); some respondents did not want exclusively online material or they were concerned about privacy online. The report did touch upon SEM education, though this was not its focus, providing conflicting views from its focus groups regarding SRE ranging from it being a 'joke' and 'no-one would take it seriously' to reports that it may be 'quite useful for sexting information'.

Specialist provision (through specialist teachers for instance) was mentioned by a handful of participants, although the exact nature of what this may look like was not clarified. Whilst this may be a useful starting point in that it tells us that there is a gap within the education that adolescents want and are receiving, there is an evident void in understanding of how best to support both adolescents and their schools with the topic of SEM.

Whilst Martellozzo et al's (2017) study is fairly comprehensive in identifying a sample of UK adolescents' thoughts regarding SEM there are some key factors which should be borne in mind with interpretation of this. Methodologically, the survey and focus groups were exclusively online with no face to face meetings. Whilst online approaches can prove useful in allowing participants to 'open up', they may also be fraught with issues of reliability and lack of flexibility in gaining richness of data (Litosseliti, 2003; Peterson-Sweeney, 2005). In this instance the focus groups were very structured with the use of ten structured questions and no opportunity for deviation or exploration away from these questions which may have limited the opportunity for individuals to elicit their true views. The use of focus groups rather than individual interviews may also have influenced participants due to the 'presence' of others in the group with some individuals perhaps susceptible to peer pressure (Lambert & Loiselle, 2008; Morgan, 1996).

Participants were additionally recruited via their parents who were already subscribed to the online survey company who conducted the research; thus perhaps those taking part had parents who already had concerns about their internet use or furthermore may have had parents who were present during completion of the survey. This has some implications for the validity of the research, although it is evident that compiling a completely unbiased and random sample when working with adolescents may be a difficult aspect of such research (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007).

Horvath et al's (2015) pre-cursory study has also come in for additional criticism from others, particularly within the political world, who have criticised the NSPCC of sensationalising issues and for undertaking research through 'creative market research group(s)' (Dunt, 2015). Despite issues with methodology and directionality the study does reveal useful insight.

5.4.3 Parker's (2014) study

Despite such limitations, other UK based research into the area of SEM and adolescents reveals somewhat similar findings in terms of the complex impacts that SEM may be having on young people today. The second most notable study to date which has investigated UK adolescents' views regarding the topic of SEM is by Parker (2014). This study gathered the views of five-hundred eighteen year olds through use of an online, mainly closed question, survey. Although this somewhat limits the richness of data gathered, alongside identified limitations in the technological experiences of eighteen year olds compared to younger adolescents, nevertheless, the study revealed some interesting statistics as summarised in Table 5 below.

Table 5 – Additional summary of Parker's (2014) key findings

Regarding SEM: ▪ 46% agreed with the statement 'sending sexual or naked photos or videos is part of everyday life for teenagers nowadays'; ▪ 80% agreed with the statement 'it's too easy for young people to accidentally see pornography online'; ▪ 37% agreed and 39% disagreed with the statement 'pornography helps young people learn about sex'; ▪ 64% of boys and 60% of girls believed that pornography has made people more sexually

explorative and open minded;
- 58% disagreed with the statement 'pornography helps young people learn about relationships';
- 66% agreed with the statement 'people are too casual about sex and relationships';
- 78% of girls and 70% of boys believed that pornography could be damaging;
- 66% of boys and 77% of girls agreed with the statement 'pornography can lead to unrealistic attitudes about sex';
- 66% of girls and 49% of boys agreed that it would be easier growing up if pornography was less easy to access.

Regarding SRE:
- On a scale of 1 – 7 (7 being the best), 36% rated their experience of SRE in school as a 5 or better;
- After friends, school was rated as the second main source of information about sex and relationships;
- 53% feel that all children have a right to education about sex and relationships;
- The majority (49%) felt that SRE should be taught in an age appropriate way beginning in secondary school, with 37% feeling that SRE should begin in primary school;
- 68% felt that SRE should be taught by a trained expert in relationships and sex;
- 81% agreed that there should be an opportunity for young people to be involved in setting the curriculum for SRE.

(Adapted from Parker, 2014)

Findings reveal a mix of emotions from participants, with the majority feeling that pornography can be damaging yet also believing that it may additionally make people more open minded. Most pertinent perhaps to the aim of the authors' study is the finding that over half of girls, and almost half of boys, felt that it would be easier growing up if pornography was less easy to access. Whilst it is noted that the act of agreeing or disagreeing with written statements may perhaps not be the most reliable data collection method, such figures reveal that many young people may be experiencing some sense of dissatisfaction and social and emotional issues with regards to SEM.

Findings with regards to SRE support Martelozzo's later study, and the findings of political insight, that SRE is something which young people feel is in need of improvement and which is generally viewed as an important part of education.

5.4.4 Baker's (2016) study

Baker (2016) conducted an additional, smaller scale, study involving an online survey with 218 16-17 year olds and three focus groups with school staff focusing on online

pornography. Findings revealed that the young people and school staff in the study felt that there were many negative effects of viewing online pornography, particularly at a young age, and that schools were identified as having a key role to play in teaching students about the risks of viewing online pornography. Many participants did not choose negative responses when asked how viewing pornography made them feel however, suggesting that those in later adolescence may not perceive pornography as being as harmful as it may be for those younger individuals. Whilst a valuable contribution to the topic area, limitations include the small-scale nature of the study and its use of a structured online survey to gather adolescents' views – again highlighting a gap in face-to-face conversations with young people.

All three studies have found that adolescents may experience competing emotions with regards to SEM and that 'better' SRE, and SRE including information on SEM, may help to support with this. At the time of writing there are no other published empirical studies known to the author which discuss the views of UK adolescents regarding SEM in the modern era.

5.4.5 Global research

Whilst the focus of this study is on the views of those within the UK education system, there is a selection of global research, mainly based in Sweden, which has gathered young people's experiences and views regarding online pornography. Some of this research echoes UK findings and is included here briefly to add support and breadth to the somewhat limited literature available regarding the UK context.

Studies found similarities with UK research in that adolescents feel that SEM can create demands and expectations with regards to sexuality and sexual behaviour (Häggström-Nordin et al., 2006a): including uncertainty, especially amongst girls (Tydén, Hanson, Larsson, & Haggstrom-Nordin, 2009). A 2010 study also revealed that, with age, individuals may be more able to deal with and reflect upon their emotions associated with SEM; viewing it as a source of information rather than a source of intrapersonal struggle (Lofgren-Mårtenson & Månsson, 2010). This particular small-scale study however involved interviews

with those aged up to 20 years old when the skills to solve problems and make decisions are typically more well developed (Casey, Jones, & Hare, 2008).

Additionally, a Europe-wide survey which asked almost 10,000 young people aged 9-16 about what bothers them online found that pornography was the most commonly reported concern with the highest level of concern from those aged 11 and 12 (Livingstone, Kirwil, Ponte, & Staksrud, 2013).

5.5 The role of adults in SRE and SEM

5.5.1 Concerns

Alongside political concern regarding SRE provision (as discussed in section 5.2), concern in the UK media, and from children's charities, is fuelling an increasing debate around both access to SEM and worries about its impacts (Dixon, 2017; Hamilton, Humphreys, & McKibbin, 2017; NSPCC, 2015; Pells, 2017; Turner, 2017).

UK newspaper articles frequently discuss an 'epidemic' of young people accessing SEM amid debate regarding whose role it is to educate young people about an issue which has previously not had to be considered in traditional sex education (Hughes, 2016; Kentish, 2016; Sellgren, 2016; Sullivan, 2015). With any such media coverage it is important to bear in mind the thoughts of Adams & Berzonsky (2005) that many accounts of adolescent behaviour within media tend to sensationalise and focus on what is unusual and newsworthy rather than that which may be normative.

Nonetheless, in line with such concerns plans in England for amendments to the Children and Social Work bill are set to include a requirement for schools to teach about domestic violence, sexting and pornography (Lord Nash & Greening, 2016) (this is yet to be approved however and how this will be delivered effectively is still under review). It is felt that the more that can be done to open up communication channels between adults and youth in order to empower young people in any intervention into online 'risky behaviour', the more success there will be in combating the challenges faced through online content (Lord Nash &

Greening, 2016). Yet the implementation of this in practice appears currently unsatisfactory in terms of SEM content, particularly as the topic may typically be seen as taboo and fraught with issues of embarrassment (Bryant, 2009).

It is evident that there is a consensus that there needs to be a change in supporting young people with issues of SEM, with appropriate and effective SRE identified as a key way in which to tackle this. As Brown (2002) states:

> *"We have responsibilities towards our children and young people, to ensure that they grow up with a well-rounded sense of sex and relationships, and not one that is solely or mainly seen through the lens of pornography." (pp.6, (Brown, 2002)*

5.5.2 Communication

Research by Parker (2014) has suggested that many adolescents (56% of those surveyed) feel that adults find it hard to help or understand with online issues. In the same study 61% felt that adults are out of touch with the relationships and friendships of young people. This may be somewhat associated however with a recognised general decline in affect for family and adults through adolescence, with peer relationships favoured over adults as an individual moves through adolescence (Larson & Richards, 1991). In particular, sexuality and relationships is identified as a difficult topic for discussion between most parents and adolescents and it is identified that more research is required to explore developmental changes in communication about sex (Berger et al., 2005).

The increasing role of technology is also emphasising the knowledge gap between adults and adolescents. As Lust (2017) suggests, parents and teachers did not grow up with the same technologies that adolescents have today, and thus many teachers (and indeed parents) lack the structural support or guidance to be able to effectively educate young people about issues such as SEM and sex and relationships in the modern age. Indeed some adolescents have commented on the awkwardness and out-of-date information provided by schools regarding SRE in general (Parker, 2014).

Accordingly, moves to prevent access to or block young people from accessing SEM have been called for, with a recent government consultation setting out plans for age verification of SEM in order to prevent access to those under age (Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, 2017). It is recognised however that such enforcement may be inherently difficult due to the modern day nature of internet access (Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport et al., 2016; Nash, 2015).

Although such regulation may be beneficial in some ways, it can be argued that preventing access to SEM faces difficulties not just in the enforcement of such an idea but in that it does not address the issue of young people being able to understand and interact with SEM in a non-harmful way. Whilst some authors have suggested that adolescents are able to self-manage what they feel is acceptable and unacceptable media content (Bryant, 2009; Nightingale, Dickenson, & Griff, 2002); this is not seen as consistent (Frith, 2017; Vilanni, 2001). Given the suggestion that when individuals are old enough to be interested in sex they are competent enough to find it on the internet (Peter & Valkenburg, 2007), it is becoming more generally recognised that education is a primary requirement in order to mediate and support young people with SEM (Lust, 2017; Martellozzo et al., 2017; Peter & Valkenburg, 2007; Welsh Government, 2017).

6 Current Study

6.1 Overview

The world that adolescents live in today is, arguably, one full of a complexity not faced by previous generations (Boyd, 2014). With the advent of technology, social media and smartphones the average UK adolescent can now be connected to virtually anywhere and anything; at any time of day. Whilst this is an exhilarating prospect it can also be an overwhelming one, none more so than in the context of SEM and SRE (Boyd, 2015). With over half of 11-16 year olds in the UK reported to have accessed SEM online and increasing concerns regarding its impact (Martellozzo et al., 2017; NSPCC, 2015) there is an identified need for further, up-to-date, research in the area specifically which gathers rich, in-depth information about adolescents' views and experiences.

6.2 Aim of research

This study addresses a gap in current research around SEM and SRE, addressing the lack of in-depth, qualitative studies into the views of young people on this topic within the UK. The aim of this study therefore is to delve deeper into adolescents' thoughts on the topic, focusing on aspects of social and emotional development in order to give an enhanced and balanced understanding. Conducting qualitative research through semi-structured interviews can help to generate understanding and can address the gap in current research which has not allowed for personal contact or open-ended discussion (Willig, 2008).

Given the tendency of recent research to be politically entwined and focused on structured or closed-question scaled responses (Martellozzo et al., 2017; Parker, 2014), this study aims to provide a balanced view and a richer picture of experience rather than scaled responses. Given the rapid changes in technology, and the way in which adolescents use technology, this research will also provide an up-to-date account of the views of those in today's schools and experiencing such changes in today's society.

6.3 Relevance to Educational Psychology practice

Providing support to schools, parents and young people regarding emotional well-being and supported, safe and appropriate education and development provision is a key component of the EP's function (Baker, 2015). As such, supporting young people and schools with SRE and the possible impact of SEM falls within this remit.

An understanding of how adolescents' development is changing in a world of increasing complexity and technology is also an essential knowledge base for the EP in providing support to adolescents and adults in navigating this time of critical psychological and emotional development (Cline, Gulliford, & Birch, 2015).

Given the few recent studies into the area of SEM, SRE, and adolescence there is a need for a more robust research base to investigate exactly how adolescents currently feel about the accessibility of SEM and SRE, the impacts of this (which may be both positive and negative) and how they would like to be supported in their education on this topic, if indeed at all. In this way it is hoped that EPs may be better informed for working with young people, schools and parents by having an up-to-date understanding of the current experiences of young people and an insight into their world. Further insight into views on this topic will help EPs to provide additional, and appropriate, support regarding not just SEM but overall emotional and social wellbeing also.

Disseminating these views to the people that matter the most – those working directly with young people is also essential. Research which has gone before is mostly aimed at government directorates/policy makers whilst provision of information to schools or to the EP profession is largely limited. Within EP literature there are no known studies which have spoken to young people about SEM and no guidance for EPs on how to approach the topic of SEM and SRE with young people and schools.

6.4 Research Questions

Through the literature review, the following research questions are identified (Table 6) with the aim to broaden understanding of this topic for EPs and educational professionals. These research questions are explored through the methodology employed in this project.

Table 6 - Research questions of the study

1) What are adolescents' views of sexually explicit media content? 2) What are adolescents' views on the impact of sexually explicit media content on social and emotional development (relationships, gender, body-image, self-esteem)? 3) What are adolescents' views about sex and relationship education? 4) What has been done, or what could further be done, to support adolescents in their experiences of sexually explicit media and sex and relationship education?

Given that the viewing of sexually explicit material by individuals under the age of 18 is technically illegal in the UK (FPA, 2015), it is noted that the research questions, and subsequent methodology, are not designed to ask participants about their direct personal experiences of SEM. The research questions are therefore intended to be answered through discussion identifying participants' experiences of the impacts of SEM on their peer and social group.

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"Schools are supposed to be preparing us for life, they're not preparing us by just sweeping this under the carpet" - Sexually Explicit Media, Sex and Relationship Education and Adolescents – an Exploration of the Views of Young People

Part II: Empirical Study

(word count 6588)

1 Abstract

The way in which adolescents access online sexually explicit media (SEM) today is fundamentally different to the experiences of previous generations due to the advent of smartphones and internet enabled tablets (Berelowitz, Edwards, & Gulyurtlu, 2012). Accordingly such unrestricted availability of SEM has led to an increasing awareness that SEM is becoming a commonplace occurrence for many young people within the UK (Martellozzo et al., 2017; Parker, 2014). Adolescence is identified as a time of heightened vulnerability and a critical developmental period for social and emotional health and wellbeing. Literature suggests mixed, and somewhat limited, findings regarding the impact of SEM on adolescent development, and recent and balanced qualitative studies regarding UK adolescents' experiences of SEM are few(Lester & Allan, 2003; Weber, Quiring, & Daschmann, 2012). There is an associated lack of clarity as to how adolescents may be educated or supported in their experiences of SEM, with a lack of clarity regarding the role of sex and relationship education (SRE) in making such a provision (particularly within Wales). This research aimed to provide a balanced account of the views of a sample of young people in the education system within South Wales regarding SEM and SRE. Eight adolescents aged sixteen to eighteen years old were interviewed via a semi-structured interview process and data was analysed using the process of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Results suggest that adolescents are dissatisfied both with the widespread accessibility of SEM, particularly to early adolescents, and with the lack of discussion or education regarding SEM within both SRE, the education system, and wider society. Implications for educational psychologists and professionals are considered alongside future direction for further study.

2. Introduction

2.1 Sexually explicit media and adolescents

2.1.1 What is sexually explicit media?

The term online sexually explicit media is used to refer to websites or apps that either describe people having sex, show video/audio of people engaging in sex acts or show clear images of graphic nudity (Baker, 2015; Braun-Courville & Rojas, 2009). In existing literature SEM is a term that may be used interchangeably with the term 'pornography' or 'erotica' (Attwood, 2005; Baker, 2015; Ofcom, 2016), but for the purposes of this project, and for clarity, it will be referred to as SEM and will specifically refer to *online* SEM. Use of the phrase *online* SEM may be typically used in reference to 'new technology' (Rosser et al., 2012): that is online technology such as laptops, smart-phones and tablets.

2.1.2 Adolescent access to sexually explicit media

Increased technology and innovative ways in which adolescents can access information online has led to new ways in which they are also able to access sexually explicit material (Martellozzo et al., 2017; Richmond, 2012). Accordingly, adolescents access to SEM today may be described as 'fundamentally different' from previous generations (Berelowitz et al., 2012). SEM is accessible to a vast majority of young people with an internet enabled device at any time and at any place – sometimes whether they have deliberately looked for it or not (Häggström-Nordin, Sandberg, Hanson, & Tydén, 2006; Horvath et al., 2013).

A recent study by Martellozzo et al., (2017) reported that around 56% of 11- 16 year olds in the UK have accessed SEM online. Such findings are similar to those of Parker (2014), which found that 81% of the 18 year olds they surveyed felt that most young men look at SEM and 40% feeling that most young women view SEM. Such figures have been criticised however due to perceptions regarding the political drivers behind such studies and associated lack of robustness and reliability in research methods, particularly with regards to Martellozzo's study (Dunt, 2015). Thus, whilst the prevalence of SEM exposure does appear to be

increasing it is difficult to ascertain an accurate picture of the extent of SEM access, particularly at the current time as new technology and internet access increases at a rapid pace (Lenhart, 2015; Rallings, 2015).

2.2 Adolescent development

2.2.1 Theories of adolescent development

The ways in which SEM may impact upon adolescent development are unclear. There are numerous theories of developmental psychology which may be broadly grouped according to the developmental areas that they focus on (Table 7).

Such theories provide insight into the development of romantic and sexual relationships during adolescence, as to be discussed. In particular, theories of social cognitive learning can here provide markedly valuable insight into how aspects of adolescent relationship development (including social and emotional development) may be impacted upon by SEM, as is a key point for investigation in this study.

Table 7 – Key developmental theories of adolescent development

Developmental area	Key characteristics
Biological	- Focus of the period is physical and sexual development determined by genes and biology. - Hormonal changes during adolescence may be regarded as the biologically based predisposition to sexual behaviour (Udry, 1988) and they may be linked to many behavioural changes (Cameron, 2004; Forbes & Dahl, 2010; Peper & Dahl, 2013). - Medical stances may focus on biological processes as being the driving force behind many of the changes and development during adolescence (Kipke, 1999).
Cognitive development	- Emergence of the 'social self' during adolescence is a period of heightened self-consciousness and increasing preoccupation with others concerns. - Egocentric assumptions prevent early adolescents from fluid thought regarding others thoughts and feelings. Preoccupation with changes in emotions and physical appearance will dominate thought (Elkind & Bowen, 1979). - Delay in maturation of the frontal lobes in adolescence leads to gaps between cognition, emotion and behaviour during middle

	adolescence and a period of heightened vulnerability to risk taking and difficulties in behavioural regulation (Steinberg, 2005).
Psychosocial identity development	- Erikson's eight stages of man proposes that human development will span eight stages. - During adolescence the individual experiences a crisis between ego identity and role confusion. - Identity crisis is most pronounced during adolescence with psychological reciprocity (the formation of identity through interaction with significant others) leading adolescents to be preoccupied with a need for peer group recognition and a dependence on peer role models and feedback (Erikson, 1968).
Social learning	**-** Socialising agents including parents, peers, teachers and the media, convey messages about gender, relationships and sex which subsequently influence adolescent behaviour (Bandura & Walters, 1969; Gross, 2004). - Adolescents will experiment with new behaviours, some of which may result in risk-taking behaviour designed to shape identity; try out decision-making skills; and gain peer respect and acceptance (Bonino, Cattelino, & Ciairano, 2005; Dryfoos, 1998; Ponton, 2008). - Adolescents may experience 'cognitive dissonance' – conflict between the behaviours, beliefs and values of peers compared to one's own (Long, 2011).
Ecological development	- Adolescent development as an interaction between the individual and the environment. - Development of autonomous behaviour, cognition and emotion is a product of interaction between the individual and various levels of their environment (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994).

Despite the differing viewpoints offered, all of the developmental models agree that adolescence is a key developmental period of adjustment and vulnerability characterised by changes in psychological, physical and social development (Ernst, Pine, & Hardin, 2006; Steinberg, 2005). Identified as a transitional period between late childhood and the beginning of adulthood, and defined by the World Health Organisation between 10 and 19 years of age (World Health Organisation, 2014), it is a period when individuals begin to examine and explore psychological characteristics of the self to discover who they are, and how they fit in the social world (Choudhury, Blakemore, & Charman, 2006; Steinberg & Morris, 2001).

2.2.2 Social cognitive learning and adolescent development

Social learning theory asserts that socialising agents, which include parents, peers, teachers and the media, convey messages about gender, relationships and sex which subsequently influence adolescent behaviour (Gross, 2004). Adolescents therefore may learn behaviour from a process of modelling and observing others. This may in turn impact upon the development of relationships.

As adolescence progresses, Harter, Bresnick, Bouchey & Whitesell (1997) propose there is increased recognition of a process of contradictory self-description, that is awareness of discrepancies between what one really feels and what one says and does. This 'false-self' behaviour is seen as being increasingly influenced by online technology and social media, such as in the development of 'false-self presentation' online (Wright, White & Obst, 2018).

Such proposals may be linked to the concept of 'fear of missing out' (FOMO), something which is increasingly discussed in wider literature and the media regarding social media use in young people. FOMO refers to a pervasive apprehension that others are having rewarding experiences from which one is missing out, leading to a desire to stay continually connected to what others are doing (facilitated through online social media or technology) (Przybylski, Murayama, DeHaan, & Gladwell, 2013). At present the extent to which social cognitive concepts such as FOMO or false-self behaviour may be associated with SEM exposure is unknown.

2.2.3 Relationship development in adolescence

Romantic relationships are identified as a key component of the western adolescent world (Bouchey & Furman, 2005) and *"central to young peoples' day-to-day lives"* (p.130, Berger, McMakin, & Furman, 2005). Despite this there has, historically, been very little research regarding how romantic relationships may change over the course of adolescence or how such relationships may impact upon well-being and mental health (Berger et al., 2005; Steinberg & Morris, 2001).

Sexual development in adolescence may accordingly be linked with the development of romantic relationships and is said to be influenced by biological maturation, progression through 'socially defined' stages of life, and through relationships with others (DeLamater & Friedrich, 2002). Bouchey & Furman (2005) further suggest that previous relationship experiences will influence future behaviour and that behaviour is set against an environmental and cultural backdrop (linking to theories of ecological development).

Whilst some have proposed that communication with the opposite sex in early adolescence may not usually have a sexual or romantic intent (Berger et al., 2005), Herdt & McClinktock (2000) assert that the age of 10 is now often referred to in Western society as the age at which sexual attraction may begin to develop. Savin-Williams & Diamond (2004) additionally suggest that sexual behaviour will be socially mediated through social cues from both parents and the media, influencing when the adolescent individual is *supposed* to seek and desire sexual activity.

Thus, romantic and sexual relationship development during adolescence is seen to be influenced by prior experience and constructed 'knowledge', and also the current cultural and environmental setting of the adolescent. This may include both intrinsic and extrinsic forces of influence with social/online media increasingly accepted as playing a role in impacting adolescent behaviour. The role of online media has been linked to the sharing of sexualised images (Daniels & Zurbriggen, 2016), increased peer influence through online media (Sherman, Payton, Hernandez, Greenfield, & Dapretto, 2016), and to how romantic relationships may develop online (Van Ouytsel, Van Gool, Walrave, Ponnet, & Peeters, 2016).

2.2.4 Sexually explicit media and adolescent development

Given the degree of change and growth associated with adolescent development, adolescents have been identified as one of the most susceptible audiences to SEM (Owens, Behun, Manning, & Reid, 2012). Research regarding SEM and adolescence tends to suggest worrying changes for adolescents' development, particularly with regards to gender roles

and sexual attitudes (Martellozzo et al., 2017; Parker, 2014; Peter & Valkenburg, 2006; Rallings, 2015).

Furthermore, much research into the impact on adolescents of viewing SEM generally reports negative impacts on young peoples' sexual activities, moral values and attitudes towards sex – as summarised in the literature review articles of Flood (2009) and Greenfield (2004). A more recent review of the literature by E. W. Owens et al., (2012) goes on to claim that proliferation of SEM (or in their words 'internet pornography') has influenced adolescents in "unprecedented and diverse ways" (pp.2, E.W. Owens at al, 2012). This is linked to beliefs that adolescents will learn behaviours and shape their value systems based on media consumption (Vilanni, 2001), drawing parallels with behaviourist and ecological developmental theories (Bandura & Walters, 1969; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Elkind & Bowen, 1979). Accordingly there is consensus in current literature that young people may learn sexual behaviour from what they see in SEM (Owens et al., 2012).

Research is mixed however, as noted by Bryant (2009) and Lee & Jenkins (2002), with a tendency, especially within wider media in the UK, for there to be a 'sensationalist' aspect to reporting on SEM and young people, with much of the widely reported research linking SEM to negative impacts. Within the global research base however, many of the more recent reviews identify a selection of research which has shown possible positive or educational benefits of SEM for adolescents (Flood, 2009; Owens et al., 2012; Peter & Valkenburg, 2016). Indeed in Peter & Valkenburg's (2016a) empirical review regarding the predictors, prevalence and implications of adolescents' use of SEM (or , in their terms, 'online pornography') over the previous 20 years: mixed responses were found in the research in respect of the impact of SEM on adolescents sexual attitudes and behaviour, with some authors concluding no clear association between SEM and negative sexual attitudes and behaviour (Svedin, Åkerman, & Priebe, 2011; Wallmyr & Welin, 2006).

Brown (2000) has argued that some adolescents resist the dominant sexual ideology that may be present in pornography, with Stern (1999) further asserting that some teenage girls will critique images and produce their own ideas about sex and sexuality. Such views are in keeping with theoretical models such as the Media Practice Model, suggesting that the

impact of media is a dynamic process between the media content and the lived experiences of the adolescent (Steele & Brown, 1995). Accordingly, discussion regarding causal effects is tentative. Bleakley, Hennessy, Fishbein, & Jordan's (2008) study for instance found that sexually active adolescents are more likely to expose themselves to SEM, and that those exposed to SEM are more likely to progress in their sexual activity.

