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**Developing Relationships that Matter:  
Educator Experiences of Delivering Relationship and Sexuality Education  
in Aotearoa/New Zealand**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts  
in  
Psychology

at Massey University, Manawatū,  
Aotearoa/New Zealand

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February 2023

### Abstract

Sexuality education is a contested space, wherein a variety of stakeholders and affective forces converge and respond to an adolescent sexuality that is configured as a social problem within dominant knowledge systems and power relations. Young women and girls are articulated as especially risky and at-risk, becoming anticipated burdens that threaten to trouble neoliberal capitalism and its postfeminist sensibilities. A tension emerges between the disposable bodies of transnational capitalism and the assumption that gender equality has already been achieved, playing out in the sexualised adolescent caricatures consumed within modern media consumption practices and the everyday sexual violence that inequitably targets women and girls. Manifesting through the author's own earned experiences and the particular ways through which gendered violence informs the standpoint of this project, the process of reading through theory becomes constitutive of the doing of this research. Evolving into a feminist posthuman approach to mapping the affective flows that produce sexuality education capacities in Aotearoa/New Zealand through a close reading of theory, policy, and six educator narratives, the latest changes to sexuality education policy are interrogated, making visible the affective forces that work to territorialise sexuality education praxis. The focus of analysis is on the possibilities for building relationships that matter with young people, by centring the relational through ethical engagement with the co-constructed narratives of educators. Connecting these narratives through theory to the broader social power relationships in which they are embedded, the gendered and colonised bodies of neoliberal capitalism emerge as hidden in plain sight, while moral, professional, and institutional barriers emerge through feelings of fear and shame as individualising forces that obstruct the relational within the context of sexuality education. Bringing the voices of educators together in collaboration, horizons of hope are also identified - with student voice, acknowledgement of the embodied knowing of young people, activism that works to increase the value of creating space for students to connect in processes of becoming (political), teacher education, and a dis-identification with heteronormative practices emerging as possibilities for troubling the (still) hidden power relationships that produce relational capacities within institutional spaces.

**Acknowledgements**

*“Indeed, to put it more strongly, the nonresidence of emotions is what makes them  
‘binding.’”*

- Sarah Ahmed (2004, p. 119)

Thank you to the educators who took the time to gift me with their narratives and their time,  
and collaborate with me in conversations that matter for  
future generations.

Thank you to my supervisor, Professor Leigh Coombes, for patiently supporting me through  
this process, and sharing the gifts of your knowledge with me. A special thank you for  
connecting me with the writings of women whose theories and understandings  
helped me to make sense of my own earned experiences,  
and of the histories that bond us together in  
new imaginings.

And thank you to my family, who bind me to the corporeal,  
while leaving space for me to  
dream in the  
Abyss.

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	2
Acknowledgements .....	3
Table of Contents.....	4
Introduction .....	6
Literature Review.....	7
A Brief History of Sexuality Education in Aotearoa .....	7
Feminist Approaches to Contextualising Sexuality Education .....	8
Neoliberalism .....	8
Intersectionality .....	9
Heteronormativity .....	10
Postfeminism .....	12
Heteronormative Technologies .....	12
Pornography .....	12
Social Media and Digital Communication.....	13
Feminist Disruptions .....	15
Discourses of Desire.....	15
A Discourse of Erotics .....	17
Feminist Posthumanism and New Materialism.....	18
Conclusion.....	20
Notes On Current Sexuality Education Policy in Aotearoa .....	21
Methodology (Ethico-Onto-Epistemology) .....	24
Standpoint Theory: Locating Myself within the Research.....	24
Ethical Considerations .....	35
Feminist Relational Ethics.....	35
Ethical Procedures .....	44
Informed Consent and Confidentiality .....	44
Ethics Committee Approval. ....	45
Power Relationships. ....	45
Narrative Theory .....	46
Research Questions .....	53
Methods.....	53
Sampling .....	53
Recruitment .....	54
Interviews .....	55
Transcription.....	56

## Developing Relationships that Matter

Processes of Analysis .....	58
Plotting the Narratives.....	58
Affective Flows.....	59
Analyses .....	61
Collaborative Desire and My Responses to the Conversations.....	61
Narrative Plots and the Relationships They Engender .....	62
Affective Flows: Politics, Policy, People, and Places.....	64
Where Does RSE Belong, Anyway? .....	67
Risky Subjects.....	76
It's Not Personal.....	77
Insufficient Training and Feelings of Discomfort .....	89
We Need to Keep the Children Safe. ....	93
Pornography, Social Media, Digital Communication, Consent, & Coercion.....	95
Student Voice.....	101
Hopeful Horizons? .....	104
References .....	106
Appendix .....	124
INFORMATION SHEET .....	124
PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM - INDIVIDUAL.....	128
GROUP PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM .....	129
AUTHORITY FOR THE RELEASE OF TRANSCRIPTS .....	131

## Introduction

“...for the complexity of the present; we need to be worthy of our times”.

- Braidotti (2018, p. xiv)

For decades, feminist thinkers committed to troubling the social power relationships that produce inequalities in women’s daily lives have interrogated the historically contested space of sexuality education, where moral conservatism, fear of adolescent sexuality, public health goals, and (neo)liberal individualising forces converge to constrain the relational in sexually education praxis. Mobilising *intersectionality*, *neoliberalism*, *postfeminism*, *heteronormativity*, and *posthumanism* as politically engaged theoretical understandings of the particular and multiple forces that work to differentially configure bodies that sit at the intersections of race, class, sexuality and gender, feminist researchers and academics have argued for an acknowledgement of the knowing and resistance embodied by young women and girls. Recent changes to sexuality education policy in Aotearoa/New Zealand, informed by rapid societal changes that are augmented by advanced technologies, open up possibilities for a comprehensive approach to sexuality education that enables critical engagement with gendered power relationships. However, the historical gap between policy and practice in sexuality education informs the impetus of this project, alongside my own earned experiences and the particular ways gender(ed) inequality affected my adolescent capacities for doing and being in the world. Mapping a cartography of the current landscape of sexuality education in Aotearoa, this research becomes an ethical engagement with the relational, tracing the ways sexual education policy, six educator narratives, and feminist theory interact through my own situated interpretations. Identifying the affective forces that occlude the relational in sexuality education praxis, and that work to territorialise the risky sexualities of marginalised bodies, lines of flight also emerge from a process of collaborating in conversation with educators - wherein hopeful horizons for young women and girls can become in relationships that engage with the complexities of the times.

