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Female Teachers' Experiences of Teaching Abortion within GCSE Religious Studies: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

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Female Teachers' Experiences of Teaching Abortion Within GCSE Religious Studies: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

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Theology and Education

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Abstract

Key words: controversial, abortion, interpretative phenomenological analysis, religious education, secondary education.

The centrality of controversial issues in contemporary education is particularly evident and pronounced within the context of Religious Education (RE). The nature of the subject means that students are confronted with complex questions about life, meaning, reality, belief and ethics. With so many differences of opinion, and an increasing diversity of worldviews, the occurrence of controversy seems axiomatic. With this in mind, the Commission on Religious Education (CoRE), as part of the National Entitlement to the study of Religion and Worldviews, specify that pupils are entitled to be taught by teachers who are capable of handling controversial issues (9c, 2008:13).

However, whilst there is vibrant scholarly debate on the nature of controversial issues, and which criteria should be used to determine such an issue, less emphasis has been placed on the experience of teachers themselves. Therefore, this thesis examined practitioners' attitudes towards teaching one particular controversial issue, namely abortion, within the context of GCSE Religious Studies. The research utilised Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and explored how female teachers perceived the nature and purpose of teaching abortion in RE, their role in approaching the subject matter, and their readiness in dealing with such issues.

The findings suggest that the experience of women in this study were complex, balancing significant moral, legal, social, historical, and professional considerations, alongside promoting student development, and wellbeing. In order to best facilitate learning regarding abortion, participants frequently occupied and navigated between a series of roles or personas in the classroom requiring significant self-awareness and reflexivity. They placed high value on teacher autonomy in making professional judgements that were decidedly personal and contextualised to their own preferences and knowledge of their classes. Participants also frequently prioritized skills that would be useful for students' ongoing and lifelong development including preparation for when students might encounter abortion for themselves. However, participants also perceived the classroom environment as authentic and built upon strong teacher–student relationships; one where students could speak honestly, having their views received seriously and positively by others. Therefore, part of the conceptualisation of participants' role included helping students to have a greater understanding of their own positioning and the positions of others. The findings also revealed teachers' intense commitment to their students, wanting to see them thrive and succeed both inside and outside of the classrooms.

Such findings are important in establishing how a number of women conceive of their own identity and role as a religious education teacher tasked with exploring controversial issues such as abortion, how they navigate their own positioning and influences, and how they approach strategies and frameworks for teaching and learning. These insights have provided a suitable bases for recommendations and implications for practice that are helpful for the wider teaching community.

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1. Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the thesis, its content and structure. The first section provides a concise summary of the existing research relating to controversial issues and abortion in Religious Education and develops the rationale for further work. Next, it briefly explains the approach to the research and outlines the study aims and objectives. Finally, it explains the structure, form and direction of the thesis.

1.1. Background and Rationale

The centrality of controversial issues in contemporary education is particularly evident and pronounced within the context of Religious Education (RE) where their occurrence is well established (Commission on Religious Education (CoRE), 2018, p. 13; Dearden, 1981; Flensner, 2020b; Kerr & Huddleston, 2020, p. 12; Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted), 2021; Religious Education Council of England and Wales (REC), 2013a, p. 23). The fundamental nature of the subject means that students are frequently confronted with complex questions pertaining to life, meaning, reality, belief, ethics, and human existence. With so many differences of opinions relating to these questions, it is easy to see how teachers might be required to navigate controversial issues with confidence and skill. Yet, as has been noted elsewhere (Nazar, 2020, p. 47; Von Der Lippe, 2019, p. 400), there has only been limited debate on teaching controversial issues within Religious Education. In many ways, Religious Education "embraces the very essence of controversy" (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), 1998, p. 57) and it is difficult to delineate which specific issues are controversial within the subject (Walsh, 2011). As Cooling (1994a, p. 9) correctly notes, "religion is inherently controversial". Accordingly, much of the debate surrounding the teaching of controversial issues has occurred in a space outside of RE, mainly within Citizenship Education.

Nevertheless, debates regarding the teaching of controversial issues in schools tend to be divided into two strands: the theoretical (or philosophical), and the pragmatic (Sætra, 2021a, p. 345). In particular, the first of these strands is currently predominately concerned with the nature of controversy and, therefore, which criteria ought to be used to classify an issue as controversial (Anders & Shudak, 2016; Cooling, 2012; Dearden, 1981; Hand, 2008; Sætra, 2019; Stradling, 1984; Tillson, 2017; Von Der Lippe, 2019; Warnick & Spencer Smith, 2014; Yacek, 2018). The second tends to concentrate on the practicalities of teaching, or strategies for teachers to

use in the classroom (CitizED, 2004; Citizenship Foundation, 2003; Council for the Curriculums, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), 2015; Council of Europe (CoE), 2015; Harris et al., 2012; Kerr & Huddleston, 2020; Oxfam, 2018; Pace, 2021; REC, 2010; Wooley, 2010). Yet, aside from these two stands, research exploring the experiences of teachers themselves is less forthcoming.

Whilst there are a number of qualitative studies examining teachers' experiences of tackling controversial issues, these tend to be located outside of RE within Social Studies (Abu-Hamdan & Khader, 2014; Byford et al., 2009; Kus & Özturk, 2019; Misco & Patterson, 2007), Citizenship (Erlich & Gindi, 2018; Oulton, Day, et al., 2004), Science (Aivelo & Uitto, 2019; Borgerding & Dagistan, 2018; Levinson, 2006), History (Kello, 2016; Pace, 2019; Zembylas & Kambani, 2012), whole-school approaches (Tannebaum, 2020; Zimmermann, 2015) and global comparisons (Cassar et al., 2021; Chikoko et al., 2011). Additionally, where teachers' attitudes, perceptions, and experiences have been explored within RE, they occur primarily in international contexts in Greece (Nazar, 2020), Sweden (Flensner, 2020a) and Norway (Anker & Von Der Lippe, 2018). Therefore, the focus of this project provides insight into the under-researched area of RE teachers' experiences of teaching controversial issues in England.

Whilst several controversial issues could have been chosen as the subject of study, abortion is an issue that carries the weighty underpinnings of complex moral, theological, social, and political convictions (Brenan, 2019; Doan, 2009; Flensner, 2020b; Keown, 2002a; McKeegan, 1993), and amalgamates both highly subjective personal experience with cultural taboo (Astbury-Ward et al., 2012; Kumar et al., 2009; Norris et al., 2011; Rocca et al., 2020). The recent ruling of the United States' Supreme Court decision to reverse *Roe v Wade* has only further brought these factors into sharper focus. Consequently, abortion is frequently considered controversial (see Chapter 3 for a fuller explanation). As a topic, abortion appears across the breadth of General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) examination boards and specifications (AQA, 2017, p. 21; Eduqas/Welsh Joint Education Committee (WJEC), 2019a, p. 16; Oxford Cambridge and RSA (OCR), 2019, p. 51; Pearson/Edexcel, 2016, p. 11)[1] and is, therefore, one that is commonly confronted by RE teachers. Resultantly, situating the study within the frame of abortion provides an appropriate and narrowly defined focus for in-depth inquiry. Therefore, this research shall generate useful findings and conclusions that will contribute to the growing

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[1] See also, Appendix A

literature within the field, and provide a better understanding of how controversial issues such as abortion are encountered and experienced by teachers of RE.

1.2. Approach to Research and Study Implementation

Given the desired primary concern with the experiences and attitudes of female teachers, the thesis adopts a qualitative approach to research within the interpretative paradigm. There are good reasons for utilising interpretative frameworks in empirical studies. They enable the researcher to concentrate on the meanings constructed by individuals as they understand and interpret their world (Cohen et al., 2017, p. 20; Punch, 2009, p. 18; Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012, p. 41) and acknowledge the diversity of complex human phenomena as understood within particular contexts. The selection of a research approach is inherently linked to the attempt to resolve the research question(s) (Oliver, 2021, p. 30). Accordingly, whilst a variety of approaches could have been selected, this thesis utilises Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).

IPA has grown in popularity across several fields including education (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2022). It draws upon fundamental principles of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and ideography to provide a systematic exploration of how individuals make sense of their life experiences (Smith et al., 2022). Through detailed and reflective inquiry IPA allows the researcher to give meaning to an individual's personal and social world (Smith & Osborn, 2008). IPA is especially suited to understanding experiences that are complex, have the potential to be emotionally laden or are under-researched (Peat et al., 2019, p. 7) and is explained in more detail in Chapter 4. The data was collected through single semi-structured interviews with ten female secondary RE teachers who teach abortion at GCSE level. The interviews took place in January and February 2021. All interviews were transcribed and analysed using IPA, generating themes that are presented and explored throughout this thesis.

1.3. Study Aims and Objectives

The research is guided by the overarching question: 'how do women experience the teaching of abortion within GCSE RE?'. In seeking to answer this question the overall aim of the research is to provide a detailed and comprehensive exploration, focused on analysing the experiences of those who encounter the phenomenon. The overall question generates several study objectives.

These objectives are framed in such a way to draw upon Nizza et al. (2021)'s work outlining four quality indicators of good IPA studies.[2]

i. To construct a coherent and unfolding narrative of participants' accounts through analytic dialogue between selected and interpreted extracts.

ii. To identify relevant and appropriate themes that are most prevalent across participants' accounts and consistent with the research question.

iii. To give depth to participants' experiences by systematic analysis and interpretation of their accounts that gives meaning to the data and notes the dynamic patterns of convergence and divergences between accounts.

iv. To extend pedagogical, educational, and psychological knowledge and understanding of women's perceptions of their teaching practice and role in approaching controversial subject matter in the classroom.

v. To use the interpretative subthemes and theoretical discussion to inform and suggest implications for best practice and future research.

1.4. Thesis Structure

Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature pertaining to controversial issues, summarising the debates surrounding the nature of controversy, which criteria ought to be used to classify an issue as controversial, and its application to teaching. It maps the tensions in the literature and outlines several conceptualisations of approaches to teaching controversial issues. Chapter 3 situates abortion within these debates, providing a discussion as to how the various aspects of the topic meet the differing criteria for controversy. It also provides an overview of the place of abortion within secondary education. The research design, approach and implementation are explained in Chapter 4 which considers both the theoretical orientation of the work and

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[2] Namely: "a) constructing a compelling and unfolding narrative; b) developing a vigorous experiential and/or existential account; c) close analytic reading of participants' words; d) attending to convergence and divergence" Nizza et al. (2021, p. 371).

pragmatic concerns of data sampling, collection, and analysis. It also considers issues fundamental to research integrity and quality.

The second half of the thesis (Chapter 5 onwards) presents the data analysis and discussion of the themes arising from participants' narratives. Chapter 5 introduces the analysis, justifies the theme selection, and gives further thought to the stories of both the participants and the researcher. Chapter 6 marks the first of three chapters relating to the top-level themes that were identified during the analysis. These three chapters are longer, in comparison, to provide an in-depth discussion of the themes in light of extant literature. Chapter 6 focuses on the way in which participants made sense of their experiences by adopting various identities, personas, or roles within the classroom. It discusses how participants explored notions of reflective practice, self-awareness, professional boundaries, and self-disclosure. The next chapter investigates how participants understood their experiences in relation to their students' holistic and long-term development and examines the outcomes they hoped to achieve in teaching abortion. The final empirical chapter, Chapter 8, investigates how participants perceived their classroom as a dynamic social environment, in which students could thrive and succeed. It considers the strategies that participants chose to implement and how they cultivated a classroom climate that was conducive to learning and development.

Finally, Chapter 9 draws together the research and evaluates the work in view of both the study aims and outcomes and personal reflections. It suggests implications of the findings for teaching practice and outlines the scope for future research orientations.

2. Controversial Issues

The teaching of controversial issues in the classroom is itself controversial. Such topics have the capacity to create division and discord amongst pupils, teachers, and society at large. It has been claimed that controversial subjects should "form no part of the curriculum for pupils below the age of 16" (Marks, 1985, p. 1). Similarly, Scruton et al. (1985, p. 45) deem the study of controversial themes to be a "self-defeating task". For scholars such as these, allowing burning issues a place on the syllabus raises significant concerns over political bias, levels of pupil maturity, and the threat to more traditional and important subject matter (Cox & Scruton, 1984; O'Keefe, 1986; Scruton, 1985).

In contrast, much of today's educational thinking in the UK rightly advocates the teaching of controversial issues across the entire curriculum. The now disbanded Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) (1998, p. 56), for example, required that "education should not attempt to shelter our nation's children from even the harsher controversies of adult life, but should prepare them to deal with such controversies knowledgeably, sensibly, tolerantly and morally". Controversy is an established part of a pluralistic and democratic culture (Cassar et al., 2021, p. 656) and forms a "normative anchor" (Misco, 2011, p. 7) of societal change. Education always involves some interaction with the beliefs of others. These beliefs are experienced first-hand through contact with those around us, or in our local, national, or international communities. However, we also interact with the beliefs of others who have contributed (or are contributing) to the global body of knowledge. Much of the information that is currently learned by students across all syllabuses and subjects is as a direct result of controversy. As such, controversy, with its potential to change the direction of human knowledge, cannot (nor should not) be readily removed from the school environment (Nganga et al., 2020, p. 87; Pollard, 1988, p. 69; Tannebaum, 2020, p. 8).

The centrality of controversial issues in contemporary education is particularly evident and pronounced within the context of Religious Education (RE). The nature of RE means that students are provoked with "challenging questions about meaning and purpose in life, beliefs about God, ultimate reality, issues of right and wrong and what it means to be human" (QCA, 2004, p. 7). With so many differences of opinion relating to these questions, it is easy to see how controversy could occur, causing disagreement both within religious groups, between different religious groups, and between those who hold to religious beliefs and those who do not. As students encounter these implicit controversies outside of the classroom, it is inevitable

that they will spill over into the classroom too. However, it is engagement with precisely such controversial issues that is at the heart of high quality RE (Ofsted, 2021; REC, 2013a, p. 23).

Although the teaching of controversial issues seems to be commonplace, there seems to be no agreed definition of what constitutes a controversial issue (Berg et al., 2003; Oxfam, 2018). As a result, more questions arise: What is a controversial issue? What criteria are used to determine whether an issue is controversial? How or when does an issue start or cease to be controversial? Further, the implications of defining a controversial issue produce practical considerations for the classroom. How should controversial issues be taught? What is the role of the teacher? What approaches should be used to facilitate learning? Exploring these questions, though numerous, will form the bedrock of this chapter as it ascertains the nature of controversial issues and their ramifications for teaching practice. The chapter begins by outlining key terms and concepts. Then, it maps some of the tensions in the literature and explains the development of scholarly debate in moving from one single encompassing definition of 'controversy' toward several criteria. Finally, it outlines several conceptualisations of approaches to teaching controversial issues in light of these proposed criteria.

2.1. Terminology

At the outset, it is beneficial for me to provide some clarification on the terminology that will be used throughout the length of this thesis and in particular the usage of 'Religious Education'. The term 'Religious Education' most closely mirrors the prevailing nomenclature used within the current political, legislative, and educational landscape in England. With no standard framework from RE across the United Kingdom, and power devolved to each jurisdiction, every home country has its own terms of reference. Scotland, for example, prefers "Religious and Moral Education" (Education Scotland, 2009). Although the English system for Religious Education bears many similarities with those in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, there are also substantial differences.[3] Accordingly, 'Religious Education' reflects the focus of the research within English schools.

It then becomes apparent that the term 'Religious Education' is not analogous to any form of "catechism or formulary which is distinctive of any particular religious denomination"

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[3] For a succinct overview of the differences between English, Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish Religious Education, up until 2013 see Jackson (2013)

(Department for Education (DfE), 1994, para. 32). Religious Education, by law, must "not be designed to convert pupils, or to urge a particular religion or religious belief on pupils" (*Education Act 1994,* Section 26(2)). Rather, in an educational context, it is the study of various religions and worldviews that allows pupils to gain understanding and reflect upon their own beliefs and values; to learn 'about' and 'from' religion (QCA, 2004).[4] Nevertheless, although the term 'Religious Education' is supported by the government, it is not intended to be definitive or irrevocable. As O'Grady (2019a, p. 2) notes, "even in England itself, though maintained schools are obliged to provide RE, there is no requirement that it should be called RE". In this way, it is also recognised that recent calls for the subject to be renamed, for example to "Religion and Worldviews" (CoRE, 2018), which is gaining more traction, or "Religion, Belief and Values" (Clarke & Woodhead, 2018)[5] may well shift the direction of the terminology in due course.

I also use the term 'Religious Studies' periodically. In these instances, reference is made specifically to emulate the use of the phrase within the title of GCSE examination syllabuses. It does not intend to convey a divergence in meaning from that indicated by 'Religious Education' above.[6]

2.2. Defining Controversial Issues: Mapping the Tensions in the Literature

To address the question, 'what is a controversial issue?' a suitable exploration of a definition is required. However, my aim of the subsequent discussion, is not to furnish the current debate by adding a further or novel position. Neither do I seek to offer an exhaustive defence of one perspective. Instead, I provide a critical overview of the existing literature; mapping the terrain to inform and shape further research questions.

Defining a controversial issue in the first instance provides some interesting challenges. First, there has been a modest but steady growth of writing on the subject within education over the past 40 years. However, as Von Der Lippe (2019, p. 2) asserts, the "topic has been less discussed in the specific context of RE".[7] There does exist a small contribution from Religious Education

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[4] The terms 'learning from' and 'learning about' religion have been criticised for good reason (Chater & Erricker, 2013; Fancourt, 2015; Teece, 2010, 2011). However, it is used here to attempt to convey some of the purpose(s) of RE.

[5] See also: Dinham and Shaw (2015); The Woolf Institute (2015)

[6] For further discussion regarding the difference between 'religious education' and 'religious studies' in the context of Key Stage 4 RE, see Wood (2018)

[7] Also, Hand and Levinson (2012)

(Anker & Von Der Lippe, 2018; Cooling, 2012; Flensner, 2020b; Nazar, 2020; Von Der Lippe, 2019), but much of the debate surrounding the definition of a controversial issue occurs within Citizenship education instead. The reasons for this are unclear. However, a shift in European policy regarding education for democracy and human rights (from 'knowing' to 'doing') coupled with high-profile social disorder and violence, may be a contributing factor to the growth of literature within Citizenship (Council of Europe (CoE), 2015). The relationship between RE and Citizenship is itself contentious. Some have noted the links between the two (Baumfield, 2003; Halstead & Pike, 2006; Jackson, 2002; O'Grady, 2019b; Teece, 1998; Watson, 2004), whilst others are keen to distance the comparison (Grimmitt, 2000; Hargreaves, 1994). Nevertheless, while the debate is ongoing within Citizenship, the term 'controversial issue' rarely appears in documentation pertaining to RE curricula, syllabuses, or guidelines (Walsh, 2011). An overview of the GCSE RS Specifications and their relationship to the topic of abortion is provided in Appendix A. However, given, as previously mentioned, that much subject matter in RE is controversial, topic specific substitutes tend to be used within guidance documentation instead. For example:

- Issues of truth, justice and trust (The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) 2004, p. 14)
- Issues of life and death, human rights, relationships and good and evil (Eduqas/WJEC, 2019a, p. 2)
- Issues of truth, belief, faith and ethics (QCA, 2007, p. 253)
- World issues (Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) 2010, p. 8)
- Issues of conviction (QCA, 2004, p. 13)
- Contemporary social issues (QCA, 2004, p. 14)
- Issues of community cohesion (Religious Education Council of England and Wales (REC) 2013a, p. 25)[8]
- Issues confronting humanity (QCA, 2007, p. 255)
- Ethical issues (QCA, 2007, p. 258)
- Issues in contemporary British society (AQA, 2017, p. 9)
- Issues in equality and social justice (Pearson/Edexcel, 2016, p. 84)

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[8] The REsilience project (REC, 2010) (which aimed to help teachers in raising and responding to issues of violent belief-based extremism), distinguished between the word 'contentious' and 'controversial', to mark out issues that specifically sought to undermine social cohesion, from those of a more general controversial nature, such as abortion or euthanasia.

Second, literature that attempts to provide a definition of controversial issues tends to fall into two realms of thinking; one that focuses primarily on the theoretical and another that emphasises the pragmatic (Hand & Levinson, 2012, pp. 614-615). Sætra (2019, p. 323), regarding this point, states that many theorists "seek to create a prescriptive moral theory" whereby normative stipulations are established on how teachers ought to deal with different types of issues. Although this conceptual approach is of great benefit in setting the philosophical context, he continues that "theory would do better to start from a practical starting point" (2019, p. 324). On the other side, many excellent practical guides on controversial issues tend to have a heavier focus on applied resources or skills that equip teachers within their lessons (CitizED, 2004; Citizenship Foundation, 2003; Council for the Curriculums, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), 2015; Council of Europe (CoE), 2015; Harris et al., 2012; Oxfam, 2018; REC, 2010; Wooley, 2010). These guides commonly provide more targeted advice or instruction for teaching specific controversial issues (for example, the Holocaust, abortion, or terrorism). As a result, a theoretical discussion of what constitutes or defines a controversial issue has a less prominent role within pragmatic literature. The definition of 'controversy' is assumed, and, instead, time is devoted to considering the teaching methods that can be employed.

Thus, the subsequent sections on defining controversial issues will be framed by these tensions; both the disparity between theory and practice, and the locus of previous scholarly discussion being situated mainly outside of RE. A crucial part of teaching involves being able to adapt lessons in response to the needs, strengths, and developmental stage of all pupils (Department for Education (DfE), 2011c). Therefore, teachers need to be able to competently recognise controversial issues to adapt their practice accordingly. Particular care in this area is required because, as Cooling (2012, p. 170) warns, "to teach as settled something that is controversial is indoctrination and to teach as controversial something that is settled is irrational". Consequently, in order to provide a comprehensive definition of a controversial issue, it is valuable to draw from insights outside of RE where discussion has been more explicit.

2.3. Defining Controversial Issues

Controversial issues, by very nature, are dynamic which makes establishing a definition all the more problematic. Controversial issues are highly contextualised; dependent on geographical and cultural considerations. What is controversial for a group of students in one part of the

country may differ from another. For the sake of argument (and taking an issue from the GCSE RE syllabus as an example), assisted marriage may be considered controversial in one particular context, but not another. Geographical and cultural differences are magnified on an international scale. Teachers in South Africa consider issues such as HIV/Aids, rape, xenophobia, and corporal punishment to be controversial (Chikoko et al., 2011). In South Korea, divorce, gender roles, welfare and racial prejudice are considered controversial (Misco, 2016), and the Hijab, compulsory Religious Education and inter-ethnic conflict are significant in Turkey (Ersoy, 2010). Further, even within a specific culture and geography, teachers may hold divergent views on what should be considered controversial (Hess, 2002).

Additionally, controversial issues are also dynamic in that they are subject to temporal and anthropological considerations. Many controversial issues are amenable to change over time. What was once considered controversial, may no longer be regarded in the same way. For instance, Wellington, in his 1986 book *Controversial Issues in the Curriculum,* included nuclear armament as a 'hot topic' of his time. Whilst themes of war, peace and conflict are present on the current GCSE Religious Studies curriculum (AQA, 2017, p. 23; OCR, 2019, p. 10; Pearson/Edexcel, 2016, p. 43), mention of nuclear armament is rare. Instead, these issues have been replaced by topics of more contemporary relevance such as religious attitudes towards terrorism and extremism. Further still, controversial issues vary in their application to either individuals or groups. Some issues are a matter of personal conviction. Kohlberg's (1969) moral development theory, as exemplified by the 'Heinz' thought experiment, is one such example. His seminal work centres on the processes of the individual when facing a controversial issue as the basis for adolescent education.[9] Conversely, other scholars are keen to emphasise collective or group norms as the context for deciding upon controversial issues (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012). This anthropological contextualisation is a key consideration within GCSE Religious Studies. Across all examination syllabuses and components, students are to become informed about "common and divergent views within traditions in the way beliefs and teachings are understood and expressed" (AQA, 2017, p. 11; Eduqas/WJEC, 2019a, p. 8; OCR, 2019, p. 2; Pearson/Edexcel, 2016, p. 6).

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[9] A view also held by more contemporary scholars (e.g., Kelly, 2009, p. 102)

2.4. From Definition to Criteria

With the fluidity of controversial issues self-evident, some have attempted a panoptic definition that attempts to encapsulate much of the aforementioned contextualisation. Fraser (1963, p. 153), in her early definition, states:

> A controversial issue involves a problem about which different individuals and groups urge conflicting courses of action. It is an issue for which society has not found a solution that can be universally or almost universally accepted. It is an issue of sufficient significance that each of the proposed ways of dealing with it is objectionable to some section of the citizenry and arouses protest. The protest may result from a feeling that a cherished belief, an economic interest, or a basic principle is threatened. It may come because the welfare of organisations or groups seems at stake. When a course of action is formulated that virtually all sectors of society accept, the issue is no longer controversial.[10]

The above definition is helpful in several regards. First, it helps situate the locus of controversy within the deeper attributes of human psychology: beliefs, values, experiences, identity, and sense of belonging. It correctly acknowledges that controversy is not purely a series of actions or behaviours. Instead, it involves one's emotion, cognition, perception, and memory. The Council of Europe (2015, p. 8), for example, defines controversial issues simply as those "which arouse strong feelings and divide communities and society". Similarly, Oxfam's (2018, p. 3) definition includes "evoke strong feelings and views", recognising controversy's holistic scope beyond individual behavioural response.

Second, Fraser's assertion that controversial issues divide the populace leaves open the definition to include a wide range of issues, including both future and ongoing controversy. Such framing is particularly important within the context of secondary education where syllabuses and examination specifications are usually reviewed periodically or changed in line with government directives. As a result, controversial issues that form topics of study are likely to be those with some longevity. At present, issues such as euthanasia and contraception are likely to continue to be controversial for many years, especially within and between religious communities.

However, Fraser's definition is also open to challenge. Malet (2015) raises the valid critique that it is difficult to imagine a scenario in which 'virtually all sectors of a society' are unanimous on a particular issue. Thus, hypothetically, any and all issues could be deemed controversial so long

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[10] A number of significant educators (Hare, 1973, pp. 51-52; McKernan, 1982, p. 58; Stenhouse, 1971) also adopted Fraser's definition, in the years following.

as they arouse sufficient 'protest' (an ill-defined concept in Fraser's terminology). Categorising all issues as controversial does not aid in providing a suitable definition. Nevertheless, it does seem axiomatic that controversy is, to some degree, scalar. There are certain issues that appear to be more controversial than others. Additionally, some issues appear to be 'superficially controversial' where a resolution is possible, usually within a relatively short space of time, whereas 'inherently' controversial issues, tend to be more protracted and have the possibility of being irresolvable (Stradling, 1984). It is these inherently controversial issues that are often debated and deliberated by students within the Religious Education classroom.

Third, Fraser (1963, p. 153) advocates that an issue may stop being controversial because "a course of action has been formulated". However, I believe there are also times where controversy desists by more passive measures. For example, in 1994, a Christian church located near Toronto International Airport made the headlines. The 'Toronto Blessing', as it was coined, saw a colossal growth in the church's attendance accompanied by reported manifestations of spiritual power and miracles. The issue created significant controversy, particularly amongst conservative evangelical Protestants, over whether the happenings were genuine (Beverley, 1995; Hilborn, 2001). However, several years later, the controversial issue had effectively 'run its course' without action being formulated, or further evidence coming to light.

In the years since Fraser's definition was postulated, focus has turned away from providing a holistic definition for controversy. Instead, it has turned towards establishing 'criterion' that can be used to ascertain whether or not an issue is controversial. Three recent publications (Anders & Shudak, 2016; Sætra, 2019; Von Der Lippe, 2019) have charted the contributions to the 'criteria debate' well, as part of their own research. Their work is drawn upon here, paying particular attention to categorisation of the terms. Both Sætra (2019) and Von Der Lippe (2019) suggest that there are at least six different criteria for deciding which issues are controversial. However, when additional scholarly work is taken into consideration, this number rises to eight criteria[11]. In light of the tension that much literature is located outside of Religious Education, I make purposeful effort in the sections that follow as to how these criteria might be understood within the context of RE.

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[11] Namely, the behavioural, political, 'politically authentic', epistemic, social, theoretical, diversity and psychological criterion

2.4.1. The Behavioural/Social criterion

The behavioural criterion contends that an issue is controversial if "numbers of people are observed to disagree about statements and assertions made in connection with an issue" and this, a matter of "social fact" (Bailey, 1975, p. 122). The behavioural criterion has, according to Yacek (2018, p. 73), "enjoyed a long history in education philosophy", particularly in relation to social discourse. He cites the example of Rugg who, in 1936, defended the behavioural criterion within social controversy as the basis of programmes of study for all schooling. More recent publications have also adopted the behavioural criteria for controversial issues. Most notably, The Crick Report, states that "such [controversial] issues are those which commonly divide society *and* for which significant groups offer conflicting explanations and solutions" (QCA, 1998, p. 56 [emphasis added]). The weight given to the behavioural criterion here should not be underestimated given the report's monumental role in the development of Citizenship Education in UK.

In many ways, the link between societal division and controversy is self-evident. Numerous issues that would be considered controversial today, for example, abortion or euthanasia, cause a divide between significant swathes of the local or national population. Although the Crick Report does not answer the question 'whose society must be divided?', it is presumed to be in keeping with the document's national focus of Citizenship Education in England[12]. Accordingly, where a controversial issue is taught in schools, it must be considered controversial at least within the English context. The idea that educational settings reflect the communities they serve is not new. Both Dewey (1964, p. 306) and Durkheim (1956, p. 71) explained that the school was a microcosm of the community a school is society in miniature.[13] Anders & Shudak make a comparable point and, in fact, propose a 'social criterion' whereby "for an issue to be considered appropriately controversial, the issues must have relevant import in the students' lives whether they are in or out of the school building" (2016, p. 25). To some extent, this relevance is seen in Religious Education through its structures and set up. For maintained schools, syllabuses are decided locally and overseen by a Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) containing representatives from local religious groups, teacher associations, and the Local Authority (*Education Act 1996,* s.375). Erricker et al (2011, p. 138), note "it is beneficial for

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[12] Northern Ireland, Wales, and Scotland were not governed under Westminster due to devolution (which occurred around the same time that the report was produced). For a further comparison of citizenship education between the four 'home' nations see Beauvallet (2016)

[13] See also Dill (2007)

the RE curriculum to reflect the interests of the local or nearby communities of which the pupils are a part…". Thus, local connections help to support the role of RE in promoting community cohesion (DCSF, 2010; Francis et al., 2017),

Nevertheless, the behavioural criterion faces understandable opposition. Dearden poses perhaps the earliest points of critique, raising two areas of objection. The first point will be dealt with in this section. The second will be briefly discussed latterly under subsection 2.4.2 'The political criteria'. In his first critique of the behavioural criterion, Dearden contends that, far from being "social fact" (Bailey, 1975, p. 122), an issue may be controversial due to "simple ignorance or else mere undisciplined assertiveness" (Dearden, 1981, p. 38). Outside of the immediate social context in which the controversy takes place, an apparent, coherent, and non-controversial solution may exist. Examples of playground spats over the spelling of words or the capital cities of countries illustrate his point. When these 'controversies' are removed from their direct milieu and viewed through the lens of external, readily available data, these issues cease to be controversial at all (Dearden, 1981, p. 38). Resultantly, to use Hand's words, "the problem with the behavioural criterion is that it lets in too much. Since, if we look hard enough, we can observe people disagreeing about anything" (2007, p. 71).

Hand is also keen to challenge Dearden's first critique on the basis that Dearden falsely appeals to the ordinary usage of the word 'controversy'. Instead, Hand (2008, p. 217) distinguishes between the normative and linguistic use of the word. Using the preceding case of the playground disagreements, he argues that the matter "*is* controversial merely by virtue of having occasioned dispute" (2008, p. 217). For the children involved, the notion that an answer may be located outside of their social context does not negate the fact that their experience is one of controversy. Further, though disputes or disagreements are an inherent part of a controversy, this does nothing to address the question of whether they should be taught in schools. To teach certain issues as controversial would be "bizarre", as they are "too remote from people's practical or theoretical concerns" (2008, p. 214). Thus, for Hand, the behavioural criterion is understandable but insufficient.

However, Hand's challenge is not without critique. The implied subjectivity, at least in this part of his writing, causes difficulty in establishing the boundaries of the term 'controversy'. Is it enough for controversy to belong to an aggrieved party, just because they perceive it as such? How does one distinguish between what is a perceived and an actual controversy? Although,

for Hand, the answers to these questions are unequivocal with teachers' choices over which issues to teach, linguistic considerations are of benefit. They assist teachers in being able to determine whether an issue is controversial and respond accordingly, especially at times where it is possible to do the 'philosophical legwork'. Leibniz (2008) for example, is helpful in this regard. He defines controversy as an issue that can be decided by means of argumentation, like in a tribunal, with its end goal as resolution. Argumentation can be distinguished from disputation where "the discussion may be endless, with no hope of decision" or war, where a solution is forcibly imposed (Leibniz, 2008, p. 49). Consequently, Hand's (2008, p. 217) statement that an issue *"is* controversial merely by virtue of having occasioned dispute" is in danger of presenting a category error by conflating the terms 'dispute' and 'controversy'.

2.4.2. The Political/Politically Authentic Criterion

In addition to the behavioural criterion, there are also numerical considerations in the debate surrounding the constitution of a controversial issue. The quantity of people required for an issue to become controversial is plural but left unspecified in both Bailey's "numbers of peoples" (1975, p. 122) and the Crick Report's "significant groups" (QCA, 1998, p. 56). It seems impractical and, likely, impossible to assign a fixed number of people as a measure of controversy. However, the Crick Report's inclusion of the term 'significant' is susceptible to issues relating to minority views. How does one qualify or quantify the significance of a group, so as not to place unnecessary emphasis on dominant culture or opinion?[14] Although beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss in detail, wider discussion over decolonising the 'ethnocentric' curriculum and the prominence of policy relating to inclusion, equal opportunities and diversity has only further brought this susceptibility to light (Ball, 1994; Jeffcoate, 1976; TES, 2019; Troyna & Williams, 1986).

The political criterion attempts to avert possible tension over the views of minority groups by distinguishing between public and private values. Essentially, it asserts that issues can only be regarded as truly controversial in schools "when answers to them are not entailed by the public values of the liberal democratic state" (Hand, 2007, p. 71). At its core is the premise that the state has a fundamental duty to protect, uphold, and enforce certain 'public values' or universally recognised rights and liberties (for example. those found in the articles of the *European*

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[14] Cooling (2012) raises similar concerns which will be examined in more detail later

Convention on Human Rights, 2021). However, the same mandate does not apply to privately held beliefs and values. Accordingly, "an issue should only be taught as controversial only if it falls outside the domain of public morality" (Anders & Shudak, 2016, p. 23) For example, slavery *per se* is something that should not be treated by teachers as controversial on the basis that there is an agreed position within the public value system (that is, it contravenes human rights). To use Hess' (2009, p. 124) terminology, if such issues are raised in the classroom, they should be presented as a 'closed' or 'settled' issue, where one position (for example, slavery is wrong) is taught as the commanding view. The political criterion does not prohibit discussion of political issues or public morality in the classroom. Neither does it necessarily deny that controversy exists outside of the public sphere. It does, however, answer the normative question of 'what should be taught as controversial?' with the inclusive response; 'that which does not undermine fundamental public values'.

Within England, the political criterion is reflected in Government standards for a teacher's professional conduct. Teachers are required to ensure that they do not undermine "fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect, and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs" (DfE, 2011c, p.10). Whilst much has been written in the area of British values and the complexities of who gets to decide which values are British[15] (Blaylock et al., 2015; Elton-Chalcraft et al., 2017; Farrell, 2016; Revell & Bryan, 2018), Religious Education plays a significant role in the outworking of the public values of the 'liberal democratic state'. The nature of the subject is one where "it embodies respect for the law and the principles of freedom, responsibility, and fairness" (REC, 2013c, Introduction) in a way that other subjects cannot. Thus, the political criterion is a helpful heuristic by which controversiality can be established within the context of broader educational aims.

On a related, but more pragmatic aside, some have argued that the political arena can also provide a good 'rule of thumb' as to which specific issues should be taught as controversial. Hess & McAvoy, in establishing the 'politically authentic criterion' suggest that controversial issues can be identified "when they have traction in the public sphere, appearing on ballots, in courts, within political platforms, in legislative chambers, and as part of political movements" (2015, pp. 168-169). Although not without self-professed issues, the criteria ensure that issues considered to be controversial are those of "public concern, not merely positions taken by

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[15] The bounds of this discussion are beyond the remit of this work

academics, scientists or experts" (Hess & McAvoy 2015, p. 94). Such an approach is similar to the 'social criteria' posed by Anders & Shudak (2016), where issues are contextualised to be important based on their relevance to the micro-community of the school. The 'politically authentic criterion', however, uses the macro-community of the citizenry to the same end.

Nevertheless, neither the political criterion nor the politically authentic criteria, when acting as a singular matrix, bears weight under considerable criticism. First, by being in very nature political, the criterion is over-reliant on liberal democratic ideals that underpin this system of government. According to Humes (2012, p. 13), "the teaching of controversial issues presupposes commitment to a set of fundamental values and principles essential to a democratic way of life." Whilst not wishing to diminish the merits of democracy, the implications are such that the criteria are 'non-transferable' to other governmental systems.

Although universality may not have been an intentional objective in the writings of those who propose the political or politically authentic criteria, it seems incoherent that a criterion would be inapplicable to those outside of a liberal democracy. Further, even the notion of 'democratic values' is problematic. Sets of values such as those proposed by Rawls (1971)[16] do not have universal consensus and therefore, there exists no agreement as to the exact definition of a democracy (Mulgan, 1968; Saward, 1994). Nevertheless, democracy is regarded by most as virtuous. The Democracy Index 2021 (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2021, p. 4)., for example, regards 47% of the world's countries to be either in 'full' or 'flawed' *de facto* democratic regime, whilst only several countries openly admit to being 'undemocratic'.

Second, the use of the general public as a "litmus test" (Anders & Shudak, 2016, p. 24) to help teachers establish which issues should be considered controversial, is also precarious. Their perspectives are likely to change, or even reverse over time. Hess deems this movement of issues from controversial (open) to uncontroversial (settled), or vice versa as "tipping" (2009, p. 125). It is particularly challenging for teachers to be able to establish controversiality, and thus adapt their teaching practices accordingly, when issues are "in the tip" (Hess, 2009, p.125). Hand also raises a similar point concerning changing perspectives, stating that, "the idea that we ought to promote whatever moral perspective society currently privileges is scarcely philosophically

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[16] That each individual has an equal right to a full range of basic liberties; social and economic inequalities are arranged to benefit the least advantaged; and offices and positions are open to all (Rawls, 1971, p. 52)

respectable" (2008, p. 227). His argument draws heavily on Dearden's (1981) second critique of the behavioural criterion. Namely, that just because an issue is widely supported does not mean that it is correct. Citing the example of the shape of the earth, Dearden (1981, p. 38) asserts that an issue could become controversial based solely on "ungroundedness, inconsistencies, invalidity or mere expressiveness of a vested interest". Accordingly, Dearden proposes a different criterion. One that is concerned with rationality and gives leverage to the quality (as opposed to the quantity) of the argument posed on either side of a division.

2.4.3. The Epistemic Criterion

The epistemic criterion proposed by Robert Dearden expresses that:

> …a matter is controversial if contrary views can be held on it without those views being contrary to reason. By 'reason' here is not meant something timeless and unhistorical but the body of public knowledge, criteria of truth, critical standards and verification procedures which at any given time has been so far developed (1984, p. 86)

The appeal to rationality, logic, and reason in establishing a criterion for determining an issue's controversiality is intuitive. In principle, Dearden's epistemic criterion "avoids the dangers of relativizing morality and capitulating ethics to the whims of popular opinion or to a morally arbitrary political consensus" (Bertucio, 2016, p. 6). His proposal is one that marks an important contribution to the development of understanding the teaching of controversial issues. As with many things, historical context is important and Dearden's assertions are set up, at least in part, as a response to Ayer's logical positivism. Within Ayer's philosophy, much of the curriculum content in the arts and humanities, such as metaphysics, theology, ethics, and aesthetics would be considered 'nonsense' since their propositional statements cannot be verified either through experience or observation. For Ayer (1946, p. 41), only "tautologies [analytic propositions] and empirical statements form the entire class of significant propositions". Thus, such a system must not only disregard most of the aforementioned content, but also "exclude all reference to controversial matters" (Dearden, 1981, p. 37).

Hand, the strongest modern-day advocate of the epistemic criterion, both defends and develops Dearden's proposal. His premise is that "rationality is both constitutive of and instrumental to human flourishing" (Hand, 2008, p. 218). Hence, "the central aim of education is to equip

students with a capacity for, and inclination to, rational thought and action" (Hand, 2008, p. 218). Both of these concepts are steeped in educational and philosophical history. Rationality in relation to *Eudaimonia,* the good life and human flourishing has long been a dominant concern for philosophy, not least with reference to Aristotelian thought. Similarly, many before Hand have considered rationality to be the chief aim of education (Lipman, 1991; Seigel, 1988; Stanovich, 2001). Hutchins (1943, p. 37), for example, rather bluntly records that "the aim of education is to make rational animals more rational". This focus on controversy as a rational endeavour stands in stark contrast to the material reductionism often associated with Ayer's logical positivism.

Nevertheless, Hand's advancement of the epistemic criterion is not solely a philosophical endeavour. His concerns are deeply pragmatic. Within his framework, Hand distinguishes between 'directive' and 'non-directive' teaching. To use his own words:

> To teach a problem or question directively is to teach it with the intention of guiding pupils toward an approved solution or correct answer; to teach it non-directively is to withhold such guidance and to present different possible solutions or answers as impartially as possible (2014b, p. 79).

Hand is clear that, "non- directive teaching is appropriate when, and only when, contrary views can be held on a matter without those views being contrary to reason" (2014b, p. 85). Accordingly, for an issue to be considered and taught as controversial under the epistemic criterion, arguments from *all sides* of a dispute must be supported by rational proof or credible reasoning. For, "either to refrain from endorsing claims that enjoy the support of compelling evidence, or to endorse claims for which the evidence is weak or ambiguous, is to undermine the core educational aim of nurturing rational thought and action" (Hand, 2008, p. 218). In my opinion, the stakes for the epistemic criterion are unnecessarily high. The epistemic criterion is one to which all others must yield and to which a teacher is under obligation to implement, lest their students' development, and the heart of education, be 'corrupted'.

2.4.3.1. The Epistemic Criterion: Critiques

The epistemic criterion has also received a generous measure of critical examination from other places over recent years (Anders & Shudak, 2016; Bertucio, 2016; Cooling, 2012; Gereluk, 2013; Gregory, 2014; Nocera, 2014; Tillson, 2017; Warnick & Spencer Smith, 2014; Yacek,

2018). So too, has Hand articulated several spirited rebuttals (Hand, 2014a, 2014b). Therefore, it is appropriate to spend time analysing this theory in more depth. However, an exploration of the challenges facing the epistemic criterion will be limited to those relating specifically to the teaching of RE. For ease, I have grouped these challenges together as 'theoretical critiques' (whose concern primarily involves the philosophical or metaphysical nature of the criterion) and 'pragmatic critiques' (concern involving the implications of the criterion on teaching practices).[17]

2.4.3.2. A Further Look at the Epistemic Criterion

When considering the centrality of rationality in the epistemic criterion, a pertinent question arises: How should one teach issues where seemingly competing views of rationality exist? Hand proposes that the requirement for an issue to be taught as controversial is that both sides of an argument are rational. However, there are different perspectives on what constitutes as rational. Many disputes, indeed, take such a form with proponents disagreeing with a defendant's logic or legitimacy of their reasoning. This disagreement is particularly acute in the area of religion. Arguments that religious beliefs are rational and logical have long been a mainstay of natural theology and apologetics. Contrastingly, several scholars (Dawkins, 2006; Dennett, 2007; Harris, 2004; Hitchens, 2007; Myers, 2013) have received often very public traction in their promotion of the irrationality of religion.[18]

In order to sufficiently outline theoretical critiques of the epistemic criteria in this context, a more in-depth examination of Hand's theory is required. Hand (2003, p. 93) articulates that "for the time being, the truth or falsity of religious propositions is a matter of disagreement among reasonable people" because the evidence available is ambiguous and does not (in his opinion) stand up to substantive verification. However, "whilst no religious proposition is known to be true…many religious claims are plausible and many religious arguments have rational force" (Hand, 2014b, p. 80). It is on this basis that Hand & White (2004) argue that pupils have a right to an awareness of religious arguments, and a right to evaluate. As they fulfil the epistemic criterion, they should be taught as controversial and therefore, 'non-directively'. Accordingly, teachers are under an obligation not to impress either their own, or any one particular set of beliefs over another for, to do so would be considered indoctrination. Within

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[17] This grouping is of the author's own design.
[18] Bryan Frances (2015, 2016) provides an interesting and succinct overview of some of the arguments posed for and against the rationality of religious beliefs in his paired papers.

community schools, Hand's view echoes the prevailing attitude of non-confessional multi-faith Religious Education that has directed teaching practice for over 50 years, since the Schools Council (1971) Working Paper no 36. Grimmit (1987, p. 258) encapsulates much of the non-confessional stance stating, "Religious' educators are essentially 'secular' educators concerned with the educational value of studying religion and religions". Resultantly, "Non-confessional RE recognises that religious matters are controversial… This kind of RE does not prescribe the conclusions pupils should come to through their search. It is 'open'" (Hughes & Barnes, 2008, p. 32). As a result, it is the discussion and discovery of controversial issues rather than the conclusions themselves that are of greater import in Religious Education.

It is important to note here, however, that Hand does allow for a slight deviation from the epistemic criterion in two cases. The first is in cases of schools with religious character where it may be better to exercise a "slightly compromised rationality-promoting education" (2008, p. 228) rather than risk the withdrawal of children from lessons such as RE (or from the school entirely). The second situation where "teaching for belief in not-known-to-be-true propositions" may be *theoretically* acceptable is when "teachers are perceived [by pupils] to be the intellectual authorities on those propositions" (Hand, 2003, p. 98). However, Hand latterly affirms that, with the possible exception of early years education, teachers are not regarded as authorities of religious truth. Therefore, at least within secondary education, Hand's second point does not apply.[19]

Nevertheless, the very admittance of the second exclusion reveals that there are broader issues at play. An argument is not deemed to be rational based solely on whether it surpasses a benchmark of logical verification. The question of 'who or what holds the authority?' is also of significance. A particular aspect of Hand's argument demonstrates this. Despite his aforementioned assertion that "religious arguments have rational force" (Hand, 2014b, p. 80)" he dismisses arguments that appeal to the authority of sacred texts as "rationally indefensible" (Hand, 2007, p. 77). Since, those who adhere to certain biblical tenets rely, not only on God's character as a source of authority, but on the "biblical writers as passive conduits for the voice of God" (Hand, 2007, p. 78). On this hermeneutical basis, he is able to argue that certain issues such as homosexuality should *not* be considered controversial. Consequently, they should be taught 'directively' as a 'closed' issue, where teachers are unapologetic in their commitment to

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[19] Tillson (2017, p. 183) argues that on this point, Hand undermines his prior argument that people can reasonably believe religious propositions.

promoting the moral legitimacy of homosexual acts (2007, pp. 84-85). Put frankly, "scriptural authority arguments are bad arguments" (Hand, 2014b, p. 80), no matter how well constructed they might be.

2.4.3.3. Epistemic Criterion: Theoretical Critiques

Cooling, in his analysis of the epistemic criterion, raises a valid concern with the outright dismissal of arguments from scriptural authority. He accuses Hand (2007) of mistaking hyper-literalist readings of scriptural injunctions with the notion of biblical inerrancy (Cooling, 2012, p. 172). Biblical inerrancy, properly understood, maintains that "whatever statements the Bible affirms are fully truthful when they are correctly interpreted in the terms of their meaning in their cultural setting and the purpose for which they were written" (Erickson, 1998, p. 263). Hermeneutics plays a crucial role in how a religious believer should interpret the claims of a religious text. Accordingly, a Christian can hold the (rational) view that certain biblical injunctions are directly applicable to today, whilst others address the needs of a particular people group, at a particular time, in a particular culture.[20] Cooling's (2012) concern, here, is with Hand's overreliance on the power of rationality within the epistemic criterion particularly as it pertains to the Christian appeal to Biblical authority. However, its application is further reaching and relevant to other faith communities, religions and worldviews.[21] In view of the role that scriptural authority plays in many religions, Cooling (2012, p. 173) formulates that the epistemic criterion is a "dangerous place to have reached" in the name of the exercise of reason.

On Cooling's charge, Hand (2014b, p. 81) clarifies his position in a rebuttal. Arguments that are processed through a hermeneutical framework are not guilty of being judged 'irrational': "Non-literalist conceptions of biblical authority that block the inferential step from scriptural prohibition to moral truth are untouched by [his] objections". However, Hand's (2014) response is not wholly satisfactory in light of the force with which he presents his initial argument, as Cooling (2014) well notes in a subsequent reply. Further, even when taking Hand's clarifications into consideration, the epistemic criterion does not adequately deal with competing

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[20] These injunctions are still important, however, and should not be ignored. They are instrumental in revealing God's character, the human condition, the grand-narrative of the Bible, and 'eternally-relevant' and applicable principles (Duvall & Hays, 2012). However, this is deliberately not a full argument here, to reflect Cooling's intentions in writing (2014, p. 87).

[21] Hand, himself, makes the same point: "attempts to settle moral questions by appealing to the Qur'an, the Talmud, the Adi Granth, the Vedas or the Tripitaka are no more rationally persuasive than attempts to settle them by appealing to the Bible" (Hand, 2007, p. 78).

claims to rationality. In this regard, whilst not dispensing with the importance of rationality when considering controversiality, Cooling's critique plays an important role in highlighting some of the complexities involved in the interplay between rationality, knowledge, faith, belief, truth and authority.

2.4.3.4. Authority

Whilst Cooling assesses Hand's evaluation of scriptural authority to be unsatisfactory, others have raised similar concerns regarding the overreliance on the authority of reason as portrayed in the epistemic criterion. Von Der Lippe (2019, p. 8), for example, propounds that knowledge is not a static or externally objectifiable quotient but "something that is negotiated and developed… between rational actors with varying degrees of authority". Appeals to rationality too, do not consider the inherently emotional nature of controversy which, in many cases, is a necessary requirement for resolution (Ashton & Watson, 1998; Ho et al., 2017; Kibble, 1998; King, 2009; McCully, 2006). Accordingly, a more nuanced view of rationality is required that takes stock of the actors' worldviews and emotions, their relationship with other actors, and their underlying dynamics of power.

In the same vein, Bertucio (2016, p. 6) asserts that the appeal to extrinsic verification standards, or a "body of public knowledge" as a primary mark of rationality is lacking. As, at least within the area of contemporary moral discourse (in which many controversial issues are found), no such coherent body exists. He draws heavily upon MacIntyre's (1981, p. 9) work that highlights "the conceptual incommensurability of… rival arguments". Whilst competing arguments may be cogent in and of themselves, they are so conceptually at odds with each other that there is no rational way of appraising the claims of one against another. Therefore, Bertucio (2016, p. 6). continues, "declarations of epistemic invalidity [or validity] are simply the proclamations of one's preferences". With this in mind, Bertucio proposes a broader definition of rationality in connection with controversial issues, one where the intellectual history and context of a contemporary dilemma are studied (as opposed to focussing on an argument 'as is'). Upon embracing this broader definition, students can better evaluate the underlying epistemic assumptions of arguments presented by one or both sides of a dispute. Likewise, they are also

able to apply the same 'epistemic intelligence' to their own arguments, thus aiding them in future examinations of controversial issues.[22]

Rationality is, no doubt, an important value in both establishing the controversiality of an issue and in education more broadly. It is not, however, the exclusive aim of education. Anders & Shudak (2016, p. 30) put it well when they write:

> Education has many goals but among them must be to promote the knowledge and skills necessary for social awareness of, and rational engagement with, the prevalent issues facing any citizen of a modern democracy. Using controversial issues to instill [sic] an ability to evaluate divergent expert testimony on prevalent issues will continue to be a significant pedagogical tool.

Whilst the epistemic criterion has, rightly, shown the importance of reason and rationality in dealing with controversial issues, it may well have been done at the expense of other fruitful educational aims. With Hand's narrow delineation of rationality, there is little room for ambiguity, conflict, or alternative constructions of the concept. Where a plurality of educational values exist, other goals (such as skills development (see section 7.3), the imparting of knowledge (Tillson, 2017), or behaving well towards others (Cooling, 2012, p. 176) are necessary as an aim in and of themselves, but also in furthering the depths and advancement of students own logic and reasoning. As a result, the above theoretic and philosophical critiques have disclosed the necessity but insufficiency of Hand's epistemic criteria, as it stands.

2.4.3.5. Pragmatic Critiques

In addition to philosophical and theoretical critiques, the epistemic criterion also faces challenge from those who are concerned with the practicalities of its use in the classroom. The epistemic criterion contends that "what distinguishes teaching-as-settled from teaching-as-controversial (or directive from nondirective teaching) is not pedagogical methods or style, but the willingness of the teacher to endorse one view of a matter as the right one" (Hand, 2008, p. 213). Its emphasis, then, is on a teacher's intentions and motives. A teacher who is teaching a settled (non-controversial) claim, must do so "with the *intention* of persuading students of its truth or

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[22] Oulton, Dillon, et al. (2004, p. 415) raise a similar point: "Developing a generic understanding of the nature of controversy and the ability to deal with it is more important that developing pupils' understanding of a particular issue *per se*".

falsity" (Hand, 2014b, p. 425 [emphasis added]). The converse is true for a controversial issue, where teachers must intend not to persuade pupils towards a particular view.

The elevation of teachers' intentions within directive teaching has been challenged. Assessing the motives and inner workings of any individual is hard to ascertain, at least from an external perspective. Tillson (2017, p. 178), highlights the indicated tension when he poses the question, "can two teachers really act in just the same way, with the only difference that justifies the former and rules out the latter being the presence of an intention?' If, as the epistemic criterion dictates, teaching-as-settled is a normative principle, then it inevitably encounters much of the longstanding debate within moral philosophy as to the nature of intention.[23]

Nevertheless, with the epistemic framework, Hand (2014a, p. 426) is not prescriptive as to how a teacher should achieve 'directive' or 'non-directive' teaching, although recognises that methods employed will differ depending on whether the issue in question is settled or controversial. With limited pedagogical guidance, the responsibility falls to the teacher to make the most appropriate use of their resources, skills, and knowledge of the class in order to bring about the learning. However, for a directive issue, Hand does endorse the use of "steering", or the "guiding [of] participants, by means of strategic prompts, questions, and interjections toward a predetermined conclusion" (2013, p. 499).

The use of steering, guiding and persuading students towards a particular view is not fully formed in Hand's writings (understandably so, given his emphasis). Accordingly, scholars have disagreed as to how and whether this directive teaching should be implemented. Gregory (2014, p. 628) contends that any form of substantively directive teaching for belief (or disbelief) is inconsonant with rational persuasion and thus a "self-defeating venture". Similarly, Warnick & Smith (2014, p. 236), argue that the directive teaching advocated by the epistemic criterion undermines the very foundation of rationality on which it is built. They assert that "teacher endorsements [of a position] add an element of coercive power" (Warnick & Smith, 2014, p. 236). With such workings at play, the student may well arrive at a 'settled' position not through rationality or reason, but through other means such as the social or situational authority of the teacher. Consequently, the "strict neutrality" that Warnick & Smith (2014, p. 243) perceive as integral

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[23] See, for example Anscombe (1957); Bratman (2009); Setiya (2003); Shoemaker (1994)

to the epistemic criteria is both limiting and impractical in light of the fluidity of classroom dynamics.

As has been shown in the debates above, the use of various criteria to determine whether or not an issue is controversial is complex. Given this complexity, it is no surprise that teachers avoid teaching topics of a controversial nature, despite their pedagogical benefit (Flensner, 2020a; Hammer, 2021; Marshall, 2010). Further, the discussion has also revealed additional points of conjecture that must be considered by the teacher in order to teach controversial issues effectively. One of these, the role of neutrality, warrants further exploration and is of notable significance within RE. Thus, the subsequent section will attempt to address the question: Which stance ought a teacher to adopt when contending with controversial issues? Like the section above, the aim is not to come to any definitive conclusions on the matter. Rather, it seeks to provide a brief overview of the current schools of thought so as to better direct the research.

2.5. Neutrality

Where teachers' attitudes towards their role in dealing with controversy have been studied, the research has occurred predominantly in subjects outside of Religious Education. Nonetheless, evidence suggests that teachers view neutrality (in one form or another) as an essential value when confronting controversial issues (Byford et al., 2009; Cotton, 2006; Cross & Price, 1996; McCully, 2006; Oulton, Day, et al., 2004; Oulton, Dillon, et al., 2004; Philpott, 2011). So too has the role of the neutral teacher been discussed from a more theoretical perspective, both within (Hull, 2005; Hulmes, 1979; Jackson, 1997; Jackson & Everington, 2017) and outside of RE (Elliott, 1971; Gardner, 1998; Richards, 2020; Warnock, 1988).

The notion that a teacher should remain neutral in classroom discussions seems reasonable, underpinned by contemporary social values. Oulton et al (2004, p. 417) note that:

> The suggestion that teachers remain neutral when discussing controversial issues is, in part, a reflection of a liberal view of education in which pupils are free to make up their own minds on issues. Such a position aims to stop teachers from using their positions of authority to impose their own views on those of the pupils

The need to avoid indoctrination is important in Religious Education, not least in the adherence to the law. RE syllabuses, as previously mentioned, "must not be designed to convert pupils, or to urge a particular religion or religious beliefs on pupils" (DfE, 1994, para. 32; *Education Act 1994,* s.26(2)). Further, imposing (to use Oulton et al's (2004) terminology) anything on a person, or group of people, suggests violations of consent, autonomy, and freedom of thought. Theoretically, indoctrination could occur in any subject on the school curriculum, or indeed outside of lesson time. Yet, the issue seems more acute when people perceive that religious views are being 'imposed' on them (or their children), as is often exemplified in the media (BBC News, 2019; Romain, 2013).

However, neutrality as a solution to indoctrination is problematic. As Hughes & Barnes (2008, p. 33) state, "Non-confessional RE should not be mistaken for a 'neutral' kind of RE". It is not neutral or indifferent to many aspects of the subject: the worldviews or opinions of the students, the law of the land, or the role of religion itself (Barnes, 2019).[24] Religious Education, as with all education, is not "value-free", as Smart (1973, p. 21) propounds. It is 'value-laden' in that it presupposes a commitment to a certain set of beliefs and principles (for example, DfE, 2011c). Further, the nature of the subject means that it directly confronts the values that underpin the lives of students and teacher, the ethos of the school and the values of society, more broadly (in a way that say, mathematics, does not). Accordingly, the teaching of controversial issues is, inevitably, fraught with navigating the potentially emotional, hostile, heated or sensitive classroom climate; something which teachers are frequently anxious about (CDVEC Curriculum Development Unit, 2012; Crombie & Rowe, 2009; Philpott, 2011). The role of the teacher, then, is not solely the gatekeeper of knowledge, but to establish a "safe and stimulating environment for pupils, rooted in mutual respect" (DfE, 2011c).[25] In light of this, Gereluk (2013, p. 79) raises the logical question concerning neutrality, "How can teachers take no stance and hope to engender a safe space for all students within the classroom?". Thus, when discord and hostility are likely, it is appropriate for teachers to be non-neutral when dealing with derogatory or offensive comments. In these classroom situations, as Wright (2007, p. 38) states, "there is a right not to tolerate the intolerant". For this reason, some scholars have made a distinction between 'neutrality' and 'impartiality', where impartiality "involves organising teaching and learning without discrimination as to ethnicity, religion, class or political opinions,

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[24] The same is recognised for Citizenship and Democracy Education (QCA, 1998, p. 56).
[25] Although, see Flensner and Von der Lippe (2019)

with freedom of expression allowed within agreed limits" (Jackson & Everington, 2017, p. 10).[26] Such a distinction is helpful in assisting teachers to recognise and conceptualise their own biases and presuppositions in relation to both their teaching methods and the material that they cover.

There is also a sense in which Religious Education cannot be 'neutral' to religion itself. One of the criticisms of a wholly neutral approach to teaching religion is that it has "either been diluted to a multifaith relativism or has become little more than a secularised discussion of social and political issues" (Cox, 1988, p.4). Erricker affirms that this quest to present liberal values as incontestable has been detrimental to Religious Education. He notes that, with a completely value-free approach to RE, "the result can be the teaching of accepted liberal values [rather than investigating religion] and not presenting the controversial illiberal teachings within religion" (Erricker, 2010, p. 57). The shift of focus from religion itself, has, according to Ofsted led pupils to a "narrowness of learning" (2010, p. 20) and a "lack of knowledge and understanding of religion" (2013, p. 9) Whilst some scholars have acknowledged, when correctly applied, "the liberal democratic framework allows rather than restricts the expression of difference" (O'Grady, 2019a, p. 158) others have been more disparaging. Copley (2008), for example, posits that the rising tide of pluralism has led to a "secular indoctrination" within RE. As such, teaching through the lens of accentuated liberal values has undermined the importance of religion, its significance for believers, and implications for wider society. In an attempt to present all views as equal, students are unable to engage with the conflicting 'truth claims' of religion (Wright, 2007). Therefore, there exists a concern amongst some, that the pursuit of neutrality within this context may lead to the "ghettoising" (Genders, 2018) of faith perspectives; playing one off against another.

Further, the concept of teaching religion and its associated controversial issues in a "neutral and objective way" (United Nations Human Rights Committee, 1993) is challenging when considering the teachers' own beliefs. For, no teacher is 'neutral' towards the subject matter that they teach. In fact, evidence suggests that teachers' religious beliefs have a significant bearing on their professional identity. Many cite religious beliefs as not only shaping their vision for the subject, but as their motivation for teaching itself (Arthur et al., 2019; Everington, 2016; Fancourt, 2017; Jackson & Everington, 2017). Cooling acknowledges that, "we are all shaped by stories which are not *just stories*. To leave them at the school gate is to leave an essential part

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[26] Also, REC Gravel (2015); (2010)

of who I am behind" (Cooling, 2002, p. 46). It is therefore impossible to divorce a teacher's personal beliefs and values from their pedagogy and practices. Neutrality, in the sense of complete objectivity, is a myth. Instead, teachers' identity and pedagogy are intrinsically linked to the metanarrative of their life, experiences and motivations

In light of the overarching narrative of objective neutrality and liberal democratic values, it is easy to see why there are some teachers with a religious 'metanarrative' that may feel prohibited from sharing their opinions, for fear of perceived indoctrination (Miller & McKenna, 2011; Revell & Walters, 2010; Thompson, 2004). Equally, as Everington & Sikes (2001) note, there are also instances of atheists who discerned their views as being incompatible with the work of an RE teacher. It is recognised that not all teachers may feel comfortable in disclosing their personal views, and that 'good' RE does not necessitate the sharing of personal values. However, the appropriate sharing of religious beliefs can also be a "professional asset" (REC, 2009). The perspective of the teacher can act as a resource to: cultivate an atmosphere of trust (Everington, 2016); encourage children to contribute their own experience (Fancourt, 2007); communicate the 'lived experience' of a believer (Everington, 2012); enhance the understanding of religious community values and purposes (Jackson & Everington, 2017); exemplify the nuances between religious denominations (Jackson, 2014a); and reinforce the professional and vocational identity of the teacher (Hulmes, 1979).

What seems to be of greatest importance, then, is not necessarily the subject content being taught, but how it is taught in light of the disposition of the teacher. Hand (2008, p.218ff) in his presentation of the epistemic criteria, relies on such a demarcation of a teacher's intentions from their actions. When considering whether a teacher should disclose their own view or opinion on a matter, he notes the difference between "imparting religious beliefs to a class" and "a readiness to disclose and defends one's own religious position in the context of classroom discussion" to be one of intention (Hand, 2014a, p. 425).[27] To many teachers, this distinction may seem intuitive. They are often markedly aware of how to use self-disclosure in the classroom, as well its impact on learners (Everington, 2012; McCully, 2006). Further, teachers are also frequently skilled in their knowledge of both their subject and their classes to know when self-disclosure may be appropriate. However, the shift towards the teacher's intrinsic character and motivations emphasises the essence of the profession as a moral endeavour

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[27] Also, Jackson (2004, pp. 34–35)

(Campbell, 2013; Carr, 2011; Cooke, 2013; Higgins, 2011; Sanger, 2008; Sockertt, 2012). The teacher, as a moral agent, is able to act according to their virtues in order to best use the resources in their control (including their personal views).

Many 'virtues' have been proposed that take stock of a teacher's personal beliefs and opinions[28], too numerous to cover in detail here.[29] However, several are deserving of mention. Watson & Thompson advocate that "what will save the teachers from unacceptable dogmatism, whether of a religious or non-religious nature, is not the absence of commitment even were this possible, but the integrity with which the teacher pursues and models openness" (2014, p. 7). Similarly, the Religious Education Council, in their RE-focussed exemplification of the DfE's Teachers' Standards, emphasise that the classroom environment should be one where religious belief and its impact are explored and evaluated. However, teachers are "not to pass judgement on the validity of an individual's beliefs" (2013b). These virtues: integrity, openness, and being non-judgemental, amongst others, are not static. They are able to be developed and cultivated through introspection and self-evaluation. Larkin et al. (2020, pp. 5-6), puts it insightfully:

> There is no neutral vantage point from which religions and worldviews can be explored without prejudice, but we can seek to acknowledge our biases and recognise the distinctiveness of our own and other people's perspectives. The result is not objectivity, but inter-subjectivity and epistemological and methodological humility. The strategy for attaining this level of reflexivity is in one sense simple: reflection. Reflection on what is learnt about and religion(s) and worldview(s); reflection on how to learn about religion(s) and worldview(s); and reflection on oneself as a learner learning about religion(s) and worldview(s).

Therefore, the term 'neutrality', as discussed, is likely to be unhelpful to teachers (and pupils), especially as a countermeasure to indoctrination. However, it is equally unhelpful for a teacher to take a 'neutral' or passive stance towards the role they will play when teaching controversial issues. For both require active reflection, sensitivity to influence of one's own beliefs and opinions, and proactive measures to best facilitate learning within professional standards and best-practice.

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[28] As an example, Council of Europe (2015, p. 25) provide one such list.
[29] As an aside, but related to an earlier section of this chapter, Nocera (2014) suggests foregoing attempting to use criteria for establishing controversiality, in favour of a 'virtue theory' approach.

2.5.1. The Stance of the Teacher

Where possible, teachers should deliberately select a suitable position from which they can bring about the appropriate learning, before a controversial issue arises (Lockwood, 1996; Misco, 2016; Waterson, 2009). Inevitably, spontaneous discussion of controversial issues can and does occur in a classroom setting. However, given the controversial nature of the RE and the subject matter that is present at Key Stage 4, much of this spontaneity can be pre-empted. Accordingly, several 'teacher roles' have been formulated. Whilst not being prescriptive, they may assist the teacher not only with recognising their own values and presuppositions, but also with deciding how best to navigate controversial issues with a particular class. They are briefly outlined in the table below:

Position	Explanation	Potential Strengths	Potential Weakness
Neutral Chairperson	The teacher adopts the role of impartial chairperson of a discussion group. Discussion is focussed on the students' viewpoints and requires the teacher not to express personal views or allegiances.	• Minimises the risk of undue teacher influence (Bomstad, 1995; Harwood, 1997; REC, 2010; Stenhouse, 1971) • Gives each student the opportunity to participate in free discussion (Humes, 2010) • Views may be expressed that the teacher has not thought of • Students can develop communication skills • Works well if lots of background material available	• The discussion can be artificial (Ashton & Watson, 1998) • Students may need practice if used to a more 'teacher-led' approach • May reinforce existing attitudes and prejudices due to limited perspectives (Ashton & Watson, 1998) • Challenging for less able students • It may cast doubt on a teacher's credibility with the class (Stradling, 1984) • Can be difficult to sustain (Stradling, 1984). • Students may mistake teacher neutrality for lack of commitment (REC, 2010).
Balanced Advocate	The teacher presents students with a wide range of alternative views on an issue. They present each view as persuasively as possible, without revealing their own view.	• It is important for teachers to illustrate that there are many opinions on controversial issues, especially if a range of opinions is not present in the group • Useful when there is a great deal of conflicting information • Useful when the group is polarised (Fiehn, 2005). • Helps to show students that issues are not two-dimensional (Wales & Clarke, 2005) • Introduces arguments that students would not otherwise arrive at (CoE, 2015)	• A balanced range of opinions may be unachievable (Carington & Troyna, 1988). • The approach can lead to teacher-directed sessions as their input is required to maintain balance (Fiehn, 2005). • Teacher may have to advocate for a view that they disagree with (Hayward, 2007) • Is 'truth' a grey area between all the different opinions? (CoE, 2015) • All arguments, including extreme positions are given equal weight (CoE, 2015)
Committed Impartiality	The teacher explicitly makes their view known. They lead discussion of student's views, whilst being willing to advocate for their position	• Emphasises transparency (Kelly, 1986). • Teacher's views are open and so students can judge bias • Teachers are seen as relatable and effected by controversial issues. They are entitled to have equally strong opinions, alongside students (Wales & Clarke, 2005) • Gives students a 'model' of how to respond to a controversial issue (Seigel, 1988; Warnock, 1988). • May be important where a teacher has a particularly strong moral or ethical opinion on an issue (Richardson, 2011)	• Could stifle discussion • Some students may just enjoy an argument with teachers (Fiehn, 2005). • Could lead to accusations of bias • May confuse student if teacher gives both fact and opinion on the same issue (Wales & Clarke, 2005) • Teacher's opinion could be given too much weight (Bridges, 1979) • Students may accept the teacher's view because they are in authority (CoE, 2015) Teacher's may present a view that may be un-evidenced (Harwood & Hahn, 1900)
Challenging Consensus	The teacher consciously and openly takes up the opposite position to that expressed by students or resource material, irrespective of their own viewpoint	• Can stimulate students to contribute to discussion (Harwood, 1997) • Tactically valuable when there is a narrow range of views in the group (Richardson, 2011) • Useful when the discussion is beginning to dry up (Fiehn, 2005). • Ensures a range of viewpoints are taken seriously (CoE, 2015) • Can challenge existing consensus (Hayward, 2007; Oxfam, 2018) • Can support students who are struggling to articulate their own arguments REC, 2010)	• As the teacher may take more than one position to develop the discussion, this may be confusing for students or lead to concerns over bias (Fiehn, 2005; Richardson, 2011). • May reinforce student attitudes
Critical Affirmation	The teacher and students advocate their own stance. This is done in a way that affirms pupils and their views, whilst subjecting all views, including the teacher's own, to a close scrutiny, especially regarding implications for the views of others (Ashton & Watson, 1998)	• Students have time to challenge the teacher's opinion and to express their own thoughts. Also, that students are in a suitable intellectual and psychological position to be able to do this. • Allows for development of critical thinking skills • The teacher can model kind and fair critique	• The teacher must be comfortable with their opinion being challenged and must models good practice in this area, (e.g., does not become overly defensive and is willing to listen to others) • Required students to be in a suitable intellectual and psychological position to have their views critiqued (Hayward, 2007) • Students may not be able to get to the 'truth' of a matter

Adapted from Fiehn (2005)

Table 1: Comparison of Teacher Positions

It should be noted that descriptions in the table above are not exhaustive. They are examples of general orientations of teacher positions, rather than mutually exclusive categories or comprehensive definitions. Further, the teacher is not bound to pursue a particular position indefinitely and may adopt several positions during the course of a lesson, in order to facilitate discussion and learning.