Caution may be exercised when interpreting results from such historical studies however given the immense advances in technology how SEM may now be accessed online. Whilst adolescents may previously have had the ability to select and filter SEM; or perhaps been provided with 'media-literacy' support – such as suggested by Brown (2000) – given the ease with which adolescents are now able to access, and be bombarded with, SEM such suggestions would need reviewing in line with modern technological uses.

There is a lack of more recent studies regarding such impact but it may be proposed that the heightened use, and availability, of SEM in current Western culture may have an increased impact upon sexual activity, particularly given that many adolescents may be exposed to SEM without actively seeking it out (Martellozzo et al., 2017)

Further critiques of the negative impacts of SEM also refer to concerns regarding early sexualisation which have, in the past, been said to be driven not so much by young people becoming more sexual, but in adults being 'forced to recognise this fact' (Buckingham & Bragg, 2004). In terms of the impact of SEM upon adolescent development however, it is seen that UK research is mixed and somewhat limited. This particular study therefore hopes to provide improved insight into how SEM may play a role in relationship development and expectations.

2.3 The role of sex and relationship education (SRE)

Sex and relationship education (SRE) can be defined as learning about the social, emotional and physical aspects of relationships, sex and sexuality, sexual health and growing up (FPA, 2011). It is notable that there are, and have been for some time, concerns that the standard, effectiveness and appropriateness of SRE in UK secondary schools is inconsistent and not fit

for purpose (House of Commons: Women and Equalities Committee, 2016; Lee & Jenkins, 2002). It is notable that there are, and have been for some time, concerns that the standard, effectiveness and appropriateness of SRE in UK secondary schools is inconsistent and not fit for purpose (Lee & Jenkins, 2002). There has also been a lack of clarity as to what such education should look like, and to what depth and breadth schools should be responsible for teaching this, prompting some, such as Baker (2015) to propose that 'modern day' SRE can be a minefield of uncertainty for many schools.

Within Wales, the Welsh Government set up the Sex and Relationships Education Expert Panel in March 2017 to review SRE in Wales following previous reports of low standards of ineffective SRE (Estyn, 2007; Selwyn & Powell, 2007; Welsh Assembly Government, 2010). Findings from this review suggest that little has changed overall in terms of the efficacy of SRE in Welsh schools with 'significant gaps' still present and too little emphasis on relationships and emotions, including a lack of information on domestic violence, gender identity and sexual orientation (Welsh Government, 2017). This report also highlights significant research gaps in Wales in relation to SRE (Table 8).

Table 8 – Identified gaps in the research literature relating to SRE in Wales

- No robust quantitative or qualitative research on:
  - What SRE is provided in Welsh schools, how it is delivered, in what contexts and with what aims/objectives;
  - The quality of the SRE experience for students and teachers;
  - SRE provision and quality in faith schools; early years; primary schools; special schools and mainstream schools for students with disabilities;
  - Identifying *what* professional training is currently delivered for teachers;
  - Identifying *the quality* of professional training for teachers, health professionals and community workers involved in delivering SRE;
  - What children, young people, parents, carers and wider communities in Wales think about school-based SRE provision.

(Adapted from Welsh Government, 2017)

Following recommendations from the SRE expert panel, the Welsh Government have since announced major reforms to SRE provision in Wales, with this becoming a statutory component of the new curriculum set to be in place by 2022 (Welsh Government, 2018).

The reform states that topics within SRE, such as aspects of SEM, will be delivered to learners when they are 'developmentally ready'. How this 'readiness' will be ascertained however is, at present, unclear. It is hoped that this exploratory research may in some way contribute to identifying how this provision may be made fit for purpose, particularly regarding the place of SEM within this.

2.4 Aims

This study addresses a gap in current research around SEM and SRE, addressing the lack of in-depth, qualitative studies into the views of young people on this topic within the UK. The aim of this study therefore is to explore more deeply adolescents' thoughts and experiences in order to give an enhanced and balanced understanding of how SEM may be impacting upon adolescent development.

There are also no recent studies on this topic within the field of educational psychology (EP) and little guidance for educational psychologists (EPs) on how to approach the topic of SEM and SRE with young people and schools. Through this study it is hoped that EPs may have further insight into these areas so that they may be better informed to provide additional, and appropriate, support for both young people, parents, and schools, not just with regards to SEM but in supporting overall emotional and social wellbeing also.

2.5 Research questions

The following research questions are identified through the literature and are explored through the methodology employed in this project.

Table 9 – Research questions of the study

1) What are adolescents' views of sexually explicit media content? 2) What are adolescents' views on the impact of sexually explicit media content on social and emotional development (relationships, gender, body-image, self-esteem)? 3) What are adolescents' views about sex and relationship education? 4) What has been done, or what could further be done, to support adolescents in their experiences of sexually explicit media and sex and relationship education?

3 Methodology

3.1 Research paradigm

A relativist ontology and a constructivist-interpretive epistemology underpins the research. A relativist ontology takes the view that knowledge is a value-laden, social reality. A constructivist-interpretative paradigm may follow on from such an ontology, taking the belief that there is no single reality or truth and that reality is interpreted.

This paradigm assumes that meaning is constructed through interaction between consciousness and the world (Scotland, 2012). It sets out to understand individuals' interpretations of the world around them and is exploratory in nature (Cohen et al., 2007)

3.2 Participants

Participants were eight individuals aged sixteen to eighteen years of age attending differing mainstream educational provision in the South Wales area. Additional demographic information relating to participants is provided in Figure 3 below. Further relevant information regarding participants' school placement is also provided to give some indication of the socio-economic background of participants.

It is noted that all participants attended schools with above average attainment compared to the national average, and with a lower percentage of pupils eligible for free-school meals compared to the national average. Such a level of education and access to free-school meals may indicate that participants are from relatively affluent areas, which should be borne in mind in interpretation of the results of this study.

Participant	Gender	Age	School (A, B or C)*
P1	Male	17	A
P2	Female	16	A
P3	Male	18	C
P4	Female	17	A
P5	Female	17	B
P6	Male	17	B
P7	Female	17	B
P8	Female	18	B

* School information

School	Geographical Location	No. of pupils on roll	% of pupils with free school meals**	% of pupils with 5 A* - C at GCSE in 2017
A	North Cardiff	1228	8.4%	84.8%
B	Vale of Glamorgan	2023	5.6%	79.2%
C	Central Cardiff	2255	11.6%	70.2%

**The average for schools in Wales in 2017 was 17%.
*** The national average in Wales in 2017 was 54.6%.

Figure 3 - Participant demographic information

The sample size was deemed appropriate for the thematic analysis purposes of the research, providing a sample size small enough to manage given the scope of the project yet large enough to yield a 'richly textured' and new understanding of experience (Sandelowski, 1995). Accordingly, upon analysis of the data, theoretical saturation was deemed to have been reached within the sample thus negating the need for further recruitment above the sample size (Glaser, 1965).

Participants were recruited through contact with sixth form leadership or senior management within each school (Appendix E) who then advertised the study to sixth form students aged sixteen or over. Students who wished to take part in the study were forwarded a parental letter (Appendix F), information sheet (Appendix G) and consent forms (Appendix H) for completion. Subsequent contact was made either with the young person

via email or via the school to arrange a suitable date and time for the interview to take place. In this way a somewhat purposeful sampling approach was taken in that all participants were within a specified age-range and educational setting and were identified through their volunteering to take part as willing to provide insight into the research questions (Emmel, 2013).

3.3 Methodology

Each interview took place with the young person in his/her respective school during the school day. Interviews took place in private classrooms with the aim of mitigating risk of distractions or interruption. Given the somewhat sensitive nature of the topic it was deemed important that the young person was able to feel comfortable and at ease with his/her surroundings. A space within a familiar environment was therefore considered to be most suitable (Smith & Osborn, 2015; Willig, 2008).

Given that the viewing of sexually explicit material by individuals under the age of 18 is technically illegal in the UK (FPA, 2015), and the ethical issues associated with this, participants were not asked about their direct personal experiences of SEM. Rather participants were asked about their general views and the experiences of their peer group and those within their school/social community with regards to direct questions relating to SEM.

Interviews were semi-structured with four prompt questions broadly covering the four research questions included (Appendix I). The main premise of the interviews was to encourage an open-ended discussion with prompt questions utilised to ensure the main research questions were covered. A semi-structured interview method can be effective in discussing a potentially emotionally complex issue (such as sexual education and sexually explicit media) in depth with adolescents as it may help to uncover deeper thought processes and ideas (Hilton, 2006). Interviews were recorded using an audio device and transcribed within one month.

3.4 Piloting

Sampson (2004) identified piloting as a useful tool for both refining research instruments and in considering issues with data collection, validity and ethics. The information sheet, consent form and initial prompt question structure of the interviews was piloted with two eighteen-year-old individuals (one male, one female). This helped to identify that the secondary information provided was clear and with accessible language for the age-range. The prompt questions were also trialed to ensure that they allowed for open ended discussion and were amenable to the age group.

3.5 Data analysis

A thematic analysis (TA) approach to analysing the interview data was taken. TA may be used to identify patterned meaning across data and offers a range of advantages to psychological research (Table 10).

Table 10 – Advantages of thematic analysis

TA Advantages:
Flexibility; It is a relatively easy and quick method to learn and to complete; TA is accessible to researchers with little or no experience of qualitative research; Results are generally accessible to general, educated public; TA is a useful method for working within participatory research, working with participants as collaborators; It can summarise key features of a large body of data, and/or offer a 'thick description' of the data set; Can highlight similarities and differences across a data set; Unanticipated insights can be generated; Allows for social interpretations of data; Can be useful for producing qualitative analyses which may be suited to informing policy development.

(Braun & Clarke, 2006).

It is noted that there are also potential pitfalls in the use of TA however through the production of an insufficient or weak analysis of themes, which may be confounded through researcher bias/subjectivity (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013).

To combat such pitfalls, the data was analysed and re-analysed a number of times, with themes and sub-themes reviewed and reframed on numerous separate occasions with fresh insight in attempts to ensure that the analysis is representative of the data set. A personal research diary, identified as a useful tool in such a design by Silverman (2013), also maintained a level of objectivity to the data and analysis.

Broadly, analysis of the data covered the six stages of TA as identified by Braun & Clarke (2006) (Table 11).

Table 11 – The six stages of thematic analysis

1) Familiarisation with data
2) Generating initial codes
3) Searching for themes based on initial coding
4) Reviewing themes (see Appendix L)
5) Defining and naming themes
6) Report writing

(Braun & Clarke, 2006)

The analysis was data-led with coding guided by the data rather than through application of theory in keeping with a semantic analysis style (Patton, 2015). Given the critical realist position of the researcher, a link between experience/meaning and language is assumed, with TA being used as a tool which acknowledges the meaning that individuals may make of their experiences.

Subsequently, themes were identified at the semantic, rather than the latent, level with the aim being to reflect the reality of participants through viewing the explicit meaning of their words (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The initial themes were reviewed and five themes defined, with associated sub-themes identified within each, as may be typical within a thematic analysis approach (Howitt, 2013). The resulting thematic map is shown in Figure 4.

Due to the semantic nature of the data analysis this also meant that the data set was considered as a whole, rather than by gender for instance. Given the requirement for participants to speak of others rather than themselves it may also not have been possible to identify if participants were talking of experiences by either males or females. Exploring

views by gender however may be an interesting avenue for further investigation to identify any particular gender differences in opinion regarding this topic.

3.6 Validity and Reliability

As with many qualitative data analysis techniques, findings may be subject to issues of validity and reliability. Validity refers to the extent to which the research measures, explains or describes what it aims to measure, explain or describe (Leung, 2013; Silverman, 1993). Reliability refers to exact replicability of the results and processes (Leung, 2015; Silverman, 1993). To an extent there may also be difficulties in representativeness/generalisability of qualitative data (Leung, 2015; Willig, 2008), although it is recognised that qualitative research itself may not often be generalisable due to its focus on a specific issue within a specific context at a certain time.

The extent to which qualitative research should be concerned with reliability is additionally somewhat debated given its interpretative nature and individual focus (Willig, 2008). This is especially pertinent when researching changing contexts – which may be applicable to the population encountered in this study given the pace of technological change for adolescents today (as discussed by Bannister et al, 1994 in Yardley, 2000). Whilst the generalisability, or transferability of this study is limited due to its limited context, drawing participants from relatively high achieving schools, reaching theoretical saturation within the data set means that the findings may be considered generalisable within this given context. This is further discussed in section 1.4.2 of the critical appraisal.

Throughout the research process there remains consideration of researcher influence or demand characteristics (with participants possibly reporting what they thought the researcher wanted to hear), as discussed in section 1.4.3 of the critical appraisal. There is also consideration that participants talking about the experiences of others may impact upon reliability, although it is noted that speaking of others may also act as a useful tool when discussing emotive topics (see section 1.3.2 of the critical appraisal). In order to maintain a sound and rigorous study and to mitigate against such considerations, measures

were put in place as suggested by Yardley (2000, 2015) Lincoln & Guba (1985). Through these measures the study maintained integrity through promoting validity and reliability.

In her work, Yardley (2015, 2000) put forward strategies which may be applied to enhance both validity and reliability within qualitative studies; some of which are applied to this study. Measures such as comparing initial coding of data with others (to triangulate perspectives) and disconfirming case analysis (to test emerging hypothesis) were applied in order to ensure robustness in the study and, to this extent, to support its quality in design and purpose. Steps were also taken to ensure that the research was carried out with sensitivity, commitment and transparency – criteria which Yardley (2000) identified as being essential for good qualitative research. Further detailed information regarding these strategies applied throughout the research process may be found in Appendix J.

Lincoln & Guba (1985) further suggest that there are four criteria of 'trustworthiness' which may support qualitative research in evaluating its worth and thus ensuring its credibility. These four criteria are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability, and Lincoln & Guba (1985) suggest various techniques which may be used to conduct 'trustworthy' research (detailed in Appendix K). Although some of the techniques may overlap with those suggested by Yardley (2000, or 2015) – such as 'member-checking' (which may be akin to consulting with others on data analysis), or 'prolonged engagement' (which could also be viewed as showing commitment and rigour) - a number of these techniques were additionally applied during the research process and are detailed in Appendix K.

3.7 Ethical considerations

Ethical approval in accordance with the British Psychological Society's Code of Practice and Ethics Committee and the standards for research set out by the Health & Care Professions Council (Health & Care Professions Council, 2012; The British Psychological Society, 2000) was granted from the Cardiff University ethics committee prior to commencing the study. Given the context of the study there were a number of ethical issues which were addressed via the research design. These considerations are shown in Table 12.

Table 12 – Ethical considerations regarding the study and how they were addressed

Ethical Issue	How addressed
Informed consent	Although parental consent may not usually be required for those aged 16 or over (Shaw, Brady, & Davey, 2011); given the nature of the study it was deemed appropriate to gain consent for participation in this instance. Both parents/legal guardians and the young person were required to provide written consent prior to participation in the study (see Appendix H). Participants were provided with a full information sheet on the nature and purpose of the project prior to the interview, which was also discussed in person with them (see Appendix G).
Confidentiality	Audio recordings of the interviews were stored securely on a password-encrypted laptop and, once transcribed and rendered anonymous, deleted. The transcribed interview data was anonymous and untraceable with no names of participants, staff, schools, local areas or other contextual information will be included. Transcribed interview participants were given an identifying code to allow for identification of supporting quotes.
Right to withdraw	The information sheet and debrief sheet provided to participants informed them that they were under no obligation to answer any questions that they did not want to during the interview. Participants were able to discontinue or withdraw from the study at any time prior to, during, or within 2 weeks from, the interview and were provided with contact details in this instance (see Appendix G).
Debriefing	Participants were fully debriefed post interview and provided with further information to take away with them to ensure their comfort, in accordance with guidelines by Harris (1998). Participants were also signposted to further services and were able to request further discussion

	with a member of school staff if they wished to discuss anything further (see Appendix G).
Sensitivity of the topic	Participants were not asked about their own direct experience of, or use of, SEM. Due to the fact that the viewing of sexually explicit material by individuals under the age of 18 is technically illegal in the UK (FPA, 2015) participants were informed prior to the interview starting that if they reveal that they had viewed SEM then this information would need to be passed on to the safeguarding officer within the school (see Appendix G).

4 Results and Discussion

The main themes and sub-themes, shown in Figure 4, present a rich and balanced review of the findings from the data set.

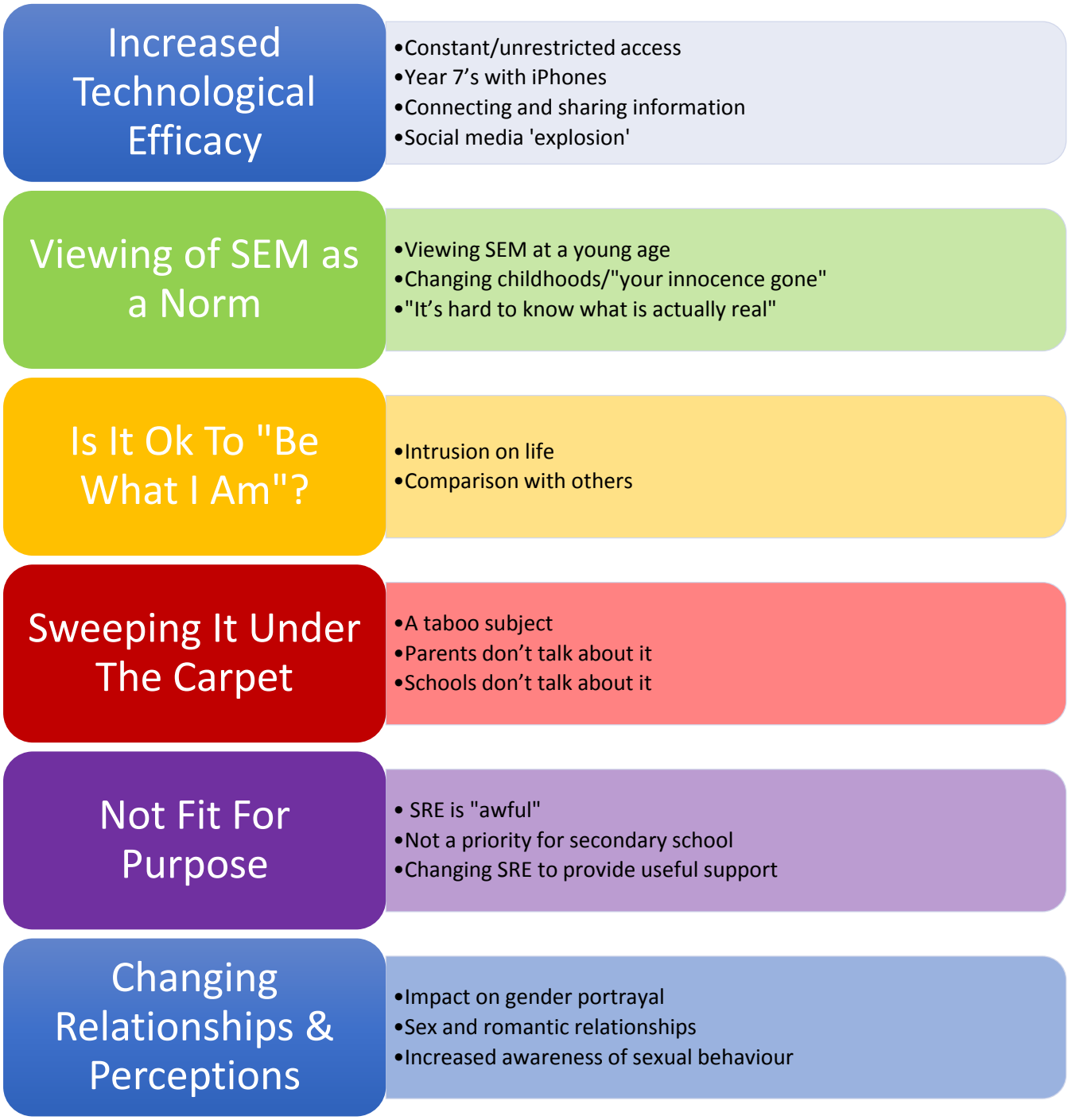

Figure 4 – Thematic map of the themes and sub-themes arising from thematic analysis of the interview data

Throughout the data SRE is discussed negatively by all participants in terms of secondary school experience. Additionally, there is a tendency for participants to talk about SEM negatively, particularly with regards to it being accessed by those younger than the participants (below the age of 16). For instance:

> *"Well yea, I think it's [SEM] a bad thing" (P2, line 14)*

> *"I think [because of SEM] they're gonna have unrealistic expectations of how sex should be and how relationships should be….And I don't think it's healthy, I think in terms of how boys see women and how girls feel about themselves, I don't think it's healthy" (P3, lines 93-99)*

> *"I don't think anyone should ever be exposed to it, and especially not when you're a child, or even as a young teenager" (P4, line 146)*

> *"I: You said it can have a really big impact on some people's lives, is that a positive or a negative impact?*
> *P6: I think that it's mainly negative just because of how people might start to view themselves…" (P6, line 192)*

This negativity is found throughout the themes and sub-themes of the data and as such is not highlighted as an individual topic in itself. Instead the focus is on themes that aim to highlight different aspects of participants' perspectives.

It is acknowledged that such findings may in part be due to the necessity of participants to talk of the experiences of others rather than their own direct experiences with SEM (as required in the research design). This may perhaps have led to a 'them and us' effect (or demand characteristics) whereby participants take on a roll of colluding with the researcher to present what they feel is the 'right answer'. Whilst efforts to minimise this effect were taken, and discussed further in section 3.6 of this paper and within the critical appraisal, such factors should be considered in interpretation of the results.

It is further recognised that despite this general disapproval that there are a few occasions when SEM may be spoken of neutrally, or in a more positive light. In order to provide a balanced and fair account of participant views these instances are exemplified where present, for instance in the sub-themes of 'Increased awareness of sexual behaviour' or

'Viewing SEM at a young age'. Therefore, whilst it is generally acknowledged that SEM is viewed by participants as a negative for individuals younger than 16 years of age, for some participants this negative impact may not be deemed as harmful in later adolescence or when SEM may be viewed as educational in nature.

In the resulting discussion each main theme is considered in relation to the research questions (see Table 9) in order to assist in making sense of the findings and contextualising them within the aims of the study.

Sub-themes are italicised and exemplary quotes from the data are given to support the discussion. A full report of supporting quotations may be found in Appendix O.

4.1 Increased technological efficacy

Participants cited the role of technology, and young people's increasing use and understanding of technology, as playing a big part in access to SEM. There is a perceived increase in adolescents now having *constant/unrestricted access* to the internet, and thus SEM (exclusively stated as being through smartphones). The age of use of such technology is reported as becoming younger and younger (P4, line 181 and P7, line 7) with *year 7's with iPhones* being a defining summary of the modern day school experience. This was linked to perceived unrestricted access to SEM (Table 13):

Table 13 – Supporting quotes regarding the sub themes 'constant/unrestricted access' and 'Year 7's with iPhones'

"Like my little brother and his friends were talking about something the other day and I was just like ew, like it's just so easy for them to see this stuff nowadays. It's just, well that's just like the norm" (P4, line 181)
"I've got a younger brother and he's only in year 8 and they're already talking about um, like, sexually explicit media and things they find on the internet and I think that's quite like worrying really 'cos it's just like not what you'd expect for a person of that age…do you know what I mean?" (P7, line 7)
"Because obviously now like technology has advanced and I walk round school and I see like a year 7 with like an iPhone 7 you know and it's like whoa ok. Cause like a few years

ago like you wouldn't see that" (P5, line 8)

"And like everyone now has a smartphone and everyone has access to the internet so I mean if you want to find it then you can, it's not hard to find……but then if you're on 4g or whatever then you can see what you want and I don't think those blocks work. And anyway it's sent round so….." (P6, line 55)

"I don't know of any blocks or anything to stop them looking at stuff. So it's just there for them and they can see literally anything, like all the, like, the sexually explicit media and stuff, there's nothing to stop young people looking at it if you've got like an iphone or whatever" (P2, line 77).

Such findings are congruent with recent research suggesting increased access to SEM by adolescents (Martellozzo et al., 2017; Parker, 2014) and suggest perhaps that access may be more unrestricted than has currently been reported. Such quotations, as seen in Table 14, also highlight the *connecting and sharing of information* which technology allows, with SEM reportedly shared between adolescents through technology, with a *social media "explosion"* playing a role here:

> *"I think in recent years obviously like technology, social media, has exploded and there are things and this kind of stuff [sexualised images] everywhere"* (P5, line 84)

Table 14 – Supporting quotes regarding the sub-themes 'connecting and sharing of information' and 'social media "explosion"'

"Because we have so much contact with each other that if one person's seen it then it's going to get spread around." (P6, line 40)
"So on Instagram…..you will come across pictures of naked people or pictures that link to sexual activities in a relationship, and obviously you see that so obviously younger people can see that too. And then on snapchat I've seen people's nudes being put on other people's stories for everyone to see. Like I know people who've been involved with sending and receiving sexually explicit media. So I think it, social media, links significantly to it [sexually explicit media] as well." (P5, line 397).
"It's a lot more in your face and a lot more….people know more…you know people in primary school know things they probably shouldn't do at that age because of their access to social media and things like that." (P4, line 128)
"I think in recent years obviously like technology, social media has exploded and there are things everywhere,. and this kind of stuff [SEM] everywhere" (P5, line 214)

There was an appreciation from one male participant that widespread access to a range of SEM shared online could be a good thing as adolescents could then see more 'realistic' sexual encounters:

> *"But I think it's good that it's on smart phones now 'cos it means there's more of it [SEM] which, some people might see as a bad thing 'cos you're more likely to be exposed to it, but then 'cos there's more of it you're more likely to get a realistic view. Like in a magazine it's more likely to be porn stars and stuff like that but then online you've still got the porn start side to it but then there's average people who are online just sharing stuff like that which might be more 'normal*." (P1, line 107).