## Literature Review

This literature review briefly introduces a history of sexuality education in Aotearoa, before the theoretical approaches feminist thinkers have employed to examine the gendered power relationships that are enacted in and embodied through sexuality education praxis are discussed. After engaging with four key concepts that are useful for developing understandings of how the politics of gender manifest in sexuality education - *neoliberalism*, *intersectionality*, *heteronormativity*, and *postfeminism* - the ways in which technological advances interact with gendered power relationships to (re)produce old and new inequalities will be explored. The attempts by feminist academics and researchers to disrupt heteronormative sexuality education by mobilising a discourse of desire (and of erotics) will then be traced, before a reading through of posthuman and new materialist understandings of sexuality and sexuality education. Lastly, current sexuality education policy in Aotearoa is briefly outlined, before the ontological, epistemological, and ethical foundations of this project are introduced.

### A Brief History of Sexuality Education in Aotearoa

Tracing the evolution of the politics that inform sexuality education in Aotearoa, a complex interaction between racism, moral anxieties enacted on adolescent sexuality, heteronormativity, and neoliberal values of individual responsibility and achievement emerges (Jackson & Weatherall, 2010a; Smyth, 2000). Jackson and Weatherall (2010a) locate the colonial racist eugenics movement of the 1920s as a moment in our colonialist history where social anxieties focused on relational displays of sexuality that exceeded the norms of Christian and imperial femininity (see also Mikaere, 1999). Here, the racialised bodies of women and girls were constructed and produced as deficient and deviant within colonialist moral and political agendas (Mikaere, 1999; Simmonds, 2011), resulting in calls for sex education to be provided in schools in an attempt to govern Māori and bi-cultural procreation (Jackson & Weatherall, 2010a). This agenda was successfully resisted within a conservative sociopolitical environment also informed by a Christian-based morality, wherein heterosexual marriage was considered the prerequisite for sex and educating young people about sexuality was viewed as tantamount to promoting it (Jackson & Weatherall, 2010a).

The permissive sexual climate of the 1960s reawakened the argument for sex education in schools by organisations such as the New Zealand Family Planning Association,

## Developing Relationships that Matter

a position that was attacked by conservative opponents (e.g. church groups and the Concerned Parents' Association) who blamed liberalism for rising teen pregnancy and Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) rates (Jackson & Weatherall, 2010a; Smyth, 2000). Themes of vulnerability and danger emerged as the tension between health promotion and moral conservatism shaped the foundation of sex education, and although some schools chose to provide it voluntarily, legislation that prevented discussing contraception with young people restricted the scope of what schools could offer their students at this time (Jackson & Weatherall, 2010a). It wasn't until the late 1980s, when concerns around HIV and AIDS were at their peak, that sex education became a component of the curriculum. By the late 1990s, sex education became compulsory in Years 9 and 10 and was positioned within the Health and Physical Education curriculum, where it continues to be nestled today. The locating of sexuality education within a curriculum historically concerned with promoting public health goals speaks to its contested evolution, with the moral anxieties that formed its foundation continuing to be reconstituted through (neo)liberal health pragmatism approaches.

## **Feminist Approaches to Contextualising Sexuality Education**

### *Neoliberalism*

The location of sexuality education in schools in Aotearoa has implications that have been the subject of local critiques (Allen, 2001; Garland-Levett, 2017; Garland-Levett, 2020; Jackson & Weatherall, 2010a; Quinlivan et al., 2014), echoing international concerns regarding the limitations of sexuality education when it focuses primarily on (neo)liberal ideals of health promotion that centre individual rights and responsibilities. Here, the state distances itself from taking responsibility for the well-being of individuals, social services become privatised, and the onus of health outcomes is increasingly placed on the individual or family system (Fine & McClelland, 2006). Thus, processes of increased *responsibilisation* work to individualise risk while denying the structural and systematic inequalities that produce the risky institutions and environments that contain young people's daily lives (Kelly, 2001). A tension emerges when health pragmatism approaches frame sexuality education as an evidence-based provision of facts that is assumed to promote healthy behaviours and respond in opposition to the moralising found within conservative approaches that seek to conceal and govern sexualities (Garland-Levitt, 2020; Rasmussen, 2012, 2015). Emerging from this tension between liberal and conservative agendas is the (re)inscribing of a morality produced through the individualising forces of neoliberal capitalism.

## Developing Relationships that Matter

The embedding of sexuality education within the Health and Physical Education curriculum has been criticised for its alignment with state agendas that seek to exert control over bodies, with the locating of health promotion within educational institutions informed by wider public health goals that seek to address the social and financial burdens of disease in attempts to produce citizens who can participate in (inter)national economies (Alldred et al., 2003; Fitzpatrick & Burrows, 2017). A contextual reading of the way education and healthcare intersect is particularly salient when the social anxieties that inform how young women's bodies have been targeted through sexuality education programmes is considered. Responding to media coverage of events wherein adolescent sexuality is articulated as a social problem that needs to be managed, a health pragmatism approach interacts with efforts to protect young girls (from pregnancy, abuse, and disease) that emerge through public discourses of sexuality education (Fitzpatrick & Burrows, 2017; Gunn & Smith, 2015; Morison & Herbert, 2020). Through these competing forces, morality is reconstituted within health promotion approaches that centre (neo)liberal ideals of personal choice and individual responsibility, while failing to account for the inequities young women face when attempting to negotiate their sexualities (Gavey, 2012; Tolman, 2012).