2.6. Chapter Summary

There exists a myriad of complexities in defining a controversial issue or providing certain criteria for its determination. Further, as shown, the path of a teacher as they attempt to navigate these issues in the classroom is a complex one. Given these theoretical and pragmatic difficulties, it is no wonder that some teachers tend to minimise discussion of controversial issues (Engebretson, 2018; Fournier-Sylvester, 2013; Gindi & Ron Erlich, 2018; Hess, 2002, 2009; McCully, 2006; McKernan, 1982; Oulton, Day, et al., 2004; Sheppard & Levy, 2019). However, at present, there is a distinct lack of research focusing on the views of teachers, who confront these matters on a near daily basis. Further, the comparatively few studies that are concerned with teachers' attitudes towards controversial issues and their perception of their role, occupy a space mainly outside of RE. Therefore, these considerations (and others) will form the basics of subsequent chapters and the research that follows.

3. Abortion as a Controversial Issue

The controversy of abortion, the procedure to end a pregnancy, looms large as one of the most prominent of current times. At first glance, such an assertion may seem surprising given its designation as "simple, routine, and frequently performed" (Jackson, 2001, p. 72). In fact, approximately 73 million abortions are carried out across the globe each year, corresponding to a rate of 39 abortions per 1000 women of reproductive age (Bearak et al., 2020, p. e1152). In the UK, just over 200,000 terminations take place, with a lifetime prevalence of abortion standing at around one in three women before the age of 45 (Department for Health and Social Care, 2020a, p. 6).

Nevertheless, despite its prevalence, the topic of abortion is far from simple. It carries the weighty underpinnings of complex moral, theological, social, and political convictions and amalgamates both highly subjective personal experience with cultural taboo. The issue is also exponentially polarised. For example, several anti-abortion American republican state representatives have recently expressed their support for the use the death penalty as retribution for those undergoing an abortion (or those performing them) where the procedure is criminalised within the state (Najmabadi, 2021; Sinclair, 2018). On the other end of the spectrum, Australian ethicists Giubilini & Minerva (2013) argue that when circumstances occur after birth such that they would have been a justification or grounds for an [in utero] abortion, an "after-birth abortion" should be permitted. Whilst perhaps at the periphery, these examples are a pointed illustration of abortion invoking and intertwining further contested concepts such as the moral status of the foetus, human personhood, bodily integrity, autonomy, equality, and justice. It also demonstrates some of the many actors at play: the woman herself, alongside her family and other children, the policy makers, government officials, doctors, regulatory bodies, ethicists, religious leaders, and activists.

Considering this contested and interwoven nature of abortion, the purpose of this chapter will be to first, outline briefly the place of abortion within secondary education. It will then explore the specific constitution of controversy as it pertains to abortion. In order to provide a useful framework for such undertaking, the following diagram, which I designed, recapitulates the preceding chapter's explorations and discussions of criteria, providing summarising questions and considerations. By analysing abortion through the lens of each of the proposed criteria, it

will be possible to lay out the key foundational concepts of the topic and situate it within the broader conversation of controversy.
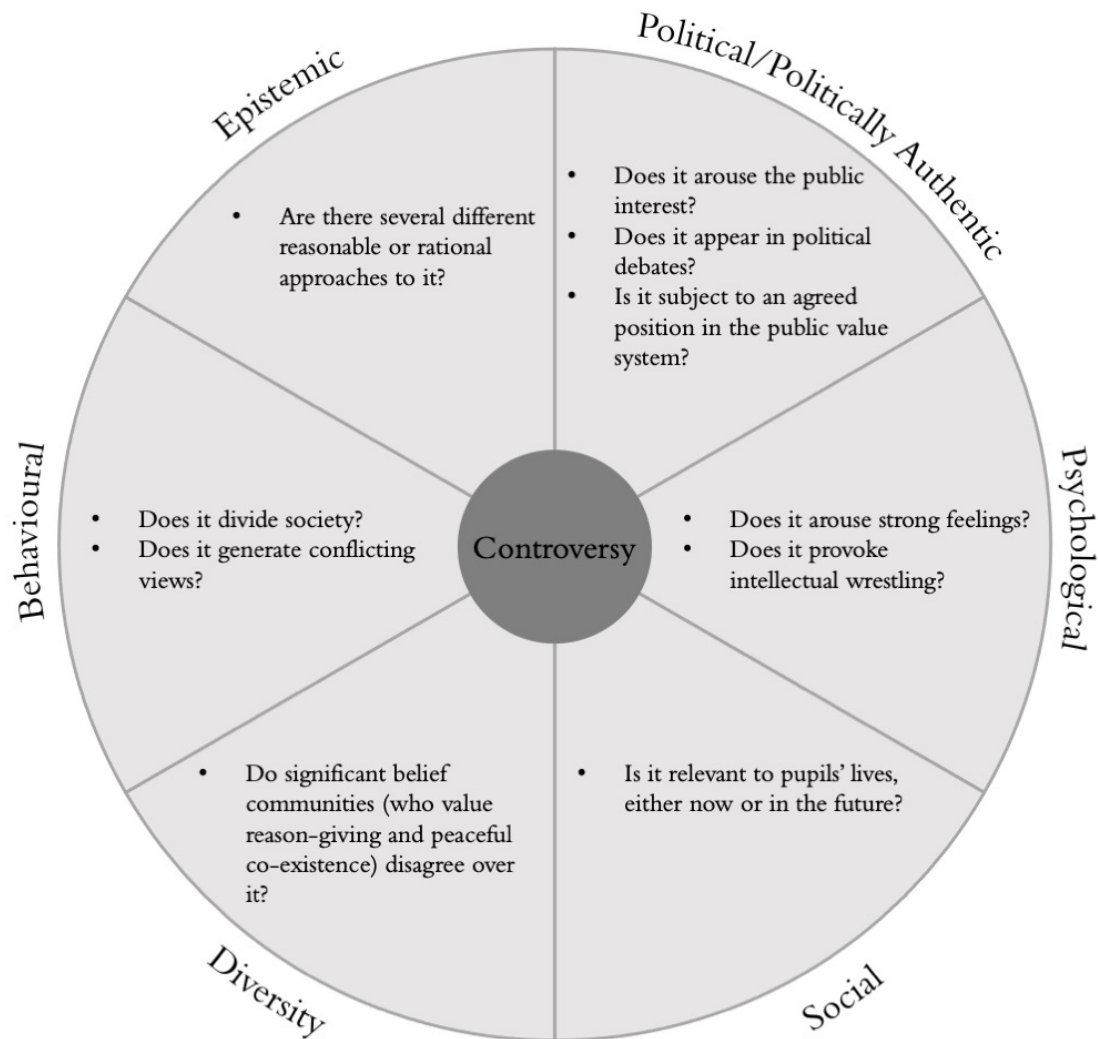
Figure 1: Overview of the Criteria for Controversy

3.1. Abortion in Secondary Education

The GCSE (General Certification of Secondary Education) qualification is a mainstay of the English educational system.[30] Underpinned by the Regulated Qualifications Framework for England and Northern Ireland, the GCSE is situated at level 2 (of 9 levels) and is normally undertaken by those in school Year 11, or aged 16 (UK Government, 2014). In England, examination boards, as the awarding organisation, develop GCSE specifications which are regulated by the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) (Ofqual, 2017) and are publicly funded (Ofqual, CCEA & the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), 2019). Depending on the school setting, GCSE Religious Studies may be compulsory or be taken as an optional subject, in either full course or short course mode (comparable to half of a full GCSE). In the last decade, the number of pupils in England who entered a full course RS course across all examination boards has increased by approximately 30% (REC, 2022), although in 2021 this number fell by 2.4% compared to the previous year (REC, 2021).

The subject aims, learning outcomes and broad content for GCSE RS qualifications are laid down by the DfE, to which all examination board specifications adhere (DfE, 2015). Although routes through various qualifications might differ, subject content consists of two parts. First, the study of religions where students are required to "demonstrate knowledge and understanding of two religions" (DfE, 2015b, p.3) including their beliefs, teachings and practices, amongst other things. The second part consists of engagement with subject content either through a "textual studies" or "religious, philosophical and ethical studies in the modern world" approach (DfE, 2015, p.6). If the latter approach is taken, students are required to study philosophical, ethical, and religious arguments as they apply to various themes including "relationships and families" and "explanations… of the value of human life" (DfE, 2015, p.7). Abortion, as a topic of study, is usually situated within these thematic studies. Appendix A provides a more detailed comparison of the different major GCSE Religious Studies specifications, including the particular positioning of abortion within them.

Within secondary education more broadly, the study of abortion is also located within the 'new' Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) curriculum; a compulsory element for all pupils ("The Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education (England)

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[30] The qualification is also used by the devolved nations in Northern Ireland and Wales, although the focus of this section is on England, in keeping with the context of the research.

Regulations 2019," 2019), where its place has faced fierce discussion. For example, in 2018, the Association of Teachers and Lecturers section of the National Education Union's annual conference debated a resolution that teenagers "still face threats of violence, inaccurate and misleading information [provided by parents and some external organisations], and unequal access to abortion services" (TES, 2018). Some supported the motion on the basis of providing balanced information and reproductive rights, whereas others rejected it citing adherence to the liberal ideology of 'abortion on demand' (Busby, 2018).

Nonetheless, the purpose, aim and scope of RSE is different in comparison to RE; and therefore, so too are approaches to teaching abortion[31]. RSE at secondary level is "delivered in a non-judgemental, factual way" to provide teenagers with the knowledge needed "to help them develop healthy, nurturing relationships of all kinds" (DfE, 2019a, p. 25), and "to prepare pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life" (DfE, 2019a, p. 8). Thus, RSE seeks to enable young people to make informed decisions regarding their own personal health, wellbeing and relationships mainly by providing, descriptive and largely objective information (including signposting to appropriate support and treatment for sexual and reproductive health issues like abortion).

One of the aims of GCSE Religious Studies is also to assist in students' "preparation for adult life in a pluralistic society and global community" (DfE, 2015b, p. 3). However, the method deployed to achieve this preparation is distinctive. The GCSE RS specifications are designed to develop students' knowledge and understanding of religious and non-religious beliefs; construct reasoned, balanced and well-informed arguments; and engage with questions of belief, purpose, truth and meaning, in order to develop and challenge their own values, viewpoints and attitudes (DfE, 2015b, p. 3; QCA, 2000, inside cover). RE then by very nature, is not simply concerned with objective 'facts' (in the way that RSE advocates) but necessitates the more complex and iterative processes of, self-reflection, critical analysis, and evaluation. Abortion, therefore, as a topic of import both within the specification and to religious and non-religious communities alike, acts as a conduit by which such skills and knowledge are actualised.

The following questions, extracted from recent Religious Studies examination papers exemplify this aforementioned approach:

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[31] Although it is recognised that RE teachers are frequently tasked with teaching and/or leading RSE.

- "It is a woman's right to choose abortion" Discuss the statement showing that you have considered more than one point of view (You must refer to religious and non-religious beliefs in your answer). [15 marks] (Eduqas/WJEC, 2016a, p. 12)

- "Abortions should never be allowed." Evaluate this statement considering arguments for and against. In your response you should: refer to Christian teachings; refer to relevant ethical arguments; reach a justified conclusion. [12 Marks] (Pearson/Edexcel, 2018a, p. 16)

- Explain for either two religions or two religious traditions, attitudes about abortion [8 marks] (Eduqas/WJEC, 2019b, p. 7)

- Explain two reasons why most Muslims do not agree with abortion. [4 marks] (Pearson/Edexcel, 2018b, p. 12)

- 'Abortion should be allowed only when the mother's life is at risk.' Evaluate this statement, In your answer you:
  - Should give reasoned arguments in support of this statement
  - Should give reasoned arguments to support a different point of view
  - Should refer to religious arguments
  - May refer to non-religious arguments
  - Should reach a justified conclusion [12 marks] (AQA, 2019)

- Explain how Christian teachings affect the attitudes of Christians to abortion. You should refer to sources of wisdom and authority in your answer. [6 marks] (OCR, 2018, p. 3)

- Explain two contrasting beliefs in contemporary British society about abortion. In your answer you should refer to the main religious tradition of Great Britain and one or more other religious traditions. [4 marks]) (AQA, 2018, p. 3)

These questions reflect Religious Education's (and the GCSE syllabi, specifically) fundamental requirement for students to be able to demonstrate well the more demanding taxonomical skills associated with the cognitive domain, including, but not limited to, the metacognitive and

'higher order' thinking and writing skills of evaluation, synthesis, critique, and the ability to hold two (or more) potentially conflicting viewpoints in tension (Baumfield, 2002; Chan et al., 2020; Jawoniyi, 2015; Strhan, 2012; Vermeer, 2012). The use of controversial topics such as abortion, then, only further seeks to promote and develop the particular skills required for a student to appropriately engage with the subject content and allow them to attain the learning aims and outcomes of the syllabus.

3.2. Abortion, the Political and Politically Authentic Criteria

When considering whether or not an issue is controversial, the politically authentic criterion advocates that the issue's prevalence in the public, legal and legislative sphere is a powerful indication of its designation (Hess & McAvoy, 2015, p. 168). There is no denying that abortion is an inherently and deeply political issue on both a global and local scale (Doan, 2009; Keown, 2002a; McKeegan, 1993), and is also perceived as politically controversial within the teaching community (Flensner, 2020b). Perhaps most acutely, the bipartisan nature of the American political system frequently situates the debate as a vast dichotomy of two separate classifications and viewpoints. The Republican Party considers itself to be "pro-life" and are "proud to stand up for the rights of the unborn and believe all Americans have an unalienable right to life as stated in The Declaration of Independence" (DOP, 2021). In contrast, the Democratic Party believe "that every woman should be able to access high-quality reproductive health care services, including safe and legal abortion" and "oppose restrictions on abortion care" (Party, 2020). Certainly, at the Congressional level there is a sharp division on approaches to abortion in relation to political affiliation, although this division is not necessarily reflected in the affiliation of the general population (Gallup, 2020; Pew Research Centre, 2019). Nevertheless, since *Roe v Wade* (1973) affirmed by *Planned Parenthood v Casey* (1992) (previous supreme court rulings that essentially protected a women's constitutional right to an abortion without undue interference from the state, prior to the viability of the foetus), there have been more than 1000 enactments and changes to the law by states (Nash et al., 2016). These changes are due, in part, to the 'separation of powers' in the American political setup whereby legislative capacity is shared between federal (national) and state (local) government.

Most notably and recently, *Dobbs v Jackson (2022),* has thrust the issue of abortion further into public, legal and legislative spheres. The ruling essentially reversed *Roe v Wade*, leaving access to abortion to be governed by the patchwork of individual state laws, some of which ban

abortion outright in all circumstances (Witherspoon, Glenza & Chang, 2022). Some states have enacted 'trigger' legislation – legislation that comes into effect if and only if a specific event or condition occurs, such as the overturning of *Roe v Wade.* Some trigger legislation is enforceable immediately and other legislation faces a delay or, as is the case at the time of writing, is being blocked by county judges (Durkee, 2022). Reactions to *Dobbs v Jackson,* have been strong in the public arena from both those who support the ruling and those who oppose it, as exemplified by the significant and often emotive media coverage of the case in the US and further afield. Likewise, the political arena has also seen strong reactions with house democrats introducing responsive bills to Congress related to the protection or enhancement of abortion rights (Women's Health Protection Act 2022, Ensuring Access to Abortion Act 2022). Additionally, the house has attempted to protect the rights to federal provision of contraception (Right to Contraception Act 2022) and same-sex and interracial marriage (Respect for Marriage Act 2022) in response to Justice Thomas' assertion that other landmark rulings should be reconsidered (Mangan, 2022). *Dobbs v Jackson* reveals the volatility and prevalence of issues relating to abortion in America's current political milieu with the abortion pendulum frequently swinging in line with a particular party's policies relating to women's rights, the status of the foetus, insurance, medication, conscientious objection, regulation, counselling, the treatment of minors, and later term abortion via dilation and extraction (often dubbed by the non-medical name 'partial-birth' abortion).

Unlike the USA, the law in the UK has been less subject to change. However, it is still subject to the vicissitudes of politics and occupies a unique and curious legal space. The underlying premise for all law relating to abortion is that is a criminal offence *prima facie* either under statute ("Infant Life (Preservation) Act 1929," s.1; "Offences Against the Person Act 1861," s.58, 59) in the cases of England and Wales; or under common law in the case of Scotland (Neal, 2016, p. 401).[32] Only under the very specific circumstances outlined in the *Abortion Act* (1967, s.1) as amended by the *Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act* (1990) are exceptions to the crime of administering or procuring an abortion permitted. These exceptions detail:

i.   Under whose authority abortions may be carried out – a registered medical practitioner
ii.   Where they are able to take place – an NHS hospital or alternative approved clinical premises (although there was currently a temporary measure in place to allow women

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[32] Northern Ireland has a slightly different legal journey. For an overview see Sheldon et al. (2020)

to access early medical abortion services at home to limit the transmission of COVID-19 (Department for Health and Social Care, 2020b). This arrangement, after considerable debate in the House of Commons and House of Lords is due to remain subject to royal consent (Rough, 2022).

iii. The statutory grounds for abortion and who must agree on them (two medical practitioners)

iv. The correct line of reporting for the procedure.

Nevertheless, despite there being relatively clear criteria for a permissible defence for an abortion, the issue still faces frequent challenge and calls to reform through both legal and public channels. In the legislative arena, by way of two recent examples; in 2017 Labour MP Diana Johnson introduced the Reproductive Health (Access to Terminations) Bill 2016-17 to the House of Commons, which aimed to "regulate the termination of pregnancies by medical practitioners and to repeal certain criminal offences relating to such terminations" (HC Deb, 2017). Similarly, in 2020 in the House of Lords, Liberal Democrat Peer Baroness Barker, initiated a Private Members' Bill which sought to "decriminalise the consensual termination of a pregnancy which has not exceeded its twenty-fourth week and in other prescribed circumstances; and to create a criminal offence for non-consensual termination of pregnancy" (*Abortion Bill [HL]* 2020).

In addition to legal and legislative dimensions, the political criterion also incorporates civic traction within its categorisation of an issue as controversial. Outside of parliamentary groups and in the public arena, there has been a general consensus that abortion legislation in its current state is unfit for purpose. Accordingly, there have been calls from organisations on both sides of the debate for reform. Such organisations are wide-ranging and include amongst others: charities, professional bodies, common interest groups, advocacy organisations, campaign groups, abortion service providers, and religious groups.

On the one hand, there are those such as Abortion Rights, the national pro-choice campaign that seek to "defend and extend women's rights to access safe, legal abortion" (Abortion Rights, 2021). The independent group fights for full decriminalisation of abortion and for women to be able to access abortion upon her request (rather than through a doctor's good faith judgement in the present construction of the law). They repudiate any endeavour to reduce the abortion time limit which at-present stands at 23+6 days gestation in most circumstances ("R (on the

application of British Pregnancy Advisory Service) v The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care [2020] ", at 73)[33]. Other organisations too have similar lines of attack, essentially viewing the current system as giving rise to avoidable trauma, delay, or barriers to services; which are discriminatory against women (for example, Antenatal Results and Choices, 2018; Family Planning Association, 2019; The Faculty of Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, 2018). The relationship to legislation by these organisations is one of amelioration since, as Ann Furedi (2014, p. 5), the former chief executive of the charitable abortion provider the British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS), states "insofar as abortion is a problem today, it is a matter of its politics, not its practice".

On the other hand, other organisations campaign for legal reforms to abortion on several bases. First, that the current formulation of the law does not appropriately consider the rights of the unborn. Although a foetus does have some interests that are protected by the law (*St George's NHS Trust v S* (1998) 44 BMLR 160, Judge JL at 175-6), it is not a 'person' until it is born (*Paton v British Pregnancy Advice Service* (1978) 2 All ER 987). This timing of personhood poses significant issues for those who "protect and defend the right to life of every human being from conception" (Right to Life, 2020). As a result, these organisations often advocate for the value of the life of both woman and foetus, and for more comprehensive support of women who find themselves in a vulnerable position as an alternative to abortion (Christian Action Research and Education, 2021).[34] In contrast to previous examples, the decriminalisation of abortion is often strongly opposed on grounds that it removes regulation and safeguards, thus "fuelling unethical and unsafe practices" (Taylor, 2019, p. 4). Reducing the legal time limit for abortion is looked upon favourably. Either in reference to foetal viability; ("the ability to survive independent of a pregnant woman's womb" (Glover, 1990, p. 124), since advances in neonatal medicine mean that babies are now able to survive before the 24-week mark[35]. Or, by appeal to comparison with other jurisdictions and legal frameworks, for example, in campaigning to bring the time limit down to at least 12 weeks, mirroring the majority of other EU countries

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[33] Under section 1(1)(a) of the *Abortion Act 1967*, a pregnancy can be lawfully terminated before 24 weeks if "the continuation of the pregnancy would involve risk, greater than if the pregnancy were terminated, of injury to the physical or mental health of the pregnant woman or any existing children of her family". In particular circumstances where there is a threat to the life, or grave permanent injury of the women, or if there a risk that the baby would be seriously disabled, this time limit is extended to full term.

[34] In many cases, such organisations go beyond advocating for better support of women to the provision of services such as counselling, pregnancy crisis centres, and helplines.

[35] For example, the British Association of Perinatal Medicine (BAPM) suggest that active management of babies born as early as 22^{+0} weeks gestation may appropriate (following assessment) due to steadily improving outcomes for extremely premature babies (2019, p. 5).

(Right to Life, 2021). Alternatively, in drawing upon intergovernmental codification such as the *UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child*[36] (Society for the Protection of Unborn Children (SPUC), 2021).

Applying the issue of abortion to the political criterion is complex. Strictly speaking, it could be argued that it should be taught in a 'closed' or 'settled' manner (Hess, 2009, p. 124) considering there is an agreed position within England, Wales, and Scotland's public value system as reflected in legal frameworks. The current formulation of the law is clear that there are certain circumstances, as detailed above, that provide a defence against the crime of administering or procuring an abortion. Accordingly, there are legal options available for ending a pregnancy. Therefore, teachers under the political criterion, should approach abortion in their classrooms such that they present the indicated 'right' position as the commanding view. However, this narrow view of the political criterion is based solely on internal policy and structure and fails to conceive of public values internationally. There exist alternative permutations of abortion law in other jurisdictions that would also consider themselves to be a liberal democratic state. In fact, such is the case even within parts of the UK. As of 2020, abortion in Northern Ireland is not designated a criminal offence in most circumstances after the repeal of certain clauses of the Offences Against the Person Act 1861 *("The Abortion (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2020,")*. In accordance with the lack of agreed public approach more broadly, abortion should therefore be taught as an open or controversial issue. In this sense, the 'politically authentic' criterion provides a more appropriate basis for deciding an issue's controversiality in the public/political realm since it "distinguishes between what is bandied about in general society as a matter of controversy and that which has entered the authentic political sphere of democratic decision-making" (Hess & McAvoy, 2015, p. 168). There is no denying that abortion, as detailed above, is a frequent and perennial feature in this political domain.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the abortion debate does not exclusively surround its legality, both in the general and within the context of Religious Education. Many, if not most, GCSE RS students will cover the law(s) surrounding abortion during the course of their studies (see, for example, Fleming et al. (2016, p. 98); Owens et al. (2016, p. 60); Watton & Stone

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[36] The preamble of the declaration states that "the child, by reason of his physical and mental immaturity, needs special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection, before as well as after birth" (United Nations, 1990), and is used to support a more conservative footing for abortion legislation.

(2016, p. 124).[37] However, as is its namesake, a Religious Studies programme goes beyond the study of democracy, citizenship, or law as its sole aim. Instead, it uses these disciplines to provide a springboard for critical discussion within the realm of religion. Inevitably and rightly, this interdisciplinarity leads to a study of the more contested (and less empirical) concepts of belief, morality, ethics, behaviour and worldview. It is such aspects of study relating to abortion that are equally as controversial thus necessitating an open, non-settled approach. In actuality, the demands of the specification as illustrated by the abovementioned exemplar examination questions not only promote students engaging in this open manner, but *require* it. Resultantly a less normative approach is needed that effectively allows students to develop the skills necessary to flourish (both in the examination, and in the world) as opposed to being steered in one particular direction (Von Der Lippe, 2019, p. 8; Warnick & Spencer Smith, 2014, p. 238).

3.3. Abortion and the Behavioural Criterion

As previously explored the behavioural criterion maintains that an issue is controversial if "numbers of people are observed to disagree about statements and assertions made in connection with an issue" (Bailey, 1975, p. 122). This declaration relies on two foundational premises. First, that controversy involves a quantitative measure of plurality; groups of people who share a similar view. Second, that two or more of these groups of people disagree, or there is discordance amongst their beliefs, claims, and frames of reference regarding a particular issue. These premises seem to be supported the use of the word 'controversy' in the common vernacular as well as its meaning derived from etymological roots; literally turning against or at opposing directions (Hoad, 1996, p. 95). Controversy then, according to the behavioural criterion is marked by the variance in conduct or actions displayed by groups of people in response to a complex situation or phenomenon. It implies divergence, conflict, division, and dispute.

Taking a societal perspective, such a disparity of views can be evidenced by recorded public opinion. Within an American context, for example, the 2019 Gallup Annual Values and Beliefs poll deemed abortion as the single most divisive issue facing the nation (Brenan, 2019).[38] With almost an even split of those surveyed claiming abortion to be either 'Morally acceptable' (42%)

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[37] Whilst legal aspects of abortion are not explicitly outlined in GCSE Religious Studies specifications, they do appear in the endorsed or approved textbooks of the course (Abbott & Clarke, 2017; Ahmedi & Power, 2019, p. 24; Owens et al., 2016, p. 72) and feature in the many individual teachers' schemes of work on this topic.
[38] See also, Cook et al. (2018); Shaw (2003)

or 'morally unacceptable' (50%); placing it well above other topics of contention such as pornography, stem cell-research, smoking marijuana, and the death penalty. This division is mirrored in varying degrees of similarity across the globe. Ipsos, in a recent global study observed a similar close to even split (within 20 percentage points) in countries like Turkey, India, and Japan; with some countries having a more favourable opinion of abortion's acceptability (for example, Sweden, Netherlands, and Canada), and others such as Malaysia or Peru resting more towards its unacceptability and impermissibility (Ipsos, 2020, p. 2).

However, whilst broad public opinion may be of some value in gaining an overall sense of people's orientation towards an issue, it is important not to oversimplify conclusions from the results found in studies such as those above. Societal attitudes towards abortion are seldom binary or absolute. The inherent complicacy of the issue means that a more situationist approach is commonplace. This approach reflects the myriad of reasons and individual circumstances surrounding the decision to have an abortion. Of practical merit, but only for the categorisation of public opinion, is the distinction sometimes made between traumatic or physical reasons for seeking abortion, and those revolving around societal motivations (Jelen & Wilcox, 2003) (in more general bioethical discussion, such a distinction is unhelpful and detrimental since any reason for pursuing an abortion has the potential to be traumatic). On the whole in Great Britain, public opinion tends to generally be in acceptance of abortions on the bases of the former, and less accepting of abortions on the bases of the latter. Clements & Field (2018), in their comprehensive secondary analysis of abortion trends over time[39], confirm this approach. Consistently over a time frame of over 50 years, Britons have been most accepting of abortion in situations where the mother's health is at risk, when pregnancy occurs through rape, or for termination for medical reasons (TFMR) (when a foetus is diagnosed with a life-limiting or fatal condition *in utero*) (Clements & Field, 2018, p. 436). Conversely, public opinion in the UK tends to be less accepting of abortion circumstances such as financial reasons, timing, partner-related issues, or not wishing to have the child where no other reason applies (Clements & Field, 2018, pp. 436-437; Gray & Wellings, 2020; Park et al., 2013, p. 20).

Like all research, conducting surveys or polls on public opinion is not an exact science. It is subject to significant methodological, pragmatic and analytical challenges both internally, for

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[39] Based on a multitude of academic and social public opinion surveys including British Election Studies, YouGov, European Values Studies, YouGov, and National Opinion Polls amongst others.

example in avoiding value-laden questions, or sampling and response bias; and externally, for example, in the reporting of the results by the media, or the commissioning of surveys by organisation with a particular agenda (Gill & Homola, 2016, pp. 275-298; Traugott, 2008, pp. 232-240). Nevertheless, a very brief exploration of the general public's attitudes towards the moral acceptability of abortion has been fruitful in revealing and contextualising the extent to which conflicting views are present. Furthermore, the demonstration of the disparity of viewpoints contingent on the many reasons women pursue an abortion, further compounds the complexity and variance of perspectives.

At this juncture, it is also important to note that the examination of public opinion above has focused primarily on the moral acceptability of abortion. Other factors such as whether abortion should be legalised, or whether women should be able to access abortion services have also been surveyed (Ipsos, 2020; Onward/Hanbury, 2019; Park et al., 2013; YouGov/MSI, 2019). Although not the only marker of division, moral acceptability does seem to encapsulate the crux of the debate surrounding abortion since, hyperbolically, one can believe that abortion is 'wrong', whilst still believing women should be able to access appropriate abortion services, free from criminal intervention, especially under a more subjectivist ethical framework. Nevertheless, abortion's inherent multifaceted and composite nature allows for a significant diversification of views. Such divergence is of necessity to the behavioural criterion in establishing whether or not an issue is controversial. Thus, the behavioural criterion is fulfilled when "it is clear that people disagree about a topic" (Iversen, 2020, p. 534), as has been demonstrated.

Finally, whilst at present abortion may be considered controversial by virtue of its current public construction, this need not be a permanent designation. The behavioural criterion is conditional only on societal division at a particular time and thusly its application to an issue is subject to shift and change. There is a general recognition that the UK is moving towards a progressively 'liberal' moral outlook on social issues, at least in comparison to 50 years ago. This outlook appertains to relationships and family life more broadly (Curtice et al., 2021; The Policy Unit, 2019) and abortion specifically (Clements, 2020; Rye & Underhill, 2019; Swales & Attar Taylor, 2017). Accordingly, it is worth raising the question whether, under the behavioural criteria, there will be significant enough of a societal division in say another 50 years' time, to warrant abortion being designated as a controversial issue.

3.4. Abortion and the Epistemic Criterion

The behavioural and political criteria give an appropriate indication of societal and political division respectively. In that sense, they are illuminative as to the *prevalence* of an issue's controversiality. However, neither of these criteria gives extensive attention to providing an *explanation* for why an issue might be controversial. Within this space, the epistemic criterion asserts that "a matter is controversial if contrary views can be held on it without those views being contrary to reason" (Dearden, 1984, p. 86). Consequently, it is concerned primarily with the grounds or rationale upon which opinions are held; ensuring that they are supported by rational proof or credible reasoning. Hand (2007, p.76) in his advocating of the epistemic criteria in the context of whether homosexuality should be taught as a controversial issue asserts that "we must examine the strength of the arguments for and against the moral legitimacy of the homosexual act". So too, then, for abortion – in order to establish its designation as a controversial issue under the epistemic criterion (or not), we must first examine the foundational reasoning of the arguments posed on each side of the debate.

Much of the discussion pertaining to abortion revolves around two separate, but related footings: the moral status of the foetus[40], and a women's right to choose. Herring, in his textbook on medical ethics, excellently encapsulates the implications of these footings:

> According to the most vehement opponents of abortion, we are witnessing via abortion the mass murder of the most vulnerable members of our societies (unborn children). To others, abortion is a fundamental human right that is an essential aspect of the move towards greater equality between men and women. To force a woman to go through with a pregnancy against her wishes would be the most profound violation of her body and autonomy (2016, p. 303).

In light of such implications, it is worth surveying both positions and their utilisation of scientific and ethical thinking, in accordance with the epistemic criterion's propositions.

3.4.1. The Moral Status of the Foetus

Ascertaining the moral status of the foetus is, essentially, a discussion around whether the foetus exists, morally speaking, as a person or in other words as 'one of us' (Watt, 2016, p. 8). There

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[40] The term foetus is used here as an encompassing term to incorporate all stages of *in vivo* human development, it therefore includes debates around the moral status of the embryo, or earlier stages of development

is little disagreement that the foetus is living in the sense it is made up of reproducing, moving, sensitive, cells – and is, therefore, not 'dead'. Nor, whether the foetus is human to the extent that what grows inside a person's uterus is the same taxonomical species. The concern then is something different; the degree to which a foetus possesses either inherently, or through acquisition, something that permits it to have certain actions and behaviours demonstrated towards it. Or, put another way, to what magnitude (if at all) does a foetus' welfare and survival have moral significance and importance? There are also temporal concerns to this question: does a foetus always have a 'moral status', is it accrued gradually, or does it obtain or receive it at a specific point?

There exists a range of approaches deployed to answer the above questions. However, to give due attention to the criterion's corroboration with rationality and logic, the subsequent sections will focus primarily on outlining non-religious or 'secular' views on the moral status of the embryo. The reasons for the outlining are twofold. First, to avoid any unhelpful blanket criticisms levelled against religious perspectives as being 'illogical' or 'irrational' (Offit, 2015; Paulsen, 2015); and second, because religious perspectives on abortion are explored more fully in section 3.5 below.

3.4.1.1. The Foetus Possesses Moral Status from Conception

For some, the foetus is to be considered as having full moral status from the moment of conception, thus affording it legislative and human rights. This claim is often made along several lines of reasoning. One common argument is based on the diploidy of the zygote[41] whereby the fertilisation event allows it to possess two copies of each chromosome: one from each gamete provider (sperm and ovum). Thus, conception is the point at which a foetus holds its entire genetic constitution and distinct genetic identity and should therefore be treated as a separate (moral) entity (Beckwith, 2007, pp. 67-68; Wolf-Devine & Devine, 2009, p. 86). An approach regarding a separate moral entity relies heavily on the embryo's existence as a part of the human community, or as a member of the species Homo sapiens. To be in very nature human, albeit at the earliest stages of natural development, is to afford an inherent moral worth (George & Tollefsen, 2008, p. 3; Kaczor, 2011, p. 105). Accordingly, abortion is an acute violation of the foetus' perceived *human* rights which are gained at conception.

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[41] A fertilised egg, the earliest stage of human development

Similarly, another approach to assigning a foetus moral status from conception lies in the potentiality of the foetus rather than its genetic make-up *per se*. For some, genetics are an imprecise marker for personhood. Warren (1997, p. 137) for example, in her renowned thought experiment, highlights that we would likely treat an intelligent, sentient, autonomous, rational alien species as if they had moral status, despite them not being a member of our social or biotic communities. Thus, there are other factors at play. An argument from potentiality maintains that it is the foetus' potential to become a human person, and to enjoy a valuable existence beyond the uterus that affords it its moral status (Manninen, 2007; Wilkins, 1993). Abortion, therefore, is morally indefensible because it deprives the foetus of a future life, or a "future like ours" (Marquis, 1989, p. 192). This parallels reasoning used by some scholars in the killing of non-foetal persons: murder is wrong because it denies a person a valuable future (Brock, 1993, p. 10; Brown, 2000; Parsons, 2002).

Both of the above approaches that ascribe moral status from conception can be deemed rational and logical in that they employ reason-seeking wisdom from reputable philosophical and ethical thought. Nevertheless, substantive critiques face arguments from both genetics (for example, Green, 2001, p. xiii; Stretton, 2008) and potential (for example. Reiman, 1993; Savulescu, 2002; Strong, 2008). However (and of particular import to the epistemic criteria) it is fair to say that all arguments surrounding the attributes or mechanics of foetal personhood are largely indeterminable; lacking in certainty or verifiable evidence and subject to metaphysical concern. As Brazier (1988, p. 14) describes, "the humanity of the embryo is unproven and unprovable". Therefore, another approach is to opt for a framework that ascribes personhood to the foetus at its 'lowest common denominator'. The 'lowest common denominator' argument posits that if we cannot be sure when a foetus becomes a person either scientifically, or as a matter of individual conscience, then we should opt in favour of the earliest point at which a foetus comes into existence: conception (Beckwith, 2007; Smith, 2008, p. 60).

3.4.1.2. The Foetus Possesses Moral Status at a Point Within the Pregnancy

For some, however, arguments made in favour of full moral status at conception are unsatisfactory. Instead, the foetus acquires personhood at another point during the pregnancy. Such an approach is ordinarily linked to one or more significant biological or developmental milestones. For example, Burgess (2010, p. 69) argues the foetus' rudimentary circulatory

system, or heartbeat at around 6 weeks gestation marks "the arrival of functioning in the first major lifesystem [and] should signify the beginning of a human life". The significance of the heartbeat bears a symmetrical parallelism to the loss of such a function being classified as 'death' when a person's heart stops beating.

Still, other scholars posit that it is not cardiovascular function that determines the moral status of the foetus, but its neurological capabilities. At around 14 days of embryonic growth, neural progenitor cells start to differentiate forming the emergence of the 'primitive streak' (Stiles & Jernigan, 2010, p. 330) The 'primitive streak' marks the first of several identifiable features precursory to the development of the central nervous system. Its appearance also corresponds to the latest stage at which one embryo can split into two (twinning) or conversely, two embryos can fuse into one (tetragametic chimerism).[42] In light of these developmental milestones, McLaren, a member of the Warnock Committee[43], argued that *in vitro* embryo research would only be ethically permissible prior to primitive streak development as biological individuation would be assured and there would be "no possibility of the embryo feeling pain" (Department of Health and Social Security, 1984, p. 65).[44]

The ability to feel pain also marks another point at which some believe abortion to be morally impermissible, associated with increased neural activity and consciousness. Initial foetal electroencephalogram (EEG) brainstem activity can be measured around 10 weeks (Bergstrom & Bergstrom, 1963; Castel et al., 2020), whereas higher cortical activity of necessity to pain perception is present around 24 weeks gestational age (Lee et al., 2005; RCOG, 2010).[45] In consideration of pain, some scholars maintain a cautionary approach to pain perception, maintaining that "allowing abortion after 10 weeks, given the epistemic uncertainty associated with fetal personhood, runs a substantial risk of resulting in murder" (Himma, 2005, p. 54). Others, however, advance the later view correlating higher brain function with consciousness (and the feeling of pain), at which point abortion becomes ethically unacceptable (Larmer, 1995; McMahan, 2002, p. 86ff.). This later developmental stage of around 24 weeks is also significant in that coincides with viability, another benchmark at which full moral status is sometimes assigned (Jensen, 2015).

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[42] This stands in contrast to those who argue that conception is the point at which a foetus is a distinct genetic entity.
[43] A governmental committee chaired Mary Warnock. It produced the 'Warnock Report' which formed the basis of the *Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990*, governing IVF and other artificial reproductive technologies.
[44] The embryo was therefore given a 'special status', although this was not equivalent with legal personhood.
[45] Although see Derbyshire and Bockmann (2020)

3.4.1.3. The Foetus Possesses Moral Status at a Point at or After Birth

Finally, the birth event demarcates an undeniable and significant separation of mother and child. For most, birth seems like the last logical point at which full moral status could be assigned. For, the foetus is now a baby. This point too marks a change in the law's orientation towards the foetus. An extraneous action directed at a foetus *in utero* (either via abortion or third-party violence) is not considered murder since by definition, murder requires the killing of a person "*in rerum natura*" (a person in being, *lit* the nature of things) (Coke, 1644, p. 50).[46] However, once the baby is born, they are at least in legal terms considered a 'person'.

Nevertheless, Giubilini & Minerva (2013), alongside Tooley (1972) and Singer (1993, p. 169) argue that the newborn and the foetus are morally equivalent in the sense that neither is a person based on self-awareness or cognitive criteria. Why then should we permit abortion in late-stage pregnancy *in utero*, but not several days late *ex utero*?

3.4.1.4. A Woman's Right to Choose

The conferring of personhood upon an entity is inextricably linked to the rights or ethical principles of freedom, entitlement, and protection it possesses. If a foetus does not become a person until at or shortly after birth, it follows logically that a woman's[47] autonomous choice to have an abortion should override any and all considerations on behalf of the foetus, since, a woman has rights that the foetus does not. However, even if one were to accept any of the above views affording the foetus moral status at some point during pregnancy, it does not necessarily follow that the foetus' rights should be held equally or above the mother's. Jarvis Thomson (1971, p. 49), using her famous violinist thought experiment, advocates that a woman's right to bodily integrity means that a foetus does not automatically have the right to 'use' another body. A woman, therefore, is not compelled to sacrifice her body at the expense of another, even if only for a short period of time. An integral part of this argument is the extent to which the foetus puts either a current or prospective burden, strain or risk upon the woman. It covers several aspects including the physiological, psychological, social, and emotional changes that a woman can expect in childbearing and childbirth. There is a sense in which pregnancy holds an innate (and sometimes unwanted) risk to a woman above and beyond that of the non-

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[46] c.f. *Re F (in utero)* [1988]; *Re MB (Caesarean Section)* [1997]

[47] Woman here is used synonymously with the female sex in reference to biological attribute rather than social construction.

pregnant state. On the farthest reaches of such a risk spectrum, the foetus could be regarded as a parasite, who uses, or exploits a woman's body at no instantaneous benefit to the 'host' (Thomson, 1971, p. 59). Thus, the foetus holds a woman to ransom. However, even more moderate conceptualisations of the foetus might still consider it to have such significant and life changing effects upon a woman as to construe pregnancy as a negative incursion. To force a woman to continue with a pregnancy that she does not desire, therefore, goes beyond encroachment and could be conceived as tantamount to degrading or abusive treatment. Accordingly, some have argued that it is only right that a woman via abortion, be able to shield herself from such bodily invasion. Such an approach is akin to self-defence whereby (much like any other form of self-defence) one is able to use whatever tools necessary to protect one's health, wellbeing and liberty from harm (McDonagh, 1996, p. 165ff.; 2002).

Nevertheless, other prevalent approaches for advocating for a woman's 'right to choose' revolve around the much more fundamental structures of equality, justice, and fairness, as opposed to the status of the foetus *per se*. They are situated within the broader historical context of opposition to an oppressive, dominant, patriarchal and paternalistic societal construction (Markowitz, 1990, p. 7).[48] It therefore goes beyond considerations of pregnancy and childbirth (as discussed above), toward an incorporation of the longitudinal and disproportionate burden that child rearing places upon a woman. As de Beauvoir notes, motherhood "is the most skillful [sic] way there is of women to become slaves" (cited in Schwarzer, 1984, p. 114). Reproductive choice, then, is framed as liberation from the constraints of domesticity, gender roles and the domiciliary via freedom from childrearing in a way that allows her to pursue her own endeavours for her own sake. As such, abortion is not necessarily about a choice itself, but rather a move towards a more egalitarian society where a woman is at liberty from reproductive burden more broadly. Bridgeman summarises well:

> Neither the unpleasant side effects nor risks to health of contraception, the lack of social provision to assist in the cost of bringing up a child which forces a woman to choose to abort, nor the physical and emotional pain of high-tech low-success fertility treatments are acknowledged. The focus upon choice makes the circumstances in which women make decisions about pregnancy and child-birth irrelevant (1998, p. 86).

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[48] Although see Farmer (2001)

Equality, it is argued, puts women on an even playing field with her male counterparts and, in terms of both sexual responsibility and sexual freedom. Abortion, according to MacKinnon (1987, p. 99), "promises to women sex with men on the same reproductive terms as men have sex with women". That is not necessarily to dismiss the obvious physiological differences (transgenderism aside) between the two, but rather a focus on societal and inter-relational power dynamics and expectations. A woman's 'right to choose' to have a safe and accessible abortion is formulated upon the objections against being told what she can and cannot do with her own body; both more generally and specifically in relation to contraception and reproductive health. It is a redistribution of power that endows women with greater self-governance and moral agency.

As we have seen, there are numerous ways of formulating an approach to the issue of abortion, with much discussion revolving around both the status of the foetus and the status of the woman. Each approach is not solely concerned with the philosophical or theoretical, but also its practical implications; the way in which one treats and perceives pregnant woman, their foetuses and decisions around their health and social care. Nevertheless, these claims to knowledge and the degree to which they can be validated are supported either by scientific means via relevant empirical evidence (for example. viability, foetal brain development); or by valid, cogent, non-fallacious or sound philosophical reasoning. As there is no agreed perspective on the issue from scientific or ethical communities, abortion can be considered controversial under the epistemic criteria and should therefore be taught in an open and non-directive manner.

3.5. Abortion and The Diversity Criteria

Within bioethics and medicine more broadly, there is continuing debate about the role and place of religious reasoning in the public square. Bioethics remains a relatively 'new' discipline, gaining traction in the 1960s and 70s against the backdrop of moral quandaries emerging from clinical and technological advancement and shifting social context. Whilst it began its journey drawing primarily from the fields of religion and medicine, more latterly it has received staggering input from (largely non-religious) philosophy and law; in what Callahan (1990) has coined the "secularization of bioethics". The 'secularization' process, for some, has led to increasing hostility and scepticism towards religious thought, advocating rather for it to have little to no involvement in bioethical discourse (Blackford & Schüklenk, 2021; Murphy, 2012) However, given the propensity of humankind toward religion, and the value of faith

perspectives in moral deliberation, others have embraced its contribution (Camosy, 2021, p. 160; Stempsey, 2011).

Cooling's (2012) diversity criteria for establishing controversiality draws upon the strengths of the epistemic criterion but advances it to be more encompassing of religious perspectives. He argues that dismissing religious arguments out of hand as being irrational due to their appeal to scriptural or religious authority, or otherwise, is unfair. To do so does not appreciate wider hermeneutical approaches to authority or take account of the relationship between ontology and epistemology from a post-secular perspective. The diversity criterion, therefore "recognises the contribution of worldview beliefs in people's assessment of the truth, meaning and significance of a knowledge claim" (2012, p. 176). Even if one holds a certain belief to be true, that does not make it absolute in the sense that it is not open to alternative claims by other rational agents with differing interests. This applies equally across both religious and non-religious positions. Biggar (2015), for example, notes that religion deserves a place at the bioethical table because it is not uniquely 'irrational' – the metaphysical and appeals to authority are equally prominent features in non-religious arguments. Further, those who favour religious approaches to bioethical issues do not negate their ability and responsibility to adopt reasonable and rational means of persuasion (Biggar, 2015, p. 231). Such contestability underpins the diversity criterion, maintaining that something should be considered controversial if "significant disagreement exists between different belief communities in society where those communities honour the importance of reason giving and exemplify a commitment to peaceful co-existence in society" (Cooling, 2012, p. 177). These arguments highlight the importance of religious belief on both individual and community decision making, a factor that has long been a factor in ethical dialogue.

Indeed, religious affiliation often acts as one of the most powerful indicators of an individual's attitude towards abortion (Gill, 2012, pp. 49-51). Consequently, and in order to exemplify the multiplicity of approaches to the abortion debate under the diversity criteria, it is worth outlining the perspectives of several significant belief communities. This is certainly not to discount other belief communities and is therefore designed to be illuminating and illustrative rather than comprehensive. Many belief communities incorporate, to a variety of degrees, the aforementioned stances on the moral status of the foetus and the woman's right to choose. So, the focus here is on that which is unique to the belief community themselves.

3.5.1. Christian Approaches to Abortion

Christianity has an extensive and complex history concerning abortion, with a variety of approaches to the issue being taken (Gorman, 1982; Stensvold, 2015). As is the case with many religious belief systems, there is no strict 'one size fits all' stance, although there exist common themes and threads across the spectrum. One of the more nuanced aspects of Christian approaches to abortion is the absence of many explicit biblical references to abortion itself, thus, leaving an element of interpretation open to the community in the light of historical, scholarly, and hermeneutical frameworks.

One foundational principle, or "ethical principle of first magnitude" as Lord Wilson (*R (on the application of Nicklinson) v Ministry of Justice,* 2014, p. 67) describes, is one of the 'sanctity of life'. According to its proponents, human life is given as a gift by God at conception. It is God alone who "maintains dominion over it" (Markwell & Brown, 2001, p. 189), having the authority to both give and take life. Since God creates humanity in His own image (Genesis 1:27),[49] human life possesses an inherent value, worth and dignity. Thus, we are not simply stewards of that life, but also have a divine command to respect and protect it (Linacre Centre, 1994, p. 51). On this divine basis, abortion is morally impermissible. The axiological claim that human life is an intrinsic, basic good for its own sake (human life qua human life should be revered) is sometimes articulated in a non-religious manner (Keown, 2002b). However, its deeply Christian theological underpinnings, doctrinal implications, and frequency of use within the belief community render it "an essentially religious concept" (Hoose, 1997, p. 228).

The sanctity of life is supported by Old Testament biblical passages that make reference to God forming and creating a person in the womb and ordaining them for a purpose (Psalm 139:13-16; Jeremiah 1:5). The New Testament is less forthcoming with passages bearing on the foetus or its development. However, the incarnation where Jesus 'becomes flesh' (John 1:14), or takes upon human form, provides the basis of a theological framework within which personhood can be assigned at conception (MacKellar, 2017, pp. 103-134; Rae & Cox, 1999, pp. 136-137; Scott, 1974, pp. 36-39). The second person of the Trinity enters into human existence not at birth, but conception. He is, as Jones (2004, p. 125), remarks, the "embryonic Christ", reinforcing the value of life from its earliest stages.

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[49] When God creates Adam in Genesis, it is archetypal of the humanity as a whole. Following Romans 5:12-14, Adam represents all of mankind for those who hold to an interpretative position of federal headship (see, for example, (Pink, 2015, p. 19)

For the Catholic church, the official teaching is that "human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception" therefore affirming the "moral evil of every procured abortion" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1997, para 2270-2271). According to Pope John Paul II (1995, para 31), this has been the church's unanimous doctrinal position throughout its history, taught by the church fathers and leaders.[50] However, allowances are sometimes made for the moral legitimacy of 'indirect' abortion where a women's life is at risk; for example, in an ectopic pregnancy, or in the removal of a cancerous gravid uterus. Such allowances appeal to the doctrine or principle of double effect (PDE) based on Aquinas' treatment of lawful killing in self-defence (*Summa Theologica* II-II, q.64 a.7*)*. PDE allows a clinician to perform an act with both positive and negative consequences, so long as the negative consequence is not the end to be sought (Kelly et al., 2013, p. 104ff.)

Similarly, The Church of England (CofE), "combines principled opposition to abortion with a recognition that there can be strictly limited conditions under which it may be morally preferable to any available alternative" (Mission and Public Affairs Council, 2005). The CofE has not formulated comprehensive official documentation around the issue, however, these 'limited conditions' include situations where the mother's life is at risk, or, after 24 weeks, where there is foetal abnormality and survival is either not possible or exceptionally limited to a very short time period (Mission and Public Affairs Council, 2005). The church is also committed to "offering care, support, and compassion for women regardless of their choices" (Newcombe, 2020, p. 88). Accordingly, as is often the case across Christendom, general opposition towards abortion is not at the expense of acting lovingly towards women, in line with Christian values.

3.5.2. Jewish Approaches to Abortion

As with Christianity, Jewish attitudes to abortion are diverse with differing approaches to law and practice. Whilst general teachings are advocated by the religious community(ies), Rabbinic pronouncements on issues relating to reproductive health are often "granted privately without publicity" (*Iggrot Moshe, Even Ha'ezer* 4:67, quoted in Steinberg, 2003, p.235). Private pronouncements are granted because each individual's unique circumstances must be taken into account and weighed up in the light of underlying principles, values, and authorities.

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[50] Although see Dombrowski and Deltete (2000), Kamitsuka (2019)

The Torah contains only one clear reference to abortion in Exodus 21:23.[51] Jewish interpretation and Rabbinical exegesis of the Exodus passage holds consistently that abortion is not considered murder and therefore, within the context, is not punishable by death (Jakobvits, 1965, pp. 484-485). Resultantly, and in contrast to the Catholic perspective above, personhood is not something that is gained or conferred at conception. Within the Jewish legal framework, a foetus is not given the same protections and rights equal to those afforded to children or adult human beings. Instead, the Talmud only gives full moral status to a child at birth (Feldman, 1983, p. 805; Schenker, 2008, p. 273). For some, the embryo or early foetus has a more limited status. The Babylonian Talmud, for example, communicates that "until forty days from conception the fetus is merely water. It is not yet considered a living being…" (*Yevamot 69b*).

In light of this view of the status of the foetus, discussions around abortion tend to revolve primarily around the health and welfare of the mother since the life of the mother always takes precedence over that of the foetus until the moment of birth (Rashi, *Sanhedrin,* 72b). The overriding halachic value of *pikach nefesh,* or the regard or preservation for human life also plays a significant part in decision making. The value overrides over nearly all other obligations and commandments. As such, one cannot be obligated to do something that contravenes or put one's health at risk. Therefore, in situations where the mother's life is at risk, it could be argued that a termination of pregnancy is not just permissible, but required (Cavalier, 2001). Further, the overarching concept of 'health' is sometimes understood more broadly to include both physical and mental health. It also considers the unique and complex situation of the mother and the impact that a pregnancy (and/or an abortion) might have on family, community, and personal life. Rabbinical discussion on abortion, therefore, pays due attention to a women's individual concerns and their implications, whether they be medical, ecological, social, financial, educational, relational or spiritual (Gordis, 1988).

However, that does not necessarily mean that a woman has 'the right to choose' as understood in its more 'secular', political pro-choice narrative. Despite allowing for abortion in certain circumstances, it is generally seen as an option of last resort. Judaism has a "pronatalist" stance

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[51] "And if men strive together, and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart, and yet no harm follow, he shall be surely fined, according as the woman's husband shall lay upon him; and he shall pay as the judges determine. But if any harm follow, then shalt thou give life for life" (*New American Standard Bible*, 1995)

towards children and family life (Feldman, 1986, pp. 89-90). For married couples, there exists the mitzvah or commanding precept of *p'ru ur'vu* [be fruitful and multiply]. Procreation is seen as a positive fulfilment of the law and conversely, the active decision of any Jew not to participate in *p'ru ur'vu* would be shirking a fundamental responsibility, tantamount to rebellion against the Divine will (Meyer & Messer, 2012, p. 2). Given this complex, dynamic, and unique nature of abortion in relation to both Jewish law and a woman's individual situation, a Jewish woman would usually heed the Mishnah's advice to "make for yourself a Rav (Rabbi)" (*Perkai Avot*, 1;6) in order to determine the moral (or spiritual) permissibility of any proposed action.

3.5.3. Muslim Approaches to Abortion

Like other Abrahamic religions, Islam has no singular approach or attitude towards abortion. Without a unified theological body to account for the entire community, views are shaped by various sources of authority, and the opinions of legal and religious scholars and commentators (Brockopp, 2003; Ekmekchi, 2017). Distinct schools of thought and jurisprudence have different interpretations of what is permissible for particular communities and their contexts, which include cultural influences, and levels of religious affiliation (Al-Matary & Ali, 2014). Broad approaches towards abortion (as with all bioethical issues) are derived from the teachings of the Qu'ran, the recorded sayings of the Prophet (*Sunna),* the oral reports concerning the words and deeds of the Prophet (*Hadith)* and the rulings logically deduced by learned scholars (*ijtihad*) (Gatrad & Sheikh, 2001). Yet, far from these teachings from being detached or aloof, engagement with complex issues such as abortion is inseparable from Islamic thought itself which values the continuities between body and mind, corporeal and spiritual, and ethics and law (Al Faruqi, 1982).

In continuity with Jewish and Christian approaches, Muslims believe that human life has inherent value and worth, with life and death an exclusive pejorative belonging to Allah (Surah 67:2; 25:3; 3:185; 16:61; 3:145). Therefore, the principle of protecting and upholding human life is held in a paramount position in Islamic religious norms (Athar, 1995; Shomali, 2008; Al-Shahri, 2016). Regarding abortion, the debate often centres not on the question, 'what value does life have?' but instead on the question 'when does life begin?'. Accordingly, the legal status of the foetus has long been a topic of juristic discourse, considering the establishment of personhood alongside factors such as the foetus' relationship with its parents, extended family, community, and God (Maffi, 2020). The Qur'an does not deal explicitly or directly with

abortion (*al-ijhad*). Nevertheless, central to the conversation is Surah 23 which concerns a prescient seventh century theory of foetal development in four phases: *nufta* or drop of semen; *alaqa,* a blood-like clot or leech-like structure; *mudgha,* a lump of fleshy substance; and *izam*, the human form (Katz, 2003; Saadat, 2009).

The point at which the soul enters the foetus' body provides a pivotal marker of abortion's potential permissibility. Within Sunni schools of thought, *Shafi'i* and *Hanaf'i* scholars, as well as Shi'ite jurisprudence allow for abortion up until 120 days, or the point at which ensoulment is believed to occur in line with the *izam* phase of development (Iqbal, Habib & Amer, 2019; Bagheri, 2021). In contrast, *Maliki and Hanbali* schools tend to favour ensoulment occurring at 40 days, corresponding to the *alaqa* phase (Shapiro, 2013; Dilwar, Afshar & Rahmini, 2017). However, whilst Hanbalites allow for abortion up until this point in certain circumstances (Al-Khatib, 2021), the Maliki school tends to be more restrictive in prohibiting abortion even before ensoulment (Musallam, 1983; Eich, 2021) due to differences in scholarly and legal interpretation. Despite these differences in interpretation across different schools and traditions, abortion in Islam is never encouraged outright (Atighetchi 2007). Instead, it is only justifiable in specific circumstances as indicated by fatwas (a formal legal pronouncement) such as risk to the mother's life, extreme hardship or suffering, rape, and foetal abnormalities (Hedayat, Shooshtarizadeh & Raza, 2006; Al-Matery & Ali, 2014).

The large disparity in Islamic thinking on termination of pregnancy is, to some degree, also reflected 'on the ground' where there is a divergence between claimed belief and practice. For example, human beings are viewed as being endowed with reason, choice and responsibilities, including stewardship of their own health (Al- Khayat, 2004; Tober & Budiani, 2007; Rassool, 2008). However, in many Muslim-majority countries, women are presumed to have low levels of autonomy (Boonstra, 2001; Morgan et al., 2002; Asabu & Altased, 2021) and, in some contexts, fatal or unsafe abortions are common (Hessini, 2009; Maffi & Tonnessen, 2019). Nevertheless, with approximately a quarter of the world's population adhering to Islam, women's experiences are governed by a range of complex factors including personal, community, cultural, religious, legal, and political considerations (Alomair, et al. 2020).

3.5.4. Humanist Approaches to Abortion

Referring to the previous GCSE exemplar examination questions in section 3.1, students are frequently required to refer to both religious and non-religious beliefs in their answers. The place of humanism within Religious Education has been subject to much contention and debate (see, for example just within one year, arguments both for (Aldridge, 2015) and against its inclusion (Barnes, 2015). Nevertheless, despite humanism not being the only non-religious worldview, it does provide good insight into one significant belief community's outlook on abortion. A belief community that offers a broadly contrasting perspective to many religious approaches.

In general, humanists adopt an outwardly 'pro-choice' position in favour of woman's sexual and reproductive rights (Humanists UK, 2021). It is not surprising then that campaign and advocacy work has centred around the decriminalisation of abortion, the establishment of buffer zones around abortion clinics, and support of 'home abortion' (the taking of mifepristone/misoprostol tablets up to 10 weeks' gestation). However, there is some disagreement, debate, and unease within the community particularly around late-term abortions and abortion for minors (Law, 2011, p. 89; Sikes, 1999, p. 64).

According to the British Humanist Association (now Humanists UK), "most humanists would probably put the interests of the woman first" (British Humanist Association, 2016, p. 2) based on arguments of rationality, scientific evidence, dignity, human agency, and quality of life. Humanists' foundational perspective of philosophical naturalism rejects the idea of appeal to higher moral authority to which the permissibility of abortion is subject. Further, it denies the notion that a foetus has a supernatural soul or non-material spirit that would afford it specific or additional rights or protection. Some humanists, therefore, stand in opposition to those who hold such views, believing that "intolerant attitudes, often cultivated by orthodox religions and puritanical cultures, unduly repress sexual conduct" (American Humanist Association, 1973, para. 6). However, even a more tempered Humanist view recognises the need for freedom of choice and approaches abortion favourably to a woman's decision in light of reasonable thought, scientific fact, and the minimisation of risk.

By outlining the various approaches to abortion above, it is evident that substantial disagreement exists between (and sometimes within) significant belief communities. These disagreements are

multifaceted; incorporating a divergence in theological, hermeneutic, philosophical, metaphysical, practical, and circumstantial outlook. Correspondingly, abortion can be considered controversial under the propositions set out in the diversity criteria.

3.6. Abortion and the Theoretic Criterion

According to Anders & Shudak (2016, p. 28), the 'theoretic' criterion is the sole sufficient criteria under which an issue can be identified as controversial: "an issue is appropriately controversial if, and only if, the issue is prevalent in the social context of the students' lives and there is observed an actual dispute among experts on that issue". The theoretic criterion can be split into its constituent parts: the issue's currency in a pupil's social climate, and the disagreement of those who hold an authoritative opinion on the matter. As has been explored above, it is clear that there is significant discord amongst those who could be considered 'experts' in the abortion debate. These experts are authoritative in the sense they are particularly knowledgeable, skilful, experienced or trained in a specific related discipline: philosophy, law, politics, bioethics, religion, science, or medicine.

The second part of the criterion, the social prevalence, refers to the likelihood of the issue to straddle more than one social arena and be subject to temporal consideration. Therefore, controversial issues are ones that are likely to be important either inside or outside of the classroom; at the present time or in the future. To this end, it is estimated that in England and Wales, 210,000 abortions occur per year, with overall numbers steadily increasing (DHSC, 2020a, p. 6). Whilst abortion rates for those under 18 are steadily declining (DHSC, 2020a, p. 7), around 1 in 3 women of reproductive age will have had an abortion at some point during their lifetime, most before 12 weeks' gestation (Jones & Jerman, 2017). Further, according to Public Health England, around 45% of pregnancies are unplanned (2018). Consequently, women are frequently faced with having to make decisions about whether or not to proceed with their pregnancies. Worldwide, around 61% of unintended pregnancies end in abortion (Bearak et al., 2020, e1152).

In light of the commonplace practice of abortion, there is a significant probability that a pupil in a school will be confronted with the issue in a concrete sense (rather than an abstract or hypothetical sense) at some point during the course of their lives. For some, abortion may be something that they or their peers face during the school years. For others, however, abortion

will manifest later as they encounter either for themselves or through others its real-world impact. Nevertheless, as pupils enter puberty together conversations inevitably turn towards sexual activity, sexual stories, and sexual health more generally. Therefore, issues of reproductive choice and decision making, including abortion, are of social import. Abortion, then, fulfils the theoretic criterion in that it is an issue that carries weight and relevance to students' lives across multiple social, developmental, and lifespan stages.

3.7. Abortion and the Psychological Criterion

Similarly to the 'theoretical' criterion, the psychological criterion also contends that a controversial issue must be relevant to the lives of students. However, its relevance goes beyond just confronting a topic because it has been imposed by an external body or entity. Students encounter the topic of abortion because they are required to know it, or it forms part of the syllabus (and therefore a teacher initiates the conversation). Instead, the psychological criterion relies on the subjective or internal qualities of the pupils themselves. This reliance shifts the focus of criteria from the issue per se to its impact and relationship with a learner. Thus, for controversiality to be established under the psychological criterion, there must be the "existence of intellectual tension between at least two of the positions within a controversial issue, which positions must seem plausible options for belief according to the individuals considering the issue" (Yacek, 2018, p. 81).

To date, little far-reaching or comprehensive research on children's attitudes toward abortion within Religious Education has been conducted. Further, the subjective and individualistic nature of moral psychology makes it more difficult to articulate and ascertain the extent to which intellectual tension is present. Nevertheless, where smaller scale research has taken place, studies suggest that young people perceive abortion as more of an abstract moral and ethical debate as opposed to one pertaining to healthcare (Harden et al., 2015, p. 3). Additionally, pupils often appreciate discussion of (bio)ethical issues due to the opportunity they provide for the class's different opinions to be voiced (Arweck & Nesbitt, 2011, p. 38). In particular, students who hold a particular faith position sometimes feel like abortion is a particular issue they are able (or, at times, expected) to contribute to from their religious perspective (Moulin, 2011, p. 322).

However, there is concern that whilst differences of opinion might be seen on a class-wide level, they may not necessarily apply to an individual pupil. The constraints of the examination

specification sometimes mean that pupils are required to present a balanced view of an issue with appropriate reference to religious, and non-religious, beliefs and teachings alongside their relevant implications. As such, they are not always given the opportunity to explore individual feelings, attitudes or personal tensions (Hoggart et al., 2010, p. 34). Thus, when considering whether abortion fulfils the psychological criterion, it is important to consider the limitations of both current research and the subjectivity of pupils' individual experience.

3.8. Chapter Summary

By examining abortion in light of each of the criteria above, the topic's position as a controversial issue seems axiomatic. Questions pertaining to abortion within the RS GCSE examination specification often assume the existence of strong differing opinions, both within and between various belief communities. Its presence within the subject, then, is multifaceted. It aids in the development of appropriate skills and knowledge acquisition and exemplifies the complex link between ethical principles and beliefs and their governance of behaviour or action. Religious (or non-religious) affiliation acts as a powerful indicator of an individual's attitudes towards abortion. Accordingly, the study of the topic allows the learner greater appreciation and understanding of a religious, or non-religious, worldview.

More broadly, abortion occupies an inherently political space. Its prevalence in the civil and legislative arena is an indication of its controversiality, both, in terms of the relationship of the law with personal medical procedures, and in its reflection of contrasting public values. Although the extent of individual intellectual tension caused by studying abortion has not yet been studied in the lives of individual KS4 pupils, societal attitudes towards abortion involve a disparity of views. Such views are underpinned by a varying conceptualisation of foundational concepts such as: personhood; autonomy; the moral status of the foetus; rights; equality; justice; the extent of governmental jurisdiction; and the role of women. Most of these views can be held without being contrary to reason, and are based on relevant scientific evidence, or ethical or philosophical theory, whilst also considering the ambiguities and limits of knowledge.

Further, with abortion having a high lifetime incidence rate, the topic is of relevance to pupils' lives both now (for some), and in the future. It is an issue that they will likely have some proximity with as they enter into their adult lives. Abortion (and bioethics in general), then, whilst perhaps commencing with considerations of the 'what if?' questions in relation to others,

does not end there. Instead, it offers a very personal reflection on the moral significance of human nature itself, calling us to evaluate our identity, values and purpose. Bioethics is, as Lamarre notes, "the ethics of all interventions upon the human being", not just as a biological entity but extending to "the most intimate parts of one's personality, one's attitudes, one's way of life, one's desires and wishes, and the representation of one's self to others" (2000, p. 247).

Given such complexity and impact, it is no wonder that teachers frequently identify abortion as a controversial issue. Larsson & Larsson (2021, p. 8), for example, in their survey of 80 Swedish teachers identified 'abortion' as a controversial topic among teachers of both civics and religion. Similarly, Flensner (2020b) in her ethnographic classroom research classifies abortion as a controversial issue amongst teachers. Abortion, like many other controversial issues, has "political, environmental, social, emotional and intellectual dimensions" and requires a careful and well-sequenced teaching approach (Ofsted, 2021, The Importance of Sequencing When Introducing Sensitive and Controversial Issues Section). In light of this, and the accompanying discussions above, it is well situated as an appropriate issue through which to explore teachers' lived experience of tackling controversial issues in the secondary Religious Education classroom.

4. Research Design and Approach

Research in Religious Education is both complicated and multifarious, especially given the inherent political, social, and educational challenges that the subject faces. Raising a hypothetical question to this end, Stern (2018, p. 7) asks:

> How can research hope to understand the complex and relatively impenetrable world of school RE? Schools are a challenge to researchers (as described in McDonald 1989) just as religion is a challenge to researchers (as described in McCutcheon 1999), so RE presents even more problems (as described in Conroy et al 2013).

As a result, RE research is unsurprisingly uncharacterised by one single approach (Baumfield, 2022; Francis, 2012; Schröder, 2016). Instead, past and present research is situated across the methodological spectrum, with notable contributions in the application of action research (Ipgrave et al., 2009; O'Grady, 2013), life history (Doney et al., 2017; Everington, 2016; Sikes & Everington, 2001), grounded theory (Cheetham, 2001; Coll, 2008), comparative approaches (Bråten, 2013, 2015; Miedema, 2007), ethnography (Breen, 2009; Conroy et al., 2013; Jackson, 1996; Nesbitt, 2002), historical inquiry (Copley, 2008; Freathy, 2008; Hannam, 2019; Thompson, 2003) and survey research (Kay & Ziebertz, 2006; Lundie & O'Siochru, 2019; Robbins & Francis, 2010).[52] Historically, a significant majority of RE research is theoretical, philosophical or non-empirical in nature (Jackson, 2004, p. 148). For example, English et al. (2005), in their ten-year analysis of two leading Religious Education journals between 1992-2002, found that 87% of articles in *Religious Education* and 55% of articles in *British Journal of Religious Education (BJRE)* were non-empirical. However, a more recent review of the special editions of the BJRE from 2011-2021 (Baumfield, 2022) revealed significantly more diversity regarding country of origin, methodology, and elements of professional knowledge (Freathy et al., 2016). Such varied approaches to RE research reflect the multi-disciplinary orientation of educational research more generally, where studies often 'borrow' theoretical and methodological frameworks from other disciplines (such as the social sciences) (Hartas, 2010, p. 14).

Given this methodological landscape, it is vital that researchers clearly outline the approach they intend to take, and how it fits within the wider landscape of RE research. Accordingly, this

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[52] The above list is not intended to be exhaustive.

chapter seeks to explore these issues by providing a discussion of the systematic processes, procedures and principles used to conduct the research, which are subject to evaluation. It also considers the basis of the inquiry as well as the acquisition, analysis and interpretation of data gathered in order to answer the research questions.

4.1. Philosophical Outlook

Research, at its centre, is concerned with making original contributions by establishing new knowledge and understanding of the world (Gibson, 2017, p. 54; Wyse et al., 2016, p. 10). When researchers approach their work, they often do so with an underlying system of ontological and epistemological beliefs. Ontology is concerned with the nature of being and reality and considers metaphysical questions such as 'what is there to know?'. Whereas epistemology relates to the nature and scope of knowledge, asking 'how do we know it?'. Far from being isolated, these terms are inextricably linked and aid the continuity of the research process: "ontological assumptions will give rise to epistemological assumptions which have methodological implications for the choice of particular data collection techniques" (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, p. 21).

There is much disorientation in the literature relating to research paradigms and philosophies which is heightened by "tautological confusion" and "incoherent classification" of terms (Mkansi & Acheampong, 2012, p. 132). For example, it is commonplace to read of a dichotomy of positions: qualitative versus quantitative; interpretive versus positivist. Others, however, are keen to move away from such discrete categories, viewing approaches as more flexible, or as a continuum in which 'mixed methods' research can be situated (Clarke et al., 2021, p. 555ff; Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 3; Newman & Benz, 1998). Further, within this broad spectrum a "welter of names" or sub-species exist (Pallas, 2001, p. 6). By way of example, a multitude of terms (empiricism, classical positivism, logical positivism, postpositivism, critical realism, pragmatism, social constructivism, critical theory, structuralism, poststructuralism, and postmodernism) occur across one double-page spread in Hartas' work (2010, pp. 42-43), and Lincoln & Guba (2013, pp. 43-79) lay out 130 "conjectures" derived solely from the metaphysics of the constructivist paradigm. With this complexity in mind, it is easy to see why researchers often view these typologies as "a maze rather than pathways to orderly research" (Crotty, 1998, p. 1), and debate over which one is superior as "a profound distraction" (Moss, 2016, p. 941)

Nevertheless, the merits of contemplating the underlying structures and philosophical rationale of this particular research project were important in adding a depth to the research by situating it within its broader context and allowing it to be more easily contrasted to the existing literature. Further, it helped to answer key context-setting questions such as those outlined by Hammersley (2012): should educational research be primarily *about* or *for* education; which criteria, if any, should the effectiveness and quality of the research be measured against; and, where should the research situate itself in relation to the material or people being studied?

