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**Towards expansive and inclusive relationship and sex education: Young disabled  
LGBT+ people's ideas for change.**

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**Abstract**

Relationship and sex education (RSE) in the UK continues to be overshadowed by the ideology of Section 28 (Local Government Act). Although repealed 18 years ago, the act has created an atmosphere of uncertainty and confusion regarding what is included in RSE. Equating teaching with promotion has legitimised phobia based upon sexuality and gender identity, mainly through the absence of discussion regarding LGBT+. LGBT+ identities are positioned as non-normative, as they are erased within a heteronormative education system. Simultaneously, disabled young people are often excluded from RSE due to ableism which denies disabled people sexuality or gender identities. This area of education seen as either not required, or not delivered in a way which is accessible and meaningful to the lives of disabled young people. This chapter foregrounds the experiences of a group of young disabled LGBT+ people who were in education. It explores their experiences in relation to RSE and presents their thoughts upon how education can become inclusive, and why such inclusion is vital to their wellbeing. We propose an inclusive whole school approach including disabled LGBT+ lives and histories in order to affirm identities, whilst ensuring RSE is accessible and meets the needs of disabled and neuro-diverse people. Including disabled and/or LGBT+ lives within all subjects across the curriculum resists

heteronormativity and disabilism and normalises disabled LGBT+ lives in line with wider society. We call for expansive and inclusive education, as this leads to equality rather than mere acceptance, and can lead to improvements and change in educational cultures, systems, structures and policies, and hopefully wider societal attitudes.

### **Introduction**

Research exploring the experiences of LGBT+ students within education has found that their needs are often not addressed (Ellis and High 2004, Fisher 2009) and that the curriculum is not suitable (Kosciw et al 2012). The work of Elia and Eliason (2010) has highlighted religious conservatism as a main factor in perpetuating this. However, it is difficult to begin discussing relationship and sex education (RSE) in the UK without noting Section 28 of the 1988 Local Government Act. The act continues to cast a shadow over perceptions of LGBT+ identities within education, although it was finally repealed in 2003 (in Scotland it was repealed in 2000).

Representing 15 years of damage and the steady infusion of misconceptions which no longer represented wider societal values; the act was perhaps most problematic in terms of its focus on young people at a time when they explore their sexuality and may need information and support. At its core Section 28 appeared to prevent teachers discussing homosexuality due to a belief that teaching equates to promotion. This is problematic as it suggests that teaching is in fact promotion, but this also reinforced and validated homophobia and intolerance through education (Ellis 2007, Abbott, Ellis & Abbott 2015, Smith 2015, Sanders & Sullivan 2014). Vanderbeck & Johnson (2015:3) described Section 28 as having a ‘chilling effect’ which undermined teachers’ confidence to mention or facilitate discussion of homosexuality. Although schools were often free to define their own RSE, the influence of Local Authorities

and confusion with regards to the reach of the Act, led to LGBT+ relationships not being discussed in schools (Burton 1995, Ellis & High 2004, Greenland & Nunney 2008, Vincent 2014).

As Greenland & Nunney (2008) show, the shadow of Section 28 is still very much prevalent in the UK education system. Confusion and uncertainty remain with regards to what can and should be taught. One of the effects of Section 28 has been the perpetuation of normative heterosexuality and gender identities and the difficulties faced in challenging this. Some research has been critical of teachers, suggesting that they are ignorant of LGBT+ issues (DePalma and Jennet 2010). However, it is important to note that teachers may have received little training in how to deliver inclusive RSE education. This may also relate to the external pressures placed on teachers who find themselves in difficult situations where they fear challenge from students and parents (Warwick & Douglas 2001, Warwick et al 2004). In response, teachers are left with little option but to ignore LGBT+ issues, which not only perpetuates heteronormativity, but creates an exclusory education which does not meet the needs of all students.

Young disabled LGBT+ people face multiple layers of discrimination as their needs are also not met due to the fact that many disabled young people are often excluded from RSE. A disablist misconception that disabled people will not need this information still prevails, thus leading to little importance being placed on the need for this education. In addition, RSE is often delivered in ways which can make it inaccessible for some disabled young people. It is often delivered within a single session, or few lessons, once a year which do not allow for students with learning disabilities or autism, for example, to explore in more depth the complexities and

nuances of relationships. And/or it does not give them the time and space to explore their own identities as part of the process of learning.