Rosalind Gill (2008) asks if “neoliberalism is always already gendered” (p. 443), highlighting the way women's bodies, homes, cooking and child rearing skills become sites that require constant (anxious) attention, and aligning with a *compulsory individualism* that requires individuals to “bear full responsibility for their life biography no matter how severe the constraints upon their action” (p. 437). The negotiation of gendered power relationships in a culture shaped by neoliberal capitalism has been analysed by theorists concerned with how young women's bodies are commodified within a marketplace that values competition, and a conception of personal freedom that is contingent on the powerful dispossessing the disposable bodies of the dis-empowered (see Braidotti, 2012; Fine, 2017; Wilson, 2017). In this way, the ideal of personal freedom is limited for marginalised groups, within a democracy reconfigured by deregulated global market economies that produce the increasingly widening gap between rich and poor – resulting in inequitable access to housing, education, employment, and health care (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017; Wilson, 2017).

### ***Intersectionality***

The implications of neoliberal capitalism on the embodied experiences of women, and especially those who are low income, Black, Indigenous, or LGBTQI+, has been mapped by

## Developing Relationships that Matter

feminist researchers who provide the theoretical frameworks that contextualise this project (see Braidotti, 2012; Burns & Torre, 2005; Chmielewski et al., 2020; Le Grice & Braun, 2018; Fine, 1988, 2017; Fine & McClelland, 2006; Tolman, 2012; Quinlivan et al., 2014). Among these theories *intersectionality*, a political position born in Black and Third world feminism, is employed to critique liberal feminism and argue for considerations of how race, class, gender, and sexuality intersect to produce particular inequalities, enacted on particular bodies (Brah & Phoenix, 2004; Salem, 2016). Sara Salem (2016) argues that the radical power intersectionality lost when it was co-opted by liberal feminism can be regained by re-contextualising it within a transnational capitalism that depends on bodies that are marked due to categorisations of gender, sexuality, race and class. In this way, intersectionality becomes a useful lens through which we can account for the particular ways young women negotiate their gendered and racialised sexualities within the context of transnational capitalism.

Deborah Tolman traces the complexities involved in attempting to produce understandings of adolescent sexuality within the context of neoliberal capitalism, acknowledging that it is “challenging to make sense of sexual empowerment when girls and young women have become commodities to be dressed for and consumed by male sexual desire” (2012, p. 751). Evoking Sandra Bartky’s (1998) explication of the particular ways women’s bodies are produced within modern societies (by putting Foucault’s conception of self-governing and ‘docile bodies’ to work), Tolman questions how young women can become empowered when empowerment is constructed as the power to perform and conform to a gendered sexuality that requires continual improvement through consumerism. The plethora of images of sexualised young bodies in pornography, social media, advertising, music, and film has also been critiqued by feminist thinkers interested in how young women negotiate these images alongside conflicting narratives of empowered sexuality, danger, victimisation, desire, and the lingering binary trope of slutty vs virtuous girls who must shoulder the responsibility for effectively managing the natural and biologically determined sexual impulses of their studly-boy counterparts (Allen, 2013; Lamb, 2010; Meenagh, 2017; Tolman, 2012).

### ***Heteronormativity***

*Joni Meenagh reminds us that neoliberal individualism fails to account for the way “the politics of our personal lives shape the choices we are able to make” (2017, p. 448), and*

## Developing Relationships that Matter

*when tracing the history of feminist interventions that attempt to disrupt compulsory heterosexuality I sometimes feel like banging my head against a wall until I bleed. A million women banging and bleeding into something so unsightly the very walls collapse from the sodden weight of it. I must also disclose at this time that I have begun to transcribe my first interviews with sexuality educators, and that this sense of frustration will need to be acknowledged in my analysis of our conversations.*

As early as 1980, Adrienne Rich mobilised understandings of *compulsory heterosexuality* as a powerful institution that exerts control over women in multiple and diffuse ways that are inextricably linked to a relationship of male domination and female subordination. Deeply connected to capitalist agendas, Rich argued that compulsory heterosexuality governs the sexual division of labour that configures women to contribute inequitable work in the domestic realm (e.g. childcare & housework), while also exerting power over our sexualities. Touching on the blurred lines that emerge when normative heterosexual power relations are enacted and embodied in pornography, sexual harassment in the workplace, and rape, Rich opens up an early conversation into the way gendered cultural norms establish and exist on the same heteronormative continuum as unwanted sex, sexual coercion, and rape (Gavey, 1992, 2019).

Wendy Hollway's (1984) explication of the way 'male sexual drive' and female 'have/hold' discourses shape heteronormative power relationships is useful for understanding the ways heteronormativity establishes the context wherein sexual violence against women becomes normative. Informed by biological determinism, Christian morality, and evolutionary psychology, the dominant discourses that position men as naturally motivated to pursue sex and women as sexually responsive within the context of maintaining relationships work to produce compulsory heterosexuality, wherein women must work to maintain relationships while men are assumed to be governed by their sex-drives (Hollway, 1984). Through these heteronormative processes of responsabilisation, women embody the responsibility for taking care of relationships while possibilities for acknowledging sexual desire for women and the need for meaningful relationships and vulnerability among men become constrained, and the objectification of women's bodies for male consumption becomes a cultural norm inscribed in our daily lives.