4.2. The Interpretative Paradigm

Given the project's primary concern with the experiences and attitudes of teachers, I found the interpretive paradigm to be most fitting. The rationale for this decision is based upon interpretivism which concentrates on "the meanings people bring to situations and behaviour, and which they use to understand their world" (Punch, 2009, p. 18). Its focus on the individual in their unique surroundings and circumstances provided a crucial scaffold in developing deep and nuanced understandings of the experiences encountered when teaching abortion from the perspective of the individual.

The interpretivist paradigm finds its roots in sociological constructs and particularly those of Schutz (1954, pp. 296-270) and Weber (1921, pp. 77-90). The authors advanced the concept of '*verstehen*' (the German word for 'understanding') to incorporate the meanings that social actors attach to their experiences within their social context (Martin, 2000, p. 7). In this way, as O'Donoghue (2006, p. 16) notes, "the individual and the society are inseparable units". The individual is unable to be understood aside from their relationship to culture, society and community and, similarly, it is impossible to understand society aside from the individuals of which it is comprised. This inseparability was especially important in the classroom context where individual teachers inhabited multiple, complex and interlinking worlds of relationships and influences that impacted their teaching practice.

From an ontological perspective, the position of interpretivism broadly constructs reality as relative. It is different from person to person and can only be captured through its representations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 5). Multiple realities exist, and each is dependent on the individual. The logical extenuation of a relativist ontology is a subjectivist epistemology. That is to say that,

just as objective reality is unobtainable, so too is direct knowledge. Phenomena can only be known indirectly, through the accounts and observations of the individuals within the world. Given the heterogeneity and rich diversity of participants accounts, knowledge was therefore "developed through a process of interpretation" (Waring, 2021, p. 16). This interpretation was not solely applicable to internal beliefs and experiences but was also viewed as the driver for behaviour or action. Such an approach affirms that human behaviour is intentional: a result of how people act in response to their interpretations of situations (Chenitz & Swanson, 1986, p. 4; Cohen et al., 2017, p. 20)

In light of this recognition and understanding of the subjective world of human experience, the interpretative paradigm allowed me to pursue a natural and inquisitorial approach that was best fitting to an open-ended exploration of specific experiences. I gained insights inductively, through a 'bottom up' approach, where insights (theory) were generated from the data gathered, as opposed to starting with a theory and using data as verification. This approach helped me to ensure that research participants were viewed "on their own terms" (Tracy, 2020, p. 51), where pre-conceived notions about people and their contexts could be avoided.

4.3. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Within the interpretative paradigm sit several "genres" (Marshall, Rossman & Blanco, 2021, p. 19) or "divergent analytic styles" (Hammersley, 2013, p. 47) of conducting research, all of which offer unique ways of understanding the beliefs, actions and experiences of others.[53] As a result, the researcher was tasked with selecting the most suitable and insightful approach to yield the data required. For the current project Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was chosen as the approach[54] most befitting to answer the research questions.

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[53] Marshall, Rossman & Blanco (2021) explain the historical and pragmatic complexities of categorisation but establish the major genres of qualitative/interpretative research as ethnographic, phenomenological, and socio-linguistic approaches. Similarly, Hammersley (2013, p.47) notes that strict typology is uncertain, and lists "'ethnography', 'case study', 'naturalistic inquiry', 'field research', 'participant observation', 'interpretive study', 'phenomenological inquiry', 'hermeneutic investigation', 'ethnomethodology', 'narrative inquiry', 'discourse analysis', 'virtual ethnography', 'visual anthropology', 'linguistic ethnography' and others" as illustrative of some of the sub-types used (often synonymously).

[54] The term approach is used here to convey the importance of IPA being a methodology, in terms of an overarching approach with ontological and epistemological assumptions, but also a method, in reference to its strategies for data collection and analysis. Bacon et al. (2020, p.757); Cassidy et al. (2011, p. 264); Dibley et al. (2020, p.27) all assert that IPA is a "methodology in its own right"

IPA is a qualitative approach that has recently grown in popularity across a variety of fields, including education. As a project that examines people's experiences, I found IPA useful because it provided a systematic exploration of how individuals make sense of their life events, through a process of in-depth, reflective inquiry (Smith et al., 2009, pp. 1–3). By assuming that people are "self-interpreting" beings (Taylor, 1985) in that they themselves are the agents of meaning to their own experiences, IPA helped me to understand the significance of these meanings through the lens of the participant. Thus, I was able to interpret the "insider perspective" (Conrad, 1987), as much as is reasonably possible. In other works, the experiences of classroom teachers have been the subject of studies utilising IPA in both published articles (Buckley et al., 2018; Gillespie, 2019; Guihen, 2019; Johnson, 2022; Mihovilović & Boulton, 2020; Shelemy et al., 2019; Waters et al., 2021) and doctoral theses (Goodall, 2014; Jones, 2018; Miller, 2014; Rowe, 2018; Stone, 2019; Willis, 2017). Within Religious Education, the use of IPA is more limited. However, it has been utilised to study teachers' experiences of spirituality (Gillespie, 2019; Wartenweiler, 2021), decolonisation (Elton-Chalcraft & Chalcraft, 2022) and understandings of school mission (Sultmann & Brown, 2019).

Regarding abortion, IPA has provided useful insights into various aspects of individuals' experiences, including the male perspective (Hunt, 2005; Jacob, 2011; Robson, 2002), social support (Milica & Bilijana, 2020), changes in emotional reactions over time (Goodwin & Ogden, 2007), religiosity and Covid-19 (Testoni et al., 2021), decision making (Kjelsvik et al., 2018), coping (Lafarge et al., 2013), and termination due to foetal abnormality (Kamranpour et al., 2020; Lafarge et al., 2017). Accordingly, I found IPA to be well suited to address the research study aims and objectives outlined in Section 1.3.

4.3.1. Theoretical Orientation

In order to understand the lived experience of others, IPA brought together fundamental principles from phenomenology, hermeneutics and ideography. In so doing, it provided a comprehensive and holistic approach, especially suited to research projects such as this where experiences were complex, had the potential to be emotionally laden and were under researched (Peat et al., 2019, p. 7). Each of these influences is examined, briefly below.

4.3.1.1. Phenomenology

Phenomenology is the study of the way things are perceived or appear to the consciousness, from the first-person point of view (Smith, 2018). Initially advanced as a philosophical approach by Edmund Husserl (1913), and developed by subsequent scholars, classical phenomenology has become a popular source for a well-developed research methodology. However, far from being homogenous, phenomenology is characterised by a number of themes, rather than a prescriptive or sedimented system of beliefs (Moran, 2000, p. 4). Nevertheless, it can be broadly categorised into two 'strands'; descriptive or transcendental phenomenology, and interpretive or hermeneutic phenomenology, both of which were drawn upon when conducting the IPA study.

4.3.1.1.1. Descriptive Phenomenology

Descriptive phenomenology, most associated with Husserl, asserts that subjective experience has value and should be an object of scientific study (Neubauer et al., 2019, p. 92). Hence, it describes the lived experience without attributing meaning to it. As part of this process, I was required as best as possible to exercise epoché (ἐποχή) or the "bracketing" out my own presuppositions, judgements, assumptions, and ideas about the experience being studied (Husserl, 1913, §§31-32). When approaching the experiences of another, I attempted to meet them with no expectations of what might be encountered. With no objective point of reference, I endeavoured to 'see' and analyse the subjective experience for what it was on its own terms. This attitude toward descriptive phenomenology, although sometimes challenging, facilitated the role of a "natural scientist who has just discovered a previously unknown dimension of reality…" (Staiti, 2012, p. 40).

Husserl also contended that an individual's experience was influenced by their *Lebenswelt,* or life-world (Husserl, 1936, §29). To use an example, the significance of a phenomena such as 'happiness' or 'anxiety' to an individual can only properly be appreciated within the broader context of that individual's life, since no two people will experience these phenomena in exactly the same way (Bloor & Wood, 2006). Nevertheless, Husserlian phenomenology does not necessitate that experiences are studied solely in isolation. Similar subjective experiences that occur in different life-worlds can be compared and commonalities identified. There exist some features of any lived experience that are common to all persons who have the same experience

and so, a more generalised description of a phenomenon is possible (Lopez & Willis, 2004, p. 728). Such universal characteristics or the 'eidetic' structures of an experience constitute what Husserl deems the 'transcendental', pure, or true nature of object of study (Husserl, 1913, §66,76). In the later chapters (6-8) of this thesis which focus on findings and associated discussion, these eidetic structures are explored in more detail as notions of synthesis and schism between individual *Lebenswelt* are revealed.

Whilst IPA finds its initial basis in Husserl's philosophy, it also draws heavily upon those who have subsequently developed his theories, categorised broadly and collectively as interpretive or hermeneutic phenomenology. It brings into play the works of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre. Whilst all three approach phenomenology from differing perspectives, their views are complementary in levelling against the main critiques of descriptive phenomenology. Namely, that it is unattainable to be able to completely set aside my own preconceptions when studying the experience of another. Additionally, pure transcendental experiences are largely inconceivable because they are always subject to temporal consideration; I was only granted access to the experience after the event and once the individual has had the opportunity to reflect upon and make sense of their experience (Smith et al., 2009, pp. 16-19). As a result, the phenomenological approaches that I utilised to understand individual's experiences of teaching abortion, took into consideration the multi-levelled and retrospective interpretations held by both the participant and researcher.

4.3.1.1.2. Interpretive Phenomenology

The knowledge of the lived experience was not something that I could obtain without interpretation. Heidegger's phenomenology proved helpful here. His existential and ontological concern for the nature of being itself led to the notion of "*Dasein*" (literally, there-being) (Heidegger, 1927, pp. 27, 32). *Dasein* is the experience of existence that is distinctive to human beings. The ability to reflect upon one's own personal existence is of central concern to *Dasein:* "Understanding of Being is itself a definitive characteristic of *Dasein*'s Being. *Dasein* is ontically distinctive in that it is ontological" (Heidegger, 1927, p. 32). However, *Dasein* is also a "Being-in-the-world" (Heidegger, 1927, p. 53) and explicitly interconnected. My existence can only be understood in reference to a pre-existing world of people, objects, relationships, language, and culture and so cannot be meaningfully detached from it (Tuffour, 2017, p. 3). Thus, in contrast to transcendental phenomenology, my subjective experience cannot be just observed

and described. Instead, it must be interpreted through or via the wider world of which I am a part. Accordingly, I entered into a dynamic and active process of interpretation through which I was able to present an account of what it meant for respondents within their context to have a particular experience (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012, p. 362).

Similarly to Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty also emphasised the ontological uniqueness of human beings in that they perceive themselves as 'different' from the rest of the world and therefore use their holistic sense to engage with it. When they experience the world, they do so from their own subjectivity but are not simply passively affected by it. Human beings are agents of the world in which they are a part (not just actors within it) because they engage in meaning making activities (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2012, xxi-xxii). In other words, human beings 'create their own story' in relationship to and with their lifeworld. As a result, Merleau-Ponty (like Heidegger) highlights the importance of a 'being-in-the-world'. However, his work developed this concept by proposing that a human being's involvement with and in the world was not only a mental, or cognitive endeavour (Matthews, 2006, p. 115). Instead, they are embodied, or a 'body-subject' (Kwant, 1963, p. 3). The material interactions that a human has with their world help to shape the way they understand and communicate with it (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2012, p. 95). This notion was important for me because any interpretation of another's lifeworld was only ever made from the embodied perspective of my own. As a result, when conducting the research, I considered that whilst empathy and listening skills were of vital importance to 'hear' the story of the individual, it was impossible to share the experiences being studied, even if they were similar to my own.

Finally, IPA draws influence from Sartre's existential phenomenology. Sartre maintained that humans are engaged in a journey of development rather than in a static state of 'being', as neatly characterised by his phrase "existence is prior to essence" (Sartre, 1948, p. 26). This journey highlights the existential notion of the "indeterminacy of the self", where the 'self' is not a quantifiable, unified entity but is inescapably immersed in the constant temporal process of becoming (Cox, 2020, v). The sense of 'becoming', for Sartre, is linked to the conscious meaning-making that occurs through the actions and interactions with others and surroundings. Accordingly, I had the ability to choose and be responsible for their own actions pertaining to their 'becoming'. Or, as Sartre (1945, p. 312) puts it, "I am the architect of my own self, my own character and destiny". However, notably, the experiences that determine 'becoming' are contingent on both the presence and *absence* of interactions with other people and objects.

"Nothingness" (Sartre, 1945), or the lack of particular occurrences play an equally important role in forming the developing self. Accordingly, I was tasked with interpreting the experience of the participant through their ever-evolving lifeworld formed on the basis of the meaning they attributed to their interactions (or lack thereof) with their environment.

4.3.1.2. Hermeneutics

The second underlying influence on IPA is one of hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is the art of interpretation and is concerned with both understanding the meaning of communication or life situations and the analysis of the conditions for that understanding (such as language, or socio-cultural influence) (Zimmermann, 2015, pp. 6-7). Given IPA's phenomenological emphasis, I could only access another's lifeworld via the participant communicating (in one form or another) with me. This communication required interpretation. Indeed, the experience being analysed, in this case the experience of teachers, was ready to "shine forth, but detective work [was] required by the researcher to facilitate the coming forth, and then to make sense of it once it has happened" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 35). The detective work took place in the form of a detailed and holistic hermeneutical analysis where I considered both textual and psychological interpretation (Schleiermacher, 1900, p. 86); a reading 'of' and a reading 'behind' or 'between' what the participant presented. When conducted properly, hermeneutical analysis has the potential to yield insights that not only include the claims of the participant but exceed them. Or, as Schleiermacher remarks, one can elicit "an understanding of the utterer better than he understands himself" (1998, p. 266). Within the discussion chapters of this thesis, such a process was evident. I formed new insights that arose from the direct communication of individual's experiences but did not remain there. Part of the joy of the IPA process was to ascertain a deep understanding of the phenomena in question by attempting to appreciate the individual's rationale, motivations, contexts, and meaning behind their communicated reality.

Within hermeneutics then, I was involved in the process of close interpretation of what was said or written. Whilst I relied on the participants 'voice' as much as possible (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 8), I, too, was subject to my own preconceptions when approaching the analysis. I entered, alongside those being studied, into what Smith & Osborn (2008, p. 53) deem a "double hermeneutic" whereby "the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of their world". It is the meaningful interaction between the two, then, that helped me to elicit the meaning and significance of individual experiences. I found the work of Heidegger, as

previously explored, to be helpful in this regard. By acknowledging that I could not help but approach the subject through my own lifeworld, my subjectivity was not seen as 'bias' to be eliminated but something to be taken stock of and an explicit part of the research process (Flick, 2018, p. 8).

Accordingly, I needed to be "reflexive" (Barrett et al., 2020; Etherington, 2004; Hibbert, 2021) in acknowledging the impact of my own history, experiences, beliefs and culture on the processes and outcomes of inquiry. Nevertheless, the recognition of my own preconceptions was not always something that could be anticipated in advance of the analysis. This is because, when I engaged with the experiences of another, it changed me (even in a small way) which in turn, affected my hermeneutics. Consequently, interpretation was a co-dependent and ever-evolving process involving the "fusion of horizons" (Gadamer, 1960, p. 306) between myself and the data.

4.3.1.3. Idiography

Finally and succinctly, IPA takes an idiographic approach to research. Idiography is a concern with the 'micro' and the particular. It is committed to the intricate analysis of the unique, subjective and often non-recurrent aspects of the phenomena under question (Wharton, 2006, p. 142). My IPA research was idiographic on two tiers (Smith et al., 2009, p. 29). First, in an analytic sense, where it provided an intensive, deep and systematic examination, focussed on the detail of a participant's experience. Second, it was idiographic in a situational sense where my priority was to understand the nuances of the individual experiences, of an individual person, in their individual context. In order to reflect this idiographic underpinning, I was required to prioritise understanding as much as I was able about one person, before moving on to the next. Additionally, even when the analysis was conducted across different cases, I located them within the particular before aligning them with more general themes alongside ensuring that the claims of the individual could still be retrieved (Smith & Eatough, 2012).

4.3.1.4. IPA Summary

The thorough examination of the theoretical underpinnings of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis are summarised below in the diagram I created below (Figure 2). The combination of phenomenological, hermeneutic and idiographic sensibilities enabled the me to concentrate on

the 'insider perspective' of others, allowing it to do "greater justice to the totality of the person, 'warts and all'" (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 54). I found IPA to affirm some of the complexities in analysing the subjective experiences of others as influenced by unique cultural, linguistic, social, physical, relational and cognitive constructs. It also helped to recognise value of my perspectives as an integral and effective part of the research process. My role was one of interpreter who entered into the lifeworld of another through their own and was therefore subject to the same influences and interpretations. Given its rich philosophical heritage, I experienced IPA to be a "mature, multifaceted, and holistic" (Tuffour, 2017, p. 3) approach that was well suited to studying and understanding the experiences of teaching abortion in the secondary RE classroom.
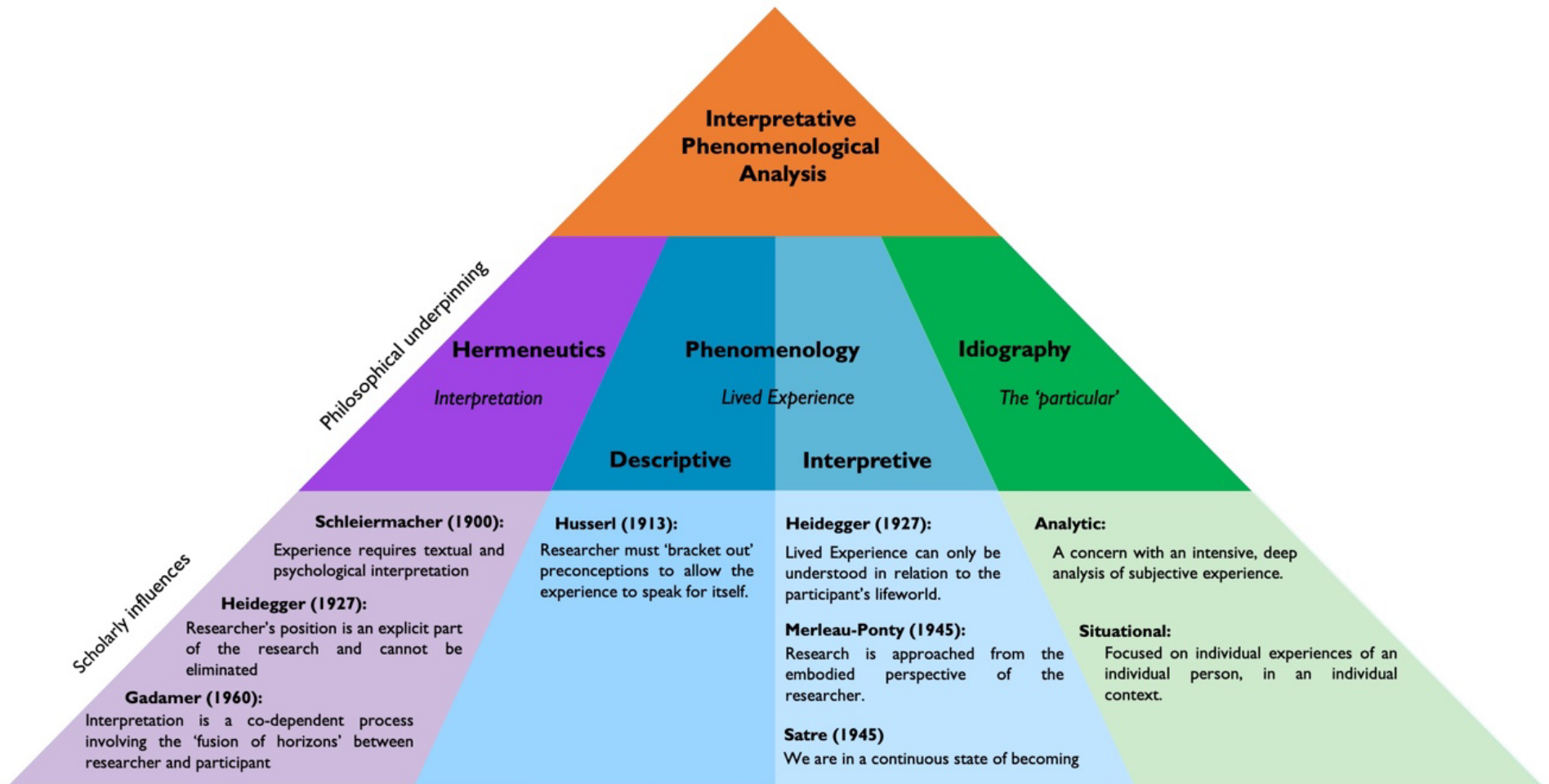
Figure 2: Philosophical Influences of IPA

4.4. Sampling

As with every research project, acquiring a sample or "the selection of a subset of the population for inclusion in a study" (Daniel, 2012, p. 1), is contingent on the methodology employed. For Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, the idiographic focus of giving full appreciation to the account of each individual's experience meant that a small, concentrated sample size was both normative and desirable. A concentrated sample allowed me to conduct the detailed and, often time-consuming, analysis required to gain appropriate insight into the significance of a phenomenon for participants. The study, therefore, was not concerned with population-wide generalisability, but with the particular understandings that were unique to the context of those individuals within the sample (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 55).

With this in mind, it was helpful to remember that in order to prioritise the depth of research data over its breadth, there was no rigid number of participants that an IPA study required. Instead, I determined the size of a sample on several factors, including: the intensity of analysis conducted on each single case; the richness of the data gained through analysis; the direction that I wished to take regarding the comparison of cases; and my pragmatic concerns including access and time constraints (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012, p. 364). Although IPA studies are theoretically possible with just a single case (or indeed, much larger numbers) these tend to be unusual, with typical sample sizes involving fewer than ten participants. As an estimate, both Smith et al. (2009, p. 52) and Clarke (2010, p.56) recommend that doctoral IPA research should have a sample size of between four and ten cases. This size allows sufficient and comprehensive analysis of each case, in addition to a cross-case comparison, whilst not being overwhelmed by the data produced. Accordingly, I chose a sample size of ten which produced a wealth of sufficient and high-quality data.

In IPA studies generally, the specificity of the sample also differs depending on the research problem and phenomena being studied. However, I prioritised the homogeneity of the sample. My objective of gaining a sample was to narrow the parameters such that it contained a single group of participants for whom the research question has relevance and personal significance (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012, p. 364). Accordingly, I limited variables and selected participants purposively on the basis that they met the specific criteria set. In this regard, those chosen to form the sample were the "critical cases" (Patton, 2015, p. 276), or the key informants whose

data was most relevant, valuable, and information rich, best placed to illuminate the questions under study.

My concern, in this study, was with the experiences of female teachers who teach the topic of abortion within Religious Education at Key Stage 4/GCSE. Therefore, I refined the substantial criteria used in sample selection by demographic characteristics such as employment status, occupation, level of education, gender, and working age. Furthermore, I further narrowed the sample size by pragmatic considerations. These "real constraints" (Cohen et al., 2017, p. 180), included the limitations of tangible resources such as time, money, or workforce.

In order to obtain the sample, I utilised my own professional and social networks. These included a call to participation on RE teacher specific social media groups, and local NATRE (National Association of Teachers of Religious Education) collaboration groups. Whilst in some ways this method had a resemblance to strategies used in convenience sampling, potential participants were also required to complete a brief screening questionnaire in order to ensure that recruitment was based on theoretical relevance and homogeneity rather than *solely* on convenience (Waterford, 2000, p. 403). An overview of the procedures used, along with relevant participant documentation and screening questionnaires can be found in Appendix B.

4.5. Data Collection

4.5.1. Semi-Structured Interviewing

IPA is most suited to a data collection approach that invites and facilitates participants to offer their first-person account of their experiences. Although I could have employed several methods, semi-structured interviews were both favoured and recommended (Reid et al., 2005, p. 22). I employed semi-structured interviews as a flexible tool that enabled an interchange of views between two (or more) people, relying upon human interaction and the centrality of conversation for meaning making (Kvale, 1996, p. 14). Further, by using semi-structured interviews, I enabled multi-sensory channels to be utilised, and emphasised the social situatedness of research data (Kvale, 1996, p. 14; Mason, 2002, p. 62). Although several different purposes of the interview exist, Lincoln and Guba (1985, pp. 268-270) suggest that their value is evident in the construction of the present (events, feelings, activities, motivation, concerns etc.), the reconstructions of the past, projections into the future, and the verifying, amending

and extending of pre-existing data. I found these purposes particularly helpful when it came to providing the "thick description" (Geertz, 1973) of what was being studied (rather than the 'thin' reporting of the facts or transcription of an interview). A well-conducted semi-structured interview aided me in communicating the interpretative examination of individual perspectives, personal constructs, negotiated meanings, and particular definitions of situations, that were influenced by contextual and temporal dynamics (Matsunobu & Bresler, 2020, p. 11).

In using the semi-structured interview, or "interview guide approach" (Johnson & Christensen, 2008, p. 208; Patton, 2015, p. 342), I was able to provide a more systematic inquiry by determining prospective topics and issues that might be covered in advance. Yet, at the same time, I was also able to adapt the sequence and working of questions during the course of the interviewing; digressing, expanding or focussing as appropriate, allowing the phenomenological 'lived experience' to speak for itself. Thus, the relatively unstructured or conversational interactions between myself and participant were maintained leading to a greater sense of comprehensiveness in the engagement, understanding and interpretation of the participant's lifeworld (Rich et al., 2013).

4.5.1.1. Constructing an Interview Schedule

Prior to interviews taking place, I drew up a flexible schedule of expansive and non-directive questions. These can be found in Appendix C. The purpose of the schedule was to guide my communication with the participant, in an attempt to facilitate the most fruitful interchange and yield the richest data. The schedule was useful in ensuring that appropriate space was given for the participant, as the experiential expert, to talk at length and contribute to solving the puzzle of the research question. Further, it also allowed me to anticipate potential problems and avoid, some of the potential 'pitfalls' of interviewing such as leading or the steering of conversation toward the interviewer's own beliefs or conclusions (King & Horrocks, 2010, p. 38).

When composing questions, I thought about the order, type and number of questions used. To this end, Robson & McCartan (2016, p. 290) provided a useful question sequencing model that I adapted to suit the specific needs of the project. The model below describes the broad conceptual framework with a list of the specific questions underneath. The list of specific questions can also be found in Appendix C (Section 11.3.4).

1. *Introduction.* I initiated the interview by introducing myself and explaining the nature and purpose of both the study and the interview. I attempted to reassure the participant of their anonymity and confirmed that permission was granted for the recording and use of the data collected in the research project and any subsequent publication.[55]

2. *Warm-up.* These few, and relatively straight-forward questions helped both the participant and I to become familiar with each other and build rapport. I designed these questions to put the participant at ease and allow them to find the rhythm of speaking and articulating their thoughts.

- Can you tell me about your current position within the school?
- How long have you been teaching?
- How is RE organised in your school?

3. *Main body of the interview.* The central focus of my inquiry was covered through several questions forming the bulk of the schedule. I intended the questions to elicit descriptive, narrative, and evaluative responses (Ary et al., 2014, p. 433). Additionally, I pursued them in an 'open' manner, providing broad parameters that encouraged participants to share freely, and allowed me to identify complex motivational influences and frames of reference (Foddy, 1993, p. 128). The main body of the interview contained ten questions, which aligned with Smith et al. (2009, p. 60) recommendations of having enough to fill 45-90 minutes. Finally, when I considered the logical order in which the questions should be sequenced, sensitive or more 'risky' questions were placed towards the end of the interview. This ordering allowed the participant to gradually work their way toward them through a technique called "funnelling" (Wilkinson & Birmingham, 2003, p. 47) where more delicate questions are posed at a time when the participant is most comfortable and which limits any potential data loss should the participant cut short their answer (or refuse altogether).

- Where does abortion occur within your particular GCSE syllabus?
- Why do you think that the subject of abortion appears on a GCSE syllabus?
- What has been your experience of teaching abortion at GCSE?
- Can you describe how you approach the teaching of abortion?

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[55] Issues relating to ethics, anonymity and the use of data are further explored in Section 4.7

- What are the main issues that you have faced when teaching the topic?

- How do you manage the classroom dynamics when teaching abortion?

- Has the way in which you have taught abortion changed over time?

- What would a positive lesson on abortion look like for you?

- How should teachers conduct themselves when teaching abortion?

- What do you think makes a topic controversial?

4. *Cool-off.* In a similar manner to the warm-up questions, I asked a few concluding questions to gauge how the participant found the interview, diffuse any tension that may have built up, and give the opportunity to clarify or amend any of the interviewee's previous answers.

- Is there anything that you would like to add?

- Is there anything that I have left out?

- Are there other things that you expected me to ask you about?

5. *Closure.* I terminated the interview by thanking the participant for their time and saying goodbye. I also gave space for the participant to raise any questions should they wish. The possibility of the 'door-handle' phenomena (Lang & van der Molen, 1990, p. 133) was also considered, where the participant could have added useful information once the interview recording has finished, although this did not occur during the study.

4.5.1.2. Conducting the Interview

Enabling the participant to talk freely and deeply took significant skill, effort, and training. In particular, I spent a significant amount of energy on the process of active listening or more specifically being an 'active co-participant' since, from an IPA perspective, the process of interpretation starts at the commencement of the interview (Normann, 2017, p. 618). I was carefully attentive, alert, and attuned to what the participant was saying (or not saying) and 'reading' the non-verbal cues; the body language, vocal nuances, facial expressions, gestures, pauses, and eye gazes enabled me to interpret and understand what is being communicated. However, I also found these activities challenging. Responding in a way that ensured the flow of conversation was maintained (Edwards & Holland, 2013), involved considerable

concentration and proved more taxing online where the timing and pacing of questions, including allowing sufficient space for pauses, was in greater focus (Ollife et al., 2021).

In semi-structured interviewing, responding to the participant can take several forms. However, I used prompts and probes as a helpful way of eliciting answers of a similar kind, obtaining response clarity, or in developing answer to yield a deeper response (Drever, 2003, p. 23). Within the interviews, I configured prompts and probes in the format of questions that were planned in advance to be drawn upon when and if participants needed a more structured approach. A list of these questions is found in Appendix C. However, most of my responses to participants were indirect and included silence, echoes, verbal fillers and non-verbal acts such as nodding (Russell Bernard, 2000, p. 196ff). I found that it was not always possible to anticipate where the conversation would lead. In fact, in an IPA study, moderated digression is encouraged, as long as it is relevant to the research question. Sometimes, these unexpected and unprompted turns gave the most valuable data, revealing what was most important to the participant and shaping the research to new insights and knowledge (Smith et al., 2009, p. 58).

4.5.1.3. Piloting, Preparations, and Practicalities

Regarding this study, I piloted the interview schedule amongst a small number of participants where the aforementioned active listening skills could be practised and honed. Piloting gave me the opportunity to ask for feedback and reflect upon both the timing, content, and composition of the questions. Based on what I learned, I made adjustments and alterations to the interview schedule that secured a greater clarity and precision of questions in relation to the intended research outcome. A record of the changes made to the initial research schedule can be found in Appendix D.

Conducting the interview also involved several logistical considerations driven by ethical concerns. Graham (2005, p. 77) highlights an important list of these factors that I drew upon to ensure smooth and proper running of the research. They included negotiating a suitable location, time and date for the interview. In this, I embodied the principle of equity (Seidman, 2006, p. 50); where I was able to be especially accommodating in scheduling the interview to be most convenient, comfortable, safe, and suitable for the participant who is giving up their time and data for the sake of the project. It also included: technological considerations (such as double checking that computers/recording devices were fully charged and functioning); ethical

considerations (expounded further in Section 4.7); and communication considerations (ensuring that the participant and I were able to contact each other prior to the interview, or in an emergency).

As a short excursus, I initially intended to conduct face-to-face interviews at a location of the participants' choosing. However, the Covid-19 pandemic meant that, to keep participants safe and abide by government laws and restrictions, all interviews had to be conducted online via Zoom or Microsoft Teams. Conducting research online via virtual communication methods brought with it its own ethical and practical challenges (Chia & Wai, 2022; Roberts et al., 2021; Sah et al., 2020). Nevertheless, the shift to synchronous online interviewing for this study was of benefit for several reasons including: accessing a greater range of potential participants at more flexible times (Archibald et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2022, p. 126; Tremblay et al., 2021). A fuller discussion on the impact of Covid-19 upon the research can be found in section 9.4.3.

4.6. Data Analysis

During the study, I found the 'data analysis' phase to be the most prolonged and time-consuming part of the project. Nevertheless, the quality of the undertaking, in terms of deep insights gained, was dependent on me being assiduous in this area (Smith, 2004, p. 40). IPA boasts a flexible approach that can be adapted to the unique requirements of study (Smith et al., 1999, pp. 219-220). As such, there exists no single course of action when it comes to the exacting process of data analysis. It is, however, guided and characterised by a set of "common principles which start with, but go beyond, a standard thematic analysis" (Noon, 2018, p. 77). Within this in mind, I took several specific steps related to data analysis. An overview of these steps is displayed in Figure 3, a model I constructed to assist in my conceptualisation of the process. It is explained in further detail below.

4.6.1. Transcription

As a precursor to analysis, I transcribed the data collected from the semi-structured interviews providing a valid written record of events. In contrast to conversation analysis,[56] IPA does not require a 'microscopic' transcription containing prosodic or suprasegmental details (intonation, rhythm, pitch, fillers). Due to its focus on the interpretation of the content given, a verbatim and semantic transcription that documents every spoken word along with broader linguistic features (such as laughter and significant pauses) is more appropriate (Smith et al., 2009, p. 74). Accordingly, I recorded interviews electronically, after which they were transcribed at the earliest realistic opportunity (usually within 72 hours). Early transcription helped me to become more thoroughly acquainted with the content of the interview, providing an additional opportunity to "'review and connect' with the data" (Grinndell & Unrau, 2018, p. 553).

4.6.2. Multiple Reading and Initial Noting

The first stage of analysis was 'within case', and involved me reading and re-reading the transcript to help become thoroughly familiar with the data and to recall the atmosphere and setting of the interview (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012, p. 368). I augmented this familiarisation further by listening to and watching the recording at the same time. I found the multi-sensory approach important since the process of transformation from raw data to comprehendible themes that occurs during analysis came "from a complete immersion with both the original interview in the form of dialogue and in its subsequent written form..." (Pollio et al., 1997). It also ensured that I adhered to a key principle of IPA: that the participant, rather than the researcher, was the focus of the analysis (Smith et al., 2009, p. 82). In this instance, I immersed myself in the data by being consciously aware of my own personal thoughts and feelings directed towards the transcript; attempting to temporarily exclude their influence allowing engagement with the data on its own terms. To that end, I pursued "emic data" (Krippendorff, 2013, p. 27): data that arises in its natural or indigenous form generated by the informants themselves.

Once I was suitably familiar with the data, the process of note making on the transcript began. At first, I placed no bounds on what I allowed myself to comment on. I made exploratory

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[56] Conversation Analysis focuses on a detailed exploration of conversation: the structure, mechanism, rules and negotiations that are included. As opposed to IPA which is more concerned with participants lived experience, using conversation to access this. For more on Conversation Analysis see ten Have (1990)

observations and questions on any aspect of the interview experience relating to the participant's narrative that I deemed to have potential significance. In this regard, 'open' or 'free' textual analysis was advanced, uninhibited by prescriptive structure or configuration (Smith & Eatough, 2007, p. 46). However, I often found myself making comments on content (the subject matter being discussed), and linguistics (the specific way in which content is discussed, including metaphors or symbols). My comments also considered IPA's theoretical commitment to "the person as a cognitive, linguistic, affective and physical being and assumes a chain of connection between people's talk and their thinking and emotional state" (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 54). In this way, the initial note making included my inceptive contextual or conceptual reflections focussed on engaging with the transcript at a more interrogative level. Finally, there are several instances where my own preconceptions, thoughts and feelings towards the interview were deliberately noted. Such noting helped to initiate the hermeneutic cycle and reflexive bracketing consistent with IPA, allowing me to 'take stock' and question prior knowledge before moving on to further or deeper interpretations.

It was important that the initial note-making phase move beyond mere description towards exploring the questions, 'why is this of significance?', and 'what is the meaning of this experience for the participant?'. To this end, my concern was not with concrete understandings and explanations, but about "the opening up of a range of provisional meanings" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 89). In subsequent analysis, I relinquished some of these tentative considerations in favour of more perceptible lines of enquiry. In order to best facilitate the process of initial noting, I made comments on the transcript using a word processor. The use of specific qualitative data analysis software (NVivo, MAX QDA etc.) in IPA studies is hotly debated, with many considering them to be "poor tools" (Wagstaff et al., 2014, p. 7) due to their limitations with multiple levels of coding, and a detachment from the narrative of the participant. Therefore, for ease and familiarity, I used Microsoft Word, which proved a sufficient tool for my needs. An example of initial noting of an excerpt is included in Appendix E.

4.6.3. Extracting Emerging Themes

Once the initial noting was complete, I transformed each note into more condensed expressions to reflect the substance of what had been uncovered from the transcript. At this stage, my focus was on using and developing initial noting, rather than returning to the transcript an additional time. I was also not concerned with omitting or selecting particular passages for attention, nor

giving any weighting to one particular note or another. Accordingly, I achieved a slightly higher level of abstraction and interpretation. Nevertheless, the extraction of emerging themes remained close to the narrative of the participant due to the work undertaken in immersing myself in the transcript during the preceding stage. The enabled me to "reduce the volume of the detail (the transcript and initial notes) whilst maintaining [its] complexity" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 91).

4.6.4. Connecting and Clustering Themes

Next, I examined the list of themes and began the process of mapping the relationships, connections and patterns between them. Pragmatically, this involved recording each of the themes chronologically on a separate document based on the order in which they appeared in the transcript. Then, in accordance with the recommendation of Smith & Osborn (2008), I clustered them in a more conceptual or theoretical manner, to view the associations between different aspects of a participant's experience. As clustering occurred, a structure materialised with several themes taking on the role of superordinate concepts, whilst others becoming less prominent. I removed some clusters altogether as a result of duplication or because, on reflection, they failed to encapsulate the essence of what the participant was saying. To this structure, I added relevant data extracts, or references to key phrases from the transcript. In so doing, I maintained the participant's voice and the analytic journey from primary source material to conceptual themes can be charted (Noon, 2018, p. 78). An example of clustering and connecting themes within a single case can be found in Appendix G.

4.6.5. Cross-Case Analysis

I repeated the above process of initial noting, extracting, connecting, and clustering for each transcript. It was theoretically possible to use the themes developed in one case to inform the next. However, I found it more valuable and in keeping with the idiographic nature of IPA to recognise what had been learned and disentangle it from subsequent lived experiences. Whilst the hermeneutical works of Heidegger and Gadamer (see section 4.3.1.2) accept that analysis will always be influenced by my prior knowledge and position, I made a concerted effort to take stock of my influences. To aid in this process, I kept a research log where personal thoughts, feelings and presuppositions could be noted and reflected upon. As a result, each participant's

account was approached (as best as possible) as if it were the first; allowing me to hear each on its own terms, unaffected by the order in which transcripts were analysed.

Finally, I compared cross-case clustered superordinate and subordinate themes with one another (See Appendix 8). I extracted prominent, consistent or prevalent themes from the combined transcripts and compiled them into a final, 'top level' table, forming the basis for the subsequent results and discussion chapters (6-8). A summary of the 'top level' table is found in Table 4 in Section 5.5.

The IPA analysis process is one that is cyclical and yet consists of several distinct stages. A visual representation of the steps is depicted in Figure 3 below:

1	Reading and re-reading
2	Initial noting
3	Extracting emerging themes
4	Connecting and clustering themes
5	Structuring themes
6	Cross-case comparison
7	Compiling 'top level' themes
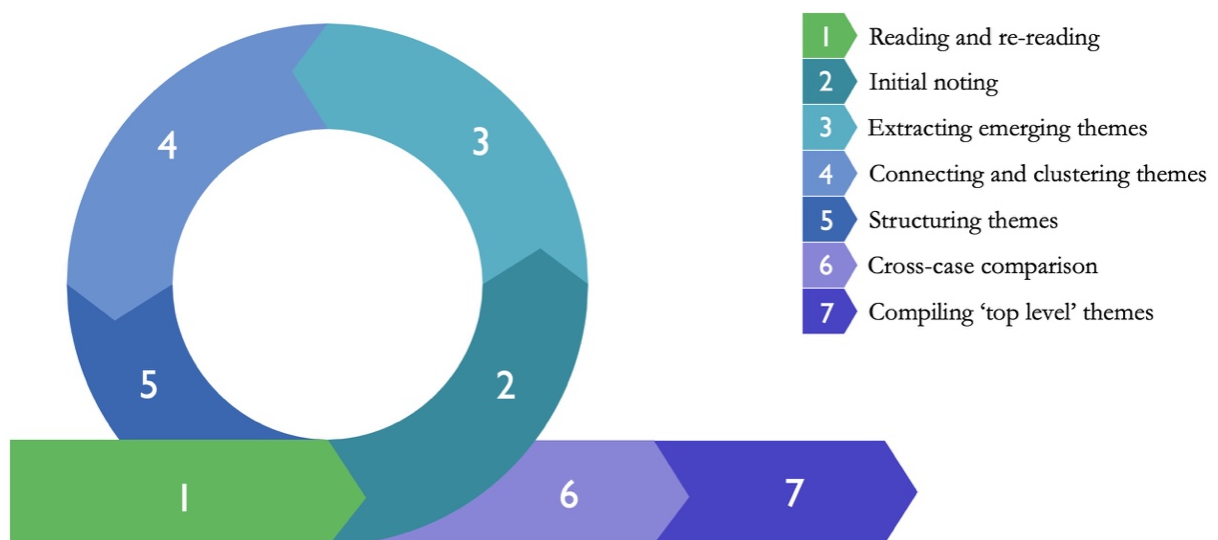
Figure 3: Summary of Data Analysis Steps

4.7. Ethics

The conducting of any interview involves a notable ethical dimension due to the involvement of human participants and interpersonal interaction. Therefore, care must be taken to ensure that the autonomy, safety, privacy and welfare of participants are safeguarded; that harm is minimised; and that research is conducted in such a way that promotes values of beneficence, justice, inclusivity, trust and integrity (British Educational Research Association (BERA), 2018; Government Social Research Unit, 2005; National Commission for the Protection of Human

Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioural Research, 1979). However, research ethics is not a purely procedural activity, so easily associated with tokenism. It also involves the ongoing, holistic and critically conscious orientation towards being an "ethical researcher" (Shank, 2002, p. 97). Accordingly, I ensured that ethical concerns ran throughout the course of the project and were not confined to a particular section. In order to aid reflective practice, I recorded these issues in my research log and considered them systematically and frequently throughout the entirety of the research process. Nevertheless, it is also advantageous to provide an overview of some of the pragmatic steps I took in order to demonstrate my commitment to ethical practice

4.7.1. Informed Consent

For this study, it was imperative that I sought the informed consent of participants. Informed consent is considered among the founding principles of research ethics and embraces a participant's autonomy: their right to freedom and self-determination. It necessitates that participants enter voluntarily into a project with sufficient information about what is required of them and the implications of their involvement before the study commences (Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), 2015, p. 29). Accordingly, I made those selected for the study aware of the nature of the study, its purpose and intention via a participant information sheet (see Appendix C – Section 11.3.2). I also pursued a subsequent verbal conversation before written consent is obtained (see Appendix C – Section 11.3.3) Within this, I made it clear to participants that they could stop the interview or withdraw from the research at any time for any reason, or no reason at all.

4.7.2. Minimising Potential Harm and Risk

Ethical research design and implementation hold participants in high regard, showing respect for the person by avoiding excessive demands, protecting their welfare and safety, and putting them at ease, wherever possible. As a result, I had a duty of care to "recognise potential risks, and to prepare for and be in a position to minimise and manage any distress or discomfort that may arise" (BERA, 2018, p. 19). The questions in the semi-structured interview were focussed on the experiences of teaching the subject of abortion in the RE classroom. By very nature, all controversial issues, including abortion, have the potential to be of a more sensitive disposition. Therefore, confronting them in the context of an interview could have, in some cases, caused participants internal distress or emotional discomfort. Whilst this sensitivity was the main ethical

challenge surrounding the interviews, I made every effort to ensure that the risk of significant discomfort, harm, stress or burden was minimised.

Bailey (1994, p. 457) proposes several approaches that can be employed to diminish risk. First, a strategy called 'Already Existing Negative Effects' can be adopted, whereby a situation is found where the adverse effects of harm already exist. In this case, teachers in their everyday practice are already regularly involved in the discussion and debate of delicate issues such as abortion, or euthanasia with their classes. Therefore, the risk of the researcher initiating or inflicting further harm is reduced (although not non-existent). In order to further reduce the risk further, I made it clear that the intent of the interview was to examine the experiences of *teaching* the aforementioned issues, rather than to discuss the issues *per se.* In light of this, I reassured teachers that they could share as much, or as little as they wished and were free to stop the interview at any point. I also choose a minimal sample size, applying any potential level of harm to the least amount of people for the shortest amount of time yet allowing the research objectives to be completed. Finally, as previously mentioned, individuals needed to be fully informed of any potential risks before their consent is given. However, in the spirit of non-maleficence and beneficence, I also ensured that the participant information sheet contained details of the potential benefits of participation, thus providing the opportunity for prospective candidates to weigh up their involvement carefully.

4.7.3. Privacy, Anonymity and Confidentiality

I also considered wider issues of confidentiality, anonymity, non-identifiability, and non-traceability. Whilst often considered the norm in social and educational research, it was important that participants' right to privacy is maintained. Facilitating this process involved the "fictionalising" (BERA, 2018, p. 21) or pseudonymising of participants' information to ensure it did not reveal their identity, or that the individual could be traced. More specifically, I ensured that identifiable data such as name, school name, or location was concealed in the final reporting. Furthermore, I also briefed participants as to the bounds of confidentiality permitted by the current project, since true or absolute confidentiality is problematic (Oliver, 2010, p. 83). In the context of a doctoral thesis, data is rarely kept just to one person (it is usually shared with the supervisory team, for example). Accordingly, I included an explicit statement about the people who had access to data as part of the participant information sheet (see Appendix B – Section 11.2.3).

4.7.4. Data Storage and Protection

Finally, to maximise the quality and integrity of the research, I ensured that legal and data protection requirements were met in accordance with the *Data Protection Act 1998* and *General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2018*. To this end, I guaranteed that data was: processed lawfully and transparently; collected for specified, explicit and legitimate purposes; limited to only what is necessary for the purposes concerned; processed and stored securely; treated with additional protection if containing sensitive personal information; and kept for no longer than is fit for the purposes of the research. Additionally, I also made research participants aware of their right to access the personal data held about them, and their right to request to delete it. As before, I discussed the requirements with participants at length during the process of gaining informed consent and made every effort to communicate that the protection of their data was of foremost consideration.

It is also worth noting here that, during the early part of the research project, the aforementioned considerations formed the basis of gaining ethical approval from my Higher Educational Institution (see Appendix I). Yet, these ethical considerations are a vital part of the entirety of my research; from inception to evaluation.

4.8. Research Integrity and Quality

4.8.1. Research Integrity

In the spirit of ethical orientation, (an addition to those expounded in section 4.7) I took several significant actions to guarantee that all aspects of the research were conducted to the highest level of quality, precision and integrity. Based on the *Concordat to Support Research Integrity* (Universities UK, 2019), these included, for example, maintaining honesty about all aspects of the project; ensuring that data was recorded and transcribed as accurately as possible, and that interpretations were valid and justifiable. It also included performing rigorous and appropriate research, in line with disciplinary norms and agreed personal and institutional protocols. I also ensured that the research valued transparent and open communication in declaring any potential competing interests, avoiding plagiarism, making the research findings widely available (including to participants), presenting the work to others and, reporting and valuing any negative results and experiences as part of the learning process. Finally, I endeavoured to hold care and respect for all participants and their data in the highest regard, by ensuring that the information

that they provided was not misrepresented and that their welfare was considered at all points of the research journey.

4.8.2. Research Quality

Comparatively, establishing criteria by which the quality of research can be gauged is more challenging for qualitative studies than for its quantitative counterpart. The suitability of traditionally positivist terms such as 'reliability' and 'validity' face substantial critique (see, for example, Meyrick (2006), and relating to the context of IPA: Rodham et al. (2015). The term validity within this section is used in line with Maxwell's (1996, p.86) nomenclature as "the correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or other sort of account". However, it is clear that validity in this context can only be understood in reference to its derivation from types of understanding as opposed to constructs used primarily in quantitative or positivist studies. Such a delineation was particularly important with idiographic phenomenological research, where the nature of the work embraces subjectivity and therefore a lack of transferability (that the results of one study can largely be generalised to other samples from the same population).

Hypothetically, even if I were to conduct the same interviews, with the same participants, and cover the same content, the inferences drawn at both the data collection and analysis stages are unlikely to be the same. Nevertheless, it is important to replace the essence of such positivist sentiments with something befitting of the current project.

With this in mind, I incorporated principles advanced by Maxwell (1992), and Denzin & Lincoln (2018), to create a framework for determining high quality research. In contrast to 'validity' Maxwell argues that typologies gained from the kinds of 'understanding' at which qualitative research aims, are of greater importance than solely procedural-driven approaches. Accordingly, Maxwell (1992) lays out five benchmarks which I will use to evaluate the calibre of my work. These benchmarks will be synthesised with Denzin & Lincoln's criteria of "authenticity" (2018, p. 140). Authenticity makes claims about the trustworthiness and rigour of research in relation to the axioms and assumptions of constructivist or phenomenological inquiry. Combining Maxwell's (1992) and Denzin & Lincoln's (2018) approaches creates a comprehensive framework enabling an assessment of both the processes and outcomes of the

project. Below is an outline and explanation of the framework. The evaluation of the project against this framework is found in Section 9.4.7.

1. *Descriptive validity[57], fairness and balance*

   "Descriptive validity" (Maxwell, 1992, pp. 285-288) is defined by the extent to which the factual accuracy of the participant's account is maintained (that is, it is not distorted, selective or fabricated). To this end, I double checked the interviews, once transcribed against the initial recording. However, alongside descriptive validity, I also added the emphasis of fairness, or balance (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). This better encapsulated my concerted effort to ensure that teachers were "not reduced to the material of research, or agents of theory implementation, but conceived as co-researchers in researching partnerships" (Afdal, 2007, p. 93)

2. *Interpretive validity and ontological authenticity*

   Interpretive validity is the ability of the researcher to present the meaning, interpretation, terms of reference, and intentions, that situations have for the participants/subjects themselves, in their terms (Maxwell, 1992, pp. 289-291). One of the strengths of IPA is its idiographic and phenomenological focus on participants' experiences expressed from the 'insider perspective' through dialogue, so in this regard, it almost always strives towards interpretive validity, if done properly. Nevertheless, IPA also goes beyond this criterion to fulfil what Denzin & Lincoln deem "ontological authenticity" (2018, p. 140) which refers to the researchers' ability to elicit previously unknown concepts. Due to the originality of the research, most constructs that I uncovered during the research process were 'new' in the sense that they are been unreported. However, it also includes the revelation and recognition of values, attitudes and feelings that are previously unexpressed, even to oneself.

3. *Theoretical validity and educative authenticity*

   Theoretical validity involves a further level of abstraction and includes the explanations that the researcher brings to the research (or indeed the participants themselves) (Maxwell, 1992, pp. 291-293). Researchers must ensure that any explanations or

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[57] The term 'validity' is used here in line with Maxwell's nomenclature, and to aid comparative familiarity with equivalent language used throughout the field.

external notions used to help understand participants' experiences are used unequivocally across all cases and are applicable to revealing further insight. In other words, any explanations must start with the data and work outwards, rather than imposing extraneous theories upon data to make participants' experiences 'fit' a particular model. Accordingly, it is my responsibility to be explicit about the methods of interpretation and explanations. With this, the research is subject to "educative authenticity" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 140) in that it seeks to create a clear and raised level of awareness of the experiences and constructions of the participant, along with any potential explanations, to all stakeholders. These principles are of particular pertinence in the discussion sections of this thesis.

4. *Generalisability*

Maxwell expounds generalisability to be the view that any theory generated from the research is useful in understanding the situations of other groups, communities or circumstances (Maxwell, 1992, p. 293). However, due to the idiographic nature of IPA, and the subjectivity and nuances of individual experience, what is learned about the can never truly be 'lifted' and applied elsewhere. Findings, therefore, are illustrative as opposed to representative. Nevertheless, in making links between the analysis and claims in the extant literature, I am able to move towards "theoretical transferability" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 51) (rather than empirical generalisability). This rich, iterative, transparent and contextualised process means that, although a direct comparison cannot be made, findings can be used in order to evaluate other studies or contexts.

5. *Evaluative validity and catalytic authenticity.*

Finally, the aforementioned evaluative aspect of research can be expanded into further criteria whereby the project is measured on its propensity towards a judgment stance (Maxwell, 1992, p. 295). This involves a critical approach to all aspects of the research including the methods used, results, and impact of the research; going beyond a descriptive or explanatory framework. As to the impact of the work, the research must contribute new light on the phenomenon in question. However, it must also engender sufficient interest and consequence to motivate[58] positive action from stakeholders

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[58] Denzin & Lincoln (2018) include one further criterion deemed "tactical authenticity", which evaluates the extent to which stakeholders (and specifically, participants) are empowered to actually act, rather than action being purely motivated. It also addresses the rebalance of power in enabling the participant's 'voice' to speak up to make their wishes know to those in authority.

(deemed "catalytic authenticity" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 140). The constitution of action is flexible and may include, for example, notions of further research, policy development, pragmatic changes or operations.

4.9. Chapter Summary

Having undertaken a systematic exploration of the context, foundations and nature of the research at hand, this chapter has provided both a theoretical and pragmatic framework within which my thesis could be approached, planned, conducted, validated and evaluated. It has revealed the polyphonic dimensions of educational research; that no two studies are ever the same, and each faces unique and contextualised challenges and deliberations. Far from being a separate entity, I have regarded the methodological considerations expounded above as an integral, iterative and reflexive process. Every new step has helped to calibrate and develop the ones it precedes. Accordingly, the iterative process has enabled the project to be best oriented towards the investigation of the research questions where the generation of knowledge is grounded in a deliberative, dialogical, value-centred, relevant and participant-focused approach.

However, it was felt that that this notion was subsumed to the categories of both 'catalytic authenticity' and 'fairness and balance' due to their similarities.

5. Analysis

Having spent some time surveying the literature relevant to the research questions and outlining the theoretical and philosophical orientation of the project's approach and design, I now turn to the data itself. Accordingly, the remainder of the thesis is dedicated to the analysis and discussion of the interview transcripts and the themes that emerged. The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is twofold. First, to provide an appropriate overview of my analytic process; explaining the development of the super-ordinate themes and outlining how they will be subsequently explored, each in a dedicated chapter (Chapters 6, 7 and 8). Second, it aims to situate both the researcher and the participants within the research story or journey; exploring their distinct, yet hermeneutically symbiotic, relationship to make sense of the particular experience under investigation.

5.1. Participant Demographics

Participants' lived experience was at the centre of this thesis and was communicated by the stories they told in the interview setting. However, whilst an immediate discussion of the transcript might prove beneficial in helping the reader to 'bracket out' any preconceptions, it does not adequately do justice to the participant as a whole person. Accordingly, demographic data is provided to establish participants within their unique contexts. Demographic data is included within this chapter as opposed to section 4.4 to allow the reader to have a closer association with the interviewees. In accordance with the ethics procedures outlined in the previous chapter, I assigned each participant a pseudonym and identifiable details such as school name or location have been altered or omitted to safeguard their anonymity.

Name	Job	Years teaching	Subject specialist?	Other responsibilities
Annabel	RE Teacher	7	Yes	Head of Personal, Social, and Health Education (PSHE)
Bethany	RE Teacher	11	Yes	Corporate worship coordinator
Clara	RE Teacher	3	Yes	Geography Teacher, Head of PSHE
Dariya	Philosophy and Religion Teacher	7	Yes	Safeguarding Lead
Ella	Head of Department (RE)	8	Yes	-
Freya	RE Teacher	15	Yes	-
Grace	RE Teacher	24	Yes	Assistant Headteacher
Holly	RE Teacher	6	Yes	-
Isabelle	RS Teacher	1	Yes	-
Josie	RS Teacher	11	Yes	Curriculum Lead/Head of Department

Table 2: Participant Demographics

Participants held a variety of job titles, according to their school's particular set up and structures. Religious Education Teacher, Religious Studies Teacher, and Philosophy and Religion Teacher were all synonymous roles denoting participants' responsibility for the teaching and learning of the subject. There was a substantial range of teaching experience within the cohort of participants; one, for example, was in their first year of teaching as a Newly Qualified Teacher, and another with almost 25 years' experience of teaching RE. All of those interviewed also considered themselves to be a 'subject specialist'. Ordinarily, the term 'subject specialist' is widely held to mean that a teacher has undergone specific Initial Teacher Training (ITT) in a particular secondary subject (or group of subjects in Modern Languages, for example). However, when participants were asked whether they considered themselves to be a subject specialist, the term was self-defined with no external benchmarking to guide their answer. Interestingly, whilst most had completed RE ITT, two participants (Clara and Holly) started their teaching careers in a different subject (Geography and History respectively). Neither had undergone any formal subject knowledge qualification or training, and yet considered themselves to be 'subject

specialists by experience', having taught RE over a number of years. Both had learned the subject content over the course of their careers to date, and had transferred and applied their pedagogical knowledge from other subjects to the context of RE.

It is also helpful to note the types of schools where participants were employed, including the particular examination specifications studied:

Name	School Type	Religious Character	Approx Number of pupils	Gender of Entry	GCSE Examination Board/Spec.
Annabel	Academy Converter	Catholic	1300	Mixed	AQA Spec A
Bethany	Academy Converter	Church of England	1500	Mixed	AQA Spec A
Clara	Community School	n/a	1200	Mixed	Eduqas Route A
Dariya	Independent	Christian	700	Boys	AQA Spec A
Ella	Academy Converter	n/a	1600	Mixed	Eduqas Route A
Freya	Academy sponsor led	n/a	1700	Mixed	Edexcel Spec B
Grace	Independent	n/a	600	Girls	AQA Spec A
Holly	Academy Converter	n/a	1100	Mixed	AQA Spec A
Isabelle	Academy sponsor led	Church of England	1600	Boys	OCR
Josie	Community School	n/a	1400	Mixed	AQA Spec A

Table 3: Participant School Demographics

Participants taught in a variety of school types and sizes, including those in the independent sector and single-sex schools. Some taught in Christian schools. However, schools with an alternative religious character or ethos to Christianity were not represented in this sample. This representation is reflective of the national picture where non-Christian faith schools remain in the minority, constituting less than 1% of all state-funded mainstream schools (Long & Danechi, 2019, p. 17). In terms of choice of examination board, a large proportion of participants taught AQA Religious Studies Specification A at GCSE. This too is unsurprising given its popularity.

45%[59] of all pupils entered into a GCSE Religious Studies full-course single-award examination in June 2020 sat AQA Religious Studies Specification A assessment papers (AQA, 2020, p. 6; Ofqual, 2020); more than any other examination specification.

Whilst not an in-depth quantitative analysis, the important demographic observations above enable a broad perspective of participants and their teaching settings. In keeping with IPA and its philosophical influences, an integral part of the analytic process is the iterative, dynamic, and cyclical switching between the 'part' and the 'whole'; forming the hermeneutic circle (or cycle). A new or different understanding of the whole is developed and influenced by an in-depth interpretation of the part(s). In turn, a fuller understanding of the whole in its context, gives greater understanding and interpretation of the parts. This oscillation between part and whole occurs on a number of different levels. Accordingly, the overarching demographical portrait of the cohort was beneficial to help me see at a glance the external frameworks which may (or may not) have influenced the participants' unique experience of a phenomenon within their context. In this way, the demographics did not determine whether participants were representative of a target population (as is of concern in other methodologies), but rather they affirmed the selection of the purposeful homogenous sample in representing a particular perspective (Smith et al., 2009, p. 49).

However, while demographical insights were valuable in incorporating the broadest boundaries of the 'whole', the 'part' could not be fully distinguished in the same way. For, each participant was an embodied individual; immersed in complex stories, motivations, purposes, relationships, beliefs, and emotions, and embedded in culture, language, environment and societal structures; a distinct and yet integrated entity with the world and others. Therefore, the unique positionality of each participant was best communicated from an insider perspective. Accordingly, the following brief biographies give a background to participants' experiences of teaching abortion. The information was offered by participants themselves, usually within the introductory sections of the interviews. In a similar manner to above, participants' anonymity was safeguarded by giving them pseudonyms and altering key identifiable details.

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[59] 112,824 of 248,340 entries

5.2. Participant Biographies

5.2.1. Annabel

Annabel has worked at her Catholic school since she was a Newly Qualified Teacher with no breaks in employment. Annabel was in her early thirties at the time of the interview. She is the deputy Head of Department for the school's Religious Studies department, and she is also the Head of Department for PHSE which the school names 'Personal Development and Citizenship'. She teaches RS across the entire range of the school, from year 7 through to sixth form but has particular responsibility for several GCSE classes. Religious Studies is a compulsory subject across all Key Stages, and abortion is a topic covered in Year 10. GCSE is taught over three years and the chosen religions are Christianity and Islam. Annabel considers herself to be a practising Catholic and identifies with many of the core beliefs and teachings of the church. One of the things she loves about teaching RS in a Catholic school is that the subject is valued highly and seen as one of the most important parts of the curriculum.

5.2.2. Bethany

Bethany has also taught in the same school since completing her Initial Teacher Education. She has taken two breaks out of teaching for a year each on maternity leave. Bethany was in her late thirties at the time of interview. Bethany teaches at a school of religious character with Church of England affiliation. She considers herself to be a practising Christian and also has the role of coordinating her school's Corporate Worship. Religious Education is compulsory across all Key Stages and so all registered pupils study a full GCSE RS across years 10 and 11. Students study Christianity and Islam. Classes at GCSE are set according to ability with one high ability, one low ability, and three middle ability groups in each year. Bethany's school employed a new Head of Department for RE two years ago who brought in a new syllabus (AQA A). Bethany teaches both higher ability classes, and several middle ability groups; all of which she enjoys. Abortion is taught at the start of Year 11.

5.2.3. Clara

Clara has been teaching consistently in the same school since qualifying, three years ago. Clara considers herself to have a humanist worldview and was in her mid-thirties at the time of interview. RE sits within the school's Humanities 'stream', where teaching staff often teach

more than one subject. Clara initially trained as a Geography teacher. Her teaching load now includes Key Stage 3 Geography and GCSE RS, in addition to her role as Head of PSHE. GCSE RS is currently taken as an optional subject, with a relatively small cohort each year (usually between 10-16 pupils) sitting the Eduqas A syllabus. The two religions studied in detail are Christianity and Islam. Other Key Stage 4 students take one class of non-GCSE RS per fortnight, which Clara helps to oversee, but does not teach. Clara's school has recently undergone some changes with the employment of a new Headteacher. Abortion is taught as a topic in the spring term of year 10.

5.2.4. Dariya

Dariya commenced her employment in a rural independent boys' school with a Christian ethos at the start of the year in which the interview was conducted. Before this employment, she worked in an inner-city state school. Within the school, the subject is branded as 'Philosophy and Ethics' and is studied at every Key Stage, although RS can be taken as a GCSE option in year 10 and 11. The subject is exceptionally popular with a large majority of pupils choosing to sit the AQA A examination. The two religions of study are Christianity and Islam. Dariya teaches all examination classes and has additional responsibilities in the form of Safeguarding Lead. Dariya considers herself to be a practising Hindu. She was in her mid-thirties when the interview was conducted and has one young child.

5.2.5. Ella

Ella is the Head of Department for RE in a semi-rural school, where she has taught for the past eight years. Up until the year in which the interview was conducted, Ella had been working full time. However, she has recently reduced her to part time to be able to spend time with her young child. Ella undertook Initial Teacher Education later in life, having previously worked in IT. She was in her early forties at the time of interview and considers herself not to hold a specific religious position. RE in Ella's school is timetabled at every key stage, with GCSE RS as an optional subject. Given the size of the school, there is a relatively low uptake of the subject with around 12 or 13 sitting Eduqas A examinations each year. Student study primarily Christianity and Buddhism. Ella teaches the GCSE classes as well as some of the 'Core' (non-examination) classes across KS3 and 4. Abortion is taught in year 10. Before beginning her career as a teacher, Ella had a first-trimester termination.

5.2.6. Freya

Freya has been a teacher for around 15 years and worked in several different schools throughout her career. Freya has been employed in her current role as 'Teacher of RE' for seven years and works within a large department of ten staff (many of whom have other responsibilities). Freya does not consider herself to be religious and was in her late forties at the time of interview. RS is a compulsory GCSE subject for all students and Freya's school is currently in the process of 'teaching out' the GCSE RS short course. The year 11s at the time of interview will be the last cohort to sit the short course examination, and the subsequent cohort will sit full Edexcel Spec B papers. Students study Christianity and Islam in detail. The subject of abortion is taught towards the end of year 11. During her first year of university, before training to be a teacher, Freya had a first-trimester abortion.

5.2.7. Grace

Grace has taught RE for 24 years, in three different schools. She has worked in her current Independent girls' school for 12 years, where she works within a staff team of four. Previously, she worked at co-educational state-maintained schools. Grace works as a teacher of RE, but also has additional responsibilities as an Assistant Headteacher of the school; a position she is relatively new to, having occupied the role two years before the time of interview. RS is an optional subject at GCSE but is well received. The course is studied over year 10 and 11 with most students opting to choose the subject. Students sit AQA Spec A and study Christian and Sikhism in detail. Grace is in her late forties and has two teenage children. She considers herself a feminist with no specific religious affiliation. Abortion is studied at the start of Year 10.

5.2.8. Holly

Holly undertook her teacher training as a second career, having worked in local government prior to teaching. Holly has occupied her role as 'RE teacher' at her school since beginning there as a Newly Qualified Teacher. Holly initially trained as a history teacher before teaching more and more RE over time. She now teaches RE exclusively. GCSE RS is an optional subject at Holly's school, with around half of the students choosing to take the subject. Students study the AQA A specification over two years and primarily study Christianity and Islam. Abortion is

studied in the latter part of year 10. Several years ago, Holly's school underwent conversion to an Academy and had substantial staff changes. Holly was in her early fifties at the time of interview and has two children who are in their late teens and early twenties.

5.2.9. Isabelle

Isabelle is a Newly Qualified Teacher in her mid-thirties, having started her role as RE Teacher in a large boys' academy school at the start of the academic year in which the interview was conducted. Prior to teaching, Isabelle worked as a housemistress in a private boarding school. RE is highly regarded throughout the school and is given substantial curriculum time at all Key Stages. GCSE RS is an optional subject, and the school normally has two classes of around 20 who sit the OCR examination each year. Students cover Christianity and Islam as the main religions of study. Isabelle works as part of a small department with 2 teachers who teach the subject exclusively, the remaining teaching is covered by non-subject specialists. Abortion is covered at the very start of the GCSE course in year 10.

5.2.10. Josie

Josie is the curriculum lead for RE in a mixed community school where she has worked for 11 years since qualifying as a teacher. She has occupied her current position for the past three years and works as part of a large team of subject-specialists. Josie's school has recently switched from compulsory GCSE RS to a model of optional GCSE RS and 'core RE' for non-examination KS4 students. Around half of students take up GCSE RS where they study Christianity and Buddhism as their main religions. Abortion is studied in year 11 of the AQA A Specification. Josie was in her early forties at the time of interview and has three young children.

5.3. Reflexivity and Researcher Positionality

On a different level, the notion of the hermeneutic cycle applied equally to the dynamics of my preconceptions as part of the analytic process (Smith et al., 2009, p. 35). In interpreting a participant's narrative, I became increasingly aware of my own presuppositions, influences, motivations, assumptions and judgements as a 'whole'. In so doing, I attempted to acknowledge and recognise these influences and their potential impact upon interpretation; 'bracketing' them to focus on the participant. Sometimes I achieved bracketing 'in the moment' through the

internal processes of self-reflection, whereas at other times this was assisted through the use of journaling and note-writing. The encounter with the participant in the interviews as 'part' inevitably changed me as a whole – adding new dimensions to my knowledge and presuppositions. The bracketing process continued and was revisited throughout the analysis in a cyclical manner, especially given that I was not always aware of these 'fore-conceptions' until I engaged in interviewing or in studying the transcription (Smith et al., 2009, p. 25). Thus, my aim was to not try and eliminate bias or remain objective, but to carefully consider and frequently reconsider my relationship to the analysis, the participant(s) and the project throughout the course of my analysis (Cassidy et al., 2011, p. 166).

5.3.1. Use of Journals

To facilitate this iterative process of reflexivity, I kept a reflective journal. The use of a journal as a tool in qualitative phenomenological research is well established. For example, keeping a journal: enables active and meaningful learning (Thorpe, 2004); allows the researcher to capture an initial response to the interviews in order to facilitate analysis (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008, p. 217); helps in goal setting (van Manen, 2016, p. 73); provides a private and safe space in which the researcher can consider one's *being-in-the-world* and dialogue with themselves (Frechette et al., 2020, p. 6); can be used in conjunction with supervision to help minimise the effects of bias and presuppositions during the analysis (Love et al., 2019, p. 7); and helps to contribute to the quality and validity of a study (Vicary et al., 2017).

Throughout the project, the journal formed the basis of recording my key thoughts outside of the 'on text' analysis of the transcripts. Entries into the journal had no formal structure or formula but were made regularly, sometimes multiple times a day. The journal recorded reflections both before and after interviews, consolidated relevant notes on literature, allowed me to pose questions (of myself and the data) throughout the analytic process, tracked my developing thought processes, and captured insights that came whilst listening repeatedly to the audio recordings of interviews (often whilst out running!) in order to get as close to the data as possible. The journal also laid the foundations of the evaluative chapter situated at the end of the thesis (see Chapter 9)

At the commencement of the analysis (before interviewing began), the journal also provided the space to take stock of my positionality which I then revisited and built upon throughout

continuous self-evaluation. Using Ahern's (1999) reflexive 'preparation' questions as a basis, the extract below is a combination of several early journal entries[60] which were useful in encapsulating and outlining my personal relevance of the research, and in reflecting on my position towards and within the project.

5.3.2. Exploring The Position of and Influences Upon the Researcher: Journal Extracts

Journal entry 27 – 5th November 2020

The topic of abortion, and its relationship to secondary education is of personal relevance to me in a few different ways. I feel a great affinity towards teaching, having begun my career as a secondary RE teacher, working in several school contexts. I found teaching incredibly rewarding and incredibly hard all at the same time. There were aspects of my subject knowledge that I felt well equipped to tackle, and some that I was less sure about. Abortion (and medical ethics more generally) was one of those areas – feeling under-resourced and under-equipped to do the topic(s) justice. So much so that later on in my career, it would become the motivation for me to undertake an MA in Bioethics and Medical Law… There are several things to ponder here – firstly, that I now consider myself, to a certain degree, to be an expert in bioethical and legal debates surrounding abortion. Secondly, that being an ex-'insider', my experience may well overlap with participants' experiences, and yet they might be completely distinct. Both of the above will need developing and reflecting upon throughout the project.