Thus far, very little attention has been given to the views of disabled LGBT+ young people regarding their need for RSE and what suggestions they have for addressing the current discrimination in delivery.

This chapter will aim to start to address this gap in understanding through exploring RSE for young disabled LGBT+ people, examining how this non-inclusive approach continues to 'other' their experiences and re-enforces heteronormativity (the normalisation of societal rules as governed by heterosexuality, binary genders, and the erasure of identities which do not fit with this system). By not including LGBT+ relationships within education, young disabled LGBT+ people argued that the message received is that any LGBT+ identity is less valid.

We suggest however, that inclusion from this perspective has become framed negatively, with inclusion being something that education has to do, rather than something it does to benefit education and ultimately address inequality. In practice thinking about the inclusion of non-normative sexuality or gender identity education as expansive, inclusive and accessible presents it is beneficial for all.

In England, upcoming changes regarding relationship and sex education (RSE) present an opportunity to change education to be more expansive and inclusive, with the introduction of compulsory relationship education in primary, and relationship and sex education in secondary schools from September 2020. New regulations and guidance assert that pupils should be able to understand the world in which they live, and that people who are LGBT+ are recognised, respected and protected by the law. Furthermore, it states that pupils growing up in families with LGBT+ members, or who are beginning to understand that they are or may be LGBT+ themselves, should

feel that RSE is relevant to them. Although this is an important step forward, it does remain that schools can make decisions about what is appropriate to teach on this subject and when, based on the age and development of their pupils, thus leaving the door open to neglecting expansive teaching in this area. Similarly, parents will still be able to request that their child be withdrawn from the RSE. The school has to respect the parents' request to withdraw the child, except in exceptional circumstances, up to and until three terms before the child turns 16; thus suggesting that education in this area will be during an identifiable discreet set of lessons. This also places power and control firmly in the hands of the parents, where there could be differences of opinion from the child, as will be illustrated below.

It is also of significance that within the new guidance is a recognition of the importance of making RSE accessible to children with special education needs and disability. The combination of these two important factors in the legislation, if fully implemented, presents an opportunity for significant change. However, as argued above this requires a shift in attitudes and culture, and how it is implemented will be vital to achieving a fully expansive, accessible education. Interestingly, English schools have had a duty under the Equality Act since 2010 to ensure that teaching (which would include RSE) is accessible to all children and young people, including those who are disabled, although it could be argued that this has had little affect and is seldom discussed.

The chapter begins with a literature review on RSE in relation to young disabled LGBT+ students, specifically focussing upon research which has centralised the experiences of young people themselves; in line with our focus upon young people's experiences and a view that disabled people are experts in their own lives. The methods employed as part of the research are then explored, paying attention to

the limitations and the scope of the research. The main body of the chapter is then divided into two sections, and within each thematic sub-sections are presented. Firstly, the experiences of sex/relationship education are explored, in relation to heteronormativity, understandings of sexuality, relationships, support and positive experiences. Secondly, taking these experiences forward the chapter moves to explore the participants thoughts about how education should be delivered based upon their experiences. Here the focus is upon ensuring that education is fully inclusive and accessible. Although the participants noted that special LGBT+ sessions within education are important, in reality LGBT+ issues need to flow through all education. Education in its broadest sense is heteronormative and everything is framed without any consideration of LGBT+ lives. Their experiences as disabled young people are explored, paying particular attention to the work of Bahner (2018) and notion of ‘cripping’ sex education. We suggest that framing education as expansive and inclusive may help to re-evaluate the importance of including education on disability and LGBT+ within schools.

### **Literature Review**

Although research exploring the experiences of young disabled LGBT+ people in relation to RSE is still emerging as an area of research, there are consistent messages to be found within the literature. It is clear, for example, that although not specifically related to disabled people, education is framed as being heteronormative. This is most clear in terms of the focus upon reproduction and biological issues, with a reluctance to discuss sexual identities. As Lofgren-Martenson (2009) noted, sex education is concerned only with heterosexual issues and this reduces the chance of engagement with positive LGBT+ role models. Heteronormativity re-enforces what is considered

as a normal discourse of sexuality (Blyth & Carson 2007) where heterosexuality is presented as the start and end point for discussion on sexuality. This is reflected in previous research which has shown that care professionals struggle and are reluctant to discuss gay relationships with people with learning disabilities (Abbott & Howarth 2007). This is echoed in relation to education as Blyth & Carson (2007) found that teachers are uncomfortable and too inexperienced to discuss LGBT+ issues.