### *Postfeminism*

Travelling with us through the already complex topography of gendered sexuality is *postfeminism*, where feminist and anti-feminist ideas become entangled within neoliberal constructions of individualism that assume gender equality has already been achieved (Gill, 2007; Meenagh, 2017). This is despite the ongoing injustices that inequitably effect the conditions of women's daily lives, including pay-gap and domestic labour inequities (Ministry for Women, 2019; Rich, 1980), psychological/emotional abuse, intimate partner violence and homicide (Fanslow & Robinson, 2004; Gerrard & Lambie, 2018), and sexual violence (Gavey, 2019; Ministry of Justice, 2021). This contradictory environment wherein young women attempt to make sense of their embodied experiences has been examined by feminists who have problematised the theoretical usefulness of the concept of sexual empowerment (Lamb, 2010; Tolman, 2012). Tracing the ways sexual empowerment is produced as an individual achievement within a postfeminist, neoliberal milieu wherein attaining ideal heterosexual desirability and desirousness becomes a measure of a woman's successful becoming, Rosalind Gill (2007) examines the gender differences that are constituted within media products that represent and produce a *postfeminist sensibility*. Identifying themes of makeover and self-improvement paradigms, self-discipline, the commodification of difference, consumerism, and the sexualisation of culture as themes that emerge in postfeminist media, Gill maps the processes by which the objectification of women becomes internalised – a shift in power that requires women to desire their own sexualisation, and to be constantly (and hostilely) scrutinised and judged on their performance of femininity. Gill delineates the processes by which compulsory heterosexuality and gender difference have been historically and continually reproduced, how the obligation to become sexualised and objectified has been re-positioned as something women should desire for themselves, and how this desire to achieve ideal sexuality becomes a task that requires constant attention and labour (see also Bartky, 1998; Brown-Bowers et al., 2015; Gurevich et al., 2017).

### *Heteronormative Technologies*

**Pornography.** More recently, Nicola Gavey (2013) has re-opened a conversation into the ways misogyny, male dominance, sexual violence, and racism are positioned as natural and normal in popular heterosexual pornography, making sense of how the commodification and consumption of highly accessible pornography in Aotearoa informs our culturally

## Developing Relationships that Matter

inscribed gender relationships. Outlining the ways in which critical enquiry into pornography has become unfashionable within a neoliberal marketplace that aligns personal freedom with the right to consume, Gavey argues for critical (re)engagement into the normative misogyny of media consumption practices, and in particular the detachment that characterises the way young men consume images of female subordination in pornography (see Antevska & Gavey, 2015). Given the high rates of pornography consumption among young people (especially young boys and from a young age) in Aotearoa (Office of Film and Literature Classification, 2018), critical enquiry into the implications of pornography use and what it can tell us about gendered norms is particularly salient in understandings of adolescent sexuality.

**Social Media and Digital Communication.** Other technological advancements that bear mentioning in relation to this research are social media and digital communication, and in particular the heteronormative sharing of sexualised images of girl's bodies - a practice that involves the circulation of images as a form of social currency (Thorburn et al., 2021). Highlighting the way technological advances change the way we communicate while upholding traditional sociocultural norms, a participatory research project in Aotearoa (Thorburn et al., 2021) traced the way young women were pressured, judged and held responsible for the distribution of images of their bodies by their male counterparts – who themselves remained exempt from taking ethical responsibility for sharing nudes among their peers. Exploring the confluence of heteronormative, neoliberal and postfeminist sensibilities that interact with technological advances to complicate the landscape in which young women attempt to make sense of their sexualities, Thorburn et al. highlight the insufficiency of neoliberal conceptions of personal choice and individual responsibility for attending to the complex gendered norms that produce competing desires within heterosexual relationships, and that inform the coercive tactics that are sometimes employed to procure nude images of young women and girls.

In her prognostic exploration into how modern technologies and bodies intersect to create new visions, Donna Haraway describes how “(v)ision in this technological feast becomes unregulated gluttony; all seems not just mythically about the god trick of seeing everything from nowhere, but to have put the myth into ordinary practice. And like the god trick, this eye fucks the world to make techno-monsters” (1988, p. 581). Haraway's observation that technology multiplies and amplifies the patriarchal gaze was exemplified in 2013 with the *Roastbusters* case, wherein young men in Aotearoa boasted about their

## Developing Relationships that Matter

sexually exploitative treatment of teenage girls by sharing images of their conquests on Facebook. Although charges were only recently laid against some of the boys involved in this case, a flurry of media attention at the time sparked debates about the girl's complicity (Fitzpatrick & Burrows, 2017), and opened up a dialogue around rape culture alongside a 'boys will be boys' narrative that works to normalise sexual violence, and the particular forms of sexual harassment and abuse that are enabled by digital technologies (Gavey et al., 2021).

Media attention invoked by the Roastbusters case also opened up a conversation regarding the responsibility of schools to provide comprehensive sexuality education, and the lack of knowledge young people had about issues of consent and sexual coercion (Fitzpatrick & Burrows, 2017). This conversation grew in prominence a few years later when actress Alyssa Milano popularised activist Tarana Burke's 'Me Too' campaign on Twitter, resulting in a viral hashtag across social media that exposed the pervasiveness of sexual abuse, sexual harassment, rape culture, and gender inequality, and saw the #MeToo Movement gain international momentum and power (Harrington, 2022). The question of why the #MeToo Movement, which was developed in Black communities as an empathetic, relational approach to empowering survivors of sexual violence over a decade earlier (Burke, 2017), gained such widespread political traction where similar movements have historically failed has been asked by feminists (Harrington, 2022), who also acknowledge that its privileging of the experiences of middle-class white women fails to attend to the intersection of racial and sexual violence that Black and Indigenous women experience (see Burke, 2017; Crenshaw, 1997/2013). Despite the distortion of its original intent through neoliberal feminism's individualising forces (Roshanravan, 2021), the mainstreaming of the movement promoted understandings of sexual violence as inextricable from gender inequality, enabling a reframing of events such as the Roastbusters case as structural and systematic outcomes of gendered power relationships and troubling the historical locating of perpetrators of sexual violence as monstrous outliers whose behaviour somehow exists extraneously from acceptable sociocultural norms (Gavey, 2019).