Journal entry 33 – 2nd December 2020

I reflect upon the particular time in which I am researching: the middle of a global pandemic. I'm sure that much will be written in the years to come about the impact of Covid on both teachers and researchers but for now it is worth exploring briefly some of my concerns and attitudes towards my research. These times have been challenging in different ways. It goes without saying that this was not the way in which I anticipated writing my PhD; in social isolation and away from the support structures that would normally form a part of the Postgraduate Researcher's journey. Much of my mental energy is taken up in 'survival' mode and writing has, at times, been a real slog... My attitude towards my thesis has often been one of frustration and feeling overwhelmed. There is a constant background anxiety that seems to be underpinning all things currently... It is my perception that teachers too will be feeling

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[60] Hence, its first person, present tense and more relaxed tone

considerably overwhelmed. Although I hope to be pleasantly surprised, I expect recruitment to be hard work, and the time and capacity of potential participants in sharing their experiences to be limited. I am also aware of my own worries about providing a suitable online environment in which fruitful conversation with interviewees can take place, especially whilst my children are doing home learning and there is a danger that they might burst in!… My internal dialogue around my research is often self-critical and negative with Imposter Syndrome looming large. I am conscious to recognise these things – I'll need to unpick further the reasons for these attitudes and consider them carefully going forward – in what ways can I attempt to mitigate these concerns both practically and emotionally?

Journal entry 38 – 15th December 2020

I take here stock of my personal value systems and their potential to influence my approaches to the analysis. One, if not the most, life-defining aspect of my being is my evangelical Christian faith and membership of the church – something that is fundamental to my motivations, actions, thoughts, lifestyle and outlook, and for which I make no apology… It is therefore worth acknowledging my leanings in line with orthodoxy towards arguments that favour life and flourishing from its earliest forms. However, this is also a position that holds significant internal tension for me and one that, as a woman, I have wrestled with for many years and continue to do so.

My own experiences of starting a family also play a part in my interest in the topic of abortion. It's taken some time to be able to write these sentences in vulnerability, but I do so recognising that they have become an inextricable part of my own story and bear upon my approaches to reproductive ethics. I have never experienced an abortion. I have however, experienced many years of fertility treatment and a significant amount of reproductive loss in the time prior to and between the birth of my two living children – some of which occurred whilst I was teaching abortion at GCSE. One of my pregnancies included the recommendation (yet decline) of a selective reduction of multifetal pregnancy. Additionally, a number of these instances of reproductive loss were traumatic, requiring emergency medical intervention. I say all this not because I can identify completely with someone who undergoes an abortion (that belongs to the individual alone) but as a way of reminding myself that a woman's experience of reproductive loss in any form is complex and not easily simplified. I am aware of this 'messiness' going into the interviews, both in managing my own emotional responses, and in drawing out the responses of participants for whom this may or may not have affected directly.

5.4. Setting Out the Analysis

The analytic process has already been described in detail in section 4.6. The remainder of the thesis addresses this analysis before providing an evaluative discussion of the project in section 9. It is, therefore, beneficial to set out pragmatically how the nature and form of the analysis will be discussed in the three chapters that follow. Accordingly, this section justifies the selection of particular extracts and themes. It outlines the top-level or superordinate themes and explains how they will be explored in each subsequent individual chapter. It also defends a rationale for engaging with further literature at the end of each of the three chapters. Finally, it describes the relevant notation used throughout the extracts and their reference to the transcripts.

5.5. Recording The Analysis: Structural Considerations

The methodological basis for the data analysis has already been addressed in Chapter 4 of this thesis. Following an extensive period of analysis, super-ordinate or top-level themes were identified. The process of analysis was time intensive. Smith et al. (2009) make a conservative estimate that a full-scale analysis of three cases may take up to two months of full-time work. However, with ten participants involved in this study, the time for analysis increased exponentially and took approximately seven months of full-time work from January-June 2021 in line with the proposed schedule of timing (see Appendix J)

One of the main challenges I faced was deciding which themes should be prioritised and on what basis. I decided that for a theme to be classified as overarching or super-ordinate (hence appearing on the 'top level' table) it should occur on at least a third, or three, of the transcripts. However, whilst the identification of prevalence or recurrence across cases was important, it was not the only factor. I also considered the duration and intensity that participants placed on each of the themes, thus, further giving precedence to the expertise of the participant as the author of their own experience and focussing only on what is of value and significance to them. Finally, I also contemplated emerging themes in relation to the research aims and questions, and their comprehensiveness in encapsulating the overall experiences of participants as individuals and as a cohort.

By the end of the analysis, I had developed three top-level or overarching themes which are presented in detail in subsequent chapters. Chapters 6, 7, and 8 explore each one of these overarching themes in turn. Within each chapter, I also included a discussion of a number of subthemes; important distinct yet related motifs that displayed the diversity and dimensions of the theme. Subthemes were developed from the data itself, with no predefined or expected number. Accordingly, some top-level themes contained fewer sub-themes than others, reflecting their prevalence and strength within the theme. In order to capture the essential qualities of participants' experience and its significance to those being interviewed, I used a representative quotation to name theme and subthemes titles. The quotation aimed to be both illustrative and characteristic of the substance of the theme or subtheme and demonstrated my commitment to maintaining a close proximity to the transcripts. The overarching themes, subthemes and their positioning within the thesis' chapter structure are summarised in the table below:

	Theme	Subthemes
Chapter 6	*'You're in that actress/ actor situation':* Teaching as persona	*'I'm really conscious':* Self-awareness of personal worldview and its impact
		'There are limits, aren't there?': Professional boundaries
		"*It's like a secret experience':* Teacher's hidden worldview
Chapter 7	*'it's for their life once they leave':* Skills development and lifelong learning	*'I have to get them to think in shades of grey':* Helping pupils understand complexity and nuance
		'Where is the human in this story?': Developing emotional intelligence
		'it's so important that they learn most of their life skills through your subject': Skills development 'beyond the classroom'
Chapter 8	*'you're trying your best':* Classroom dynamics and flourishing	*'You're trying to create an environment where they feel valued':* Cultivating trust and relationships
		'Pupils need to be listened to and have to be heard': Authenticity and honesty in the classroom
		'You're having essentially an academic debate': Distancing and impartiality
		'This is the place to try and figure it out': Expressing an opinion as learning

Table 4: Table of Top-Level Themes

5.6. Representation of Participants in Themes

IPA does not necessitate that each participant is represented within each superordinate or subtheme. Instead, as an essential part of the analysis, I investigated the convergence and divergence between participants in keeping with idiographic nature of the participant's experience. Therefore, it was important that when I looked at the analysis as a whole, each

participant was represented in some capacity. In reality, I found exceedingly strong support for each of the superordinate themes which represented nine, ten, and ten participants respectively. For subthemes, there was a varying degree of support. At either end of the spectrum, one subtheme ('You're having essentially an academic debate': distancing and impartiality) represented the greatest number of participants (9), whereas another subtheme ('Where is the human in this story?': Developing emotional intelligence) was represented by five participants.

In order to establish a definitive list of themes and subthemes, I had to revisit the groupings several times throughout the analysis. I developed the thematic structure (shown in the Table 4 above) from the bottom up, with subthemes being clustered first before the super-ordinate themes were compiled. Several of the subthemes materialised later in the process. Consistent with the iterative nature of IPA, I then reviewed earlier transcripts in light of themes that subsequently emerged (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 75). Once all of the interviews had been conducted and themes began to emerge, I revisited each of the transcripts to identify further instances relating to each theme which were included in ongoing analysis.

At the beginning of each analysis chapter is located a master table of all of the subthemes within the group, detailing the participants they represented and the corresponding key extracts relating to each participant. Although some subthemes were more prominent amongst certain participants than others (and their prominence is discussed within the analysis), the table provides both myself and the reader with a guide to the selected extracts of each participant's transcript that relate to each subtheme. It seemed impractical to quote and discuss every single occurrence of a particular subtheme across all participants. Therefore, I selected transcript extracts either because they best reflected the theme in question, or because they demonstrated a significant variance or unity with other extracts, or because they provided a suitable opportunity for rich insight. Further, I also included a similar number of extracts from each participant, where relevant, in order to maintain a level of parity throughout the discussion.

5.7. Interrelationship of Themes

Though the themes and subthemes in each of the analysis chapters were presented separately, there was inevitably some overlap and interrelationship between them. During the analysis when the thematic structure was emerging, I found several extracts to be equally pertinent or fitting to more than one sub-theme, mainly because the participant's narrative touched upon more

than one theme concurrently. In these instances, I included the extracts in the theme that appeared to be most dominant in the narrative, in the theme where its position provided a more informative or fuller analysis, or where the extract helped to distribute the representation of participants across themes. This approach also prevented me from becoming over-reliant on a small number of extracts and helped me to engage with the breadth as well as the depth of participants' experiences.

5.8. Notation

As mentioned previously, a central part of my analysis was a line-by-line examination of each participant's transcript. However, when extracts were used throughout the writing, I referenced them according to their timestamp. Although perhaps not usual practice in IPA studies[61], I felt my decision was justified on two bases. First, denoting an extract by its time helped me to better situate it within the overarching narrative of the interview. Noting the time that an extract was spoken enabled me to remember the conversation more acutely. I was able to recall to mind the specific parts of the interview along with their direction, context, poignancy and emotional atmosphere, in a way that line numbers would not. Second, I found that timestamps served as a useful reminder to consider the continuity of the extract (the 'part', again) within the context of the whole. References to time rather than to individual lines helped me to preserve the organic nature of the conversation without imposing an outside, or artificial structure. Phenomenological hermeneutics relies on the foundational notion or obligation of understanding the text within its context in order to bring forth interpretations of meaning (Laverty, 2003, p. 30). Therefore, I was able maintain a sense of 'situatedness' and fusion of the text and its context by using timestamps. In light of this, wherever extracts are cited directly, the following notation is used: (*First letter of participant's first name*, Timestamp). For example: (*A,* 29:10)

5.9. Transcription Guide

I used a semantic transcription schema, with a specific focus on the meaning of accounts rather than exhaustive prosodic or paralinguistic features. Filler words such as 'umm' or 'yeah' were

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[61] However, timestamping is more commonplace in other general qualitative studies, especially those using qualitative data analysis software such as NVivo or MAXQDA.

included, where relevant. Where participants mispronounced words, I corrected the spellings in the transcripts, except where a different or shortened form of the word was used (for example, 'cos instead of because). Finally, I expanded initialisms or acronyms in full after the first instance, where the meaning may be ambiguous. Those that have previously occurred in the writing of the thesis (for example: GCSE, RE, RS, AQA, OCR etc.) have been left in their initialised state. A guide to the notation used within extracts is found in the table below.

Notation	Description
[laughs]	Expressional or non-verbal utterances
<u>underlined</u>	Emphasised or stressed speech expressions
–interjection–	Interjections or interruptions
<unclear>	Omitted words or internet instabilities during online interview
…	Short pauses
… (duration in seconds)	Longer pauses
[clarification]	Word added to provide further clarification or the object of the sentence

Table 5: Transcription Notation

5.10. Engagement with Extant Literature

It is widely accepted that phenomenological research projects (and most research, more generally) contain one or more 'discussion' chapter(s) or sections. Ordinarily, the aim of such a section is to critically examine findings in light of extant literature and theory. It synthesises the research, contextualises it in dialogue with relevant scholarship and moves it along the journey toward application, implication, or areas for further research (Peoples, 2020, p. 75). For the IPA researcher, two broad strategies for presentation exist. Either, a 'results' section can detail the analysis of emergent themes together in their entirety. The results section is then followed by a separate 'discussion' section that adequately engages with the literature relating to all themes. Alternatively, each superordinate theme can be addressed in turn with a single and combined 'results and discussion' chapter (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 76).

Although each approach has relative benefits, I selected the second strategy of combining 'analysis plus discussion' into a single chapter per superordinate theme in order to avoid truncation and maintain a sense of continuity. Accordingly, Chapters 6,7, and 8 of the thesis are larger and more substantive in nature. Within each of these chapters, I present the analysis is

first as a discrete section. Subsequently, I focus on a more concentrated discussion of each superordinate theme which connects the analysis with existing literature and shifts the focus towards the wider context of "complementing, illuminating, or problematising" (Frost, 2021, p. 76) alternative perspectives as found outside of the research.

One of the most unique and exciting parts of the IPA study is that themes emerge throughout the analysis that are not anticipated by either the interview schedule or the exploration of initial literature (Smith et al., 2009, p. 113). As a result, I explored and engaged with new literature directly related to the emergence of unforeseen themes. Therefore, the discussion subsections of each of the chapters include opportunities not only to illuminate and build upon the preliminary literature reviews, but also to reconsider findings in the context of selected further scholarship.

5.11. Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of the analytic process. It began by outlining the demographics of the participants, followed by their brief biographies. Next, it explored the concept of reflexivity and research positionality. Finally, it described the development, recording and representation of the analysis and detailed the processes of notation and transcription.

6. Findings and Discussion 1: 'You're in That Actress/Actor Situation': Teaching as Persona

This chapter explores the different ways in which participants talked about their role as a teacher who adopts a particular persona or character in the classroom. The meaning of such an 'acting' role for participants was shaped and influenced by various contexts including; their teaching philosophy, school environment, previous experiences, relationships to the pupils, pedagogy, self-awareness and reflective practice. The findings relating to the three main subthemes which are discussed in this chapter are detailed and presented in table 6. The first subtheme was drawn from participants' verbalisation of their internal reflections about their teaching practice, character and values, in addition to the potential impact of these upon others. The second subtheme seats the locus of these reflections within the bounds of professional responsibilities which include upholding the vocational and ethical standards of those who work in the public sector and are responsible for young people's educational development. Lastly, the third subtheme discusses the hidden worldview of the teachers and the holding back or separation of participants' 'true' or authentic self in order to adopt the 'teaching' self (or actor).

Theme	Subtheme	Extract	Participant	Time(s)
You're in that actress, actor situation: Teaching as persona	'I'm really conscious': Self-awareness of worldview (7/10 Participants)	'I spend a lot of time thinking about my story and when it might impact people'	Bethany	42:39, 50:30
		'How much of my own ethics am I putting into the lesson?'	Clara	06:37, 16:14, 69:03
		'I'm aware that I probably approach it in a certain way'	Ella	27:22, 31:51
		'You're in that kind of persona, you're in that actress actor situation'	Freya	30:36
		'I'm very aware that I might have an impact on them'	Grace	08:40, 13:27, 51:23
		I feel like I need to 'speak up'… but I don't want that to be too much	Isabelle	06:40
		'I really watch what I say and think about how I am in the classroom'	Josie	08:40, 64:32
	'There are limits, aren't there?': Professional Boundaries (7/10 Participants)	'I'm their teacher at the end of the day'	Annabel	08:01
		'If you share nothing of yourself, you're a bit robotic'	Clara	18:35
		'I'm their teacher, I'm certainly not their friend'	Dariya	15:02, 17:31
		'There are limits aren't there? There are things you don't need to share'	Ella	34:23, 37:42
		'It's clear where the boundaries are'	Freya	06:10
		'You have to be extra careful in situations like abortion, you know… the rumour mill starts'	Isabelle	09:10, 33:50
		'I'm careful to be professional'	Josie	40:40, 44:11
	'It's like a secret experience': Teachers' hidden worldview (7/10 Participants)	'I guess I hide my personal viewpoint from students, but it influences the way in which I teach it'	Annabel	31:08
		'I guess I'm trying to get that across to the, but they don't know it's what I think'	Clara	33:17
		'My experiences are my own, and their special, and I don't want them to know about them'	Dariya	13:17
		'Sometimes, maybe, when I'm teaching, I'm trying to convince students, or myself, that I made the right decision	Ella	33:33
		'Obviously they don't know so, it's like a secret experience'	Freya	31:54, 43:09
		'It's real and it matters, but they just don't know who its real or who it matters to'	Isabelle	16:19, 18:10
		'Maybe we're doing them a slight disservice… perpetuating some sort of myth'	Josie	41:44

Table 6: Table of Themes - Teaching as Persona

6.1. 'I'm Really Conscious': Self-Awareness of Worldview

Participants described both positive and negative aspects of teaching abortion, and frequently spoke of the two alongside each other. However, several made the association that teaching sensitive or controversial topics necessitated a greater amount of care in their behaviour towards pupils. There was a sense of the weighty nature of the topic and the potential impact of participants' teaching on students. Accordingly, because of the extra sensitivity, participants talked in depth about their self-awareness: being conscious that they occupied a particular position (in terms of beliefs, and within the social ecosystem of the class); that this position could influence others' thinking and behaviour; and that in light of this, there was a need for teaching practice to be carefully adapted. Participants' awareness of a potential impact on students was not only attributed to the material that teachers chose to cover, but also to the delivery of the same. Grace, for example, articulated the direct link between her teaching practice and her awareness of its potential impact on those she taught:

> And I think that's what I'm very conscious of, in my, in what I'm teaching, particularly with ethical themes, and controversial themes, I'm very aware of the role I am playing in their own sort of views and lives. And, you know, a lot of them may not care about it, actually, at all. And they might leave and never think about it again. But I'm very aware that I have an impact on them… It's a responsibility but also a privilege. (Grace 51:23)

Grace's perception of the impact of her actions was definitive as opposed to speculative, speaking in terms of the role 'that I am playing' as opposed to one that she might or should play. From this perspective, rather than being something hypothetical, teaching abortion exemplified the real-world effect of the teacher upon the young person in their ability to form and shape the views, opinions and thoughts of others. For Grace at least, her teaching role and associated responsibility were framed positively, as a privilege. Nevertheless, such responsibility was undertaken with proper consideration and concern, being mindful of the power dynamics at play and the need to tread carefully.

Others described a similar experience but incorporated the notion that their self-awareness was shaped by perspectives drawn directly from a broader sense of identity and connection to a shared humanity. Bethany's narrative, for example, started in the plural demonstrating her attentiveness to the interconnectedness of all human relationships and the ability for any one agent to affect another:

…we're all human, we've all got threads to our story. And actually, the more that we can understand our own stories for ourselves, the better we will be. I think I spend a lot of time thinking about my story and when it might impact people [in my class]. (Bethany 51:15)

However, in this context, the self-understanding of all of the facets of her story (the 'threads') had significant impact on Bethany's teaching practice. The increasing consciousness of one's personal worldview was equated with human flourishing and continuous development. This consciousness framed the move towards introspection and the evaluation of the impact of teachers' belief systems upon others as a key characteristic of reflective practice in the area of abortion.

For others, however, the expression of the link between the outworking of beliefs (in the form of behaviour) and the impact on those in their class was construed negatively. Specifically, the warning that a teacher's actions in teaching abortion could be potentially detrimental to students. The scope and nature of these possible negative consequences were described multifariously. Some, like Clara, talked about abortion being a topic that caused a level of apprehension or anxiety because of the probability of doing 'harm' in its broadest forms:

There is real potential for topics like medical ethics to do our kids harm or to spread misinformation or you know. I just, it worries me a lot. (Clara 69:03)

Although 'harm' here was unspecified and general, its association with the more specific notion of misinformation highlighted some of the particular tensions that participants might face. When tackling the topic of abortion, Clara's narrative indicated that a teacher must navigate distortion appropriately. The teacher was required to present religious belief systems accurately and coherently, without disinformation. However, they should also confront how some religions have portrayed the abortion debate to mitigate misunderstandings among the student body.

Similarly, Josie mentioned the potential for harm when teaching the topic, although in a stronger manner than Clara:

You can do untold damage, if you set a foot wrong when you're talking about things like abortion. There's a skill to it. (Josie 64:32)

There was a sense of the gravity of teaching abortion in Josie's experience, and a healthy respect and wariness of the subject confronted. The inference from Josie's comment was that such a complex topic necessitated a certain level of expertise or training (which she possesses), and therefore the teaching should not be left to non-specialists, as is often the case with RE.

Others, however, talked about more specific implications of getting it wrong, particularly in relation to those in their classes who have either had an abortion, or may face a situation where they contemplate a termination in the future. Again, these implications further compounded the sense of responsibility that the teacher faces in helping to shape and prepare young people for a real and potentially traumatic situation that they will likely encounter in one form or another. Bethany, for example, made clear associations between considering and adapting her actions and reactions and those who might face an abortion scenario:

> *I guess I take it quite seriously, I'm aware that how I act in my classroom has the potential to do more damage than good – you know, if someone is maybe ever in that position of needing an abortion, so I'm really aware that I come across that I'm that loving person, that accepting person. (Bethany 50:30)*

In such a circumstance, she was keen to present herself in a specific manner; displaying the positive values that she both possessed and regarded highly in order to support pupils. Grace adopted a similar future-focussed position in desiring to equip students for potential encounters with abortion by providing comprehensive teaching material:

> *So, I need to teach really carefully. I want to give them all the information because it might affect how they feel about abortion (Grace 13:27).*

It is an important aspect of Grace's statement that it was the RE teacher that took upon a concern for preparing pupils in matters of sexual health (in contrast to say, the PSHE teacher). Although some of the women in the cohort, for example, Annabel and Clara[62] had PSHE responsibilities in addition to their RE teaching role, this finding brought to light some of the tensions that participants faced in navigating a controversial topic with concrete and practical implications.

Josie's articulation of the same sub-theme was equally interesting. There was convergence with the previous accounts above in demonstrating self-awareness concerning those who may face

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[62] See Table 2 in Section 5.1

an abortion scenario. However, her account differed by encapsulating a feeling of disbelief, or internal agitation about what might occur in the lives of pupils outside of the classroom:

> *Clearly, logically, I've been talking to children who've had abortions, but it didn't seem right. I'm so conscious that I am teaching children who had abortions… children who have had abortions… like they're not adults, they're not grown up yet. And so, I really watch what I say and think about how I am in the classroom. (Josie 08:40)*

From Josie's perspective, she had conceptualised those whom she teaches as 'children', although she didn't unpack why this was the case. Nevertheless, the notion of abortion was incongruous with her conceptualisation, instead she chose to seat abortion as something that happened to those who had sufficient maturity. As a result, her experience of teaching abortion to those who may well have had a termination was one of cognitive dissonance and unease.

Others talked about their self-awareness not only in terms of the impact of their behaviour, but also in terms of the impact of the vocalisation of their own personal beliefs. Ella and Grace's accounts, for example, explained parallel experiences:

> *I think I'm really conscious that I am very much pro-choice. And I think I am on the liberal end of that spectrum, and I don't want that to affect the kids too much. (Ella 27:22)*

> *With my personal views on abortion, I think I'm very, very conscious of the fact that I am pro-choice and feminist about it, so I have to be mindful of viewpoint and not let it affect them [the students]. (Grace 08:40)*

These extracts exemplified a disparity between participants' perception of their own sense of self, in which beliefs about abortion were mainly fixed and clear, and those of the pupils, where beliefs about abortion were seen as more fluid and malleable.[63] However, participants also recognised that their views towards abortion did not appear *ex nihilo but* were undoubtedly shaped by their unique and complex experiences, backgrounds, and contexts.

For example, both Freya and Ella spoke of their own previous experiences of termination in contributing to the formation of their views on the topic. Ella, in the quotation below,

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[63] Although see Section 7.1 where some participants felt that students' views were initially more fixed, and it was therefore their role to help them to view thing in 'shades of grey'

mentioned specifically that her termination 'colours her thinking'; an interesting phrase to use given its normal sense in conveying a negative distortion of one's views. However, in light of the further unpacking of the phrase in the latter part of the extract, the interpretation allowed for a more nuanced way of describing her self-awareness. Her experience of self-awareness in this area consisted of two parts. First, the awareness of the fact that her previous termination had an impact on her perceptions and feelings towards the topic. Then second, the awareness that those feelings and perceptions influenced her classroom practice:

> *I think I mean, what also kind of colours my thinking is that I had a termination. So, I think that must play a part, because I think that that experience then kind of influences my perception of the topic and I'm aware that I probably approach it in a certain way.* (Ella 31:51)

The exacting nature of the changes in teaching behaviour as a result of participants' self-reflection was varied among those who described such an experience. However, most talked of restraining or holding back a certain part of their conduct. For some, restraint was very pragmatic, involving the restriction of one specific action. Bethany and Grace's experiences, for example, exemplified this pragmatism:

> *I try my best not to show a reaction, regardless of what I might agree or disagree with (Bethany 42:39)*

> *I'm mindful in terms of the language I use, I try not to say certain things (Grace, 14:02)*

However, for others, the concept was more metaphysical, moving away from a restriction of certain elements of practice towards a restriction of the 'self', or, at least, the conception of self as the identity that held most internal consistency. Freya's narrative, which formed the title statement for this subtheme encapsulated the metaphysical interpretation:

> *I think when I'm teaching [abortion] the kids don't get the real me. You kind of take a step back from yourself because you're in that kind of persona, you're in that actress/actor situation (Freya 30:36)*

In this particular case, the restriction of the true self-involved not allowing others to see, hear, or experience what they considered to be the most authentic version of the participant's being. The idea of the hidden self is explored more fully in section 6.3. However, it is important to note that this dissociation from the true self was neither static nor an end in and of itself. Instead,

it required an inhabitation of a different or new identity or persona; in this case the 'teaching' persona. The teacher, in a very real sense, became an actor or a character in the world of the classroom. This provided a suitable and effective two-way barrier. The intention of the teacher was that students were protected from unintentional harm due to poor handling of the topic, or undue influence from someone who too strongly articulates their own or a one-sided view. Additionally, adopting an acting position put an appropriate measure of distance in place between teacher and student that protected the teacher from any distress or discomfort occurring as a result of confronting a highly sensitive (and personal) topic.

Overall, this subtheme demonstrates the extent to which self-awareness and the cyclical process of reflective practice play a crucial part in the experiences of those interviewed. Given the sensitive nature of the topic of abortion, there was a global heightened sense of awareness both in recognising their own particular stances and worldview, and in considering the potential effect of this stance upon students. Participants were very conscious of their own positioning, role, or persona within the classroom and their relationship toward the students as a result. As part of this, participants were also keen to maintain and utilise appropriate professional boundaries. A more thorough discussion of professional boundaries can be found in section 6.2.

6.1.1. Discussion: Reflective Practice and Self-Awareness

The established modern paradigm for ITT and development includes within it an acute focus on self-awareness and reflection. Perhaps the most obvious exemplification of this paradigm is observed in *The Teachers' Standards*, which stress that "appropriate self-evaluation, reflection and professional development activity is critical to improving teachers' practice at all career stages" (DfE, 2011c, p. 7; Massialas et al., 1970). Reflective practice has grown in significance to become a mainstay of initial teacher education (ITE), continued professional development (CPD), and accepted teaching practice. However, its definition is contested. Loughran (2002), for example, notes its different interpretations both between and within disciplines. Similarly, Meierdirk (2016) contends that its meaning has, to some degree, been lost because of its association with competency-based teacher professionalism and tick-box bureaucracy. Nevertheless, there are some aspects of broad consensus. One of the most suitable, encompassing descriptions for our purposes is reflective practice being the "process of learning through and from experiences towards greater insights of self or practice" (Finlay, 2008, p. 1) and yet, such a definition rests on several assumptions.

First, that teachers perceive both the need, value and purpose of engaging in reflective practice. The government's assertation that reflective practice is crucial to improving practice (DfE, 2011c, p. 7) is well-documented elsewhere. For example, reflective practice increases teacher effectiveness by: advancing awareness of group processes and dynamics in the classroom, encouraging innovation; supporting resilience; embedding a culture of continuous improvement; growing independence; helping to evaluate skills; developing and honing strategies; and, expanding the capacity to solve problems, to name but a few (Belvis et al., 2013; Ferreira et al., 2013; Wagner, 2006). For participants in this study, reflective practice seemed an ordinary part of their professional lives. However, it was not solely constrained there. The nature of the conversations during the interviews revealed the inherent intersection between their personal and work activities. Discussions regarding a topic such as abortion involved such intimate explorations that it was not possible to understand reflective practice only in relation to their work as a teacher. In this way, participants saw themselves as reflective *people* (which involved their work) as opposed to reflective practitioners alone; ascribing any benefits to their *personal* development as opposed to just their professional development. In any case, individuals' consent to take part in the study signalled their appreciation of the value of engaging in an activity where self-reflection was paramount. Although disclosure of the exact motivation for participants' involvement was not requested or recorded, the purpose of the study was made clear to potential participants from the outset. They were required to contemplate and talk about their experiences of teaching abortion. In this regard, whatever their motivation, the data gained was from those who relished the opportunity to reflect, at least upon this area of practice.

The second assumption of Finlay's definition is that reflective practice is achievable by those who engage in it. In other words, teachers must, to one degree or another, have the skills and abilities to be able to participate in it. Such skills include self-awareness, description, critical analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (Atkins & Murphy, 1993, pp. 1188-1189). It also relies on the basic requirement that teachers know what reflective practice is, even if only intuitively rather than specifically by name. Nevertheless, "the process of learning through and from experiences" (Finlay, 2008, p. 1) encompasses the ability of an individual to engage, in the first instance, in a form of introspective examination. They take stock of their thoughts, feelings, behaviour, attitudes and actions. However, the focus is not strictly autogenous. As Heidegger (1927, p. 53) notes, human existence as "Being-in-the-world", necessitates activity rather than a static state. One's experience is only properly understood in reference to a pre-existing world of other

entities and interconnectivities (people, objects, relationships, language, and so on). Therefore, reflective practice goes beyond the self in a hermetic sense, and encompasses a critical assessment of the significance of one's environment, power and context (Ryan & Walsh, 2018, p. 2).

Flanagan (2021) highlights the challenges involved in reflexivity without a sufficient understanding of self. She quotes Hammachek (1999, p. 209) who states: "Consciously, we teach what we know; unconsciously we teach who we are". As a result, Flanagan (2021, p. 320) advocates that in helping teachers to understand themselves or their personal worldview, they become "worldview conscious" and thus, better reflective practitioners. Interestingly, understanding oneself has also been a longstanding goal of RE in relation to pupils. For example, the Interpretative Approach to RE advocated by Jackson promotes the centrality of self-awareness for pupils to succeed (Alberts, 2012, p. 147ff). However, more recently, it has received further attention from Ofsted's *Research Review Series: Religious Education* which notes the building of 'personal knowledge' as a key feature of high-quality RE. Personal knowledge recognises that pupils study RE content from a particular position which is influenced by factors such as their "values, prior experiences and own sense of identity" (Ofsted, 2021, Personal Knowledge in RE section). Accordingly, teachers should develop their 'personal knowledge' by increasing pupils' awareness of their presuppositions, assumptions, and positioning. What is true for students, in this case, is also true for teachers in their own reflexivity.

In this study, by providing space for reflection and guiding participants through a series of questions, they were able to think critically, not only about their feelings surrounding teaching abortion but how these connected to other aspects of their experiences. The emphasis of the double hermeneutic in IPA is to make sense of participants as they are making sense of themselves. Through reflection, some processed the deep impact of their own experiences of termination on how they approached the topic of abortion (both in their positioning toward its morality, and in their positioning as to how they approached teaching it). For those who had not experienced a termination, they too were 'worldview conscious': exploring the various aspects of their experiences, contexts, backgrounds, values, beliefs, presuppositions, and assumptions alongside their potential influence on pupils. Consequently, whilst participants displayed an already detailed 'personal knowledge', the interviews provided further opportunity to make sense of their experiences in teaching abortion specifically. Thus, they both employed and developed their skills of self-awareness in the focus of a particular issue.

The final presumption of Finlay's (2008) definition is that reflective practice is, indeed, what its name implies: a reflection related to action, conduct, or behaviour. Schön (1991) distinguishes between 'reflection in action' and 'reflection on action' referring to its occurrence either during or after the event. In this case, participants were required to explore their experiences of teaching abortion in the past, thus conducting 'reflection on action'. For the most part, participants were well-engaged in such a process. They considered their actions and behaviour in a variety of situations and contexts. Further, even when they thought carefully about their standpoints and positioning, they did so in the grander narrative of their potential impact (either positive or negative) on pupils.

However, the reflection *per se* is not an end in itself. By very nature, reflection-on-action guides one to consider what they would do differently or better next time. In its essence, then, it is a process that is intrinsically bound up with change. Through reflecting on past practice, a teacher gains a greater depth of insight and knowledge about themselves and behaviour which, in turn, transforms their future practice. Therefore, as Dewey (1933, p. 133) notes, reflection "enables us to direct our actions with foresight." For this reason, reflexivity is a cyclical or spiralised undertaking, one that moves towards a more continuous process of learning and implementation. Accordingly, most 'models' of reflective practice are recorded and explained as such. For example: Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Cycle; Gibb's (1998) Reflective Cycle; Atkins & Murphy's (1994) model of reflection; Jasper's (2003) Experience-Reflection-Action (ERA) cycle; and Borton's (1980) 'What' framework later developed by Driscoll (2007) and Rolfe (2011), all convey a similar concept of periodic and repetitive stages that must be conducted cyclically.

For these participants, the focus of their reflection was primarily on their past actions. In the interviews, they were not asked directly about any potential plans to change their practice for the future. One of the challenges (and adventures!) of the IPA process is the tension between the temporal dynamics of the participant and the interviewer. The participant, in constructing meaning from the articulation of their experiences, has in mind all of their previous encounters with the issue explored (which, they are either recalling directly, or have indirectly shaped their thinking). On the other hand, the interviewer can only acquire the "in the moment" data that the participant chooses to reveal (McCormack & Joseph, 2018). The interviewer does not have access to the thinking of the participant and so can only interpret what is communicated. As a result, it is likely that participants, upon reflecting on their experiences of teaching abortion,

gained new insight that would have caused them to consider how they might wish to change their practice. However, this consideration of change was not expressed and so is left largely unknown. Consequently, participants' reflections in this instance were not cyclical in nature, and instead formed only part of the process.

6.1.2. Discussion: Teacher Persona and Identity

Considerable work has been undertaken to outline the importance and benefits of teacher identity and its development (see, for example, Day et al., 2007; Freese, 2006; Graham & Phelps, 2002; Hong et al., 2017; Sachs, 2005). However, the concept of teacher identity has been explored in a variety of ways, through different disciplinary lenses, and for a multitude of reasons. Accordingly, teacher identity, as Olsen (2008, p. 4) asserts, "is hard to articulate, easily misunderstood and open to interpretation". Miller (2008, p. 174), also highlights the fluid nature of teachers' identity stating that that such an identity is, "relational, negotiated, constructed, enacted, transforming and transitional". Therefore, obtaining an all-encompassing understanding of teacher identity which successfully appreciates both its discrete elements and the interplay between them, is challenging. Nevertheless, there does exist some commonality between scholars' approaches: Teachers' identity is shaped and reshaped over time by a multitude of influencing factors including the cultural, contextual, and biographical proving it to be dynamic and malleable.[64]

However, even the very notion of teacher identity is complex as is its separation from personal identity, more generally. In the participant accounts above, there was a definitive sense that, for some, their teaching or teacher identity was not the 'real' them. It was characterised by a restriction, a holding back or dissociation from their true self to 'become' someone different: a separate or altered identity. Beauchamp and Thomas (2009, p. 178) also identify such difficulties in the comprehension of teacher identity, stating; "one of the most complex issues in the determination of what identity revolves around the notion of self, or self-concept, and its relationship to identity". Interpreting their experiences in this way highlights the tension between the relationship of the 'self' and 'identity'

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[64] See, for example, Mitchell & Weber (1998) for an examination of changing nature of teacher identities from pre-service training through to established leadership. Additionally, Flores & Day (2006) provide a multi-perspectival longitudinal investigation of the influencing contexts of teacher identity.

From the narratives of those interviewed, it is possible to draw a distinction between the self and identity (or, at least, to characterise or describe their experiences by assigning such terms which are in and of themselves meaning-laden). The 'self' encapsulates how they understand themselves as the object of reflective consciousness, and as the most internally consistent projection of individual existence. It is a sense of 'who I am, to me'. However, it is important to note that, within phenomenology, the self is never only an 'object' understood by an insider looking further in. Instead, we are aware of our embodied lived experiences, even if they are not a part of our direct attention at that particular moment time. As Husserl (1973, pp. 492-493) explains:

> When I say "*I*," I grasp myself in a simple reflection. But this self-experience [*Selbsterfahrung*] is like every experience [*Erfahrung*], and in particular every perception, a mere directing myself towards something that was already there for me, that was already conscious, but not thematically experienced, not noticed.

In contrast, a participant's 'identity' encompasses the distinctiveness of their being as understood in relation to the perception of others. It therefore contains a subjective, yet extrinsic element in the sense of establishing 'who I am (or want to be) to others. Accordingly, it is inevitably linked to different contexts, groups, and social situations that one finds themselves in. In this case, participants reflected on their identity only concerning their job, role and position as a teacher in the social construct of the classroom.

In their attempt to conceptualise teacher identity, Akkerman and Meijer (2011, p. 310) helpfully explain the dialogical interrelations amongst multiple voices, sub-identities or "I-positions". They assert that a person can occupy many sub-identities based on their particular social context and what is required of them at that time. A teacher's identity therefore has temporal considerations, asking: 'who am I, at this moment?' To use an oversimplified example, a participant may well inhabit the identities of mentor, learner, public speaker, assessor, facilitator, organiser, or rule-enforcer all in the same lesson. At the same time, they may also be a mother, partner, daughter, friend, or colleague. Thus, the identity of a participant in one I-position can either contradictory or complementary to the I in another position (Henry, 2016, p. 293). They function, according to Hermans (2004, p. 303), like "interacting characters in a story involved in the processes of question and answer, agreement and disagreement, and negotiation and cooperation". These, at times, conflicting sub-identities or 'I-positions' were experienced by participants who also continued the metaphor of feeling like characters in a story. Freya, for

example, referred to herself as an actor within the 'stage' of the classroom to ascribe specific meaning to her experiences.

The role of the teacher as actor or performer is one drawn upon as both an actuality and a metaphor for exploring educative communication (Prendergast, 2008; Sawyer, 2004; Timpson & Tobin, 1982), as a method of creative participation and practice (Harris, 1977; Hill, 1985; Sawyer, 2011), and as a model of the teaching experience more broadly (Alexander et al., 2005; Pineau, 1994). However, the acting concept finds appeal not only as a way of explaining teacher identity *per se* but has wider application to identity formation more generally. Goffman (1959, p.238), for example, in his understanding of the role of self in society advances his 'dramaturgical theory' whereby individuals function as performers within specific social environments or 'stages'. He suggests that the identity to which we give dominance at a particular time is the one of "impression management". We make decisions to reveal certain aspects of the self to others, and to conceal or withhold different aspects. These choices are akin to how an actor might perform or juggle their various roles on a stage. Such a theory helps to explain the comparable experiences of participants who also made metaphysical conceptualisations, deliberately restricting certain elements of themselves that had been shaped by past occurrences (like their experiences of termination, for example).

Nevertheless, it is important to recognise both the unity and the multiplicity of these identities so as not to emphasise one over the other. For participants, although it might have felt like they were taking on a different persona or identity, they were still operating as a unified whole, and were deliberately aware of their decision to operate in this I-position. The unified nature of their experiences sets them apart from a dissociative disorder which, typically, is characterised by both disruption to the normal integration of consciousness, memory, emotion and motor control alongside an inability to direct mental function that would normally be amenable to access (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 291). The coherence of the self in existential unity emphasises the agency of the person and therefore their ability to navigate between different personas. However, such unity also demonstrates how teachers cannot truly separate 'themselves' from their role since their teacher identity is an integral part of their overall being. Certainly, for the observer (the student, in this case), there is no part of the teacher identity they see that is not the person, in essence. It is, as Parker (2017, p. 2) insightfully notes that 'we teach who we are', and that teacher identity is an expression of one's true self:

> Teaching, like any truly human activity, emerges from one's inwardness, for better or worse. As I teach, I project the condition of my soul onto my students, my subject, and our way of being together. The entanglements I experience in the classroom are often no more or less than the convolutions of my inner life. Viewed from this angle, teaching holds a mirror to the soul. If I am willing to look in that mirror, and not run from what I see, I have a chance to gain self-knowledge- and knowing myself is as crucial to good teaching as knowing my students and my subject.

Viewing participants' teacher identities as a form or reflection of their most authentic self is a helpful tool in explaining the emotional weight they felt in the seriousness of their responsibilities and their desire to do right by the students. If their teacher persona is, to one degree or another, an integral part of their personhood, then participants cannot help but emotionally engage with their jobs and the lives of those that they teach. In fact, to not engage emotionally would, at least in Nias' (1989) construction, lead to an unsustainable incongruity resulting in more acute consequences. She expresses that teachers have "hearts and bodies, as well as head and hands", before going to explain that emotional commitment to their job is a necessity, claiming: "without feeling, without the freedom to 'face themselves', to be whole persons in the classroom, they implode, explore – or walk away" (Nias, 1989, p. 305).

Teachers' identities are shaped by a multitude of other contextual factors not specifically articulated by participants including, for example, their: external political environment (Mockler, 2011), own schooling experience (Miller & Shifflet, 2016), school or institutional ethos (Keiler, 2018), and initial teacher training (Misfud, 2018). More specifically where RE teachers' identities have been explored, they include the role of faith and religious affiliation (Bryan & Revell, 2011)[65] and gender (Sikes & Everington, 2003). Each, in their own way, bears upon the formation and adoption of various identities and contribute to the role that they play in each individual's practice.

The depth of reflection on the personas they adopted in the classroom further reveals the capacity of participants to both be and become more self-aware. For, an experience of one's self (in all its unity and multiplicity) is a fundamental requirement in recognising the degree to which a person chooses to reveal themselves to others. Such an awareness demonstrates the skills and abilities to navigate their way through the complex lifeworlds that they inhabit. Accordingly,

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[65] Although, see Vince (2021) who highlights the limitations of the category 'Muslim' in 'Muslim RE Teachers'.

participants were committed to the ongoing processes involved in being 'worldview conscious' with a greater insight into their own personal knowledge. The link between participants' self-awareness and an understanding of their teacher identities was evident amongst participants, who used the interviews as a space to explore their identities further and make sense of the experiences they encountered. As such, they built key mechanisms into their everyday practice that enabled them to more effectively approach controversial topics such as abortion within Religious Education.

6.2. 'There Are Limits, Aren't There?': Professional Boundaries

Those who were interviewed talked in depth about the need for suitable professional boundaries whilst tackling the topic of abortion. Boundaries were often framed in reference to their positive implications; either of facilitating productive classroom dynamics, safeguarding both students' and teachers' wellbeing, or in relation to promoting the holistic and educational development of the student. Participants affirmed these obligations to professional standards both as universal for all those teaching Religious Education, and for themselves as individual teachers in specific educational contexts. Accordingly, participants desired to conduct themselves in such a way that upheld their interpretation of good ethical standards and in a manner consistent with internal and external benchmarks. The specific nature of what participants perceived as professional boundaries varied in conceptualisation and form. However, many associated their professionalism with their answer to the question 'should I share my own views in the classroom?' Thus, they related professionalism to the manner and content of a teacher's speech. Nevertheless, there was a divergence of views about the correct answer to the above question.

Isabelle, for example, expressed that she was able to share her own opinion and still maintain appropriate standards (which in the case of teaching abortion, she interpreted as neutrality):

> *And I can give my opinion while also being neutral. I would hate to think that me saying something of my opinion ever made the student who thought differently, feel that they were wrong. (Isabelle 33:50)*

In her narrative there existed a false dichotomy between being 'neutral' and communicating one's view. The implication was that, in Isabelle's understanding, striving for neutrality did not involve a setting aside one's opinions, beliefs, and views. Instead, neutrality encompassed a broader, more holistic, definition whereby difference was recognised and accounted for, rather

than dismissed. Additionally (although she was unable to know for certain whether this has happened in her teaching practice to date), the strong language used by Isabelle highlighted the desire to maintain a positive relationship with students. She distinguished between the action of sharing one's opinion and the intention behind doing so, which in her case, she interpreted as beneficial. However, within this, there was the underlying proposition that neutrality involved the teacher steering away from determining wrong and right.

Annabel also had a pedagogical justification for sharing her perspective inside the bounds of professionalism:

> *We feel that talking about our personal beliefs opens up conversations with the students. But you do have to be careful – I'm their teacher at the end of the day. (Annabel 08:01)*

Annabel's expression was one of mutual expectation or reciprocity: the teacher expects the students in their class to be honest and share their personal views. Therefore, the teacher or, as was important for Annabel, the teaching team should be encouraged to do likewise. There was a strong sense that such a stance had been decided on in collaboration with other teachers as a move of best practice. As such, it was likely to have been well considered. Nevertheless, Annabel still cautioned a careful approach whereby the teacher was obligated to behave professionally, ensuring that a clear and appropriate border was drawn between the differing roles of teacher and student.

In some circumstances within the interviews, participants, in navigating the issue of whether to share their views on abortion, conveyed a considerable amount of reasoning, self-talk and sense-making of their experiences. Such a process was a fundamental part of the IPA process. Clara's excerpt below was more lengthy, yet is useful to quote in full due to the depth of her interpretation:

> *But even now having this conversation with you, it's making me think. I'm wondering…I suppose I wonder if having broken those unofficial rules, and having the kids see me as a humanist with a certain set of morals. Does that mean then that I teach more openly? Do I give away too much of my own personal view? Or do I still manage the walk the line where I reflect my view, but also the tolerance that I have other views? And do I, by being that figure of authority and role model in the room, do I accidentally influence their moral journey? Because they already know mine? Or am I massively overthinking it? And actually, as a teacher, I am able to*

both be true to myself and discuss the full conversation of the issue. Yeah. There's a sense in which you have to be true to yourself and if you share nothing of yourself, you're a bit robotic. (Clara 18:35)

There was clear evidence of Clara interpreting and making sense of her experience of sharing her view on abortion in the classroom. She reflected not only upon her personal stance on the topic but also upon the values that underpinned them. By allowing herself to work out her conclusions by journeying through a series of questions, Clara negotiated (and resolved) the tensions between her morality, actions, status and impact. She perceived sharing one's own opinion with students as an 'unofficial rule'. Although Clara did not indicate where this 'rule' had come from, there were parallels with other participants who described an equivalent phenomenon. External influences (such as teacher training, mentoring, conversations with colleagues, and continued professional development) alongside internal aspects (such as intuition, experience, reflection, preference and individual personality) played a significant part in establishing participants' opinions on the matter. Nevertheless, Clara's critical reflections justified her commitment to sharing her perspectives on abortion due to the inherent role of a person's opinions in reflecting and forming their identity as a two-way process.

In contrast, other participants' experiences were of the opposite persuasion. Dariya, for example, expressed:

I don't tell them anything about me. As soon as you start to open the doors a little bit I suspect they might take a mile. I'm their teacher, I'm certainly not their friend. But even then, I'm not sort of pally with them. I think that blurs some boundaries and causes some issues. (Dariya 15:02)

At first impression, Dariya's clear demarcation ('anything') might render her persona as dispassionate or impersonal since her perception of herself as not 'pally' went above and beyond the association of teacher as the antithesis of a friend. Her reasoning for her position seemed conjectural rather than based on prior negative experience Accordingly, Dariya's attempt to maintain such boundaries was viewed as an effort to avoid inappropriate relationships and circumvent any concerns associated with an unbalanced power dynamic (presumably such as negating her authority to deal with misbehaviour or disruption).

Interpreting her experience in this way led Dariya to display a more pessimistic view of students' maturity. In contrast, others such as Clara, Isabelle and Annabel viewed students' maturity more

optimistically in the sense that they could share their opinions to encourage students to respond appropriately; in essence, having a two-way exchange. Dariya's experiences were different in that she perceived students to be unable to respond to her sharing an opinion on abortion with suitable sensitivity or in a manner that was sensible or beneficial to learning. Accordingly, her solution to avoiding the predicted response by students was to never talk about her views.

Nevertheless, the latter part of Dariya's transcript helped to situate her position as something that was in the best interests of the student. Thus, her motivation for clear boundaries were borne out of a desire to prioritise the students' needs and learning at the expense of her self-articulation:

> It's not about me, it's about them. Like, you don't need to know my views. It makes no difference to your learning. (Dariya 17:31)

Both Josie and Ella's experiences favoured a more middling position. Whilst neither denied that there is space and room for an RE teacher to share their opinion appropriately, they discerned that abortion was a subject where teachers should avoid doing so:

> But I wouldn't say that this is something that you can draw on personal experience for. And I am very, very conscious about not expressing an opinion on it, potentially more so than the other subjects because there has to be a line somewhere (Josie 40:40)

> I think that there's… there's lines that people don't cross. There are limits aren't there? There are things that you don't share and that's one of them. I think there's also the kind of stuff around abortion being about sex, and no one wants to know about their teachers having sex, do they? [laughs] (Ella 37:44)

Both recognised that there was some merit in sharing one's views in the classroom. However, in their perception, sharing did not translate to mean that teachers should communicate their opinions on all things. Instead, they believed that abortion constituted a topic that was, by their own criteria, 'off limits'. Ella attributed this designation to the topic's intimate nature and link between abortion and sex. Whilst looking for confirmation or solidarity through her questioning, she placed abortion within the realm of reproductive health more generally. Thus, it was part of an area that was personal and where privacy should be respected. Both Ella and Josie felt that a teacher expressing their personal views or experiences of abortion 'crossed the line' of acceptability and professional expectations. The teacher is in a position of responsibility

and can exert authority and influence upon students by virtue of the position they hold. Correspondingly, to share such information was to put students at risk of overfamiliarity with the teacher. Further, some participants also believed there to be situations of a potential damage to staff's professional integrity. Isabelle spoke specifically about one of these situations in her narrative:

> *I think that you have to be extra careful in situations like abortion, you know… the rumour mill starts which can be just awful in schools… and you want to avoid that really. No one wants that. (*Isabelle 9:1)

She identified the possibility that information shared may not be kept in confidence by the students, exposing teachers to misrepresentation or fabrication. Isabelle's communication assumed the underlying principle that there was an existing and established system whereby unverified accounts or gossip could be circulated amongst the student body. Her experiences of deliberately not speaking about abortion in the classroom were therefore based on evading any potential shame, humiliation, or indignity that might occur as a result.

Isabelle's interpretation of her experiences mirrored other participants. Both Josie and Ella also framed their experiences in terms of vulnerability:

> *If I tell them, there's a potential that I could be in a very vulnerable position as a human being. I don't know, I think… I think I've always felt it's perhaps an overshare. But it's, it's part of my life that they don't need to know about.* (Ella 34:23)

> *There is a there's a vulnerability there I think as a, as a teacher and as a woman and so I'm careful to be professional* (Josie 44:11)

Of note is that both of the above excerpts explored vulnerability in relation to a fuller, more holistic conceptualisation of their identity. That is, participants did not simply stop at saying 'I could feel vulnerable'. Instead, it was (together in these cases) in reference to an internal part of their existence: 'I could feel vulnerable *as a…'*. Thus, the excerpts identified which particular area participants felt is most exposed or open to exploitation. For Josie, these were two separate but interlinked considerations: her role as a teacher and her role as a woman (and by abstraction, therefore, her role as a female teacher). For Ella, vulnerability was a more deep-seated core of her being that is 'on display'; her humanity. In this sense, the experiences of these participants revealed the nature of abortion as an issue that did not stand alone. Instead, the topic collided

with other foundational beliefs involving justice, identity, freedom, autonomy, individualism, expression and human responsibility. It asked questions relating to the core of humanity: What does it mean to be human? When does life begin? Who or what is worthy of value? How should we relate to each other? How should we view and treat the body? Accordingly, expressing one's view on abortion correlates to the expression of a part of one's core beliefs. For this reason, it was easy to see why several participants made clear stances sharing their opinion; feeling that certain parts of their 'self' or foundational beliefs were susceptible to attack, leaving them emotionally vulnerable.

In summary, the emergence of the subtheme relating to professional boundaries highlighted the recognition by participants of the deeply personal nature of abortion and its potential implications for exposure and vulnerability for both student and teacher. Accordingly, participants desired to put appropriate distance in place in order to maintain healthy and appropriate relationships were often rooted in a commitment to promote best teaching practice and student flourishing. Participants' experiences were shaped by their appeal to fulfil the obligations of both internal and external standards of behaviour and conduct, including those relating to upholding public trust in the profession. Additionally, they were influenced by participants' unique perceptions of their own opinions and beliefs on abortion concerning the innate 'self' and foundational identity. Whilst the exacting nature of how much a teacher should share their opinion varied from participant to participant, each adopted the position that best suited their individual circumstances. This adoption included their pedagogical perspectives in addition to considerations for the need for self-preservation or protection from potential shame, embarrassment, or harm.

6.2.1. Discussion: Should I Share My View?

The question of whether or not a teacher should be open to pupils about their particular views on a topic or subject (or indeed about their religious or non-religious identity) is arguably one that faces all RE during the course of their career. Not all teachers perceived it beneficial to share their own views. Dariya was the clearest example of this in the study, understanding her experience of providing clear boundaries to be one of total commitment to the students' learning, putting her potential hubris aside. However, the appropriate sharing of one's views can be a "professional asset" (REC, 2009), where the perspective of the teacher can act as a resource to: cultivate an atmosphere of trust; encourage students to contribute their own

experience; communicate the 'lived experience' of a believer; enhance the understanding of religious community values and purposes; exemplify the nuances between religious denominations; and reinforce the professional and vocational identity of the teacher (Everington, 2012, 2016; Fancourt, 2007; Hulmes, 1979; Jackson, 2014a; Jackson & Everington, 2017). Some participants, such as Annabelle and Isabelle, made the conscious decision to be open about their views on abortion when it was appropriate and productive to do so. They too constructed their experiences as a professional asset but framed this only in the context of helping to create an atmosphere of trust and encouraging pupils to contribute their own experiences (the first two aspects of the list above). Their focus, therefore, was on classroom dynamics as opposed to sharing their views because it better explained content or subject material.

The diversity in the narratives of the participants in this area highlights the importance of teacher autonomy in making professional judgements. Such judgements were highly personal and contextualised. They were adapted to suit the needs and preferences of the individual, their particular approaches to teaching and learning, and their unique knowledge of the class and its interpersonal dynamics. Whenever participants chose to share their views, they did so tentatively, recognising the potential impact of their actions upon the learner and their journey of enquiry. Additionally, they were keen to stress that sharing their opinion did not detract from the validity of the others' (potentially different) opinions in conversation. In this way, they were critically aware of the power dynamics at play and their responsibility as teachers to ensure that their views do not dominate the classroom at the expense of analytic discourse. Their approaches, therefore, align with the principle of 'respecting persons' in the Practice Code for RE teachers (REC, 2009, p. 3) which explains that teachers, before sharing their views with students should ask:

> …'Will this help the learning?' They also consider prefacing their thoughts with 'My comments/beliefs are no more important than those of anyone else in this room/group', and are receptive to pupils' critical evaluations of their responses.

The high value that some place on the role of expressing an opinion (either the teacher's or the students') is itself contentious. The government's recently produced guidance on *Political Impartiality in Schools* (DfE, 2022), for example, asserts that "whilst there is no blanket prohibition on teachers and staff expressing their views on political issues…they should avoid expressing… [them] unless they are confident this will not amount to promoting that view to pupils". In the recommendations of the guidance, the DfE suggest that school leaders ought to

consider whether there needs to be a school-wide policy for sharing personal opinions, or whether this is a judgement reserved for the individual teacher (DfE, 2022). Although the guidance relates to political issues more broadly, many of the controversial issues covered in RE have a political edge. Indeed, abortion, as previously argued, fulfils the political criterion for controversiality (section 2.4.2). It remains to be seen whether or not schools will adopt formal policies of this nature. However, the possibility of individual schools determining when personal opinions could be shared runs contrary to the values held by participants who viewed themselves as dual-experts: both in their knowledge of their legal and professional responsibilities, and in their exercising of individual discernment and judgement.

With RE specifically, Cox (2021), for example, argues that in making student opinion a substantive part of a curriculum, the tendency might be to associate it with assessment. The overemphasis on data and its analysis in secondary education (DfE, 2019b; Harford, 2018), despite calls for its more productive use (DfE, 2016), leaves open the possibility for something personal and subjective to be measured quantitatively. This is problematic for a variety of reasons, not least because a teacher cannot (nor should) fully evaluate one person's opinion in comparison to another's. Further, it raises significant precarious issues, such as: whether a particular opinion can be considered 'good' or 'bad'; whether it needs to be justified, how one should balance minority views over the majority, and the implications of assessing someone's character as opposed to their learning. And yet, until more recently, this approach has been the general approach of syllabuses. For instance, the pre-2016 OCR syllabus adhered to the following format for evaluation questions: a statement, followed by the question, "Do you agree? Give reasons to support your opinion and show that you have thought about different points of view" (OCR, 2014). Such an approach was comparable across various examination boards.

In more recent years, GCSE evaluation questions have moved towards a more critical approach to controversial issues with an emphasis on reasoned debate rather than opinion. For example, the evaluation questions for Eduqas' Religious Studies GCSE (awarded from 2018) follow the format: "Discuss this statement showing that you have considered more than one point of view" (Eduqas/WJEC, 2019b). The change from 'do you agree' to 'discuss', echoed across all examination boards, is a significant move. Nevertheless, expressing an opinion is frequently acceptable and credit worthy way of producing a justified conclusion. Further, and more significantly, the scaffolding or writing frameworks that teachers utilise to assist students in

structuring evaluation often encourage the expression of opinion at the final stage. For many involved in this study, permitting and, at times, persuading young people to form and articulate their position on abortion was an accustomed part of their teaching practice. This was true not only for abortion, but for controversial issues more generally. As such, although they were aware of the sensitivities involved, it was often difficult for them to distinguish an approach to teaching abortion separately from how they might approach all contentious subject matter.

Such findings mirror those of Everington (2012) whose research into the lives of trainee RE teachers identifies the sharing and use of teachers' 'life knowledge' to be understood as a key or expected part of teaching practice (especially by those more recently qualified). In her study, she categorises two different types of life knowledge that teachers used. Category 1 was "knowledge with a strong factual element but based on personal experience" which includes knowledge of particular cultures, religions, ideologies, and positions, making it different to knowledge that can be gained through the study of literature alone (Everington, 2012, p. 347). Category 2 was "knowledge with a strong experiential dimension but including factual knowledge" which includes challenging personal life experiences such as death, illness and divorce. For participants in this study, it might seem legitimate to partition those who have had a lived experience of a termination into those who share Category 2 life knowledge, and those who do not into Category 1. Obviously, a participant choosing to share their views on the abortion debate (Category 1) is different in substance to choosing to share their own personal abortion experiences (Category 2). Whilst one's experiences may shape their views, and vice-versa, it is possible to hold a position within the abortion debate without a direct lived experience of a termination. For example, a person could think that abortion was morally permissible, without ever having had one.

Nevertheless, in this case, whether or not a person had had a termination seemed to have little or no bearing on their willingness to share Category 1 life knowledge. Furthermore, those who did have a lived experience of abortion seemed (for valid reasons) reluctant to share their Category 2 knowledge. The experiences of participants, then, seem to point towards a more complex and nuanced interlinking and reciprocity between experiential and factual knowledge. In the narratives of those interviewed, the weighting of fact and experience was not so clearly observed. Instead, their life knowledge entwined both fact and experience into one integrated story that was shared as a whole. Whenever teachers decided to share the interwoven life knowledge, they did so cautiously and attentively, balancing their desire to be seen as 'real' and

'authentic' with professional boundaries and concern for the welfare and learning of those in their classes.

6.2.2. Discussion: Whose boundaries?

Invoking personal preference within professional boundaries was cited as the main rationale for the decision for participants to share opinions relating to the abortion. As with other similar professions, teaching involves an expectation to uphold "public trust" and "maintain high standards of ethics and behaviour" both within and outside of school (DfE, 2011c, p. 14). Trust, as Goepel (2012, p. 494) notes is "valuable social capital" and an important foundation for education systems where parents or guardians entrust their children, to one degree or another, into the care of schools paid in part by themselves as the taxpayer.

However, whilst it is clear in some circumstances there is a definitive demarcation of unacceptable professional behaviour (bringing with it appropriate legal or disciplinary action), other circumstances are more contested and complex. Observing appropriate boundaries is dependent on both context and person (Ehrich et al., 2011), and relies on the teacher's character and virtue (Arthur et al., 2019) alongside "practical wisdom" (Biesta, 2009b, p. 187). Such an ability to know how to act in certain scenarios is one developed through experience, reflection, review, conversation with colleagues, CPD, and learning from others' practice. In reality, ethical character and ethical action are somewhat integrated. In more general terms, practical wisdom or "*phronesis*" is an "integrative virtue, developed through experience and critical reflections, which enables us to perceive, know, desire and act with good sense" (Peterson & Arthur, 2021, p. 30). Therefore, teachers in approaching their professional boundaries (which may be at times contested) should be aware of their motivation, character, wider public and moral requirements, and the particular aspects of their unique situations which may require further reflection. In many ways, this awareness was undertaken by participants by virtue of the participation itself. In the stories told and interpretation of those experiences, some women interviewed demonstrated a commitment to awareness and evaluation of their role, positioning, motivation and ethical virtues and character.

Nevertheless, some have suggested that professional boundaries are overstepped when a teacher shifts their focus from the students and their wellbeing to themselves and their own needs, desires and wants (Hargreaves, 2000, p. 820; Johnson, 2008, p. 100; Riley, 2011, p. 26). Whilst

occasionally teachers engage in such a shift for less desirable or deliberately self-seeking motivation, others do so unconsciously with well-meaning motivation to help students (Morris, 2015, p. 377). Yet, in the context of this study, the above formulation of overstepping professional boundaries is too limited and problematic. In a considerable proportion of the participant narratives, they chose to share about themselves. However, this sharing was *for the conscious purpose* of engaging, supporting or connecting with pupils and their learning. Thus, they perceived themselves as being both well-meaning, focusing on the students and maintaining appropriate professional boundaries. Indeed, arguably, those who revealed something of their own opinion demonstrated a more heightened awareness of their professional boundaries in comparison to those who chose non-disclosure.

All participants, regardless of whether they decided to disclose their views on abortion to the class, articulated their interpretation of 'professional boundaries' in a similar manner. Both groups' accounts involved the notion of maintaining and promoting a certain distance or separation between student and themselves as teacher. Aultman et al. (2009) identify eleven typologies of professional boundaries in education ranging from 'temporal boundaries' where a teacher should not spend a disproportionate amount of time with one or several students, to 'financial boundaries' where a teacher should not provide monetary or altruistic gestures to individuals. However, in our case, participants conceptualised their professional distance as relating to 'communication' boundaries. In other words, participants understood the relational gap that separates the teacher from students (at least in part) as one that was demonstrated through communication, or lack thereof; avoiding "highly personal subjects" or "sharing personal information that does not benefit the student directly" (Aultman et al., 2009, p. 630).[66] Communication is a fundamental part of the teaching process however, in this instance, verbal communication[67] was the key avenue through which participants expressed their professional boundaries to students. Participants understood the maintenance of their professionalism through: what was said; how it was said; and what they chose not to say. As a slight aside, communication too is integral to IPA, which at its essence is concerned with "giving voice" (Larkin et al., 2006) to participants' experience by first, making sense of them and second, by conveying their meaning. Accordingly, the dynamic of listening to talking about talking provided an interesting context to explore communication in greater depth.

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[66] See also Barrett et al. (2006); Holmes et al. (1999)
[67] It is recognised that non-verbal communication also forms a part of how teacher communicate their boundaries to students. However, participants chose not to speak about this in their narratives.

Even for those who chose to share their view, there were certain aspects of the abortion debate that were deemed off-limits, which included details of terminations (for teachers who had this particular experience). Accordingly, they attempted to negotiate carefully the desire to be seen as 'real' in the classroom and the wanting to maintain professional boundaries. This tension has been highlighted elsewhere. Everington (2016) identifies similar themes in her study of pre-service teachers[68] and emphasises the necessity for further training in this area. However, in the present study, there was no specific area that could be identified as explicitly 'unprofessional' in that it violated any ethical or statutory codes of practice. However, the amount of distance that participants created and deemed acceptable through their communication was varied.

Regardless of its size, a relational and communicational "gap" (Biesta, 2004, p. 11) between student and teacher must occur in some capacity for teaching and learning to take place. Blenkinsop (2007, p. 129) argues that such a gap is necessary to ensure that students "directly engage with the subject matter as an end", rather than engagement with the teacher or their associated opinions. This concern was often echoed by participants who were ever aware of their students' engagement with learning. Dariya, perhaps was the most outspoken example of the gap ('...*you don't need to know my views. It makes no difference to your learning. (Dariya 17:31)).* The gap or student-teacher distance also fulfils other purposes that are beneficial for creating an effective learning environment. For example, it helps provide a structure where both students and teachers are clear about what is expected of them (Bernstein-Yamashiro & Noam, 2013, p. 80). It enables both parties to be kept safe (Day et al., 2006, p. 170; DfE, 2021a, p. 95), and facilitates effective behaviour management (Macleod et al., 2012). That is not to say that distance negates a teacher from being caring, friendly or building rapport. Too much distance, or conflicting relationships as perceived by the student are detrimental to achievement and a student's sense of self-esteem (Engels et al., 2021; Hughes et al., 2012; Verschueren et al., 2012).

Generally, the experiences of participants mirrored the importance of effective teacher-student distance as explored above. All were committed to their conceptualisations of professionalism and aligned themselves to boundaries that they felt to be appropriate in tackling a sensitive topic like abortion. However, these boundaries were negotiated, permeable, and fluid. Although they

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[68] See also Stern (2018, pp. 33-35)

often had a general rule of thumb for their professional behaviour and a clear understanding of what 'overstepping' the boundary line looked like (for example, sharing graphic details of their abortion), much of their positioning, opinion sharing, and interpersonal dynamics up to the line was navigated spontaneously and with improvisation. Such negotiation accommodated the dynamic nature of teaching: no lesson is ever the same, neither is any class, nor even a teacher's thoughts and feeling towards a subject and on any given day. Further, it corroborated others' similar conceptualisations of the mechanisms in play when RE teachers establish professional boundaries: the "moving backwards and forwards between personal and professional life is crucial to enabling teachers to make professional judgements about when and how to bring their own views and experiences into the classroom" (Everington, 2016, p. 178).

Everington's (2012, 2014, 2016) work examining the life-histories of teachers also highlights that for English RE teachers, there is a correlation between age and the intentionality of sharing one's opinion, with younger teachers being more open to disclosure. However, this correlation was not replicated in the present research, with the majority of participants being willing to share their personal knowledge to varying degrees. Perhaps such a finding is suggestive of a continuing trajectory, given that several years have passed since Everington's studies. Similarly, the work of the RedCo project (van der Wan et al., 2009) indicated a tendency, in other European countries, for RE teachers with a religious commitment to be more open in comparison to those without. Female teachers in this study were not explicitly asked about their religious beliefs, although many chose to reveal them during the interviews. Nevertheless, no substantive trend could be determined, with both those holding a religious commitment and those who did not being equally likely to be open about their views and opinions.

Finally, the extant literature regarding professional boundaries is often framed to emphasise their establishment in protecting students from harm, or abuse.[69] This framing is not to be dismissed given that the professional is the one that has the greater power[70] over the pupil and therefore is the one who controls the boundaries to shape the learning environment (Lovorn et al., 2012; McCroskey & Richmond, 1983). However, although power was a factor in participants'

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[69] See, for example Cayanus & Martin (2008); Hopkins et al. (1998, p. 125ff); Morgan (2016)

[70] Classroom power-dynamics are complex and beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss in detail. However, several factors determine a power imbalance in this context including age (whereby the teacher is an adult, and students are minors), employment (the teacher is paid to be in the classroom, whereas the student is not), autonomy (the teacher chooses to be in the classroom in a way that student cannot), authority and influence. Although, see Cothran & Ennis (1997) for example, for a more nuanced depiction of power in the classroom whereby students also view themselves as controlling the dynamics.

conceptualisations, a bigger aspect was how professional boundaries provided a measure of protection for them; either from harmful comments, slander, diminished reputation, relived trauma[71], or the invasion of privacy. Accordingly, professional boundaries acted as a helpful tool, or "coping strategy" (Lindqvist et al., 2019) for maintaining appropriate relationships in potentially emotionally laden or distressing situations.

The cognitive 'wrestling' and weighing up of professional boundaries and personal knowledge remained largely unresolved for participants. Whilst the minority communicated a more definitive stance in relation to how much they shared, the negotiated nature of the 'gap' (or distance a teacher chose to put between themselves and their students) meant that most participants' experiences were characterised by an acute sense of equivocation and imprecision. Accordingly, whilst exploring the issue in conversation, participants had to find a form of resolution where they were satisfied to 'sit in the messiness' of tackling controversial issues such as abortion. However, such resolution is unsurprising given the complexity of the topic. Accordingly, participants' experiences were indicative of the intricacies and moral ambiguity that are common to these topics.

6.3. 'It's Like a Secret Experience': Teachers' Hidden Worldview

The final subtheme that emerged within the broader context of adopting a particular teaching persona or character in the classroom relates to the experiences of participants in keeping part of themselves, their opinions, or their beliefs 'hidden' (both from those within the classroom, and those outside of it). It explores further the link between participants' experiences and their worldview and how they interpret this link in relation to expressing it to others. More specifically, it focusses on that which participants choose not to disclose.

During the interviews (as indicated in the previous section 6.2.1) some participants talked in detail about how they avoided communicating their personal opinions on the subject because it left them vulnerable. However, it is important to note that, for some, the interpretation of these experiences was not automatically a negative construction. Dariya, for example, in talking particularly about her attitudes toward the abortion debate, comments:

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[71] The relationship between abortion, trauma, and mental health is complicated with a variety of perspectives on how to interpret the facts. Reardon's (2018) comprehensive literature review denotes both the tensions and common ground between opposing positions: those who minimise the impact of abortion on mental health; and those who maximise it.

My experiences are my own, and their special, and I don't want them to know about them. (Dariya 13:17).

The 'them' in her statement referred directly to the pupils in her class. However, Dariya's notion extended to any person with whom she did not wish to share her experiences. In making sense of the phenomenon in conversation with the interviewer, Dariya unpicked the closeness of her held beliefs alongside her desire to remain autonomous and in control of the narrative surrounding her story. The transcript portrayed the sense in which some participants chose to hold back certain aspects of their experiences. This holding back was not because they were perceived as shameful or reprehensible. Rather, they were held tightly because they were so extremely personal and special. Accordingly, they were not given away lightly and thus access was limited to those for whom the participant deemed fit.

The currency of intimacy was particularly echoed by those who had experienced a termination. Freya, for example, states:

It's sort of like an experience that only I have access to – like me, I never told my dad. I told my mum eventually, but it was hard and personal and so it's something that rarely goes outside of me. (Freya, 31:54)

She communicated with great honesty about the internalised nature of her abortion; something that remained 'inside', in contrast to the 'outside' as spoken about in the excerpt. The confidentiality of her experiences was present even within her immediate family set up. Although Freya did not expand on the reasons why she found it difficult to share the fact that she had had a termination with her family, it did bring into focus the contrast between the women who now know about her abortion, and the man (her dad) who did not. Thus, placing the issue (as pertains to Freya) as one that was understood mutually and most acutely by women. This mutual understanding proved even more compelling considering the revelation of her abortion to the interviewer, also female.[72]

However, despite the secret nature of the abortion and the prohibition of sharing it with those in her class, Freya still identified a purpose and meaning to her experiences in her teaching:

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[72] Further reflections on this can be found in Section 9.4.2

My abortion… It's all about kind of, like communicating it and talking to them I want to say from experience, but obviously they don't know so, it's like a secret experience. I sort of use the experience as something quite empowering. Like yes, it was hard, but I can use [it] as a tool to say, 'these are the options, this is what you can do' and I can share that. (Freya 43:09)

Freya recognised that she uses her experiences covertly in the classroom setting to help students further their learning; to enable them to appreciate the processes and decisions involved. Although they are concealed from view, they still have tangible implications for teaching practice. The very fact that they were undisclosed allowed Freya's experiences to take on a solemn yet cherished position where she felt a sense of power both in controlling the access to her story, and in utilising it to equip others.

Annabel identified a similar meaning to her experiences. She states succinctly the link between her nondisclosure and its impact on practice:

And I guess I hide my personal viewpoints from students, but it influences the way in which I teach it. (Annabel 31:08)

By acknowledging that which is known to herself, but unknown to others, Annabel could better recognise her positionality in the classroom and the influence of her viewpoints on her conduct. In self-reflection she was able to further explore the impact and influence of particular beliefs and the extent to which they comprised the teaching 'persona'.