The extent to which adolescents are able to differentiate between reality and fiction through media however has been documented in literature (Vilanni, 2001) with separation between the real and the virtual world increasingly difficult, especially so perhaps for the younger adolescent (Carr, 2011). It may be that P1 was able to reflect upon his personal experience with the cognitive awareness that late adolescence brings (Choudhury et al., 2006; Steinberg, 2005), giving caution to interpreting that younger adolescents may equally be able to identify between the virtual and reality. It is also noted that participants would not have had the same experiences when they were 12 and 13 years old in comparison to those younger adolescents whom many described, with the advent of the smartphone identified by all as a key precursor in the wide access to SEM – something which was seen as markedly different to participants own experiences just some five years on. Accordingly, participants frequently had a sense of nostalgia for a pre-smartphone era with almost all participants stating that they would not have liked to have had access to the same technology when they were younger. For example:

> *"When I was in year 7 I didn't think about that, it wasn't in my mind at all 'cos I would have no way of accessing that or even coming across it accidentally. I was protected in a way. And maybe they're not protected these days."* (P2, line 379)

4.2 Viewing of SEM as a Norm

All participants were forthcoming in reporting that *viewing SEM at a young age* was the norm in their experiences:

> *"It's such like a widespread thing now, like everyone from year 7 upwards views it."* (P8, L628)

Whilst the overall opinion was negativity regarding the viewing of SEM, especially by younger age groups (frequently referred to as year 7 or year 8 pupils), some participants felt that perhaps individuals were better placed to deal with SEM as they got older (see P6, line 151 in Table 15). This may be linked to social development theories of increased awareness and notions of the self as adolescence progresses (Bresnick, Bouchey & Whitesell, 1997). Such views are not conclusive however with others feeling that later adolescents or even adults should still not be exposed to aspects of SEM (P4, line 93 and P3, line 121). Further focused research would be helpful to further investigate this perception of 'coping'.

Table 15 – Quotes supporting the sub-theme 'viewing SEM at a young age'

"I: So in your peer group, what kind of age was it that people would start talking about it [SEM]? B: Really young. Like 12, 13" (P1, L197)
"Like loads of young people see it nowadays like you're always hear of young kids, year 7, year 8 and they're talking about that these things they've seen on the Internet and like everyone my age as well. So you can see it, like it's just really widespread it's just quite, just normal now...common to see it." (P8, L45)
"I've got a younger brother and he's only in year 8 and they're already talking about um, like, sexually explicit media and things they find on the internet and I think that's quite like worrying really cause it's just like not what you'd expect for a person of that age…do you know what I mean?" (P7, L7)
"As you get older you start to have a wider experience of the real world, so you're more likely to be able to know what the difference is. But when you're 13, 14 you have pretty much no experience of things like that, but as you get older you do just learn how to differentiate between oh well that's real and that's not." (P6, L151)
"At 16…well maybe at that age…sex is kind of becoming a part of your life but also I still think you're a bit young to be exposed to that…I mean the level and extremity of a lot of sexually explicit media, I think 16 is too young to see that, you're still too young to have to look at and deal with, and process, stuff like that. So yea definitely under the age of 16 is too young and possibly under 18. But yea the younger you are it's worse, like say people in year 7 I don't want them to have to mature that quickly." (P4, L93)
"I certainly think it's a negative think that young people should be able to access that sort of stuff without…any sort of control, I mean they can be seeing something that even adults shouldn't necessarily be comfortable seeing so like, if you're really young and you're seeing that then it's going to mess with your head more…" (P3, L121)

Such views were linked to perceived impacts of SEM on both social and emotional development through *changing childhoods*, with P4 suggesting that SEM exposure can mean "*your innocence gone*":

"It's like once you've seen it then that's your innocence gone then isn't it, you can't get it back." (P4, line 69)

The word 'innocence' was often mentioned, with SEM, and technology alongside this, seeming to alter childhood, forcing adult material into consciousness (Table 16).

Table 16 – Quotes supporting the sub-theme 'changing childhoods'

"Seeing this sexually explicit media and stuff like that and thinking that they need to grow up and be doing that, 'cos they're kids you know, you should be a kid" (P5, line 125)
"Like what's wrong with being a kid now, everyone just wants to grow up and it's like you're forced to grow up 'cos of all this adult stuff that you can see, that you really don't need to….I mean you don't need to see that, 'cos it's stuff for adults and you're not an adult, so you should just be allowed to be a kid for as long as possible." (P7, line 42)
"Like some of the things I overhear year 7s talking about, I'm shocked and I just think like we weren't like that when we were that age. I think people are much more like open with each other and showing off about things like that rather than being shy about it, 'cos it's so out there and people can see it so much." (P2, line 144)
"I think it does put a lot of pressure on having an opinion on sex a lot younger than maybe older generations would have" (P4, line 54)

There were also concerns that SEM brings unrealistic views of the world and, as P6 articulates, for some "*it's hard to know what is actually real"*:

"It's hard to know (like) what is actually real, like what is real life." (P6, line 132)

This brings up questions of what is 'normal' for young people today and what their views of realistic expectations may be. Indeed this may be supported by social learning and ecological psychological theory with participants having concerns that the behaviour of others will be shaped by what they see around them and their interaction with the environment (Bandura & Walters, 1969; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Long, 2011). Table 17 provides further supporting quotes regarding participants' views in this guise, with frequent references to such concerns that others' realities will be negatively shaped by what may be seen in SEM.

Table 17 – Quotes supporting the sub-theme "it's hard to know what is actually real"

"I think they're gonna have unrealistic expectations of how sex should be and how relationships should be" (P3, line 93)
"I think a lot of it it's not an actual representation of how things are in the real world and I think if a lot of your education comes from sexually explicit media then you'll get a warped idea of what's actually real so you don't actually know what's real and what's not." (P6, line 91).
"I certainly think it's a negative think that **young** people should be able to access sort of stuff without any sort of, any sort of control, I mean they can be seeing something that even adults shouldn't necessarily be comfortable seeing so like, if you're really young and you're seeing that then it's going to mess with your head more and make you think more about how well that's how people are" (P3, line 124)

What was interesting in conversation was that many participants expressed concern at younger adolescents' access to SEM, seemingly feeling that at the age of 16-18 they were more able to handle such material. Such feelings may be linked to theoretical views of social learning and social cognitive development which may suggest that the older adolescent (16 years +) has further developed their social self, thus becoming more competent in interpreting and managing behaviour and emotions (Choudhury et al., 2006). Expressions of dissatisfaction with SEM (discussed herein) suggest that there were many negative emotions however with regards to the general widespread accessibility of SEM, regardless of the age at which it was accessed.

4.3 Is it ok to "be what I am"?

Dissatisfaction was a key emotion expressed, with the availability of both technology and SEM, with participants expressing concerns about feelings of self-worth both related to physical and emotional development, or self-image:

> *"I think it is hard for someone to just look in the mirror and think to themselves it's ok to be what I am"* (P5, L226)

This was linked to the impact of both technology and SEM as an *intrusion on life*, with technology bringing SEM and social media when they may be unwanted (Table 18). The use of the word 'intrusion' is therefore chosen to signify a disturbance or imposition to the lives of participants, with SEM generally viewed as something which is a negative impact. The word 'innocence' again came up, with participants feeling that smartphones in particular may contribute to such issues (P8, line 213 for instance).

Table 18 –Quotes supporting the sub-theme 'intrusion on life'

"Even when actually if you think about it it's not actually that good a thing to have a smartphone, I mean yea you can see information and stuff a lot but all the social media….I mean does it actually make anyone's lives better?!" (P5, line 149)
"Especially in primary school, children should be kept as they are. Like not just have a smart phone and be able to look at everything, just have your childhood." (P2, line 320) "You could just be like on a website and then suddenly you've got inappropriate images and obviously when you're younger that's quite scary and you won't like….it's putting people in a vulnerable position when they don't want to be." (P4, line 41)
"I: And why do you think now, looking back, you wouldn't have wanted you to have one? [a phone] M: 'Cos I think it's just quite dangerous, it's just like you get so….people can get quite addicted to it you know. They have their phone as, like, their regular routine and I think you just get bored of reality almost because you're almost on virtual things. It's not real, it's not real connections with people, you're just looking at your own phone instead. You're not out there doing things, you're just on your phone as the main thing in your life." (P7, line 171)
"If I had a smartphone when I was, like 12 or whatever, like they do now, then I just don't know if I could have dealt with that, you know. When I was 12 I was still innocent and didn't know about sex, well not like the sex you see in a lot of sexually explicit media, and that was just a simpler time you know….kids should be innocent you know, like you're a kid when you're 12, you should just be a kid and not worry about this stuff." (P8, line 213)

SEM, and also social media, were frequently cited as leading to *comparison with others* (Table 19). This was mainly reported by the female participants in terms of both body image and sexual behaviour, although comparison with others in terms of school work and general life was also discussed (see P5, line 88).

This is in keeping with the majority of correlational research regarding social media and unhealthy comparison (Bolton et al., 2013; Krayer, Ingledew, & Iphofen, 2008; Perloff, 2014)

furthermore suggesting that SEM may be having a similar and more far-reaching impact in terms of sexual behaviour comparison. This is something which is highlighted by adult studies in relation to pornography (McKee, 2007; Short, Black, Smith, Wetterneck, & Wells, 2011).

Such objectification is in keeping with the view that young people, especially girls, who share provocative or sexual imagery of themselves may be engaging in a form of self-objectification in which they begin to see, and treat, their bodies as objects of others' desires. The American Psychological Association (2007) suggest that, in this way, the adolescent may internalise the perspectives of the 'observers', treating their physical appearance as something to be looked at and evaluated by others online – as also discussed by Brown, Keller, & Stern (2009). It may be that participants were led to identify SEM as contributing to such issues due to the focus of the research and that a wider range of [online] media may be impacting here; further clarification may be sought through more focused future research.

Table 19 – Quotes supporting the sub-theme 'comparison with others'

"Like there's pressure to be good in school and all this anyway and then pressure on how you need to look and how you need to be having sex and that you need to be having sex….and it's just like….too much…you know. " (P5, line 188)
"Girls might be more thinking like, oh well, girls look like that in porn so that, you know, especially when you're young and you've got access to it, then girls might be thinking that they need to have like really big boobs, and immaculate bodies, and no body hair…." (P3, line 57)
"I think it is the expectation on themselves and the expectation of other people to be able to live up to that and be able to look like that and act like that" (P2, line 274)
"Like some girls know what guys have seen and so they feel like they're not good enough and so they have to, step up to the mark and be like that. Like, they might feel that there's a certain expectation that they have to be a certain way. I mean some girls might feel that they're not good enough and are like oh well they've seen this and I need to live up to that, like the expectation that they need to be like this" (P8, line 105)

4.4 Sweeping it under the carpet

SEM was frequently cited as a *'taboo' subject* and one shrouded in secrecy (Table 20*).* It was accepted that SEM was not something which was ever freely discussed by parents or by schools*,* something which was deemed to be negatively impacting upon the impact that SEM has on adolescents' ability to deal with, and negotiate, SEM. It was often expressed by participants across the three schools that, regarding SEM, *parents don't talk about it* and *schools don't talk about it* (Table 21).

There was one participant (P1, L118) who also felt that because SEM is seen as a taboo subject then its appeal increases to young people. Such thoughts may be linked to theories of adolescent risk taking, with seemingly dangerous or illicit activities often linked to adolescent identity development (Dryfoos, 1998, Ernst, Pine & Harding, 2006).

Table 20 – Supporting quotes regarding the sub-theme 'a taboo subject'

"Well yea 'cos no-one talks to young people enough or just skirts around stuff like this and then it's like, well you're not talking to us about it so what do you want us to do about it. Let's all just not talk about it and hope it goes away." (P4, line 359)
"It's [SEM] just not spoken about really. I mean compared to how available it is I don't think it is spoken about nearly as much as it perhaps should be" (P6, line 8)
"I think it's good to have exposure to it because the more taboo something is then the more chance people are going to be excited and going to want to do it" (P1, line 118)
"I think making it more open is important. Because when things are more open it makes young people less susceptible to believing things that aren't real or that aren't realistic that they come across on the internet, it's easier for them to ask and things like that." (P2, line 422)
"I: Ok do you think it needs to be a taboo subject? D: I don't think so cause it's part of life really, especially now with things you can see online it can't really be a taboo because of how widespread it is, you can't just sweep that under a rug cause it's such a big thing." (P6, line 407)
"I still think it's very much a taboo subject. I mean it's not so much that sex is something that shouldn't be discussed, I think it should be in a safe way, but I think sexually explicit media is something that everyone kind of dodges around cause I don't think anyone wants to face the situation head on and actually say well is it appropriate….is it not." (P4, line 226)

"I think it just needs to stop being so taboo cause it is just so widespread." (P6, line 173)

Participants felt quite strongly, and some quite angrily, about this lack of communication; feeling that schools in particular were letting them down in some way (see P1, line 266). This feeling of being let down by school was linked in many ways to the sense of dissatisfaction with the quality of SRE provided. Schools were seen as frequently providing support regarding drugs and alcohol, yet neglecting to provide support regarding SEM (Table 21). It may be seen that SEM could be as harmful in some ways to emotional and mental health – although there is currently not sufficient evidence to support such an assumption. Given that young people are asking for support with SEM within SRE however suggests that this is an area which needs urgent addressing.

Table 21 – Supporting quotes regarding the sub-themes "Parents don't talk about it" and "Schools don't talk about it"

"Why is it just like this secret thing that we're not going to talk about. Schools should be teaching us about this stuff, not just leaving us to figure it out, I mean we're the kids you know. Schools should be preparing us for life, they're not preparing us by just sweeping this under the carpet" (P1, line 265)
"Teachers can't just act like it doesn't exist and just let the pupils experience it on their own, I think there needs to be some discussion about it." (P6, line 176)
"They [school] always go on about like drugs or, we had a lesson once on healthy living and all that. But they don't teach about technology enough or things that are actually the most relevant issues for us today. Like feeling shit about yourself is probably a lot more of an issue, I think." (P1, line 226)
"I think maybe at home most parents probably know that it's something that happens but then they don't want to talk about it, it's a conversation that no-one wants to happen." (P2, line 540)
"I would say that probably not many would choose to go to their teachers to talk about stuff like that so yea I would say that there's probably a lack of people out there who they could like talk to about stuff." (P3, line 136)
"I feel like parents don't really know the ins and outs of what their child does or what's going on around their child, despite what they would like to think. So I feel like there is just no escaping it really, even as much as you try." (P5, line 462)

Such feelings of secrecy and a lack of communication linked in to concerns that the available SRE curriculum is out of date or not fit for purpose within schools, which again were not viewed as open spaces for dialogue or discussion. The concept of SRE in its current form was investigated in more detail with participants in order to identify current school experiences and also how SRE may be utilised as a vehicle within which communication lines could be opened up.

4.5 Not Fit For Purpose

> *"You go into a school and you have a sex ed and stuff like that and its' awful, absolutely awful, it's just the worst thing ever and it gives you a really clinical look on it"* (P1, line 16)

In terms of views regarding SRE, all participants reported dissatisfaction with the quality of SRE that they received at secondary school, such as articulated by P1 above that *SRE is "awful"*. All participants across the three schools furthermore felt that SRE is *not fit for purpose* or *seen as a priority by secondary school*. Within this it was acknowledged that schools should be teaching about SEM, although it was evident that providing this within SRE would require a major overhaul of existing SRE provision.

Whilst it was acknowledged by some that SRE at primary school had been useful, within secondary school it was seen as something which was not deemed a priority and which was not appropriate for the experiences and lifestyle of the modern day adolescent. This is in keeping with recent discussion regarding the quality of SRE within Wales (Welsh Government, 2017). Such dissatisfaction with SRE led one participant to view SEM as his main source of education regarding sex and relationships (P1, line 18 - Table 22).

Table 22 – Quotes supporting the sub-themes of 'SRE not fit for purpose' and 'not a priority for secondary school'

"It was just kind of like rushed and they wanted to get it out the way, like it was just something they just felt they had to get through and then just brush it under the carpet…..Well just like they didn't think it was important and couldn't be bothered to talk about it" (P5, line 310)
"It's not about relationships should be and how things are unhealthy in relationships and what should be expected if you are in a relationship, like respect and treating people

properly and all that. It's like if someone was mistreating you or something I don't think people would understand or if someone's just using someone for sex and stuff I don't think they'll understand that because they haven't learnt it. And then they just think oh well that's normal 'cos that's what they are seeing, not what they've been taught." (P7, line 169)

"I came away from it with nothing really helpful, I mean it sort of scares you about se whereas sexually explicit media can help as shows you that it's something that's you need to be afraid of and that it can be a good thing." (P1, line 18)

"I can't talk about my experiences because I never have any sex and relationship education in high school.
I: You didn't have any…
C: No. It clearly wasn't a massive priority." (P2, L347)

"You could tell that they felt uncomfortable about it, it was people talking about it in a really clinical way. I had the scariest teacher in the world and she sort of just…it was just awkward" (P1, L311)

"Like it was just kind of touched upon, like wasn't actually in depth." (P8, L244)

"I think that schools should definitely be making it a priority" (P2, L468)

Changing SRE to provide useful support, and support which is also appropriate, to adolescents was wholeheartedly welcomed and requested. Views on how SRE should be delivered within schools however was mixed amongst participants, although all agreed that it should include aspects of SEM and how to be resilient online/in the face of social media. There was also consensus that SRE needed to be delivered more often, at a younger age and through face-to-face lessons rather than through videos or written material. Having someone available in the school setting who could be approached for questions or issues was deemed an important and reassuring factor for most participants – see Table 23 below.

Table 23 – *Quotes supporting the sub-theme 'changing SRE to provide useful support'*

"I: So the teacher makes a difference?
P2 Yea I think it's important to have someone who young people can talk to". (P2, L553)

"I think it needs to be changed….because people are a lot more open with sex and sexuality now, that schools do treat it that it's quite….well you have that sex education in year 6 and then it's never spoken about again, like that's it you've had that now there you go. And I think it needs to be spoken about a lot more and needs to be more frequent, cause as you go like 12, 13, 14 you do get quite a lot more exposure to, like, sexually explicit media, so I think that you need to have PSE around those ages as well, not just

when you're in year 6." (P6, L231)

"Because it's just all about puberty and biology and how your body develops, it's not about relationships should be and how things are unhealthy in relationships and what should be expected if you are in a relationship, like respect and treating people properly and all that". (P7, L170)

"They [schools] should be saying, in terms of body image, that there can be examples of things that aren't realistic. And they should be teaching them that images on stuff like Instagram isn't always the way that things really are either, you know…to help people to not have issues about their self-esteem". (P1, L217)

"I: And when do you think they should being spoken to about sexually explicit media?
D: I think probably around the age of 13 because, like especially now people are getting their hands on smartphones a lot earlier than they used to be so I think that it doesn't necessarily need to be too early, like you could get a bit of a weird view but I think at 13 it needs to be introduced, talking about it and I don't think they should get all the education at once because they will be a bit of an overload" (P4, L529)

"Like maybe they should be teaching us like what do you do if you want to talk to your boyfriend, or girlfriend, or whatever about stuff like this and sexually explicit media or looking at pictures on Instagram…."(P8, L202)

"..and boys need to be taught about this stuff I think, like taught about how that would make someone feel and how they should approach stuff. And how to treat each other. Like the same for girls too to help them so they don't feel that well if you want to be sexy then you need to post pictures of yourself in this and that and hardly any clothes" (P8, L208)

4.6 Changing relationships & perceptions

Participants felt that exposure to SEM may be having an *impact on gender portrayal* – suggesting that males and females may have to behave in certain ways sexually or appear in certain ways to the opposite sex. This was linked to discussion around *sex and romantic relationships*, with many participants feeling that relationships amongst their peers may be overly sexual in nature, focusing more on sex rather than feelings (Table 24). It is not possible to directly attribute this to SEM however and further research would be needed to ascertain the role of SEM here, however there are worrying reports of adolescents feeling pressure from SEM to act a certain way in a relationship (see P8, line 53 and line 66 and P6, line 160). Taking behavioural and ecological psychological stances, such reports are

concerning for the future wellbeing of today's young people as their views of the world, including sex and relationships, will be moulded by their experiences during adolescence (Bouchey & Furman, 2005).

Table 24 – Supporting quotes relating to the sub-themes 'impact on gender portrayal' and 'sex and romantic relationships'

"For boys who stereotypically might repress that, like not talk about how they feel, then with their self-esteem it's a massive thing 'cos they think they need to be like how these things, the media they see is and that's how they need to be when they're in a relationship; and also how their girlfriend should be as well. Like if she's not like that, what they think is the norm, then is there something wrong" (P2, line 200)
"It's like men have to be that certain sort of attitude and behaviour that sort of goes with porn 'cos it means that they get the girls" (P3 line 76)
"Because I think people will see these things online and think ah well that's how I'm supposed to act and that's how I'm supposed to be. And then that's how they think that they have to act when they're in a relationship. So yeah, I think it does affect relationships. Like I heard a story about this girl and this guy that were going out and the guy was saying to the girl that she had to do all these things, it was like someone I know. And she didn't want to do these things but he said that that's how people had sex when they're in a relationship and kind of put pressure on her to do these things that she didn't want to" (P8, line 53).
"I've got mates at other schools and they say that girls do stuff to the guys, like in the toilets at school or like after school and stuff like that. And most the time the girls don't want to but the guys say that if that girl doesn't do it then he'll just find another girl who will. So the girl thinks she has to" (P8, line 66)
"Like a mate, a guy, wanted to do stuff with his Mrs and she just thought he was disgusting, and then he didn't feel that great I don't think, but then it's like there's these people in sexually explicit media and then there's real life, and I don't know…. maybe it was like disappointed like" (P6, line 160)

Not all the reports from participants were negative regarding SEM , with some speaking of the educational benefit that they felt may come from SEM, bringing *increased awareness of sexual behaviour* – although it was noted that older adolescents would benefit most from this (see P1, line 9) and that communication with partners would be important also (see P6, line 158) (Table 25). This is in keeping with some previous global findings suggesting that SEM may be used for educational purposes (Peter & Valkenburg, 2016; Trostle, 2003),

although the age and extent of exposure may be important here in providing benefit rather than harm.

***Table 25* – Supporting quotes regarding the sub-theme '*increased awareness of sexual behaviour*'**

"I mean it [SRE] sort of scares you about sex whereas sexually explicit media can help as shows you that it's not something that you need to be afraid of and that it can be a good thing" (P1, line 19)
"I mean if you've got someone who's never been exposed to it at all and then they have sexual encounter they've got no idea what to expect realistically, they don't know what they're doing, what it's going to be like, you'd have people afraid of what it's going to be like, people who are nervous and that's not helpful in life and leads to you not having good experiences" (P1, line 42)
"Then it's a tug of war between those people who want to see it and those who don't and those people, like some boys I know, who think its educational and those that think it's awful." (P4, line 230)
"I guess for some people it might make them feel like they're learning something, like learning how to be sexual in a relationship, but in my experience that usually isn't really a good thing 'cos actually it's not real and your partner might not like that" (P6, line 158)

4.6 Summary

This exploratory study has given insight into the experiences of young people today in relation to both SEM and SRE provision. Discussion of the findings in relation to the research questions has focused the analysis in order to answer the questions posed (Table 9), though it is acknowledged that data may also have served to answer additional questions such as adolescents' use of technology within school or the way in which they communicate with peers.

Building upon previous studies describing increased exposure to SEM (Baker, 2015; Martellozzo et al., 2017), participants describe SEM as being a normative experience for today's adolescent, whether through direct exposure, or awareness of such media through peer relationships and discussion. The extent to which such normative experiences are deemed to be socially or morally acceptable from an adult viewpoint is a discussion that prevails within wider society; and it is an interesting contribution to this debate that the

young people in this study generally viewed SEM exposure in younger children (below the ages of 13-14 years old) as 'wrong'. There were also reports of individuals as young as 11 years old openly discussing SEM. This appears to be an increase in younger exposure to SEM than discussed in previous studies, although the limited sample size pertains that such experiences may not be widely generalised.

Dissatisfaction with the accessibility of SEM is highlighted, particularly for younger individuals, with all participants feeling that viewing SEM aged 11 or 12 is 'wrong'. This presents stronger feelings than the 37.1% in Baker's (2015) study who agreed with the statement that 'viewing online pornography aged 11-14 years old is bad thing', although the age at which participants in Baker's study felt it was wrong is unknown. The current study allows further insight into such conclusions, with participants feeling that younger adolescents are not ready, physically or emotionally, to be exposed to the wider world of sex, with a loss of innocence frequently cited as an unwanted and saddening impact of SEM availability.

Wider impacts of SEM exposure on changing relationships and comparisons with others are intertwined with worrying discussion of adolescents sharing SEM through social media and technology, something frequently discussed within the UK media (Hughes, 2016; Kentish, 2016). In terms of social and emotional impacts, there are also suggestions that SEM can impact upon body image and self-esteem and subsequently, at times, lead to issues with 'not feeling good enough' – particularly for girls.

Some participants made reference to possible benefits of access to SEM in terms of educating young people about sex. The extent to which this may be appropriate education, or indeed the impact of individuals learning about sexual relationships in this way, is unknown and an area which would warrant further interesting research. Data also points to the sharing of SEM socially through technology, notably amongst boys. It could be argued that in this sense SEM contributes to social conversation and shared constructions of reality formed within peers groups.

All participants reported dissatisfaction with SRE provision with regards to SEM and relevant

information regarding sex, with the topic of SEM described as being taboo and secretive both within the school community and, to an extent, at home. Such views are in keeping with consensus within both England and Wales that changes are required to the SRE curriculum (House of Commons: Women and Equalities Committee, 2016; Hughes, 2016; Welsh Government, 2017) and the analysis above may provide initial insight into changes that may be made.

Whilst Parker's (2014) study suggested that 18 year olds felt that SRE should be delivered by a trained expert, findings here reveal that having someone available within school to answer questions, and promoting openness of communication in SRE (which includes open discussion of SEM), were more important than who delivers the information.

Additionally, there is an overwhelming sense that the young people in this study feel hard done by, perhaps by both their SRE education provision and wider society in its construction of sex as something which adolescents are not meant to have an awareness of or interest in. Alongside this however were views that SEM is changing the way that relationships are formed, with sexual elements of relationships intensified at younger ages through the ease with which SEM (depicting others and also individuals themselves) is able to be shared. Whilst participants viewed this as a bad thing for younger ages, for those participants aged 16-18 this was very much seen as a part of everyday life amongst their peer group and a factor in the development of 'relationships' based around sexual images rather than romantic associations.

There was a general consensus that exposure to SEM cannot easily be controlled and that it is not something which young people are able to be readily shielded from. Consequently, change was described as being desired to support adolescents in their experiences and their understanding of sex and relationships, moving beyond simple biological explanations and being relevant to the world of the adolescent today. Rather than just appropriate education, open and honest communication was also requested as a key factor in facilitating such change. Further discussion and conclusions are reported in chapter 6 and chapter 7.