The reframing of sexual violence as inextricable from gender inequality saw governmental interventions informed by therapeutic discourses that attend to the psychological effects of sexual violence on women (and locate the responsibility for overcoming these effects with the victims of sexual violence) shift away from the

## Developing Relationships that Matter

pathologisation of women's experiences to a focus on hegemonic masculinities, creating possibilities for troubling gendered power relationships (Gavey, 2019; Harrington, 2022). However, the successes of the #MeToo Movement can also be contextualised within transnational capitalism, and neoliberal agendas that work to ensure women can maximise a human capital that is obstructed by traditional gendered norms and inequalities (Harrington, 2022). The subsuming of feminist political activism within neoliberal, governmental and corporate interests complicates the potential for heteronormativity to be unlearned, and by redistributing the power to protect women back into the hands of the men who are held responsible for ensuring that the institutions they govern align with a postfeminist sensibility (in attempts to increase productivity and avoid sexual misconduct claims), the potential for hegemonic masculinities to be reconstituted through narratives of 'good vs bad men' is also opened up (Harrington, 2022). The way educators are negotiating these competing political interests within their classrooms is particularly salient within the context of this research, with the latest iteration of *Relationships and sexuality education: a guide for teachers, leaders, and board of trustees – Years 9-13* (RSE guidelines; Ministry of Education, 2020) responding to the current sociopolitical milieu by centring relationships, digital technologies, and consent.

### *Feminist Disruptions*

**Discourses of Desire.** Within feminist poststructural and discursive approaches to knowledge, the disruption of heteronormativity relies on the assumption that discourse and reality co-constitute each other in a way that enables possibilities for resistance to gendered power relationships by questioning that which is understood to be natural and universal (Davies & Gannon, 2005; Gavey, 1989). The assumption that discourse doesn't simply reflect material reality but also constitutes it is informed by Foucault's (1975/1995) genealogical approach to knowledge production, which positions the privileging of mind over body and culture over nature as effects of power/knowledge relationships that are inextricably linked and productive - and can therefore be resisted and rewritten (Tuin & Dolphijn, 2012). This discursive approach informs a body of work exploring how *discourses of desire* can open up potentials within sexuality education curriculums for young women to explore the possibilities of their own embodied experiences (Allen, 2012). Michelle Fine's (1988) seminal observation that sex education in the United States (US) frames sexuality within discourses of victimisation, vulnerability and danger while omitting discourses of desire has

## Developing Relationships that Matter

initiated an ongoing conversation regarding the possibilities of mobilising desire and pleasure as protective and empowering forms of resistance to the compulsory heterosexuality and conservative morality embedded in sex education curriculums. Fine theorised that creating space for young women and girls to explore their own desires could open up possibilities for disrupting discourses of risk and victimisation that position women as always passive and receptive, enabling a shift wherein young women can be reimagined as sexual subjects, and aligning desire and pleasure with sexual empowerment and autonomy. This re-imagining of young people as sexual subjects in their own right requires a shift in cultural values, disrupting the way “adolescent sexuality has been equated by the research, clinical, and policy collective with medical pathology and sociocultural deviance” (O’Sullivan & Thompson, 2014, p. 433) in modern Western societies, and calling into question the normative moralising and surveillance of adolescent sexuality that emerges when childhood innocence is unquestionably romanticised (Jackson, 1990, as cited in O’Sullivan & Thompson, 2014).

Jackson and Weatherall remind us that “sexual health issues are pervasively moral and political” (2010a, p. 49), and critiques of feminist approaches that centre desire remind us that sexuality education is a site wherein various stakeholders (e.g. parents, schools, governments, religious groups), *including feminists* compete in the surveillance and governing of young women’s bodies (see Allen, 2012; Lamb, 2010; Rasmussen, 2015; Tolman, 2012). Central to these critiques are analyses of how the neoliberal commodification and sexualisation of bodies inform how young women experience desire (Tolman, 2012), how we go about defining ‘authentic embodiment’ and sexual empowerment (Lamb, 2010), how postfeminist sensibilities require that young women be held responsible for achieving sexual autonomy (Tolman, 2012), and how ethical considerations of desire might vary between groups (Rasmussen, 2015).

Responding to these critiques, Fine and McClelland (2006) revisited the analysis Fine (1988) had contributed almost 20 years earlier, and noted that a discourse of desire was still missing from sex education curriculums in the US - where policy is dominated by ‘abstinence only until marriage’ guidelines that alongside emergency contraception and parental consent mandates inequitably target the bodies of marginalised groups (bringing to mind the recent changes to abortion legislation in the US). Highlighting the way the sexuality of young women has become a “dense transfer point for relations of power” (Foucault, 1990, as cited

## Developing Relationships that Matter

in Fine & McClelland, 2006, p. 299), the authors position comprehensive sexuality education within a human rights framework, and reconsider desire as a conceptual tool for promoting critical inquiry that creates possibilities for how young women come to understand and negotiate their sexualities. In particular, Fine and McClelland mobilise *thick desire* as a framework for attending to the changing times, acknowledging a dissonance between the saturation of caricatures of adolescent sexuality that are commodified within popular culture (with the help of technological advances including the Internet) and the increasingly conservative approach to sexuality education in schools in the US. Conceiving thick desire as a way of engaging young women in conversations that matter, the authors position sexuality within the broader context of “social and interpersonal structures that enable a person to engage in the political act of wanting” (Fine & McClelland, 2006, p. 325). Here, sexual politics are explicitly linked to young people’s entitlement to critically engage with how the broader structures that shape their lives create possibilities for both danger and pleasure, and to imagine futures for themselves that include equal access to education, healthcare, reproductive rights, protection from abuse and coercion, and the structural conditions that enable such futures to be supported.