For others, however, the exploration of the hidden self in their experiences gave way to intense self-scrutiny which led to a sense of tension over whether participants' approaches were correct. These moments were often where the foundations of the IPA process (the researcher making sense of participants, making sense of themselves) were most acutely realised:

I do use my own experiences in the classroom – but I can't obviously tell them it was me. But the stories I have can help them understand a bit, so I just turn it into 'I was reading online the other day' or 'I have a friend who…'. So, I do tell my personal stories, but I don't put my name to it, I use other ones, so it sort of feels a bit dishonest, but not. I guess making it personal means it's not abstract anymore: it's real and it matters, but they just don't know who its real or who it matters to (Isabelle 18:10)

Isabelle reflected on the somewhat paradoxical nature of her sharing her personal worldview: an attempt to get students to appreciate the concrete (as opposed to theoretical) effects of abortion on women by using pseudonyms. Isabelle like Freya had a clear pedagogical rationale for her approach, perceiving it to have a positive effect on the students' learning. However, her narrative also portrayed how she felt an element of internal tension or mental unease in utilising such an approach: '*it sort of feels dishonest, but not*'. Although Isabelle felt her approach to teaching abortion was subjectively justified, there remained some doubt or need to prove her decision when communicating this to the interviewer. Additionally, Isabelle took a step further than Freya in that she went beyond using her story indirectly to choreograph conversation and learning. Instead, Isabelle openly and directly communicated her story to students, but behind the veil of another. Thus, Isabelle maintained a certain (smaller) level of distance in order to keep her personal views and opinions hidden from view.

Ella and Josie also both used the interviews to explore, in detail, their experiences of their hidden or unshared views on abortion. Specifically, they traversed how they chose not to be open about their position for abortion, whereas they would for other sensitive issues. For both participants, it appeared to be the first time that they had thought about this aspect of their experience:

> *It's difficult. I would never tell them about my abortion, but that's interesting because I do in so many ways, talk about my own personal beliefs and my thought processes about almost everything else. But I never take that extra step and say, I had a termination and I, I'm not quite sure why I don't do that. I think sometimes, maybe, when I'm teaching, I'm trying to convince students, or myself, that I made the right decision.* (Ella 33:33)

Ella identified her termination as one of the only things that she chose not to disclose with her class, although she freely shared about other aspects of life. Her narrative also implied that Ella talked to her class about her opinions about the abortion debate but stops short of telling them of the termination itself. Although she started her reflections unsure of the reasons surrounding her decisions, Ella's rationale emerged as her narrative continued as if she was having an internal dialogue with herself rather than the interviewer. At this juncture, she recognised the possibility that she used the classroom as a forum to justify her choice to have a termination.

This possibility called to attention an important aspect of the participant's interpretation. Ella was speaking to herself vicariously through the students. She acknowledged that subconsciously, there might be doubts or questions surrounding her choice and conversations with students

were a way of her exploring the decision-making process to validate them. In this way, her self-reflection on this particular area of her practice revealed how her teaching assisted in appeasing a niggling conscience or making peace with her previous experiences. Although Ella started by articulating that she may be trying to convince students that she made the right decision in having a termination, it was recognised that the students in this context did not need convincing since they were not aware that abortion had affected Ella directly. Although there was an element of Ella trying to convince students generically that having an abortion might be the right course of action for any individual, the emphasis here was on Ella herself. Thus, her considerations were ones of self-confirmation as was reflected in the shift of language from 'students' to 'myself'.

Josie too used the interview to make sense of her experiences of withholding her views on abortion in comparison to other topics:

> *I don't share my opinion on abortion because for whatever reason, it seems like a much more personal issue. And yet, I would talk about euthanasia, and my dad dying in the hospice. And I'd be quite happy to have that conversation with them. But I wouldn't…I wouldn't about abortion. Now…. I'm thinking though now as we speak… because actually, it isn't more personal, is it?... And if it isn't, then maybe we're doing them [the students] a slight disservice somewhere on the lines. Because actually, what we're then doing is perpetuating some sort of myth that you can be very open about death. And we can be very open about the end of life, and we can very open about all sorts of moral issues. But actually, reproductive rights just aren't to be discussed. Yeah. I had never really thought about it before. Hmm... I need to go away and think about that. (Josie 41:44)*

Josie's verbalisation of her thinking developed as she 'works out' her particular rationale not to share her views on abortion. As she processed, Josie came to the cognitive realisation that, in her view, there was inconsistency pertaining to both thought and practice. She made a comparison between feeling able to share openly about her experiences of death and euthanasia yet recognised that the same openness did not extend to abortion. Equating abortion and euthanasia in this manner was consistent with other participants who often drew parallels between them; construing them as the 'big two' bioethical controversies at the beginning and end of life respectively. However, Josie also reflected on the longer-term impact of not sharing her views. Situated within the context of the students' learning, she identified that her undisclosed views might not be the most helpful regarding the perpetuation of the silence around reproductive ethics. Although the journey of her meaning-making led to a resolution

to reflect further, rather than a commitment to changing her approach, Josie identified the issue as a point of tension. Underlying such a construction was an awareness and presumption that the taboos surrounding abortion were detrimental to students and potentially damaging to those who had or might experience a termination. Accordingly, Josie was keen not to perpetuate the taboo and foresaw the potential for teachers to play a part in bringing this to fruition.

In conclusion, the emergence of this subtheme from participants' narratives is an important insight into the way some teachers chose to view their opinions on abortion as secret or hidden. In adopting a persona, or taking on the position of an actress, participants were able to select which part of them is seen by students, and which is unseen. For abortion, the most common approach amongst teachers was for their views to remain undisclosed. Non-disclosure was equally the case for those who had a direct termination experience and for those who had not. Nevertheless, although participants' views were often not explicitly articulated to students, they were still used to influence teaching practice in a way that the teacher found empowering and important. This influence occurred in a variety of ways and for the benefit of the student and/or the teacher. Some participants utilised their unspoken views on abortion to influence classroom conversation and discussion; to allow students to explore the issue from alternative perspectives; or to assist students in accessing advice or support if and when they might require it. They utilised numerous methods to achieve this including depersonalisation and anonymisation. For others, their unspoken yet covertly expressed views occupied a more cathartic space where participants attempted to use classroom discussion as a way of affirming their own particular opinions or choices. Nevertheless, participants often grappled with their decisions; either in relation to what they perceived to be the 'right' course of action, or when comparing their approach to abortion to other sensitive areas of their practice such as euthanasia. They noted a certain lack of perceived freedom to communicate in the area of reproductive ethics which was not present in other areas of ethical discourse. Finally, participants demonstrated a self-reflective approach where they considered the rationale for their decisions in addition to the short- and long-term impact on others. Such a consideration prompted a deep and intense level of cogitation where participants frequently unpicked their lived experiences and, within the context of the interview, evaluated and revisited their approach to whether or not they communicated their views on abortion to students in their classes.

6.3.1. Discussion: Self-Disclosure

The notion of 'hidden-ness' or the choice not to reveal certain aspects of ourselves is a dynamic of interpersonal relationships. For participants, the emergence of this sub-theme was observed across seven out of ten members of the cohort, highlighting its strength and importance in the interpretation of their experiences. The narratives of those interviewed indicated the nature of adopting a teaching persona (the overarching theme of this chapter) as one of holding something of oneself back from others. Holding back was a conscious decision; deliberately refraining from revealing aspects of participants' life, story, emotions, and experiences that otherwise (in a different situation, for example) could have been made known.

The awareness of the existence of a 'hidden self' is congruent with heuristic models of self-understanding. For example, the Johari window depicts information that is known or unknown to self or others in four panes, and has been utilised to explore a variety of different individual developmental and group processes (Hughes, 2009, p. 40):

	Known to self	Unknown to self
Known to others	*Public self* Areas of Free Activity	*Blind self* Unaware area
Unknown to others	*Hidden self* Avoided or hidden area	*Unknown self* Area of unknown activity

Adapted from (Luft, 1961, p. 6)

Figure 4: The Johari Window

Information, feelings, emotions, thoughts, and opinions relating either to participants' opinions on abortion, or their experiences of termination directly remained purposefully in the quadrant that was known to self and yet unknown to others.

Although honesty or self-disclosure is typically conceptualised as a virtue, self-disclosure has both advantages and disadvantages. Self-disclosure helps to build trust (Bedrov et al., 2021; Slepian & Greenaway, 2018; Sprecher et al., 2012) and reciprocity (Finkenauer et al., 2018; Willems et al., 2020) within relationships. It also enhances feelings of solidarity and empathy towards others (Mangus et al., 2020; Portt et al., 2020). For the teacher, self-disclosure, when

used appropriately, can "serve as a powerful tool in the classroom" (Cayanus, 2004, p. 6), connected to improved measures of success or outcome. For example, self-disclosure is positively associated with increased student classroom participation (Goldstein & Benassi, 1994; Jebbour & Mouaid, 2019), motivation and interest to learn (Cayanus & Martin, 2008; Henry & Thorsen, 2021; Zardeckaite-Matulaitiene & Paluckaite, 2013), clarity of understanding (Downs et al., 1988), and positive classroom environment (Allen & Court, 2009). In the Johari Window model, it is argued that increasing the 'public self' and reducing the 'hidden' self is desirable because it fosters a greater amount of self and mutual understanding where individuals and co-workers are more aware of their limitations thus facilitating more effective team dynamics (Luft, 1964, p. 66).

However, disclosing personal information inevitably involves risk taking and with it the possibility of being misunderstood or hurt (Ejsing, 2007). Further, culture has various systems and structures (tacit or otherwise) that often deem high levels of disclosure between strangers to be inappropriate, especially concerning intimate relationships (Tang et al., 2013). Accordingly, participants found that they did not want to enlarge the pane of the 'public self' in favour of keeping their 'hidden self' protected.

Nevertheless, it is worth highlighting that it was not easy for participants to withhold their personal views. Their narratives were often characterised by an acute sense of tension and cognitive grappling. Such a characterisation was unsurprising given the high stakes of a disclosure. Furthermore, participants experienced something of the higher cognitive capacity and processes required to construct a story, or participate in reactive or on-the-spot deliberation about how much to share, how much to withdraw and in what capacity. Cognitive theory suggests that truth telling is the "more automatic, dominant response" (Köbis et al., 2019, p. 778) of human thinking. To modify this response by crafting a lie is therefore to create an additional function, imposing a greater demand on cognitive skills, and rendering the need for greater cognitive or processing capacity (Verschuere et al., 2018; Vrij et al., 2006).

In most circumstances, participants did not interpret withholding their self-disclosure, or omission of their experiences, as a direct lie. However, they did construct them along various degrees of deception, subterfuge, or manipulation. Isabelle, for example, tells her story under the guise of an anonymous 'friend' or 'something she read online'. In this, there is a certain element of active deception (or deception by commission) whereby another party is deliberately

misled. Active deception stands in contrast to other accounts which employ more passive deception (or deception by omission) where a person deliberately holds information from another party (Kimmel et al., 2011, p. 227). Accordingly, in some instances, the internal moral weighing up of a participant's decision making added to the greater cognitive capacity required to navigate self-disclosure in abortion discussions.

The interpretations of participants' positioning in moral terms or whether their disclosure decisions were 'right' or 'wrong', also serves to demonstrate the currency of personal experience. The autobiographical narrative, when used in the classroom (as much as anywhere else), is powerful and able to be utilised to connect with, influence, and persuade. It, therefore, has significant value not only in shaping and moulding the attitude of the speaker, but also that of the hearer (Stephens et al., 2010). For some participants, there was a certain trading off their experiences, even if done so subversively, to directly affect or sway the perspective of others. Whilst these participants, generally, constructed their actions as of positive value to the student (that is, they assisted in the learning and teaching process, or allowed students to engage with a more holistic approach to the issue of abortion), the agency of a storyteller was an important factor in controlling the power and dynamics of the classroom environment.

In fact, the language of power was used explicitly and understood in relation to both the participant themselves, and the student simultaneously. Freya, for example, highlights her experience of having an abortion as something she "uses" and is "something quite empowering". The sense of control, or empowerment, to which she refers relates to both herself (as the individual who can potentially use her story for good) and to the students who, in her interpretation, gain a greater sense of autonomy through knowing about various options should they find themselves having to consider abortion in the future. This adds to the further currency of both the story and the storyteller. The interplay between control and self-disclosure, then, brings to light the complexity of participants' decisions concerning whether or not to share something of their experiences in the classroom.

However, control in and of itself was not the singular interpretation of participants' experiences. Instead, a more multi-layered or interlaced understanding is a more accurate depiction. In speaking, certain motifs came to the fore whilst others retreated, only to be drawn on again from another perspective. These motifs build upon and weave in and out of each other, akin to dance (Rogoff, 1990); moves that are regulated by the desire to create meaning and are

negotiated through interaction with others, context and surroundings. For example, at times, avoiding hurt and shame became a more prominent rationale for avoiding self-disclosure. Such a rationale correlates to the seminal findings of Rosenfeld (1979) which suggest that females avoid self-disclosure to elude personal damage or injury and challenges with interpersonal dynamics, whereas males tended to avoid self-disclosure to maintain control over interpersonal dynamics. However, at other times, motifs of secrecy, privacy, stigma, moral behaviour, and hesitancy formed a clearer part of participants' interpretations.

This interpretation raises several important questions about the nature of self-disclosure in relation to abortion: What is it about the constituency of abortion that results in reluctance towards self-disclosure?; Why do participants feel more able to share their opinions on other issues (such as euthanasia) in comparison to abortion? And what is the relationship, if any, between a lack of self-disclosure and the perpetuation of taboos surrounding abortion? These questions form the basis of the discussion below.

6.3.2. Discussion: Secret, Stigma and Abortion

Participants who had a termination often used specific language around seclusion, restriction and confidentiality to interpret their lack of disclosure. Freya, for example, explains her abortion as a 'secret experience' (Freya, 43:16). Similarly, Annabel (31:08) describes her experience as something 'only I have access to'. Secrecy, or keeping secrets is a complex term to describe. However, both Pannebaker's (1989, p. 211) definition of secrecy as "active inhibition of disclosure" and Bok's (1983, p. 3) as "intentional concealment" encapsulate some of participants' understanding of their experience. Those who spoke of their secrecy concerning their abortion did so as both an active and intentional process that required deliberate decision-making. Such a decision demanded mental resources and had the potential to be burdensome. In this way, it was not merely the opposite of self-disclosure which did not merit the same measure of encumbrance.

Also implicit in both participants' experiences of secrecy and in the definitions above is that secrecy is a situated reality in relation to others. In other words, person A's secret can only be understood in the context of the person B who does not have access to the information concealed. Secrets are contextual and relational – individuals work to hide their secrets *from* others who, in their perception, are not supposed to be privy to such information (Kelly, 2002,

p. 3). In this case, participants concealed their personal information from students in the first instance, but also extended the concealment on occasion to family members (which, for example, in Annabel's experience includes her dad, but not her mum). When establishing why this is the case, it was important to pay closer attention to some of the reasons given for such secrecy.

In the context of this study, it is clear that most participants who had an abortion believed, at least in part, that their experience should be kept a secret. Although somewhat idiosyncratic, research suggests that certain topics tend to be kept secret more often than others. Sexual secrets in particular are among the most commonplace (Hill et al., 1993; Norton et al., 1974; Vrij et al., 2002, p. 63; Ayalon et al. 2019). However, abortion is often held as something particularly secretive (Slepian et al., 2017, p. 63; Vrij et al., 2002). Vangelisti (1994, p. 115) characterises secret topics as those which are taboo, those that break common rules, and those which break convention (in that they would be considered unfit for public discussion). Of these, a taboo is the more influential motivation (Vangelisti & Caughlin, 1997, p. 686).

The etymology of taboo situates its origins in Polynesia (Hoad, 1996) and comprises a general cultural prohibition on specific entities because they are either repulsive, or because they are sacred or consecrated (or indeed, on occasion, both). Within the context of teaching and for the purposes of this study, taboo may be defined in line with Evans, Avery, and Pederson's (2000, p. 295) educational description as personal and societal "beliefs that constrain actions by making certain behaviours and discussion or certain topics forbidden or discouraged". Accordingly, taboo topics are ones that teachers would ordinarily opt to de-emphasise or avoid. Historically, abortion has been included as a topic within education that is explicitly taboo (for example, Massialas et al., 1970, p. 88). Participants in this context emphasised the same sense of personal and current societal belief that rendered abortion taboo. However, their experiences were far from simple. Participants were confronted with the reality of being required to teach abortion despite both its taboo and their outlook on whether abortion should be taught at all in Religious Education. Additionally, they wrestled with the tension of societal versus personal beliefs on the taboo of abortion. Josie, for example, talked about abortion being a societal or cultural taboo as something that did not reflect her desires for the topic to be talked about more openly.

Accordingly, the taboo was an impetus for secrecy in participants' experiences, particularly amongst those who had abortions. For Norton et al. (1974), secrets held because of taboo often involve negative or stigmatising information as it pertains to the secret-keeper in connection with others. Consequently, people tend to keep secret the things that not only have weighty emotional value attached (for example, in the case of traumatic or disturbing events), but also constitute perceived embarrassment, shame or disapproval from others (whether specific individuals or society writ large).

More generally, the link between abortion and stigma is clear. For example, Rocca et al. (2020, p. 6), in their longitudinal study of 667 US women found that perceived community abortion stigma existed at least 5 years post abortion, although this stigma did not affect women's moral judgements of their abortions themselves. Similarly, Biggs, Brown, and Foster's findings (2020, p. 8) in their interviewing of 928 women revealed societal stigma to have significant prevalence in women's experiences. Perceived stigma motivates the desire to keep abortion experiences secret (Astbury-Ward et al., 2012; Cockrill et al., 2013). Further, abortion stigma at early gestation is easily perpetuated due to its "concealable" nature (Quinn & Chaudoir, 2009) in that it is not readily visible (in contrast to the way that something like divorce might be 'seen' as more obvious).

However, the implications for women who kept their abortion experiences secret because of perceptions of how others might judge them are more hotly contested. Within abortion research specifically, some have argued for a negative impact on women including internalised feelings of guilt and shame (Hoggart, 2017) along with adverse emotional outcomes (Hanschmidt et al., 2016; Major & Gramzow, 1999; Shellenberg et al., 2011). However, others have suggested no link between abortion and long-term distress, despite its stigma (for example, Charles et al., 2008). Most are agreed that stigma is at least a risk factor for poor mental health outcomes for some women (Academy of Medical Royal Colleges, 2011, p. 19; Major et al., 2008, p. 12). Nevertheless, it is important to note the contextualised nature of stigma as it pertains to abortion which includes various geographical, cultural, political, medical, and situational factors (Kumar et al., 2009; Norris et al., 2011).

For those within the study who had first-hand experiences of abortion, stigma (particularly perceived societal stigma) was identified as a rationale for their secrecy, even within their own families. However, within the interviews, they chose not to unpick the exacting reasons for

why they felt such stigma existed in detail, focussing instead on the fact that was present and was an influencing factor on their thoughts and feelings towards their experiences in the classroom. In this way, their perception of the societal stigma surrounding abortion was carried forward into the way they perceived their classroom environments. They assumed that the 'mini societies' of their classrooms were reflective of their broader society in which they were situated with little distinction (or thought of distinction) between the two. This assumption was the case for participants who had not experienced abortion who were, albeit in a slightly different way, also aware of the stigma surrounding abortion furthering the tension in approaching controversial topics in the classroom.

Where feelings of shame or guilt might have been present, these did not come across in the temporary relationships built in the interviews which were characterised by honesty, candour, and openness. This characterisation does not diminish the role that negative emotions might have played in participants' understanding or construction of their experience to this point. In fact, the withholding of abortion from family members, in one particular case, suggests more complex processing of past experience, fraught with turbulence. Nevertheless, the framing of the interview questions required participants to reflect upon their own positioning in relation to the student-teacher role and left any further exploration of more intimate aspects of their experience to the discretion of the participant themselves (at no point were they ever asked whether they had a termination, for example). Perhaps then, the stigma they explored, regardless of whether they had an abortion, was something that was not always internalised, but one that was determined by external factors such as professional boundaries as highlighted in the earlier sections of this chapter.

6.4. Chapter Summary

This chapter has explored the different ways in which participants conceptualised and interpreted their role as a teacher in navigating the topic of abortion. In particular, it has paid attention to the construction of their role as adopting a persona or 'acting' role. In participants' narratives, the analysis was shaped by three main subthemes emerging from the data. The first issue pertains to the degree of seriousness with which participants considered their position, how this materialised, and its impact on teaching and learning. Such self-awareness was manifested through participants' in-depth reflection and articulation of their commitment to personal development, worldview consciousness, and reflective practice more broadly. In doing so, they

had various interpretations of their identity within the classroom and navigated between and within a range of 'I-positions'. Accordingly, the persona(s) participants adopted when teaching was not always their most authentic or internally coherent selves. However, there was an existential unity as well as a multiplicity of identities. The teaching identity was not reduced to being any less of themselves in a substantive sense, and yet also involved a holding back from a full expression of the self. Traversing these various personas helped participants to build key mechanisms through which they were able to effectively approach controversial topics such as abortion within Religious Education.

Second, the analysis highlighted participants' views of the importance of establishing and maintaining professional boundaries in their role in the classroom. All were committed to their conceptualisations of professionalism and aligned themselves to boundaries they felt to be appropriate in tackling the topic of abortion. The question of whether participants should share their views on abortion was not clear cut and illustrated the high value that was placed on teacher autonomy in making professional judgements that were decidedly personal and contextualised (considering the needs and preferences of both themselves and the class). Participants' experiences involved an interlinking and reciprocity between their own personal encounters with the topic and more factual knowledge. Within this framework, they concerned themselves with a desire to conduct themselves ethically and in a manner that met both internal and external expectations. To achieve this, participants created a relational gap or sense of distance, largely promoted and interpreted through communication. However, the size of the gap (and the boundaries they built to maintain them) was negotiated, permeable and fluid; protecting the student just as much as they protected themselves. Finally, for some, the navigation of personal, professional and societal tensions required an open posture towards unanswered questions and a steadfastness in allowing aspects of their practice and experience to be unresolved.

Last, and related to participants' experiences of navigating their teacher persona, emerged the subtheme of knowingly holding back or concealing their opinions or parts of their stories relating to abortion. Participants frequently perceived and identified this concealment in terms of that which was secret or hidden. Secrecy was characterised in such a way that emphasised the special or sacred nature of their deeply personal experiences, as opposed to being kept hidden because they were overwhelmingly shameful, stigmatised, or shocking. Nevertheless, although personal opinions and stories were often not explicitly shared in the classroom, they were used

in such a way to influence the class for a range of purposes, for example, in shaping the classroom narrative or discussion, to help students to see alternative points of view, or for more personal or cathartic reasons such as to provide the participant with a sense of affirmation of their (secret) opinions or choices. However, the process of keeping certain aspects secret was not always easy for participants given the greater cognitive capacity required to construct non-disclosure, which was often done 'in the moment'. Their secrecy was therefore an active process, and their interpretation here was complex, interlaced and multi-layered. Nevertheless, the hidden nature of aspects of their experience revealed the power with which their stories impacted both the teacher and their students, even if the students were not aware of it.

7. Findings And Discussion 2: 'It's for Their Life Once They Leave': Skills Development and Lifelong Learning

This chapter examines the experiences of participants tackling the subject of abortion in relation to their self-described purpose or goals of their teaching the topic. More specifically, it explores their construction of the abortion debate in Religious Education as one key to developing skills development and lifelong learning. Overarching this particular theme was participants' expression of their teaching role as one desiring to equip students with the knowledge, skills, and competencies required to allow them to thrive as holistic individuals who can navigate adult life well. Within this, findings relating to three subthemes are discussed further. Participant extracts and their relation to subthemes are detailed and presented in Table 7 below. The first subtheme was drawn from participants' accounts of using the topic of abortion to enable students to understand the complexity and nuance involved in both discussions surrounding abortion and in wider ethical deliberation. The second subtheme outlines participants' concern for the topic to be used as a lens through which students can develop emotional intelligence, and their ongoing commitment to creating opportunities for students to grow in maturity. Finally, the third subtheme discusses teachers' experiences of navigating the topic of abortion in a way that is future focussed; preparing students to handle the possible challenges that may come their way outside of the classroom, or as they enter adult life.

Theme	Subtheme	Extract	Participant	Time(s)
'it's for their life once they leave': Skills development and lifelong learning	'I have to get them to think in shades of grey': Helping students understand complexity and nuance (8/10 Participants)	'it's about embracing the messiness'	Bethany	18:35, 50:30, 53:03
		'To appreciate that, that it's the complexity of being in a moral situation'	Clara	08:47, 10:17, 26:43
		'I'm trying to really push with the boys like not everything is black and white'	Dariya	20:32
		'I have to try and get them to think in shades of grey'	Ella	15:16, 24:14
		It's not as easy as 'yes or no'	Freya	20:35
		'I have to work hard to get them to see that it is actually an issue'	Grace	08:50, 26:19
		'It's right at the edges of the blurry boundaries of what's right and wrong'	Holly	17:20, 45:31
		'It's the grey areas they can't grasp… and so it's my role to help them in that	Josie	16:30, 28:44
	'Where is the human in this story": Developing emotional intelligence (5/10 Participants)	''where is the human in this story?"	Bethany	15:02, 22:36, 28:16
		'I have to try and broaden their horizons a bit'	Dariya	28:20, 65:15
		'I want them to think what it might be like to be in that situation'	Freya	09:30
		'I want them to think about all the different factors involved'	Isabelle	34:10
		'This is actually someone's life'	Josie	08:40
	'It's so important that they learn most of their life skills through your subject': Ongoing development beyond the classroom (7/10 Participants)	'Because obviously we're not preparing them for life otherwise'	Annabel	24:19, 43:23
		'But try and get them the skills that might be useful for them'	Bethany	26:35. 28:00
		'they've learned something beyond like what they need to know for the exams'	Ella	12:06
		'It's for their life once they leave'	Freya	38:05
		'[it] sets them up for other discussions in the future'	Grace	18:49
		'I think it could affect everyone so we're preparing them for that'	Holly	07:32
		'it's so important that they learn most of their life skills through your subject'	Isabelle	24:14, 26:24

Table 7: Table of Themes - Skills Development and Lifelong Learning

7.1. 'I Have to Get Them to Think in Shades of Grey': Helping Students Understand Complexity and Nuance

During the interviews, participants articulated various aspects of their teaching role but frequently spoke of their teaching in reference solely to their students. It seems natural to think of the student and teacher as intertwined (since, for example, one cannot be a teacher without students to teach). However, the focus of the participants often leaned towards describing their experiences in terms of what they did on behalf, or for the benefit, of those in their class. This focus made evident the fact that when participants were recalling and reflecting upon different aspects of their practice, they were not often making generalisations that could be made applicable to all teachers in all contexts. Instead, they had in mind their particular pupils, in their particular classes, in their particular schools. There was a certain amount of ownership and familiarity in connection to those being taught that revealed the extent to which participants were invested in the lives of students. Accordingly, when those interviewed spoke of their experiences they were, by very nature, personal and an expression of the existing relationships that had been formed, some over long periods of time. In light of these relationships, participants took their roles seriously, distinguishing student transformation and development as a fundamental part of their responsibility.

Alongside this responsibility was the recognition by participants that their teaching role marked a certain level of maturity that students did not yet possess. Participants saw themselves in a state of further development which they recognised as allowing them to have a better understanding and handling of more complex issues such as abortion. A more advanced standing shaped the way how they perceived student responses to abortion in comparison to their own. For example, they often perceived students to have an approach to abortion (they sat in one or the other of the extremities of 'pro-life' or 'pro-choice' camps), as opposed to their own more sophisticated, composite or nuanced approach. Such a perception was also founded upon the participants' knowledge of their students' class contributions. Correspondingly, participants regularly felt as if they were well-placed to assist students along their journey of increasing maturity in dealing with the topic of abortion. Josie, for example, states:

> *I think they have a very set way of thinking. It's less of a grey area. I think that's it. And, therefore, in their head, it's a choice between not allowing abortion because you are killing the baby or having the baby. And they can't... it's the grey area they can't grasp. And so, it's my role to help them in that.* (Josie, 28:44)

The use of metaphoric language ('black and white') as a way of expressing absolutist positions was echoed amongst several participants, who also utilised the terminology of 'grey' in reference to a more balanced or considered position. In fact, the prominence of the phraseology was so strong amongst those interviewed, that it provided the encompassing sentence for this particular subtheme. It was an interesting observation that the specific language was used in the same way by more than one participant. The duplication highlighted both the similarities of participants' experiences, and the degree to which metaphor was a helpful tool in helping participants express what they meant in a way that was relatable and easily understood. Dariya also employed the terms 'black and white':

> I find they're very like black and white about everything. Everything is either like right or wrong. I'm trying to really push with the boys like, not everything is black and white. Not everything is either right or wrong. (Dariya 20:32)

Dariya used the metaphor to emphasise the broader aspects of her teaching experience concerning students' inclination to view the world from a morally absolutist position; where ethical issues are either 'right' or 'wrong'. She conceived her role as trying to stretch students to think beyond their instinctive initial response to consider a more philosophically robust, less reactional position. Ella articulated a similar idea, although her narrative emphasised a greater reflective, interpretative element of thinking in contrast to Dariya and Josie's accounts whose focus was more descriptive:

> I wonder whether they see issues in black and white more than not, and they gain nuance, as they get older. So, you know, they have very much, I guess, a gut instinct type response, you know, abortion is killing babies and the death penalty is killing murderers and rapists and our job is to sort of figure that out. I have to get them to think in shades of grey. (Ella, 22:14)

The association of abortion with 'killing babies' accentuated the often-oversimplified preconceptions that students may bring into the Religious Education classroom when they first encounter the topic. Accordingly, part of Ella's business was to unpick and deconstruct these preconceptions, laying the ground for more mature views as they get older. Undergirding this capacity, was the notion that Religious Education (and more specifically, the RE Teacher) helped to move students several steps along the journey of thinking about abortion; a journey that was ongoing into adulthood. In an earlier part of the interview, Ella explained further that

her students tended to steer towards views that would be designated on the right of the abortion spectrum; 'pro-choice', or 'anti-abortion' (to use her words)

> *I'm always quite surprised how conservative kids are, and how anti abortion they are and how pro-life they are. And year 10s are sort of sensationalist and hyperbolic most of the time anyway, and I have to try and get around that. (Ella 15:16)*

The use of the words 'sensationalist' and 'hyperbolic' were particularly eloquent and illuminating of how students in Ella's class presented their views, which in this case were correlated to their age, more generally. Ella's experiences were that her students articulated their opinions in a manner likely to cause strong emotional feelings, or in an exaggerated or overstated fashion. Although the implication was that students' responses were related in part to cognitive development, this provided the footing for Ella to seek to develop such responses. Additionally, Ella's proximity to students was insightful in establishing their initial propensity toward a more conservation stance. Josie's experiences mirrored those of Ella:

> *Children can see things as very, very theoretical, as in, you can talk about abortion, and I tend to find lots in a very, very black and white responses. And normally down to the side of that it shouldn't be allowed. Like, if you're, if you've got to come down on one side or another, for a 16 year-old normally, I find that they're very anti-abortion in general. And so, I get them to think about why that is and all the different opinions* (Josie 16:30)

Moving towards a more analytical interpretation, Clara also had similar experiences but unpicked the reasons behind students' foundations:

> *I think I struggle sometimes when they come in and they're like, they've already made up their mind or they're… or that, you know, they've had parents' kind of opinions brought in with them, and they're very much like, you know, no, it's, it's wrong. It's wrong to kill. They're unwilling to hear an opposing argument. And I have to get them to think about different perspectives.* (Clara 10:17)

She reflected on the impact of students' upbringing upon their opinions and, more specifically, parental influence. Clara ascertained that, in her experience, students frequently entered the classroom having already had discussions about abortion at home. Often, links between home and school would be constructed positively. However, in this particular context, Clara was honest about her interpretation as something contested or unfavourable. The language that Clara used painted a picture of students' views as not entirely their own, or ones that were not

necessarily independently thought through. Instead, students' views emulated, or were a transmission of their parent'(s') positions. She accepted that this transmission was a difficult tension to navigate. Accordingly, whilst advancing the importance of exploring alternative views, there was a resistance to doing so by students who entered the classroom with fixed, established, views.

In a similar way to others above, Grace also had to strive to allow students the opportunity to engage with alternative perspectives. However, in her interview, she correlated such engagement with a more systematic effort to understand abortion as an issue that is, by very nature, controversial:

> *I think for some kids, they don't understand why it's such a big issue, if that makes sense, and so I have to work hard to get them to see that it is actually an issue that's debated. Most of them come in with a fixed pro-choice view, and so I have to try and get them to think about other points of view.* (Grace 08:50)

Almost all of those interviewed emphasised the importance of allowing students to be confronted with views that were markedly divergent from their own and assumed this importance to be a normative part of teaching Religious Education. Engaging with others' positions was therefore believed to be an integral part of developing more mature, rounded, and nuanced approaches to the topic of abortion. Nevertheless, participants' construction of the attributes or accentuation of this nuance took on several forms. Both Bethany and Freya, for example, wanted students to gauge the intricacy of women's decision-making process and the potential for it to be both burdensome and diversiform:

> *I guess it's that whole picture, I don't want them to leave with a sense that it's an easy decision to make because it's a huge decision and I want them to see that.* (Bethany 50:30)

> *It's not as easy as 'yes or no'. It's, it's a very hard in some cases, it's a very hard decision to make and I want them to get that.* (Freya 20:32)

Clara, too, delved deeper into what this burden might look like for those who decided to have an abortion:

> *And like, yeah, so I suppose when I talk about it it's trying to help them understand that the physical process itself is emotionally and I imagine spiritually, very difficult. They usually have quite a simplistic view of abortion. But actually, the impact of*

that on a personal level. So, I think, for me, in terms of what I'd like to achieve with them, would be understanding the difficulty and the complexity of the decision, taking into account, you know, her environment, her experience, her partner (or not), and to appreciate that. (Clara 26:43)

Her desire, here, was to convey to students the whole-being implications of having an abortion. These implications were not confined to the emotional aspects that must be navigated before such a decision is made, but the subsequent physical and spiritual significance of the experience. Additionally, Clara emphasised the importance of helping students to see the women's unique scenario; the different relationships and factors that have a bearing on her decision and her feelings towards that decision.[73]

Interestingly, the convergent experiences from those interviewed indicated that participants began with the presumption that students often came into the classroom with a 'fixed' view on abortion. Accordingly, the teachers' job was to help students in recognising their own starting positions alongside any potential biases or narrow thinking. Furthermore, they also saw their role as engaging students in alternative standpoints and opinions to broaden their thinking and help them approach the issue at hand in a more informed or nuanced manner. However, it is important to note that within this, participants did not necessarily see it as part of their capacity to directly change students' views. Instead, the emphasis was more on helping them to navigate their own existing standpoints in a more rounded way. In this regard, those interviewed often shared their desire to allow students to feel unsettled as an integral part of exploring, evaluating, and developing their knowledge and skills. Such an approach reflected the essential diverse nature of the abortion debate, and ethics more broadly. Accordingly, participants encouraged students to view cognitive tension as part of the learning process – one that should be embraced rather than resolved for the benefit of an oversimplified and easily-reached position. Both Bethany and Holly summarised this well in their transcripts:

> *It's okay to live in the grey areas. I want them to know that that's what ethics is all about* (Holly 17:20)

> *It's about embracing the messiness. Embracing it and not being scared of it.* (Bethany 53:03)

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[73] This idea is explored in more detail in subtheme b, below.

Overall, this subtheme demonstrates the extent to which participants saw the topic of abortion as one that is inherently complex in many regards; both as a summarisation of the plethora of different moral approaches to the issue, and as a reflection of the intricacies of a women's unique and varied individual circumstances. As a result, participants' experiences often centred on wanting to allow students to come face to face with these complexities. Consequently, they were keen for students to develop a well-rounded, sophisticated, and sensitive response to the issue that moved beyond an initial automatic binary reaction toward more latitudinous considerations. Those interviewed often interpreted their own role in this scenario as one that develops such critical skills that are beneficial to students as they navigate further issues within Religious Studies and encounter potential similar 'real-life' situations outside of the classroom.

7.1.1. Discussion: Ethical Thinking

In terms of skills and long-term development, participants constructed their experiences and their role as a teacher as having a responsibility to move students forward in their ability to navigate complex controversial and ethical issues such as abortion. Part of the nature of IPA demands that phenomenological enquiries "seek the moment" (McCormack & Joseph, 2018, p. 15). Participants' experiences, therefore, were situated. However, the IPA researcher embarks on the study of such experiences by immersing themselves in participants' lifeworld and analysing them through various lenses including cultural and socio-historical meanings. (Moran, 2000, p. 61)[74]

The relationship between ethics (where abortion would, arguably, sit) and Religious Education as discrete disciplines has, historically, been fraught with tension. In part, the newest GCSE Religious Studies specifications were drawn up as a response to the old. There was growing concern that a Religious Studies GCSE "could consist of…very little religion at all" and "had been so watered down that it no longer represented a mastery of any given subject" (Gibb, 2016). Many schools' Religious Education departments had shifted their focus toward 'ethics' or 'philosophy' and had rebranded themselves as such (Jones, 2013; Teece, 2017; Tillson, 2011). In turn, this shift had undermined the quality of their learning, giving them a superficial, narrow

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[74] For a good example of this see Tan et al. (2019) who utilise social comparison and cultural influence to consider the impact of prescription footwear in diabetes patients.

and distorted understanding of the significance of religion and belief (Ofsted, 2010, p. 32; REC, 2013c, p. 37)

However, for a variety of stakeholders, the introduction of the newest Religious Studies GCSEs has caused tension. During the consultation process, a significant number of teachers expressed their concern about the lack of ethics on the syllabus and its impact on both the uptake of the subject and upon teaching and learning. They argued that higher order thinking skills would be curtailed in favour of 'facts' or 'knowledge' (DfE, 2015a, p. 21). For others, debates were more pedagogical, having built up teaching strategies, models and approaches to assist in the teaching of ethical or philosophical issues more broadly.[75] For example, Felderhof & Thompson (2014) explore a virtue ethics approach to Religious Education, and *Philosophy for Children (P4C)* utilises child-led enquiry and Socratic dialogue to maximise the ethical discussion (Hannam, 2012, p. 127; Lipman, 1991).

Through this historical, political and pedagogical lens, participants' experiences are situated within an already contested space, where the disciplinary holds of ethics, philosophy and theology (amongst others) and their position within Religious Education are debated. Nevertheless, the very nature of being required to teach abortion demonstrates, at least in part, the necessity for participants to help young people approach such issues. Most notably, there was great congruence in participants foreseeing their job as one where they equipped students specifically to increase their awareness of the complexity of abortion and to develop the capacity to navigate ethical topics in 'shades of grey'. Despite being both contested and a necessity, participants constructed this experience as something worthwhile, and yet something that they had to work hard to achieve.

Participants' reflections on their students having an initial tendency to view ethical or moral dilemmas as binary (good and bad/ right and wrong) is something that is well documented in the extant literature. In fact, such an observation corroborates with much that unpins much early moral development theory. Piaget, as one of the foremost scholars to attempt to systematise cognitive aspects of child development, distinguishes between moral heteronomy (or moral realism) and moral autonomy (or moral relativism). The former, he attributes to earlier childhood where the tendency is "to regard duty and the value attaching to it as self-subsistent

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[75] It is important to note that these strategies are not a new phenomenon. Loukes (1961), for example suggested that RE should focus on exploring 'real-life' teenage issues such as sex, marriage, death and suffering.

and independent of the mind, as imposing itself regardless of the circumstances in which the individual may find himself" (Piaget, 1932, p. 106). Whereas the latter includes an "understanding the why and wherefore of the laws which society lays upon us" (Piaget, 1932, p. 358).[76] In other words, heteronomous morality connotes externally imposed (usually, from an authority or parental figure), absolutist, and static rules that are uncompromising. In contrast, moral autonomy is attributed to later childhood and consists of accounting for others' perspectives on issues. It moves them towards an appreciation of the intention and motivation of another's point of view and establishes for themselves their own, more relativist moral positioning.

Establishing cognitive maturity, in part, as an evolution of morality from one's authority figure to a personally held position helps to account for some participants' experiences of the influence of parents on students' views of abortion. Clara, for example, articulated the challenges she had in trying to equip young people to move beyond the views that they "brought in with them [to the classroom]" (10.17). Her interpretation of this event, therefore, highlights the strength of exertion she perceives that caregivers and parents have upon young people in their development of moral reasoning at this moment in their education (see also Smetana, 1999; Walker and Taylor, 1991).

Additionally, the desire explained by teachers to move students towards more nuanced, balanced and complex thought processes builds upon other areas of cognitive and moral maturity. For example, the teenage years are fertile ground for the development of skills such as autonomous and abstract logic (Markovits, 2013, p. 73); the ability to use imagined realities to think systematically about the potential outcomes of proposed problems; the capacity for formal operational cognition or the ability to hypothesise and manipulate ideas through internal processing (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958, p. 56); higher order cognitive processing (Greiff et al., 2015); the coordination of multiple variables (Bullock et al., 2009, p. 174); the development of altruistic and empathic emotions as motivational factors (Eisenberg et al., 2009, p. 229); an awareness of the individual principles of conscience (Kohlberg, 1984, pp. 621–639) and an understanding of their role and position in wider society (Erikson, 1951, pp. 234–237).

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[76] The specific age range to which each category applies is overlapping and fluid.

In terms of adolescent development, confronting the subject of abortion was designated by participants as one that was useful in attempting to achieve the goals of more holistic and mature cognitive thought, beyond that of moral heteronomy (the dichotomies of abortion being right/wrong, good/bad, or yes/no). However, the starting question of participants was not 'which issues can students encounter to help them in the process of cognitive development?', which presumably might have included abortion, but equally might not. Rather, they perceived abortion, unsurprisingly, as a topic that was predefined and externally allocated by examination boards. Therefore, they were required to navigate developing students' complex thinking within the bounds of extrinsic parameters. As a result, they often found themselves in a place of tension. Their experiences were such that they viewed their role beyond that as delivering content and facts *about* abortion. In fact, there were very few references to content in their narratives. Yet, they sometimes felt as if the demands of having to help young people approach complex ethical debate were demanding, exacerbated by the fact that the skills required to navigate these successfully were still being developed. Furthermore, such a tension also made the measure of concrete success criteria in this area difficult to obtain. Becoming proficient at handling abortion debates in a balanced manner, one that recognises the appropriate nuance and implication of a held position, is a formidable task given that the adult population also remains binary or polarised (DiMaggio et al., 1996; Duffy et al., 2019, p. 26). Consequently, this adds to the contested space in which a teacher is required to operate in bringing about learning.

7.1.2. Discussion: Engaging With Others' Views

In seeking to develop students' ability to reflect upon and engage with the more nuanced areas of controversial topics, the focus of participants' meaning-making was on the processes involved in order to facilitate this "grey thinking" (Fischer, 2007, p. 163). As such, their narratives were categorised by a lack of clarity in establishing the concrete target against which skills development could be objectively measured. Participants were less able to conceptualise, at least in these instances, what constituted grey thinking in pragmatic terms. How exactly one student could be better at such a skill than others, or what attributes a student who was exceeding in this area might possess, were left largely untouched and nebulous. Instead, they chose to concentrate on their own role and the teaching methods they employed to further students' development, despite not having a terminus in mind. In particular, participants highlighted the key importance of allowing students to engage with a variety of different voices and views to achieve a more balanced approach to abortion.

The study of religion (and different people's views therein) is an integral and indispensable part of a "broad and balanced" (DfE, 2011a, note 11) education due, in part, to the influence of belief on individuals, culture, behaviour and society. It grants the opportunity to study and understand the variety of perspectives contained within the world in which we live, either as means in itself ((Department for Children Schools and Families, 2010, p. 7; Jackson, 2004; Schools Council, 1971; Watson & Thompson, 2014, p. 64) as a cultural or socio-anthropological phenomenon (Gibb, 2012; Schools Council, 1977; Yates, 1988), as a theological enterprise (Cooling, 1994b, 2000; Pett & Cooling, 2018), or as a multi-disciplinary, conceptual enquiry (Erricker, 2010).

More recently, the value of exploring a variety of different voices has been emphasised as a crucial part of developing 'religious literacy'[77], or the possession of effective skills and knowledge to navigate the "daily encounter with the full range of religious plurality" (Dinham, 2015, p. 110) present in our society. To act in a rounded manner and operate well amongst diversity, one must have the opportunity to understand the multitude of beliefs, their impact on individual and community living, and their implications on values and behaviour. This approach is largely sociological in nature (Hannam et al., 2020, p. 221) but provides a useful steer whereby religion and belief are embodied, and not divorced from people and populations. As such, proponents of a religious literacy approach emphasise highly the role of discourse and interchange between and within those who hold different opinions. Dinham (2020, p. 5), for example, argues for a "better quality of conversation about the religions and beliefs that are there", and The Woolf Institute (2015, p. 8) call for opportunities for "interreligious and inter-worldview encounter and dialogue".

The notion of conversation or dialogue between views is largely congruent with participants' experiences. From their perspective, helping students to consider abortion in a more nuanced way involves facilitating circumstances where they are confronted by a range of different perspectives and different points of view, contrasting them to their own in order to understand them better, thus, increasing their religious literacy. By seeking a greater understanding of alternative views through reflection and conversation with others, participants believed that this new knowledge would translate into students becoming more skilled at having a sensitive and respectful conversation in wider contexts. They, therefore, saw their roles as twofold. First, by

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[77] 'Religious literacy' itself is not a new concept in Religious Education (see, for example, Wright, 1993), but has experienced a wealth of debate over the previous few years.

providing the alternative viewpoints, and second, by helping them engage with these viewpoints critically. On a pragmatic level, engagement with a variety of positions on abortion may well happen within the classroom itself where the individuals within the class hold a multitude of positions. However, the more likely situation, as indicated by participants' experience, is that this engagement needs to be assisted by the teacher whether through questioning, planned activities, story-telling, or facilitating discussion.

Facilitating dialogue and understanding of a wide range of opinions and positions is also emphasised in the attempt to reorientate the subject away from Religious Education and towards 'Religion and Worldviews (RW)', as recommended by the Commission on Religious Education (2018). The report asserts that studying RW "prepares children and young people for living in the increasingly diverse world in which they find themselves" (CoRE, 2018, p. 5). By understanding a variety of worldviews, young people can appreciate important aspects of human experience and how meaning and purpose are ascribed to them. The move towards a new nomenclature continues to elicit considerable debate on several fronts. For example, regarding the inclusion of the word 'religion', Chater & Donnellan argue that the combined title (Religion *and* Worldviews) is confusing and undermines the strength of a worldviews orientation (Chater & Donnellan, 2020, p. 125). Additionally, the inclusion of both non-religious and religious worldviews has led to claims of confusion and an overcrowded curriculum (Barnes, 2021, pp. 7-9; Schweitzer, 2018, p. 5). Nevertheless, the report makes clear that the study of particular worldviews on their own is not a sufficient basis for learning. Instead, young people should also grasp the underlying methodologies, categories, and approaches to the study of worldviews to apply them both to their own lives, and the lives of those with unfamiliar worldviews (CoRE, 2018, p. 36). Accordingly, principles of discourse, abstraction and translation are important.

Within the context of participants' interpretations of their experiences, they too placed significant value on these principles in aiming for students to become proficient in controversial conversation, astute at knowing how to handle a variety of different viewpoints, and adept at exploring their positionality. In this way, teachers' experiences corroborate Shaw's arguments made in favour of a worldview approach. She asserts that, by participating in an exploration of worldviews (or, becoming worldview literate), a student is able to contribute towards "intercultural understanding and competency by developing the ability to talk well about and engage well with religion and worldviews in diversity, from a self-aware perspective" (Shaw,

2020, p. 155). This conviction of developing skills of understanding, and consequently, discourse and self-awareness, has been highlighted elsewhere. Although empirical studies are sparse, Salter's research with primary RE teachers revealed how those surveyed perceived the importance of a Religion and Worldviews approach in helping students to 'disagree well' with others and contributed to wider social and personal development (Salter, 2021, p. 319). Although participants in this study did not reflect specifically on worldviews, they too emphasised a key aim in teaching abortion as helping students to increase their skills of discussion, disagreement and critical engagement.

However, the journey through understanding and wholesome discourse towards an appreciation of others' views, is not without critique. Hannam & Biesta (2019, p.58) challenge the supposed ideal that learning about the worldviews and orientations of others directly correlates to an increased attitude of compassion, awareness, respect, or appreciation. They state that:

> it is wonderful…when enhanced understanding does lead to a change in attitude, but the claim that understanding is the key 'mechanism' here, cannot be substantiated. Understanding does not automatically translate to empathetic action

Hannam & Biesta (2019, p. 58) raise the point that the opposite might be true and there may be circumstances where increased knowledge or enhanced understanding "leads to the opposite: to disrespect, hate, and so on". They pose an interesting observation given participants' proclivity both to assume such a link between developing knowledge of others' views and increasing maturity, and to construct this link positively. In all their accounts and narratives, there was never a time when participants reflected on the potential negative impact of utilising this mechanism. Thus, it could be argued that a positive outcome assumption was taken for granted within participants' practice and perhaps highlights its prevalence within the RE community more widely.

7.2. 'Where Is the Human in This Story?': Developing Emotional Intelligence

As previously mentioned, participants talked in depth about their experiences of helping students to comprehend some of the intricacies of an individual who might be considering an abortion. Although closely linked to the previous subtheme, there was a distinct emergence of some accounts (five out of ten participants) of a different subtheme that related directly to using controversial topics like abortion as a vehicle to enable students to develop their emotional

intelligence. In teaching the topic, participants were invested in creating opportunities for the students to maximise their capacity to discern and control their own emotions. Furthermore, participants often linked their experiences with assisting students to develop a sense of empathy and understanding both for those facing abortion situations and for others. Thus, students' interpersonal skills were cultivated which had both immediate and eventual benefits.

Josie, for example, reflected on the importance of recognising that abortion is not something that can be separated from the personal experiences of women. In this way, an abortion could not be rendered abstract and, in some way, ineffectual. It was instead, by very nature, an embodied experience.

> *I think for me… there was a point where for the first time that I thought oh, no, this is someone's reality, this isn't a theoretical ethical concept here. This is actually someone's reality and the potential reality of people sitting in front of me, and so I want them to see that too.* (Josie 08:40)

Josie emphasised the connectedness of the topic of abortion firstly to women in a remote sense; those who exist in a space far removed from her immediate context. However, on a deeper level of reflection, she began to relate abortion to the potential present or future context of those sitting in her class. The repetition of the word 'reality' indicated the strength of her desire to remember and ensure that abortion does not become a topic of study detached from those most directly affected. Accordingly, Josie was keen to reflect on her own journey of personal discovery in grounding her teaching in authenticity and concrete experiences.

For Bethany too, she reflected on her teaching experiences where she was keen to portray the idea that abortion is substantive and corporeal; one that should not be disconnected from the individual in question:

> *So, there is that kind of, like, removed sense of, you know, there isn't that emotional attachment. And just want them, you know, to ask, where is the human in this story? Yeah, and just make that connection that this is someone's life* (Bethany 22:36).

In her interpretation of her classroom experiences, Bethany did not explicate why there was a tendency for students to act in a way that favoured the abstract or philosophical and, in so doing, separated 'discussion' or 'debate' from the tangible (or at least conceptually concrete) connection to 'real' people. Although, in context, Bethany viewed such a tendency as part of the journey

of emotional intelligence that students partake in as they engage with controversial subject matter, and Religious Studies classes more generally. The articulation of her own experiences revealed that when students were initially confronted with a controversial topic, they possessed a cognitive distance to the topic that, to her, demonstrated a lack of emotional maturity or inability to make links between theory and practice. As they progressed, these skills began to develop as they were presented with the opportunity to engage with a plethora of views. In this, students were taught how to navigate the more complex areas of ethical debate and were challenged appropriately in both their knowledge of content and in their formation of a coherent and emphatic response. Consequently, in Bethany's narrative, emotional intelligence was not something that was purely advanced by age as students progress through their education. Instead, emotional intelligence could be learned, developed, and improved upon.

Nevertheless, later in her account, Bethany highlighted the limitations of the teacher's role in the development of students' emotional intelligence and the importance of viewing the longevity of the process:

> *We can get them so far, in terms of their emotional response, and beginning to think about abortion as a controversial issue, and then whatever life brings them will then take them the rest of the way. I kind of think of it we're planting seeds. And if I can plant seeds of empathy, and compassion, and thinking at this from like another point of view, then I feel as if I've done my job* (Bethany 28:15)

The expression of Bethany's account was not defeatist here. Rather, it was a recognition that a 'perfect' response to abortion was as elusive for students as it is for adults. Accordingly, the role of the teacher, from her perspective, was to move the student one step along the journey toward emotional intelligence and maturity in considering others' circumstances. It was significant that the focus of this particular excerpt began with a collaborative sense ('we') in which Bethany identified and associated with a corporate body of teaching professionals; both those within her department but also those more broadly. She perceived that, universally, the teacher's job was to lay the foundational skills needed to first, establish abortion as a controversial issue requiring sensitivity and maturity; and second, develop a greater emotional aptitude and confidence in confronting such complex issues. This activity could not be completed in its entirety by the Religious Studies teacher either in approaching one topic such as abortion, or in time investing in young people over a series of years. Instead, Bethany recognised that she had a crucial yet partial role to play in the ongoing and lifelong development of students' self-understanding,

empathy, reflection, social awareness and relationship management; especially towards those who might hold different religious beliefs.

Nevertheless, empathy was a seemingly crucial element that some participants, such as Bethany, were keen to emphasise in the construction of their role in building emotional intelligence. For example, the ability to understand the thoughts and feelings of others and share in those was viewed highly. Accordingly, students were encouraged to identify with women who were experiencing difficult and complicated situations, to help them not only to be more emotionally intelligent members of society once they leave school, but also better at navigating current classroom dynamics and relationships between peers:

> *And I think I'm trying to get my pupils to have those empathy skills, so not to meet, you know, either their own thoughts or the thoughts of others with judgement, because it's so easy to judge and go 'well, you're wrong'. But when we're not sure about things that needs to be met with empathy, as they try to figure out the world around them* (Bethany 15:02)

In the context of abortion, Bethany attempted to utilise the topic's essence of controversy, where there was a disparity of views, to instil a response in students that avoided polarisation. However, her interpretation of her experiences was intriguing. In the above extract, Bethany associated judgment with articulating (in an accusing manner) a perceived incorrect moral stance; that someone was wrong. However, the concept of 'judgement' also precedes the spoken action and was also applied to one's inner consciousness; that one can judge someone in their thoughts as well as in their actions. Whilst emphasising the solution to judgment as empathy, she also incorporated the notion of judgement as applying equally to the self and internal negative self-talk. Her overarching commitment to empathy thus extended to being aware of, and sensitive to, thoughts and feelings as they applied to both self and others; and in administering kindness in seeking to understand and appreciate the full breadth of these thoughts and feelings. This was an important value as Bethany attempted to combat assumptions, preconceptions and notions of shame and guilt that she believed to be unhelpful.

Freya and Isabelle's narratives also revealed convergent emphases on the aims of their practice as ones that helped students to unpick the complexity of women's experiences with particular reference to the emotional aspects of abortion situations:

I want them to think about what it might be like to be in that situation and not just for abortion or whatever, but for everything. (Freya 09:30)

I suppose I really want them to think about all the different factors involved when a woman requests an abortion… to really engage with the emotional side of what that must take. (Isabelle 34:10)

Like Bethany, Freya's interpretation of this part of her experience was centred on enabling students to develop empathy skills; an understanding and appreciation of the feelings of others, even though they might not directly experience or share them for themselves. The topic of abortion was a helpful conduit to develop empathy given its complexity and controversy. However, Freya's horizons were more extensive than one singular issue as she sought to incorporate the development of empathy into all expressions of her teaching.

Similarly, Isabelle accentuated the importance of getting students to think holistically about the multifaceted nature of a woman's individual situation, and paid particular attention to emotional dimensions. However, in the interpretation of Isabelle's experience, it was important to note not only what she included within her description, but also what she omitted. In this case, Isabelle framed her narrative around a woman's decision to step forward and request an abortion as opposed to the emotional and psychological aspects that might affect women during or after an abortion. This framing made sense given the context of Religious Studies but is noteworthy, nonetheless. For, in helping students to appreciate how those with various religious and non-religious worldviews might approach abortion, the key question is whether adherents to that particular worldview find abortion to be *morally permissible.* Or, put another way: how does religious or non-religious belief affect the circumstances under which a woman is allowed to access abortion (if at all)? It is the answering of this question that is perceived, at least by Isabelle, as important within Religious Studies and not (as might otherwise be expected) questions related to the treatment and outlook of women who have already had an abortion. Such a focus revealed a tendency by some participants to direct their class's ethical and theological discussion concerning abortion to the decision itself. In so doing, they, arguably, segmented the issue into 'pre-abortion' and 'post-abortion' ethics, with a concentration exclusively on the former.

Dariya, in her interview, gave particular weight to the decision to have an abortion in an attempt to help students appreciate a religious worldview:

Lots of the students, they take a sort of atheist stance themselves. I think that that's quite sort of challenging for them to get past that, yes trying to get them to understand that people might hold religious views and believe in God and that be a logical thing and that might influence how they think about things like whether they have an abortion. It's quite foundational. (Dariya 28:20)

Dariya conveyed an understanding of the influences of students' various backgrounds and upbringings, recognising the importance of getting students to take stock of these so that they might better understand others. Her intention here, was to encourage students to think carefully and critically about the fact that religious (and by extension non-religious) beliefs can determine an individual's behaviour, thus, effectively making fundamental links between faith and practice. Whilst this link might seem axiomatic for an adult, it was perceived by some (such as Dariya) as a key part of students' emotional intelligence and development of empathy skills.

Overall, this subtheme demonstrates how participants often constructed their experiences of teaching abortion around a desire for students to develop a particular set of skills. More specifically, for students to grow and mature in emotional intelligence and their ability to empathise with others. By exploring the personal nature of abortion, alongside its particularly emotional complexities, students are confronted with recognising their own positionality. Further, it also demands that they engage with the multi-faceted aspects of women's stories, taking account of their unique situations (even if these women are hypothetical cases presented as examples to students). Engagement includes any beliefs, and important moral values, including their religious beliefs, that might impact how a woman might approach the issue or influence her decision making. In so doing, students can develop their capacity to place themselves in another's position. By extension, they should (as is the aim of some participants) be better able to perceive, understand and manage emotion in relation to themselves, their peers, and others whom they might encounter outside of the classroom.

7.2.1. Discussion: Personal Worldviews

For all participants there seemed an emerging priority to ensure that, when teaching the topic of abortion, they did so in a way that reflected the complex nature of women's situations. Resultantly, they were keen to stay close to the reality of those who might experience abortion. Participants frequently made a concerted effort not to discuss abortion in the abstract, or in terms of general morality of whether abortion decisions were right or wrong. Instead, they committed

to helping pupils understand a woman's (and often her partner's) perspectives, paying close attention to the multitude of factors at play. In doing so, they believed they were contributing to developing students' skills that would be useful for their ongoing education and preparation for adult life.

Their focus, therefore, was on exploring the particular positioning or worldview of the individual people affected by abortion. The Commission on Religious Education report makes the distinction between institutional worldviews which are "shared among particular groups and sometimes embedded in institutions" and personal worldviews which are "an individual's own way of understanding and living in the world, which may or may not draw from one, or many, institutional worldviews" (CoRE, 2018, p. 4). Although there is some overlap between the two, the dual appreciation of the term worldview categorises the report's approach to both the subject's content and methods of study.

On the one hand, the distinction between institutional and personal worldviews is helpful. It "acknowledges the diversity and complexity" of the norms, ideals, values and relationships that it underpins and their establishment into more formal, systematic, or organisational structures (Benoit et al., 2020, p. 28). The terminology also reflects the actuality of beliefs across a wide range of contexts, steering students away from monolithic constructions of a worldview. In other words, it broadens student perspectives beyond that of a singular or discrete 'Christian worldview' or 'Jewish worldview', for example, towards a more integrated and authentic conceptualisation that is sensitive across time, tradition, custom and location (Greetz, 1957; Kanitz, 2005). Additionally, it appropriately acknowledges the fluid, unbound, and fuzzy nature of worldviews whereby a person may move within and between different positions at different times and under different circumstances (Riegel & Delling, 2019, p. 404; Sire, 2015, p. 25). They may also join with others in shifting and intersectional movements, inhabiting one position collaboratively for a period and aligning themselves with more formalised systems of belief. Accordingly, as Freathy & John (2019, p. 7) summarise, it prevents personal and institutional beliefs and orientations from being understood as an "'off-the-shelf' product, consumed by an unthinking and universally-assenting populace".

However, on the other hand, the distinctions between personal and institutional worldviews are problematic, as is the relationship between them.[78] For instance, Loseke (2007, p. 676) contends that polarisation and separation of the personal from the global is a Western notion, open to the challenge of radical individualism and therefore not reflective of how identity would be constructed in many parts of the majority world. Additionally, the dichotomy also leaves itself open to challenge in its neglect of the communal aspects of worldview composition (Kuusisto et al., 2019, p. 398). For this reason, Cooling et al. (2020, p. 46), suggests it is important that we "capture the importance of community in the development of a personal worldview".

In this context, participants' experiences were almost exclusively concerned with the personal worldviews of those facing abortion. In overemphasising the particular and complex contexts, and situations of individuals, they often showed new awareness of both the institutional and the community aspects of worldviews. Further, given this intense focus, it was sometimes difficult to ascertain how participants incorporated a thorough understanding of the religious, or non-religious, facets of a person's worldview. Only Isabelle and Dariya seemed to ask their students explicit questions relating to the extent of influence of religious, or non-religious, belief on a woman's decision making. Accordingly, most participants tended to direct the class's discussion towards gaining an understanding of abortion as an ethical issue as a whole rather than one situated exclusively within Religious Education. Additionally, the omission of general explorations regarding community aspects of worldview formation led to a propensity towards discussing the individual moral permissibility of abortion. Or, put another way, the focus of teachers was often 'pre-abortion' in attempting to allow students to understand what a woman in a particular situation *should* do, given her unique context and beliefs. However, a more holistic examination of the influence of institutional worldview was often lacking.

7.2.1.1. Personal Worldviews at the Expense of the Institutional

The focus on the personal worldview is interesting since, in recent times, both Benoit et al. (2020, p. 29) and Riegel & Delling (2019, p. 412) have noted the tendency for teachers to over-focus on the intuitional worldview. In our contrasting findings, there was little to no mention of institutional worldviews (both religious and non-religious). Instead, in situating abortion discussion mainly within an ethical dilemma concerning one or two people, it was assumed that

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[78] See Miller (2020) for an interesting exploration of this problem.

either institutional worldviews had a limited impact on the decision making of an individual, or that institutional worldviews were a collection of similar, personal worldviews.

Regarding the former, scholars have established that institutional religious worldviews greatly influence abortion attitudes (Adamczyk et al., 2020; Hoffmann & Johnson, 2005; Jelen & Wilcox, 2003). However, it is less clear whether religious affiliation affects abortion decisions directly. Both Tomal (2001) and Adamczyk (2008) suggest an inverse association between religious affiliation and abortion rates amongst certain substrata of communities and populations. Nevertheless, there remains considerable research still being conducted in this area, especially in more systematic methodologies. That said, empirical work in the sphere of sociology and psychology of religion, more broadly, establishes the influence of 'extrinsic religiosity'[79] upon attitudes and behaviour, particularly in relation to sexual practices. For example, in the timing of premarital sex (Lyons & Smith, 2014; Rowatt & Schmitt, 2003) or sexual risk-taking (Cowden & Bradshaw, 2007; Zaleski & Schiaffino, 2000).

Assuming, in light of the aforementioned discussion, that institutional worldviews (particularly religious ones) do indeed have an impact on the decision making of individuals, then the notion that participants often perceived institutional worldviews as a coming together of multiple, similar, personal worldviews comes into clearer focus. Freathy & John (2019, p. 7) suggest a similar idea whereby "an institutional worldview might merely be considered as the official or formal expression of collective personal worldviews as they have been shared through corporate traditions, rituals, behaviours, (un)written sources… over time." This suggestion bears resemblance to early Durkheimian theory of religion, where overlapping personal experiences form "collective effervescence" (Durkheim, 1995, p. 208) creating the possibility for social conformity and group influence and agency. However, the integration of part to whole is, arguably, more complicated than participants interpreted. Under such a framework, it seems logical that every religion is an institutional worldview, yet not all institutional worldviews are a religion (van der Kooij et al., 2013, p. 213). However, this framework becomes problematic when we encounter how some construct their personal worldview as 'bricoleurs' (Hervieu-Leger, 2006). In no longer largely accepting one set of institutional dogmas or values and basing one's personal worldview instead on a variety of different perspectives, the institutional

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[79] A distinction is often made in the literature between extrinsic and intrinsic religiosity that has overlap with the institutional/personal worldview divide (see, (Donahue, 1985; Hunt & King, 1971)

worldview is shifted to reflect this disparate understanding. Thus, conceivably it becomes so idiosyncratic and amorphous that it is untenable to maintain and difficult to describe.

In assuming that the institutional worldviews were the collective resemblance of personal worldviews, and choosing to focus their narratives primarily on the personal worldviews of individual women, participants demonstrated a confused conceptualisation of the concept and failed to appropriately engage with the broader perspectives surrounding the abortion debate. There is still much empirical work to be done in examining the way RE teachers perceive and implement worldviews, given the subject's relatively new attempted reorientation. However, our findings in this study are reflective of those found by Everington (2019) in her qualitative study of twenty-five RE teachers. Although framed around non-religious worldviews, the research found that only a small number of participants appeared to make a clear distinction between the institutional (or organised) worldviews and the personal (Everington, 2019, p. 17). So too in this study, participants either did not consider the institutional in their explorations or conflated the two categorisations. Something was true for both religious and non-religious worldviews.

Nevertheless, there was a significant endeavour by participants to ensure that students moved beyond a purely intellectual ascent towards understanding the complex emotional, practical, medical, and relational aspects of abortion. Positively, this approach supports the CoRE's more integrated vision where "worldviews should not be understood as merely sets of propositional beliefs. They have emotional, affiliative (belonging) and behavioural dimensions" (2018, p. 72). In this way, participants' focus on the personal worldview of those who might be facing such an abortion decision was beneficial in providing a more comprehensive and nuanced depiction of a woman's position. Accordingly, participants were keen for students to think carefully not as a problem to be solved, or a case to be studied, but as the whole person, as depicted by the subtheme's encapsulating phrase 'where is the human in this story?'.

Smith argues that an over-reliance on the cognitive or intellectual aspects of worldview distorts the concept in that it leads to a "narrow, reductionistic understanding of the human person that fails to appreciate the primary, noncognitive way that we negotiate being-in-the-world" (Smith, 2009, p. 65). As such, a cogent approach to worldviews appropriately and effectively incorporates how we encounter the world not only through thinking, but also through feeling which forms a powerful driver for behaviour and decision making (for example, Bechara et al.,

2000; Lerner et al., 2015; Zajonc, 1984). This approach, according to Cooling, "moves the debate away from a purely cognitive focus on pupils forming their own systems of ideas and takes on board the emotional and identity forming aspects of human experience" (Cooling, 2020, p. 409). Thus, a broader, more holistic approach is a strength in helping students and teachers to understand that in order to navigate our own, and others' worldviews, we must do so with the explicit recognition that we are not simply rational persons but embodied, affective, desiring ones who are fundamentally oriented towards what we love.

7.2.1.2. Affective Phenomenology and The Triple Hermeneutic

The shift of participants' focus towards non-cognitive aspects of the personal worldview of those whom they wished students to engage with (usually, women making abortion decisions), makes for interesting discussion within the framework of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. Heidegger argues that the "existential totality of Dasein's ontological structure must be grasped… in the signification of the term "care"" (Heidegger, 1927, p. 237). Accordingly, a person's primordial inhabitation of their orientation is "absorbed in the world of its concern" (Heidegger, 1927, p. 236). Our lived experience is not one where we view or perceive the world as a series of objects that we engage with cognitively from a sense of distance, as in much Husserlian phenomenology (Arnold, 2020). Instead, for Heidegger, the situated, reciprocal nature of the world means it necessitates one to be deeply involved or entangled within it on a level that involves our whole person, including our feelings and emotions. Thus, Dasein's authentic existence is meaningful within the affective vista of care (or love), in that we explore our experiences through desire, intuition, devotion and solicitude rather than cognition alone (Horrigan-Kelly et al., 2016, p. 3).

In participants' experiences of teaching abortion, their inclination was often to move away from the abstract and the cognitive toward the affective and emotional. Their desire was for students to grasp the authentic, messy, and frequently complex situations and feelings of those affected by abortion or termination decisions. This complexity was representative of life more generally, and therefore vital for students' development in the areas of skills and lifelong learning. However, similar to the explanation above, their motivations insofar as they were revealed in their narratives, sat under an overarching impetus towards care, or concern. Some participants, for example, felt the need to speak up on behalf of the 'invisible' women being discussed in the lesson. Consequently, they demonstrated a sensibility towards telling the stories of those affected

by abortion when they were unable to speak for themselves; either because they were fictitious, or because they existed in the form of a depersonalised example or case study. By abstraction, teachers framed their practice in such a way as to enable students not to see others as 'objects' to be thought about, but rather as holistic persons worthy of connection on a fundamental emotional level of care or bilateral humanity. The commitment, then, to want the whole person to be understood brings a teachers' orientation toward the affective aspects of the personal worldview into sharper focus.

Finally, from a hermeneutical perspective, participants' experiences added a fascinating layer to the IPA process. Typically, IPA has been understood as individual researchers working with the experiences of individual participants. Correspondingly, IPA's 'double hermeneutic' acknowledges that whilst "the participant is trying to make sense of the personal and social world; the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of their personal and social world" (Smith, 2004, p. 40). However, more recent work has sought to expand IPA's hermeneutical horizon. For example, in working collaboratively with multiple researchers (Montague et al., 2020), with groups of participants (Love et al., 2020), utilising more innovative artefacts, photography and card-sorts (Morrey et al., 2021; Quincey et al., 2021), and in combining methodologies (Agarwal & Sandiford, 2021; Bullo & Hearn, 2021; Jedličková et al., 2022). In this study, the hermeneutical horizon expanded beyond the expected double hermeneutic to a triple hermeneutic: the researcher was making sense of the participant, who is making sense of themselves, by making sense of their students' experiences.

For Gadamer's hermeneutics, although the initial constraint was between interpreter and text, its later expansion recognised:

> …its fundamental significance for our entire understanding of the world and thus for all the various forms in which this understanding manifests itself: from inter-human communication to manipulation of society (Gadamer, 1967, p. 18)

His approach established that meaning is not something discrete or concrete to be discovered, but rather an unveiling of a phenomenon which is already there. Therefore, it has the capacity to extend understanding to meanings that are not yet understood (Palmer, 1969, p. 163). As one's horizon, or bounds of understanding, encounters something new it participates in a discourse between the past and the present. Accordingly, the dialogical process whereby the old and new meet to expand the capacity for understanding is a 'fusion of horizons (Gadamer, 1960,

p. 305). Such understanding is linguistically mediated, constructing meaning through the movement between part and whole in concentricity (Gadamer, 1988, p. 68).