5 Limitations and Future Research

It is argued that this study provides a unique contribution and valuable insight into identified gaps in existing literature regarding adolescent views of SEM and SRE. This is an exploratory study with a small sample size however, and therefore generalisation to a wider population is limited (Leung, 2015; Willig, 2008). Furthermore, it is recognised that not all adolescents will show similar behaviours or experiences to those documented through this research, with the understanding that there are many factors that may impact upon behaviour, and particularly 'risky' behaviour, in adolescents (Adams & Berzonsky, 2005).

Accordingly, caution should be taken in informing wider legislation or practice. It is also recognised that anecdotal/indirect experiences (as described by participants) may provide some issues of reliability (Hayes, 2000).

Accordingly, future research should aim to gather the views of younger adolescents and also attempt to capture the direct lived experiences of individuals, rather than pertaining that they may only talk about 'others' experiences. Whilst there may be ethical dilemmas in such research it is felt that this will be an important step in gathering further rich and insightful information from which to begin to make positive changes in the realm of SRE provision and support regarding SEM within school settings.

Recognising the small-scale of this report, it would be beneficial for future studies to draw from a wider sample size and a variety of settings, including those more vulnerable pupils. Whilst consultation is currently underway in England regarding SRE, similar consultation in the Welsh context (in line with recommendations from the SRE expert panel) (Welsh Government, 2017), would also be helpful in identifying how an updated SRE provision can fit into the Welsh education system.

6 Implications for educational psychology practice

Providing support to schools, parents and young people regarding social, emotional and behavioural well-being and supported, safe and appropriate education and development provision is a key component of the EP's role (Baker, 2015). Supporting adolescents and schools making sense of, and communicating about, both SEM and SRE falls within this remit and as such this research provides clarity and up-to-date insight into how adolescents' experiences are changing in a world of increasing complexity and technology. Such real time knowledge and consideration is an essential knowledge base for the EP in providing support to adolescents and key adults in navigating this time of critical psychological and emotional development in a young persons' life (Cline, Gulliford, & Birch, 2015).

Results may provide consideration for EP practice across a variety of levels from direct work with individuals to wider systems and spheres of influence. A summary of a range of points of influence provided by the study are shown in Table 26 below.

Table 26 – Examples of implications for educational psychology practice in supporting young people with their experiences of SEM

Individual level – direct work with young person/family	- To have an awareness of the role that SEM may play and show an understanding and openness to discussing the topic of SEM and/or SRE; - EPs can have a role in providing/facilitating intervention or support for those who may be experiencing negative effects regarding SEM or online media use. This may particularly relate to issues of self-esteem and body image and utilise intervention such as cognitive behavioural therapy (Squires, 2010); - To have an increased understanding and sensitivity to the role that parents/family may play in supporting young people with their experiences of SEM, utilising their expert knowledge and wider understanding of the experiences of young people to support parents in their role. The NSPCC provides useful information for parents regarding discussing SEM with young people (NSPCC, 2017) and could be incorporated into the EP's work both with young people and parents in promoting communication and dispelling the awkwardness that may surround discussion of SEM.

Systems level – work with school staff/schools	- To work with schools to support the development of appropriate and relevant SRE schemes of work which include discussion of SEM. Existing resources, such as those developed by the PHSE institute in England (Blake, Emmerson, Lees, & Hayman, 2014) or by youth work consultant Vanessa Rogers (Rogers, 2016) , may be utilised and shared with schools to provide a starting point for developing an appropriate and up-to-date curriculum. EP's can bring essential psychological understanding and insight into the creation of this curriculum; - To share knowledge with schools regarding SEM use and the impact it may have, raising awareness of how schools may support their pupils; - To be able to discuss aspects of SEM with school staff and offer a shared understanding of the difficulties in SEM communication within schools. This may include supporting school staff to feel confident in teaching about SEM so that they may in turn create confident pupils, as championed in the 'HandsOnScotland' toolkit which promotes confidence in young people as being led by teachers (NHS Scotland, 2013). - Working with schools to support healthy use of social and online media. This may be incorporated into promoting resiliency and 'character education' within schools, which is currently being developed by researchers in Birmingham, UK (Arthur, Kristjánsson, Harrison, Sanderse, & Wright, 2016; Arthur, Kristjánsson, Walker, Sanderse, & Jones, 2015). Such work could subsequently promote subjective and reflective traits in young people better equipping them to analyse the SEM they are exposed to. This is something which EP's are well placed to valuably contribute to and cascade to both schools and young people.
National level – considerations for policy makers	- In line with recommendations set out by the SRE Expert Panel, and alongside movements in the English education system, (Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, Government Equalities Office, Baroness Shields OBE, & Department for Education, 2016; Welsh Government, 2017), for EPs to contribute to, and support, consultation with all young people in Wales in their views of both SEM access and SRE. Such information may be utilised in the development of an updated and fit for purpose SRE curriculum and may also help to support training and guidance for teaching and education staff in communicating with young people regarding SEM.

7 Final Conclusions

In light of the current national focus on both SEM and SRE involving adolescents (Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport et al., 2016; Welsh Government, 2017), this report offers the first qualitative study asking adolescents in Wales face-to-face about their views of both SEM and SRE. Furthermore, the research sought to present the balanced and honest views of adolescents rather than being driven by any particular political or moral stance. In these ways, the research has its strengths in being an open and honest representation of the under-represented views of this group, providing an up-to-date account of life for today's adolescents.

It is not the purpose of this study to sensationalise or to vilify adolescent behaviour, as the mass media may often portray (Adams & Berzonsky, 2005). Rather, it is to identify and to document the experiences of today's youth in order that we, as adults, may have increased understanding and clarity of their normative lives. Adolescent development, and indeed human development, is undergoing increasing change over faster time-scales with the advent of ever increasing technology which can influence the way in which lives are lived, relationships conducted, and information shared.

Whilst there have been concerns about the 'premature sexualisation' of young people for a number of years (Buckingham & Bragg, 2004), it is felt that the widespread prevalence and awareness of SEM today can only be further impacting upon the extent of sexualisation that is currently taking place. Whilst it is not dismissed that 'pornography' as a media may have a very long history, the way in which SEM is now accessed, and the 'no holds barred' content of this SEM is fundamentally different from the pre smart-phone era.

The wider academic and developmental psychological literature would indeed suggest that there are various negative impacts that SEM may have on adolescence development, although it is recognised that there is a requirement for a great deal more qualitative and focused research in this area. Given the new ways in which adolescents are able to communicate and access SEM however it does not seem probable that simply attempting to restrict access is the answer here, if indeed an answer is what is needed. The advent of SEM

which is freely available and accessible online, via a variety of platforms, to the majority of children and young people who now have, to all intents and purposes, unrestricted internet access marks a change in the cultural and sexual norms that young people today will experience. Accordingly, findings suggest that adolescents are frustrated with SEM as a 'taboo' subject, and accordingly unsatisfied with a SRE provision which is not fit for purpose.

It may be that providing education may help mitigate some of the negative impacts identified (issues with body image, sexual comparison and romantic relationship dynamics). For some of the young people in this study, notably the male participants, SEM was not seen as a wholly bad thing but as a form of education in how to perform sexually, preparing you for future sexual relationships. Such views are beneficial in the SEM debate as they provide insight into the positive way in which SEM may contribute to young people's lives. However, it is importantly noted that all participants expressed concern regarding younger adolescents viewing SEM (11-13/14 years old), finding that such behaviour was becoming more and more common. So whilst SEM may be viewed as a positive outlet for some adolescents, when they possess the cognitive ability to objectively interpret what is seen, there is still a clear issue of excessive exposure to SEM at an age when one may not be socially or cognitively mature enough to be able to process such adult concepts (Choudhury et al., 2006; Steinberg & Morris, 2001).

Therefore, education which is purposeful, appropriate, honest and open – and importantly, as posed by (Dombrowski, Gischlar, & Durst, 2007), tailored to the developmental level of the individual - is proposed as, at the very least, the starting point for supporting young people with navigating the adult world which they increasingly find themselves accessing.

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"Schools are supposed to be preparing us for life, they're not preparing us by just sweeping this under the carpet" - Sexually Explicit Media, Sex and Relationship Education and Adolescents – an Exploration of the Views of Young People

Part III: Critical Appraisal

(word count 6,596)

1 Overview

The first part provides a critical account of the research practitioner and the research process. The development of the research is discussed and contextualised within the research paradigm. Critique of the ethical issues, research design and analysis is further provided.

The second part considers the contribution to knowledge that the study provides; its impact on professional practice within the educational psychology (EP) profession; and also upon the researcher's professional development and practice. Future directions for further study are also provided.

The critical review is written in the first person to reflect the purpose of this section of the thesis as a personal reflexive and reflective account of the research process.

Part 1 – The Research Process

1.1 Research development

1.1.1 Topic selection

"*I would hate to be a teenager nowadays*" is a phrase I often hear spoken amongst adults within both my peer group and professional work. The reasoning behind this often links to the role of technology providing instant access to a breadth and depth of information and media which, many adults find overwhelming and intrusive at times, let alone young people (David, Roberts, & Christenson, 2017; Hussain, Griffiths, & Sheffield, 2017). Whilst notions of 'it wasn't like that in my day' come to mind, such debates do raise questions about how today's young people feel about this aspect of their lives, and if it really is so bad being an adolescent in modern society.

It has been proposed that that many professionals within the education system may struggle to identify with the experiences of today's young people, unaware of many of the technological advances and changes in communication impacting upon their lives (Parker, 2014). This is something I have also had experience of in my role both as a trainee EP (TEP) and, previously, as a secondary school teacher. I feel that this is particularly pertinent with regards to the topic of SEM, something which has not generally been widely discussed or acknowledged within schools, or, until recently, the wider educational system.

Given my position as a TEP I wanted to establish the role of schools, and EPs as supporters/facilitators of education, in SEM. The subsequent literature review confirmed that SRE may offer a key role in providing an open forum and safe space for discussion for young people in their experiences of SEM. The literature also revealed that existing findings from research regarding adolescents and both SEM and SRE within the UK were tied up in issues of methodological reliability and political influence (Dunt, 2015; Martellozzo et al., 2017; Parker, 2014). Such limitations in current research therefore cemented the topic as being a valuable and relevant area for further investigation, with such limitations identified as contributing towards research topic selection(Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007).

1.1.2 Researcher influence

My own experiences were identified as possibly providing their own bias to the research, with my previous experience with adolescents acknowledged as having impact upon my current thinking and constructions of reality. As James (1990) suggests however, 'we begin our study with our own experience since other experiences can be intelligible only in these terms' (James, 1990, p.361, cited in Greene & Hogan, (2005).

In this sense my own worldview determined the conception and subsequent conduct of the research, accepting that "what can be known and how we can know are inseparable" (p. 197, Clarke, 2009). Given my awareness of such influences, it was important throughout the research process that I attempted to remain with an impartial and critical view both of my own work, and that revealed within the literature. The use of a research diary, as advocated by Silverman (2013), was employed to monitor my thoughts and reflections in this way, providing space and time for reflexivity and review of both thoughts and processes.

1.1.3 Construction of the literature review and research questions

The aim of the literature review was to firstly provide a theoretical background to psychological theories of adolescent development, giving psychological grounding and insight to the research study and the research topic. Grounding the research within such a breadth of developmental theorisation aimed to open up the research to an empathetic interpretation, being concerned with how something is experienced rather than attempting to limit experience to that which can be theoretically explained (Willig & Rogers, 2017).

Through personal and epistemological reflexivity, it is recognised that the research was led by my own assumptions and worldview which, as Willig (2008) suggests, will inherently impact upon the construction of the data and the findings. Personal reflexivity is defined by Willig (2008) as reflection upon how a researcher's own experiences, interests, values, beliefs, political standpoint, wider life aims and social identity may shape research. Epistemological reflexivity involves the researcher asking questions of their research

regarding, for example, the extent to which the research question may define findings or how the research design and methodology may construct findings. This encourages reflection regarding the assumptions made during the research.

Another researcher may wish to focus on one particular aspect of development perhaps, giving different and equally valid findings, and it is hoped that the theoretical grounding of this study is broad enough to provide suitable avenues for further focus in this way.

The review subsequently developed the rationale for exploration of the role of SEM and SRE in the lives of adolescents. It is acknowledged that there is a large body of global research which was not considered in depth within the review, perhaps limiting the robustness of the literature search. Given the scope of the study however, and its exploratory nature, it was not the premise to test pre-existing hypothesis, but rather to establish the honest experiences of today's adolescents. Therefore, justification for inclusion and exclusion of literature aimed to complement the purpose and design of the research.

The choice of three most recent papers – by Baker, (2015); Martellozzo et al., (2017); and Parker, (2014) - to inform discussion regarding UK adolescents' views of SEM and SRE was chosen due to their recent undertaking and relevance to the topics discussed. The direction of the research, and research questions, was subsequently guided by identified gaps, and supported additionally by the most recent SRE expert panel findings in Wales (Welsh Government, 2017), published during the latter stages of the development of the literature review and further supporting the identification of a gap in knowledge in the national context.

1.2 Research paradigm

A research paradigm may be constructed through a researcher's ontological and epistemological beliefs, which in turn inform the methodology of a study (Scotland, 2012). A relativist ontology and a constructivist-interpretative epistemology were adopted in this study, discussed further below, leading to a qualitative methodology.

1.2.1 Ontological assumptions

Ontological assumptions are concerned with what constitutes reality and may take contrasting stances. Smith (2015) describes a realist stance as taking the belief that research produces *facts* about the world, whilst a relativist stance sees research as producing *understandings* of how people interpret and experience the world. A relativist ontology underpinned this research as it was felt that it was important to acknowledge that there may be different realities expressed and experienced by participants, particularly in such exploratory research. Such a stance allowed me as a researcher to accept that each individual will have different realities, allowing an objective and inquisitive methodology to explore these realities.

1.2.2 Epistemological stance

A researcher's epistemology is the standpoint which frames the way in which one makes sense of the knowledge produced through research. Following from a relativist ontology, a constructivist-interpretative paradigm was taken in this research, assuming that meaning is constructed through interaction between consciousness and the world (Scotland, 2012). Constructionist approaches may also be referred to as interpretivist as they focus on how the social world is interpreted by those within it (Robson, 2011 & Smith, 2015).

Interpretative research sets out to understand individuals' interpretations of the world around them and is exploratory in nature (Cohen et al., 2007). As adults and educational professionals, we do not experience the world in the same way as young people do. A constructivist-interpretative paradigm acknowledges this through suggesting that the social world can only be understood from the standpoint of the individuals who are participating in it - thus recognising the need to explore the views of others. It is additionally recognised that participants would not share the same experiences, allowing critical interpretation through which facts were identified yet also acknowledged as being bound within participants' interpretations and their social construction of society (Willig, 2008).

Such a stance is also in keeping with the social constructionist stance of the Constructionist Model of Informed and Reasoned Action (COMOIRA) framework (Gameson & Rhydderch,

2008) adopted in my practice as a trainee educational psychologist. My research practice thus reflects my professional practice, acknowledging that individuals may construct many different, sometimes conflicting, 'realities' and 'truths', which may all be accepted as valid, relevant and appropriate within their own contexts.

In terms of alternative epistemological stances, a critical realist approach may also have been adopted but it was felt that such a paradigm may not fully align with the level of transparency desired within the study (see Appendix N).

1.2.3 Methodology

The adopted research paradigm lends itself to a qualitative research design, as described by Willig (2008), being concerned with how individuals experience the world and attribute meaning to events. Whilst use of a quantitative research design was also considered, this was rejected due to the underpinning philosophy of constructivist-interpretivist as being directed at understanding phenomena from an individual's perspective and not reducing events to simplistic interpretations (Scotland, 2012). It was felt that adopting a quantitative methodology would have perhaps weakened the focus of the study in identifying, and championing, the honest and open voice of the young person through the quantification of data. A mixed method approach was also alternatively considered, and rejected, as discussed in further detail in section 1.4.1.

Thematic analysis (TA) was adopted as a data analysis method (see section 1.5 for further discussion). Whilst TA is not tied to any particular epistemological stance it may be best suited, as purposed by Joffe (2012), to elucidating the explicit nature of a groups' conceptualisation of the phenomenon being studied. Accordingly, TA is identified as in keeping with the constructionist stance of the research. Such a position also appreciates that the social construction of participants' experiences of SEM and SRE is very much tied to their generational position today.

1.3 Ethical considerations

1.3.1 Gaining ethical approval and amending the initial research design

Initially I had intended for the study to identify the experiences of early-to-mid adolescents aged 13-14 years old as a key, under-researched, group in this field. Initial feedback from the Cardiff University Ethics Committee however requested that semi-structured interviews only be conducted with participants aged 18 and over. Given the focus of the study in establishing the experiences of adolescents today it was felt that it would not be most useful to interview participants of this age-range, the intention being to identify the experiences of adolescents at the present time, not historically. This view was taken with the acknowledgment that individuals over the age of 18 would have markedly different educational and social experiences during this period, especially so in their experience and use of technology in relation to SEM.

Resubmission to the ethics committee gained approval for interviews with individuals aged 16-18 approved with parental consent. Despite those aged 16 and over in the UK not being required to have parental consent for participation in research studies (as put forth by the BPS Code of Human Research Ethics (The British Psychological Society, 2010), this was considered necessary due to the sensitive nature of the topic. The difficulties in gaining ethical approval to investigate the topic of SEM with individuals younger than 18 related to child protection issues regarding the legal age for viewing pornography. Given the wide prevalence of SEM exposure to young people, as identified within the literature review, this mirrors concerns regarding how to approach the topic of SEM with young people and within schools. This also highlights the difficulties in undertaking research within this topic, and the associated underrepresentation of young people's views.

This is identified as a key frustration and limitation of the research; as it is felt that the requirement to gain parental consent may well have led to bias in the sample with only those individuals feeling able to approach their parents indirectly about the topics of SEM and SRE subsequently able to take part.

Consequently, individuals who may find discussion of the topics more difficult may also have been excluded from the study due to issues relating to potential embarrassment/awkwardness and reluctance to approach a parent/guardian to take part. Given the existence of struggles in discussion between parents and young people, regarding not just SEM but adolescent life in general (Bokhorst, Sumter, & Westenberg, 2010), it may have been even more pertinent therefore to ascertain the views and experiences of those young people particularly affected by such lack of communication.

Such ethical difficulties reinforced assumptions that SEM is a complex topic, with many adults finding SEM a difficult topic to broach with young people (Rogers, 2016). Alongside this, as others have stated before, research into this topic is "fraught with ethical difficulties" (pp. 4) (Horvath et al., 2013). Accordingly, it is recognised that there must be caution exercised in our approach in order to minimise harm. The research design therefore, alongside the inclusion of clear pre-study and debrief information (Appendix G and M), was carefully considered in order to uphold ethical standards and to ensure participant safety and wellbeing.

1.3.2 Sensitivity of the topic

The viewing of sexually explicit material by individuals under the age of 18 is technically illegal in the UK (FPA, 2015). Subsequently, on request from the Cardiff University ethics committee and in line with safeguarding responsibilities, I was bound to make participants aware that I would need to pass on any disclosure of viewing SEM to a member of school staff (see Appendix G). Such a caveat required that participants were not asked to tell me directly about their own personal experiences of SEM, rather they were asked about their general views and the experiences of their peer group and those within their school/social community. This has a number of implications for the research design due to the potential impact this may have had on participants' openness and honesty during interview.

Participants talking about the experiences of others, rather than themselves, may also have led to issues of reliability as they may recall what they think takes place, rather than what they have known themselves. This was accepted as part of the research design however and

a process of semantic data analysis attempted to present the data 'as is' through presentation of views as representations of their generational experiences (see section 1.5.1).

On the other hand it is recognised that speaking of 'others' indirectly can be a useful approach in the context of discussing potentially emotive or difficult subjects, as identified by Braun & Clarke (2013). Thus, this caveat may alternatively have had the impact of making the topic easier to discuss by removing some of the emotive connection through individual disclosure.

Anonymising the interview data served not only to protect participants, but also aimed to provide piece of mind and to mitigate any fears of repercussion or 'getting into trouble' from their responses. This step in the research process is identified as a feature of research which may additionally encourage openness (Boyle, 2007).

1.4 Methodology

1.4.1 Research design

A qualitative approach was chosen for a number of reasons. On development of the literature review, previous studies which had already completed online, mainly quantitative, surveys were identified, thus highlighting a research gap for qualitative investigations focusing on the student voice. This was further advocated by the published report of the SRE expert panel in Wales which identified a lack of qualitative research promoting the voice of the young person within this research area (Welsh Government, 2017).

Although a mixed methods approach (such as triangulation) may be used to provide a broader scope for understanding of a problem (Creswell & Clark, 2017; Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009), a qualitative investigation was deemed most useful to investigate the richness of experience and produce a more focused and robust study. Given the requirement for informed consent it was also felt that a large enough sample size to be useful for quantitative analysis would not be easily achieved given the time and resources available.

1.4.2 Participants

The sample size of eight was deemed appropriate for the thematic analysis purposes of the research, providing a sample size small enough to manage given the scope of the project yet large enough to yield a 'richly textured' and new understanding of experience (Sandelowski, 1995). Accordingly, upon analysis of the data, theoretical saturation was deemed to have been reached within the sample thus negating the need for further recruitment above the original sample size (Glaser, 1965).

A purposeful sampling approach, as described by Emmel (2013), was taken to some degree. Emmel (2013) describes three aspects of purposeful sampling, with this sampling method being purposeful in its focus on both *context* (educational setting) and *phenomena* (SRE and SEM); although it could be argued that this did not meet Emmel's third purposeful sampling criteria of *theory* (given that the study is not driven by any particular theoretical leads nor intending to generate theory).

In this study, all participants were within a specified age-range and educational setting, and were identified through their taking part as willing to provide insight into the research questions. In this way participants were also purposefully selected to provide information rich data to provide best insight into the purpose of the research, as described by Emmel (2013) and Patton (2015). The sample size was also in keeping with Emmel's (2013) purposeful sampling strategy, with the insight and interest of participants regarding SEM/SRE judged to constitute a more useful representative sample than a larger sample size with no knowledge or views on SEM/SRE.

Difficulties in participant recruitment was a key issue that had to be overcome. Having no existing links to schools in the South Wales area I was reliant upon the enthusiasm and helpfulness of school staff to offer their students as potential participants. The role of gatekeepers in research was something I particularly reflected upon here, especially due to the complexity and sensitivity of the topic area (Cohen et al., 2007). Ensuring the casting of a wide enough net for recruitment without relying on a single source for participants was also a lesson learnt here in terms of research design.

It is additionally reflected upon that using schools for recruitment excludes those individuals not in mainstream education from the study. Furthermore, participants all attended schools which above average attainment compared to the national average, and a lower percentage of pupils eligible for free-school meals (FSM) compared to the national average. The number of pupils eligible for FSM can often be seen as an indicator of relative poverty within an area, with a lower number suggesting higher affluence (Taylor, 2017). This may suggest a certain level of wealth for the families and the socio-economic background of participants, which is important to bear in mind in analysis of the data and in making generalisations beyond this demographic group.

Accordingly, a possible limitation of the study is that those who may be most vulnerable, such as young people who may be educated in more specialist provisions,' are not included within the sample size. If the sample had been drawn from both mainstream and alternative education provision however then it may have been more problematic to draw firm or reliable conclusions, particularly in relation to SEM provision. Furthermore, drawing from a wider sample may have been a distraction away from the focus of the study to inform around SRE and SEM in mainstream education and may have weakened the results as it may not have as clearly related to the 'typical' adolescent.

1.4.3 Semi-structured interviews

In development of the prompt questions for the interviews (Appendix I) care was taken to ensure that questions were not leading and that participants would be able to provide their balanced and honest responses. Through this I aimed to ensure that participants did not feel pressurised into reporting what they felt I wanted to hear through 'demand characteristics' (as identified by McCambridge et al., 2012). Despite these efforts however it cannot be certain that demand characteristics were not present. As Robson (2011) suggests, even in situations where participants are explicitly told that no one response is valued over another (with no right or wrong answer), they may still feel that certain responses will portray them in a better light than others.

An alternative approach may perhaps be an adaptation to not fully reveal the focus of the study, as identified as a potential solution to this bias (Robson, 2011). Given the sensitivity of this particular topic however there may be grounded ethical issues to such an approach if involving adolescent individuals.

Carrying out the interviews in a school setting attempted to provide a sense of normality. It is, however, recognised that this may also have had an impact on participants providing 'socially acceptable' responses, perhaps being reluctant to discuss such matters within the school setting (J. Smith & Osborn, 2015). Accordingly, future research may consider discussion outside of a school setting which may yield different findings.

1.4.4 Terminology

Given the use of the term 'sexually explicit media' there may have been some differences in how participants interpreted the term. The term 'pornography' may have carried with it different connotations and it is perhaps feasible that the term 'online pornography' may have been used instead, as in Martellozzo et al's. (2017) study. The way it is thought that young people interact with sexually explicit content online however determined that I wanted to open the study up to discussing media that may be deemed sexually explicit yet not labelled as 'pornography'.

Thus, the use of the term SEM is considered a viable definition for the purposes of this study. The participant information sheet (Appendix G) aimed to negate any confusion in relation to this by explicitly detailing what was meant by the term SEM. Use of consistent terminology in research however may be important in future studies in building up a rich and valid picture of this topic.

1.4.5 Piloting materials

The initial participant information sheet aimed to provide a balance of viewpoints so as not to lead participants and to avoid demand characteristics – through the identification for instance that SEM could be viewed positively as well as negatively. In this instance piloting,

as identified by Sampson (2004), was considered as a useful tool for both refining research instruments and in considering issues with data collection, validity and ethics.

The information sheet, consent form and initial prompt question structure of the interviews were therefore piloted with two eighteen-year-old individuals (one male, one female) in order to identify any issues and allow for refinement. Subsequently, some of the initial language used was adapted to make it more accessible; and the layout of the information sheet was also modified to make the information clearer.

1.5 Analysing the data

1.5.1 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis (TA) was chosen to analyse the data due to its use as a tool to identify patterned meaning across data and its range of advantages to psychological research, as outlined in Table 27.

Table 27 – Advantages of thematic analysis

TA Advantages:
Flexibility; It is a relatively easy and quick method to learn and to complete; TA is accessible to researchers with little or no experience of qualitative research. Results are generally accessible to general, educated public; TA is a useful method for working within participatory research, working with participants as collaborators; It can summarise key features of a large body of data, and/or offer a 'thick description' of the data set; Can highlight similarities and differences across a data set; Unanticipated insights can be generated; Allows for social interpretations of data; Can be useful for producing qualitative analyses which may be suited to informing policy development.

(Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Despite such advantages it is noted that there are limitations in the use of TA, most notably through risk of the production of an insufficient or weak analysis of themes subsequently leading to a weakened analysis and discussion. This may be confounded through researcher

bias/subjectivity (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013), and discussion of measures to minimise this are provided in section 1.5.4.

A semantic analysis was favoured over a latent analysis in recognition that data reflected participants' understanding of the experiences of others – thus favouring an approach to look at explicit meaning rather than attempting to unpick implicit meaning in the retelling of the experience of the 'other'. This is also reflected upon in the decision not to analyse the data according to the gender of participants, realising that unpicking the data at this level may not be representative or useful given the study design. Given the sample size this may also not have been most useful at the semantic level.

It is considered that to use a latent approach would have been too subjective in this instance, for example taking an assumption about whether or not participants were talking about their own experiences as opposed to peers when talking of 'others' and then making further assumptions about the meaning behind the language used would have been a difficult and very subjective task. A semantic analysis also lends itself to a thematic analysis of the data rather than an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach, as discussed below.

Whilst a latent analysis may have provided a more in-depth insight into one particular theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006), given the exploratory nature of the research it was also deemed important to provide a rich description of the entire data set. Through this the aim was to fully represent the views of participants, rather than focusing on underlying assumptions or ideas which may perhaps have taken away from the overarching aim of the research to represent the predominant thoughts of young people.

Semantic analysis is additionally regarded by Braun & Clarke (2006) as a particularly useful method when investigating an under-researched area (or one where the views of participants are not known), such as is the case for SEM and SRE within this context. Rather just describing the data however, interpretation of the significance of patterns and their broader meanings in relation to previous literature was attempted in order to provide a rich depth to such an analysis (Patton, 2015).

Whilst it is additionally recognised that a semantic analysis may perhaps be more suited to a realist ontology, a constructivist-interpretivist stance is also recognised as being suited to a semantic analysis. As Badie (2016) purports, semantic analysis may allow the researcher to support participants in their own construction of the world, producing their own understanding, and developing this, through the interview process. Therefore, this may be viewed as a semantic analysis of the relationship between adolescents and others experiences of SEM and SRE in the context of constructivist interactions.

Dorsey (2012) furthermore supports that constructivism may select any semantic analysis that may also deliver proper verdicts concerning normative judgements. Thus, it could be seen that as researcher I may be complicit in co-constructing the normative reality for young people through a process of semantic analysis.

The use of other data analysis tools were also considered before TA was adopted, as discussed below.

1.5.2 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

IPA has its focus on exploration and interpretation of personal meaning, having an idiographic interpretation and inferring, and assuming, underlying meaning (V. Clarke, Braun, & Hayfield, 2015; J. Smith & Osborn, 2015). Whilst IPA was considered as a useful tool in unpicking meaning behind language, it was not deemed to be suitable to the design of the research or the semantic data analysis style adopted.

Given the limitations placed on participants to speak about their own experiences (as discussed in section 1.3.2) it is accepted that participants may not have actually experienced SEM themselves. In this sense IPA was not considered suitable due to the complex difficulties associated in interpreting meaning from information of 'others' experiences rather than one's own. This is particularly important given the phenomenological epistemology which may be linked with IPA (Braun & Clarke, 2006; J. Smith & Osborn, 2015) which pertains to the study of consciousness as experienced in the first-person (D. W.

Smith, 2018) - thus making IPA an unsuitable tool for analysis of the data collected (which may often have been offered in the third person).

1.5.3 Grounded theory

Grounded theory may often be used with an open-ended research design and research question, aiming to generate theory from data (Robson, 2011). Given the emotive and sensitive nature of the topic however, and associated difficulties in participant recruitment, it may have been difficult to undertake progressive data collection and a true grounded theory approach may have been problematic to achieve (Charamaz, 2015; Willig, 2008).

The focus of the study in investigating a pre-identified social issue meant that the initial research questions were formulated at a very early stage in the research design. This accordingly meant that it was considered too difficult to remove myself from the topic enough to be able to reflectively, and subjectively, produce an evolving research design as would be suited to grounded theory (Charamaz, 2015). It is recognised that grounded theory may have produced some interesting findings away from the focus of the research however, and perhaps future research may consider the use of grounded theory to investigate other aspects of SEM impact, particularly upon specific features of adolescent development for instance.

1.5.4 Minimising researcher bias

A reflexive and reflective approach was taken to the research process, particularly during data analysis when allowing the space and time to approach analysis was deemed important to ensure my own assumptions and beliefs did not overly guide the process. For instance, emerging codes were discussed with fellow researchers/colleagues to help identify any necessary modification or clarification of codes. Within the research process as a whole I was also keen to provide a balanced and un-biased account of participants' views, appreciating that inaccurate research is of little use in informing both professional practice and future research.

Whilst others had not read the full interview transcripts; excerpts and emerging quotes were shared and discussion took place regarding emerging codes, possible themes and sub-themes to identify repetition and clarify positioning within the wider research questions. Whilst such practice has its confines in that fellow researchers may also have been led by their own assumptions, this process proved helpful in sustaining an open and investigative approach to the data set (Yardley, 2015).

Section 2: Contribution to knowledge

2.1 Distinct contribution to knowledge

2.1.1 Literature regarding SEM and adolescents

The research provides new and current insight into the views of adolescents regarding SEM and SRE within South Wales. It is understood that qualitative research of this nature regarding SEM has not been undertaken within this context previously, therefore contributing to a gap in the research literature. Whilst it is recognised that findings are small-scale and, through the analysis adopted and the exploratory style of the research, broad in their nature, it is hoped that the study provides a platform for future research and a starting point for implementing change within SRE in Wales.

Whilst previous UK based research (Baker, 2015; Martellozzo et al., 2017), has suggested that SEM has now become a normative experience for many adolescents, the current study allows a richer insight into adolescents views and wider experiences of SEM. In particular it provides insight into the reasoning for this, and also the impact of such exposure, highlighting the explicit role of technology in increasing exposure to SEM and also the impact that technology has on the way in which relationships and sexuality are now constructed.

Another interesting finding from the research is that SEM exposure in younger children (below the ages of 13-14 years old) was wholly viewed as 'wrong' or inappropriate. In some ways this corroborates concerns in existing literature regarding excessive exposure to SEM at a young age when one may not be socially or cognitively mature enough to be able to process such adult concepts or to objectively interpret such media (Choudhury, Blakemore, & Charman, 2006; Steinberg & Morris, 2001). This extends the existing knowledge base however, suggesting that older adolescents may possess a higher awareness to subjectively respond to SEM and online media. It also provides insight into attitudes towards SEM and technology, with a loss of innocence frequently cited as being a concern for the participants' generation.

For some of the young people in this study, notably the male participants, SEM was not seen as a wholly bad thing but as a form of education, preparing individuals for future sexual relationships. Although the extent to which this may be 'healthy' or providing appropriate expectations requires further investigation.

Such findings are beneficial as they provide insight into the positive way in which some young people may view SEM. Gender effects regarding the ability (or desire) to critique images, such as those reported by Stern (1999) regarding teenage girls critique of sexual images, are not known through this study however and gender differences in experiences of, and views of, SEM in adolescence would be an interesting avenue for further research.

Additionally, understanding of the increasing role that technology plays in exposure to, and sharing of, SEM is a valuable contribution of this research; with awareness of this seen as a key benefit in understanding, and empathising with, the young people we work with.

2.1.2 SRE and wider education

Findings suggest that the SRE provision experienced by participants was lacking across all secondary educational settings attended, with the exception being that SRE in primary school was generally perceived as being more useful and appropriate. It may be that participants' views of SRE were impacted by the focus of the study, leading them to conclude that SRE provision without SEM was inadequate. Findings are in keeping with previous UK studies however identifying that many adolescents across England and Wales feel that a formal educational provision regarding SEM is warranted within secondary schools (Baker, 2015; Martellozzo et al., 2017; Parker, 2014). Accordingly, it can be reasonably assumed that SRE provision across the UK as a whole is in need of updating in line with the modern-day experiences of secondary school pupils. Within Wales specifically it is also recognised that this is a shared assumption by Welsh Government (Welsh Government, 2017).

Implications from this study also suggest that, in line with the rapid pace of changing technology and exposure to SEM, education regarding SEM should be ongoing and revisited,

not just touched upon once with one particular year group. This builds upon previous research which has suggested that SRE has a key role here (Baker, 2015; Parker, 2014) and it is an interesting addition to note that participants felt that SEM should be discussed across secondary education – with some drawing comparison with the extent to which issues such as drugs and alcohol are discussed.

2.2 Contribution to the educational psychology profession

Whilst we may not wholly generalise from qualitative findings, insight into the views of young people may be viewed as an essential contribution to the way in which we understand, and are able to communicate with, and about, young people (Harding & Atkinson, 2009).

2.2.1 Working with families and young people

The EP role is increasing involved with supporting young people with social and emotional wellbeing (Ashton & Roberts, 2006; Welsh Government, 2016), with many issues being linked to perceptions of increased pressure and intensity within modern life which individuals are experiencing at younger and younger ages. Therefore, any research which helps EPs to better understand and gain insight into what life is currently like for the young people with whom we work is invaluable in its ability to help us to relate to, and understand, their experiences.

Whilst the EP may not always be the individual on the 'front line' with young people, they are working with those adults who are. As such EPs are in a position where they are able to communicate with others from a position of current and appropriate knowledge.

2.2.2 Working with schools and wider systems

EPs have a role in creating educational settings which are open and inclusive, where young people feel safe and cared for and are able to learn and ask questions without fear. The importance of constantly learning and being aware of a changing culture for young people today is additionally identified as a key aspect of the EP role (Ashton & Roberts, 2006;

Association of Educational Psychologists, 2012). Therefore, if we as adults are afraid of a topic such as SEM then it is our role to educate ourselves about it so that we understand such fears and are able to support others also. Awareness of the current experiences of young people is provided through this study.

Working within a secondary school setting and with adolescents may present its own challenges, (Head, 2002) and SEM can be a sensitive topic for discussion, often seen as a 'taboo' topic and one which is not openly spoken about (Owens & Gowen, 2012). Although this study cannot provide full answers of how to approach the topic of SEM, and we must be cautious in generalising from such a small-scale to inform policy, it does provide insight into what might, and might not, be helpful. In this way it may help to inform EPs in one of their key roles as identified by the Welsh Government as follows:

> *"The focus of an EP's work is to support and develop the skills of others to identify need and promote inclusive approaches that can help"* (p.2, Welsh Government, 2016)

Utilising this knowledge and sharing it with schools, teaching staff and others working with young people can help to empower others through enabling individuals to feel more equipped to be able to tackle the topic, and not to shy away from it – as asked for by the young people in this study. Discussion of the development of more formal strategies however is likely to require the support of a much more in-depth and robust research base (Welsh Government, 2017).

2.2.3 Collaboration with policy makers

In line with recommendations set out by the SRE Expert Panel and, alongside movements in the English education system (Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, Government Equalities Office, Baroness Shields OBE, & Department for Education, 2016; Welsh Government, 2017), there is a recognised role for EPs to contribute to, and support, consultation with young people in Wales on their views of SEM access and SRE. Such information may be utilised in the development of an updated and fit for purpose SRE

curriculum and may also help to support training and guidance for teaching and education staff in communicating with young people regarding SEM.

2.3 Limitations of findings

Steps taken to promote the validity of the research (Appendix J and Appendix K) aimed to ensure its robustness. Given this, it is the belief that the study was conducted rigorously, with the findings, and conclusions drawn contributing new and valuable information to the topic area and further understanding of the experiences of young people. There are limitations to the study however.

Findings do not focus on any one particular aspect of adolescent development, aiming to provide a rich overview of general views of SEM and SRE rather that investigating in depth impacts on any one particular aspect of development. Given the gap in research on adolescent views in this area however this was deemed an important and warranted overview, and future studies may use these wider findings as a platform for further investigation regarding specific developmental aspects, such as sexual development, peer interaction or social development.

Additionally, given the fast-paced nature of current technological advances it is therefore the case that much research involving the use of technology (and increasingly portable technology) can become out-dated quickly. Whilst this study therefore provides valuable current insight, it must be critically reviewed within its generational context.

It is recognised that results from a single qualitative study cannot be wholly generalised and may not be taken as representative, which can limit the validity of such research (Leung, 2015; Yardley, 2015). However, taking the relativist assumption that experience will be socially composed in some way, we may suggest, as (Kippax et al., 1988) do, that each individual social appropriation (i.e. the range of actions accessible to the individual) may potentially be generalisable. It is further recognised that once an experience is 'known' then it may be subject to universalisation (Haug, 1987 cited in Willig, 2008, p.17).

It has also been argued that theories of social construction convey that individual 'appropriation of the social' can be generalisable (Kippax, Crawford, Benton, Gault, & Noesjirwan, 1988), with Willig (2008) reporting that once an experience is identified it can therefore be known that it is available within society. This somewhat negates issues of generalisation, asserting that knowledge is useful across a range of contexts and levels.

Furthermore, the limits of my capacity to access the experiences of another, and what their experience can tell us, is also acknowledged (Greene & Hogan, 2005). The 'third-person effect' is identified in previous research (Parker, 2014) as leading to a risk that participants may raise more concerns, or be more conservative, when reflecting on past experiences or experiences of others. This 'third person effect' is described as when an individual shows greater concern for issues affecting others rather than themselves (Parker, 2014). Further research would be useful in investigating the experiences of younger adolescents 'in the moment' in order to minimise such issues.

I am conscious, in line with such limitations, that the longevity of this study may be limited to the current context, denoting that the application of knowledge gained from the research would be best placed into consciousness and shape practice at the current time for it to be most meaningful. This links with the importance of continued professional development, alongside up-to-date awareness of a changing culture for young people today, as identified as a key aspect of the EP role. The topic area may subsequently be viewed as a key area warranting further, ongoing, research to keep pace with the impact of technology and SEM on adolescent life.

Given the opportunity to do the research again I perhaps also would have considered a more latent approach to the data analysis in order to further explore the meaning of young peoples' experiences. In this case however I would attempt to establish a wider sample population at an earlier time in the research process, allowing the inclusion of younger participants (with informed consent) and thus delving deeper into the lived experiences of those younger adolescents. It may also have been useful to conduct focus groups either to inform interviews or as a way to amplify and further understand the findings (Robson, 2011). Although ethical considerations would need to be reviewed and the research design

adapted for such an inclusion. Alternatively, with more time available, preliminary quantitative data may also have been collected to subsequently inform the individual interviews and perhaps increase the robustness of the data though triangulation (Creswell & Clark, 2017).

2.4 Future directions

Robust materials for analysing aspects of adolescent development may be applied to further research in order to further establish the extent to which SEM may impact upon development. A focus on investigating a link between SEM use and intrapersonal development may be particularly useful given recent widespread concern regarding the social and emotional wellbeing of today's youth (NICE, 2013). Assessing intrapersonal development with measures such as those used by Barber (2003) through instruments such as the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, (NPC, 2014; Rosenberg, 1965) and Perspective Taking and Empathy sub-scales could be utilised here as simple measures of quantifying experience (Barber, 2003; Davis, 1996).

Combining such research with qualitative insight through triangulation (as was beyond the scope of this study) may additionally support the robustness and validity of future research (Creswell, 2012; Saunders et al., 2009). The current study may also provide a platform and starting points for future investigation regarding adolescent views on how SRE may be adapted to incorporate SEM and how schools may become skilled in developing cultures of open communication. Future work may wish to collaborate, or make reference to, existing research in the development of 'character education' with its broad aim to promote autonomy and reflexivity in young people (Arthur, Kristjánsson, Harrison, Sanderse, & Wright, 2016; Arthur, Kristjánsson, Walker, Sanderse, & Jones, 2015). In line with the wishes of participants for education regarding how to be resilient in the face of online social media and SEM, it is argued that such philosophies fit well into this subject matter.

2.5 Impact on the researcher's practice

I have learnt a great deal from the research process - as a researcher, a professional and personally. From a research perspective, the process has taught me to be flexible and

adaptive in my thoughts, taking on board the input and insight of others to influence my own work. This was particularly pertinent in terms of feedback from the ethics committee and subsequent adaptation to my original conception of the research design.

Personally, I found the process to be enlightening, especially given the opportunity to be able to hear the views and experiences of young people first hand. Eliciting the voice of the young person, as described by Maybin (2005) and Robinson (2014), is something I am passionate about and a feature which can become overlooked in the day-to-day busy-ness of professional life. Such experience reminds me to be acutely aware of my role as a TEP to take care to 'listen to and promote the voice of the child or young person I am working with, as the role is identified by Welsh Government (Welsh Government, 2016).

It is recognised that the research is relatively small scale and, whilst offering important insights, generalisation of impacts upon practice should be taken with caution and grounded within additional theoretical and research literature. Despite this caveat, the research findings allow me to share the knowledge of some young people's experiences with other professionals, promoting open and honest discussion surrounding how we may approach our work with young people. Discussions I have been fortunate enough to have with colleagues during the research highlighted the extent to which discussion of SEM may permeate to many different groups. In this way, the research has supported the opening up of lines of thought and communication at least in some way.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Overview of Biological development during adolescence

Whilst biological theories of adolescent development may not be strictly in keeping with the psychological focus of the study, it is deemed useful to provide some reference here due to the biological impacts on adolescent sexual and relationship development.

The onset of puberty during adolescence involves dramatic changes in body shape, physical size and hormone levels, with research linking the timing and stages of puberty to adolescent sexual behaviour (Crockett, Bingham, Chopak, & Vicary, 1996). It is these hormonal changes during adolescence which may be regarded as the foundation of libido – that is the biologically based predisposition to sexual behaviour (Udry, 1988) and they may be linked to many behavioural changes (Cameron, 2004; Forbes & Dahl, 2010; Peper & Dahl, 2013; Warren & Brooks-Gunn, 1989). Accordingly medical stances may focus on biological processes as being the driving force behind many of the changes and development during adolescence (Kipke, 1999).

However, whilst it is recognised that hormones and neural development may affect behaviour and sexual interest in some ways (although many causal interactions remain unclear) most effects appear to be interactions with social and psychosocial factors (Fortenberry, 2013; Moore & Rosenthal, 2006; Smetana, Campione-Barr, & Metzger, 2006; Susman & Rogol, 2004). Consequently 'biosocial' models are generally considered to provide more robust explanations for changes observed during adolescence rather than sociological or biological models alone (Crockett et al., 1996; Susman & Rogol, 2004; Udry, 1990).

Appendix B – Overview of Cognitive development during adolescence

The emergence of the 'social self' during adolescence is seen from a cognitive development perspective as a period of heightened self-consciousness during which there is increasing preoccupation with others concerns about their thoughts, actions and appearance (Choudhury, Blakemore, & Charman, 2006). Such development is linked to the notion of egocentrism, as described by Elkind (1967) who elaborates on Piaget's early work regarding cognitive development (Piaget, 1929). Elkind proposes that egocentric assumptions prevent early adolescents from fluid thought regarding others' thoughts and feelings, suggesting that preoccupation with changes in emotions and physical appearance will dominate thought until adolescents grow out of egocentrism (Elkind & Bowen, 1979). Damage associated with 'growing up too quickly' is highlighted by Elkind (1984) and linked to fears that young adolescents may appear to be more competent than they are.

Piaget and Elkind may be criticised however as being too simplistic and limiting in their focus (Donaldson, 1978; Goswami, 2008). More recent theories of cognitive adolescent development therefore, whilst drawing upon the principles of Piaget and Elkind, may also take into account advances from neurodevelopment regarding adolescent brain development (Steinberg, 2005) (Figure 5).

In this model Steinberg (2005) proposes that slower maturation of the frontal lobes during adolescence leads to gaps between cognition, emotion and behaviour during middle adolescence (12-16 years) and a period of heightened vulnerability to risk taking and difficulties in behavioural regulation. Such a viewpoint takes into account more recent advances in neurological understanding, providing a deeper insight into development alongside the psychological. This adds to the supposition that causal relationships within development are not well understood; and that there may be many different components which may be taken into account when discussing adolescent development (Susman & Rogol, 2004).

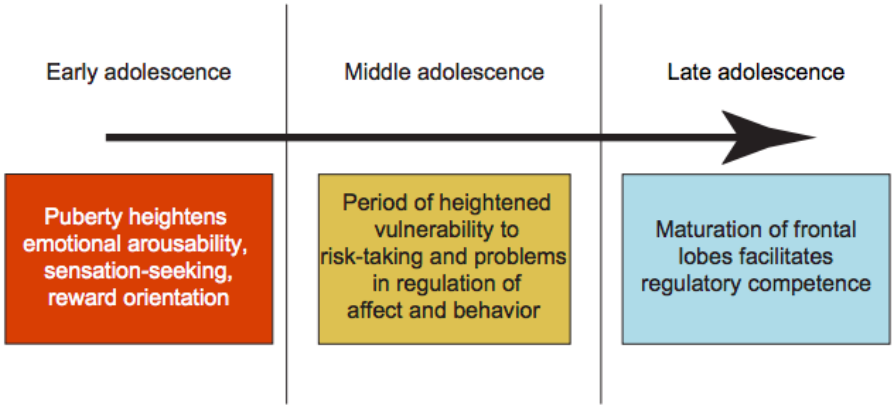

Figure 5 – Steinberg's proposed theory of cognitive development in adolescence
(Steinberg, 2005)

Appendix C – Overview of Psychological and Psychosocial development during adolescence

Of the psychoanalytical views of human development, Erik Erikson's Eight Stages of Man is perhaps the most cited and well recognised theory (Weiner, Freedheim, & Lerner, 2003). Drawing on the work of regarding psychosexual development (Freud, 1905), Erikson (Erikson, 1959) proposed that human development will span eight stages over the lifespan. These stages represent the psychological needs of the individual against the demands of society, with a crisis said to occur at each stage fundamental to human development. Dependent on how each crisis is resolved will form either a psychological strength or weakness of the individual (Table 28).

Table 28 - Erikson's stages of Psychosocial Development

Stage	Crisis	Resolution	Age
1	Trust vs. Mistrust	Hope or Withdrawal	Infancy (0 – 1 ½ yrs)
2	Autonomy vs. Shame	Will or Compulsion	Early Childhood (1 ½ - 3yrs)
3	Initiative vs. Guilt	Purpose or Inhibition	Play Age (3 – 5 yrs)
4	Industry vs. Inferiority	Competency or Inertia	School Age (5 – 12 yrs)
5	Ego Identity vs. Role Confusion	Fidelity or Repudiation	Adolescence (12 – 18 yrs)
6	Intimacy vs. Isolation	Love or Exclusivity	Young Adult (18 -40 yrs)
7	Generativity vs. Stagnation	Care or Rejectivity	Adulthood (40 – 65 yrs)
8	Ego Integrity vs. Despair	Wisdom or Disdain	Maturity (65+ yrs)

Adapted from (Erikson, 1963a)

During the stage of adolescence, defined by Erikson as 12-18 years of age, the individual is said to search for a sense of self and develop a personal identity (ego identity). Failure to develop an identity leads to confusion about the individual's self-development and role within society (role confusion). Such conflict leads Erikson (1963b) to describe adolescence as a stage "between the morality learned by the child, and the ethics to be developed as an adult" (Erikson, 1963b, p.245) with the adolescent experiencing a heightened sense of divergence between his/her identity as a child and how his/her identity will be as an adult.

Intrapersonal development is associatively described as a central component of adolescent development, involving the consolidation of the self, alongside an increasing awareness of others (Erikson, 1968). Accordingly, Erikson's stage model may also be referred to as a theory of identity (Kroger, 2005). In line with later works of the likes of Berzonsky & Adams (1999) and Marcia, Waterman, Matteson, Archer, & Orlofsky (1993), which sought to further investigate identity formation within the adolescent identity crisis, Barber (2003) offers that this may be quantified through measures of self-esteem, perspective taking and empathy.

Critically, Erikson's developmental theory suggests that identity crisis is most pronounced during adolescence with psychological reciprocity (that is, the formation of identity through interaction with significant others), leading adolescents to be preoccupied with a need for peer group recognition and dependence on peer role models and feedback, something which is supported through behaviourist and social cognitive theorists (Muuss, 1996).

Despite its lasting legacy within psychological reference, stage theories such as Erikson's may be criticised as being too simplistic in setting out development as a linear process with a lack of empirical data (Rosenthal, Gurney, & Moore, 1981) and we may look to social psychologists to provide additional context to adolescent development.

Appendix D – Overview of Ecological and Cultural developmental impacts during adolescence

In contrast to cognitive theories, ecological perspectives typically view adolescent development as an interaction between the individual and the environment. Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological framework model accordingly proposes that adolescent development of autonomous behaviour, cognition and emotion is a product of interaction between the individual and various levels of their environment (Figure 6).

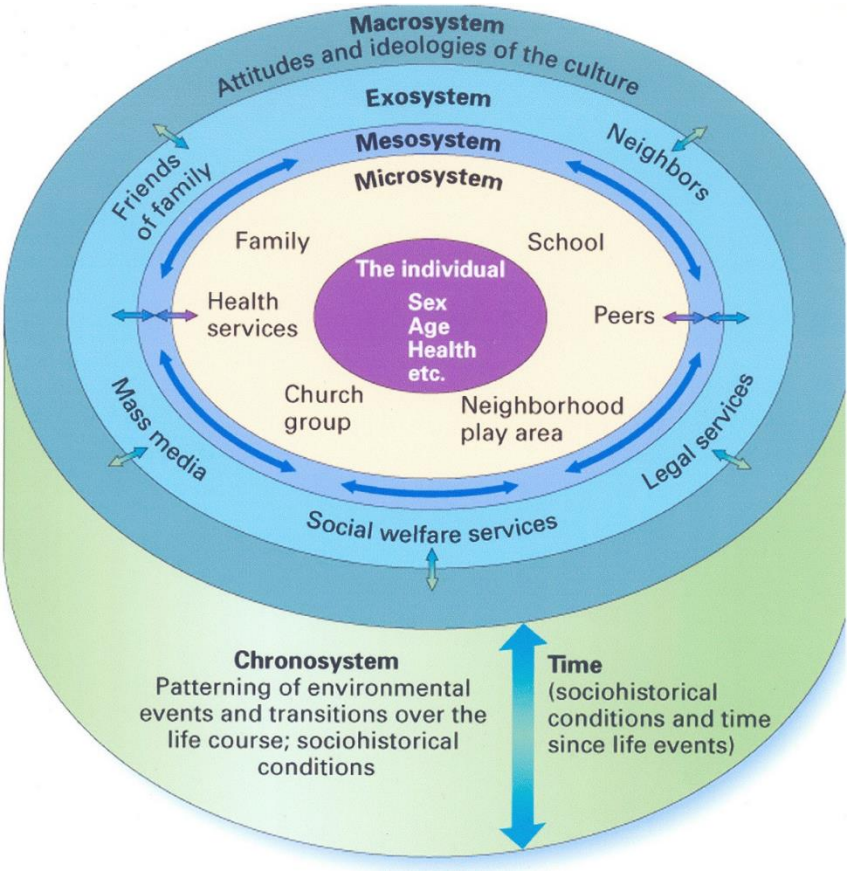

Figure 6 - Ecological Framework Model of Developmental
(Adpated from Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994)

Bronfenbrenner and Ceci's model does not set out linear stages of development, rather it proposes that various systems surrounding an individual affect development and growth. Thus, there are varying levels of environmental impact which may affect the adolescent, these being - the microsystem (those factors closest to the individual e.g. family, close peers); mesosystem (the ways in which the microsystem components work together); exosystem (other people and places which may impact, perhaps indirectly on the individual); and the macrosytem (wider cultural ideologies and influences). The sum of these factors are deemed to influence and shape development, particularly during the critically influenced adolescent stage of the chronosystem (Muuss, 1996; Steinberg & Morris, 2001).