**A Discourse of Erotics.** Fine and McClelland (2006) argue that the right for young women to have conversations that explore sexuality is central to this imagining, and research suggests that young people desire more comprehensive conversations to occur within sexuality programmes here in Aotearoa (Allen, 2001, 2007, 2008; Jackson & Weatherall, 2010a, 2010b). Louisa Allen (2001) argues for the inclusion of a *discourse of erotics* in sexuality education, as a way of bridging the gap between knowledge and practice in adolescent sexual behaviours. Citing Wight’s (1992) review of research with young people in Britain, Allen highlights the social determinants that inform safe sexual practices, and in particular the way gendered power relationships and role expectations act as impediments to applying sexual knowledge to sexual practices. Central to Allen’s conception of a discourse of erotics is the potential ‘talking through pleasure’ would have for engaging students in conversations that centre sexual agency and consent. In her research with young people, Allen identifies a flaw in the underlying logic of sexuality education when it is assumed that the acquisition of knowledge will lead to changes in sexual behaviour, and the divide between the knowledge prescribed within official sexuality education curriculums and the sexual knowledge gained from lived experiences – with young people viewing the latter as more useful. In this way, Allen problematises the assumption that young people will make

## Developing Relationships that Matter

good choices if they are informed on risk-management practices that focus on avoiding unwanted pregnancies and STI's. Arguing instead for sexuality education that draws from the embodied experiences of young people, this approach resists the moralising and surveillance traditionally associated with adolescent sexuality (while also opening up new modes of surveillance?) and acknowledges the dissonance that emerges when young people are denied the status of sexual subjects and are instead positioned as always at-risk and in need of governance. Here, the binary oppositions of teacher/student, adult/child, and knowledge/experience are disrupted, creating possibilities for conversations between educators and students that allow young people to draw knowledge from their own embodied experiences - and perhaps give the adults entrusted with their care an insight into what it means to inhabit the complex virtual and material worlds they are becoming in.

**Feminist Posthumanism and New Materialism.** Extending from and working through the discursive approaches that shape the existing literature on sexuality education, feminist posthuman and new materialist theories respond to the limitations of humanist approaches that assume sexual agency can be located within a self-contained and individual body - and instead draw from multidisciplinary approaches to position materiality (and therefore sexuality) as always relational, contingent, complex, and emergent (Alldred & Fox, 2018). Although posthuman enquiry manifests in a variety of approaches, Cecilia Åsberg and Rosi Braidotti (2018) cite Donna Haraway's (1988, 1991) *cyborg ontology* as a particularly useful place to start thinking about the complex processes that inform the Anthropocene. Mapping the entanglement of nature, culture, technology, science, politics, and human and non-human entities, Haraway advocates for ethical engagement with the constructed-ness of gender, class and race within colonialist and capitalist agendas – arguing against the assumed naturalness of discriminate categorisation in favour of cyborg and hybrid partial identities that are always in flux and can therefore trouble the boundaries carved out by the historical myths produced within the patriarchy. Braidotti's (2011) theory of *dis-identification* articulates the way inequitable power relationships discomfort how we feel about situating ourselves within discrete categories by creating a feeling of simultaneously belonging and not belonging. Working to unsettle the fictive binaries (e.g. woman/man, nature/culture, animal/human, machine/flesh) that cannot contain our relationality, a dis-identification with normative power relations and narratives of the self becomes political when the complexities and ambiguity's that push and pull through the disposable bodies produced through the colonising forces of transnational capitalism are accounted for. Through processes of dis-

## Developing Relationships that Matter

identification, Braidotti advocates for the archaic logic that supports the structural inequities that shape what we can do in the world to be unlearned, creating new possibilities and ethical re-imaginings.

Acknowledging the way poststructural and discursive approaches have successfully traced the processes by which subjectivity, agency, desire, and sexuality become socially constituted, posthuman theories also acknowledge the limitations of poststructuralism when it fails to challenge the anthropocentric positioning of sexuality within individual human bodies (Fox & Alldred, 2013). Here, an ontological shift is required that moves away from the privileging of the hu-Man, and toward an onto-epistemology that rejects Cartesian mind/body dualism and liberal individualism in favour of a materiality that is always embedded, embodied, affective and relational (Braidotti, 2018). The concern with textuality and social construction found within poststructural approaches is also transformed in posthuman cartographies that centre materiality and social production, and the possibilities for sexuality that are potentialised (or constrained) by the relational and mutable flows between human and non-human entities (Alldred & Fox, 2018). Instead of denoting an absence or lack, desire is reimagined in posthuman approaches as a productive and creative force that extends beyond and pre-exists individual human bodies, opening up possibilities for both augmenting and restricting affective capacities (Fox & Alldred, 2013).

Central to this understanding of desire (and sexuality) is Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) working of *assemblages*, wherein the reality or truth of an idea, social institution, body or thing becomes less salient than how the relationships between entities produce affective flows and intensities that are continually shifting within and between bodies in processes of becoming. Here, agency is reimagined as the ability to affect or be affected, and assemblages themselves become affective mechanisms that produce capacities for feeling, doing and desiring. Working in ways that both *territorialise* (shape and restrict how a body can affect and be affected) and *deterritorialise* (open up possibilities for what bodies can do, desire, and become), these affective flows can be understood as impersonal and productive (Fox & Alldred, 2013).

A body of work has emerged that explores how the mapping of assemblages can be employed to produce knowledges of sexuality (e.g. Braidotti, 2011; Fox & Alldred, 2013; MacCormack, 2018; Probyn, 1995) research practices (e.g. Alldred & Fox, 2018; Braidotti, 2012; St. Pierre, 2013) and sexual education policy (e.g. Alldred & Fox, 2018; Garland-

## Developing Relationships that Matter

Levitt, 2020), providing me with new ways of conceptualising this project (which can itself be considered an assemblage). In particular, Sarah Garland-Levitt's (2020) reimagining of sexual education policy through feminist, new materialist theory expands on Louisa Allen's (2001) research into the knowledge/practice gap by mapping the way schools have historically prioritised the mind while marginalising and censoring the body, which is reflected in the assessable achievement objectives embedded in sexual education policy in Aotearoa. Drawing from Barad's (2007) concept of *knowing in being*, Garland-Levitt argues for sexuality education that acknowledges the entanglement of mind, body, emotion, knowing, and doing, and a centring of the embodied knowledge of young people and processes of becoming, rather than measurable outcomes. In her close reading of sexuality education policy, Garland-Levitt traces the discourses, social institutions, values, and ideas that contribute to sexuality assemblages in Aotearoa, potentialising a re-imagining of the processes by which young people become knowing *in being*. In this way, the affective flows that traverse through sexuality education policy can be mapped, an approach that Alldred and Fox (2018) extend further to include educators and the micro-political flows that produce sexual capacities in school students in the UK. Conceptualising sexual citizenship as "an emergent property of the material flux of affects between humans, things, social collectivities and ideas" (p. 17), the authors trace young peoples' capacities to participate in the social worlds they are becoming in through sexuality education assemblages, and identify possibilities for re-imagining sexuality education praxis.