As illustrated in Figure 5 below, there are many levels within which the hermeneutical process takes place. For participants, their 'fusion of horizons' falls on two separate fronts. First, in their interactions with students in the everyday nature of their job whereby they seek to understand those in their classes, which in turn helps them to understand themselves. Secondly, as they reflect on their experiences with students and verbalise these to the researcher within the time bound nature of the interview, meaning-making occurs as they make sense of their experiences through questioning. Next, for the researcher, they are tasked with listening well to establish the significance of teaching abortion for the participant. However, the level of self-reflection and the 'back-and-forth' in appropriately recognising the factors influencing the researcher's own interpretation means that the researcher is also making sense of their position. Finally, for the student, their encounters with the 'subject material' which, in this case, is abortion (or more usually, a person faced with an abortion decision), facilitates a fusion of horizons between their existing understanding and the confrontation with new material. The arrow between student and subject is depicted in the diagram as one way because they can influence the experience of the student. However, the subject content (abortion) is static or inanimate and so unable to be influenced by the student.
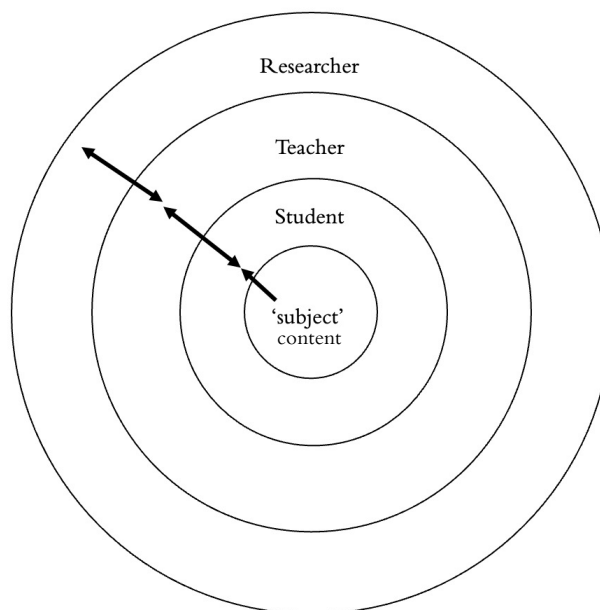
Figure 5: The Fusion of Horizons Between Parties

7.3. 'It's So Important That They Learn Most of Their Life Skills Through Your Subject': Ongoing Development Beyond the Classroom

In consideration of skills development and lifelong learning, the notion of 'outside the classroom' was of particular import for numerous participants. Those interviewed often spoke in detail about the various ways their experience of teaching abortion incorporated future-focussed aims: preparing students to more effectively navigate the challenges that might occur as they enter adult life. Accordingly, a third subtheme emerged that included participants' temporal interpretations and commitment to their role as moving beyond the immediate benefit for students towards more eventual outcomes. In so doing, participants embodied the more vocational aspects of their role; deriving a sense of purpose and value from the prospects offered to students. Additionally, it affirmed their awareness of the value of Religious Education for students' ongoing maturity.

Although this was perhaps indicative of educational aims more broadly, the focus of participants was orientated around their practices and the potential advantages or opportunities students gained as a result. Some articulated the importance and relevance of studying abortion beyond its appearance on the syllabus:

> *I want them to look back and think they've learned something beyond like what they need to know for the exams – that what they did in RE was useful for them in some way.* (Ella 12:06)

> *Yeah, usually, as an educator, you know, it will be on the specification and they might be examined on it, but I definitely use this as an educational tool. It's for their life once they leave.* (Freya 38:05)

For Ella and Freya, there was a recognition that part of their responsibility as a teacher lay in teaching the content that was largely determined by external organisations and benchmarks (for example, examination boards). As abortion appeared on the syllabus, they were committed to equipping students with the skills and knowledge required to adequately navigate assessment in this area (namely, GCSE qualifications) until such a time where it ceased to be a part of an accredited programme of study. However, Ella and Freya also placed distinct emphases on the longevity of the topic for students' ongoing education. Although examinations were important (and could have a significant impact on students' futures), both participants considered education

more holistically, where assessment was only one component of young people's development. Additionally, there was a reflective and retrospective element to Ella's narrative in particular – the desire for students to look back on their own experiences in Religious Education classes and view them as worthwhile and profitable even in some intangible sense. Thus, they saw beyond the immediate few years when students were in front of the teacher and interpreted their experiences as being intrinsically valuable for students throughout their lifespan. This longevity was something that gave greater purpose and meaning to their role as the teacher and provided a suitable and integrated motivation for their work.

Building on this motivation, some participants talked in more specific detail about the nature of the skills they were seeking to develop in students that would be beneficial for adult life. Annabel, for example, highlighted two particularly important elements. First, the ability for students to engage well in divergent views:

> *I think in this, it's about not shying away from conflict, or disagreement. It's a part*
> *of life, and so teaching students to disagree well is a fundamental part of RE. Which*
> *is why I think it's such an important subject to teach. Because alongside with what*
> *I do now, we are preparing them for the future* (Annabel 35:10)

The 'this' referred to at the beginning of the excerpt was 'abortion'. Annabel foresaw one of the primary benefits of teaching debates about abortion as allowing students to be confronted with clashes of opinion. She discerned that adult life was often full of discord and difference (without ascribing a moral value to this). As a result, she believed that one of the strengths of her teaching was in allowing students to become familiar with the tools required to navigate conflict well. Although situated within the wider context of RE more generally, Annabel emphasised the importance of ethical debate as preparation for adult life in a way that other subjects perhaps did not. However, in addition to the focus on handling external relationships and opinions, Annabel (in a later part of her transcript) also thought reflectively about the impact of her teaching on those who might face abortion situations in the future:

> *I also need to make sure that I feel like I've done a service to them. So, properly*
> *prepared them for how this could potentially affect their life, and any interactions*
> *that they have with abortion as a topic in the future. Helping them to really*
> *understand all bases: what it is; what the law states; why the law exists; how life was*
> *before; and then obviously how religion comes into it; so that in any future*
> *discussions they feel equipped to be able to deal with them, or any future situations*

feel equipped to deal with them. I guess it's just making sure that that's done correctly. (Annabel 42:23)

Here, Annabel extended the bounds of her input beyond what would normally be considered 'religious approaches' to abortion (and therefore strictly within the remit of RE) and included the legal, social, and historical facets of the debate. These formed an important backdrop to the discourse that she believed to be useful for those who might encounter abortion in the future. Further, the repetition of the phrase 'make sure' accentuated the weight that Annabel felt of her particular responsibilities. She recognised the potential impact and consequences that her actions might have on young people's overarching ability to engage and deal with future situations. The relational aspects of her practice further compounded the sense of duty and holding herself accountable. Annabel did not view herself as answerable for the progress of a generic group of students. Instead, she was invested in the lives of *her* students who were in her class(es). Accordingly, Annabel's experiences were to be understood in this frame of reference. She wanted to do her utmost to help the individuals in her class (with all of their diverse characteristics and personalities) because she cared about them and longed to see them thrive as adults.

Holly's narrative was largely concurrent with Annabel's above. However, her story also revealed a slightly broader interpretative angle compared to other participants. She viewed her experiences of teaching abortion as important not purely because it was a topic that was likely to have a direct impact on current students, but because it was likely to be perpetually pertinent for groups of students for the foreseeable future:

> *I think it's really relevant as a subject, in that most, most students you teach will probably come across that topic at some point in their lives, whether it's through friends or someone they know, or the TV, and you know, so I think it's really relevant to them. It's never gonna stop being topical. I think it could affect everyone so we're preparing them for that.* (Holly 07:42)

In highlighting the perceptible longevity and universality of the topic of abortion, Holly's excerpt further stressed the essence of the subtheme as establishing holistic development 'beyond the classroom'. Abortion, through various means, was something that students would have otherwise encountered. As such, RE provided an essential and pre-emptive 'space' in which these issues could be discussed and explored at length in preparation.

It is also significant that, for some participants, interpreting the classroom as a 'training ground' did not necessitate students coming to a fixed opinion on the matter of abortion. Grace, for example, said:

> *I think it's good to think through your view, even if, you know, even if they walk out feeling like I just still don't know, to have even had the discussion on a topic like abortion, but also those other ethical issues, sets them up for other discussions in the future* (Grace 18:49)

Of particular interest in this narrative was how Grace constructed her practice as, at times, seemingly incomplete. She acknowledged and embraced the fact that students may leave her class in a similar or greater state of uncertainty than they arrived. In other educational arenas, uncertainty might be construed as deficient, favouring a more concrete outcome (the implication being that a student may not be able to demonstrate learning objectively). However, underpinning Grace's positive interpretation of her experience was a commitment to the processes involved in lifelong learning. In this way, her job of 'setting students up for the future' would never be complete. Accordingly, the pursuit of a finite or definitive positionality on abortion was, in this instance, a misnomer. Instead, Grace accentuated the task of inquiring into ethical issues (both abortion and others) as advantageous to the student – one that helped them to productively navigate equivalent discussions and debates in later life.

In line with Grace's assertions, Bethany also explained a similar awareness of the partial nature of her job. She drew upon two aspects of partiality, the first directly related to the trajectories of students' lives:

> *In some ways, they haven't lived enough life yet, to really, to really do this. And so, we're only able to take them so far. Because until they have their hearts broken, or until they get engaged and it falls apart, or they find themselves pregnant, or friend, pregnant, or whatever, it's all going to be theory, in a way. And so, you know, we can take them so far, but try and get them the skills that might be useful for them.* (Bethany 26:35)

There was a recognition, here, of the substantiated nature of abortion. Bethany was correct in her assertion that one cannot truly experience an abortion as an outsider. However, even then, one individual's experience is not necessarily correspondent to another. Nevertheless, in relation to students, Bethany worked on the assumption that direct abortion experiences are a rarity. As a result, her input in preparing students for such an eventuality was only ever speculative or pre-

emptive, as exemplified by the phrase 'it's all going to be theory'. In lieu of concrete examples from which to draw, Bethany's focus was to lay the groundwork (in terms of skills development) that might assist students when a situation might be more comprehendible. The impact of her teaching was also partial and largely unknown since it was unlikely that any teacher would ever receive direct feedback as to how their lessons helped (or did not help) a person facing an abortion situation.

It was also worth carefully noting Bethany's inferences at the beginning of the excerpt of whether students *should* study abortion given their age and level of maturity. In theory, the broader skills that Bethany sought to develop could be gained through other means or the study of other topics. Her narrative highlighted that abortion (and perhaps sexual ethics more extensively) could be a useful tool in the context of Religious Education. However, there also existed the potential for students to lack the appropriate wisdom and capability necessary to tackle these topics effectively. Such wisdom and capability were, at least according to Bethany, advanced with age.

The second way Bethany's experience related to partiality was found in the dynamic way adults' opinions are formed:

> *It's trying to convey to them, you know, there are some things that today, you may feel this is absolutely right, and this is absolutely wrong. But you might change your mind on that tomorrow, or next week, or in five years' time, or when you go through something, you might think, you know, I was really sure on this, but actually, that has now changed or developed. And so, my job is to help them to see how they've got to their opinions and help them understand themselves.* (Bethany 38:00)

Bethany determined that moral decision making was subject to change, even as adults. However, she indicated that shifting views were more commonplace in the teenage years when students were forming their identity and establishing their place in the wider milieu. Consequently, although Bethany did not steer students away from positing a stance on abortion, she did so under the frame of reference that they were likely to change. This approach was a conscious one that was explicitly communicated to students. Therefore, committing to an opinion was of secondary importance to Bethany who was much more concerned with providing students with the tools to be able to evaluate and comprehend the origins of their views. In light of students'

proclivity towards changeable standpoints, Bethany's experience of teaching abortion was fragmentary and incomplete.

The above accounts of participants' experiences called attention to the prominence of enabling students to access the topic of abortion in a way that endured and had relevance for their ongoing development and adult lives. This relevance was summed up best by Isabelle's articulation of her teaching circumstances:

> *And I just think it's so important that they learn most of their life skills through your subject. That's why RE is so good for that.* (Isabelle 26:24)

Isabelle, along with other participants, saw the unique position of Religious Education in helping to shape students' lives by moving them beyond a purely academic study towards a more comprehensive education. Whilst not detracting from the intellectual rigour of the topic, participants also incorporated and planned for students to develop certain skills and competencies in their practice. This planning allowed students to: better navigate any future situations they may find themselves in; grow in maturity; traverse disagreement well; have a greater understanding of their own opinions; and, appreciate the likelihood for these opinions to change with increasing age.

7.3.1. Discussion: Education and Domains of Purpose

The findings revealed in the section above demonstrated teachers' commitment to the vocational nature of their job. Participants frequently constructed their role as one that they perceived to have a lasting impact on students that went beyond their immediate classroom context. In particular, was their emphasis on the 'life skills' that moved beyond the strictly academic towards those needed for success in employment and relationships with other people. Looking more broadly, debates regarding the purpose of secondary education have been ongoing for decades and are inextricably bound to the shifting tides of policy, reform, and sociological concern (Ball, 2021).

Biesta (2009a, 2020) suggests a helpful, and well-regarded, categorisation of the aims of education orientated around three 'domains of purpose': qualification, socialisation, and subjectification. Qualification pertains to the requirement for individuals to "do something"

(Biesta, 2010, p. 19) which includes both the specific such as equipping in particular skills or knowledge or more general disposition. It is usually connected to economic arguments and training for the world of work but is not necessarily restrictive. Socialisation allows the individual into existing ways of doing and being in relation to social orders (Carter, 2019, p. 126). Lastly, subjectification encompasses an individual developing a sense of self-identity and growing in their security and maturity as a unique person. In seeking to answer the question 'what makes a good education?' a composite answer is required that recognised the interconnectedness of the domains.

Many of participants' accounts directly relate to one or more of the domains of purpose, often holding them in a place of both synergy and conflict. Bethany, for example, pays particular attention to subjectification in her commitment to help students understand themselves. Thus, she finds meaning in her experiences in facilitating them to become more settled in their identity through grappling with controversial issues such as abortion. Bethany's constructions of her role demonstrate her underlying values of individual freedom and autonomous discovery and development. This freedom, according to Biesta, is a positive existential, first-person matter whereby teachers' focus is on the development of students to navigate themselves, or how I develop "as the subject of my own life, not as the object of what other people want from me" (Biesta, 2020, p. 93). However, Bethany also recognises the potential tensions and limits of this direction. Subjectification is an ongoing process and, regarding abortion specifically, highlights the temporal and conceptual 'gap' between learning to tackle an issue hypothetically in the classroom versus its encounter in real life (which often occurs at a later point in time and is conditional on legal and societal norms). Accordingly, the domain of subjectification is, in effect, bound by the broader domain of socialisation.

For other participants such as Annabel and Holly, their interpretations reveal a framing of their experiences around the socialisation domain. They note the importance of confronting topics such as abortion for the benefit of young people who may be required to navigate the issue in the future within the current value systems, legal systems, and health systems of current society. In this way, one of their concerns is to help students adapt to society's pre-existing systems and structures. They take seriously their responsibility to equip others with the ability to be and act as functioning and fruitful members of society who can successfully manoeuvre through 'any interactions' (Annabel, 42:21) with abortion. This approach rightly assumes that abortion is an issue that students will encounter more readily in the future. The conception rate amongst

fifteen to seventeen year olds has reduced by almost half over the past 30 years (Nuffield Trust, 2021), and most abortions occur amongst those aged 18-25 (Department for Health and Social Care, 2022). Consequently, whether in the context of encounters with opposing views in debate or navigating abortion situations in close proximity, participants' goal was to allow students to operate well as individuals within the broader constructs of societal patterns once they left secondary education.

The interplay between individual and social meaning in navigating identity is mirrored in the literature elsewhere, most notably, Erikson (1951, 1959, 1968) whose psychosocial theory both accentuates development across the whole lifespan and stresses the unique nature of adolescence in forming identity through negotiated contexts involving group and community influences. Successful resolution in this stage results in fidelity or the "strength to sustain loyalties freely pledged, despite the inevitable contradictions of value systems" (Erikson, 1964, p. 125). In other words, development involves the integration of various previously explored roles and the commitment of a more integrated self to others in recognition that they may hold ideological differences. Dependability on this identity results, pragmatically, in individuals who are: active citizens (Côté, 2009); apt at navigating close personal relationships with others (Marcia & Josselson, 2013); and importantly within the context of RE, are academically successful (Good & Adams, 2008) and better able to form religious identity (Markstrom-Adams et al., 1994). Accordingly, for many participants, their desire to use their teaching to enable students to develop skills that will be useful for students as they navigate social and individual maturity is well-founded.

What is notably absent in participants' interpretation, however, was the domain of the qualification, at least in specific relation to employability. There was sparse concentration given in the narratives to embodying the notion that education enables students to be certified or entitled to 'do something'. Perhaps this was because the circumstances under which interviews were obtained meant that reference to qualification was assumed. In their reflections, the fact that students were in their lessons to work towards a formal GCSE in Religious Studies was implicit and, in many ways, seemed secondary. They, therefore, chose to focus elsewhere. This move further reveals participants' prioritisation of their job as understood in terms of longevity and universality; something that went beyond and outside of the classroom. Such a shift away from the academic or scholastic meant that participants held broader, more transferable, types of knowledge and skills in higher esteem.

7.3.2. Discussion: Knowledge, Contested Curriculum Spaces and Character

The Ofsted *Research Review Series: Religious Education* refers to three different types of knowledge:

- first, 'substantive' knowledge: knowledge about various religious and non-religious traditions
- second, 'ways of knowing': pupils learn 'how to know' about religion and non-religion.
- third, 'personal knowledge': pupils build an awareness of their own presuppositions and values about the religious and non-religious traditions they study

(Ofsted, 2021, 3 Types of Knowledge section)

For most participants tackling the subject of abortion, the prioritisation of the types of knowledge was stark. There was less emphasis on the first and second types of knowledge in contrast to the third. Whilst there was some mention of an explicit exploration of religious positions on the abortion debate, participants' concerns were more deeply structured around personal knowledge or development. It may well be the case that 'substantive' knowledge of religious and non-religious traditions was more firmly rooted in other areas of the curriculum or areas of study. Similarly, the accounts of those interviewed contained little disclosure of metaepistemological or metacognitive aspects of learning, or 'ways of learning'. However, even within the context of personal knowledge, participants' experiences were directed at skills and competencies that sat outside of the boundaries of self-awareness, as the report emphasises. They were less concentrated on the (student) self per se, and more focused on the self in relation to others.

In participants' narratives, this focal point of the value of such 'soft skills' is usually related to preparing students for adult life. In line with the literature, it encompassed internal qualities: students' volitions, attitudes, predispositions, virtues and character development (Devedzic et al., 2018; Touloumakos, 2020), alongside other areas of interpersonal development such as effective conflict resolution, communication, and social skills (Majid et al., 2012). Locating teaching within the context of skills development is a notable omission in the Ofsted research review. In fact, vertical models of skills assessment such as the 8-levels scale of attainment (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 2010, pp. 45-46) based on a linear composition of revised versions of Bloom's Taxonomy of the Cognitive Domain (Anderson & Krathwohl,

2001), are heavily criticised.[80] This move towards a more substantive curriculum is no surprise given the recent political push towards "knowledge-rich" (Gibb, 2021) curricula. Such a move has come, in part, due to the influence of scholars such as Hirsch who argues that definitive curricula and student attainment suffer because of "an influx of educators trained in child-centres, anti-curriculum idea, along with an influx of skill-orientated textbooks reflecting the anti-curriculum point of view" (Hirsch, 2009, p. 26). Additionally, within an RE context, the subject has faced the fair critique of producing inadequate levels of subject knowledge and understanding needed to progress (see, for example, Ofsted, 2013, p. 5).

However, whilst it is pertinent to acknowledge the place of knowledge as pivotal in Religious Education in a way that was perhaps lacking in participants' conceptualisations, this does not negate the broader aims of holistic development that also hold significant value. The emphasis on skills development and lifelong learning that was of such importance to participants is also situated across several other domains including Personal, Social, Health Education (PSHE), Citizenship Education, and more overarching requirements such as Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural development (SMSC), and the recent commitment to promote British Values (BV). The relationship between, RE, Citizenship, PSHE, SMSC, and BV is complex.[81] All are statutory duties as a part of children's education. However, whilst PSHE and RE often sit as separate subjects, there is much overlap both in terms of content (both PSHE and RE cover the issue of abortion), and in terms of staffing (a significant number of teachers, as was the case for participants, have responsibility for both subjects). Citizenship is also often taught as integrated with PSHE. Furthermore, the umbrella terms of SMSC and adherence to British Values apply to all areas of secondary education, and yet, RE is often the place where these areas are dealt with more acutely in a way that other subjects do not. Accordingly, the confusion and overlap of a multitude of arenas has led some to the conclusion that Religious Education has become "colonised" (Dinham & Shaw, 2015, p. 3; Sharpe, 2021, p. 336) by other themes.

The sense of colonisation or infiltration featured in some participants' interpretation of their experiences, in the sense that it existed and had the potential to cause tension, but it was not a

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[80] See, for example, Wintersgill (2019)

[81] There is a wealth of literature examining these complexities. By way of several useful examples, Farrell & Lander (2019) outline the tensions of promoting British Values in a multicultural RE settings; Sahajpal (2018) writes carefully about how one of the challenges facing RE is the diminishing role on SMSC, Gearon (2010) explains how Citizenship themes are overlapping but not, in and of themselves, religious; and the Errickers' seminal work (2000) recognises both RE and PSHE's development beyond the cognitive domain, and yet both being ineffective.

prominent theme. Instead, participants were animated about the sense of privilege and rewarding personal investment that came with assisting students to develop skills and attributes that would equip them well for adult life. Most notably and as explored above, participants were concerned with students' development as a whole person with a significant accentuation on their character or disposition. The concept of character development has seen a renewed manifestation in the literature. For example, the most recent *Ofsted School Inspection Handbook* places significant weight on the judgement of pupil's personal formation and the development of:

> pupils' character, which we define as a set of positive personal traits, dispositions and virtues that informs their motivation and guides their conduct so that they reflect wisely, learn eagerly, behave with integrity and cooperate consistently well with others. This gives pupils the qualities they need to flourish in our society *(*Ofsted, 2022, 251).

Furthermore, in their examination of the literature, Moulin-Stożek & Metcalfe (2019, pp. 8-9) establish that RE contributes to pupils' character in four ways: knowledge and understanding of virtues; opportunities for reflection; virtue reasoning; and virtuous action/practice. Their subsequent empirical research based on the accounts of 30 RE teachers revealed that teachers were able to easily identify how RE could contribute to each of these aspects of character development. However, teachers in their study in both Faith Schools and Non-Faith Schools also highlighted the use of ethical and controversial issues in lessons to bring about these contributions, specifically (Metcalfe & Moulin-Stożek, 2021, pp. 353-354). In this way, the experiences ascertained by the aforementioned study are similar to the experiences of participants in this study.

There exists, then, the need for teachers to balance the largely political, academic and institutional drive towards a more substantive, knowledge-based curriculum that has significant rigour and currency, and the need to develop students' skills and character for lifelong impact. Yet, participants seemed agile enough in their professional skills and judgements to have different emphases for different types of subject matter. The more ethical or controversial subjects, such as abortion, tended to lend themselves more suitably towards skills advancement, personal knowledge and character development. This association was something that participants held in high esteem and that had significant meaning in the conceptualisation of their roles and relationships with young people. Whilst knowledge of various forms was perceived as valuable,

it was never seen as an end in itself. Rather, knowledge was a means by which more integrated and comprehensive development could take place.

7.4. Chapter Summary

This chapter has highlighted the multiple ways in which participants interpreted their experiences of teaching abortion as ones that sought the holistic development of students. Despite the contested and complex relationship between ethics and RE, teachers demonstrated an unwavering commitment and desire to have a lasting impact on students. Such impact extended past the boundaries of the classroom and into the future lives of those whom they taught. As part of this, participants perceived their role as assisting students to move beyond their pre-existing views and positions towards more nuanced, balanced and complex thought. Accordingly, they attempted to work past moral heteronormity, enabling students to embrace moral autonomy where they were able to demonstrate an appreciation of the intentions and motivations of others' views and establish a position for themselves. To achieve this, participants focused on the importance of allowing students to engage with others' views to facilitate them to think in 'shades of grey'. This dialogue between positions was a key part of advancing religious literacy and an understanding of the multitude of beliefs needed to operate well amongst diverse positions within society. Such an approach was often engineered and relied heavily on the values of discourse, abstraction and translation. In attempting to create opportunities for students to confront a variety of views, it was assumed by participants that, in turn, confrontation would necessitate considerations of these views in light of their own to contrast them and understand them better. In teaching the subject of abortion in this way, participants perceived themselves to be helping students to increase their proficiency in skills such as communication, disagreeing well, and critical engagement.

In order to further advance the skills that are fruitful for lifelong development, participants were also keen to ensure that discussions concerning abortion were not done in the abstract. Instead, they gave intense focus to the complex realities of women and paid particular attention to the comprehension of their unique personal worldviews. In so doing, they provided an expansive and beneficial spotlight on the non-cognitive aspects of worldview construction. As we negotiate being-in-the-world, we do so not only as thinking creatures but as ones who rely heavily on affective and emotional aspects of our experiences in order to make sense of them. To this end, participants sought to teach students the importance of viewing others holistically

through the framework of care in which people are worthy of connection on a fundamental emotional level of bilateral humanity. However, the intense focus on the personal worldview often came at the expense of broader perspectives surrounding the abortion debate including the institutional and community aspects of worldviews. Consequently, it was sometimes difficult to ascertain how participants incorporated a thorough appreciation of the more organisational religious or non-religious facets of their abortion experiences. Nevertheless, the interplay between participants and their eagerness to speak on behalf of the 'invisible' women who were the locus of discussion made for an interesting hermeneutical perspective within IPA. Moving beyond the double hermeneutic (the researcher making sense of the participant, who is making sense of themselves), the process moved towards a triple hermeneutic whereby the researcher is making sense of the participant, who is making sense of themselves, by making sense of their students' experience in grappling with women's experiences.

The desire to do justice to the stories of those facing abortion decisions led participants away from more substantive knowledge towards helping students to navigate and develop soft skills, character, and dispositions that were beneficial for long term success. In this way, one of their concerns was to ensure students had the opportunities to navigate socialisation or the ability to adapt to society's pre-existing structures and systems. Such a concern moved them away from building personal knowledge as strictly relating to self-awareness, towards a competency or character-based construction. Such a commitment could create tension in a curriculum that is becoming increasingly knowledge-rich and where broader skills are colonised across other educational arenas such as PSHE and citizenship. Whilst participants did not seem to diminish the role of substantive or metacognitive knowledge in their practice overall, they also recognised the specific nature of controversial topics in allowing a larger emphasis on character and skills advancement. Consequently, and in relation to abortion specifically, participants utilised their professional discretion to focus attention on the value of students' holistic development aligned to their vocational aims, sometimes in contravention to other curricula constraints.

8. Findings and Discussion 3: 'You're Trying Your Best': Classroom Dynamics and Success

This chapter analyses how participants understood their experiences of teaching abortion as attempts to cultivate classroom environments that enable students to thrive and be successful. Summarised by the theme quotation 'you're trying your best', it focuses on the various ways in which participants believed themselves to be making every effort possible to engage in practices that would be of benefit to students. Within this, findings relating to four subthemes are further discussed, with a summary of participant extracts presented in table 8 below. The first subtheme was drawn from participants' construction of their practice as one that maximised opportunities for students to maintain a suitable measure of detachment and objectivity to navigate a scholarly discussion appropriate to GCSE level studies. The second subtheme concerns itself with a cross-case experience of participants embodying the role of champion and involved being committed to an active pursuit of authenticity and openness of expression in the student body. Further, it encompassed the ability to facilitate a space in which students could share their own experiences, even if they were different from others. Following on from this, the third subtheme relates to how these expressions of students' experiences were received. It involved participants curating a classroom environment that encouraged trust and investment in relationships so that students felt valued and respected enough to voice their thoughts effectively. Finally, the fourth subtheme discusses the commitment of participants to pursue student learning by allowing students to express their opinions appropriately.

Theme	Subtheme	Extract	Participant	Time(s)
'you're trying your best': Classroom dynamics and success	'You're having essentially an academic debate': Distancing and impartiality 9/10	'I see it as more than that'	Annabel	30:14, 37:41
		'we're arguing points not people'	Bethany	102:02
		'I want it to be quite… impartial'	Clara	74:12
		'There has to be that separation I think'	Dariya	34:56, 38:50
		'You're starting with assumptions'	Ella	40:25
		'I do try to make it as scientific as possible'	Freya	05:05, 26:55
		'I try and rid that emotion from the debate	Grace	14:08, 18:20, 19:40
		'I think they should keep their opinions as their own'	Holly	14:04, 21:20
		'At the end of the day they have to sit an exam'	Josie	11:54
	'Pupils need to be listened to and have to be heard': Authenticity and honesty 8/10	'Pupils need to be listened to and have to be heard	Annabel	19:10, 23:54, 30:14
		'My viewpoint was accepted within this particular topic'	Bethany	15:29
		'You need those differences to be able to discuss properly'	Clara	12:35
		'I want everyone to have the chance to be heard'	Ella	56:19
		'I'm trying to create a culture in which kids are being tolerant of all beliefs and viewpoints	Grace	14:47
		'I try and have this mentality that nothing is off limits and its very open'	Isabelle	11:37, 35:11
		'No judgement which is the most important'	Holly	3:20, 11:49
		'you've got to a good job of encouraging the discussion'	Josie	24:17
	'You're trying to create an environment where they feel valued': Cultivating trust and relationship (7/10)	'I think it's about having a relationship with them'	Bethany	14:16, 16:06, 45:00
		'That sort of glues you together where you can trust each other'	Clara	13:54
		'They feel like I value them'	Freya	25:11
		'It takes a lot of trust to let that kind of honest conversation happen	Grace	29:30
		'it's all about relationships at a very fundamental level'	Holly	29:45, 40:59
		'They knew me and knew what I was like	Isabelle	30:37, 34:34
		'I love the kids and I want that to come across'	Josie	56:11
	'This is the place to figure it out': Expressing opinion as learning (6/10)	'We want them to be able to make their own decisions about things	Annabel	17:02, 32:14
		'Through saying it, they're trying to figure something out'	Bethany	16:21
		'there's something about forcing them to say what they think and why that helps them to learn'	Ella	12:11
		'Keep asking them why and keep getting them to think'	Freya	31:08
		'I've got a responsibility to try and create a space where they're able to think about these things and say what's on their mind	Grace	27:20, 38:20
		'Expressing what they think is always an opportunity for learning'	Isabelle	24:50

Table 8: Table of Themes - Classroom Dynamics and Success

8.1. 'You're Having Essentially an Academic Debate': Distancing and Impartiality

During the interviews, participants spoke about the various ways that they managed interactions both between student and teacher, and student and student in order to facilitate a positive classroom environment. It seems natural for such inter-relational work to be considered a fundamental part of a teacher's role and responsibility, regardless of their subject speciality or context. However, in this specific instance, participants often chose to focus parts of their narratives on the tension between the deeply personal nature of the topic content, and the desire for students to maintain an appropriate level of distance. The ability to approach debates around abortion with a certain objectivity was constructed positively – as a tool to be able to adequately explore the many aspects controversy and to effectively meet the demands of GCSE level of study. In the retelling of their stories, most participants framed them in a way that brought their practice to the forefront. In other words, teachers' experiences had a distinct emphasis on how distance and impartiality were of benefit primarily *for the students,* as opposed to themselves. Nevertheless, the exacting nature of this emphasis was varied and encompassed several discrete aspects of practice pertaining to the teaching of abortion.

First, participants spoke in detail of their desire to be careful in their use of language and terminology surrounding the debate. Those interviewed were keen to avoid inflammatory or potentially influencing language when talking about pregnancy and abortion. Ella, for example, highlighted the importance and her conscious effort of avoiding the word 'baby':

> *I think I'm really conscious. And I think the rest of my team are really conscious not to use the word baby when talking about a pregnancy, and to correct kids, when they use the word baby. Because I think that's a real distinction. If you don't think about it and talk about it as a baby, you need to talk about it as a foetus. Otherwise, you are starting with this assumption that what is inside your womb is a baby is a person is a thing that has moral value.* (Ella 40:25)

Ella recognised that conferring a particular term on an entity can hold particular moral weight. In this case, the word 'baby' had connotations with personhood alongside its associated legal and ethical implications. Whilst demonstrating an awareness of her own positioning within the debate, Ella was mindful that the terminology she selected in communication with young people was significant; going beyond merely a range of expression toward a potentially life-altering construction of meaning. Accordingly, Ella when accounting for the implications in her choice of words was keen to maintain language that made it clear that a foetus did not have the same

moral status as a baby outside of the uterus. This assertion was in keeping with the UK's legal and political conceptualisation of the status of the foetus, which also mirrored her own.

Freya too conveyed a similar desire, although with an emphasis on the scientifically correct terminology:

> *And I'm when I teach it, I'm really, really specific with this idea that it's an embryo and then it becomes a foetus. It's not a baby until it is outside of the mother's tummy. I'm really kind of picky on that, because I do think the term baby, it's not right. It's not scientific in the discussion about it. I think you say the word baby. You think, baby, baby. You think cute baby with chubby cheeks and chubby legs. But in actual fact, a foetus isn't a baby. Yes, it's tiny.* (Freya 05:55)

In distinguishing between a foetus and a baby, Freya based her comparison on physical characteristics. Her narrative highlighted the impact of how certain words carry with them specific mental images based on prior knowledge, association, and background experience. In this case, she proposed that hearing the word 'baby' built up a picture in one's imagination that was similar to the visual perception conforming to the standards of normative expectation and reality. Or, when a person heard the word baby, they thought baby (in the sense of 'chubby cheeks and chubby legs', to use Freya's words). Such a conceptualisation of a baby was, according to Freya, unhelpful as it was an inaccurate depiction of what a foetus looks like. It was also interesting to note the tension in Freya's account – she was keen to stress that the term 'baby' should be reserved for *ex utero* use (with foetus being used prior to this) based on its physical appearance. However, whilst it is fair to say a foetus in its earlier stages of development would look dissimilar to a newborn baby, this is not the case with a foetus at 38 weeks' gestation, for example.

Utilising the correct vocabulary also extended to other aspects of the debate. Grace, for instance, told of her commitment to model the most appropriate language to pupils in her class so that they could have a fruitful debate situated within the context of academic study. By avoiding emotionally laden language (such as 'killing') she implied that a measure of distance or separation was necessary to help pupils navigate the issues appropriately. The desire to use equitable language also usurped attempts to communicate the experience of a religious believer who may hold an alternative point of view. In other words, Grace had in mind particular rules that applied to all pupils in the RE classroom. These rules included communicating in such a way that was respectful and, where possible, avoided overly emotive language.

So, I do try and use the right terminology. I think if you're having a, what is essentially an academic debate or ethical debate about it, you've got to make sure you're using the right language. Words like 'killing' are too emotional, even if you're talking about what other religions think. (Grace 19:40)

In a congruent account, Annabel also emphasised the need for unweighted language and the overarching commitment of both the teacher and the class to maintaining an appropriate level of criticality and academic objectivity. However, Annabel viewed this commitment as going beyond the articulation of others' beliefs (as in Grace's interpretation), to challenging the assumptions of the syllabus itself:

In a Catholic school we have to help them understand the Catholic view, which is fine, but I guess I see things as more than that. We look at the [Catholic] specification's definitions. And the pupils are always soooo shocked about the difference in wording because the general definition is like "the ending of pregnancy… um... or the termination of a foetus to end a pregnancy" something like that, I can't remember it word for word. And then the GCSE specification is like "the <u>expulsion</u> of the foetus with the <u>intent</u> to destroy life" or something like that [laughs]. The word 'explusion' and 'intent' are so emotive. yeah... I guess... I kind of think of like 'expulsion', you think of something quite dramatic and y'know. I think it just... yeah... brings so many emotions to the fore that perhaps y'know...(2s) Anger, disgust. I think it's highly weighted as a definition. I don't like it; it makes me feel uncomfortable. It's not helpful. (Annabel 37:41)

Although Annabel did not go on to articulate the steps that she puts in place to mitigate these concerns, her narrative suggested the significant value that she placed upon herself to be impartial. Annabel's experience demonstrated her role in moving the class away from language which could have an undue influence on students. Instead, she promoted the importance of detachment, or 'looking in' to the debate from outside. Extending this outsider perspective even to evaluate the curriculum frameworks within which Annabel was situated was indicative of the strength of this subtheme for some participants.

For others who explored distancing and impartiality, they too focussed on what was omitted from their teaching practice. In addition to avoiding certain terminology, participants often made the deliberate choice not to use visual props or imagery.

So, I don't like, and I probably will never ever use images in the lessons either of the foetus or the mum. You know, you'll see this in the textbooks, like a woman with a belly. I think no. I think that's really wrong for them to use them. I think it's

very misleading because most abortions are not like that. I don't think they're effective. I don't think I they're helpful. I don't agree with them being used. (Freya 07:40)

Freya spoke strongly of her opposition to visual images, even within context of the textbooks where they frequently appeared. Regarding utilising imagery of pregnant women, she believed them to be unhelpful in presenting a picture of abortion to students that was misleading. The underlying rationale here was that since most terminations occur during the first trimester, this was usually before a 'bump' is seen. For Freya, the use of visual imagery was one that bore moral significance. It therefore carried with it issues of integrity and justice where her disagreement was justified in wanting to tackle deficient and inaccurate depictions of abortion for the benefit of her students.

The feeling of discomfort created when visual imagery or props were used as a teaching aid and the subsequent decision to avoid them in personal practice was an experience mirrored by other participants. However, some questioned the legitimacy of this position:

And… I've always… I won't show pictures because I want to be neutral. Because I think it's really emotive. It feels too emotive to so show a 24-week foetus which looks to a teenager's eyes (and to me) like a baby. So, I don't do that. And, but always in the back of my head, I've been like 'so many other people do, so, is it right that I don't do that?' I question myself sometimes, but I stick to it, because I ultimately think it's right. But I do sometimes think should I be doing that? (Grace 14:18)

Grace's account revealed that, for some participants, there existed an unwritten expectation to use particular forms of teaching practice despite a feeling of them being 'wrong'. For Grace, the potential pressure to use visual imagery related to abortion arose from her perception of its prevalence across the sector. For others who felt a similar pressure, they correlated this pressure with the influence of having been shown imagery in their own Religious Education, during their teacher training, or when observing external organisations running sessions with classes.

Despite the origin of the expectation, participants' experiences highlighted a noteworthy association between the imagery used and its prospective negative impact on students (although, arguably imagery could also be used for positive purposes). Josie summarised well:

Something visual feels like it has way more power than anything else. So, I wouldn't show images of anything. You know, it could be potentially much more damaging, and I want it to be quite… impartial. (Josie 11:54)

The desire to avoid a negative impact on students by creating a sense of distance and impartiality was a key motivator for participants. As was embodying an to approach the issue that brought about the richest student learning. In light of this, some participants spoke in detail about the practicalities of implementing such an approach. For example, several articulated their commitment to reduce the time spent in getting students to form an opinion:

I know this, I know, this is kind of the opposite of what RS is all about. I try not to go into I agree, I don't agree. I just get them to have quite an abstract discussion. (Freya 06:45)

You would, you would never ask somebody directly in the same way that you wouldn't ask a stranger on the street or whatever, it's, yeah, it's personal and so I think they should keep their opinions as their own (Holly 14:04)

Freya's account, in particular, explored another expectation of RE Teachers that caused tension when tackling the issue of abortion. Namely, that getting students to the point where they could articulate their own opinion sometimes ran counterintuitive to establishing objectivity or impartiality. In other circumstances, getting pupils to form opinions was interpreted as being positive. This tension has been explored elsewhere in this thesis (section 8.4.1) Nevertheless, in this case, the deeply personal nature of abortion (where, as Holly explained, it might be deemed inappropriate to ask an individual's views) meant a more philosophical or theoretical approach was more appropriate.

Finally, in exploring the different ways in which participants have constructed and understood distance and impartiality, it was worth asking the question 'who was the distance for, the teacher or the pupils?'. In some cases, participants only alluded to the benefits of impartiality for the students, as was explored previously. However, for some, the conversations in the interview led them to honestly reflect upon motivations relating to themselves:

I think I have to separate myself a bit from it too. I've got to think of my well-being teaching it. I try the very best I can to take my emotions out of it when I'm teaching it. I've got to do what's best for me. I'm still learning like, what works best for me…I was really scared of the topic. Like, I'm not going to be able to do it, I'm really not emotionally ready for it. And that's it, as time has progressed on a lot and I'm more

resilient it's become a lot more easier [sic] to take myself out of the situation and it's just like a debate, like anything else in RE really. (Freya 26:55)

Freya, having experienced an abortion herself was recognisant of the importance of distancing in preserving her mental health. She acknowledged the progress made in feeling more able to tackle the issue as time progressed. Nevertheless, it was important here not to miss the longstanding impact that her termination experience had on her ability to engage with the subject material on an emotional level. Accordingly, Freya utilised dissociation strategies where she embarked on the process of disconnecting from her thoughts and feelings to better cope with potential triggers. For participants like Freya, the need to approach the teaching of abortion in a dispassionate way that sought to avoid its emotional dimensions was all the more important in their individual construction of healthy teaching practice.

Overall, this subtheme demonstrates the extent to which participants' experiences of teaching abortion demand an approach that involves a certain level of objectivity and fair-mindedness. To establish the best quality learning for students and preserve the mental wellbeing of the teacher, participants viewed their practice as attempting to maintain an open, critical and academic debate. In so doing, their experiences often centred on reducing the emotional burden of the topic alongside its associated negative implications. Whilst the pragmatic steps taken to achieve this varied between participants, there was a strong confluence of commitment to utilising correct terminology and language. This commitment meant favouring scientific terms and avoiding that which might be construed as value laden. Likewise, those interviewed often interpreted the use of imagery as being particularly impactful and to be avoided because of the possibility of them holding moral weight and undue influence. Finally, the issue of distancing was important not only for students, but also for participants (especially those who had had experiences of termination) in maintaining appropriate emotional boundaries with those who they taught.

8.1.1. Discussion: Language, Imagery, and Influence

Participants' experiences of attempting to ensure impartiality in both the language and imagery they use in the classroom further demonstrate their commitment to upholding professional values such as neutrality. It also reveals the extent they were aware of the potential influence, bias, and impact of words and pictures upon students and the wider abortion debate. This bias

is well-reflected in the literature. Camosy, in a recent opinion piece for *The New York Times* helpfully asserts that "the struggle in the abortion debate is, in many ways, a struggle over language" (2019, para 1). His article highlights the shift in terminology from 'pro-life' to 'anti-abortion' which he renders negatively. However, similar accounts of language and its significance in formulating the debate occur over a wide variety of positions and mediums. For example, inflammatory or emotive language is used as a discursive tool by those at either end of the spectrum of beliefs whose battle is often over the application of the same linguistic motifs such as 'dignity' and 'human rights' (Hunt, 2021). Additionally, it has been argued that ideological and distorted vocabulary pertaining to abortion is evident throughout printed media (Purcell et al., 2014), social media (Sharma et al., 2017), the legislative sphere (Abrams, 2013; Johnson et al., 2005, p. 293), and even the medical community itself (Friedman & Pennisi, 1996).

Grimes & Stuart (2010, p. 93) note that "the contentious issue of abortion is riddled with jabberwocky – terminology that is contradictory, obsolete, ambiguous and misleading". However, it is the not the use of inaccurate terminology itself that faces fair critique, but rather how language is a conduit of meaning and a powerful mechanism able to be deployed to persuade, and at times manipulate, the reader or hearer into adopting a particular position (Mikołajczak & Bilewicz, 2015). It is this, more fundamental nature of language and its ability to affect the recipient that participants were most aware of. Consequently, they frequently adapted their teaching practice in due consideration of such potential leverage and aimed to utilise vocabulary which, in their perception, minimised the risk of undue influence. Specifically, this adaptation involved gravitation towards more medical terminology, including obstetric and anatomical descriptions. In recent times, this move has also been seen by several media outlets who have made a public commitment to move away from language that could be construed as inaccurate or misleading. For example, as seen in *The Guardian's* updated style guidance that moves away from using terms such as 'heartbeat bill' in reference to restrictive US abortion laws (Glenza, 2019).

The capability of words to construct meaning for individuals is also a foundational part of the IPA process, which presupposes that language is the primary instrument through which a researcher can capture and interpret a participants' experiences. Accordingly, it relies on the "representational validity of language" (Willig, 2008, p. 66) whereby a person's experience can never be accessed directly, but is mediated through their choice of expression and prose. The

close, iterative and cyclical process of interpreting the narrative via transcribed text allows the researcher to be sensitive to the subtleties of the "way language speaks when it allows the things themselves to speak" (van Manen, 2016, p. 111). However, IPA also recognises, in line with Ricoeurian thinking, that language itself is subject to "existential structures constitutive of the being-in-the-world" (Ricoeur, 1991, p. 42). Consequently, it gives takes into consideration the situatedness of participants' experiences including historical, cultural, linguistic, and social norms and practices (Smith & Eatough, 2012).

The notion of situated, interpreted, and meaning-saturated language is important, both in exploring participants' experiences of teaching within an IPA framework, and in explaining why participants felt so strongly about utilising appropriate terminology about abortion in class discussion. Approaching abortion in a way that avoided unnecessary influence and provocation helped teachers to maintain the sense of distance needed to enable students to navigate the issue from all angles. Additionally, in the perception, it assisted in the modelling of respectful communication and helped set boundaries within which fruitful conversation could take place.

Yet, the concepts of impartiality and equitability applied not only to language but also to the visual imagery used. In a similar manner to those described above, participants recognised the potential impact of pictures, photographs, and diagrams upon and within the abortion debate. Within bioethics, more broadly, there has been a steady move of scholarly literature towards a more thorough recognition of the sensory and affective influences on thought and action. Lauritzen, for example, advocates for the intersectional and interdisciplinary study of 'visual bioethics', which acknowledges "that the study of ethics has historically relied almost exclusively on rational–linguistic approaches to controversial issues in a way that downplays the significance of images and visual representation to moral argument and human behaviour" (Lauritzen, 2008, p. 50). As regards abortion, such visual imagery is first used (albeit not always intentionally) as visual 'metonyms' (Bhargava et al., 2020; Bishop, 2019) in representing the rhetorical landscape of pre-existing polemics.

Images, therefore, communicate by association and typify particular positions and stances. They serve as a conduit of meaning in epitomising and often intensifying complex verbal and written narratives. However, the use of visual imagery also goes beyond that of representation. Images themselves become "visually mediated arguments" (Mills, 2008, p. 61) taking on the context

and structure of interpretations of meaning and engaging the cognitive and emotional processes involved in aesthetic imagination.

By way of several examples, many have stressed the "powerful role that biomedical imaging, and the human artifice it involves, can play in influencing the nature, timing, and tone of this debate" (Kirklin, 2004). In particular, the increasing development and precision of ultrasound in depicting foetal morphology has led to the significant deployment of images beyond the realm of diagnostics, and into operation for commercial, social and political purposes (Callender et al., 2021; Nicolson & Fleming, 2013, p. 5; Roberts, 2012). Additionally, the use of foetal remains has been used as a tool for emotional discourse and the construction of arguments within the abortion debate (Hopkins et al., 2005). Yet, imagery and visual representation apply as much to the mother as it does to the foetus. Given that the majority of abortions occur in the first trimester, the portrayal of pregnant women tends to focus on their abdomen and overinflate their pregnancy progress in what Glausuisz (2019) refers to as the "headless, legless, pregnancy bump" or "the disembodied mother" according to Botha (2017). Accordingly, participants' desire to steer away from using imagery, and their recognition of its potential impact on students is commendable and legitimate.

Within RE, the use of imagery with abortion is largely unexamined, usually relying instead on anecdotes and disparaging remarks about the input of external organisations and charities upon schools.[82] Within this study, participants were exceptionally careful of their choices of imagery and did not outsource their teaching of abortion, preferring instead to conduct it themselves. However, other studies have revealed a differing picture. Conroy et al., in their research note several school sites (not just those of religious character) where the materials used by classroom teachers were "highly charged" (2013, pp. 40-41). They include two separate examples of the use of overly graphic imagery including vacuum aspiration, and reference to partially intact foetal remains. It is important to note then, the idiographic nature of participants' experiences and their potential to be unreflective of the broader teaching vista.

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[82] For example, Brook, in a previous campaign for young people's 'informed choice' on abortion in education highlight the scaremongering and shock tactics used in images relating late-stage abortions (Education for Choice, 2012). Similarly, showing students images of aborted foetuses to have been reported in Irish Schools (Power, 2018)

Nevertheless, participants' narratives were illustrative of the way that some teachers constructed their experience in a way to remain as impartial as possible both through words and images. In this way, they moved between several of the teacher roles outlined in Table 1 (section 2.5.1). For some, they most closely aligned to the 'balanced advocate' position whereby they presented students with a range of different positions on an issue, without revealing their own. This approach allowed them to effectively help students navigate a wide range of conflicting information and influences, and consider arguments that they would not otherwise arrive at (Council of Europe, 2015, p. 16) However, for a considerable number of other participants, they adopted the role of 'critical affirmation' where, to have a largely academic debate, all stances were subject to scrutiny, evaluation and critique including explicit recognition of the impact of language and imagery upon the construction of arguments. By being flexible and intuitive to the needs of the class and their unique dynamics, participants endeavoured to be committed to the long-term success of their students.

8.2. 'Pupils Need to Be Listened to and Have to be Heard': Authenticity and Honesty

Curating classroom dynamics that were conducive to students' accomplishment were particularly important for numerous participants, and involved the concepts of authenticity and honesty. Those interviewed frequently wanted their teaching to facilitate an environment where students felt able to share and have their views treated with respect and appreciation. However, underlying these values was a conceptualisation of the participant's classroom as unique and special. The classroom held a particular space for both pupils and staff where matters fundamental to the human race could be explored (in a way that was not experienced elsewhere). In so doing, genuine communities of learning could be formed where students could grow in their holistic development. This distinctive nature of the RE classroom was something that added extra weight to the seriousness of participants' responsibilities:

> *I wonder if it [abortion] discussed at all, other than in schools, and so I've got to do a good job of encouraging the discussion.* (Josie 24:17)

> *What other subjects talk about grief? What other subjects talk about difficult things? What other subjects talk about, you know, belief systems, arguments, understanding different people's points of view? And I think you want to advocate for them to feel like they can say whatever they like and it's fine… to allow them to have a voice.* (Isabelle 35:11)

Both Josie and Isabelle's accounts above depicted their role in encouraging an environment where students felt completely comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings, if they wished. There were two distinct, yet interconnected, elements to such an environment. First, the role of the speaker who needed to feel confident and secure enough to share. Second, the role of the hearer in accepting what was said so that the speaker felt like they had been valued and heard. Regarding the first, participants often interpreted their experiences of teaching abortion in such a way where they desired students to be 'real' with them, even if that meant they expressed a view that was unexpected, or different to expected norms. In other words, authenticity required a sense of internal consistency between what pupils were thinking and what they chose to say. Ella couched this internal consistency in rights-based language, citing a reciprocity akin to the Golden Rule:

> *I think I want everyone to have a chance to be heard, no matter what their view. I think that's basic human dignity. I would want that for me.* (Ella 56:19)

In this, she recognised the relationship between students authentically expressing themselves and valuing them for their own sake (regardless of their views). However, for Ella such a commitment was universal. Her aspiration was that *every* student should feel a sense of belonging and regard and should be treated in a way that reflects and upholds their inherent worth.

Isabelle's interpretation was similar, but she extended this openness to the teacher in addition to the students. In creating an environment where people felt willing and able to share honestly, she acknowledged that in some senses the teacher did not sit outside of that which they had built. To use her words, the space was 'shared'. Although, as previously explored, professional boundaries were important and expected, Isabelle reflected on how this approach lent itself to a certain vulnerability on behalf of the teacher:

> *I try to have this mentality that nothing is off limits and its very open, it's a space they can share. And then it means they will literally ask you anything in the world. And well, during those topics especially as a woman, you can get asked a lot.* (Isabelle 11:37).

It was interesting that Isabelle viewed her role as a female teacher in a different way to how she imagined the role of a male colleague. Not only was Isabelle asked numerous questions relating to abortion as a matter of fact, but she attributed this questioning to her gender (and therefore,

presumably her ability to relate, even in part, to the experiences of those who undergo an abortion). Isabelle's perception was that by creating a classroom that values authenticity, she built trust with students in such a way that allowed them to ask even the most difficult of questions. Although Isabelle did not divulge the extent to which she answered these questions, it was important to her that they felt like they could ask without fear of the negative effects from others.

The reactions of others and the appropriateness of their comments in response to what was said was also a fundamental part of participants' construction of the successful classroom. In facilitating good communication, the role of the hearer was equally as valuable as the role of the speaker. Accordingly, those interviewed often talked about their role in setting clear expectations on behalf of those listening and reacting. For Bethany, she equated accepting people's views with a sense of equality:

> *When you're getting into those controversial issues, if they can see, oh, actually, my viewpoint was accepted within this particular topic, even though it was controversial, then you can have a discussion where everyone is equal.* (Bethany 15:29)

In the wider context of Bethany's narrative, she was not referring to acceptance as synonymous with agreement. Instead, she acknowledged the validity of that view for the individual and attempted to understand the worldview and experiences that influenced their assertion. Therefore, she attempted to promote and develop understanding others beyond surface level assumptions. This understanding went beyond an initial reaction to the statement and asked the question 'what had led the speaker to that conclusion?

Grace articulated a similar experience to Bethany's with an emphasis on tolerance:

> *I'm trying to create a culture in which the kids are being tolerant of all beliefs and all viewpoints. So, I have to be mindful of that in my approach.* (Grace 14:47)

Grace drew particular attention to the belief that creating an environment that allowed students to flourish involved developing the capacity or willingness to appreciate another's view, even if it did not agree with your own. As was the case for Isabelle, Annabel pointed out that this capacity was just as applicable to teachers as it was to pupils:

Pupils need to be listened to and have to be heard. And I think some teachers are reluctant to hear the views of others sometimes, so we need to be open to the fact that they are 15 and 16 and their opinion might not be like ours. (Annabel 30:14)

Annabel articulated that 'we' (the community of RE teachers) should be mindful of how we react to students' differing views. However, this mindfulness was just as much a reminder to herself as much as it was a general plea. By framing her reflection as an imperative, Annabel desired to model such behaviour in her interactions with students and cultivate it within the student body.

The conviction of moving towards interpersonal dynamics that effectively respected and valued differing worldviews rested on several realisations. First, that there was indeed a variety of opinions that should be embraced and celebrated. And second, a diverse student body brought a great opportunity for learning. Clara highlighted the noteworthy point that diversity was foundational to good quality discussion through which students could learn and benefit:

Whatever kids say in the classroom has to be done respectfully. Like you can say a whole range of things, but we respect those views so that we can have a proper discussion. You need those differences to be able to discuss properly. (Clara 12:35)

The way in which participants interpreted the value of 'respect' was multifaceted. For most, it encompassed a mutual appreciation of potentially disparate viewpoints with a commitment to understanding them, all whilst not imposing one's views upon others. However, some participants made sense of their experiences by providing a more nuanced definition. For example, Holly made a fascinating correlation between tolerance and subjective morality:

And I think that's because it's open to everyone and I create this kind of culture of diversity. And you know, there isn't a right or wrong and you have to be tolerant of other people, you have to listen to other people's views, and you're allowed to challenge people, but you can't say that they're wrong, you can just say that you disagree and, and we build those in quite early on. So, there isn't ever a sense I think that students feel like they're not included in lessons (Holly 3:20)

For Holly, then, respect equated to subtle yet important differences in permissible language. To avoid dismissing others' views out of hand, she allowed students to express their disagreement with one another, but stopped short of allowing them to assign moral judgements (right and wrong) to the same. Her construction of disagreement was interesting since, there was an unspoken insinuation that disagreement involved a conflict-type situation whereby a lack of

consensus existed, and one party believed their position to be correct. Nevertheless, Holly's motivation was to give pupils the tools to navigate such disagreement well. In this case, she taught them set phrases and sentences that helped them to handle potentially inflammatory conversations. This approach was forged through relationships (explored in more detail in section 8.3.1) and a process that started long before students encounter the topic of abortion. Holly's account stressed the longevity and foundational nature of the work that went into teaching controversial issues. As students became more familiar with each other and began to understand each individual's unique worldview, perhaps over a period of years, they became better equipped to address increasingly complex subject matter together.

In summary, the emergence of this particular subtheme from participants' narratives was a useful insight into the way some participants conceptualised their role in establishing classrooms dynamics that encouraged pupils to thrive whilst discussing abortion. In seeking to create an environment that valued openness, authenticity and honesty, participants were able to encourage pupils to contribute to discussion regardless of their viewpoints. These values were often situated within a framework that recognised students as unique individuals, with opinions that mattered and, through expressing them, enhanced learning for the whole group. Alongside building a classroom setting where pupils felt comfortable to share, participants also sought to ensure that contributions were well-received; encouraging students to embrace diversity and difference and ground their responses in mutual respect. For some, this resulted in implementing specific approaches and ground rules to guide and steer fruitful dialogue. Nevertheless, participants also recognised the key role that they played in both modelling and shaping class dynamics. However, this role did not preclude them from being a part of the systems they desired to create. For, in holding an open, honest and respectful discussion in high regard, participants too often felt the need to embody such attributes. This left them open to potential vulnerability and required them to form a response to how they might answer difficult questions.

8.2.1. Discussion: Authenticity, Off limits and Respect

The value of reciprocal authenticity whereby both students and teachers exhibit behaviour that is open was something that participants felt was an important part of their practice and conducive to constructive learning environments. Existing definitions of authenticity in the context of teaching are wide ranging (Kreber et al., 2007), but tend to be associated with concepts of identity and self in relation to community and society. The notion of authenticity as it pertains

specifically to the participant's teaching persona, and the manoeuvring between differing I-positions has been discussed elsewhere in the thesis in section 6.1.2. This subtheme, although related, has a more specific focus on participants' desire to facilitate classroom spaces and dynamics that are themselves authentic to promote student learning and success. Accordingly, it moves away from the teacher's interpretation of their own sense of self, towards their understanding of themselves within a more integrated classroom ethos or climate where there was a strong desire for students (individually and collectively) to embody the values of authenticity.

Such integration did not detract from participant's awareness of their behaviour in the classroom environment. In fact, their narratives frequently considered the importance of mirroring or modelling the values they wanted their classes to embrace for the benefit of learning. Participants believed that allowing students to be honest was useful in helping them learn. Based on this belief, they wanted to be perceived as honest in order that they might encourage students to be the same. The link between honesty or authenticity and learning seems logical and is nothing new, Rogers (1969, p. 229), for example, highlights "realness" and "congruence"[83] as teacher characteristics that promote a high-quality education. However, participants' interpretations of the experiences in this subtheme went beyond transmission by association. Instead, it involved a sense of ownership and shared authenticity by all parties.

Several factors make students feel authentic in the classroom, for example a neutral pedagogic approach, an approving social climate concerning diverse beliefs, space for different worldviews in instruction, group composition, and the position of the teacher regarding religion and their students (Ubani, 2018). During the course of the interviews, almost all participants drew on one or more of these areas to explain their experiences of providing an environment that was open and real. However, one particular area of conformity was their articulated commitment to developing an 'approving social climate' where students felt as if they had the opportunity to speak honestly and their views were heard in a way that was respectful and honouring.

Within this approving social climate, interpretations of 'respect' were multifaceted and involved conceptualisations of participants' own values and characteristics, alongside aspects of their

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[83] In his writings, Rogers does not use the word 'authenticity', but uses the above terms to refer to the equivalent concept of 'being truly myself to another' (p. 222).

practice, contexts, backgrounds and training. Nevertheless, respect was seen as reciprocal and exchanged between both student and teacher. Ackroyd provides a helpful structure for ascertaining how teachers' mutual respect, highlighting three frames of influence: the micro level of teacher's individual understandings and personal commitments; the meso level of the departmental or school-wide ethos alongside community contexts; and the macro level of national policy and societal discourse (Ackroyd, 2020). Therefore, whilst teachers' experiences are constructed and communicated to the researcher at the micro level, they are also situated within the wider influences of school-wide, local and national policy. For example, the Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2011c, p. 10) and Prevent strategy (UK Government, 2011, p. 107) establish 'mutual respect' as a fundamental British value that a secondary teacher must uphold. Accordingly, this approving social climate is built not only from the classroom (micro) up, but also from the national (macro) down. For participants, their constructions of an environment that epitomised respect reflected the influences of national and local policy as they navigated their professional role within their contexts. Although they did not refer to exact references to policy in their narratives, almost all participants demonstrated a foundational commitment to mutual respect and perceived this to be an overarching component in helping students to be authentic.

Essentially, the value of respect, is a "social ethic" (Curren, 2017, p. 26) in that it is concerned with the character of an individual within their community or classroom milieu. As such, curating an 'approving social environment' involved validation of individual responses and opinions, and a commitment to an appropriate reaction in response. The positive validation of and reaction to student ideas, was often a greater priority for participants than an assessment of the content of the ideas themselves. Accordingly, many participants desired their classrooms to be ones where honesty and openness extended to all and every aspect of life.

In recent times, the idea of classrooms being a 'safe space' where students can share openly has received considered affirmation, both in general educational terms (Bonnell et al., 2010; Bramberger & Winter, 2021; Holley & Steiner, 2005; Rom, 1998), and Religious Education specifically (Osbeck et al., 2017; Watson, 2012, p. 18). Perhaps most notably, the concept of creating safe spaces "to encourage expression without fear of being judged or ridiculed", is recommended to policy makers, school communities, teachers and teacher trainers, in the influential *Signposts* document commissioned by the Council of Europe (Jackson, 2014b, p. 47). Within empirical research too, Dinham & Shaw, in assertions drawn from their extensive

interviews, conclude that "[students] feel RE should help them manage difference positively and avoid offence" (2015, p. 8). Additionally, both parents and employers perceived RE's role in fostering attitudes of respect as more important than substantive knowledge of religion or belief (Dinham & Shaw, 2015, p. 19). Although our findings in this context are concerned primarily with teachers, participants' high regard for the role of controversial issues in facilitating safe spaces, mirrors findings by Dinham & Shaw (2015, p. 19) and in the evidence collected for the CoRE's Interim Report (2017, p. 26) highlighting consensus in this area.

Nevertheless, the notion of 'safe spaces' has faced considerable and fair critique. Flensner & Von der Lippe (2019), for example, raise the questions as to whom is being kept safe, and from what. They argue that authentic learning involves risk taking, substantial disagreement, and, at times, being uncomfortable. Accordingly, 'safe' is a false term that is unhelpful for both students and teachers. Additionally, whilst participants' advocacy of nothing being off-limits was mainly related to content taught, this is not always the case. Recent examples of teachers being suspended for inappropriate use of imagery pertaining to the Prophet Mohammed (pbuh) at All Saints Academy, Bedford (BBC News, 2022), and Batley Grammar School (BBC News, 2021) reveal that there are, at least in the eyes of school leaders and the general public, certain things that are unacceptable to raise in the classroom. Similarly, schools' behavioural management policies often outline certain things, such as racism or profanity, that are off limits for students. As a result, the nebulous conceptualisation of a safe space where 'anything goes' has been deemed unconstructive and politicised. Instead, alternative terms have been suggested such as Iverson's "communities of disagreement" (2019) or Arao & Clemens' "brave spaces" (2013). These, more nuanced aspects of authentic spaces recognise a "pedagogy of discomfort" (Boler, 1999, p. 175; Zembylas, 2015; Zembylas & McGlynn, 2012) where uncomfortable emotion can be a powerful and transformative tool for learning beyond accepted norms and dominant beliefs. However, more often than not, participants spoke only of the positive aspects of safe spaces and did not engage in a critical appraisal of such an approach.

Finally, the concern of students and teachers to facilitate an open, authentic, and safe space for discussion in RE has led to what McKain deems the "'no right answer' problem" (McKain, 2018, p. 172). He argues that the attempt for all voices to be heard equally (under the guise of tolerance) is counterproductive and, in fact, has the opposite effect where students are less able to think critically and respectfully. Some participants, such as Holly, constructed their experiences of establishing authenticity in terms of steering students away from right or wrong,

perceiving them to facilitate a culture that embraces diversity. This interpretation reveals that, for some teachers who were involved in teaching controversial issues such as abortion, they too were not always aware of the implications of placing such a high importance on the (admirable) values of authenticity and honesty, and the potential detrimental effects on classroom dynamics and students' development.

8.3. 'You're Trying to Create an Environment Where They Feel Valued': Cultivating Trust and Relationships.

A central part of participants' construction of their practice in tackling the subject of abortion revolved around the strength of the teacher-student relationship. There was recognition amongst many participants that the study of more complex subject matter required a greater depth of relationship. In this way, participants perceived their RE classrooms as having a nature distinct from other subjects. The intrinsic complexity and significance of material studied within RE alongside its association with shared experiences meant that the subject had a natural affinity to relationship-building:

> *Maybe more than anywhere else I think my classroom, the RE classroom, is one where we can discuss things that you don't anywhere else. You talk about life and death and everything in between and that sort of glues you together where you can trust each other.* (Clara 13:54)

Clara's experience was one where she viewed the concepts and questions studied in RE as ones that might not have universal answers and therefore lend themselves to community exploration. Resultantly, this approach brought with it a sense of cohesion where everyone is enquiring together. She linked this to a feeling of trust, which was interpreted as a willingness to talk about issues of significance in collaboration with others. Such willingness also exposed students to the possibility of being emotionally or cognitively stretched in a way that might be uncomfortable. Whilst, for Clara, her willingness was a positive endeavour, other participants also highlighted the reality of things not always meeting expectations. Grace, for example, articulated that facilitating honest discussion was not without difficulty:

> *I think it takes a lot of trust to let that kind of honest conversation happen. It's not easy you know and sometimes it works better than others, but you have to try because you know it's what will help them to learn.* (Grace 29:30)

Grace's account helped acknowledge that trust was not a binary concept (that is, classes either trust each other or they do not). Rather, it developed over time. Similarly, since a class is made up of individuals and subgroups with differing social dynamics, there was likely to be different degrees of trust between them. Grace identified that honest conversation happened best when an appropriate level of trust and reciprocal understanding was present. However, this was not always the case. Nevertheless, she was resolute in her goal of trying to cultivate such an environment because she believed it to be one in which students could best learn.

Other participants made sense of their experience by exploring the practicalities of nurturing an environment of trust. Both Bethany and Holly placed meaning upon the seemingly small but purposeful actions they conducted:

> *And, you know, I always make a point of working in welcoming them at the door and saying hi, knowing their names and you know, so there's that instant connection as quickly as possible. It's the little things that help them to feel secure to share the big things. You're trying to create an environment where they feel valued.* (Bethany 45:00)

> *I always greet students at the door, know every student by name, always ask them something about themselves, and they just feel quite valued. And I think, then they value each other. So, it's a focus on really knowing the children that you might have, and what makes them tick, essentially. I mean, it's all about relationships at a very fundamental level.* (Holly 29:45)

For both of these participants, trust could only be built by investing in relationships, and this process fell just as much outside of conversations about controversial topics as it did within them (if not, even more so). They stressed the importance of knowing students as individuals, being familiar with their names, building rapport with them, and, where appropriate, enquiring into parts of their lives outside of the classroom. The emphasis on students being known by the teacher as an individual through conversation and physical action was significant, since it formed the groundwork from which more established relationships could be formed.

Trust was also demonstrated pragmatically by ensuring that students had clear and familiar expectations and boundaries of behaviour. Although these expectations were conceptualised differently from teacher to teacher and class to class, participants frequently constructed consistency as essential to helping students gain an awareness of their roles and responsibilities so that they might flourish:

I think it's about having a relationship with them. And that you've built up that trust and they know, okay, this is how it works in an RE classroom and this is how it works with Ms. X [surname] (Bethany 14:16)

For most participants, cultivating trust involved the amalgamation of both the emotional and practical dimension (such as the above). A students' trust in a teacher was not just an estimate of the probability that the teacher would perform a certain action or react in a certain way.[84] It also involved a positive feeling towards them which often manifested itself in a sense of safety and security, as Bethany later explored:

I want them to know that I'm invested, that I'm there. So, I think that definitely involves relationship to feel safe, that their viewpoints are going to be heard (Bethany 16:06)

The emphasis here was on the dependability of the teacher rather than the pupil. In her practice, Bethany sought to be present to those in her class. This presence went beyond a physical existence in time and space. It also involved a conscious awareness of being engaged with other people; sensitive and adaptive to their needs. In Bethany's construction, when students were on the receiving end of this dependable relationship, they felt safe. Within this safe environment, students were protected by a teacher who not only understood them, but who could act as a 'gatekeeper' holding the overarching responsibility for the behaviour in the room. As such, they were protected from any risk of danger or potentially hurtful response, as the teacher could intervene with suitable authority should any undesirable behaviour occur. On the other hand, Bethany's interpretation revealed that trust was also built on the past experiences of the students in relation to the teacher's behaviour. Whilst ground rules could initially be set by the teacher (giving an elementary level of safety), much of the trusting relationship was developed when the teacher acted in such a way that upheld these rules. Or, in other words, a safe environment is developed when teachers act to protect that safety, challenging behaviour that is out of line with classroom (or the school's) expectations when appropriate.

It seems fitting that cultivating an environment in which students are valued and trust was built requires an emotional commitment from the teacher. However, the nature of such an emotional

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[84] The word teacher in this sentence could equally be replaced with another student.

connection was expressed differently amongst participants. For Isabelle, this was framed in the language of impact and legacy:

> *I want them to think 'Wow, that teacher really made a difference because they knew me and knew what I was like', even if you didn't teach them in any exam classes.* (Isabelle 34:34)

There was an underlying assumption in Isabelle's narrative that students in examination classes (who usually had a greater number of hours in RE classes) were often perceived by others as being less important. It is not uncommon at Key Stage 4 in a school of non-religious character to have two types of classes. One who (usually) make the deliberate decision to take GCSE RE as one of their optional study choices. The other consists of those who have not chosen RE as a GCSE option but are still required by law to receive a religious education. This second group of 'Core RE' (or equivalent) classes usually have less timetabled contact with the RE teacher. Therefore, Isabelle was keen to preserve the same commitment to building relationships of trust across both groups of students impartially. She also desired to see this commitment play out in impacting students' lives across the board.

For others however, the emotional connection to those taught resembled something much closer to the love of a parental relationship. Holly, for example, spoke honestly about the RE classroom acting as a conduit for discussion which might not be present in students' home lives:

> *Actually, some students probably don't have that at home that they can have that discussion. So maybe it's important so that they get a bit of that in school even though it's not quite the same and it's your job as a teacher is just to create an environment where they can do that* (Holly 40:59)

For Holly, this revelation seemed to be one that struck her for the first time as she was given the space to explore her experiences in the interview. Although there was a recognition of the clear differences between parent and teacher, Holly reflected on the fact that for some young people school might be the only opportunity they have to consider issues such as abortion. Her role, therefore, was viewed as all the more impactful, especially for pupils who were disadvantaged in particular ways. Accordingly, there was keen awareness and appreciation of the privilege, benefits, and sense of fulfilment that came with being allowed to input into students' lives in this way.

Holly's experience also accentuated the importance of allowing students to develop safe, healthy and trusting relationships with teachers in order to thrive. Whilst this thriving was true of all pupils generally, Holly's reflections left space for the possibility that the teacher might (in one way or another) fulfil a role in some pupils' lives that would otherwise be fulfilled by a primary caregiver. In incorporating and exemplifying values of trust, honesty and dignity into classroom practices, classrooms became secure environments. But, more notably, the teacher in this context became the representational reality of such an environment – the secure or safe *person*. The teacher did not just offer a place where open discussion could take place but offered themselves as a safe person with whom topics like abortion could be discussed.