Appendix E - Research Letter to Schools

School of Psychology
Cardiff University
College of Biomedical and Life Sciences
70 Park Place
Cardiff
CF10 3AT

Dear Sir/Madam,

Research Project into Sexually Explicit Media and Sex & Relationship Education

I am a Doctorate student at the University of Cardiff currently completing a training course leading to a qualification as an Educational Psychologist. As part of my course I am planning to conduct a research project looking at the experiences and views of 16-18 year old pupils with regards to sexually explicit online media and sex and relationship education.

Recent research has shown that there is a rise in reports of teenagers struggling with their thoughts and feelings about sexually explicit media/pornography, something which can negatively impact on pupil wellbeing and achievement. There is a lack of clarity as to how teenagers feel about the availability and accessibility of sexually explicit media and their views on what is, or what would be, most helpful in supporting them with their experiences.

In an increasingly complex world, teenagers have a wealth of information and media at their fingertips and the impact that consuming this can have on their development is an under researched area. Particularly in relation to sexually explicit media there is a lack of clarity as to how teenagers feel about the availability and accessibility of this to them; alongside their views on what is/would be most helpful in supporting them with their experiences.

In this study, I am hoping to investigate a sample of 16-18 year old pupils' experiences and views on the following:

- What are adolescents' views of sexually explicit media content?
- What are adolescents' views on the impact of sexually explicit media content on social and emotional development?
- What are adolescents' views about sex and relationship education?
- What has been done, or what could further be done, to support adolescents in their experiences of sexually explicit media and sex and relationship education?

Pupil's views would be investigated through semi-structured interviews, with a sample of 8 pupils, on school premises. This interview will ask about the young person's views regarding sexually explicit media, sex and relationship education and strategies to support young people with this topic. I will carry out the interviews and provide pupils with full information and signposts for support/further information if required. Informed consent would be gained from pupils and their parents/guardians prior to any interview recordings taking place. Of those pupils who wish to take part, 8 will be chosen at random to be interviewed on school premises at a future convenient time.

Interview data will be audio recorded; typed up anonymously (with no names or links to friends, family, school etc.) and deleted within 2 weeks of interviews taking place. The results will be published within Cardiff University's internal library and possibly within academic journals but neither the name of the school or of any participants will feature.

It is hoped that this research will provide information which will help to support both pupils and schools in understanding and talking about both sex and relationship education and sexually explicit media; and how to best support pupils in dealing with relationships and development in adolescence.

I would be very grateful if your school would like to take part in this research and I would welcome the opportunity to discuss this with you in further detail. If you have any questions or concerns regarding the research please do not hesitate to contact myself or my research supervisor using the contact details below.

Yours sincerely

Caroline Morgan

Caroline Morgan
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Appendix F – Parental Letter

School of
Psychology
Cardiff University
College of Biomedical and Life Sciences
70 Park Place
Cardiff
CF10 3AT

Dear parent/guardian,

Research Project into Sexually Explicit Media and Sex & Relationship Education

I am a Doctorate student at the University of Cardiff currently completing a training course leading to a qualification as an Educational Psychologist. As part of my course I am conducting a research project looking at the views of 16-18 year pupils with regards to sexually explicit online media and sex and relationship education.

Recent research has shown that there is a rise in reports of teenagers struggling with their thoughts and feelings about sexually explicit media/pornography, something which can negatively impact on pupil wellbeing and achievement. There is a lack of clarity as to how teenagers feel about the sex and relationship education that they receive and the availability and accessibility of sexually explicit media alongside their views on what is, or what would be, most helpful in supporting them with their experiences. It is hoped that this research will provide information which will help to support both pupils and schools in understanding and talking about both sex and relationships education and sexually explicit media; and how to emotionally support pupils in dealing with relationships.

Pupil's views will be collected by participation in an interview with the researcher on school premises. This interview will ask about the young person's views regarding sexually explicit media, sex and relationship education and strategies to support young people with this topic. Of those pupils who wish to take part, 8 will be chosen at random to be interviewed – this is due to the relatively small scale and scope of the project.

Your son/daughter is under no obligation to take part. Their views are very important and if they would like to voice their opinion on this topic as part of this project then that would be very much appreciated. If they do take part then the time of the interview will be carefully scheduled in line with their school commitments so that it will cause minimal disruption to their studies.

Please find included an information sheet for you and your son/daughter to read through. If your son/daughter would like to take part in the study, and you are happy for them to do so, then please complete the enclosed consent forms and return them via your son/daughter's form tutor.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research then please don't hesitate to contact me or my research supervisor using the contact details on the information sheet.

Yours sincerely,

Caroline Morgan

Appendix G – Information Sheet

Information Sheet for Research Project into Sexually Explicit Media and Sex & Relationship Education

1) What is this research about?

This project will ask you some questions about yourself, your thoughts on 'sexually explicit media' and sex and relationship education.

'Sexually explicit media' means **websites or apps** which may describe people having sex, show video/audio of people engaging in sex acts or show clear images of naked people. Sexually explicit media may also be called 'pornography'. This project is just about online websites or apps (not magazines, DVDs or other offline things).

Studies have shown that a lot of young people are now accessing sexually explicit media online, either by accident or by searching for it. Whilst some people feel that this is a very negative thing, other people think that young people are now learning a lot about sex and relationships in this way. Schools and the UK government are also deciding what kind of things should be taught in sex and relationship education in schools and whether sexually explicit media should be talked about more in these lessons and within schools.

In this project, I would like to find out young people's thoughts and feelings about sexually explicit media and also their opinion on sex and relationship education in schools. I hope that this information will help schools and adults to understand more about how young people like yourselves feel about sexually explicit media and whether there are things that can be done (or are being done) to help to support young people with their relationships and sex education.

Key questions investigated in this study:

- What are adolescents' views of sexually explicit media content?
- What are adolescents' views on the impact of sexually explicit media content on social and emotional development?
- What are adolescents' views about sex and relationship education?
- What has been done, or what could further be done, to support adolescents in their experiences of sexually explicit media and sex and relationship education?

2) How is information being collected?

Information for the project is being collected through interviews with 8 young people. These interviews will take place on school premises during the school day and only the researcher and the young person will be present during the interview. Interviews will be anonymous.

Only 8 people will be interviewed and these will be picked at random from those people who would like to take part. If you are picked at random then I will be in contact with your form tutor/head of year to arrange a time to come into school for the interview.

3) **What will happen in the interview?**

The interview will consist of a number of questions about your thoughts about sexually explicit media, sex and relationship education for young people. These will be based on the key questions given on the first page of this information sheet. The interview will be audio recorded and should take approximately 30 minutes.

There are no right or wrong answers, this is not a test and I'm just interested in your honest answers. The more honest that you are the more helpful this will be to young people like yourselves.

4) **What happens to the interview recording?**

The audio recording will be stored confidentially and transcribed (typed up word for word). Once it has been typed up the audio recording will be deleted.

Your responses will be anonymised – **this means that when the interview is transcribed any identifying features such as names, the name of your school or names of your family and friends will be removed, therefore no-one will know who has said what. Any names or identifying things you may say will also not be typed up.**

Your views are very important and some of what you say may be shared in the final research report – but your name will not be given. For example, something you say may be shared as follows – Participant A said, "I think that x, y or x is a good idea".

The anonymous record of the interview will be included in the final copy of the research report.

5) Will anyone know what I have said in the interview?

As mentioned above, the interview will be anonymous and no-one will be able to trace what you have said.

According to UK laws, the viewing of SEM under the age of 18 is illegal. Therefore, if you under the age of 18 then, i**n order to keep you safe,** if you tell me that you personally have viewed SEM then I will need to pass this information on to a member of staff within school. You will not be in trouble but I will need to pass this information on in-line with UK law. I will not ask you directly if you have watched SEM, I will just ask your views about it.

6) **What will happen after the interview?**

The information from the interview will be looked at with the information/thoughts from other young people in order to provide useful information about young people's thoughts about sexually explicit media and sex and relationship education.

This information will be included in a final report. Cardiff University will see this final report and it may also be published in academic 'journals'. The name of your school won't feature in the report and no-one will know that you've taken part.

If you decide after the interview that you don't want what you have said to be used in the report then you can withdraw from the study within 2 weeks from the interview taking place.

4) Contact Details

If you would like to discuss the project in more detail then you can contact me using the information below:

Caroline Morgan
Trainee Educational Psychologist
School of Psychology
(College of Biomedical and Life Sciences)
Cardiff University
70 Park Place
Cardiff, CF10 3AT
MorganC3@cardiff.ac.uk

If you have a complaint about the research then you may also contact the following research supervisor or university ethics committee:

Dr Simon Claridge
Professional Tutor
School of Psychology
(College of Biomedical and Life Sciences)
Cardiff University
70 Park Place
Cardiff, CF10 3AT
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02920 876497

School of Ethics
School of Psychology
Cardiff University
Tower Building
Park Place
Cardiff, CF10 3AT
psychenquiries@cardiff.ac.uk
02920 874007

Sources of Further Information/Support/Advice

http://www.healthforteens.co.uk/ - A website designed in consultation with young people about a range of health and relationship needs
http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Sexandyoungpeople/Pages/Sex-and-young-people-hub.aspx - NHS website for young people all about sex and relationships
https://sexetc.org/ - An American website written by teens for teens with lots of information about sexual health

www.themix.org.uk

Appendix H – Consent Forms

PART A TO BE COMPLETED BY YOUNG PERSON

Sexually Explicit Media and Sex and Relationship Education – Your Thoughts

Name: _____

		Please initial each box
1	I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.	☐
2	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, and without any adverse consequences or academic penalty.	☐
3	I understand that only the researcher will have access to my original interview recording, that this recording will be stored securely and then deleted once it has been transcribed and made anonymous (within 2 weeks from the interview date).	☐
4	I understand that this research will be given to Cardiff University and that it may be published elsewhere also.	☐
5	I understand who I can contact if I have a concern or to make a complaint.	☐
6	I consent to being audio recorded	
7	I give permission to be anonymously quoted directly in the research report	
8	I agree to take part in the above study.	

Name of Participant	Date	Signature

PART B TO BE COMPLETED BY PARENT/GUARDIAN

1	I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet version for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

2 I give permission for my child (named above) to take part in the study

Name of Parent/Guardian	Date	Signature

Appendix I – Interview Script and Prompt Questions

Interview Script and Prompt Questions

Pre-Interview

"My name is Caroline Morgan, thank-you for meeting with me today, your views are really important so I'm very grateful for your time. Before we've met today you will have seen a brief information sheet about what this research is about. I'll just go through that again with you now." – (See 'Information Sheet for Research Project')

"The interview aims to investigate your experiences and thoughts about aspects of SEM and SRE. Rather than specific yes or no questions the interview will generally ask you more questions about your thoughts, feelings and experiences."

"You don't have to take part and if there's any questions you don't want to answer or would rather not say then that's fine. Do you have any questions before we begin?"

Interview

First question: Can you tell me your thoughts about SEM?

Subsequent prompt questions: How does it make you feel? Why do you think that? Do you feel that it can be a good thing? Do you feel that it can be a bad thing? Do you know what your friends/peers think about it?

Second question*:* Some people think that SEM is a big problem for children and young people today, what are your thoughts?

Prompt questions: Why do you think that? How does that make you feel? Do you think that other people feel the same way?

Third question**:** Can you tell me if you think that SEM impacts on the way that people act with each other? Or how they feel about themselves?

Prompt questions: Do you feel that it has had an impact on relationships? Do you think it has an impact on how boys and girls are with other? Does it impact upon how you feel about other things? Does it make you feel a certain way – happy, sad etc.?

Fourth question: Can you tell me your thoughts about SRE?

Subsequent prompt questions: Have you always felt this way? How useful has SRE been to you? Are schools getting it right for young people?

Fifth question: How do you feel about SEM being included in SRE? / Some people think that SEM needs to be taught in schools, what are your thoughts on this?

Prompt questions: Is this important? How would you feel about it? What role do you think that schools have in supporting young people with this? Do young people need support with SEM?

Appendix J - Strategies considered to ensure reliability and validity

Strategy	How this was used to promote reliability and validity
Comparing researchers coding	Whilst the author coded the data, emerging codes were discussed with fellow researchers to help to identify any modification or clarification of codes. Whilst fellow researchers had not read the full transcripts, excerpts were shared and discussion took place regarding emerging codes, possible themes and sub-themes. Initial themes and sub-themes were also shared and deliberated to identify repetition and clarify positioning within the wider research questions. Comparison in this way had its purpose in triangulating perspectives to ensure that it was not confined to the author's interpretation only and that the data codes would make sense to others.
Disconfirming case analysis	Once themes and sub-themes had been identified, data was reviewed for instances that did not fit the themes and sub-themes selected. This process may be useful in order to test emergent hypothesis and to ensure that data that may not fit the overall trend is still considered and presented in the analysis. In this way, the limits of the generalisability of the data were also established to an extent, in that it was evident that not all participants shared exactly the same views. This was particularly pertinent in terms of one participant who was more positive towards the issue of SEM than the remaining participants. Such review identified that there were other participants who voiced similar opinion, yet in a quieter manner. Thus, the sub-theme 'Increased Awareness of sexual behaviour' came to light and identified a useful balance to the data set.
Paper trail	Transcribed interviews were colour coded and notes were made upon them during initial coding and emergence of themes. This enabled structure to the analysis process and created transparency as it allows others to see the coding process. Documenting the emergence and modification of themes and sub-themes also allowed for clarity and reflexivity. An example of this can be seen in Appendix L.
Reflexivity	It is identified that the researcher may have influenced the study through her position as received by participants. Participants may have wanted to impress the researcher as a psychologist or elder peer and thus may have elaborated upon their experiences or opinions. Equally it is likely that

	participants may have felt nervous or awkward given the nature of the interview and may not have provided a true reflection of their experiences in this way also. The data provides a balance of participant views in order to mitigate for this and, through theoretical saturation, this effect has been minimised as it was possible to ascertain that all participants offered broadly similar view points. Throughout the process rigorous reflective consideration was adopted in order that participant bias in this way could be considered. A research journal was helpful in this way since it allowed for reflection and review of reflections, thus enhancing reflexivity. Applying such reflexivity to the research design led to choices such as carrying out the interviews in a school setting to provide a sense of normality for participants. Through initial rapport building conversation the researcher also ensured that participants felt comfortable and at ease. Such steps were taken to promote the reliability of the study as much as possible, since these provided a stable and similar interview setting for each round of data collection. Reaching theoretical saturation in data across three schools and eight participants reinforced the reliability of the research design.
Sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour and transparency and coherence.	The study design also embraced these characteristics (sensitivity, commitment, transparency) in order to maintain its robustness and quality. Through identifying and addressing many ethical issues to ensure the safety of participants (section 1.3 of the Critical Appraisal); and through thorough analysis of relevant previous studies to influence the research design; the study aimed to be sensitive to its context. A thorough and in-depth engagement with the topic was also taken throughout the research process, with external colleagues in the field of SRE approached to discuss the study further. In these ways commitment and rigour to the topic and to the research was shown. Through a semantic data analysis (and through disconfirming case analysis and comparison of coding); data was also presented clearly and transparently.

(adapted from Yardley, 2015 and Yardley, 2000)

Appendix K – Lincoln & Guba's Evaluative Criteria for qualitative research and how some of these techniques were applied to the research process

Criteria	Techniques to establish the criteria	How the techniques were applied during the research
Credibility (confidence in the truth of feelings)	• Prolonged Engagement (spending sufficient time in the field) • Persistent Observation (sufficient depth of engagement) • Triangulation (using multiple data sources) • Peer debriefing (exploring analysis with another) • Negative case analysis (being aware of non-conforming data) • Referential adequacy (returning to archived data to check validity of analysed data) • Member-checking (data is checked with members of the group from where the data was derived)	• The entire research process took place over a period of around 18 months, allowing the researcher to become engaged and immersed within the topic. • The coding process and data analysis was discussed with a peer. • In line with 'Disconfirming Case Analysis' (Yardley, 2000) data that did not fit the general trend was identified and reflected upon. Supporting quotes not included in the main data analysis were also returned to often in order to check validity.
Transferability (showing that the findings have applicability in other contexts)	• Thick description (describing a phenomenon in sufficient detail in order to evaluate the extent to which conclusions drawn may be transferable)	• Data was analysed in detail and coded at a semantic level in order to reduce the degree of personal interpretation and to allow, at the explorative level, the words of the participants to speak for themselves. Reaching theoretical saturation through the sample also means that conclusions may be transferable to some extent to similar contexts (see section 2.3 in the Critical Appraisal for further discussion).
Dependability	• Inquiry audit (the process and product	• Seeking supervision from a

(findings are consistent and can be repeated)	of the research is examined by an external individual)	research colleague throughout the process provided an audit of the dependability of the research process. A clear outline of the methodology of the research is additionaly provided in section 3 of the Empirical Study and section 1.4 of the Critical Appraisal to allow for replicability of the study in terms of research design.
Confirmability (the extent to which findings are shaped by participants and not by the researcher)	• Confirmability audit (an external audit to confirm confirmability) • Audit trail (a transparent description of the research steps) • Triangulation (using multiple data sources) • Reflexivity (reflecting on the effect of the researcher)	• Seeking supervision from a research colleague helped maintain the integrity of the findings. • A description of the research steps is provided (see 'Inquiry audit above). • The researcher kept a research diary throughout the research process to provide space for reflection. The effect of the researcher on participants is also reflected upon and mitigated for, as discussed further in the Empirical Review.

Adapted from Lincoln & Guba (1985) and Cohen & Crabtree (2006)

Appendix L – Example of searching and reviewing themes and sub-themes (stages 3 and 4 of thematic analysis)

P2 – lines 10 - 24

I:So the first thing I'll sort of ask you really is what are your thoughts on sexually explicit media? Um, say, do you think it's a good thing or a bad thing for young people today?

Increased tech.

P2: Well yea, I think it's a bad thing. I think as technology has progressed I think there are people who like 10 or 20 years ago had no idea of any of this and now people are getting younger and younger; the age that things are getting released to them is getting much younger.

Younger generation viewing SEM?

I: Mmm

Tech. at younger ages

P2: Cause there are like ten year olds with iphones now, I think they've got access to things that you'd never, that people like me and XXXX and people and things would never had access to until say 14, 15 [years old] and so I think the age is getting much younger. I think it is, like….

Access to tech.

I: Yea. Do you think, like you said there's 10, 11 year olds with iphones, do you think that means that they are able to look at anything anytime then?

Access to tech.

P2: Yea, yea I think so cause I don't know of any blocks or anything to stop them looking at stuff. So it's just there for them and they can see literally anything, like all the, like, the sexually explicit media and stuff, there's nothing to stop young people looking at it if you've got like an iphone or whatever.

Viewing SEM

Unrestricted/constant

Tech

P2 - lines 269 – 293

I: Ok, what do you think is the worst thing?....

P2: …I think it is the expectation on themselves and the expectation of other people to be able to live up to that and be able to look like that and act like that and I think it's always going to produce negativity and be a bad thing for young people. And I think if we're not careful, like with the sex education part if we're not educating young people that that's not all it is, that's not it, it's fake it's a…it's a film then as they start to grow up, it's a sensitive thing, and they're not treating it as a sensitive thing as it should be and it's just too blasé and that's not right.

Pressure/ comparison

SEM as a norm?

Lack of reality?

Lack of education

I: Yea, like it's quite common place then?

P2: Yea, yea,

Subtheme: Viewing SEM at a young age

Subtheme: Year 7's with iPhones

Subtheme: Constant/unrestricted access

Subtheme: Year 7's with iPhones

Subtheme: Comparison with others

Subtheme: Not a priority for secondary school

Subtheme: "It's hard to know what is actually real"

I: Ok, do you think that it can kind of impact on relationships, how people are, boyfriends, girlfriends? Younger and older?

Constant / intrusion

Relationships more sexual?

P2: Yea, I mean it might, because it's become quite an obsessive thing so I think people might not be getting into relationships for the right reasons or they might be expecting something off their partner that isn't realistic or maybe just kind of removing the emotional side from it, it being all about the physical things and not about actually getting on. Like some people I know they just expect that a relationship is just physical and well...

Unrealistic expectations

Subtheme: Intrusion on life

Subtheme: Sex & romantic relationships

Subtheme: "It's hard to know what is actually real"

P2 – lines 347 - 389

P2:I can't talk about my experiences because I never have any sex and relationship education in high school.

Lack of SRE provision

Subtheme: Not a priority for school

I: You didn't have any...

Perception of SRE by schools/young people

P2: No. It clearly wasn't a massive priority.

I: Do you think it should be a focus and a priority?

Concern for younger generation

SEM not talked about

Different lives

Less technology for older generations

P2: Well yes definitely cause it's such a big thing now and it's just ignored or not talked about. I mean what ideas will these year 7s have and then if no-one actually talks to them about it then well...it just doesn't seem good. Well, I don't think. But then when I was in year 7 I didn't think about that, it wasn't in my mind at all cause I would have no way of accessing that or even coming across it accidentally. I was protected in a way. And maybe they're not protected these days.

Young people not protected anymore?

Subtheme: Schools don't talk about it

Subtheme: Changing childhood/"your innocence gone"

I: Ok, that's interesting, tell me more about that

'Adults' not protecting younger

Viewing SEM

Inappropriate

Change to childhood

P2: Well, like we're not protecting them. They can just see all of this and, all of this that adults have produced, and then kids are seeing it, and it's not meant for kids, it's meant for adults. But then kids are thinking they're adults sooner than they should be and then there's sexting going on when you're 12 and it just seems too young for that.

Subtheme: Viewing SEM at a young age

Subtheme: Connecting and sharing information

Use of tech.

Key:

Main themes:

- = Increased Technological Efficacy
- = Changing relationships & Perceptions
- = Viewing of SEM as a Norm
- = Not fit for purpose
- = Sweeping it under the carpet
- = Is it ok to "be what I am'?

Script writing = initial thoughts and coding

Appendix M – Participant Debrief Information

Thank-You

Thank-you for taking part in the study; your views are very important and I am very grateful to you for sharing them with me.

The purpose of this research was to look at young people's thoughts on 'sexually explicit media' and sex and relationship education. We have talked about your experiences today and have broadly covered the points below:

- What are adolescents' views of sexually explicit media content?
- What are adolescents' views on the impact of sexually explicit media content on social and emotional development?
- What are adolescents' views about sex and relationship education?
- What has been done, or what could further be done, to support adolescents in their experiences of sexually explicit media and sex and relationship education?

What happens next?

The audio recording of our interview will be stored confidentially and transcribed (typed up word for word) within 2 weeks after the interview. Once it has been typed up the audio recording will be deleted.

Your responses will be anonymised – this means that your name, the name of your school or names of your family and friends will be removed and then cannot be shared with anyone else. The anonymous record of the interview will be included in the final copy of the research report. The interview data will then be looked at with the data from other young people in order to provide useful information about SEM and sex and relationship education.

If you decide that you don't want what you have said to be used in the report then you can withdraw from the study before _____ by contacting me on the contact details below. After this date, the information will have been typed up and made anonymous and it won't be able to be taken out of the study after this time.

People you can talk to

If you want to talk to anyone about what we have spoken about today then please let myself or a member of school staff know. We can then arrange for an appropriate adult who you can talk to further.

You can also contact any of the services shown below if you have any additional worries or concerns in any way.

Contact Details

If you have any questions or queries about the research then please don't hesitate to contact me using the following details:

Caroline Morgan - Trainee Educational Psychologist
School of Psychology (College of Biomedical and Life Sciences)
Cardiff University
70 Park Place
Cardiff, CF10 3AT
MorganC3@cardiff.ac.uk

If you have a complaint about the research then you may also contact the following research supervisor or university ethics committee:

Dr Simon Claridge
Professional Tutor
School of Psychology
(College of Biomedical and Life Sciences)
Cardiff University
70 Park Place
Cardiff, CF10 3AT
claridges@cardiff.ac.uk
02920 876497

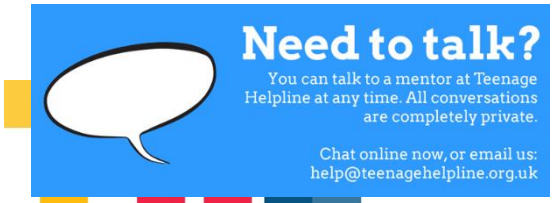
School of Ethics
School of Psychology
Cardiff University
Tower Building
Park Place
Cardiff, CF10 3AT
psychenquiries@cardiff.ac.uk
02920 874007

Sources of Further Information/Support/Advice

http://www.healthforteens.co.uk/ - A website designed in consultation with young people about a range of health and relationship needs

http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Sexandyoungpeople/Pages/Sex-and-young-people-hub.aspx - NHS website for young people all about sex and relationships

https://sexetc.org/ - An American website written by teens for teens with lots of information about sexual health



www.teenagehelpline.org.uk

Essentia

www.themix.org.uk

Appendix N - Critical Realism as an alternative epistemological position

Whilst critical realism may acknowledge that research data gathered may not always provide direct access to reality, accepting that just because something is not known or lived does not mean that it does not exist (and vice versa) (Willig, 2008); its lack of clarity in methodological design was identified as a limitation in such an approach (Yeung, 1997).