Research suggests that sex education, when it has been relevant to young LGBT+ people, has in general focussed upon prevention of STIs. Of course, such information is vital for young people, but as Blanchett (2002) suggests, sex education needs to include a more balanced curriculum with a focus upon all aspects of sexuality, not solely HIV/AIDs education. The importance of the accuracy and appropriateness of information for disabled young people has been highlighted by DuBeau (1997) who found that poorly handled education on such aspects as HIV can lead to the re-enforcement of negative stereotyping of gay lives. DuBeau (1997) explored how a participant had become increasingly anxious about what they thought as the inevitability of AIDS and rape, which they had assimilated with being gay. This sentiment is somewhat echoed by Thompson (2007) who found that such negative stereotypes adversely impacted upon disabled people. It was suggested that young LGBT+ people often receive limited information about aspects of sexuality such as relationships and identity, and therefore tend to accept such negative stereotypes, which can be harmful.

Underscoring the discussion of RSE in the lives of young disabled LGBT+ people are misconceptions about sexuality. This is eloquently summarised by a participant in Blyth & Carson's (2007) research:



I didn't want to talk to Mrs Hewitt about being gay but I wasn't allowed to talk to anyone else, so I did. She said that I didn't need to know about condoms because I didn't need them, only the other boys in the class would need them, and she said that I couldn't be gay either because it wasn't nice! (Blyth & Carson, 2007, p.37).

In this regard being disabled is seen as being a barrier to receiving sex education (Richards 2017). This reflects perceptions regarding the capability and capacity of disabled people to in fact possess a sexuality and gender identity (Toft et al 2019a, 2019b). Disabled people are desexualised and framed as being non-sexual and therefore not in need of sex education. There are definite echoes of Section 28 here in terms of the assumption that disabled people are being protected by not discussing sexuality. This has been highlighted by Slater & Liddiard (2018) in relation to trans lives. They note that the current unfounded concerns regarding trans adults influencing the decisions of children is a worrying echo of the ideology behind Section 28.

The implications of denying young disabled LGBT+ people information has not been fully explored (although this chapter aims to begin to address this). However, it is clear from research in the field of disabled child protection that a lack of conversation about sexuality, healthy relationships and consent and a failure to adequately prepare young people has the potential to place them in risky and/or abusive situations as they explore their sexuality – although of course no young person is responsible for their own abuse, a lack of understanding can increase vulnerability (Franklin & Smeaton 2017; Stauffer-Kruse 2005). As Corker (2001) noted, teachers play an important role in initiating conversations about sexuality. In this regard, teachers can help young people to develop positive identities through

discussion. In framing homosexuality (in this instance) as a forbidden topic (Corker 2001) it is seen as something different or something that shouldn't be talked about. Blyth & Carson (2007) also suggest that not accommodating the needs of gay disabled pupils (in their research) they are isolated and alienated. It may be logical to extrapolate that denying information can affect a sense of identity, negatively affect well-being and place undue stress on their lives. Responses to addressing the balance for disabled LGBT+ pupils have been limited but perhaps most notable is the work of Thompson (2007). Thompson proposed a queer inclusive pedagogy informed by five key tenants: the importance of constructing alternative-affirming environments which attempt to de/center; the right of individuals to a sexual identification of their own choosing and understanding; while working against normalizing pulls of Other/ing professionals (e.g. resisting heteronormative approaches in education); developing supported alliances in queer communities; and preparing and supporting participants for life in the community (adapted from Thompson 2007: 42). Most recently, and of relevance to the findings presented here, the work of Bahner (2018) is important in calling for the visibility of intersectional and non-normative experiences within the curriculum. Within this approach, disabled students take the lead in giving their voices and discussing aspects of their lives as a way of disrupting divides between sexuality and disability.

## **Methods**

The data used within this chapter is taken from two connected datasets. One-to-one interviews (13) conducted December to January 2018, and two focus groups (10 and 6

participants) in June 2018. All participants were LGBT+<sup>1</sup> aged 17-25 years and identified as disabled. This resulted in a sample of young people with a range of intellectual disabilities, autistic spectrum conditions and mental health needs.