The ideas of sacrifice and personal interest or concern in students' lives were almost universally explored by all participants who viewed it as their duty to create positive student–teacher relationships. None of those interviewed referred to specific examples of relationships with individual students, although they may well have had these in mind. Instead, they chose to keep to more all-encompassing and inclusive explorations. Nevertheless, the strength of emotion and feelings for some participants was palpable:

> *I love teaching, and I love the kids and I want that to come across and for kids to be able to feel that somehow.* (Josie 56:11)

Josie's construction of her role went beyond that of 'just a job'. It was a vocation that she felt a significant amount of satisfaction in and one where she was emotionally invested. The repetition and accentuation of the word love indicated something of her feelings toward those she taught. This powerful sense of affection and affinity towards students was, in many ways, selfless. Josie desired for students to be the recipients of her devotion without necessarily feeling the same in return. It would perhaps be deemed inappropriate for Josie to verbally express her love to students directly. However, she wanted it to be sensed by them, nonetheless. Josie's commitment to strong, selfless, positive and caring relationships was the bedrock for her practice, viewing them as both beneficial for their own sake, and because they formed the context within which students could develop, learn and grow.

The narratives in this section have revealed the particular ways in which participants constructed their role in building classroom environments that valued trust and cultivated relationships. Whilst not always easy and requiring a selfless investment, these relationships were often held in the greatest esteem and involved practical and emotional elements. They start long before a

student begins to discuss abortion and are developed over time. They also occasionally meant that teachers were left open to a certain level of vulnerability. Such relationships were vital in establishing a sense of dependability and security for the student, within which they could succeed and feel able to contribute meaningfully to class discussion. Finally, participants' experiences of valuing students meant that they expressed feelings of deep affection and affinity towards them. They recognised the often unique privilege of having input and creating stability in students' lives, perhaps in ways that students did not experience elsewhere. As such, participants desired these relationships to have a long lasting effect; going beyond the discussion of one particular topic and impacting students' lives beyond the classroom.

8.3.1. Discussion: Attachment, Love, and The Student-Teacher Relationship

At the heart of this subtheme was participants' commitment to building trusting and impactful relationships with students. Within this, the focus of some narratives stood in seeming contrast to previous discussions in section 8.2 where, at times, interpretations of authenticity meant facilitating environments where nothing was off-limits. Instead, for teachers such as Bethany, establishing a 'safe' classroom where students could thrive involved establishing trusting relationships by holding the overarching responsibility for the classes' behaviour and content. In theory, the two approaches are not mutually exclusive. It is possible for a teacher to both be able to effectively manage behaviour and create an environment where nothing is off-limits. However, in participants' interpretations, the two were conceptualised differently. The open or unlimited classroom mainly pertained to the content or subject material studied, whereas behaviour management was associated with cultivating relationships of trust. The role of the teacher in setting the behavioural climate when tackling controversial issues is discussed extensively in the extant literature, both pragmatically in terms of what a teacher should do (for example, Council of Europe, 2015, p. 17; Fournier-Sylvester, 2013; Oxfam, 2018; REC, 2010, Gateway Document 2.6) and from more theoretical or psychological lenses (for example. Baynham, 2020; Beadle & Murphy, 2013; Oberholzer, 2019). Accordingly, participants' recognition of their own impact on the learning of students by effectively managing behaviour is well founded.

There is also a significant body of research that determines the strength of a positive student–teacher relationship as one of the most important factors in promoting achievement and student outcome (Allen et al., 2018; Baker, 2006; Holzberger et al., 2019; Pianta et al., 2012) and in

reducing negative behaviour and drop-out (Kincade et al., 2020; Roorda et al., 2011). However, setting clear or valid criteria for objectively measuring the strength of relationship is problematic (Pastore & Luder, 2021). Nevertheless, for participants, their interpretations of the student-teacher relationship meant they were conceptualised as ones of intense emotional commitment and connection. It was within this context most participants believed that students could feel most valued, and therefore succeed.

Teaching, as an emotional undertaking, is often discussed as a "double-edged sword" (García-Moya et al., 2019, p. 6). Whilst its benefits are recognised, there is a wariness that relationships that are too close might jeopardise teachers' professionalism or threaten either teacher or students' wellbeing. However, teaching is, by very nature an "emotional practice" (Hargreaves, 1998, p. 838). It involves understanding and interpreting the emotions, feelings, and desires of students and self (van Manen, 2015, p. 125) alongside a carrying of an emotional labour or burden out of a sense of care (Kidger et al., 2009). This emotional labour is arguably intensified when studying controversial issues such as abortion which are in themselves emotive.

The affective and passionate dimensions of participants' experiences in this subtheme were particularly strong and resembled something much closer to the love of a caregiving relationship. Within the literature, the teacher-student relationship has, at times, been characterised as love both from the perspective of the teacher (Goldstein & Lake, 2000; Virat, 2020) and the student (Uitto et al., 2018, p. 47). The dominant theoretic context in understanding the relationship in this manner is the framework of attachment theory, although other models such interpersonal theory (Pennings, 2016, p. 234; Wubbels et al., 2015, p. 366) as have also been deployed.

As its basis, attachment theory asserts that children form attachments, initially to a principal figure (usually a parent or primary caregiver) and then to other significant subordinate attachment figures such as school teachers (Bowlby, 1982, p. 204; Howes & Spieker, 2016, p. 315). From the perspective of the child, the attachment aims to achieve or maintain emotional security and stability. These attachment relationships are a substantial influence on children's psychological, social and emotional development. It is important to note that not all relationships are categorised as attachment relationships (Ainsworth, 1989, p. 710). However, there do exist similarities between the child-parent relationship and the student-teacher relationship that would render the latter a flexible attachment relationship (Goossens & van Ijzendoorn, 1990; Howes & Hamilton, 1992; Riley, 2011). Kesner, for example, in reference to attachment states

that "perhaps there is not another non-familiar adult that is more significant in a child's life than his or her teacher" (2000, p. 134).

Applying the principles of attachment theory to the student-teacher relationship means that the teacher acts as a secure base, which is a precondition for proficiency in students' exploration of, and assistance with, learning (Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Schuengel, 2012; Verschueren & Koomen, 2012). Research has suggested that students who form strong attachment relationships with teachers are more likely to have improved academic outcomes (Hattie, 2009, p. 108), increased wellbeing (Clements, 2010), and are better accumulate personal resources such as hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism that are favourable to academic achievement (Carmona-Halty et al., 2019; Martin & Dowson, 2009). For participants, who often perceived their roles to be one of attachment, they too conceptualised the benefits of establishing close relationships with students. Their narratives revealed their commitment to students within the framework of wanting to facilitate classroom dynamics where students could achieve. Attachment theory, therefore, is a useful lens through which to view their experiences. It assists in helping to understand the strength of connection to students, and the rationale for forming them.

However, the student-teacher relationship must also be considered from the perspective of the teacher, where strict adherence to attachment theory does not. Forming close relationships with students is frequently one of the most rewarding aspects of their work (Corbin et al., 2019; Shann, 1988), is associated with increased wellbeing (Konu & Rimpelä, 2002; Spilt et al., 2011), and the avoidance of burnout (Milatz et al., 2015). Klassen et al. (2012) also argue that forming close relationships with students is an underemphasised part of teachers' basic psychological need. However, the teachers' relationship formation occurs on a multitude of layers. Utilising a dyadic attachment framework, for example, establishes the object of the relationship as both the individual and the group (Riley, 2011, p. 31; E. R. Smith et al., 1999). As a result, teachers form close relationships with both individual students and the class as a whole. This assertion corroborates with participants' experiences who spoke of the significance of their relationships as directed at both the part and the whole. Furthermore, where their relationships with students were interpreted through the language of closeness or love, these relationships were conceived of as mutually beneficial to themselves in addition to the student.

As a pertinent aside, I found it uncomfortable to interpret participants' experiences as loving toward their students. My reflective journal entries written when exploring this subtheme note

that the language of 'attachment', 'closeness', or 'connectedness' as easier to record than the language of love. As a result, I found this particular subtheme needed a significant amount of revisiting of the data, a deep exploration of my own positioning, and (perhaps in contrast to other subthemes) more deliberate reflexivity and bracketing. Writing from the position of the teacher inevitably drew to mind my previous experiences both of teaching in the classroom, and of being a student. Accordingly, I found myself to be reluctant and awkward in describing participants' experience in this way. Upon reflection, I believe this reluctance was due, in part, to my concerns around misrepresenting participants and how the interpretation might be perceived by others. Such an occurrence is not unique. Aldridge (2019) for example, notes the expressed discomfort of seminar attendees at the invocation of love as it pertains to the student-teacher relationship, referencing the suggestion that he refers to 'care', 'sympathy' or 'compassion' instead. However, he argues that one should be willing to "risk the language of love" (2019, p. 535), despite its ambiguity, romantic connotations, and challenge to prudishness in describing the fundamental orientations of human contact and its associated passion, affection and peculiarities. As a result, I decided that the language of love was the closest and correct interpretation of the data in this instance, and the encapsulated the significance and meaning of the experiences of those interviewed.

8.4. 'This Is the Place to Try and Figure It Out': Expressing Opinion as Learning

The final subtheme that became apparent from participants' explorations of their experiences related to their attempts to create classroom environments where students were encouraged to take ownership of their own learning. During the interviews, participants spoke about the various ways in which they tried to facilitate this process. However, they frequently emphasised how the acts of talking and discussing abortion were fundamental to a students' learning. The context of the secure learning environment provided fruitful opportunities for students to think critically and take risks to explore the issue of abortion more fully:

> *Within the discussion, there needs to be safety if they say something. But through saying it, they're trying to figure something out. And it might come out backwards, or inside out but I'm like 'brilliant!', because actually, if we can start to talk it out, then we can start to write it out. But actually, we can't start to write it out until we start to talk it out.* (Bethany 16:21)

If they're able to talk through what they're thinking with other people, either me or on their table, it helps them understand what's going in in their head. And... but this [the RE lesson] is the place to try and figure it out. (Bethany 20:57)

Bethany's accounts highlighted the significant link between talking and learning (and, by association, writing as the outworking or evidence of this learning). Accordingly, she perceived her role as one of encouraging problem solving and a 'trial and error' approach despite students' contributions not always being fully developed in its articulation or form. Bethany valued the importance of 'talking out' or allowing students to process their thoughts through verbal communication, either with her or their peers. It was relevant to note that, although the context here meant that she was talking about abortion specifically, her choice of language broadens the application to her teaching practice more comprehensively. In other words, Bethany conceptualised her classroom as a special and embracing culture of discovery within which an uncovering and exploration of students' own thinking around a range of relevant topics (including abortion) occurred. This discovery was sharpened in community, where conversation helped to bring sense and meaning to their ideas and order their thoughts accordingly.

Freya conveyed a similar idea but with a more acute focus on her own responsibility of questioning students:

I want them to be able to work it out in the classroom, like I always like to always be questioning. I think, like, the best way to teach something like this is just to keep questioning them, like, keep asking them why and keep getting them to think (Freya 31:08)

Questions in teaching can be used for a whole range of purposes. Some are procedural and directive, whereas other assess an individual or group's progress and understanding. However, for Freya, her questions were specifically designed to help the student grapple with the topic at a deeper level: forming new connections with and between complex content areas; reflecting upon and explaining their thinking processes; and embracing challenge to independently consider more nuanced aspects of the topic at hand. As such, the use of open and higher cognitive questions helped to promote and develop a community of inquiry where students were facilitated to engage in purposeful discourse to acquire new understanding, knowledge, skills and attitudes. This, in Freya's understanding, was a process that was led by the teacher who steered the direction of exchange based on: their more advanced knowledge of the material being covered; insights into pedagogical best practice; and familiarity with the individuals in

their classes. As result, the teacher could tailor and direct their specific questions to maximise opportunities for cognition and contribution.

Grace's account was, in many ways, convergent with Freya's. Yet, Freya also explored what the visible outcome of learning looked like. This outcome was framed in the context of potential change:

> *And I think as long as I knew that they had felt able to express their opinion or even change their opinion, you know, some of them can change their opinion because of a lesson. If they felt able to that's a winner, because it means they've been able to think through things and they've understood.* (Grace 38:20)

Underlying Grace's assertion was her belief that the process of learning was by very nature, one that brought with it the capacity for change. In the excerpt above, it was not that only those who had changed their position that had learned, but rather that change was a clear indicator of adjustment because of learning that had taken place. The disposition of such change might vary for each individual. For some, change might be more subtle or imperceptible to the outsider, resulting from an internalised alteration or modification to a student's thinking that is not shared with another. However, for others (as Grace described) change will be more conspicuous with a demonstrable and communicable development of their stance or positioning toward an issue.

Along slightly different lines to those such as Freya and Grace, Ella also recognised the link between verbally expressing an opinion and learning. However, this link was construed negatively and as a source of tension between what was required by the examination board and what Ella believed to be the best way to teach abortion:

> *I think that the exam questions force them to be able to form an opinion. I'm not sure if I agree that they should have an opinion about everything all the time, but there's something about forcing them to say what they think and why that helps them to learn* (Ella 12:11)

The tension of whether students should be required to express a view on abortion either in class discussion or in written assessment has been explored by other participants elsewhere. Nonetheless, the formulation of Ella's interpretation here justified its place within this particular subtheme. An elementary reading of Ella's narrative might have suggested that she was ambivalent or undecided about whether or not students should articulate their views. However,

a closer interpretation of the text, especially its wider context, revealed Ella's stance couched in more tentative language. The word 'force/forced' was both duplicated and stressed in such a way that indicated her disagreement. Despite this indication, Ella still acknowledged that verbalising a standpoint required thinking that is useful in bringing about learning. In this way, she highlighted (albeit reluctantly) the value of having an endpoint that demanded a certain level of processing. The very definitive activity of stating a conclusion acted as a cognitive bottle neck, necessitating an ordering of ideas and information that constituted an intelligible operation.

The next two accounts were divergent from many of the others articulated in this subtheme. Yet, it was valuable to include them here both to demonstrate the distinctiveness of participants' experiences and to analyse them more comprehensively. Annabel, in explaining her experiences of teaching in a school of religious character, explored the dual function of her role.

> *We very much feel in all of this that yes, we're supposed to be developing their faith and helping them grow in their faith, but equally we want them to be able to make their own decisions about things. We're not evangelists, we're teachers.* (Annabel 17:02)

On the one hand, there existed an expectation that Annabel was involved in the formation of students' faith and its development in line with the school's ethos and values. This formation was a key part of Annabel's identity and one that, in other places, she spoke of with great privilege and admiration. As a result, she took this part of her job seriously. On the other hand, Annabel desired to teach in such a way that enabled young people to make their own decisions on issues like abortion. The inferred implication here was that when all options were put on the table, including having a termination, students may well choose a course of action that runs counter to the official teachings and doctrines of the church. Annabel, therefore, found herself having to navigate the tension between the two seemingly contrasting approaches. In her narrative, she attempted to alleviate some of this tension by positioning her experience as one shared with other members of her team. Nevertheless, her correlation of faith development with 'evangelist' and helping students make their own choices as 'teaching' demonstrated her preference for the latter as the primary construction of her role. Accordingly, she fulfilled her role as the teacher by helping students explore a variety of approaches to the issue (including the principles advocated by the Catholic church), and by equipping them with the knowledge and tools required to reach well-informed decisions. In this way, her aspirations went beyond

helping the students to *just* express an opinion. They accounted, instead, for a decision: a more settled or definitive resolution as a part of the learning process.

Isabelle, who teaches in a boys' school, also drew parallels between students communicating their opinion and the learning taking place. However, she made sense of her experience by exploring the dynamics of her relationships to those she teaches, both in terms of authority (student-teacher) and gender (boy-girl):

> *And the questions coming out are just sometimes absolutely ridiculous. But I could either get angry and think that they were taking the mick, which some might have been. But also I was like, this is always a learning opportunity, because the only interaction you might have with girls is when you're kissing one and having sex with them and so them expressing what they think is always an opportunity for learning.* (Isabelle 24:50)

Her explorations were insightful and highlighted some of the differences between those teaching in a boys' school in comparison to those teaching in a co-educational setting. By creating an environment in which the boys feel able to share, some of the questions she was posed might be considered by some to be puerile, crude or ill-mannered. However, she took pride in her attitude towards answering these questions. She positioned herself as the adult in the room, distinct from the students in terms of maturity. Rather than reacting awkwardly, or heavy-handedly, Isabelle approached every question with a certain amount of stoicism and wisdom, as if nothing that the boys threw at her (even if they were done with poor intentions) could prevent her from acting professionally. As a result of her 'there is no silly question' approach, each student enquiry became an opportunity for the whole class to learn.

Student enquiry was also especially important in light of her perception that the boys in her class might have limited contact with peers of the opposite sex from day-to-day. In fact, she emphasised that often, the boys' relationships with girls tended to be romantic or sexual in the first instance. Therefore, they lacked friendships or peer relationships with girls in their immediate vicinity that would change the dynamic of class discussion. As such, they lacked a comprehensive knowledge of the female reproductive system, and the breadth diverse views that would be more commonplace in a mixed gender class. For Isabelle, this deficiency of knowledge and views meant that she constructed her role as all the more important. As potentially one of the only female relationships a student might have outside of a sexual or

parental relationship, it was her job to provide not only opportunities for learning through questions posed, but also to articulate the female perspective more broadly.

In the final subtheme of this section, participants explored the various ways in which they conceptualised communicating an opinion as learning, all within the context of forming classroom dynamics that allowed for students to achieve. Whilst all viewed talking as fundamental to the learning process, some constructed their experiences as encouraging a classroom environment where trial-and-error and problem solving were welcomed. Within this environment, students engaged in the practice of 'talking out' their viewpoints so that they could analyse them more fully and establish a sense of discovery together in community. For others, learning was developed through effective questioning and was marked by the process of change. Participants also noted that, although not always desirable, having students articulate their opinions acted as a cognitive bottle neck which directed them to organise and formulate their thinking in a way that was fruitful and conducive. Finally, several participants made sense of the tensions faced in their nuanced contexts, either in a school of religious character, or a single-sex school. In the first, they wrestled with the difficulties of teaching abortion through the lens of one particular religious approach, whilst also desiring students to make (and feel comfortable to communicate) their own decisions on the issue. In the second, they viewed their role as a vital part of boys' development in providing the female perspective and allowing them to explore questions that might otherwise seem secretive or discourteous.

8.4.1. Discussion: Dialogue, Talking and Learning

The use of talk, conversation, and discussion as a pedagogical tool in the classroom is well reflected in the literature. The concept of encouraging young people to speak in order for them to access and improve learning has been associated with more systematised or commonplace expressions such as "talk for learning" (Barnes, 2008; DfE, 2011b), developing "oracy" (Holderness & Lalljee, 1988; Newman, 2020) or "dialogic teaching" (Alexander, 2008, 2020; Earl, 2018; Wells & Ball, 2008). Empirical evidence of the link between good talking and good learning tends to be situated within small-scale qualitative research (Howe & Abedin, 2013), and inclines towards primary rather than secondary education (Higham et al., 2014). Nevertheless, it has been suggested that talking is a powerful tool in constructing and shaping knowledge (O'Connor et al., 2016, p. 111).

Knight (2020, p. 2), helpfully outlines three broad categorisations of advocating improved classroom talk: the psychological or cognitive argument; the sociological argument; and the communicative competence argument, all of which were deployed by participants. Participants' constructions of the communicative competence argument, where engaging students in classroom dialogue in order to develop and enhance their communication skills which are vital for success both within and beyond schooling, have already been discussed in section 7.3 Nevertheless, both the psychological and the sociological arguments were also a significant feature of participants' narratives. From a psychological perspective, students can engage in a variety of cognitive processes through talking such as: "hypothesising, exploration, debate, and synthesis" (Barnes, 2010, p. 7). These are vital in helping students engage memory and recall, in processing new information, and in linking new concepts to pre-existing knowledge. Language, then, both spoken and heard, not only manifests thinking, but is also essential to structuring it, and shaping the higher mental processes necessary for learning (Alexander, 2008, p. 92). Vygotsky's theories of cognitive development were a significant underpinning of such an approach, whereby language and thought are reciprocal and socially negotiated (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 94). As such, when students talk with others they are engaged in thinking and, subsequently meaning making as the "internal structure resulting from the unification of thinking and speech" (Mahn, 2003, p. 126). The role of dialogue, therefore, is substantial in a number of ways in the learning process, but particularly in what Mercer (2008, p. 35) deems a "mediating role". In this, cognition and learning are always mediated by cultural and social activities such as talk. The mediative role extends to the cognitive and cultural space between teacher and students, between students themselves, between society and the individual, and between what is known by the student and what is still to be known.

The notion of the mediative nature of language was mirrored by many participants who perceived dialogue to be of the utmost importance in facilitating cognitive processes and deepening their knowledge and understanding. The evidence of participants' conceptualisation of this mediation was seen in the phrases such as 'working it out' (Freya 31:08) or 'talking it out' (Bethany 16:21). Language occupied an intercessory position where knowledge could be negotiated between and within individuals. In some cases, this negotiation had a destination in the articulation of an opinion or position. This acted as a bottle neck which exerted constructive pressure in order to accelerate the cognitive processes. Therefore, planning opportunities for discussion in lessons and assisting such a negotiation through questioning was a prominent aim of participants' approach to tackling the issue of abortion. However, in the interpretation of

participants' experiences, speaking also occupied an additional mediative role; one between thinking and writing. Consequently, the ordering and systematising of a student's thinking through dialogue was significant in establishing the demonstration of that thinking via external measures such as written examinations. As such, participants often shifted away from conceptualising the importance of speaking in learning as an abstract cognitive structure toward more pragmatic outworking.

The second of Knight's categorisations, the sociological arguments for classroom talk, involves the importance of dialogue as it pertains to inclusion, rights, freedom of expression, patterns of social interaction and behaviour, and students' ownership of the learning environment (Knight, 2020, p. 2). For classrooms to be appropriately equitable and inclusive, they must value the "presence, participation and achievement of all learners, regardless of their context and personal characteristics" (UNESCO, 2017, p. 13). As such, the sociological perspective recognises fundamental power dynamics at work in education and sees student participation as a way of redressing the balance of young people's agency (Cook-Sather, 2018; Mayes et al., 2017; Mitra, 2018). The increasing weight placed on the importance of teachers listening to and engaging with the 'student voice' is derived, in part, from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (URCRC) which sets forth that all parties

> …shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child. (United Nations, 1990, Article 12.1)

Building upon the URCRC, a number of recent government reforms, policies, regulation, and guidance documents have also recognised the importance of engaging with students as key stakeholders in their own learning (DfES, 2003a; DfES 2003b; DCSF, 2008; DfE, 2014; PHE/DfE 2021)[85]. However, in a helpful summarisation of Article 12 of the URCRC and the broader importance of student participation, Lundy (2007, p. 933) suggests four key aspects which require the input of the adult:

A. Space – where children must be given the opportunities to express a view
B. Voice – where children must be facilitated to express their views

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[85] For a further overview, see Robinson (2018)

C. Audience - where the view must be listened to

D. Influence - where the view must be acted upon, as appropriate

For participants, the first three aspects formed a substantial part of their interpretations of their role in the classroom. They often favoured a collaborative-constructionist approach to learning that aimed to recognise the unique social interactions and dynamics of the group, and held values of inclusivity, empowerment, and respect in high esteem. Accordingly, students were perceived as co-constructors of their knowledge and development in partnership with others in the room; their peers and the teacher. As a result, participants spent a considerable amount of thought and time 'reading' the social environment and dynamics brought about by the students. From there, they reacted responsively to comments made in order to orchestrate further 'space' and 'voice' to an appropriate 'audience' where students felt able to succeed. For participants such as Annabelle and Isabelle, this orchestration seemed all the more important given their unique contexts of having either other 'voices' at play (such as the strong ethos of the school), or a lack of particular voices (such as in a single gender school environment). Although Lundy's fourth aspect of 'influence' played a lesser role in participants' experiences of teaching abortion, this was understandable given that their disclosed objective in facilitating dialogue was to help students navigate the predetermined subject matter (often set by examination boards). In this sense, true participation where, according to Hart (1992, p. 14), learning is child-initiated and self-determined, was unobtainable due to the constraints of wider educational systems and structures.

8.5. Chapter Summary

The final superordinate theme has explored participants' multifaceted experiences of managing classroom environments and dynamics that enable students to thrive and be successful learners and individuals. As part of the conceptualisation of their role, participants frequently described each of their classes as communities within which they held the responsibility for directing and facilitating collective expectations, ethos, and values. Given the sensitivities of tackling controversial issues such as abortion, this responsibility was viewed as all the more important. As the teacher, they perceived their influence as extending not only to how well students were able to learn the subject material, but also to how well they were able to navigate interpersonal relationships and the formation of attitudes towards controversial issues more generally.

Accordingly, participants often held and sought to embody certain core values and practices that would help students to thrive in navigating such complex topics.

First, they ensured that an appropriate level of distancing and objectivity in discussing abortion was maintained by all parties. This distance was important to facilitate students' critical engagement with a wide range of approaches and views. Consequently, they were frequently deliberate in their utilisation of language, recognising its impact and potential leverage in shaping views, and in communicating a certain set of ideals. As such, language was constructed as situated, interpreted and meaning-saturated. Keen to minimise the risk of undue influence, participants favoured language and terminology that was primarily scientific in nature and which they perceived as most neutral and included, for example, using the word 'foetus' rather than 'baby' in reference to abortion. Similarly, participants also demonstrated a heightened awareness of the potential implications of graphic imagery which they deemed to be unsuitable for viewing in the classroom.

Underpinning the desire for objectivity was a commitment to ensure that all students were valued, heard, and taken seriously regardless of their views. Participants endeavoured to create a classroom environment that was special and unique in comparison to other subjects, because it allowed students to discuss issues fundamental to human existence. Within this, there was a strong emphasis on ensuring that students could be honest and authentic in communicating their thoughts and views, and for those to be received positively by other members of the class. As such, participants sought to develop an approving social climate that was shaped, in part, by the teacher but was also subject to the influences of national and local policy, and school wide expectations and ethos. This approving social climate was constructed as a 'safe space' where students could contribute freely and without fear of negative repercussions. However, in establishing such environments, participants did not always consider the potentially unfavourable consequences that might counteract the sorts of values they were keen to imbibe. Nevertheless, part of the commitment to ensuring that students were able to speak freely was the association of dialogue and speech with learning. Allowing students the opportunity to verbally process their arguments and articulate their position was a vital strategy in facilitating the processes that deepened knowledge and understanding, and helped them to structure their cognition. It also enabled participants to allow students to feel valued and respected through the upholding and maintenance of their rights. In turn, students were given greater ownership of their learning involvement and participation.

Finally, to create an environment where students could thrive and succeed, participants' narratives spoke heavily of the importance of developing impactful and positive student-teacher relationships. These relationships were interpreted as ones that had strong affective emotional aspects, and involved an intense commitment to students as individuals, as well as to their learning. Such commitment was reflective of the emotional labour required to navigate controversial issues. It also typified teachers' more overarching love for their students and desire to see them grow and prosper, not only as students of Religious Education, but also in their ongoing development at a formative time in their adolescence.

9. **Evaluation, Implications for Practice and Future Orientation**

The final chapter discusses what was attempted and achieved during this research. It draws together a summary of the themes and situates them in their relationship to other literature and claims to knowledge. It then provides an evaluation of the project, incorporating personal reflection, comparison to external criteria, and an assessment of its scope and limitations. The chapter ends with suggestions for how the research might impact ongoing practice and where there is scope for future work to be done.

9.1. Review Of Study Aims and Objectives

In this study, I have investigated female teachers' experiences of tackling the controversial issue of abortion in the context of GCSE Religious Studies. The importance of studying controversial issues in Religious Education is well established (CoRE, 2018, p. 13; Dearden, 1981; Ofsted, 2021) and is an integral part of approaching a subject that is fundamentally concerned with complex questions about life, meaning, reality, belief, ethics, and human nature where a variety of worldviews, opinions and approaches exist. Whilst there is significant scholarly debate (explored in Chapter 2) on the nature of controversial issues and which criteria should be used to determine such an issue, less emphasis has been placed on the experience of teachers themselves. Furthermore, abortion, as one of these controversial issues studied by students across several GCSE Religious Education examination specifications (AQA, 2018, p. 3; OCR, 2018, p. 3; Pearson/Edexcel, 2018a, p. 16; 2018b, p. 12)[86], has received little attention in the literature as it pertains to teachers. As a result, I chose Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith, 1996) provide a systematic exploration of how individuals made sense of their teaching experiences. By seeking to bring together fundamental principles from phenomenology, hermeneutics and ideography, IPA provided a comprehensive and holistic approach to in-depth and reflexive inquiry that preserved the diversity and complexity of individuals' unique perspectives. Accordingly, the research was guided by the overarching question: 'how do women experience the teaching of abortion with GCSE RE?'. The research question generated several study objectives[87] which are restated below, alongside a brief indication of where a further discussion can be found within this chapter:

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[86] See also, Appendix A

[87] As previously stated, these objectives draw from Nizza, Farr and Smith's (2021) markers of achieving high quality IPA studies

- To construct a coherent and unfolding narrative of participants' accounts through analytic dialogue between selected and interpreted extracts. *These themes are summarised and discussed in section 9.2 and 9.4*

- To identify relevant and appropriate themes that are most prevalent across participants' accounts and consistent with the research question. *These themes are summarised and discussed in section 9.2*

- To give depth to participants' experiences by systematic analysis and interpretation of their accounts that gives meaning to the data and notes the dynamic patterns of convergence and divergences between accounts. *These themes are summarised and discussed in sections 9.2 and 9.4.*

- To extend pedagogical, educational, and psychological knowledge and understanding of women's perceptions of their teaching practice and role in approaching controversial subject matter in the classroom. *These themes are summarised and discussed in section 9.3*

- To use the interpretative subthemes and theoretical discussion to inform and suggest implications for best practice and future research. *These themes are summarised and discussed in sections 9.5 and 9.6*

9.2. Summary Of Themes

My analysis focused on themes that emerged from the data set. These themes were prevalent across the breadth of the narratives, with each of the three overarching or top-level themes containing the voices of every participant, and each subtheme representative of at least half of those interviewed. Although each theme was interpreted through the lens of one researcher's perspective, the analysis drew upon and included a wide range of selected excepts. This approach allowed each participant's story to unfold on its own terms before engaging in the process of review and comparison between cases, highlighting patterns of correlation alongside idiosyncratic distinction. Overall, participants' stories were complex and involved the interweaving of accounts with dynamic foci. They often spoke of themselves and their own

feelings and emotions, however, they equally situated their stories in reference to their students' experiences, their profession or vocation, the class, or their encompassing view upon the abortion debate without distinct reference to themselves. Nevertheless, the overarching experiences of most participants can be summarised by them trying their best to navigate the issue which, on the one hand, has significant religious, moral, legal, social, and historical complexities with the potential for distress, hurt and negative long-term implications. However, on the other hand, participants perceived their role as a privilege and one that played into their professional strengths and values as a teacher able to confidently position themselves to handle intricate classroom dynamics and direct learning for the benefit, development, and wellbeing of the student. This overarching experience was explored through three top-level themes investigated in Chapters 6-8.

Chapter 5 examined how participants shaped and positioned themselves as an individual within the social context of the classroom. Participants drew upon a variety of explanations, analogies, and illustrative examples to address the meaning of their role as a teacher and their role in approaching abortion. Most applied their need to construct an identity based on a number of personas or 'acting' roles. Doing so required significant self-awareness and dedication to reflective practice as they navigated between and within various personas that were, at times, incongruent with each other and yet subsisted in a state of existential unity. At the same time, participants established their conceptualisation of the self within the very clear boundaries of professionalism. They placed a high value on teacher autonomy in making professional judgements that were decidedly personal and contextualised, all within the parameters of conforming to internal and external ethical expectations. Pragmatically, participants tended to achieve this autonomy through the creation of a relational gap or sense of distance between themselves and the students. By knowingly holding back or concealing their opinions or experiences related to abortion, there remained parts of their stories that remained secret, hidden away from students. These hidden experiences were held tightly as cherished and special but were often used in a variety of ways to influence class discussion and direction. Nevertheless, non-disclosure was frequently burdensome for participants, adding to the complexity and cognitive capacity required to handle the issue.

Chapter 6 explored participants' changing perceptions of their experiences in relation to their self-described objectives of ensuring that, in teaching abortion, students learnt skills and knowledge that would be useful for their ongoing and lifelong development. Emphasis was

placed on the importance of equipping students to move beyond preconceived or binary views on the abortion debate, toward an appreciation of a multitude of perspectives that appropriately acknowledged diversity, nuance, balance, intricacy, and alternative stances. Participants frequently relied on values of discourse, abstraction, and translation to achieve this multiplicity, where it was hoped that engaging with a variety of different approaches to abortion would necessitate consideration of their own positioning alongside a greater understanding of others. Many (although not all) participants gave intense regard to the complex realities of women experiencing abortion, encouraging students to engage with the multiplicity of factors that might impact their personal worldview and decision making. Engaging with the realities of women enabled a triple hermeneutic to emerge within the study where the researcher made sense of the participant, who was making sense of themselves, by making sense of their students' experience in grappling with women's experiences of abortion. However, despite an increasingly knowledge-rich curriculum, the content was rarely the sole focus of participants, for whom the development of competency or character-based skills was important across many accounts. Accordingly, they used their professional discretion to focus on the value of students' holistic development, which includes equipping them to handle the possible challenges of controversial issues outside of the classroom in preparation for adult life.

Chapter 7 focussed on participants' framing of the teaching as abortion in reference to cultivating classroom environments and dynamics that were conducive to students thriving and succeeding. Summarised by the quotation 'you're trying your best', participants perceived themselves as making every effort possible to engage in practices they believed were of benefit to students. For controversial issues like abortion, this involved promoting a measure of distance and objectivity to facilitate scholarly and critical engagement with a wide range of views. As a result, the use of neutral language and imagery was particularly important in participants' interpretations. Underpinning the desire for objectivity was a commitment to ensure an approving social climate where all students were able to speak honestly, and for their views to be received seriously and positively by others. This approach was significant not only in allowing students to feel valued and respected but was also established as a key mechanism in the learning process. Authenticity was an important value that teachers were keen to embody and perpetuate amongst students. To be authentic, participants constructed their classrooms as 'safe spaces' where students could speak freely without fear of negative repercussions. However, they did not always consider the longer-term implications of doing so. Nevertheless, the classroom environment was summarised in participants' conceptualisation as one that was highly invested.

It built upon positive teacher-student relationships and involved strong affective and emotional elements in their intense commitment toward students.

9.3. Relationship To Other Research, and Claims to Knowledge

The teaching of controversial issues is an essential part of Religious Education (Conroy et al., 2013, p. 213; Cooling, 2012; Ofsted, 2013, p. 27; 2021; REC, 2013a, p. 23). Recent scholarship has moved the defining of a controversial issues away from a singular, panoptic description toward various criteria (Anders & Shudak, 2016; Sætra, 2019; Von Der Lippe, 2019). Abortion, as a topic that frequently occurs on GCSE specifications (AQA, 2017, p. 21; Eduqas/WJEC, 2019a, p. 16; OCR, 2019, p. 51; Pearson/Edexcel, 2016, p. 11) meets the suggested criteria on several bases. First, it is an issue that not only causes significant disagreement amongst and between groups and communities (Bailey, 1975), but it is also vehemently debated in the public, legal and legislative spheres (Hess & McAvoy, 2015). Such contrary views and opinions are held in a manner that is rational, logically sound and uses credible reasoning (Dearden, 1984). However, where noteworthy disagreement does exist between belief communities, these communities "honour the importance of reason giving and exemplify a commitment to peaceful co-existence in society" (Cooling, 2012, p. 177). Abortion is also an issue that is prevalent in the life of the students (Anders & Shudak, 2016), and is something that they are likely to encounter at a point during their school lives. As such, it is both relevant and creates a sense of "intellectual tension" (Yacek, 2018, p. 81) in navigating between the differing held positions.

Given such complexity, it seems reasonable that many RE teachers find it demanding to address controversial issues (Anker & Von Der Lippe, 2018; Quartermaine, 2016). For example, previous research has indicated that teachers often feel unclear about how to react or behave (Flensner & Von der Lippe, 2019; Jackson, 2014a), insecure about their capacity to cope (Cotton, 2006; Oulton, Day, et al., 2004; Zembylas & Kambani, 2012) and lack confidence (Fournier-Sylvester, 2013; McCully & Barton, 2007). They often struggle to know how to handle their own or students' emotions (King, 2009; Pace, 2019; Sætra, 2021b), perceive a lack of training (Council of Europe, 2015; Oulton, Day, et al., 2004; Wooley, 2010) or attempt to avoid the issue altogether (Flensner, 2020a; Hammer, 2021; Marshall, 2010).

For our participants, the teaching of abortion as a controversial issue was unavoidable due to their specification choices. However, whilst there did exist areas of complexity, their overall

experience was positive. They enjoyed the challenge of teaching such issues and perceived their role in helping young people to navigate such important issues as one that was satisfying, fulfilling, and tied to vocational elements of their job. These positive aspects are under researched in the literature.

To effectively navigate teaching abortion, participants were committed to processes of self-reflection and awareness. Whilst in other places, self-awareness has been conceptualised as a professional responsibility (CCEA, Cassar et al., 2021, p. 662; 2015, p. 33; Council of Europe, 2015, p. 19; Department for Education, 2011c, p. 7; Lenz et al., 2022, p. 55), interviews revealed that the inherent intersection between the personal and professional dimensions of the topic demanded a wider conceptualisation of reflective practice that was bound up in their identity. They were reflective *people,* as opposed to primarily reflective *practitioners.* Accordingly, they aligned more with Flanagan's notion of RE teachers becoming "worldview conscious" (2021, p. 320), and frequently explored the various aspects of their experiences (including their own abortions), contexts, backgrounds, values, beliefs, presuppositions, and assumptions alongside their potential influence on pupils.

In conceiving of themselves, they recognised the various personas that they were required to adopt in the classroom. In line with Akkerman & Meijer's assertions, their teacher identity involved dialogical interrelations amongst multiple voices, sub-identities or "I-positions" (2011, p. 310). However, their interpretations of themselves went beyond just 'acting' (Alexander et al., 2005; Pineau, 1994). Instead, it involved traversing within and between teacher identities as both multiplicity and integrated unity that were reflections of their core, or most authentic self (Nias, 1989, p. 305; Parker, 2017, p. 2). Resultantly, their teaching identity could not be readily separated from their person, explaining the emotional weight they felt in the seriousness of their responsibilities. Nevertheless, the question of whether participants should disclose part of themselves by sharing their views on abortion loomed large and was one that solicited a range of opinions. This range of approaches is reflective of the debate in previous research and literature (Cox, 2021; Geller, 2020; Hess, 2009; Journell, 2011), and considers the recommendation for care and caution (DfE, 2022; REC, 2009). Some participants were reluctant to share their view. However, a greater number who did, did so with the conviction that it was beneficial for students' learning and perceived themselves to be operating well within professional boundaries. Interestingly, in divergence wit previous research which often situates boundaries as a measure of protection for students (Cayanus & Martin, 2008; Hopkins et al.,

1998; Morgan, 2016), participants who chose not to share their view did so primarily to protect themselves, either from harmful comments, slander, diminished reputation, relived trauma, or the invasion of privacy. Additionally, non-disclosure came with a sense of tension. Keeping the "hidden self" (Luft, 1961, p. 6) secret demanded a high cognitive capacity. This demand was particularly seen in those who had abortion experiences who often encountered stigma and associated shame (Astbury-Ward et al., 2012; Biggs et al., 2020; Cockrill et al., 2013; Hoggart, 2017; Rocca et al., 2020, p. 6; Shellenberg et al., 2011)

Practically, teachers highlighted the value of dialogue and engaging in others' views to think about abortion in a way that was balanced and appreciated the complexity of the issue. Thus, they aligned with other researchers who also highlight the importance of teachers' proficiency in handling discussion (Gregory, 2014; Hand & Levinson, 2012; Quartermaine, 2016; Salter, 2021). However, they often assumed the link between engaging with a variety of views and increasing maturity without considering the potential negative implications of this approach such as where increased understanding translates to disrespect (Hannam & Biesta, 2019). Yet, it was particularly important for participants to ensure that the nature of their teaching stayed close to the reality of the lived experience of women experiencing abortion; desiring the topic not to be taught in the abstract. As such, they focussed almost exclusively on the "personal worldviews" (CoRE, 2018, p. 4), often at the expense of the community, institutional, or religious aspects of worldviews. In fact, there were occasions when participants spoke very little of religion at all, creating a sense of tension in navigating the contested and "knowledge-rich" (Gibb, 2021) curriculum. On the one hand, they desired students, during their religious education as a whole, to grow in the 'substantive knowledge' and their 'ways of knowing' (Ofsted, 2021). However, they also recognised the benefits of controversial issues like abortion in equipping students with softer skills, and character development (Devedzic et al., 2018; Moulin-Stożek & Metcalfe, 2019; Touloumakos, 2020) that suitably prepared them for adult life. This sense of tension is underdeveloped in the literature.

Participants' experiences also highlighted the importance of neutrality and objectivity. This extended beyond a conceptualisation of their own positioning towards debating and the facilitation of discussion (Byford et al., 2009; Cotton, 2006; Cross & Price, 1996; McCully, 2006; Oulton, Day, et al., 2004; Oulton, Dillon, et al., 2004; Philpott, 2011). Participants also explored the inherent possibility for visual imagery to serve as a conduit of meaning and with

it, the potential for imagery to invoke unhelpful emotional responses and be of detrimental influence. Within RE, the exacting nature of the scope and use of imagery with abortion is largely unexamined, usually relying instead on anecdotal evidence (Education for Choice, 2012; Power, 2018) or more limited case studies (Conroy et al., 2013, pp. 40-41). Nevertheless, the understanding of teachers in this study alluded to its prevalence.

Finally, the experiences of those interviewed revealed the depth to which they endeavoured to cultivate classroom dynamics that were fruitful and allowed young people to flourish. In line with others' affirmation, participants perceived the importance of creating 'safe spaces' (Bonnell et al., 2010; Bramberger & Winter, 2021; Holley & Steiner, 2005; Osbeck et al., 2017; Rom, 1998; Watson, 2012). However, teachers were not always aware of the implications of values of authenticity and honesty, and the potential detrimental effects on classroom dynamics and students' development, thus corroborating theoretical assumptions made by those who have advocated for alternative terms (Arao & Clemens, 2013; Flensner & Von der Lippe, 2019; Iversen, 2019). Yet, the motivation for the creation of authentic and open spaces was underpinned by participants' aspiration to construct and maintain positive student–teacher relationships which established trust and were representative of strong emotional commitment and connection on behalf of the teacher. Here, participants' interpretations aligned with other scholars' recognition of the emotional burden of teaching (Hargreaves, 1998, p. 838; Kidger et al., 2009; van Manen, 2015). Yet, they also moved beyond this burden and were driven by exceptionally strong motivations of devotion and affection that resembled something much closer to the love of a caregiving relationship, and construction that has received little attention elsewhere.

9.4. Evaluation of Approach

This section evaluates the study approach, design and execution in light of my reflective journal entries and the markers of quality defined in the literature. It begins by outlining the assessment of the research as a whole, and highlights areas of joy and challenge in conducting the study. Due to the highly personal and reflective nature of this assessment, a first–person narrative will be adopted. Subsequently, the evaluation moves on to discuss the context, timing, and procedures of the analysis and influencing factors, before considering the study in relation to external gauges of research integrity and quality.

9.4.1. Overall Impressions

Perhaps my most outstanding reflection of conducting the study was the privilege it was to hear participants' stories in all their variety and diversity. It was a particular honour to hear women speak so honestly and openly about their joys and struggle. Before commencing the interviews, I had been worried that, given the sensitivities of the topic at hand, participants would be reluctant to engage in the process of expressing and interpreting their experiences. Having worked previously in quantitative research, I was also apprehensive about the seemingly low numbers of participants (in contrast to larger scale quantitative projects) and the impact this would have on the ability to gain sufficient data. However, contrary to my initial concerns, I found that data was abundant and, at times, felt rather unwieldy. Resultantly, the analytical processes of transcription, close line by line reading, and the iterative nature of allowing themes and subthemes to emerge took much longer than expected. The proposed timeline for the study can be found in Appendix J where the data analysis phase was anticipated to take place March–June 2021. In reality, the analysis was not completed in its entirety until the middle of August 2021, during which time I had also moved house and started new employment. Nevertheless, I was grateful for the elongated time spent in analysis which allowed for a closer familiarity with the data, and a greater opportunity to ensure that themes were extracted, structured and compared to best represent of participants' experiences.

9.4.2. Depth of Reflection

There was a considerable depth to participants' accounts as indicated both by the length of the interviews and the content therein. Although I had anticipated that interviews would last an hour, there were several occasions where they lasted in excess of 90 minutes. As is an important part of an IPA study, I was keen to ensure that I created a space which permitted participants to tell their own stories, using their own words in detail and at their own pace. Practically, creating space involved building rapport with participants (which began from the first point of email contact) and helping them feel at ease about what was expected from them at each stage. It also involved adopting a demeanour that was warm, humble, and open minded, and yet did not assume to know more than the respondent (Leech, 2002, p. 665; Seidman, 2006). During the interview itself, I found myself making a conscious effort to not say too much and respect silence as a catalyst for driving conversations forwards (McGrath et al., 2019, p. 1004). Given the

sensitivities of the topic, such silence was at times uncomfortable but provided the opportunity for participants to engage in deep reflection and contemplation.

In framing the research question around participants' experiences of teaching abortion, I had (perhaps naively) not expected participants to be so forthcoming with the personal nature of their own abortion experiences and events. Instead, I thought it likely that their narratives would be orientated around teaching practice. Nevertheless, the fact that they were willing to share deep and intimate details of their lived experience speaks credit to the interview climate set by the researcher in cultivating a level of security that facilitated disclosure. In some instances, the weight of gratitude in having permission to enter into participants' lifeworlds was more acutely felt. For example, in the case of Freya who was willing to share with an unfamiliar researcher, and yet her abortion was kept secret from her dad. There were no definitive answers as to why this was the case, and Freya's rationale for participating in my research was largely unknown. However, alongside altruism, perhaps there is something significant and cathartic about opening up a space that is focussed solely on hearing the priorities, concerns and stories of women that facilitates honest and heartfelt reflection. It is difficult to comprehend a comparable concentrated space where this sort of sharing occurs outside of a counselling scenario.

In this instance, the unexpected sharing of deeply personal abortion experiences was also the mark of comprehensive and good-quality analysis. Smith, Flowers & Larkin (2022, p. 55), in speaking of approaches to data collection state:

> These unexpected turns are often the most valuable aspects of interviewing: on the one hand, they tell us something we did not even anticipate needing to know; on the other, because they arise unprompted, they may well be of particular importance to the participant.

As was the case in this study, the unexpected turns added great richness to the data both in setting relevant context to the narratives, and in enhancing the concerns of the participants as expressed through the articulation of their feelings, thoughts, sensations, and impressions. However, these unexpected turns also added to the weightiness and emotional processing time I required in order to adequately take stock of each interview. Although, as a researcher, I felt pastorally well-supported, the interviewing process was tiring. I required significant concentration to elicit good quality accounts from participants. Further, I found the desire to iteratively revisit the data whilst not wanting to separate it from its emotional connection to

participants, to also be draining. Nevertheless, such emotional investment was ultimately an integral part of the process and further highlighted the role of both the interviewer and the interviewee as active participants in constructing interpretations and meaning of experience.

9.4.3. Impact of Covid-19

The middle phase of the research project was significantly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. During this time, schools were closed with teaching moving predominantly online, the population was ordered to stay at home apart from very specific circumstances, and there was a very serious negative impact on health and wellbeing (including mental health), business and the economy, and more general societal structures.

Speaking personally, the pandemic made conducting and completing a PhD more challenging. Having to care for clinically vulnerable relatives, home-school my children, continue working two part time jobs (one of which was in healthcare), and navigate the background anxiety of a country in crisis was not always conducive to study. As a result, there were certain times when the thesis received greater amounts of attention, and other times where other priorities were competing for my time. Although different to how I envisaged the writing of my PhD, the gracious support of family and friends enabled me to see the process through. Furthermore, the requirement for me to be more flexible developed characteristics such as resilience, self-awareness, and a more concentrated ability to focus that have been a positive outworking, useful for ongoing personal development.

Covid-19 also had a significant impact on my research process. Initially, I experienced challenges in recruitment. I sent the first call for participants out in the Autumn term of 2020 which coincided with the easing of the first lockdown restrictions and the introduction of the 'rule of six' which permitted social gatherings of up to six people. During this time, most schools returned to face-to-face delivery with social distancing and class 'bubbles', having spent the previous term closed.[88] However, despite a concerted effort, uptake for participation was low. I suspect that this was due, in part, to the limited capacity of teachers whose focus was on reorientating pupils back to in-person learning, and in attempting to recuperate and recover from the significant challenges of delivering both online provision for the majority of students

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[88]For a helpful timeline of key coronavirus and school-related events in the UK see Timmins (2021, p.30-33).

alongside in-person provision for key worker children. As a result, I decided to initiate a second call for participants in January to correspond with the beginning of the new spring term. I hoped that teachers would have greater capacity and energy to be able to engage in research participation. However, shortly after I put out my second call for participants via various networks, the Government announced a further lockdown and a closing of schools until the 8th March. Yet, this time around, I found participants to be more forthcoming, perhaps due to the familiarity of teaching online. Accordingly, I was able to successfully recruit ten participants. All of the interviews were conducted between January and February 2021.

As a result of the pandemic, I had to conduct all interviews via Microsoft Teams. This change was an alternative from my original hope to conduct face-to-face interviews. One of my concerns with conducting online interviews was the anticipated difficulties in enabling multi-sensory communication channels, and the reading of body language which helps to emphasise the social situatedness of research data (Kvale, 1996, p. 14; Mason, 2002, p. 62) and aid the interpretation (Murray & Holmes, 2014, p. 24). In order to appropriately prepare for the shift to online interviews and develop my skills, I undertook additional training and research to ensure that I maintained best practice and high ethical standards. Despite not having an objective reference point for comparison, there was no discernible detriment to conducting the interviews online. I found that participants' body language and facial expressions were clear and relatively straightforward to read. In fact, at times, the proximity of the camera to the face made it easier to pick up body language cues. This observation follows the findings of other scholars who recorded no significant difference between face-to-face interviews and those conducted via video conferencing software (Irani, 2019; Krouwel et al., 2019; Novick, 2008; Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004).

I also found conducting the interviews online to have other significant benefits. Logistical considerations such as geographical flexibility and cost efficiency allowed me a greater access to a broader range of potential participants (Archibald et al., 2019). Additionally, the flexibility in timings meant I was able to schedule interviews outside of work hours, thus permitting me to engage those who may have otherwise declined a face-to-face interview (Cole, 2017). It is also possible that online interviews gave a greater freedom for respondents to discuss sensitive topics due to the perceived sense of confidentiality created (Gray et al., 2020, p. 1293; Madge & O'Connor, 2004, p. 148; Smith et al., 2017, p. 149).

Finally, the pandemic itself is likely had an impact on teachers' reflections and experiences. The full extent of Covid-19 ramifications upon teachers is still yet to be felt. However, early indications have highlighted increased levels of stress and work-related anxiety (Kim et al., 2022), a grappling with identity (Kim & Asbury, 2020), and growth in levels of attrition, burn out and reconsideration of future work plans (Allen et al., 2020; Fullard, 2021). During my interviews, participants rarely spoke of Covid-19. I asked questions that required participants to reflect upon their experiences of teaching abortion generally, but I did not set any time parameters for these reflections. Accordingly, when participants spoke about their experiences, they did so almost exclusively in reference to their 'usual' pre-pandemic approaches. I found it difficult to ascertain, then, what impact, if any, the pandemic had on teachers' experiences of teaching abortion.

9.4.4. Structuring and Identifying Patterns Across Emergent Themes

I found analysing individual transcripts and making exploratory comments in order identify emergent themes very labour-intensive. However, it was also enlightening as the close reading of the text revealed more of what was important to the participant. The analysis process was representative of the hermeneutic circle where the interview became a set of the parts, but was reorientated and reorganised into a new whole as interconnections, patterns and relationships were identified (Smith et al., 2009, p. 91). Nevertheless, I found the second part of the process, the cross-case analysis involving identifying similarities and differences between participants and how one might illuminate another, to be more challenging. The cross-case comparison and compiling of top-level themes should "bring together similarities in participants' accounts of their experiences and so point to high-level connectivity between them" (Smith & Nizza, 2022, p. 56). On the whole, and after some manipulation of the data (on the dining room table!), the comparison and composition came together in a way that was coherent and felt an honest reflection of the key elements of participants' accounts. The high number of transcripts represented by each superordinate and subtheme was indicative of the shared nature of these aspects of participants' experiences.

However, at the same time, the cross-case analysis stage "needs to point to the particular and different ways in which those participants manifest the experience" (Smith & Nizza, 2022, p. 56). When reviewing the themes at the end of the process, I identified that the appreciation of divergence and idiosyncrasies was stronger in the first two superordinate themes ('teaching as

persona' as expounded in Chapter 5, and 'skills development and lifelong learning' as expounded in Chapter 6) but was weaker in the third ('classroom dynamics and success' as expounded in Chapter 7). This identification led to a revisiting of the arrangement of the subthemes. In an initial attempt to analyse the data, I grouped subthemes 7.2.2, 7.2.3, and 7.2.4 together as one theme relating to classroom dynamics more broadly (thus, leaving two subthemes within the superordinate theme). However, this more expansive grouping was considerably more sizable in comparison to the other subtheme, involving many more excerpts and interpretations. This left the subtheme too broad and not in keeping with the ideographic nature of IPA where variation and distinction could be identified. Accordingly, by subsequently re-evaluating and analysing the data, I was able to reveal more distinct subthemes that allowed for a richer, more detailed, interpretation. The first (7.2.2) related to creating authentic and honest classrooms. The second (7.2.3) unpicked the mechanism of achieving this by cultivating trust and relationships. Finally, the third (7.2.4) was specifically concerned with participants' experiences of facilitating pupils to express their opinion as a learning activity. I believe the overall analysis resulting from the reconstruction and repositioning of subthemes in such a manner was better for the changes made because of the more specified focus of participants experiences.

9.4.5. Updated IPA Terminology

In early 2022, towards the completion of the theses, the second edition of Smith, Flowers, & Larkin's *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method and Research* was released. The new edition presented the opportunity for the authors to change some of the terminology used to describe analysis to more clearly reflect the actuality of what was happening. It is important to note that the changes in terminology do not change the IPA process itself. Rather they alter the names used to describe the process. The main changes involved replacing 'emergent themes' with 'experiential statements' which are then brought together to make 'Personal Experiential Themes (PET)' (previously, superordinate themes). Then, in cross-case analysis, rather than referring to top-level themes, the term 'Group Experiential Themes (GET)' is used instead. In many ways, the new terminology is helpful and enables a clearer elucidation of the procedures and processes involved at each stage. It also assists those who are new to IPA, or who are reading research with little prior knowledge of the approach to have a greater depth of understanding of its focus and operation. In answering the question of whether to switch to the new terminology, the authors state:

> If you are new to IPA or in the early stages of an IPA research project, we would advise you to use the new terminology. However, if your analysis is well under way, we think you can use either the old terminology or change to the new... We realise that both sets of terms will be used for a period of time. (Smith et al., 2022, p. 76)

In light of this advice and given that my analysis was complete at the time the changes were announced, I decided to remain with the old terminology. The process of using the old terminology throughout this thesis was an important part of my conceptualisation of the process. Nevertheless, in future work or in subsequent studies following the research, I will adopt the new terminology which will be important as the field gradually moves in the direction of utilising the more delineated and accurate parlance.

9.4.6. Insiders and Outsiders

A vital part of the IPA process, and also of qualitative research as a whole, is the recognition of the investigator's centrality to the analysis and research (Brocki & Wearden, 2006, p. 88). The hermeneutic and interpretative elements of IPA acknowledge that the construction of meaning is a joint enterprise between the researcher and the participant. The researcher is "considered part of the co-creation of participants' meaning-making" (Love et al., 2020, p. 1) Thus, the process is inextricably linked to the ability of participants to give clear accounts of their experiences, thought processes and emotional states (Baillie et al., 2000, p. 393; Willig, 2008, pp. 66-67). However, it is also linked to the proficiency of the researcher in being able to reflect, analyse and articulate findings from the data (Alase, 2017, p. 13). To do this best, the researcher must occupy a reflexive stance in determining their positionality concerning the research question, participants, data, and conclusion.

Debates about insider or outside researcher positionality have been longstanding in qualitative and phenomenological research (Bridges, 2017; Crossley et al., 2016; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Perryman, 2011). Insider research is usually classified as work "undertaken within an organization, group or community where the researcher is also a member" (Fleming, 2018, p. 311). However, it can also include work where the researcher has previous close knowledge of the group, even if they are not a member (Adler & Adler, 1987; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Hellawell, 2006). In sharing values or identity with the group being researched, the researcher has the possibility to secure more privileged access and a greater depth of data (Humphrey, 2007). However, they might also find it more challenging to separate their own views from

participants and encounter issues of partiality or bias (Kanuha, 2000, p. 442; Kerstetter, 2012, p. 112). Nevertheless, the dichotomy of insider/outsider is not always helpful, and it has been argued that researcher positioning is more fluid, vacillating and shifting and thus, should be viewed as part of a continuum (Eppley, 2006; Herr & Anderson, 2005; Wickins & Crossley, 2016).

The discipline of maintaining a reflexive journal or research log served as a useful tool for "recording of learning and prompt[ed] the process of interpretation and bracketing as a reflective mechanism" (Vicary et al., 2017, p. 563). Much of the reflection and evaluation of my positioning in this section are drawn from excerpts and themes from this journal. Undoubtedly, my personal familiarity with the field of Religious Education, having previously taught in a variety of Secondary School settings, allowed me to understand much of the language, abbreviations, habits, values, practices, and contexts of teachers within the study. Like others undertaking IPA research, my motivation and choice to study the research topic was driven by personal interest. As a result, my early approaches to the research question were driven by my position as a relative insider. I use the term relative here as, despite being outside of RE teaching for several years, I still felt a sense of disconnect with the community which in many senses had undergone significant changes during my absence. Nevertheless, many of my ideas, perceptions, opinions, thoughts and hopes were based on my previous experiences within the field. My initial preconceptions were that teachers, generally, were ill-equipped to deal with controversial issues in the classroom and had little opportunity for training and continued professional development in this area. I suspected that abortion might be a complex topic to navigate, and yet one that brought about a great amount of fulfilment and teacher interest.

As research progressed, I observed that my understanding of pedagogical and psychological concepts relating to abortion and teaching controversial issues developed in line with time spent reading and researching the surrounding literature. As this occurred, my focus shifted towards more of an outsider perspective 'looking in' on participants' experiences through a degree of distance and scholastic separation. This interesting shift across the continuum from insider to outsider also occurred during the interviewing. As a novice interviewer, I was initially keen to share my background with participants in a way that I perceived as favourable to building rapport and making them feel at ease. Upon reflection, I think this disclosure had a more solid basis as an attempt to counteract imposter syndrome and was fuelled by a desire to want to feel validated by participants as to my qualifications and expertise. As the participant continued and I began

to take stock of this, I felt more secure in my identity as the researcher. Resultantly, as I grew in confidence, I felt more able to ask probing questions and become more attentive to the needs of participants as an outsider.

A greater awareness of the multiple roles I inhabited developed as the research process proceeded. My reflective journals note an increased understanding of my own preconceptions and assumptions, and an ability to recognise them and their impact on the research. By the end of the project, it felt easier to separate the insider and outsider positions. Overall, the undertaking of research within an arena that I am familiar with was of great benefit. I was frequently surprised by participants' experiences which were often considerably different to my own. Yet, the acquaintance with the teaching environment made the research feel more meaningful and purposeful as a contribution to the field.

9.4.7. Research Integrity and Quality

As previously noted in section 4.8.1, principles advanced by Maxwell (1992), and Denzin & Lincoln (2018) provided a helpful framework in determining high quality research. These principles were supported by Nizza et al.'s (2021) markers of excellence in IPA studies which were incorporated into the study objectives (section 8.1). The section below outlines again the framework before briefly outlining how each of the criteria was met.

9.4.7.1. Descriptive Validity[89], Fairness and Balance

"Descriptive validity" (Maxwell, 1992, pp. 285-288) is defined by the extent to which the factual accuracy of the participant's account is maintained (that is. it is not distorted, selective or fabricated). There are, arguably, several points during the IPA process where validity may be compromised. Hypothetically, there may be errors in transcription, or the closeness of the data might be lost through interpretation that is too abstract or that is loaded to fit the researcher's agenda. Additionally, the cross-case analysis might favour one or several participants over others.

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[89] The term 'validity' is used here in line with Maxwell's nomenclature, and to aid comparative familiarity with equivalent language used throughout the field. However, it is clear that 'validity', in this context, is only to be understood in reference to its derivation from types of understanding (as opposed to constructs used in quantitative, or positivist studies).

Throughout the research process, I ensured that the close reading of the text and the cyclic return to the data over a period of time allowed themes to be identified as an appropriate reflection of participants' experiences. Pragmatically, to ensure familiarisation with the data, I listened to the audio recordings, and watched the video recording of the interviews numerous times before coming to the written analysis. This was a fruitful process in helping to ensure that I recalled parts of the transcripts in light of the whole. Additionally, to enhance accuracy, I conducted the individual analysis of participants' interviews immediately after transcription (rather than transcribing all the interviews and then subsequently analysing them). Finally, the analysis as outlined in Chapters 5-7 contained a substantial number of participant quotations from the breadth of the sample to ensure a balance of voices in representing top-level themes.

9.4.7.2. Interpretive Validity and Ontological Authenticity

Another type of validity, interpretive validity is the ability of the researcher to present the meaning, interpretation, terms of reference, and intentions, that situations have for the participants/subjects themselves, in their terms (Maxwell, 1992, pp. 289-291). "Ontological authenticity" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 140) refers to the researchers' ability to elicit previously unknown concepts. The ideographical and phenomenological nature of IPA lends itself well to allowing the participant's voice to be heard, where their concerns and priorities direct the research. There was, as Smith et al. (2022, p. 149) note regarding validity, "a clear account of the purposive sampling used to recruit a homogeneous sample who (i) have the lived experiences of the phenomenon at the heart of the study, and (ii) can adequately articulate their experience". Regarding demographic and comparable characteristics, all participants occupied narrow demographic parameters which enabled me to present themes that applied uniquely to certain individuals in certain contexts. Additionally, the originality of the research meant that most of what I discovered was 'new' in the sense that it was unreported. The findings also included constructs that were unexpected or new to me, such as participants keeping parts of themselves hidden and yet using them covertly to influence the direction of discussion (see 5.3).

9.4.7.3. Theoretical Validity and Educative Authenticity

In order to bring about theoretical validity, I sought explanations that the researcher brings to the research, or indeed the participants themselves (Maxwell, 1992, pp. 291-293). It includes starting with the data and working outwards and ensures that the research is subject to "educative

authenticity" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 140) where the findings and methods of interpretation are made transparent to all stakeholders.

Throughout the entirety of the research, the principles and practicalities of IPA were followed, both from a theoretical standpoint and in terms of analytical approach and structure. The thesis relied heavily on Smith et al. (2009)'s seminal work, alongside a variety of other IPA literature and studies. In this sense, it could be considered a 'traditional' IPA study in that it did not venture into more advanced designs. I believe that the methods employed were explained clearly throughout the research both in relation to what is written here, but also in communication. Although participants were given a participant information sheet (see section 11.3.2), there were several occasions where individual participants had more specific questions relating to their data and what would happen to the findings. In these instances, I was able to provide a more detailed explanation to the participants, thus maintaining openness and transparency.

9.4.7.4. Generalisability

Generalisability is the view that any theory generated from the research is useful in understanding the situations of other groups, communities or circumstances (Maxwell, 1992, p. 293). In an IPA study, what is learned can never be directly applied elsewhere as findings are illustrative rather than representative. Nevertheless, in discussing the findings in light of extant literature (Chapters 5-7), I was able to move towards "theoretical transferability" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 51) where I compared findings to other studies, identifying similarities and differences. I hope that in the future orientations of the work (see section 9.6) this study might also act as a point of reference, correlation and juxtaposition to further developments in the field.

9.4.7.5. Evaluative Validity and Catalytic Authenticity

Finally, a project can be measured on its ability to make a judgment stance (Maxwell, 1992, p. 295) which involves a critical approach to all aspects of the research including the methods used, results, and impact of the research. In this chapter I provide a suitable evaluation of the work, alongside areas of further development. The long-term impact of this work is yet unknown. One of the personal goals in conducting the research was that the work would be of use both in the academic community and the practitioner community. I hope to publish this thesis in

various forms and so it will be a useful activity to revisit the impact of the work once it has further impact.

9.5.   Implications For Practice

In this study, a rich, transparent, and contextualised analysis of participants' accounts was achieved. Although each teacher had unique experiences, exploring the links between the analysis, my personal and professional experience, and the claims of extant literature means that a number of implications for practice can be tentatively suggested. In this way, it allows "transferability to persons or contexts which are more, or less, similar" (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2022, p. 46) to those studied. Achieving a greater understanding of women's experiences of teaching abortion in GCSE Religious Studies can help to improve practice in this area by emphasising the meanings that teachers ascribe to their situations, explaining how these meanings shape the challenges and difficulties they face, and highlighting changes that could help in supporting teachers.

Figure 6 provides a visual representation of my suggested approach to better support teachers to navigate controversial issues such as abortion. Based on the analysis and discussion conducted in the previous chapters, it links the key themes discussed and viewed as important by participants (the four circles on the ring) with suggestions to further facilitate their role (grouped into four areas indicated by the boxes). These four areas are knowledge, emotional and practical support, self-awareness and reflection, and planning and strategies, which are briefly explored further in the subsections below.
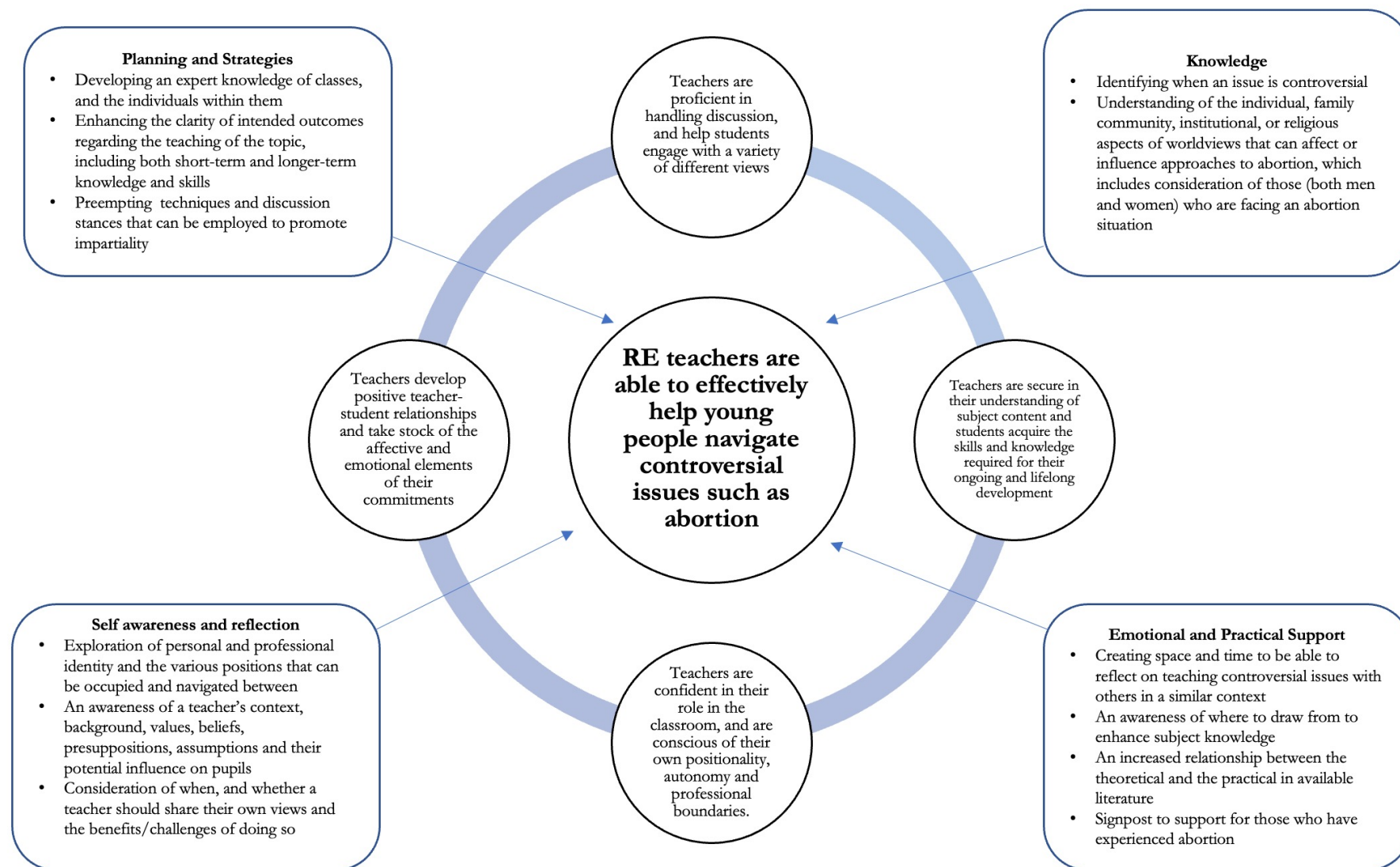
Figure 6: A representation of how RE teachers can be facilitated to help young people navigate controversial issues such as abortion

9.5.1. Knowledge

For RE teachers to be effective in helping young people navigate controversial issues, they must first be able to identify which issues are controversial. This allows them to select and deploy effective and appropriate strategies for teaching and learning. As a result, providing support to teachers to improve their theoretical understanding of how controversy arises and develops would be beneficial in equipping them to recognise potential controversy quickly. Using a model like the set of questions laid out in the 'wheel' diagram in Figure 1 (the overview of the criteria for controversy) is a helpful starting place in this regard, providing a suitable tool to begin to explore various theoretical approaches to identifying controversy. A framework such as this would also allow teachers to identify controversy pre-emptively.

Further, when confronting an issue such as abortion, teachers must be secure in their understanding of the subject content. The extent to which students are able to acquire the skills and knowledge required for their ongoing development is dependent, in part, on teachers' familiarity with their topic material. Within this study, female teachers paid particular attention to the importance of allowing students to explore the experiences of a woman experiencing an abortion. This focus on the individual worldview acted as a helpful mechanism by which students could develop emotional intelligence and consider factors that, otherwise, they would not consider. However, family, community, institutional and religious aspects of the worldviews of those experiences of abortion, were often lacking. Therefore, if this tendency is reflected throughout the wider RE teaching community, there is a need to build upon teachers' subject knowledge to encompass a more holistic understanding of factors influencing approaches to abortion, with a specific focus on the impact of religious belief. Similarly, participants' focus on women's perspectives (and particularly women who may be experiencing an abortion situation) led, at least in this study, to a notable absence of male voices. Although this may be indicative of the wider complex relationship between men, masculinity, and abortion (Coyle, 2007; Hardwig, 2015; Nguyen et al., 2018), there is an important need for teachers to provide balanced perspectives which consider the experiences of both men and women.

9.5.2. Planning and Strategies

Participants in this study often talked about the way in which teaching abortion required the development of positive teacher-student relationships which incorporated the affective and

emotional elements of these relationships. Skills such as building trust, allowing students to speak openly, creating understanding and affirming classroom cultures with appropriate amounts of challenge, and establishing consistent and secure learning environments were deemed to be a great value when tackling controversial issues. Many of these skills will be familiar to teachers who, as part of their core practice, are required to create a "safe and stimulating environment for pupils, rooted in mutual respect" (DfE, 2011c). Such an environment is cultivated through expert knowledge of classes and the individuals within them. Nevertheless, the emotional and affective aspects of the teacher-student relationship should not be underestimated with the emotional labour intensifying when studying controversial issues (which are in themselves emotional). As a result, when approaching such issues, appropriate consideration and preparation should be given to how a teacher may feel towards students, classes, and subject content, as well as how such feelings might impact the social fabric that underpins positive teacher–student relationships.