## **Conclusion**

Emerging from the process of reading through theory, this project becomes a rhizomatic (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) approach to researching sexuality education, wherein the relationship between students, educators, schools, and sexuality education policy in Aotearoa (and the affective flows that emerge from this particular sexuality education assemblage) will be mapped. This approach to research is not an uncomplicated one, with some theorists claiming that posthuman and traditional qualitative methods are inherently incompatible (Taylor, 2016; St.Pierre, 2016). St. Pierre (2016) argues for reading through theory when attempting to embark on posthuman research, allowing for an *ethico-onto-epistemological* approach that de-centres the assumed agency of researchers (who design research that sets out to solve problems and answer questions) in favour of a concern with what the research *does* (see also Allen, 2018). Here, the processes involved in doing research

## Developing Relationships that Matter

become a site of discovery, and my methodological foundations emerge from a process of reading through (and locating myself within) the history of feminist theory. My literature review has mapped the history of feminist attempts to make visible, disrupt, and decolonise the way gendered power relationships are constituted. Here, identifying the affective flows that open up possibilities for decolonising the institutionalised heteronormativity that informs sexuality education praxis in secondary schools in Aotearoa becomes the aim of this project, through a process that is made visible as this research progresses.

## Notes On Current Sexuality Education Policy in Aotearoa

The latest iteration of sexuality education guidelines (Ministry of Education, 2020) in Aotearoa respond to a historical gap between policy and practice that has resulted in the inconsistent implementation of sexuality education curriculum in schools, and critiques that inadequate attention has been paid to relationships, sexual and cultural diversity, positive sexuality, and gender (see Education Review Office [ERO], 2018; Ellis & Bentham, 2021; Le Grice & Braun, 2018). Underlying the revised RSE guidelines is a holistic, whole-school approach informed by four concepts including: *Hauora* (a Māori philosophy that includes four interdependent dimensions of wellbeing - *wairua*, *hinengaro*, *tinana*, and *whānau* - loosely translated as the spiritual, mental and emotional, physical, and family or social determinants of health); attitudes and values - including the development of personal responsibility and respect for the rights of others; a social-ecological perspective that takes into account the interrelationship between individuals, others, and society; and health promotion - which includes involving students in creating healthy emotional and physical environments. The renaming of sexuality education as ‘relationship and sexuality education’ also emphasises a holistic approach that takes into consideration the relational determinants of sexual well-being, a shift away from the historical focus on preventing unwanted pregnancy and STI’s.

The RSE guidelines (2020) also take into account societal changes, acknowledging shifting cultural norms regarding gender and sexuality, increased use of digital communication, social media, and pornography, increasingly diverse populations, and the importance of conversations that consider healthy relationships and consent. Holistic approaches to sexuality education have been successfully implemented in Sweden, where adolescent sexuality is framed within guidelines that centre sexuality as a source of joy and connection (Fine, 1988), and in the Netherlands and Finland where sex-positive sexuality

## Developing Relationships that Matter

education embedded in a rights-based framework has been associated with improved sexual health outcomes for adolescents (Vanwesenbeeck, 2020). The possible social benefits of well implemented sexuality education include the promotion of gender equality, increased self-esteem and health outcomes, and reducing school drop-out rates, sexual violence and coercion (see Ellis & Bentham, 2021; ERO, 2018; Greytak et al., 2013; Tolman, 2012; Vanwesenbeeck, 2020), underscoring public health goals that rely on effectively putting into practice policy guidelines that centre holistic and positive approaches.

Research suggests that the effective implementation of sexuality education is contingent on a variety of factors, including culturally appropriate frameworks, comprehensive teacher training, explicit considerations of gendered power relationships, social acceptance of adolescent sexuality, and student involvement in curriculum design (ERO, 2018; UNESCO et al., 2018; Vanwesenbeeck, 2020). A report from the ERO (2018) - an external agency that evaluates and reports on education in schools in Aotearoa - found that most schools were delivering sexuality education that met the minimum standards of the curriculum; however, some schools were not even meeting these, and many schools had large areas that needed improving in order for a holistic approach to be fully realised. Although the basic biological aspects of sex and puberty were being covered, in-depth considerations of relationships, consent, sexual violence, pornography, digital communication, and social media were reported as insufficient. With research suggesting that the development of gender norms in early adolescence informs the foundation of romantic relationships and heteronormative contradictory standards (Moreau et al., 2019), this gap between policy and practice becomes a missed opportunity for contemporaneously engaging students in conversations that explore the ways broader social structures inform their own gendered becoming.

The limited possibilities for sexuality education when it is embedded in institutional spaces has been critiqued, with Jackson and Weatherall (2010b) observing that “an assessment-driven curriculum provides a poor soil in which to cultivate an ‘imagined’ feminist education as, for example: open and frank discussions about sexual practices and feelings, encouraging critique of gendered practices and notions, taking an embodied approach, providing for students to negotiate the curriculum around their needs and desires” (p. 181). However, its position as an authority on knowledge production makes continual enquiry into the practice of sexuality education in schools imperative (Jackson & Weatherall,

## Developing Relationships that Matter

2010a). While Anita Harris (2005) argues that young women have found ways to resist the surveillance and commodification of their sexualities in alternative 'safe-spaces' (e.g. zines, websites, comics), the question of how schools are putting the newest guidelines into practice acknowledges sexuality education as a crucial site wherein gendered power relationships can be (re)produced, and resisted.