Additionally it is recognised that with such a paradigm the critical stance of the researcher can lead to interpretations of competing participant views through the researchers own elucidations of what is most accurate, or 'scientist knows best', something which may disempower participants (Fletcher, 2017). This is linked to the uncertain grounding that the entirety of truth can never be known through the stance of a critical realist, accepting that the researcher will have more power to represent the 'truth' as it is situated within the culture and history of its time (Redman-MacLaren & Mills, 2015). Whilst it is seen that a relativist stance may also carry some similar covets; given the desire to provide a semantic analysis of the data and an accurate representation of the young persons' voice in this study it was felt that a critical realist paradigm may not align with the level of transparency desired in the study.

Appendix O – Supporting quotations

Main Theme	Sub Theme	Supporting quotations	Location (participant/line number)
Increased Technological Efficacy			
	Year 7's with iPhones	"Because obviously now like technology has advanced and I walk round school and I see like a year 7 with like an iphone 7 you know and it's like whoa ok. Cause like a few years ago like you wouldn't see that"	P5, L8
		"I: Ah yea. At what kind of age then do you think that people are starting to see this kind of stuff? B: It's definitely the first time that people have a phone or something"	P1, L90
		"Cause there are like ten year olds with iphones now, I think they've got access to things that you'd never, that people like me and XXXX and people and things would never had access to until say 14, 15" …"Yea, yea I think so cause I don't know of any blocks or anything to stop them looking at stuff. So it's just there for them and they can see literally anything, like all the, like, the sexually explicit media and stuff, there's nothing to stop young people looking at it if you've got like an iphone or whatever. "	P2, L21 + L77
		"I mean if they're going to be getting a child a phone at that age, when they're in primary school say, then they should also be having a conversation with them about what is ok and what is safe to look at."	P2, L563
		"I think, anything like, say, from say like 16 downwards I would just class that as too young and I even think sort of say 18 year olds that are gonna be seeing certain things, I think there's things that 18 year olds like me shouldn't be seeing."	P3, L22
		"Kids can do whatever they want on the internet"	P4, L480

		"Now everyone has an iPhone, and it's on the internet."	P5, L133
		"I you've got the technology, like a smart phone, then it's inevitable that you're going to come across it eventually so you may as well be educated about it."	P6, L306
		"I've got a younger brother and he's only in year 8 and they're already talking about um, like, sexually explicit media and things they find on the internet and I think that's quite like worrying really cause it's just like not what you'd expect for a person of that age…do you know what I mean?"	P7, L7
		"Like most young people have iphones, smartphones, they can have the internet in their hands, like they can do whatever they want really. So I think it needs to be monitored maybe….Like now there's unlimited internet and you can do whatever, whenever and there's no limit. Cause it's 3g and 4g and all that so it's there, like if you want to see it, it's there."	P7, L27 + L33
	Connecting & sharing information	"I: And do you think phones have made a difference then, technology? B: Yea definitely with phones, smartphones. A friend of mind first discovered this sort of thing on their Nintendo DS as it had an internet connection, looking at pictures and stuff like that. So, anything with an internet connection really."	P1, L102
		"But I think it's good that it's on smart phones now cause it means there's more of it which, some people might see as a bad thing cause you're more likely to be exposed to it, but then cause there's more of it you're more likely to get a realistic view. Like in a magazine it's more likely to be porn stars and stuff like that but then online you've still got the porn start side to it but then there's average people who are online just sharing stuff like that which might be more 'normal."	P1, L107
		"If you don't really know what that is then it's like teasing each other for not knowing and then it's like not nice and then their friends feel like they then have to look so that they know. Like even the ones that would have no idea originally they would then be hearing it from their classmates who had been exposed to things like that."	P2, L154
		"But now it's a lot more accessible for younger people and that's the main concern. It's not that	P4, L64

		it's there but it's how easily you can stumble across it on the internet cause there aren't many controls with it." "Cause obviously while the internet can be a good thing because it spreads information quickly, the issue with that is that it spreads the wrong kind of information to you and makes things more accessible for kids." "Because we have so much contact with each other that if one person's seen it then it's going to get spread around." "I: At what age do you think people are starting to see this kind of thing? D: Well I think as you come into secondary school, like 11, 12, because there's just so many more people of your age that are then, well there's gonna be someone who's seen something and then they're gonna tell their friends and they're gonna tell other people and then stuff gets sent around."	P4, L113 P6, L40 P6, L185
	Social media "explosion"	"I think that's what the problem is these days, that kids think they're a lot older than they are and access to social media and stuff like that makes them feel like they're older" "With things like Instagram you're constantly seeing the highlighted things and the edited things and then you're always thinking, well I don't live like that I don't look like that, and I think things like social media have massively impacted children's self-esteem. Especially younger now, cause there are like year 5s with Instagram accounts now and that's….that's scary." "it's a lot more in your face and a lot more….people know more…you know people in primary school know things they probably shouldn't do at that age because of their access to social media and things like that." "I dunno, I guess cause I think in recent years obviously like technology, social media has exploded and there are things everywhere, and this kind of stuff everywhere, so I think it's just down to the increased access that people have." "I saw this thing earlier for instance on Instagram and it was a picture of this girls, and she was in	P4, L536 P2, L219 P4, L128 P5, L84

		leggings and she was like really skinny and then there was like a comment on it saying like oh if I looked like that then I would feel horrible about myself…. I: Because….she's skinny? S: Yea cause like this person was saying she's too skinny and then like I saw comments on there like oh she needs a bum, you know, she needs to do some squats, and I just feel that then if people try and then do that cause they feel that that's what other people want and that's what's attractive then they just get shot down for doing that as well cause they're changing themselves. So I think it's kind of just like a vicious cycle"	P5, L214
		"Oh like Instagram and stuff, there's just pictures all the time and then they're filtered but people can feel that that's real. I mean even though you know it's got like a million filters on it, you can still feel that pressure, do you know what I mean. "	P5, L246
		"So on Instagram you know it has the search icon, well I love going on that just to find new people to follow and stuff but then obviously on that you will come across pictures of naked people or pictures that link to sexually activities in a relationship, and obviously you see that so obviously younger people can see that too. And then on snapchat I've seen people's nudes being put on other people's stories for everyone to see. Like I know people who've been involved with sending and receiving sexually explicit media. So I think it, social media, links significantly to it [sexually explicit media] as well. "	P5, L397
		"….like it is really beat into people at a young age that no means no but I think that really, with like sometimes peer pressure, especially on apps, like people re like well I've done this so why haven't you, things like that"	P6, L209
		"Like even on Instagram and stuff when you see people in bikinis and stuff, I mean I think even just stuff like that will ruin people's self-image of themselves and make them think oh well I look nothing like that and I'm not good enough….stuff like that."	P7, L99
		"Obviously on snapchat people can send things on there, but of course I've never seen anything on there, I mean I have snapchat but I've never seen anything. But people can just send whatever on there, like it doesn't matter."	P7, L156

		"All of my friends are like with social media, they're like oh have you seen this person or this person and then they've got their boobs out or their bum out, or now a lot of things you see are about being fit, so you have to have like abs and take pictures of yourself in gym gear. Like one girl we know she's now obsessed with the gym and she follows all these people and just all the time she's thinking about what she's eating and what she looks like and it's just like there's so much pressure"	P8, L120
	Constant/unrestricted access	"It might sound silly….but I remember like when I was in year 7, I mean I live in like a little village, and there's a filed down there and it's on like the beach and I remember there used to be a bunch of us, it didn't matter how old you were you just came out as a little group and you would like run round and play games like man hunt or tag or football and stuff like that. And I look back on those days and I love them, it just brings back so many memories. But now I feel like children, like even say year 7s, they just walk round on their phones, like their iPhone 7s all the time and I just think that everyone just seems to be on their phone nowadays and I feel as if they miss out on stuff…"	P5, 113
		"But obviously on smart phones now there's like a ridiculous access, you can't really get away from it."	P1, L107
		"if you, or one of your friends, is seeing online that sex is the cool thing to do and seeing all these pictures and stuff then they'll think oh that's what I should be doing and then they do it, and they tell their friends and their friends are doing it"	P4, L158
		"Like on social media or Instagram or things where it's just constant and you can't get away from it"	P4, L181
		"Like my little brother and his friends were talking about something the other day and I was just like ew, like it's just so easy for them to see this stuff nowadays. It's just, well that's just like the norm"	P5, L19
		"There are like apps which can be, what's the word, camouflage as looking like another app so the parents wouldn't know what it was or be suspicious about or stuff like that. So I feel like parents don't really know the ins and outs of what their child does or what's going on around their child, despite what they would like to think. So I feel like there is just no escaping it really,	P5, L460 P6, L55

		even as much as you try. “ “And like everyone now has a smartphone and everyone has access to the internet so I mean if you want to find it then you can, it’s not hard to find……but then if you’re on 4g or whatever then you can see what you want and I don’t think those blocks work. And anyway it’s sent round so…..” “When I was in year 7 I didn’t think about that, it wasn’t in my mind at all cause I would have no way of accessing that or even coming across it accidentally. I was protected in a way. And maybe they’re not protected these days.”	P2, L379
Viewing of SEM as a Norm			
	“It’s hard to know what is actually real”	“And now it’s like the innocence has gone cause they’re seeing these things so young. And then with Instagram and stuff as well there’s this pressure to look good all the time and then with sexually explicit media there’s this pressure to be like that much younger and to be thinking "well maybe I should be doing this too" or "maybe well, like I should be sexy and all that and I should be showing off my body". “I think they’re gonna have unrealistic expectations of how sex should be and how relationships should be” “I certainly think it’s a negative think that **young** people should be able to access sort of stuff without any sort of, any sort of control, I mean they can be seeing something that even adults shouldn’t necessarily be comfortable seeing so like, if you’re really young and you’re seeing that then it’s going to mess with your head more and make you think more about how well that’s how people are” “I mean it’s good for information, cause people may know what happens and how you should look and things like that” “And I guess it kind of puts sex in a box of like, this is how it should be, this is how you should	P2, L231 P3, L93 P3, L124 P4, L143 P4, L170

		look, this is how you should act and you know I think it just makes it very difficult"	
		"I think a lot of it it's not an actual representation of how things are in the real world and I think if a lot of your education comes from sexually explicit media then you'll get a warped idea of what's actually real so you don't actually know what's real and what's not."	P6, L91
		"It's hard to know like what is actually real, like what is real life."	P6, L132
		"As you get older you start to have a wider experience of the real world, so you're more likely to be able to know what the difference is. But when you're 13, 14 you have pretty much no experience of things like that, but as you get older you do just learn how to differentiate between oh well that's real and that's not."	P6, L151
	Changing childhood/"your innocence gone"	"It's like once you've seen it then that's your innocence gone then isn't it, you can't get it back."	P4, L69
		"But yea the younger you are it's worse, like say people in year 7 I wouldn't want them to have to mature that quickly."	P4, L98
		"I think that's what the problem is these days, that kids think they're a lot older than they are and access to social media and stuff like that makes them feel like they're older"	P4, L536
		"But now they can be exposed to anything and it's different what they can see, and what they can search for, and what they've been taught about, or not taught about, regarding what they've seen. Cause they may see these things but they haven't learnt about them yet. Yet that's being spread among them now. I: Yea, so that's only a couple of years difference between your age now and year 7 C: Yea, it's only been a few years really but it's definitely different now compared to when I was in year 7."	P2, L 128
		"Like some of the things I overhear year 7s talking about, I'm shocked and I just think like we weren't like that when we were that age. I think people are much more like open with each other and showing off about things like that rather than being shy about it, cause it's so out there and people can see it so much."	P2, L144

		"I mean I think I would have been terrified. I mean when I was 10 or 11 that would have completely freaked me out. I would have been very embarrassed I think so I don't think I would have said anything to anybody about it. I think there may have been some element of curiosity but I think I'd have been just scared"	P2, L529
		"I think it does put a lot of pressure on having an opinion on sex a lot younger than maybe older generations would have"	P4, L54
		"Seeing this sexually explicit media and stuff like that and thinking that they need to grow up and be doing that, cause they're kids you know, you should be a kid"	P5, L125
		"Like you hear of young people….in a friends little brothers school where a kid was trying to force himself on this girls, and they're like 8. You would never have heard of something like that when I was that age. It's hard to pinpoint that that is because of SEM but I do think it makes people think in a more sexualised way."	P4, L522
		"It wasn't like that when I was 12, like I didn't have a smartphone til I was 14, and even then I don't think they were used as much as they are now. Like now there's unlimited internet and you can do whatever, whenever and there's no limit. Cause it's 3g and 4g and all that so it's there, like if you want to see it, it's there."	P7, L33
		"Like what's wrong with being a kid now, everyone just wants to grow up and it's like you're forced to grow up cause of all this adult stuff that you can see, that you really don't need to….I mean you don't need to see that, cause it's stuff for adults and you're not an adult, so you should just be allowed to be a kid for as long as possible. "	P7, L42
		"But you hear these stories and it just makes me glad that I'm not like, that age…. I: What age? K: Like, 14...anymore….I know it's just a few years but I didn't have a phone when I was 12, 13 and so I didn't see these things"	P8, L91

	Viewing SEM at a young age	"I think that if little kids do watch something like that and develop that as their idea of normal sex then that kid is then messed up you know until they can go to a psychologist to get it sorted out."	P1, L406
		"I: So in your peer group, what kind of age was it that people would start talking about it? B: Really young. Like 12, 13. And it's like….somebody peeled back the curtain, there's more to life than what you thought you know when you first discover that sort of thing."	P1, L97
		"B: …I mean if anything I'd say that it is an outlet. I: Ok in what way? B: Like obviously you're too young to have any sexual encounters when you're like 13, 14 so it's an outlet to you know…..you can't get to see these things yourself but you can see them somewhere else."	P1, L161
		"Nowadays kids with smartphones are seeing it all the time, like you've got kids I've heard them in year 7 talking about stuff. So, like, well it's hard to say, cause you're not mature enough at that age to know about it, but then if you're watching it should you be taught about it. I mean for me I think it would have been good for me at 14, and my peers. But I'm not sure it should be younger."	P1, L378
		"Me and my friends had smartphones, like phones that could get on the internet when we were 14 or so. No, no, like I didn't have a phone then, I think maybe it's better. I: Better, in what way? C: Like, having a phone when you're that young means that you can't get away from this stuff and you can just see it there whenever, and maybe it's too young. You can be too young to see this. I wouldn't have known what to do."	P2, L90
		"Now you've got children from the age of 3 using smartphones, iPad, laptops and they are a lot more exposed to it then."	P4, L371
		"I think it should be like aged 16, when you're thinking about having sex, cause then when you see those images you won't be as shocked and you'll have more of an idea of what it's about. When you're younger you might think you're grown up but really you don't have a clue about all	P4, L544

		that kind of stuff. "I think the number of people who haven't seen it is just going down and down." "Like loads of young people see it nowadays like you're always hear of young kids, year 7, year 8 and they're talking about that these things they've seen on the Internet and like everyone my age as well. So you can see it, like it's just really widespread it's just quite, just normal now...common to see it." "it's such like a widespread thing now, like everyone from year 7 upwards views it." "As you get older you start to have a wider experience of the real world, so you're more likely to be able to know what the difference is. But when you're 13, 14 you have pretty much no experience of things like that, but as you get older you do just learn how to differentiate between oh well that's real and that's not." "At 16…well maybe at that age you can access it because sex is kind of becoming a part of your life but also I still think you're a bit young to be exposed to that level,,,I mean the level and extremity of a lot of sexually explicit media, I think 16 is too young to see that, you're still too young to have to look at and deal with, and process, stuff like that. So yea definitely under the age of 16 is too young and possibly under 18. But yea the younger you are it's worse, like say people in year 7 I don't want them to have to mature that quickly." "When you're young you're less likely to have the sort of understanding and you're more likely to be influenced I would say. So I think, I certainly think it's a negative think that young people should be able to access that sort of stuff without any sort of, any sort of control, I mean they can be seeing something that even adults shouldn't necessarily be comfortable seeing so like, if you're really young and you're seeing that then it's going to mess with your head more…" "I've got a younger brother and he's only in year 8 and they're already talking about um, like, sexually explicit media and things they find on the internet and I think that's quite like worrying really cause it's just like not what you'd expect for a person of that age…do you know what I mean?"	P6, L275 P8, L45 P8, L268 P6, L151 P4, L93 P3, L120 P7, L7

Is it ok to "be who I am"?			
	Comparison with others	"Like there's pressure to be good in school and all this anyway and then pressure on how you need to look and how you need to be having sex and that you need to be having sex….and it's just like….too much…you know. "	P5, L188
		"And I think it is hard for someone to just look in the mirror and think to themselves it's ok to be what I am"	P5, L226
		"I: So, do you think it can have any impact at all on how people feel about themselves…self-esteem, confidence things like that? B: Yea definitively. I mean when you look at when people look at sexually explicit media as children they're seeing grown men and grown women and if it's like teenagers who are watching that who haven't developed then yea I can imagine that people would have insecurities about themselves. But all teenagers have that anyway don't they. I mean if you look at an older sister or someone else in your year group who is more developed than you are then you might feel these things. Like all people going through puberty are gonna have issues with body confidence and stuff like that."	P1, L183
		"But I definitely think that with PSE, if we're going to talk about that later, then schools should be explain that sex isn't just a bad thing and they should be saying, in terms of body image, that there can be examples of things that aren't realistic. And they should be teaching them that images on stuff like Instagram isn't always the way that things really are either, you know…to help people to not have issues about their self-esteem"	P1, L216
		"I think it is the expectation on themselves and the expectation of other people to be able to live up to that and be able to look like that and act like that"	P2, L274
		"I don't necessarily think young kids being able to see porn where everyone's immaculate as in stick thin or really muscly…I wouldn't necessarily say that that's gonna give them a realistic expectation of how they should look and how they should behave as they mature."	P3, L35
		"Girls might be more thinking like, oh well, girls look like that in porn so that, you know,	

		especially when you're young and you've got access to it, then girls might be thinking that they need to have like really big boobs, and immaculate bodies, and no body hair…."	P3, L57
		"So they go along with the trends, so with what they think guys find attractive. Cause I know a few people who have kind of, like lost themselves, well maybe not lost but they've kind of changed and altered themselves to try and be like the ideal, you know. And then younger boys are getting these ideas from these trends that they are seeing. Does that make sense?"	P5, L199
		"I think boys can feel pressure too. Yea I think it's down to like all the trends. And I think that guys can feel just as pressured as girls, I don't think it's just all one way. I: So guys might feel pressured to look a certain way or be a certain way as well? S: Yea, yea. Like online and on apps I always see like oh when girls say they like nerdy boys this is what they think and it's just like a picture of a really attractive guy with just like some glasses on, you know. And well society probably doesn't consider that that's what someone may typically look like and then people feel that oh well maybe I should wear glasses then and look like that, I think it just all gets muddled up along the way really. "	P5, L233
		"I think maybe people need to be educated a bit more on like there are so many other people that feel the exact same way as them and that they're comparing themselves to whatever they see as well, it's not just you that's doing it."	P6, L115
		"I think that because if you see it without ever having being spoken to about it you are going to compare yourself to whatever you see, so I think it needs to be like drilled into people that this isn't an accurate representative of what happens."	P6, L252
		"Like some girls know what guys have seen and so they feel like they're not good enough and so they have to, step up to the mark and be like that. Like, they might feel that there's a certain expectation that they have to be a certain way. I mean some girls might feel that they're not good enough and are like oh well they've seen this and I need to live up to that, like the expectation that they need to be like this"	P8, L105
		"All of my friends are like with social media, they're like oh have you seen this person or this person and then they've got their boobs out or their bum out, or now a lot of things you see are	P8, L120

		about being fit, so you have to have like abs and take pictures of yourself in gym gear. Like one girl we know she's now obsessed with the gym and she follows all these people and just all the time she's thinking about what she's eating and what she looks like and it's just like there's so much pressure"	
		"It's like, it's…you've got to look a certain way and then show everyone else that you look like that. Like even with that I think boys have this idea of how girls are supposed to look and what they're supposed to wear. So you feel like you have to look like that too, cause boys are seeing this pictures of other girls and that's what they're liking, so then we have to compete with that."	P8, L130
	Intrusion on life	"Even when actually if you think about it it's not actually that good a thing to have a smartphone, I mean yea you can see information and stuff a lot but all the social media….I mean does it actually make anyone's lives better?! "	P5, L149
		"I'm all about preserving that innocence for as long as you can and not being exposed to these kind of things. Especially in primary school, children should be kept as they are. Like not just have a smart phone and be able to look at everything, just have your childhood."	P2, L319
		"They can just see all of this and, all of this that adults have produced, and then kids are seeing it, and it's not meant for kids, it's meant for adults."	P2, L379
		"You could just be like on a website and then suddenly you've got inappropriate images and obviously when you're younger that's quite scary and you won't like….it's putting people in a venerable position when they don't want to be."	P4, L21
		"I don't think anyone should ever be exposed to it, and especially not when you're a child, or even as a young teenager. I mean it should be a choice that you have to go and look for"	P4, L146
		"And then children might think kind of, am I sexy enough and then well, should I do that too and do I need to look like that for someone to find me attractive. And I think it just puts a lot more pressure on children than they need to have on themselves."	P4, L182
		"Um I think with people my age it's quite hard to avoid really, it's sort of inevitable that you're going to come into contact with it really….and I think that becomes more likely as you get older.	P6, L22

		But I think people are now coming into contact with it at younger and younger ages now than what it used to be." "I think it detracts from social skills, like my sister is always on her phone and sometimes you have to say to her like two or three times to get her attention cause she'll be on her phone." I: And why do you think now, looking back, you wouldn't have wanted you to have one? [a phone] M: Cause I think it's just quite dangerous, it's just like you get so….people can get quite addicted to it you know. They have their phone as, like, their regular routine and I think you just get bored of reality almost because you're almost on virtual things. It's not real, it's not real connections with people, you're just looking at your own phone instead. You're not out there doing things, you're just on your phone as the main thing in your life." "II had a smartphone when I was, like 12 or whatever, like they do now, then I just don't know if I could have dealt with that, you know. When I was 12 I was still innocent and didn't know about sex, well not like the sex you see in a lot of sexually explicit media, and that was just a simpler time you know….kids should be innocent you know, like you're a kid when you're 12, you should just be a kid and not worry about this stuff."	P6, L83 P7, L71 P8, L213
Not fit for purpose			
	SRE is "awful"	"It's stuff we need to know so it should just be a lesson like anything else. And then that's good because it's a lesson about stuff that's actually happening to you, you know it's not a lesson like history or something" "You go into a school and you have a sex ed and stuff like that and its' awful, absolutely awful, it's just the worst thing ever and it gives you a really clinical look on it and there's no, you know people come away from that sort of stuff….like I came away from it with nothing really helpful, I mean it sort of scares you about se whereas sexually explicit media can help as shows you that it's something that's you need to be afraid of and that it can be a good thing." "I:What kind of outdated stuff? B: Oh, just like stuff they always go on about like drugs or, we had a lesson once on healthy living	P2, L570 P1, L16

		and all that. But they don't teach about technology enough or things that are actually the most relevant issues for us today. Like feeling shit about yourself is probably a lot more of an issue, I think."	P1, L226
		"I mean it must suck to teach kids about sex and stuff like that cause kids can be just horrible to teach, especially the subject, and I think people have just gotta learn though otherwise you're just gonna have people with no idea what to do and they're gonna learn all of their stuff, like some of my friends have done, all from porn sites. Which I don't think is right cause you're not learning why you have to use condoms or why you have to use contraception or anything like that"	P1, L248
		"I: Ok, thanks. This next question is probably quite easily answered but if I was to ask you in a scale of 0 -5, with 0 being completely useless and 5 being really really useful, how would you rate the SRE you've had at school? B: From here, a two I: Ok. What stops that from being lower then? B: Cause they taught us about contraception which is so important I: And what would stop it being higher? B: Cause you could tell that they felt uncomfortable about it, it was people talking about it in a really clinical way. I had the scariest teacher in the world and she sort of just…it was just awkward….I mean one of our PSE lessons they asked us to write down all the sexual positions that we knew but there's just no level of trust at all like you have no idea what they're going to do with that information, are they gonna take the kids that know the most then. I mean when I did it I really didn't feel comfortable answering this cause what are they gonna do with this information, are they gonna corner me cause they think that I'm watching sexually explicit media or are they gonna question me as to how I know all this."	P1, L304
		"Compared to how widespread sexually explicit media is as well I don't think it really adds up, I mean sexually explicit media should be spoken about more compared to how much alcohol and drugs are."	P6, L281 P8, L243

		"What we did have was useful but I just feel like it wasn't enough and there was still stuff that we needed to know. Like it was just kind of touched upon, like wasn't actually in depth. "I think if children can be taught about sex at the age of 11 then they should be taught about sexually explicit images"	P5, L339
	Not a priority for secondary school	"I can't talk about my experiences because I never have any sex and relationship education in high school. I: You didn't have any… C: No. It clearly wasn't a massive priority." "It was just kind of….it was more what it felt like rather than what they actually said cause it felt that it was just kind of like rushed and they wanted to get it out the way, like it was just something they just felt they had to get through and then just brush it under the carpet…..Well just like they didn't think it was important and couldn't be bothered to talk about it like, it just, it just wasn't talked about or out in the open and then you feel like you shouldn't talk about it either then, so you couldn't have any questions or anything" "I: How easy do you think it is, on a scale of 1-4, to talk about SEM within school? M: Well, impossible really, like a zero because they just don't mention it, it's never spoken about by teachers or adults. Like if I'd had a lesson on it or something then I'd feel that I could go and speak to the person who had taught that lesson about it." "I think that schools should definitely be making it a priority because I think…well I think that parents should have a responsibility to talk to their children in some way but I think it's easier to do, an easier conversation to have in a classroom environment rather than it feeling like a telling off from your parents." "Like it was just kind of touched upon, like wasn't actually in depth."	P2, L347 P5, L310 P6, L439 P2, L468 P8, L244

	Changing SRE to provide useful support	"I think it's been useful but with regards of how to separate from what you see on social media and porn I would probably say it's lacking massively from modernisation."	P3, L168
		"I think it needs to be changed for how it used to be because people are a lot more open with sex and sexuality now, that schools do treat it that it's quite….well you have that sex education in year 6 and then it's never spoken about it again, like that's it you've had that now there you go. And I think it needs to be spoken about a lot more and needs to be more frequent, cause as you go like 12, 13, 14 you do get quite a lot more exposure to, like, sexually explicit media, so I think that you need to have PSE around those ages as well, not just when you're in year 6."	P6, L231
		"I had it [SRE] in year 6, yet I've had nothing since and I think that's quite bad, I think that should be changed maybe. Because it's just all about puberty and biology and how your body develops, it's not about relationships should be and how things are unhealthy in relationships and what should be expected if you are in a relationship, like respect and treating people properly and all that. It's like if someone was mistreating you or something I don't think people would understand or if someone's just using someone for sex and stuff I don't think they'll understand that because they haven't learnt it. And then they just think oh well that's normal cause that's what they are seeing, not what they've been taught."	P7, L169
		I: What kind of things do you think perhaps should have been included then? K: Um, I think like, I mean I don't know if I've just missed it or something but being safe in sex and stuff and like your sexual health and all things like that, I think that needs to be included especially as people are growing up.	P8, L244
		"They [schools] should be saying, in terms of body image, that there can be examples of things that aren't realistic. And they should be teaching them that images on stuff like Instagram isn't always the way that things really are either, you know…to help people to not have issues about their self-esteem. The same with sexually explicit media and comparing the way you look. I mean with social media, say you look at someone's Facebook profile you're going to see all of their best moments and you're going to think oh that person's got a wonderful life. And…that sort of stuff needs to be taught rather than a lot of the outdated stuff that is taught"	P1, L217
		"I: SO the teacher makes a difference.	