Interviews were supported by a schedule constructed to explore the challenges the participants faced in their everyday lives (including education), and were supplemented with innovative tools such as vignettes (exploring stories and situations with the participant), role-plays (enacting scenarios) and card games, to help participants engage in the process. Focus groups were conducted around the same broad topics and used existing support group meetings in which participants were all well known to each other. The focus groups developed ideas which were first explored in the interviews and gave space for fuller exploration.

We are transparent about the limitations of the data collection and the areas we continue to develop. The sampling was convenience based and we used gatekeepers we have previously worked with, resulting in two main data collection sites in central England (a local support group and specialist college). Reasons for this were both pragmatic (to enable access to a often “hidden” group) and ethical. We wanted to ensure that the young people had support pre, during and post data collection in case issues were raised for them. Although we frame disability as a collective identity and suggest that disability categories are problematic, the sample is limited in that the young people did not identify as being physical disabled or having sensory or communication needs; this was simply a result of the recruitment approach and necessity in accessing disabled young people through existing groups, and was not purposeful. We continue to develop our methods and sampling approach in this regard

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<sup>1</sup> We use LGBT+ as this was the preferred term of the young people with whom we worked. It refers to sexualities and gender identities that are considered non-normative (e.g heterosexuality and binary conceptualisations of gender). We are aware of the potential limitations (such as the invisibility of identities in the + sign) and the debates regarding what should be included in the acronym.

to ensure wider inclusivity. The research also employed a degree of strategic essentialism in that other important identities (e.g. race/ethnicity, religion) were not the focus. This limits the ability to explore how experiences of disability are negotiated by young, black, Christians (for example), and how these identities impact on their lives, as this is an emerging area of investigation we felt that this focused approach would be a good starting point. We employed thematic analysis as this complemented the exploratory approach.

The research was guided by the social model of disability which locates disability in the social, cultural, material and attitudinal barriers that exclude people with impairments from mainstream society. Thus, people are disabled by discrimination, prejudice and by a society that fails to address their needs in terms of social relations and structures, and not as a result of their individual impairment (Oliver, 1996). The research from which the data is taken was largely exploratory, and we used a toolkit approach to theoretical frameworks employed including intersectionality and critical humanism. This paper is underpinned by Thomas' (1999) 'psycho-emotional disablism' as adapted by Blyth & Carson (2007) which stresses how the sex education received leads to feelings of not being "normal" or having internalised feelings of being different. This is important for our research as the experiences of the participants show that not providing relevant, accessible information threatens to invalidate their identities as both disabled and LGBT. However, we will extend this theoretical framework in relation to our findings, attempting to move towards a less deterministic view and one which acknowledges personal agency.

Heteronormativity features prevalently throughout this chapter and we subscribe to the viewpoint that normative ideas in education continue to reinforce

gender binarism and heterosexuality, with non-normative sexualities and gender-identities being erased (see the work of Ferfolja 2007; Ferolja and Ullman 2017 in particular). Other research (Francis 2018) has extended the work of Rich (1980) on compulsory heterosexuality as a framework to this debate. We therefore take these two aspects ('psycho-emotional disablism' and the dominance of heteronormativity) as the framing of this chapter.

### **The young people's experiences**

There were several degrees of heteronormativity experienced by the participants, ranging from the perpetuation of the link between sexuality and reproduction with an unwavering focus entirely upon biology and anatomy; to ignoring LGBT+ issues. On a basic level the participants explained that their experiences of sex education were always in relation to bodies and reproduction. During a focus group, Amy stated:

Sex education in school was literally biology, like this is a cross section of a man's reproductive area, this is a cross section of a woman's. This is what happens, there you go! (Amy)

This was a common experience, as participants described sex education as focussed upon understanding conception. This also shows that the education received was often fleeting and brief with a real lack of detail. In this regard, sex education was presented as being something that schools did because they had to, and that it was mandated from higher authorities. There was no sense that the schools felt a responsibility to prepare the students for intimate life. This was well summarised by Kabir:

I know there was a thing that school's had to do sex ed lesson. But in my school they got around it by just doing one session. It was just very basic.