Additionally, participants explored the necessity for teachers to be proficient in handling discussion and debate, helping students to engage with a variety of different views. It is therefore wise for RE teachers to anticipate strategies for navigating complex subject matter before teaching a lesson. For example, a teacher could review Table 1, which outlines a variety of stances and positions that they can occupy in a discussion, evaluating their strengths and weakness in promoting impartiality, and deciding which ones are the best fitting for their particular classes and contexts. Additionally, they may want to consider in advance how exactly they can create classrooms that cultivate a spirit of authenticity, openness, and honesty without being detrimental to student learning, or creating a culture of 'no wrong answer', which should include investigation of the benefits of challenges of expecting young people to share their opinion.

Furthermore, work that can be achieved in the planning stages of preparing to teach a controversial issue should include regard for the prospective outcomes and intentions of covering the issues. There is a range of legitimate reasons for studying controversial issues. These may include the fulfilment of short-term aims such as acquiring the knowledge required to succeed in examinations. However, they may also include longer terms goals such as equipping students with the skills and character that can prepare them for adult life (including, in this case, if they encounter abortion as an issue for themselves, their partner, or friends). These longer-

term goals are often difficult to locate within the current curriculum frameworks which highly value more substantive knowledge. Therefore, asking questions the seemingly basic questions such as 'what am I trying to achieve in the short and long term?', 'what is my purpose in teaching this issue?', 'what skills, knowledge, and characteristics am I trying to get pupils to establish?' may provide the basis for further reflection and practice development.

9.5.3. Self-awareness and reflection

Within this study, participants revealed themselves to be highly self-aware and reflective, actively trying to understand themselves and their practice in greater depth in order to improve. In my experience, this is broadly indicative of most RE teachers. Teaching controversial issues requires that teachers are confident in their role in the classroom, and are conscious of their own positionality, autonomy, and professional boundaries. Whilst explorations of this self or worldview consciousness are inevitably an individual endeavour, doing so collectively presents a significant opportunity for continuing professional development. To my knowledge, there is very little in the way of training to help teachers explore their own orientations. Therefore, one implication for practice that I have identified is the need for such training to be designed and made available. In order to assist teachers in their self-awareness and reflection, the training should include an exploration of teachers' personal and professional identity(ies) and the various personas and I-positions that can be occupied and navigated between. This will support teachers to "know how to balance the competing pressures of wanting to be a real person in the classroom with wanting to maintain suitable professional boundaries" (Stern, 2018, p. 34). It should also guide teachers to an awareness of their individual backgrounds, values, beliefs, presuppositions, and assumptions, and help them consider the potential impact and influences of these on pupils. Most notably and based on conclusions drawn from the analysis conducted in this thesis, it would be beneficial for training of this nature to provide a structure where RE teachers can consider when, and whether, they should share their own views. This should include reflection on the benefits and challenges of sharing one's own viewpoints and explore the way in which, even if not disclosed, they can be used to influence young people (both positively and negatively).

9.5.4. Emotional and Practical Support

Finally, undertaking the research has revealed how valuable having the space and opportunity to talk these issues through was for participants. After completing the interviews, several participants contacted me to say how fruitful they found the opportunity, how much they appreciated having time to reflect, and how beneficial it was for their contemplating their own practice. There is something to be said here in a teaching world that is busy and that does not often afford much in the way of time without agenda, for the necessity of listening to one another's stories and exploring issues together with honesty. Perhaps one of the most impactful aspects of conducting the research was the recognition of how valuable time and space are in creating networks of emotional and practical support and how willing participants were to share their experiences in order to make sense of them. Most of the women interviewed had never spoken about their experiences before which, I suspect, is the case for most RE teachers. Accordingly, one of the implications for practice that has arisen from this thesis is the need to create time and space to be able to reflect on teaching controversial issues with others in a similar context. By providing this arena and capacity for controversial issues to be discussed, teachers will be able to have strategic and relevant conversations with others (often outside of their immediate teaching situation) that will sharpen their professional practice, allow for mutual encouragement and support, increase their awareness of where to draw from to enhance their subject knowledge, and start to 'fill' the gap between the theoretical and practical strands often depicted in the literature.

9.6. Future Orientations

Within IPA it is typical for the researcher to select a small homogenous sample to explore shared perspectives on a single phenomenon. Whilst this is of great benefit as a way of understanding and interpreting the experiences of a tightly bound group, it makes large scale conclusions inaccessible. Therefore, if I were to expand and develop the research in the future (maintaining IPA as an approach), I would seek modest incremental contributions to knowledge. This study has looked specifically at female teachers' approaches to teaching abortion. My rationale for this was well founded. However, the logical place for extension would be to conduct a similar study that investigates male teachers' perspectives. Throughout the whole of the study, there was very little mention of men. The findings were directed by the narratives of the participants, who often chose to focus their efforts elsewhere. This absence is intriguing. There is a very real sense

in which abortion is an issue that directly affects women. However, a comparable study may highlight which, if any, of the top-level themes are unique to women and how men's experiences might differ. Smith et al. (2022, p. 112) suggest that a multiple perspective studies where the aim is to understand a phenomenon from more than one distinctive vantage points are possible within more complex study designs. Such an approach has been adopted by other scholars (Loaring et al., 2015; McGregor et al., 2014) but a comparison of two separate studies (this one of women and another of men) would provide a better basis for future orientations.

Further research should also investigate the extent to which themes developed within this study are generalisable towards other controversial issues, or other areas of the wider teaching community. Other controversial issues have been recently identified within RE such as terrorism (Anker & Von Der Lippe, 2018), Middle Eastern conflict (Flensner, 2020a), ritual circumcision (Von Der Lippe, 2019), and homosexuality (Hammer, 2021). An interpretative phenomenological analysis undertaken by a similar group of participants in one of these areas would establish a useful differentiation between participants' priorities as regards abortion in contrast to other topics. Similarly, participants' experiences in relation to teachers of other secondary subjects or disciplines seem important but have also not yet been studied. For example, it would be useful to establish whether those teaching abortion within a PSHE context identified similar joys and struggles.

9.7. Conclusion

It has been difficult to write a conclusion to this thesis that does appropriate justice to the depth of reflection shared by participants, and to the sense of privilege I felt to enter into the lifeworlds of those who contributed. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, at its heart, provided the opportunity for me to conduct an extensive and comprehensive investigation into how people make sense of significant experiences. It helped me to know, in detail, what this particular experience was like for these particular people, at one particular moment. In that sense, the research itself was tightly bound in a way that is special, exclusive and unrepeatable. And yet, it is this very exclusivity that allowed my research to be so profitable.

The issue of abortion is sensitive and highly charged across several spheres and disciplines. This assertion is no different within the RE classroom where teachers are confronted with having to navigate the study of abortion in such a way that is beneficial for learning, helps students achieve

in their examinations, prepares young people for adult life, effectively deals with complex discussion and competing values, and demands them to take stock of their own opinions, experiences, and viewpoints. Although challenging, this experience can bring with it feelings of enjoyment, accomplishment, and professional satisfaction. Helping students to navigate such issues often aligns with the very reasons that teachers choose their profession – to make a difference and invest in the lives of young people to enable them to flourish and thrive. In developing my knowledge of teachers' experience of tackling the controversial issue of abortion, I revealed nuance and complexity in a topic that is frequently polarised and often reduced to a set of binary principles and generalisations.

In concluding my thesis, my overarching feeling is one of immense honour as I have heard and interpreted others' valued stories. There was one particular moment in my interviewing of Clara where her words seemed particularly poignant:

> *Maybe more than anywhere else I think my classroom, the RE classroom, is one where we can discuss things that you don't anywhere else. You talk about life and death and everything in between and that sort of glues you together* (Clara 13:54)

The role of my thesis has, in part, been to mirror Clara's classroom – to be a place where I have been able to discuss things which are rarely considered elsewhere. I felt a great sense of affinity to my participants and have done my upmost to ensure that I have done their experiences justice. In understanding in greater depth how these teachers interpreted and constructed meaning from their encounters, I hope that others too may identify with their experiences. For, honest conversations and appreciation of others' experiences will only increase teachers' ability to more effectively teach controversial topics and ensure that students enter the adult world equipped and able to navigate them with fairness, charity and respect. In journeying alongside others in their experiences of life, death and everything in between, I was granted precious moments to uncover and explore the very essence of human nature. Moments that I believe bind us together; ways of thinking, being, feeling, and acting that are messy, affective, passionate, and relational, and yet at the same time profoundly meaningful and significant.

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11. Appendices

11.1. Appendix A – Comparison of GCSE RE Specification

Appendix A provides a comparison of the different major GCSE Religious Studies specifications. It first outlines, in broad terms what is covered during each component of the study, before contrasting the location of abortion to other similar controversial topics. Finally, in explains the particular positioning of the topic within each examination board specification

11.1.1. An Overview of The Components of Study on GCSE RS Specifications

	Component 1	Component 2	Component 3	Notes
Eduqas A **C120P1-5**	Religious, Philosophical and Ethical Studies in the Modern World (50%) 1. Relationships 2. Life and Death 3. Good and Evil 4. Human Rights	Study of Christianity (25%)	Study of a World Faith (25%)	C1 – all themes compulsory, paper combines all religions C3 – choose 1 religion, 1 paper for each religion
Eduqas Short **C125**	Religious, Philosophical and Ethical Studies in the Modern World (50%)] 6. Relationships 7. Life and Death	Study of Christianity (25%)	Study of a World Faith (25%)	C1 – all themes compulsory, paper combines all religions C3 – choose 1 religion, 1 paper for each religion
Eduqas B **C120PB**	Foundational Catholic Theology (37%) 1. Origins and Meaning 2. Good and Evil	Applied Catholic Theology (37.5%) • Life and Death • Sin and Forgiveness	Judaism (25%)	All aspects compulsory
AQA A **8062**	The study of religions: beliefs, teachings and practices (50%) 2 different religions	Thematic Studies (50%): A. Relationships and Families B. Religion and life C. Existence of God and revelation D. Peace and Conflict E. Crime and Punishment F. Human Rights and Social Justice G. Textual 1 (Mark) H. Textual 2 (Mark)		C1 – choose 2 religions, 1 paper for each religion. C2 – choose 2 from A-F **or** G+H and 2 from A-F
AQA Short **8061**	The study of religions: beliefs, teachings and practices (50%) - 2 different Religions	Thematic Studies: (50%) A. Relationships and families B. Peace and Conflict		C1 – choose 2 religions, 1 paper for each religion C2 – both themes compulsory
AQA B **8063**	Catholic Christianity (50%) 1. Creation 2. Incarnation 3. The Triune God 4. Redemption 5. Church 6. Eschatology	Perspectives on faith Themes (25%) E. Relationships and Families F. Peace and Conflict G. Human Rights and Social Justice H. Textual 1 (Mark) I. Textual 2 (Mark)	World Religion (25%) Islam or Judaism	C1 – all aspects compulsory C2 – choose 2 from A-C **or** D+E. Themes A-C are from the perspective of Catholic Christianity + non-religious views. C2 – 2 papers (1 for themes, 1 for religion) but are one component in the specification
OCR **J625**	Beliefs, teachings and Practices (50%) - 2 different Religions	Religion, philosophy and ethics in the modern world from a religious perspective (50%) 1. Relationships and families 2. The existence of God, gods and the ultimate reality 3. Peace and conflict 4. Dialogues		C1 – choose 2 religions, 1 paper for each religion C2 - from the perspective of 1 religion from those studied in C1, separate paper for each religion
OCR Short **J125**	A: Beliefs and Teachings (50%) - 2 different Religions	Religion, philosophy and ethics in the modern world from a religious perspective (50%) B. Relationships and Families C. Dialogues		C1 – choose 2 religions, 1 paper for each religion C2 - from the perspective of 1 religion from those studied in C1, separate paper for each religion One component in spec. in 3 parts (A,B,C)
Pearson/Edexcel B **1RB0**	Religions and Ethics (50%) 1. Beliefs 2. Marriage and Family 3. Living the Religious Life 4. Matters of Life and Death	Religion, Peace and Conflict (50%) **Or** Religious, Philosophy and Social Justice (50%)		C1 – From 1 chosen religion C2 – From another chosen religion (different to C1)
Pearson/Edexcel B (Short) **3RBO**	Religions and Ethics (50%) 1. Beliefs 2. Marriage and Family	Religion, Peace and Conflict (50%) 1. Beliefs 2. Crime and Punishment		C1 – From 1 chosen religion C2 – From another chosen religion (different to C1)
Pearson/Edexcel A **1RA0**	Study of Religion 1 (50%) Catholic Christianity, Christianity **or** Islam 1. Beliefs and Teachings 2. Practices 3. Sources of Wisdom and Authority 4. Expression and Ways of Life	Study of Religion 2 (25%) World Religion 1. Beliefs and Teachings 2. Practices	Philosophy and Ethics (25%) 1. Existence of God 2. Relationships and Families	C1 – All areas compulsory C3 – World religion must be different to that studied in C1 C2 - from the perspective of religion chosen in C1
Pearson/Edexcel A (Short) **3RA)**	Study of Religion 1 (50%) 1. Beliefs and Teachings 2. Practices	Study of Religion 2 (50%) 1. Beliefs and Teachings 2. Practices		C1 – Choice of Christianity, Catholic Christian, Islam or Judaism C2 – Choice of Christianity, Catholic Christianity, Islam or Judaism. Must be different to C1 choice, and Christianity and Catholic Christian is an impermissible combination

Colour grouping indicates similarities in 'type' of syllabus and weighting of one particular tradition (e.g. AQA B/Eduqas B both major on Catholic Christianity).

11.1.2. Where Is Abortion Situated on GCSE Religious Studies Specifications?

	Contraception	Abortion	Euthanasia	Animal Experimentation	Genetic manipulation
Eduqas A **C120P1-5**	**C1[1] Theme 1** RPESMW[2] Issues of Relationships	**C1 Theme 2** RPESMW Issues of Life and Death	**C1 Theme 2** RPESMW Issues of Life and Death		
Eduqas Short **C125**	**C1 Theme 1** RPESMW Issues of Relationships	**C1 Theme 2** RPESMW Issues of Life and Death	**C1 Theme 2** RPESMW Issues of Life and Death		
Eduqas B (Catholic) **C120PB**		**C1 Theme 1** Foundational Catholic Theology Origins and Meaning	**C2 Theme 3** Applied Catholic Theology Life and Death		
AQA A **8062**	**C2[3] Theme A** Thematic Studies Relationships and Families	**C2 Theme B** Thematic Studies Religion and life	**C2 Theme B** Thematic Studies Religion and life	**C2 Theme B** Thematic Studies Religion and life	
AQA Short **8061**	**C2 Theme A** B: Thematic Studies Relationships and Families				
AQA B (Catholic) **8063**	**C2 Theme A** Perspectives on faith Religion, relationships and families		**C1 Topic 6** Catholic Christianity Eschatology		
OCR **J625**	**C2 Theme 1** RPESMW Relationships and families	**C2 Theme 4** RPESMW Dialogues	**C2 Theme 4** RPESMW Dialogues		**C2 Theme 4** RPESMW Dialogues
OCR Short **J125**	**Section B** RPESMW Relationships and families	**Section C** RPESMW Dialogues	**Section C** RPESMW Dialogues		
Pearson/Edexcel B **1RB0**	**C1 Section 2** Religion and Ethics Marriage and the Family	**C1 Section 4** Religion and Ethics Matters of Life and Death	**C1 Area 4** Religion and Ethics Matters of Life and Death		
Pearson/Edexcel B (Short) **3RBO**	**C1 Section 2** Religion and Ethics Marriage and the Family				
Pearson/Edexcel A **1RA0**	**C3 Section 2** Philosophy and Ethics Relationships and Families in 21st				
Pearson/Edexcel A (Short) 3RA)					

The following table depicts the location of the topic of abortion in reference to specification and component. For comparison, other similar controversial issues are included.

[1] Component 1
[2] Religious, Philosophical and Ethical Studies in the Modern World
[3] Component

11.1.3. Eduqas/WJEC Route A, Full and Short Course

Component 1 focuses on Religious, Philosophical and Ethical Studies in the Modern World and accounts for 50% of total marks. Students are graded on four themes. All themes are compulsory at Full Course, themes 1&2 at Short Course. Abortion appears in Theme 2: Issues of Life and Death (see highlighted), and to a lesser extent, in Theme 1: Issues of Relationships. It is worth noting that Theme 2 is the only place where students are required to explicitly consider non-religious viewpoints. As such, it is necessary to study both religious and non-religious perspectives on bioethical issues.

Component 1:

Religious, Philosophical and Ethical Studies in the Modern World

	Theme 1: Issues of Relationships	Theme 2: Issues of Life and Death*	Theme 3: Issues of Good and Evil	Theme 4: Issues of Human Rights
Areas of Study (Three for each theme)	Relationships Sexual Relationships Issues of equality: gender prejudice and discrimination	The World The Origin and Value of Human Life Beliefs about Death and the Afterlife	Crime and punishment Forgiveness Good, Evil and Suffering	Human Rights and Social Justice Prejudice and Discrimination Issues of Wealth and Poverty
Concepts Learners should be able to explain and apply these concepts in relation to the theme. **Specifically assessed in (a) questions**	adultery divorce cohabitation commitment contraception gender equality responsibilities roles	afterlife environmental sustainability euthanasia evolution abortion quality of life sanctity of life soul	good/evil forgiveness free will justice morality punishment sin suffering	censorship discrimination extremism human rights personal conviction prejudice relative and absolute poverty social justice

Assessment

Written examination: 2 hours
50% of qualification
120 marks (plus 6 for spelling, punctuation and grammar)
Spelling, punctuation and grammar marks on question 1(d) ONLY

*Awareness of non-religious perspectives will be assessed in Theme 2: Question (d) Life and Death.

Source: Eduqas/WJEC (2016, p.7)

N.B The concept of the Pikuach Nefesh (sanctity of life) also appears in Component Group 3 (Study of a world faith) in the Judaism content – Beliefs and teachings: Life on Earth

11.1.4. Eduqas/WJEC Route B (Catholic Christianity)

Route B offers students the opportunity to undertake a more detailed study of Catholic Christianity. As such, there is a less prominent emphasis on ethical issues. That being said, abortion and the sanctity of life in relation to *imago Dei*, appear in Component 1: Foundational Catholic Theology within Theme 1 (Origins and Meaning).

Component 1:

Foundational Catholic Theology

Themes	1. Origins and Meaning *Awareness of non-religious perspectives will be assessed within this theme.*	2. Good and Evil
Areas of Study	Origins and Meaning Beliefs: Creation Sources: The Bible Forms: Painting Forms: Symbolism Practices: Loving and Serving in Catholic communities in Britain and elsewhere	Good, Evil and Suffering Beliefs: Trinity Beliefs: Incarnation Sources: Jesus and moral authority Forms: Sculpture and Statuary Practices: Popular devotion as practised in Catholic communities in Britain and elsewhere
Concepts Learners should be able to explain and apply these concepts in relation to the theme.	creation ex nihilo evolution imago Dei inspiration omnipotence revelation stewardship transcendence	conscience evil free-will goodness incarnation Natural Law privation suffering
Assessment Written examination: 1½ hours 37.5% of qualification 90 marks (plus 6 for spelling, punctuation and grammar) Spelling, punctuation and grammar marks on question 1(d)		

Theme 1: Origins and Meaning
- *Imago Dei* and abortion

Source: Eduqas/WJEC (2017, p.7)

11.1.5. AQA Route A, Full and Short Course

Component 2: Thematic Studies focuses on ''religious, philosophical and ethical studies' and accounts for 50% of total marks. For Full Course GCSE, there are six themes that students are able study (see below). However, teachers choose to teach only four of these. However, a second route through the specification is possible, where students can study two textual themes instead. In these cases, only 2/6 'religious, philosophical and ethical studies' themes are chosen. Abortion falls within Theme B: Religious and Life
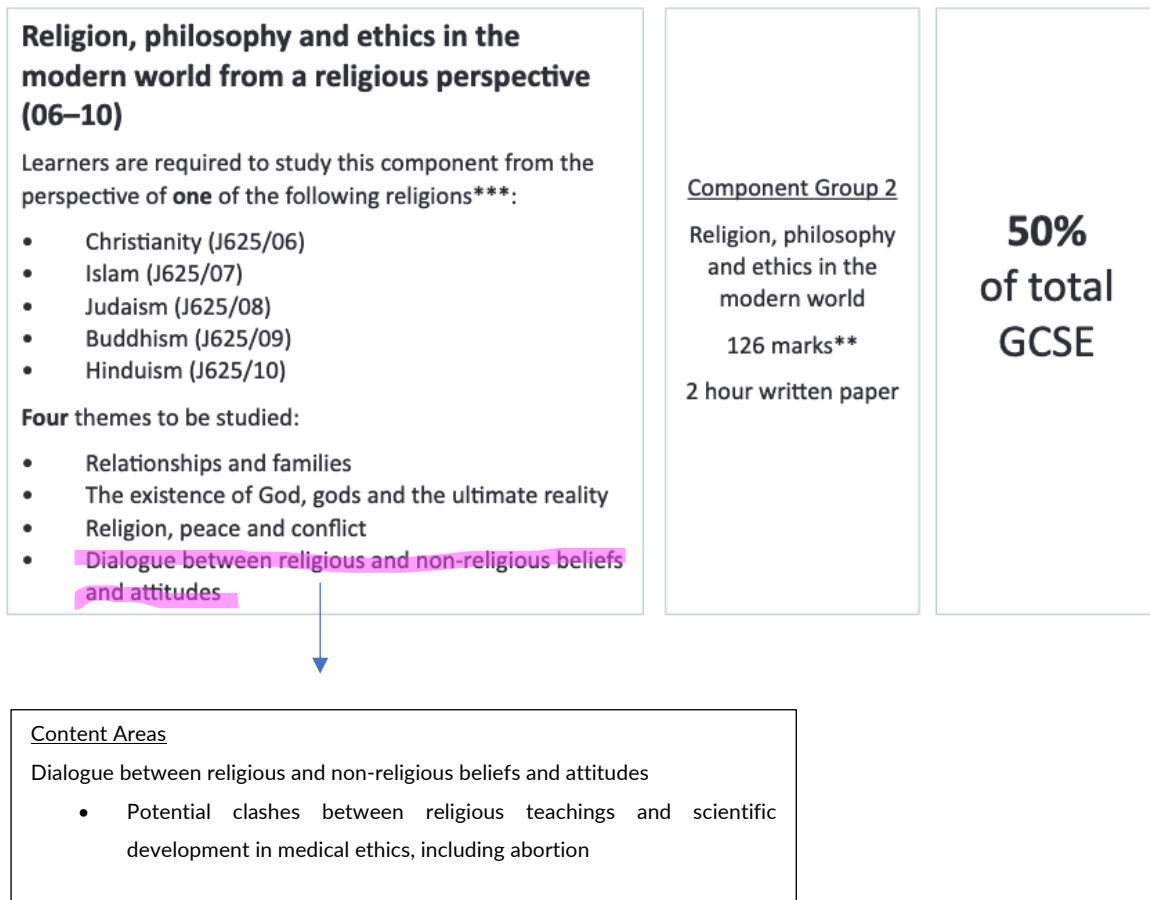

Source: AQA (2017, p.7)

For short course GCSE, only Theme A: Relationships and Families, and therefore only the topic of contraception, is able to be studied.

N.B The concept of the Pikuach Nefesh (sanctity of life) also appears in Component Group 1 if Judaism is chosen.

11.1.6. OCR (Full And Short Course)

Component 2 focusses on religion, philosophy and ethics in the modern world from a religious perspective accounts for 50% of total marks. For Full Course GCSE, there four themes within this component, all of which are compulsory. Short course students are only required to study 'relationships and families' and 'dialogue between religious and non-religious beliefs and attitudes' (dialogues). Abortion is situated in the 'dialogues' theme.

Religion, philosophy and ethics in the modern world from a religious perspective (06–10)

Learners are required to study this component from the perspective of **one** of the following religions***:

- Christianity (J625/06)
- Islam (J625/07)
- Judaism (J625/08)
- Buddhism (J625/09)
- Hinduism (J625/10)

Four themes to be studied:

- Relationships and families
- The existence of God, gods and the ultimate reality
- Religion, peace and conflict
- Dialogue between religious and non-religious beliefs and attitudes

Component Group 2

Religion, philosophy and ethics in the modern world

126 marks**

2 hour written paper

50% of total GCSE

Content Areas

Dialogue between religious and non-religious beliefs and attitudes

- Potential clashes between religious teachings and scientific development in medical ethics, including abortion

Source: OCR (2019, p.4)

11.1.7. Edexcel/Pearson B (Full And Short Course)

Edexcel Specification B contains three areas of study. For full course, two areas of study are chosen to be examined on. Each chosen area of study accounts for 50% of the total marks. Abortion is covered 'Matters of Life and Death' (see highlighted). Further, students must be able to apply ethical theory (e.g.) situation ethics to these areas. Students who take short course must take paper 1 and paper 2, but only the first two topics. Accordingly, abortion does not occur on the short course

Source: Pearson/Edexcel (2022, p.5)

Content Areas
- Matters of Life and Death
  - Abortion
+ Application of Ethical theory to all areas

11.2. Appendix B – Pre-screening and Sampling

Appendix B explains the participants' journey through the pre-screening process as indicated by the top row of the box below. The advert, participant information sheet, privacy notice, consent form, and preschedule survey are all included with this Appendix. It also includes two rejection outcome letters, one for if the selection criteria was not met, and one for when saturation was reached.
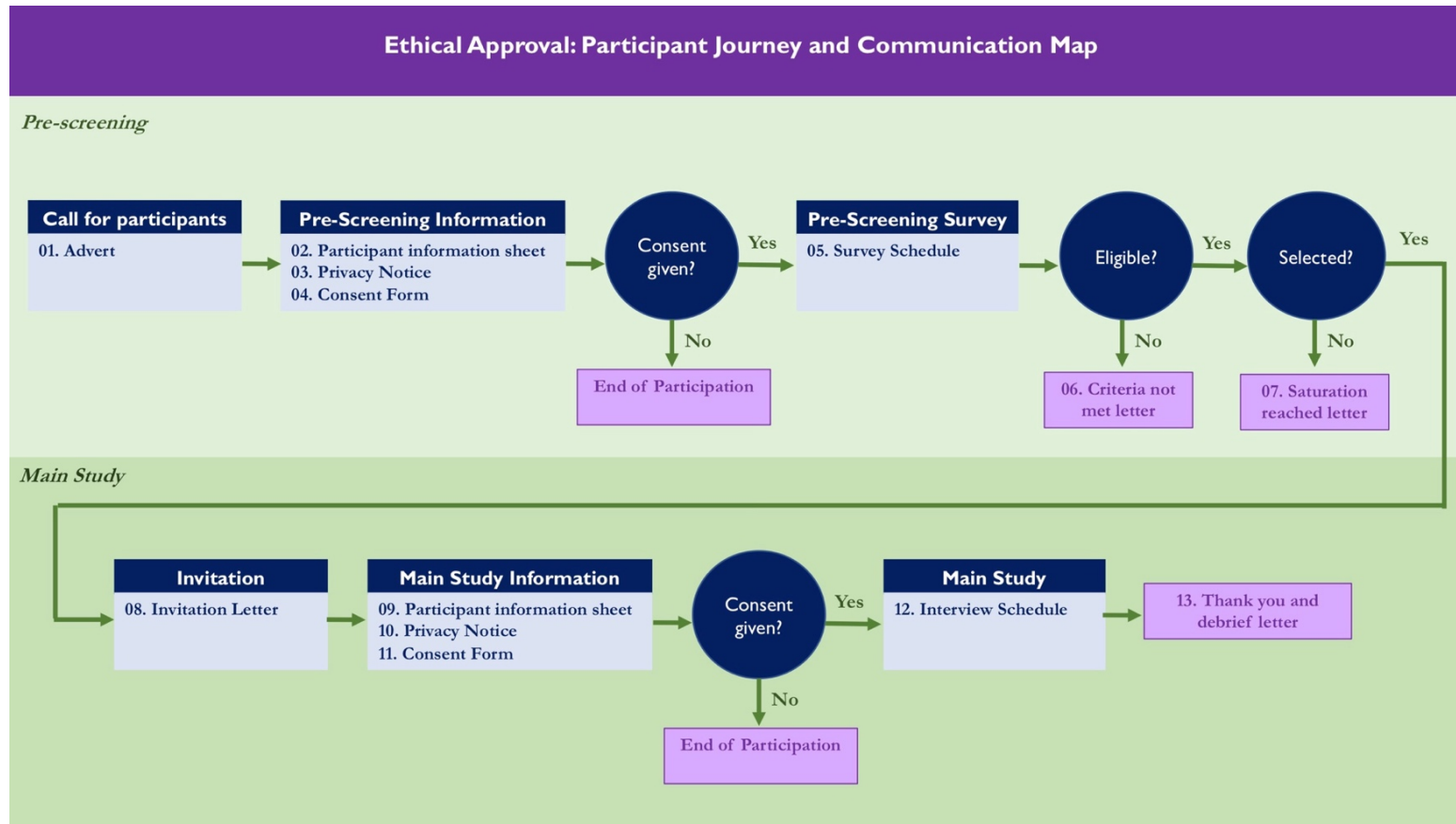
Figure B1: Participant Journey and Communication Map

11.2.1. Pre Screening: Advert

Are you a female RE teacher?
Do you teach the subject of abortion at GCSE?
Would you like an opportunity to share your experiences?

We need your help

We are looking for people to be part of a PhD research study that explores teachers' experiences of tackling controversial issues on GCSE Religious Studies specifications.

Taking part involves a confidential online video interview lasting 60-90 minutes and helps to further our understanding in this area.

If you would like in taking part, please follow the link: www. _____. com to register your interest and confirm your eligibility.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact Abi Maguire: 165298@live.stmarys.ac.uk

Thank you for your consideration!

11.2.2. Pre-screening Information: Participant Information Sheet

1. ***Research Study Title***
    Female teachers' experiences of tackling the subject of abortion within GCSE Religious Studies (Pre-screening)

2. ***Invitation***
    You are being invited to provide pre-screening information to help us decide whether you might be eligible to participate in the above study. However, before you decide whether to complete the pre-screening survey, it is important that you understand why it is being done and what it involves. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Should you have any questions about anything you read, require further information, or if you have concerns about the study, please contact the principal investigator, Abi Maguire at <u>165298@live.stmarys.ac.uk</u>.

    This information tells you about the pre-screening process for the study. If you are selected for the main study, there is a separate participant information sheet and consent form that you will need to read and complete at a later date.

3. ***What is the purpose of the research?***
    The aim of the main study is to examine female practitioner's experiences of teaching one particular controversial issue, namely: the topic of abortion at GCSE (14-16 year olds). The study will enrol participants who meet certain criteria. The purpose of the pre-screening is to collect basic information about you to determine whether you meet these criteria.

    The research study is being conducted as part of a PhD in Education and Theology at St. Mary's University, Twickenham, London and led by Abi Maguire

4. ***Why have you been invited?***
    You have been invited to take part in this pre-screening survey because you have responded to a call for participants

5. ***What will happen if I agree to take part?***
    You will be asked to complete a short online questionnaire. It is estimated to take around 5 minutes of your time. Please note that completing this pre-screening questionnaire does not guarantee participation in the main study. If you are eligible to take part in the main study (a 60-90 minute online video interview) you will be contacted at a later date with more details.

6. ***Do I have to take part?***
    Your participation is entirely voluntary and you are under no obligation to take part in this research project, however your involvement is greatly appreciated. If you decide to take part in this pre-screening questionnaire, you will be asked to indicate your agreement on the consent form below. You are free to withdraw your consent at any time, without providing a reason. If you decide to complete the pre-screening, you are under no obligation to complete the main study, if you are selected.

7. *Payment*
   This study is completely voluntary; there will be no reimbursement or payment for time

8. *What are the possible benefits of taking part?*
   Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will have a beneficial impact on best practice.

9. *What if the something goes wrong?*
   If you have any complains about the project in the first instance you can contact the researcher, Abigail Maguire 165298@live.stmarys.ac.uk. If you feel your complaint has not been handled to your satisfaction, you can contact the Director of Supervision, Professor Anthony Towey anthony.towey@stmarys.ac.uk

10. *Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?*
    All the information that we collect during the course of the pre-screening will be kept strictly confidential. Any electronic data collected in the pre-screening questionnaire will be stored in line with GDPR legislation as detailed in the Privacy Notice below. Information will be encrypted and held on the St. Mary's University servers protected by relevant security processes and technology. Your data will be stored for a period of 3 years. After this time has expired, all data will be destroyed. Data will only be able to be viewed by the lead researcher (Abigail Maguire) and the immediate project team at St. Mary's University who are authorised to work on the project

11. *Who is organising and funding the research?*
    The project is organised by Abigail Maguire and is supervised by Professor Anthony Tower, Dr. Mary Mihovilovic, and Dr. Trevor Stammers in conjunction with St. Mary's University, Twickenham, London.

12. *Who has ethically reviewed the project?*
    The project has been ethically approved by the St. Mary's University Research Ethics Committee

13. *Contacts for further information.*
    Abigail Maguire, Institute of Education, St Mary's University, Twickenham, UK. Email: 165298@live.stmarys.ac.uk

    Thank you for your consideration in taking part in this research.

11.2.3. Pre-screening Information: Privacy Notice

St. Mary's University, Twickenham
Privacy Notice for PhD Research Project: Female teachers' experiences of tackling the subject of abortion within GCSE Religious Education.

1. *The Purpose*

   Personal data means any information about an individual from which that person can be identified. It does not include data where the identity has been removed (anonymous data).

   We are collecting your basic personal data such as your name, email address, gender, and contact details in order to carry out the research project named above. We will only collect data that we need in order to provide and oversee this service.

2. *Legal basis for processing your data*

   We must have a legal basis for processing all personal data. In this instance, the University undertakes research as part of its core functions function for the community under its legal status. Data Protection laws allow us to use personal data for research with appropriate safeguards in place under the legal basis of public tasks that are in the public interest.

3. *What we do with it and who we share it with*

   All the personal data you submit during the pre-screening questionnaire is processed by the immediate project team at St. Mary's University, Twickenham, who are authorised to work on the project and access the information. Your data will be used to assess your eligibility for participation in the research project. On occasion, our research may be audited and access to the data may be required. The University puts in place safeguards to ensure that audits are conducted in a secure and confidential manner. In the case of complaints about a research project the Head of Research Ethics Committee may require access to the data as part of our Research Misconduct Procedure. The privacy of your personal data is paramount and will not be disclosed unless there is a justified purpose for doing so. The University will never sell personal data to third parties.

5. *Transfer of data to a country outside of the European Economic Area (EEA).*

   All personal data that you share during the pre-screening questionnaire will *not* be transferred outside of the European Economic Area.

6. *Security*

   We have put in place appropriate security measures to prevent your personal data from being accidentally lost, used or accessed in an unauthorised way, altered or disclosed. We have established procedures to deal with any suspected personal data breach and will notify you and any applicable regulator of a breach where we are legally required to do so. Any personal information will be encrypted and stored on St. Mary's University servers.

7. *How long do we keep it for?*

   Your data will be retained by the University for 3 years or until project is completed, whichever is earliest

8. What are your rights?

You have the right to request to see a copy of the information we hold about you and to request corrections or deletions of the information that is no longer required.
In some circumstance you may have the right to object to the processing of your personal data, to request it is erased where it is no longer required for the stated purposes, or that inaccurate information about you is corrected.
A reminder of the following rights of the individual:

1. access to the individual's data
2. rectification
3. erasure
4. restriction of use
5. objection to the use
6. data portability

If you wish to exercise any of these rights, please submit your request to GDPR@stmarys.ac.uk

9. Complaints

If you wish to raise a complaint on how we have handled your personal data, you can contact the University Data Protection Officer who will investigate the matter.

Our Data Protection Officer can be contacted at GDPR@stmarys.ac.uk

If you are not satisfied with our response or believe we are not processing your personal data in accordance with the law, you can complain to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) https://ico.org.uk/.

11.2.4. Pre-screening Information: Consent Form

- I agree to take part in the pre-screening survey
- I have read the above information sheet. I understand what my role will be in this pre-screening survey, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction
- I understand that I am free to withdraw from this study, for any or no reason and without prejudice.
- I agree that I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I provided will be safeguarded
- I have read the Privacy notice and agree to the University processing data collected for the purposes connected with the Research project as outlined to me
- I understand that I am free to ask any questions at any time before and during the study
- I confirm that I am over 18 years old

11.2.5. Pre-screening Survey Schedule

Information about you
   a) First Name
   b) Surname
   c) Email
   d) Gender
   e) Job Title
   f) Number of years teaching
   g) How did you complete your initial teacher training? (drop down + other)
   h) Are you an RE Specialist (define)? (Y/n/not sure/other)

Information about your school
   i) School name
   j) School Address
   k) Type of school (drop down + other)
   l) Age Range (drop down + other)

Information about your RE curriculum
   m) Do you currently teach GCSE Religious studies? (Y/n)
   n) Which exam board ? (Drop down + other)
   o) Which specification? (drop down – A/B/Short/both)
   p) Do you teach the topic of abortion within your specification?
   q) On which component or theme does the topic occur? (open)

   Thank you

11.2.6. Pre-screening Information: Criteria Not Met Letter

St Mary's University Twickenham London

[Pre-screening Letter – Inclusion criteria not met]

Dear [name of potential participant]

Thank you for expressing your interest to take part in a research study. The study is entitled 'Female teachers' experiences of tackling the subject of abortion within GCSE Religious Studies' and forms part of a PhD in Education and Theology undertaken at St. Mary's University, Twickenham.

Unfortunately, the current focus of the research only allows people who fulfil specific criteria to participate in the study. On this occasion, you are unable to take part because [insert unmet criteria]

Thank you once again for your interest and willingness to contribute.

If you have any questions about the research then please contact Abi Maguire, on the email address above (165298@live.stmarys.ac.uk).

Kind Regards,

Abi Maguire (Principal Investigator)

[St Mary's Address]

[Pre-screening Letter – Saturation Reached]

Dear [name of potential participant]

Thank you for expressing your interest to take part in a research study. The study is entitled 'Female teachers' experiences of tackling the subject of abortion within GCSE Religious Studies' and forms part of a PhD in Education and Theology undertaken at St. Mary's University, Twickenham.

At the present time, the study has reached capacity and is currently full. We will, however, contact you again should an opportunity to participate arise.

If you have any questions about the research then please contact Abi Maguire, on the email address above (165298@live.stmarys.ac.uk).

Thank you once again for your interest.

Kind Regards,

Abi Maguire (Principal Investigator)

[St Mary's Address]

11.3. Appendix C – Main Study Participant Information and Interview Schedule

Appendix C explains the participants' journey through the main stage of the interviews. The table that was previously seen in Appendix B (11.2) is duplicated for ease. The main study pathway is indicated by the bottom row of the box below. The advert, participant information sheet, form, and interview survey are all included with this Appendix, along with a thank you letter.
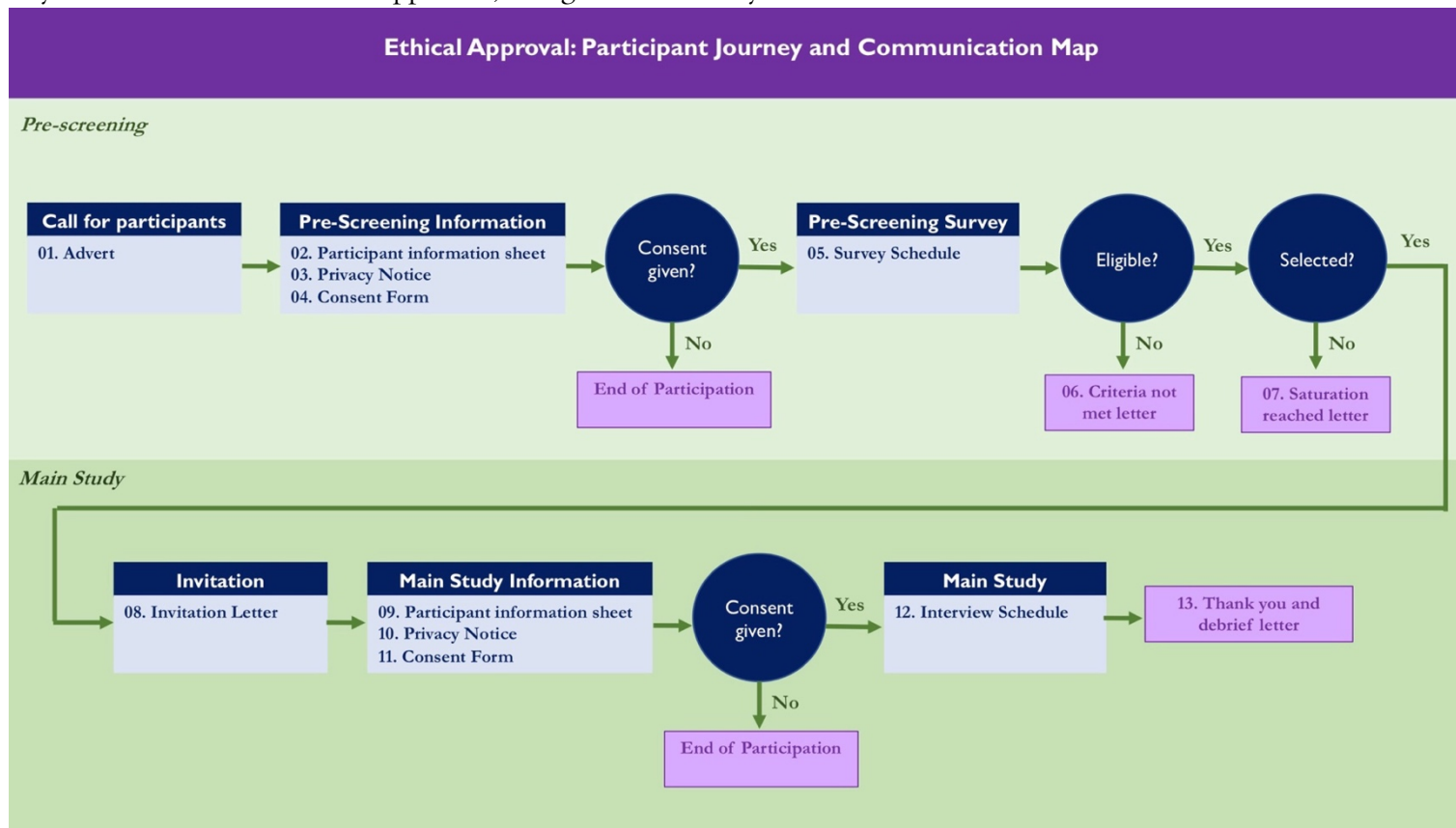

Figure B1 (duplicated): Participant Journey and Communication Map

11.3.1. Main Study: Invitation Letter

[Invitation Letter]

Dear [name of potential participant]

Thank you for expressing your interest to take part in a research study. The study is entitled 'Female teachers' experiences of tackling the subject of abortion within GCSE Religious Studies'. It forms a part of a PhD in Education and Theology undertaken at St. Mary's University, Twickenham.

We would now like to invite you to participate in this study.

To participate, you are being asked to tell us about your views and experiences of teaching the topic of abortion in a one-off online interview with a researcher lasting approximately 60-90 minutes. The investigations will occur on a day and time that is convenient to you. The information that participants give in the interview will help us to build up a picture of how the topic is taught at GCSE and how teachers feel about doing so. There are no wrong or right answers and we are keen to gain a wide range of accounts and perspectives.

You should only participate if you want to; choosing not to take part will not disadvantage you in any way. However, before you decide whether you want to take part, it is important for you to understand why we are doing the study and what it would involve for you if you decide to participate. Please take the time to read the enclosed information sheet carefully and think about whether or not you would like to take part.

If you have any questions about the research then please contact Abi Maguire, who will be carrying out the study, on the email address above (165298@live.stmarys.ac.uk). Alternatively, a phone or video call can be arranged at your convenience.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please reply to this email confirming your interest. You will then receive further communication with additional details and to arrange a time to conduct the online interview.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter.

Kind Regards,

Abi Maguire (Principal Investigator)

[St Mary's Address]

11.3.2. Main Study: Participant Information Sheet

St Mary's University Twickenham London

PhD Research Project Title

Female teachers' experiences of tackling the subject of abortion within GCSE Religious Studies.

1. ***Invitation***

   You are being invited to take part in this research study. However, before you decide, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it involves. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Should you have any questions about anything you read, require further information, or if you have any questions or concerns about the study, please contact the principal investigator, Abigail Maguire at 165298@live.stmarys.ac.uk.

2. ***What is the purpose of the research?***

   In Religious Education students tackle complex questions about life, meaning, reality, belief and ethics. With countless opinions on these matters, controversy in the classroom seems inevitable. The aim of this project is to examine female practitioner's experiences of teaching one particular controversial issue, namely; the topic of abortion at GCSE (14–16 year olds). It explores how these teachers perceive the nature and purpose of studying abortion, their role in dealing with challenging classroom dynamics, how they best facilitate learning, the impact on teaching the topic from both personal and professional perspectives, and their readiness in dealing with such issues.

3. ***Why have you been invited?***

   As a female teacher who is involved in teaching the subject of abortion at GCSE Religious Education and has completed the pre-screening questionnaire, you have been chosen for participation in this study.

4. ***Do I have to take part?***

   Your participation is entirely voluntary and you are under no obligation to take part in this research project, however your participation is greatly appreciated. If you decide to take part, you will be asked to indicate your agreement on the consent form. Should you decide not to take part, you will be able to keep a copy of this participant information sheet. You are free to withdraw your consent at any time, without providing a reason up until the point of data analysis (May 2021). During the interview, you are able to refuse to answer a question or stop at any point.

5. ***What will happen if I agree to take part?***

   You will be asked to participate in an online interview. It is estimated to take around 60–90 minutes of your time.

6. ***Payment***

   This study is completely voluntary; there will be no reimbursement or payment for time

7. *What are the possible benefits of taking part?*

   Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will have a beneficial impact on best practice. Results will be shared with participants in order to inform their professional work, on request.

8. *What happens if the research study stops earlier than expect?*

   Should the research stop earlier than planned and you are affected in any way, you will be informed and given an appropriate explanation

9. *What if the something goes wrong?*

   If you have any complains about the project in the first instance you can contact the researcher, Abigail Maguire 165298@live.stmarys.ac.uk. If you feel your complaint has not been handled to your satisfaction, you can contact the Director of Supervision, Professor Anthony Towey anthony.towey@stmarys.ac.uk

10. *Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?*

    All the information that we collect during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You, or your school, will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications. Any electronic data collected in the online interview will be stored in line with GDPR legislation as detailed in the Privacy Notice. Information will be anonymised and held under password protection on the St. Mary's University server protected by relevant security processes and technology and stored for a period of 10 years. After this time has expired, all data will be destroyed. Data will only be able to be viewed by the lead researcher (Abigail Maguire) and the immediate project team at St. Mary's University who are authorised to work on the project.

11. *What will happen to the results of the research project?*

    Results of the research will be published primarily in submission to the award of PhD in Education and Theology at St. Mary's University Twickenham (and validated by Liverpool Hope University). The research may also be published elsewhere, at a future date, for example in academic journal articles, or conference proceedings. You, or yours school will not be identified in any way in any report of publication. If you wish to be given a copy of any reports resulting from the research, please ask us to put your details on our circulation list.

12. *Who is organising and funding the research?*

    The project is organised by Abigail Maguire and is supervised by Professor Anthony Tower, Dr. Mary Mihovilovic, and Dr. Trevor Stammers in conjunction with St. Mary's University, Twickenham, London.

13. *Who has ethically reviewed the project?*

    The project has been ethically approved by the St. Mary's University Research Ethics Committee

14. *Contacts for further information.*

    Abigail Maguire, Institute of Education, St Mary's University, Twickenham, UK. Email: 165298@live.stmarys.ac.uk

You will be given a copy of this form to keep together with a copy of your consent form.

Thank you for your consideration in taking part in this research.

11.3.3. Main Study: Consent Form

St Mary's
University
Twickenham
London

Name of Participant: _____

Title of the project:
PhD: Female teachers' experiences of tackling the subject of abortion within GCSE Religious Studies

Main investigator and contact details: _Abi Maguire 165298@live.stmarys.ac.uk_

Members of the research team: Prof. Anthony Towey, Dr. Mary Mihovilovic, Dr. Trevor Stammers,

1.   I agree to take part in the above research study. I have read the Participant Information Sheet which is attached to this form. I understand what my role will be in this research, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.
2.   I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study, for any or no reason and without prejudice up until the end of May 2021.
3.   I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I provide will be safeguarded.
4.   I am free to ask any questions at any time before and during the study.
5.   I have been provided with a copy of this form and the Participant Information Sheet.

Data Protection: I agree to the University processing personal data which I have supplied in line with the Privacy Notice. I agree to the processing of such data for any purposes connected with the Research Project as outlined to me.

Name of participant (print)………………………………………………………………………..

Signed…………….………………… Date………………………........

If you wish to withdraw from the research, please complete the form below and return to the main investigator named above.

Title of Project: _____

I WISH TO WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY

Name: _____

Signed: _____ Date: _____

11.3.4. Main Study: Interview Schedule

Intro

- Introducing myself, explaining the nature of study and the aim of the interview
- Reminding of right to withdraw up until May 2021, confidentiality, double checking consent, permission to record, happy with the everything in the information pack.
- Notetaking/Looking down to make sure we've covered everything.
- Say as much or as little as you like, you're free not to answer a question, or come back to it later etc.
- There are no right or wrong answers and that I'm interested in what they have to say about the topic in as much detail as they want to give. No rush – take your time in answering
- Any questions before we start?

Warm up (Background and Position)

Question	Possible Prompts and probes
Can you tell me about your current position within the school?	*What is your job title? Have you always been in this capacity in xx school?*
How long have you been teaching?	*How long in this school?*
Can you tell me briefly about your teacher training?	*Specialist vs non-specialist? SCITT vs ITT?*
How is RE organised in your school?	*Department size? Compulsory in all stages?* *Subject name? Core RE? External exams?*

Interview Questions

Question	Possible Prompts and probes
Where does abortion occur within your particular GCSE syllabus?	*At what stage of their GCSE journey do pupils encounter the topic? Why have you chosen to study it? Why there?*
Why do you think that the subject of abortion appears on a GCSE syllabus?	*What is its purpose? What does it achieve?*
What has been your experience of teaching abortion at GCSE?	*Positive/Negative? How has it made you feel? What have you found easy/hard? Any specific examples or times that stick out to you?*
Can you describe how you approach the teaching of abortion?	*Planning? Resources? Strategies? Communication?*
What are the main issues that you have faced when teaching the topic?	*How do you think these issues should be dealt with? In what ways are these specific to your classroom/school/context? Affect teachers more broadly?*
How do you manage the classroom dynamics when teaching abortion?	*Peer relationships? Student-teacher dynamics? Parents?*
Has the way in which you have taught abortion changed over time?	*In what way? What things have you found helpful/unhelpful?. How does the way in which you teach now compare to when you first started?*
What would a positive lesson on abortion look like for you?	*Good learning? Links to other parts of the curriculum? Skills? Knowledge?*
How should teachers conduct themselves when teaching abortion?	*Why? Sharing own opinion? Displaying certain values?*
Can you describe any training you might have received in teaching topics like abortion?	*How long ago? Teacher training? Are you aware of training opportunities?*
What do you think makes a topic controversial?	*What criteria? Why?*

Closing

- Is there anything that you would like to add?
- Is there anything that I have left out?
- Are there other things that you expected me to ask you about?
- Thank you and next steps

11.3.5. Main Study: Thank You Letter

[Thank you letter]
Dear [name of participant]

On behalf of myself and St. Mary's University, I want to thank you sincerely for taking part in the online interview on [date] as part of a PhD research study: Female teachers' experiences of tackling the subject of abortion within GCSE Religious Studies

It is only with the help of volunteers like you that we are able to conduct the research. I value the time you committed in talking honestly about your experiences and perspectives during the interview. Your contributions are invaluable and it was a pleasure working with you.

The goal of the project is to explore how female teachers perceive the nature and purpose of studying abortion at GCSE RS, their role in dealing with challenging classroom dynamics, how they best facilitate learning, the impact on teaching the topic from both personal and professional perspectives, and their readiness in dealing with such issues.

Once all participants have completed their interviews in the study, your contributions will be analysed together with those of all other participants. I anticipate that we will have collected all the necessary data by May 2021

If you would like to keep in touch with the project's developments and receive summary of findings when available, please reply to this email to indicate your preference.

We also recognise that some of the subject matter discussed in the interview might have been sensitive for some participants. If taking part in this study has raised any specific concerns, please consider using one of the following services for support:

- Your local GP or mental health services
- The Samaritans
    24 hour helpline: 0800 116 123
    Email: jo@samaritans.org
    Website: www.samaritans.org
- Pregnancy Crisis Helpline
    o Weekdays 9am–5pm: 0800 3689296
    o Website: www.pregnancycrisishelpline.org.uk

Once again, thank you very much for your participation in the study.

Kind Regards,
Abi Maguire (Principal Investigator)

11.4. Appendix D – Post Pilot Interview Schedule Change

Intro

- Introducing myself, explaining the nature of study and the aim of the interview
- Reminding of right to withdraw up until May 2021, confidentiality, double checking consent, permission to record, happy with the everything in the information pack.
- Notetaking/Looking down to make sure we've covered everything.
- Say as much or as little as you like, you're free not to answer a question, or come back to it later etc.
- There are no right or wrong answers and that I'm interested in what they have to say about the topic in as much detail as they want to give. No rush – take your time in answering

Post pilot changes: Need to give participants the opportunity to ask questions at this point, also need to reassure participants that if I look down, it's because I'm making note

Warm up (Background and Position)

Question	Possible Prompts and probes
Can you tell me about your current position within the school?	*What is your job title? Have you always been in this capacity in xx school?*
How long have you been teaching?	*How long in this school?*
Can you tell me briefly about your teacher training?	*Specialist vs non-specialist? SCITT vs ITT?*
How is RE organised in your school?	*Department size? Compulsory in all stages? Subject name? Core RE? External exams?*
~~What has been your experience of teaching controversial issues~~	*~~What is controversial? Criteria?~~*

Post pilot changes: Last question not needed. It was too open and too long for a warmup

Interview Questions

Question	Possible Prompts and probes
Where does abortion occur within your particular GCSE syllabus?	*At what stage of their GCSE journey do pupils encounter the topic? Why have you chosen to study it? Why there?*
Why do you think that the subject of abortion appears on a GCSE syllabus?	*What is its purpose? What does it achieve?*
What has been your experience of teaching abortion at GCSE?	*Positive/Negative? How has it made you feel? What have you found easy/hard? Any specific examples or times that stick out to you?*
Can you describe how you approach the teaching of abortion?	*Planning? Resources? Strategies? Communication?*
What are the main issues that you have faced when teaching the topic?	*How do you think these issues should be dealt with? In what ways are these specific to your classroom/school/context? Affect teachers more broadly?*
How do you manage the classroom dynamics when teaching abortion?	*Peer relationships? Student-teacher dynamics? Parents?*
Has the way in which you have taught abortion changed over time?	*In what way? What things have you found helpful/unhelpful?. How does the way in which you teach now compare to when you first started?*
What would a positive lesson on abortion look like for you?	*Good learning? Links to other parts of the curriculum? Skills? Knowledge?*
How should teachers conduct themselves when teaching abortion?	*Why? Sharing own opinion? Displaying certain values?*
Can you describe any training you might have received in teaching topics like abortion?	*How long ago? Teacher training? Are you aware of training opportunities?*
What do you think makes a topic controversial?	*What criteria? Why?*
If you could change something studying abortion on the GCSE curriculum, what would it be?	*Why? What would that achieve?*

Post pilot changes: First two questions were added (in yellow) because I felt there needed to be a better transition into the specific questions regarding abortion, and specifically where they taught them. There also needs to a question

Closing

- Is there anything that you would like to add?
- Is there anything that I have left out?
- Are there other things that you expected me to ask you about?
- Thank you and next steps

11.5. Appendix E – Initial Noting of an Excerpt

Linguistics	Transcript	Content
	30:11 AM – Yeah… And how would you manage a potential student–teacher conflict?	
Imperatives. Strength of comments	30:14 B – …. ooo…. um… I mean…. again, I've just done a whole training course on this today. The fact that pupils need to be listened to and have to be heard. And I think some teachers are reluctant to hear the views of others sometimes, so just being open to the fact that they are 15 and 16 and their opinion might not be like ours.	Drawing on experiences or keen to demonstrate skillfulness? Who?
Opinions being possessive	And obviously, in a Catholic school we have to help them understand the Catholic view, but we're not evangelists, we're teachers! So, I think that conflict is sometimes natural, and	Who is we? Sense of identity with team/school/ethos Tensions between purpose of teacher
Language being reflective of 'adult' life	helping them understand that that could happen in real life as well. And so, yes, maybe it's just a matter of agreeing to disagree sometimes, but in a healthy way.	
	32:01 AM – mmm.. and why do you think that teachers are reluctant to hear the views of their pupils?	Relating experiences to adult life
Exasperation? Frustration?	31:07 B – [sighs] I don't know whether it's because of my own personal viewpoint on abortion and	

	how it might differ to others. Like… some are perhaps a bit more set in their views of the Catholic Church and think it shouldn't even exist, if that makes sense? Whereas, I'm open to it being 'a thing' and I understand why people might make that choice in their life. Um... and despite the fact I don't personally agree that I.... think	Perceives her perspective to be different of the church
Thinking and justification	that I would be able to have one, I don't know because I've never been in that position, I don't know... I think	Hesitation around articulating view. Why?
Couches opinions in obscurity	that personal beliefs might differ ever so slightly. Um... and I also think that sometime maybe gender might come into it? If I can say that? I think that being female sometimes… we're	
Testing where the boundaries might be	better at empathising and understanding other viewpoints. And maybe sometimes male members of staff teaching these topics might find it	Places experiences within those whose are similar for support
	difficult having those conversations because they perhaps don't feel like they can empathise with it so much.

33:42 AM – So your gender being a potential factor too? | Experiences affecting primary women |
| Repeating back | 33:46 JB – Yeah, yeah, yeah... so I think in that sense maybe the conflict be greater, potentially greater. I don't know [laughs] because I've never been | |
| Understood what has been communicated | in a male member of staff's classroom seeing them teach it, but that's just my | |

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Clarifier Nervous?	perception of it, I guess. That maybe male colleagues might struggle a bit more, so... I think there are certain issues that are perhaps easier to teach as a female. And maybe students feel like they can ask questions in different ways to female versus male teachers. 35:07 AM - OK. What about other factors that might be at play in managing potential student-teacher conflict?	Gendering of issues Identification with students
Processing	35:10 JB - Yeah... hmm.... I'm thinking.... So, I think it's about not shying away from conflict, or disagreement. It's a part of life… and so teaching students to disagree well is a fundamental part of RE. Which is why I think it's such an important subject to teach. Because alongside with what I do now, and PSHE, we are preparing them for the future. And that's why we felt really strongly about teaching 50% of the themes and not just 25% because we felt like it just wasn't as relatable to them, and we weren't then... we almost felt like we	Repetition of earlier statements Subject having long reach
afterthought	were doing them a disservice... That one cohort that went through on Spec B, we felt like... a bit like we'd done them a disservice because we hadn't gone into such a deep discussion over some of those thematic topics which	Purpose in teaching Deliberate choice Content is meaningful for student – why is this important

Vocational language	inevitably, some of them might experience.	
Repetition	37:33 AM – That makes sense. So, it sounds as if you're saying that it's important to spend some curriculum time thinking about issues that might affect the pupils at some point in their lives?	foundational Is it inevitable? Why does she think this? Links to potential situation
Mirroring and attempts to summarise	37:41 JB – Definitely, definitely, definitely, Sorry... I just remembered something that I maybe should have said earlier. When we look at the definition of abortion, this always opens up quite a big discussion. So, when we obviously first start teaching it, before going into the law and that, we look at what the NHS definition of abortion is, and then we look at the Specification's definitions. And the pupils are always soooo shocked about the difference in wording because the general definition is like "the ending of pregnancy...um... or the termination of a foetus to end a pregnancy" something like that, I can't remember it word for word. And then the GSCE specification is like "the expulsion of the foetus with the intent to destroy life" or something like that [laughs]. And... that always brings so much discussion that we sort of draw out 'why do you think this second one	
Strong agreement		
One thought leads to another		Discussion important
		Abortion situated in wider social and political context. Where is the religion?
Strong emphasis		
Verbatum knowledge of the specification		But she did.

Intense emphasis	is so weighted?' and then we link that in with the views of the Church and that then springs out some discussion. I thought that just might be interesting to mention. 38:58 AM – Thanks for remembering! And what do you think they find most shocking about the definition? 39:10 JB – The word 'explusion' and 'intent' are so emotive. Those two words, they're just always shocked by it.	Does discussion = disagreement? Uses questioning to navigate controversy Links to religion come after social/health Why
Rephrasing of questions	39:15 AM – So they're shocked because the wording is emotive?	
Is she talking about just pupils or herself also? Mirroring Repetition Obvious to who?	39:20 JB – Yeah, yeah... I guess... they think of like 'expulsion', you think of something quite dramatic and y'know. Whereas... because we tell that obviously there are two ways that an abortion can be carried out, which they're never really aware of. And so, when they then hear that definition, I think it just... yeah... brings so many emotions to the fore that perhaps y'know......"What!!!!" Anger, disgust.	Controversy as inherently emotional Explanation of the strength of emotion felt by students

		Lack of foundational knowledge of abortion processes
		Description of emotions

Participant B

16:06
So I think that that definitely involves relationship to feel safe, that their their viewpoints are going to be heard

45:00
And, you know, I always make a point of working in welcoming them at the door and saying hi, knowing their names and you know, so there's that instant connection as quickly as possible

14.16
I think it's about having a relationship with them. And that you've built up that trust and they know, okay, this is how it works in an RE classroom. And this is how it works with Mrs. X

15:00
And they feel, I guess comfort in a way and trust that they're in a safe environment,

45:15
that they know I'm invested in that I want to be there

20:57
It's sort of you're trying your best to create an environment where they feel valued and safe and are able to talk out their opinions and work out through their conversations, what's going on in their head

17:02
And whether it comes out, like say backwards, not exactly how they meant, or whatever it is, I'm like, but this is the place to try and figure it out

16:21
.Within the discussion, there needs to be safety that if they say something, and through saying it, they're trying to figure something out, and it might come out backwards, or inside out, I'm like, brilliant, because actually, if we can start to talk it out, then we can start to write it out. But actually, we can't start to write it out until we start to talk it out.

38:00
trying to convey to them, you know, there are some things that today, you may feel this is absolutely right, and this is absolutely wrong. But you might change your mind on that tomorrow, or next week, or in five years time, or when you go through something, you might think, you know, I was really sure on this, but actually, that has now changed or developed

34:18
Studying abortion is a really interesting journey to go through with them. Because I'm just seeing that reality. You know, you've got basically horny teenagers, and they're just like, Oh, yeah, whatever, so binary. But you get to see them thing that there are ramifications to your actions potentially.

21:33
And to appreciate how you got to your opinion at this particular point, which may change or it may not, that is complicated, how you even got there, and to understand the threads of how you got to your opinion - that's what brings the texture into what we're discussing

18:27
Because and I always say, you know, what you think today may not be the same afternoon may not be the same tomorrow may not be the same next week probably won't be the same in five years time.

Relationship Building

Trust and Valued

Creating a secure environment where pupils can share

Talking as a way of learning

Views are subject to change/ journeying through emotional development

As an alternative to full understanding

26:35
In some ways, they haven't lived enough life yet, to really, to really do this. And so we're only able to take them so far. Because until they have their hearts broken, or until they get engaged, and it falls apart, or they find themselves pregnant, or friend, pregnant, or whatever, it's all going to be theory, in a way. And so, you know, we can take them so far, and try and get them like, say, to think, you know, what, how might this person [having the abortion] feel about that?

28:15
We can get them so, in terms of their emotional response, and beginning to think about abortion as a controversial issue. But in some ways, And then whatever life brings them will then take them the rest of the way. I kind of think of it we're planting seeds. And if I can plant seeds of empathy, and compassion, and thinking at this from like another point of view, then I feel as if I've done my job

22:36
So there is that kind of, like, removed sense of, you know, there isn't that emotional attachment. And just want them, you know, to ask, where is the human in this story? Yeah, and just make that connection that this is someone's life

24.16
I can't go "I'll just go get an abortion" like it's this flippant thing that you can go and get like a, a cup of coffee from Starbucks. It's like, No, no, no, no, no, this is not a flippant thing.

50:00
But what's most important is that I'm loving that person, and that I'm accepting that person so that they don't feel lonely or disconnected or shut out. Because that is, for me, far more damaging than potentially the decision that they're about to make

18:35
And I'm also a big believer and trying to convey to them that whatever issues we're looking at is always complicated

50:30
You know, it's that whole, whole picture. And it's not diminishing from the decision that that person might be making. Because that is a huge decision

For those going through abortion

18:33
But I'll say things, you know, there are huge range of views within this. But it's about trying to understand the other person's point of view

53:03
It's about embracing the messiness. Embracing it and not being scared of it.

102:02
We're arguing points, not people

51:15
You know, we're all human, we've all got threads to our story. And actually, the more that we can under understand our own stories for ourselves, but also the stories of others and understand where we have those common connections. Like, surely that makes a bit of a happier and more content and more connected world. And that's, that's ultimately why I want to teach RE

38:32
it's not trying to push people to like, either end of a spectrum

42:39
I need to be open to whatever they might bring, and whatever. And you know, that is part of the challenge, and the joy of teaching

15:02
when we're not sure about things that needs to be met with empathy, they are trying to figure out the world around them

16:33
And I think trying to get my pupils to have those empathy skills, so not to meet, you know, either their own thoughts or the thoughts of others with judgement, because it's so easy to judge and go when you're wrong.

For each other

Empathy

11.7. Appendix G – Cross-Case Analysis

Appendix G provides a visual representation of the process of cross–case analysis. Superordinate and subordinate themes were compared across all participants. Prominent, consistent or prevalent themes from the combined transcripts were pulled out and groups together. These groupings formed the basis of the top–level tops which was used for subsequent discussion in Chapters 6-8.
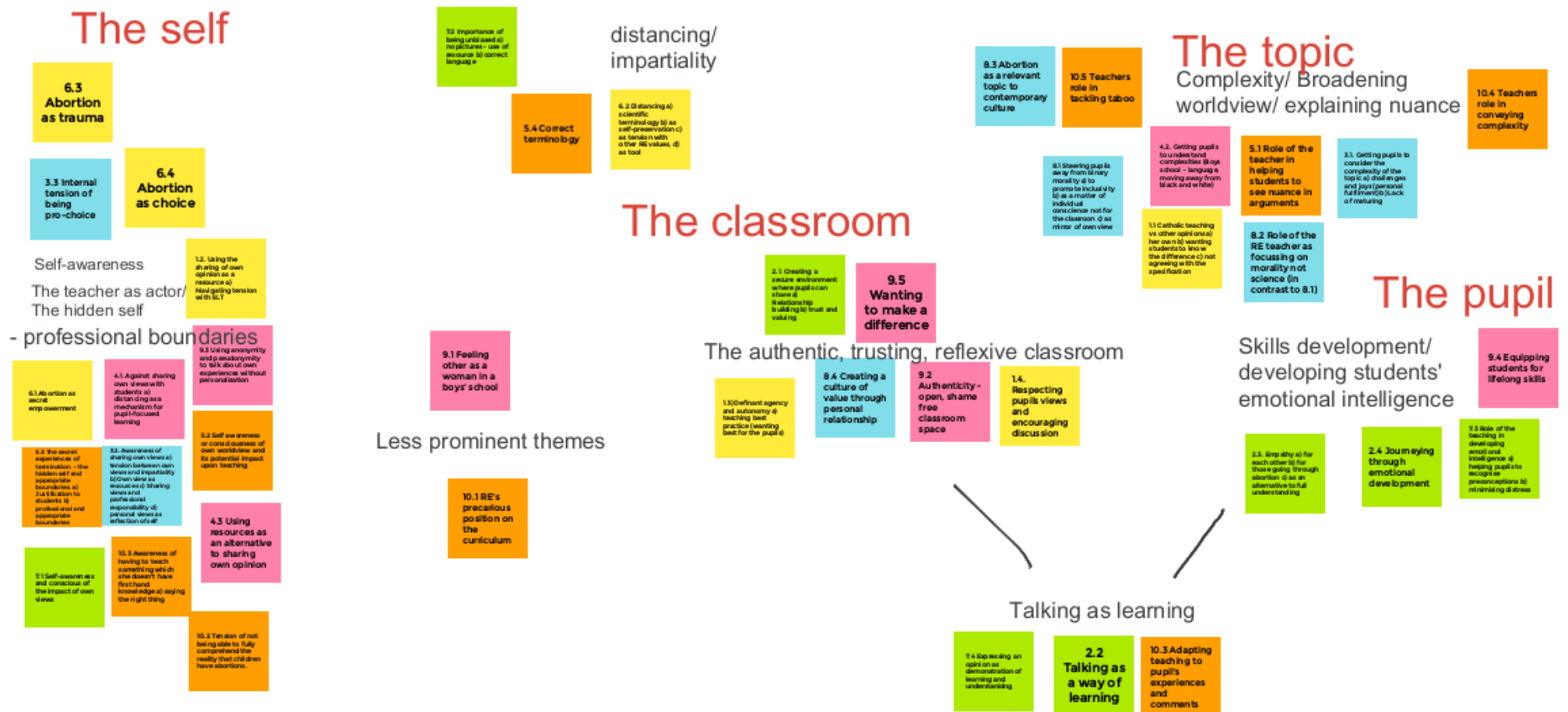
11.8. Appendix H – Ethical Approval

20 August 2020

Dear Abi

I am writing to confirm that your application for ethical approval of your research enquiry has been approved at Level 2.

Researcher's name:
Abi Maguire
Regnum:
165298
Title of project:
Female teachers' experiences of tackling the subject of abortion within GCSE Religious Education.
Supervisor:
Anthony Towey/Trevor Stammers/ Mary Mihovilovic

Should you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact me.

M Mihovilović

Dr   Mary   Mihovilović
Programme Director MA in Education

11.9. Appendix I – Project Timescale

AUTUMN 2019
September-December
- UNDERTAKING LITERATURE REVIEW
- FINALISING PROPOSAL AND STUCTURE

WINTER 2019
January - March
- METHODOLOGY
Justification and selection
- TRAINING
Identification and adressing of training needs

SPRING 2020
April - June
- DEVISING INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

SUMMER 2020
June-August
- CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS
- SUBMISSION FOR ETHICAL APPROVAL
- RECRUITMENT

AUTUMN 2020
September-December
- INTERVIEW PILOT
- DATA COLLECTION
(Semi-Stuctured Interviews)

WINTER 2021
January - March
- TRANSCRIPTION
- DATA ANALYSIS 1
(In case extraction and structuring of themes)
- CONFIRMATION REVIEW

SPRING 2021
April - June
- DATA ANALYSIS 2
(Cross-case comparison of themes)

SUMMER 2021
June-August
- DATA ANALYSIS 3
(Overall themes compiled for discussion)
- WRITE UP 1
Analysis and Relexivity Chapter

AUTUMN 2021
September-December
- WRITE UP 2
Abortion as Controversial Issue chapter
- WRITE UP 3
Discussion chapters on superordinate themes

WINTER 2022
January - March

SPRING 2022
April - June
- WRITE UP 4
General conclusions and recommendations chapters

SUMMER 2022
June-August
- EDITING AND COMPILING
- SUBMISSION