		C: Yea I think it's important to have someone who young people can talk to. But then I guess it might be hard for the person to make the decision about who teaches it but then it should be something that is thought about"	P2, L553
		"I'm definitely for the classroom setting. Having it done as a lesson will show you how important it is to learn these things and allows you to discuss things with others and that."	P2, L584
		"I: And when do you think they should being spoken to about sexually explicit media? D: I think probably around the age of 13 because, like especially now people are getting their hands on smartphones a lot earlier than they used to be so I think that it doesn't necessarily need to be too early, like you could get a bit of a weird view but I think at 13 it needs to be introduced, talking about it and I don't think they should get all the education at once because they will be a bit of an overload. I think it needs to be introduced that there is various sexually explicit media out there and education around that."	P4, L529
		"Like maybe they should be teaching us like what do you do if you want to talk to your boyfriend, or girlfriend, or whatever about stuff like this and sexually explicit media or looking at pictures on Instagram. I feel like boys just do what they want all the time and some boys just talk to us like, just in really derogatory ways, and then just like like like all the time, all these pictures of girls with their boobs and their bums out and their tiny waists and they don't care about how that is making girls feel. And they just say oh it's not a big deal. But it is and boys need to be taught about this stuff I think, like taught about how that would make someone feel and how they should approach stuff. And how to treat each other. Like the same for girls too to help them so they don't feel that well if you want to be sexy then you need to post pictures of yourself in this and that and hardly any clothes"	P8, L202
		"I think it would be better if it's coming from the teachers of the school, because that way it's coming from someone that you know and that you trust. And also it gives them someone to go to if they're ever exposed to it and they don't know what to do about it. So again it just gives kind of a life line to a kid so they can actually speak about it so they don't have to bottle it all up and worry about it"	P4, L409
		"I: Do you think for you and your peers, if someone had spoken to you about SEM when you	P7, L289

		were 13 say, do you think things would be any different for you now? P7: Umm I think that it would make people more aware and if it's like, if you're shown that this isn't real then I think people would know that then and then not expect it in real life and then they would be better in their relationships and there wouldn't be so much pressure on everyone to be like, all sexual and stuff in relationships. You know, you would know that actually it's not real and actually it's ok not be like that. I think it's just not healthy to have these unrealistic expectations cause then it's just always bad for you if you don't reach it."	
Sweeping It Under The Carpet			
	A taboo subject	"Well yea cause no-one talks to young people enough or just skirts around stuff like this and then it's like, well you're not talking to us about it so what do you want us to do about it. Let's all just not talk about it and hope it goes away."	P4, L359
		"I think it's good to have exposure to it because the more taboo something is then the more chance people are going to be excited and going to want to do it. It's the same with sex and drugs and alcohol you know….the more taboo it is the more likely people are going to want to do it. It's like the stereotype of somebody going to an all-girls school or an all-boys school then they're going to be more crazy when they do interact with the opposite sex because they've been wrapped up"	P1, L118
		"I think making it more open is important. Because when things are more open it makes young people less susceptible to believing things that aren't real or that aren't realistic that they come across on the internet, it's easier for them to ask and things like that."	P2, L422
		"I would say that probably not many would chose to go to their teachers to talk about stuff like that so yea I would say that there's probably a lack of people out there who they could like talk to about stuff."	P3, L136
		"I still think it's very much a taboo subject. I mean it's not so much that sex is something that shouldn't be discussed, I think it should be in a safe way, but I think sexually explicit media is something that everyone kind of dodges around cause I don't think anyone wants to face the situation head on and actually say well is it appropriate….is it not."	P4, L226

		"I mean for older generations sex may not have been a talked about subject and now with sexually explicit media there's kind of like a whole other side to it as well."	P4, L504
		"So I just think that the whole attitude of it just needs to be embraced with pupils and sit them down and talk to them about it straight and get it sorted and then they just know."	P5, L325
		"It's [SEM] just not spoken about really. I mean compared to how available it is I don't think it is spoken about nearly as much as it perhaps should be. I: Ok, so do you think it's something that is quite available? D: Yea it is, but it's a bit taboo compared to how available it is.	P6, L8
		"So I don't think we should stop people seeing it, I think there just needs to be more education around it and I think it just needs to stop being so taboo cause it is just so widespread."	P6, L172
		"I think that people who haven't seen it – they're in the minority, the very small minority, so if you just don't discuss it and pretend it's not there I think that really causes quite a big detriment to a large amount of people compared to how many people it would help."	P6, L267
		"Whereas normally sexually explicit media isn't talked about, it's kind of something that's in a dark corner of the internet that people flock to and then they talk about it there."	P4, L217
		Ccause I guess that's the whole issue with it all, it's that people just don't talk about it and it's just all brushed under the carpet and now people are trying to fix it without telling the people that they're trying to fix it. So no-ones really aware of anything. I: I know, I know. I can imagine that might be quite frustrating. L: Well yea cause no-one talks to young people enough or just skirts around stuff like this and then it's like, well you're not talking to us about it so what do you want us to do about it. Let's all just not talk about it and hope it goes away. "	P4, L352
		"I: Ok do you think it needs to be at taboo subject? D: I don't think so cause it's part of life really, especially now with things you can see online it can't really be a taboo because of how widespread it is, you can't just sweep that under a rug	P6, L407

		cause it's such a big thing."	
	Parents don't talk about it	"But the responsibility lies with the parents, if these people are giving their kids a smartphone and they're not looking after what they're watching then is the responsibility with porn and kids or is it the responsibility of the adults. I mean it's like saying oh you've let your kid go into a warehouse and they've picked up a machete, I mean is that the fault of the kid or the machete producers, no it's the parents."	P1, L417
		"For a kid to go and look at media like that is a normal thing and it's gonna happen, because it happens a lot of the time, and I don't think adults understand what is going on here"	P1, L428
		"I think maybe at home most parents probably know that it's something that happens but then they don't want to talk about it, it's a conversation that no-one wants to happen."	P2, L540
		"If they like speak to their parents like, then they might be disgusted that they've seen something that they shouldn't have like hassle and that like why did they see it, and how, and why did they chose to look at it at all or whether it was by accident or not"	P3, L133
		"And I think maybe parents should talk to their children, in the modern day, should make their children aware of it. Like we all know that everyone is looking at stuff like that, so maybe just make them aware of reality and how that sort of media is not how you should behave or how you have to be."	P3, L204
		"Yea. I mean a, because they're gonna be maybe embarrassed of what they've seen or, or they're not gonna feel comfortable talking about it to their parents and their parents aren't gonna feel comfortable taking to their children about stuff like that."	P3, L374
		"Like you don't want to tell your parents about anything, you want to keep everything secret. Whereas sometimes it can be beneficial to have it out in the open so it can be addressed and kind of put to bed and then people feel like they can ask about it when it's appropriate and things like that. And kids won't feel so scared about the whole topic."	P4, L268
		"Kids can do whatever they want on the internet and I think they should be monitored to keep them safe….I mean not always checking their phone and stuff like that as that could be a	P4, L480

		problem for trust between parents and their children, but just putting in place some sort of safeguarding or locks on the internet, or just keeping track somehow of what's being looked at and then talking to children about what they're looking at"	
		"There are like apps which can be, what's the word, camouflage as looking like another app so the parents wouldn't know what it was or be suspicious about or stuff like that. So I feel like parents don't really know the ins and outs of what their child does or what's going on around their child, despite what they would like to think. So I feel like there is just no escaping it really, even as much as you try."	P5, L460
		"But I understand that parents probably do want to protect their child and be like no they're too young they don't need this information but then I think they need to realise that their child probably definitively is seeing all this stuff though so they should at least get the correct information about it"	P5, L483
		"I mean there are parents who try and block what their children see but I think if you stop people seeing something then they're just going to want to see it more and then they're just gonna like get things like through their friends and things like that anyway."	P6, L169
		"Cause your parents are your support system at home and they're always gonna be there so I think people may find it easier to ask their parents questions than like in a classroom at school. But I think that school should still teach them about it and then maybe parents should be advised to just go over things with them at home as well and let them know that in case they want to ask any questions or anything and give them an opportunity to do that."	P7, L285
		"I: Who do you think is dodging it?L: Well, like schools and adults. They know it's there but they're just letting it carry on and not talking about it and not doing anything."	P4, L234
	Schools don't talk about it	"Schools should be teaching us about this stuff, not just leaving us to figure it out, I mean we're the kids you know."	P1, L266

		"I: So, is there anywhere else this information could come from? B: Well if not the school then who, you know. It's their purpose to prepare people for life and this is your age where you're learning about sex and relationships and so you should be guided through that."	P1, L288
		"Because if you don't tell them about it they're going to do it by accident or they're going to find out about it another way, so it's a way for the schools to kind of take control of that situation and make it safer. "	P4, L 295
		"Yea. I think some schools just forget about it sometimes, cause they all know everything they need to know and forget that the kids in the school don't."	P4, L342
		"I:So do you think perhaps that adults and teachers and everybody, do you think they have an understanding of how widespread it is? P: I don't think so really because like people, like teenagers, they are being born into having all this access and I think that some people act like the problem is not nearly as big as it is, or not problem, but the presence of it, they don't actually realise it's there and they just act like it's not there. But it's very big thing and has quite a big impact on some people's worlds	P4, L540
		"Teachers can't just act like it doesn't exist and just let the pupils experience it on their own, I think there needs to be some discussion about it."	P6, L176
		"School is preparing you for adult life so they teach you about employment and how to find a course at university but sex and sexually explicit media is obviously a big part of life so I think the school needs to focus more on that because you are going to come into contact with it as you grow up. So schools need to prepare you in that way as well, not just getting a job."	P6, L247
		"I definitely think it needs to be discussed, we need to be talked to about it in some way or other so we're not just asking each other all the time or googling it, I mean that's never a good idea is it."	P7, L255
		"Well, I think if people haven't seen it and then it's taught then they might feel uncomfortable	P6, L422

		because they'll be like whoa what is this but then I would also say that if they have that opportunity to learn about it fully and completely in a controlled, organised manner in school then I would say that that's a better way to go about it than if they say go to their friend who doesn't know everything" "Sometimes you can't talk to your parents about it cause it's a bit awkward but if you're forced to sit there and listen then it's good cause you're just getting the information." "It should be taught about in school and talked about in school, cause everyone's seeing it and everyone knows about it so why is it just like this secret thing that we're not going to talk about. Schools should be teaching us about this stuff, not just leaving us to figure it out, I mean we're the kids you know. Schools should be preparing us for life, they're not preparing us by just sweeping this under the carpet" "Don't think I'd go to a teacher to ask about it cause it would just be out the blue like cause it's just never ever discussed"	P8, L193 P1, L265 P8, L341
Changing Relationships and Perceptions			
	Sex and Romantic relationships	"And then I feel like younger guys they obviously see all this and see the trends going round and then they think oh well that's what I want. So I do think it has, I mean I do think that respect has been lost, some respect has been lost, for a girl. Especially if she's like, they don't want to do the things that the boys have seen on like sexually explicit media. " "I mean you do hear things about people touching people up and saying things, I mean like I know that's not right. But it's really difficulty growing up and I dunno….I don't really know. I mean I can't see too much of a link between someone watching sexually explicit media and doing something wrong. I mean 99% of the sexually explicit media you see is two consenting people together getting it on and I don't see how that could have too much of an effect on boys."	P5, L187 P1, L151

		"I:Mm do you think it's just relationships are getting younger then C: Yea, yea I think that as well its earlier, well maybe not that young, but like nowadays the things that like year 7s know about, I would have had absolutely no idea when I was that age."	P1, L119
		"So I think people might not be getting into relationships for the right reasons or they might be expecting something off their partner that isn't realistic or maybe just kind of removing the emotional side from it, it being all about the physical things and not about actually getting on. like some people I know they just expect that a relationship is just physical and well…. I: Ok, why do you tank that? C: Well I definitely think sexually explicit media plays a part, cause maybe the boys then think that they should be doing this all the time and having sex all the time. Like sometimes people aren't even fussed about a relationship they're just like sending things to each other and doing things together and it's not about having a relationship, it can just be blasé. "	P2, L289
		"Like it's always happened, like people in primary school having a boyfriend or a girlfriend or whatever, like it was like that when I was in primary school, but I think it's becoming less and less innocent with the things that they're being exposed to."	P2, L312
		"Especially when we're at that age where it's sort of, you're finding out about your sexuality and relationships and things like that and I think they could have a, it could lead towards them, sort of, having unrealistic expectations of how sex is and possibly how relationships work."	P3, L24
		"It affects how children see themselves and each other. Like they might not see each other just as friends anymore, they see it as more sexual and stuff like that, like you hear of young people….in a friends little brothers school where a kid was trying to force himself on this girls, and they're like 8."	P4, L520
		"I guess everyone wants to try what they see and then that can have an effect within the relationship, cause, so like usually you would go through the stage of getting to know the person bla bla bla but I feel like it can be rushed into doing things, like including sexual activities and stuff like that. So I do feel like it has changed. I: So maybe that kind of thing, like intimacy or physical things, might happen sooner?	P5, L171

		S: Yea, like before you even know someone, that's the expectation like. "	
		"Cause it's like oh my god I should be doing that and am I weird if I'm not doing that and what will my boyfriend think of me and all that."	P5, L258
		"It gives the wrong impression of what…I don't know….how relationships and sex and stuff should actually be."	P7, L14
		"Yea it's just like sending nudes is just, all the time, like sometimes it's like you're not popular unless you're asked to send nudes. I: Wow, and how do you think girls feel about that? Well, and guys? S: It just cheapens everything doesn't it, like it's just about how you look and nothing else, and just about being sexy enough, or sexier, it's always just it's never enough and you can never feel good enough cause there's always someone else sending something else as well or something better.	P5, L439
		"I guess for some people it might make them feel like they're learning something, like learning how to be sexual in a relationship, but in my experience that usually isn't really a good thing cause actually it's not real and your partner might not like that. Like a mate, a guy, wanted to do stuff with his mrs and she just thought he was disgusting, and then he didn't feel that great I don't think, but then it's like there's these people in sexually explicit media and then there's real life, and I don't know….maybe it was like disappointed like. I mean I don't know cause he didn't really say that but like, I think it might be hard to have the reality and then the not reality like all the time….constant almost"	P6, L158
		"I think like how they portray it is that relationships are just for sex and women are just there for sex, not for whatever a relationship is… I: In what way…. M: Well like having a connection or actually getting to know them."	P7, L82
		"I think if people view this [sexually explicit] media then they will just think well oh I don't need to have a connection with someone to have sex, or be intimate or whatever, like that doesn't matter… Like 11, 12 year olds watching this now are going to have a different view, the wrong	P7, L133 + L142

		view, or relationships and think it's just about sex, or just think that sex is the most important thing. So they like might not actually think that they need to have a connection with somebody, and I think that's what's expected cause that's all they know." "Because I think people will see these things online and think ah well that's how I'm supposed to act and that's how I'm supposed to be. And then that's how they think that they have to act when they're in a relationship. So yeah I think it does affect relationships. Like I heard a story about this girl and this guy that were going out and the guy was saying to the girl that she had to do all these things, it was like someone I know. And she didn't want to do these things but he said that that's how people had sex when they're in a relationship and kind of put pressure on her to do these things that she didn't want to, I mean like not awful stuff but yeah she then felt that she had to be like this" "I've got mates at other schools and they say that girls do stuff to the guys, like in the toilets at school or like after school and stuff like that. And most the time the girls don't want to but the guys say that if that girl doesn't do it then he'll just find another girl who will. So the girl thinks she has to" "So one girl right she had seen that her boyfriend had been looking at this stuff, sexually explicit media, and it was just gross like and she was so upset cause she started thinking that he didn't fancy her and like was she not enough for him. And then I think he just didn't care and so she just got so caught up in like, trying to impress him and be like the girls on the internet"	P8, L53 P8, L66 P8, L154
	Impact on Gender Portrayal	"But I know more boys than girls who watch it. Like when I was in the younger years I knew a bunch of guys who watched it and all of the girls knew it and they were disgusted by it." "For boys who stereotypically might repress that, like not talk about how they feel, then with their self-esteem it's a massive thing cause they thing they need to be like how these things, the media they see is and that's how they need to be when they're in a relationship; and also how they're girlfriend should be as well. Like if she's not like that, what they think is the norm, then is there something wrong, and what they think is the norm might not be the norm…does that make sense… I: Yea, definitely. C: Cause there's like a masculine like a bravado thing between males but then also between females it can happen as well. I think cause it can tend to be, again, like boasting	P1, L74 P2, L200

		to each other about what they've done and all that."	
		"It's like men have to be that certain sort of attitude and behaviour that sort of goes with porn cause it means that they get the girls like….I wouldn't really say that it's a feminist side of things I would say, it's very much that the man is really macho and muscly and wouldn't necessarily, it's not too much geared towards a…ummm…making love,"	P3, L76
		"I would say there's quite a lot of um, sort of pressure for them to have a boyfriend that's the popular one, the muscly one, the one that's the most sort of laddish as opposed to someone that's seen as a bit more kind and friendly."	P3, L103
		"Like girls thinking they have to be like girls in sexually explicit media, and look like and do those things, and boys expecting it, kind of thing."	P5, L165
		"Like one of my friends little sister had pictures of herself, not in underwear, but in like not very much clothes. And it's just, that's the norm. It's just a cycle cause everyone does it, so everyone else does it to fit in. It's like some people have to post pictures to prove their sexy, like they're on trend. Well, going back to uploading things, like people upload stuff on snapchat, like girls do it with their boobs out or guys shirtless, saying oh snap me. So I see that a lot. And on Instagram loads of pictures of parties with boobs, tiny skirts, loads of girls. Cause obviously like dressed and heels make it easier to show your bum or your boobs, so it's more common for girls to do it. But then I know, like a guy, friend of a friend was saying to him the other day, oh you know that girl you're friends with, do you mind if I try to get nudes off her."	P5, L425
		"I think the boys put it on the girls, like pressure, and so they need to know that that's not real and that girls shouldn't just be expected to be like these things they watch. Cause then the girls just feel rubbish cause they're not like what they've seen on the internet etc."	P7, L310
		"Cause guys our age are always looking at it and seeing stuff and think that all of us [girls] are like that and it's just all about sex then. Like some girls will think that if a guy wants pictures of them then he likes her, or if he wants her to do stuff to him, but then they don't, they just want like sexual stuff, they don't care.	P8, L74

		I: So it's a lot of assumptions from guys maybe? K: Well yea, thinking they can just have what they want, when they want. And girls aren't like that, well they shouldn't be treated like that you know. But then, some girls act that way as well, they act all chachy like and want the boys to look at them. Like there was a guy and a girl on a school field, not here, like, just a story you know, but they were having sex and like there were other people there just filming on their phones and they all thought it was funny. But, it's...well….it's not funny is it. Sex is a serious thing and it's just, some people treat it like a joke." "So yea, if they're [boys] then seeing sexually explicit media I think that makes them think a certain way about girls as well. And then if a girl has seen that kind of thing too then it's like an extra pressure that they have to be like this sexually….so….like…I dunno. It's hard you know."	P8, L147
	Increased awareness of sexual behaviour	"I mean it [SRE] sort of scares you about se whereas sexually explicit media can help as shows you that it's something that's you need to be afraid of and that it can be a good thing." "I would say that the longer that you have exposure to it then the more you can adjust to, and realise that that is unrealistic and it's an unrealistic example of what real sex is life. I mean say if you've got somebody who, you know, a 13-year-old kid, I mean I've got people on my bus at that age, when they hit puberty or something and that's all they think about, talk about, everything like that. And I think if somebody at that age who realistically is not likely to have any sexual experiences for a couple of years, if they are exposed to sexually explicit media then they have a longer period of time to figure out what it's like and figure out what to expect. I mean if you've got someone who's never been exposed to it at all and then they have sexual encounter they've got no idea what to expect realistically, they don't know what they're doing, what it's going to be like, you'd have people afraid of what it's going to be like, people who are nervous and that's not helpful in life and leads to you not having good experiences." ….." so if you've got someone that is only recently exposed then they're going to think that side of the showbiz side of sex is what's real and they won't know what real sex is like." "There'll be people who will say I'm glad I watched it cause I knew more things about it and was more prepared."	P1, L19 P1, L36 + L49 P1, L 66

		"The people who I have talked to about sexually explicit media are definitely the people with more relaxed views and are calmer about it and have a greater understanding of it, I mean obviously they do cause they've seen it more. I: A greater understanding of…. B: Well sex"	P1, L82
		"Then it's a tug of war between those people who want to see it and those who don't and those people, like some boys I know, who think its educational and those that think it's awful."	P4, L230
		"I guess for some people it might make them feel like they're learning something, like learning how to be sexual in a relationship, but in my experience that usually isn't really a good thing cause actually it's not real and your partner might not like that"	P6, L158
		"I: Ok. Do you think there's anything positive that can come from it at all? Some people think that in some ways it can be educational, what do you think about that? K: I feel like if you've got the proper education in school or at home or something then you don't, like it could be something different to proper education. I mean I supposed it could be helpful in some way but I think there's just so much stuff out there that's just like….extreme…not relatable and just not useful, not typical I guess of what real life is like"	P8, L176

Appendix P – Table of search terms and hits returned

Adolescent development literature		
Database searched	**Search terms used**	**Hits generated**
PsychINFO 1860 - 2017	Development psychology	7121
	Adolescent psychology	3754
	Adolescent development	44748
	Adolescent psychology AND adolescent development	565
	Development psychology AND adolescent psychology	38
	Adolescent development AND romantic relationships	428
	Adolescent development AND romantic relationship development	3
	Adolescent development AND sexual relationships	102
	Adolescent development AND sexual relationship development	2
Web of Science 1990 - 2017	Development psychology	17857
	Adolescent psychology	4529
	Adolescent development	44996
	Adolescent psychology AND “adolescent development”	92
	Development psychology AND adolescent psychology	1158
	Adolescent development AND “romantic relationships”	31
	Adolescent development AND “romantic relationship development”	4
	Adolescent development AND “sexual relationships”	57
	Adolescent development AND “sexual relationship development”	1
British Education Index	Development psychology	255
	Adolescent psychology	309
	Adolescent development	492
	Adolescent psychology AND adolescent development	29
	Development psychology AND adolescent psychology	10
	Adolescent development AND romantic relationships	2
	Adolescent development AND romantic relationship development	0
	Adolescent development AND sexual	0

	relationships	
	Adolescent development AND sexual relationship development	0
ERIC	"Development psychology"	360
	"Adolescent psychology"	749
	"Adolescent development"	5095
	"Adolescent psychology" AND "adolescent development"	31
	"Development psychology" AND "adolescent psychology"	4
	"Adolescent development" AND "romantic relationships"	29
	"Adolescent development" AND "romantic relationship development"	1
	"Adolescent development" AND "sexual relationships"	13
	"Adolescent development" AND "sexual relationship development"	0
SEM and adolescence literature		
Database searched	**Search terms used**	**Hits generated**
PsychINFO 2012 - 2017	Pornography	1973
	Online pornography	81
	Sexually explicit media	46
	Pornography AND adolescents	250
	Sexually explicit media AND adolescents	12
	Pornography AND adolescents AND impact	41
	Online pornography AND adolescents AND impact	6
	Sexually explicit media AND adolescents AND impact	4
Web of Science 2012 - 2017	Pornography	1475
	"Online pornography"	52
	"Sexually explicit media"	52
	Pornography AND adolescents	294
	"Sexually explicit media" AND adolescents	22
	Pornography AND adolescents AND impact	46
	"Online pornography" AND adolescents AND impact	4
	"Sexually explicit media" AND adolescents AND impact	5
British Education	Pornography	31

Index 2012 - 2017	Online pornography	4
	Sexually explicit media	2
	Pornography AND adolescents	10
	Sexually explicit media AND adolescents	2
	Pornography AND adolescents AND impact	3
	Online pornography AND adolescents AND impact	1
	Sexually explicit media AND adolescents AND impact	1
ERIC 2012 - 2017	Pornography	460
	"Online pornography"	13
	"Sexually explicit media"	4
	Pornography AND adolescents	80
	Sexually explicit media AND adolescents	1
	Pornography AND adolescents AND impact	10
	"Online pornography" AND adolescents AND impact	1
	"Sexually explicit media" AND adolescents AND impact	0
SRE literature		
Database searched	**Search terms used**	**Hits generated**
PsychINFO 2007 - 2017	Sex education	3415
	Sex and relationship education	77
	Sex education AND secondary school	52
	Sex and relationship education AND secondary school	0
	Sex education AND secondary school AND UK	3
Web of Science 2007 - 2017	"Sex education"	2987
	"Sex and relationship education"	37
	"Sex education" AND "secondary school"	57
	"Sex and relationship education" AND "secondary school"	0
	"Sex education" AND "secondary school" AND UK	1
British Education Index 2007 - 2017	Sex education	772
	Sex and relationship education	100
	Sex education AND secondary school	190
	Sex and relationship education AND secondary school	6
	Sex education AND secondary school	30

	AND UK	
ERIC 2007 - 2017	“Sex education”	4929
	“Sex and relationship education”	68
	“Sex education” AND “secondary school”	408
	“Sex and relationship education” AND “secondary school”	17
	“Sex education” AND “secondary school” AND UK	1

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