(Kabir)

The participants also noted that issues concerning gender identity tend not to be acknowledged in RSE. Binary assertions regarding gender and biological determinism were reinforced. Edith highlighted how her PHSE (Personal, Social and Health Education) lessons taught her that there are 'no other genders, just male and female, and if you're a woman you will want to have sex with a man'. This focus upon sex did not often translate into information that was useful for LGBT+ students, as they explained sex was only usually discussed in relation to heterosexual sex. This extends into discussions on relationships which the participants described as being inadequate. The participants were particularly concerned about this and suggested that this was something they would have appreciated. Edith, for example, noted that she would have welcomed more information on things she struggled with, such as consent in relationships:

It [sex education] was just mechanical, there wasn't anything on consent! That really annoyed me. They needed complicated things on consent like [that], you know. (Edith)

The participants were keen to stress this omission from their sex education, yet noted that such information and support did not necessarily have to resemble formal education. Education with regards to relationships could be achieved through less formal information dissemination and the creation of safe spaces through support groups and networks. This is particularly important for young people with learning disabilities or autism, for example, where the complexities and nuances of issues such as consent need considered explanations, situational context and possibly

individualised approaches, not something which can be delivered accessibly in a single lesson.

Participants particularly noted that during school they would have liked an outlet simply to talk about sexuality and gender identity. Kabir suggested that no-one appeared to be aware of sexuality and that ‘there wasn’t any service if you had feeling; there was no place to go, nowhere it could be addressed’. The experiences of one focus group participant, Nick clearly identifies the need for such support.. Nick stated that he was diagnosed with autism and voiced being trans in close proximity to each other. As a result, he argued, school became an unsafe environment for him:

I went to an all-girls school, so it was really hard to be like ‘hi, I am a boy, I’m the only boy in the entire school’, there was another guy but I came out before him. It was really scary and we had to wear skirts and stuff, and it was not accepted. The pupils in my year were alright but it was people in the other years, the younger years, and the staff were awful about it. (Nick)

Throughout his secondary education this was shown through abuse from staff who ‘kept dismissing it and dead naming me and calling me a girl’.

It is interesting to learn that the participants did not frame their experiences of sex education in relation to being disabled. Sex education in this regard was rarely seen as needing to address issues of disability. Although we are aware of the limitations of our sample, and that this may not be the experience of all young people with the same impairments, or young people with physical disabilities or communication needs. We are also unable to explore if other identities (race/ethnicity, religion etc.) impact upon this. However, we suggest that with this sample, this is because they are striving to be considered as “normal” (Alpemo 2012) or a result of the nature of the education they received (reproduction). There was a desire of the

pupils to fit into such a heteronormative and ableist environment, as will be explored further in the next section.

From the entire sample (29 in total) only two young people reported having wholly positive experiences within education. Abigail for example, explained how she had been taught about her rights as an LGBT+ and disabled person, within specialised lessons. This was particularly evident in relation to intimacy, relationships and discrimination. Sam, a focus group participant reported a very supportive school and a very positive experience throughout education. We conclude this section with a quotation from his story which shows how an inclusive and supportive whole school approach can have a profound and affirmative effect on young people:

I have had a really positive experience at my secondary school. They positively helped with pretty much the majority of my transition. They supported me if I was being bullied or picked on because of me being part of the LGBT community. The school as a whole, every member of staff. (Sam)

### **Inclusive/expansive education**

Our overarching argument is that it is not specific relationship and sex education that is of the most importance. According to our sample of young disabled LGBT+ students, it is the overall ethos of the school and its ability to work inclusively while working to minimise the pervading heteronormativity. Although the participants did have a number of suggestions to improve how RSE is delivered. As a way of clarifying this assertion it is important to understand that what the participants suggested is a change and re-evaluation of what is taught (including LGBT+) and how it is presented (inclusive of LGBT+). First, this section will explore what has been referred to as ‘Including LGBT+’, the feeling that LGBT+ histories and lives need to



be represented in education through specific targeted attention. Their removal/omission does much to damage the young people who have reduced frames of references or role-models. Second, what we have termed 'Inclusive of LGBT+' where the entire school ethos is to work towards inclusivity and developing values that resist heteronormativity, includes disability and filters this throughout the whole curriculum, resulting in an expansion of the education offered.

### *Including LGBT+*

Jake, during a focus group, argued that there is LGBT+ erasure in sex education due to the failure to focus upon LGBT+ issues and teaching which is inaccessible. The participants were clear that there should be specialist teaching which covers LGBT+ identities and relationships? and that this was not the responsibility of the young person to seek this out:

If I have the right to it; then it should be standard. You shouldn't be having to ask for certain things to be taught to you. You shouldn't have to ask it should just be done regardless, which I think would also help with tolerance. You could argue that it would be difficult for disabled people to understand but, you know, like with normal sex education it can be broken down, it can be simplified, you know it can be adapted, so there is no excuse really. (Wayne)

This quotation raises an important point related to the participants as young disabled students. They did not focus upon their impairments and did not extensively explore how they thought education should be appropriate for them, as they believed that this was the job of the teacher and it was something which could be achieved with few problems. Being disabled was not seen as a barrier to receiving RSE, as barriers existed due to the schools inability to engage with LGBT+ issues. The participants

proposed a number of requirements which would ensure LGBT+ issues were included in their RSE:

- 1- That LGBT+ education should be delivered by someone who identifies as LGBT+.

During the focus groups, this aspect was particularly frustrating for the participants who felt that the best approach to ensuring sex education was inclusive of their needs was for it to be delivered by an educator who identifies as LGBT+. It was suggested that this would ensure that the information would be more accurate particularly in terms of sex:

Yeah, lets have a straight person's perspective on gay sex because they are going to know about that. (Nick)

There was also a feeling that this may be a way of combatting heteronormativity. This point was raised by Amy, who framed non-LGBT+ people as perpetuating biases:

I genuinely think that instead of getting biased straight people to teach us about who we are, they should get people who know what we are going through. (Amy)

As with Nick's comment, Amy also felt that being able to relate personal experience to teaching was beneficial in this instance.

- 2- A mentoring service should be available in schools in order to engage on a one-to-one or group basis with someone with expertise. Participants suggested groups led by a mentor would help to normalise LGBT+ issues.

- 3- Parents/carers should receive education/information about LGBT+ relationships/identities.

The participants felt that parents/carers played a key role in continuing phobias away from the school environment. One heated debate during a focus group reflects how passionately both Nick and Karen felt about the need to educate their parents about LGBT+ and for them to understand and validate their identities:

Nick- God yeah, [dad's partners name] and my dad need a fucking gay dictionary shoving down their throat.

Karen- Everyone time I mention pan-romantic to him he is like I think you made that word up. It is made up. Every week you make up something and you claim to be something different this week.

Nick- And he says are you off to see your girlfriend, no dad, it's my boyfriend, shut up.

- 4- A focus upon 'doing' relationships, not solely reproduction and anatomy:

As previously noted in relation to the experiences of sex education, the lack of focus on relationships, was particularly problematic. Jake, suggested that for him as a disabled LGBT+ student, this would be particularly beneficial.

I would go back to my point on the relationship side of things, not so much the sexual side but more so how you get into them. That stuff isn't explained in education really, not to the point it should be. There should be more stuff in education about how relationships work, again, it is more sexual stuff that they teach. They should teach about understanding the person, especially for LGBT

stuff, how different sexualities accept different genders for example, and how for certain sexualities gender and sexuality don't matter- or there are no barriers. (Jake)

The young people who had autism, intellectual disabilities and mental health disabilities specifically stated that they would particularly benefit from such relationship education.

### *Inclusive of LGBT+*

The most common response from the participants with regards to how to change relationship and sex education was to be inclusive of their identities as young disabled LGBT+ students, and to change the ethos of education and schools in general. The focus here is less upon specific sex education lessons but the application of the school-wide curriculum to expand and include disabled LGBT+ lives and therefore presenting a more representative view of wider society. This aspect has previously been highlighted by Vanderbeck & Johnson (2015) whom we quote at length in order to clearly present our argument:

Beyond RSE, schools also differ significantly in terms of how other areas of teaching—such as Citizenship, History, English, or other subjects—incorporate systematic reflection on issues related to homosexuality and same-sex relationships would potentially present a richer, fuller, and more potentially honest account of the world. Conservative religious groups (as well as other groups with morally conservative agendas) continue to question the legitimacy and appropriateness of schools choosing to incorporate issues related to homosexuality into the teaching of National Curriculum subjects, while the Government has done little to encourage this kind of teaching and

resisted calls to specify it within the requirements of the National Curriculum.

(20)

Here the call is to incorporate homosexuality (Vanderbeck & Johnsons' words) into the curriculum in the broadest sense in order to normalise such issues. As Bahner (2018:650) notes, introducing specialised sex education programmes for disabled young people is 'inherently ableist and counters equal participation', as it reduces social interaction and reinforces expectation around participation, particularly in terms of the future labour market. A response is to expand education to be inclusive for the benefit of all. One focus group participant, Jake, also made this link. He used the example of his experience with history lessons which have never included LGBT+ lives or historical lives:

It is quite difficult, that is another thing, like Kabir said with the history of the community not accepting. The history of being taught about it, it makes you think well am I normal? Because this isn't in the history books, this isn't really talked about as much as it should be. (Jake)

Here the link between Thomas' (1999) 'psycho-emotional disablism' are clear. Jake is suggesting that because he sees no visible LGBT+ histories or role-models in his education, his identity is positioned as being abnormal or something different. Jake took the lack of LGBT+ issues with the curriculum as a sure sign that being pansexual (in his case) was not normal and something that as a disabled person, he couldn't be:

...it could make people feel not normal, because it is not in the proper curriculum. If it is not in the curriculum it shows that it is not accepted. But it needs to be in as many places as possible I would imagine. It makes people feel more accepted on different areas. (Jake)

Such suggestions may require radical shift in approaches to teaching and yet it is the fact that the way in which education is delivered has resisted incremental changes, which has set it at odds with the make-up of wider society. Such a statement is underlined by the knowledge that within schools there are people who are working to teach in this manner, and that steps have been taken since the repeal of Section 28 to provide young people with appropriate sex education. However, as Greenland & Nunney show (2008) the role of the teacher is in a state of confusion with blurred boundaries over roles and responsibilities in relation to sexuality and gender identity. The experiences of the participants suggest that education is not neutral and that it plays a part in either affirming identity or creating a sense of isolation or exclusion. Therefore, it appears important that schools and the curriculums they teach are aligned with wider societal values, equality laws, and as now recognised in current government guidance. Francis (2018) found that queer students referred to this in terms of honesty, openness and comfort; suggesting that these attributes were valued most highly in teachers. The participants in Francis' (2018) research suggested that if these were absent, teachers tended to come across as judgemental or too embarrassed to talk about sexuality. To refer back to the introduction and the rhetoric surrounding Section 28, this does not equate to the promotion of any sexual or gender identity, but is an embracing of the fact that people are diverse and that teaching from a position that re-enforces dominant values on sexuality and gender is unrepresentative and exclusory. Our suggestion to expand education is line with Bahner's (2018) proposal to 'crip' sex education (although the focus is different) and is an example of how including disabled LGBT+ lives within education can work to centralise disability and sex. The politicised nature of crip theory, it is suggested, would promote a form of pedagogy that is empowering and open to studying difference. In addition, we would

argue that what is delivered across an expansive curriculum needs to be accessible to all disabled young people, the young people in this sample felt that this should be a given. They also called for attention to be given to ensuring that safe spaces and individualised support should be available to students exploring their disability and LGBT+ identities.

### **Conclusion**

The views of the young disabled LGBT+ people we spoke to and our analysis, suggest that it is not sex education per se which needs to be queered/crippled. The process of making education appropriate for them as disabled students was seen as being less of a concern and something that teachers should be able to achieve.

Although other research, as previously mentioned, has suggested that teachers do find this difficult. However, it was noted that the ‘doing’ of relationships should be given more focus.

More accurately, the participants called for a change in the ethos of schools and the curriculum, which needs to be particularly mindful of how they reinforce ableism, heteronormativity and binary gendered identities. This leaves little space for disabled LGBT+ lives. Education in this regard perpetuates a psycho-emotional disablism (Thomas 1999) which alienates young disabled LGBT+ students and accentuates the invisibility of lives similar to theirs, undermining the validity of their identities but positioning them as not normal or desirable. For the participants in this research, ensuring that disabled LGBT+ issues and lives are present across education is more important than specific sex education lessons or complex LGBT+ inclusive pedagogies, although specific support needs regarding sexuality were noted.

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