Here, this research becomes concerned with how the latest changes to sexuality education curriculum in Aotearoa have been interpreted, embodied, and put into praxis in schools, and what possibilities have been opened up for engaging students in conversations that centre the knowing that becomes in their own embodied experiences. With the foundation of RSE resting on the contradictory cornerstones of Māori philosophy, neoliberal attitudes and values, a social-ecological approach, and health promotion, the ways in which students and educators are interacting with these affective flows (alongside their own embodied experiences within educational institutions) becomes the focus of this research. First, I will need to explore the way my own experiences interact with this project, by using standpoint theory to locate myself within this particular research assemblage.

### Methodology (Ethico-Onto-Epistemology)

#### Standpoint Theory: Locating Myself within the Research

*My Mother's home was always full. Born in 1958, she was one of six children who were severely beaten by my grandfather. She escaped at sixteen, pregnant with my older brother, into a marriage with my father. He taught English as a second language, so after I was born in 1978 I spent the first years of my life in Nauru and Fiji. There is a photo of my brother and I drinking Coca-Cola stolen from our father under a palm tree, smiling and golden. They divorced when I was 4yo, and my father got custody of us out of spite, so my mother (ostensibly kidnapping us) fled to Australia. At least that's one of the stories I've been told. My father calls her a madwoman and she calls him a profanity, so my attempts at sense-making are obscured. Regardless, we ended up back in the small town where I was born, a single mother with her two kids. I still drive by the old brown farmhouse where we lived from time to time, and over the years I have watched its gradual decomposition.*

*My mother and her siblings survived together, so there was always more than one Mum in the house. I call them the Aunty-Mothers, my mother and her sisters, a cacophony of witches with hairy armpits and free-floating breasts. Always with a fag or joint in hand, cackling together or screaming at each-other while us kids (the Cousin-Sister-Brother's) ran wild in the bush or on the streets outside. The uncles would quietly deliver the goods produced by their labour – croissants and ounces of dope. They were always home, my Aunty-Mothers, and the family friends they collected over the years. There was a cult of them, and a guru with a grating voice exclaiming tired platitudes about the gift of life, who I quickly decided was an idiot. Mum tells me stories about the tantrums I would have, excessive and public, in buses and supermarkets and playgrounds. How the Aunty-Mothers, embarrassed, would tell her I needed spanking, but that she would just ignore me until I had quietened down. How as a toddler I would run into the ocean, fearless, and keep running until the water rushed over my head.*

*We moved around a lot, from this rental to that, with this family or the other, even after Mum met my Stepfather. I would visit my blood-father once or twice a year in some dark flat in the city, his brown-stained toilet and sausages for dinner making him strange. At Mum's we ate lentils and homemade hummus, and aside from the Aunty-Mother-Cousin-Sister-Brother chaos and an occasional party with scary adults on LSD claiming to BE GOD,*

## Developing Relationships that Matter

*she kept an obsessively clean house, and baked perfectly timed whole-food cookies so that the smell of oats and honey welcomed us home from school.*

*My Mother and Stepfather spent much of their time bickering over the minutiae of our daily lives - how much money it would cost to fill the water tank or why it was so hard for him to pick his pants up off the floor (the rage with which my mother wields a vacuum cleaner is clamouring). The Aunty-Mothers would wander through their elaborate English Cottage-style gardens, roses and sweet peas laced with opium poppies and crawling vines. Or sit at the kitchen table drinking coffee and smoking (‘you kids get away from the table!’), carefully dissecting the meanings behind each other’s idiosyncrasies. Sometimes I would hang around to listen for leaked glimpses into their secret adult world, but mostly I would hide in my room reading books – recoiling from the deafening banality of it all.*

Donna Haraway (1988) argues for an approach to knowledge production that centres partial perspectives situated within particular sociocultural, historical, and local contexts. In this way, she seeks to disrupt the biased truth claims produced within the dominant sciences and technologies of the (colonial and capitalist) West, wherein the violence of patriarchal objectivity is constructed as value-free. While acknowledging that social constructionist approaches have produced valuable methods for deconstructing universal truth claims, Haraway also explores the potential for women’s lived experiences to be reduced to disembodied texts within constructionist paradigms, and promotes the use of partial perspectives in order to avoid a descent into the abyss of linguistic relativity. By forming connections between embodied visions and situated understandings, Haraway hopes that “meanings and bodies that have a chance for life” (1988, p. 580) can be built. As I write, my hope is that my own situatedness will be revealed and refined, providing a site from which to elucidate the problems this research sets out to address.

This attempt to position myself in relationship to the research also acknowledges the partial perspective I bring to this project, and the fragments of my own embodied experiences that are woven through and co-constituted within it. Situating myself is no easy task, with my supervisor advising me to consider my emotional relationship to the work, and the voices of feminist philosophers weaving a chorus of *embodiment* throughout the literature (see Bartky, 1998; Beauvoir, 1949/1988; Butler, 2011; Haraway, 1988; Lamb, 2010; Wollstonecraft, 1792/1988). I find this call for embodied knowledge discomfiting, laden with the violence and contradiction that define my symbolic and lived in female-marked flesh. Adrienne Rich

## Developing Relationships that Matter

argued that we should begin with the body, not to transcend it (just when I imagined I might escape!), but as an action toward reclamation that works toward locating “the grounds from which to speak with authority as women” (1985, p. 9).

*I am 43 as I write this, in the middle of some kind of transition wherein my body, having always responded to the gazes that assessed me as I walked the streets, is becoming less visible - or at least less attuned to the stares. This is a welcome invisibility, one I have been cultivating since I reprioritised my inner-world through a return to my studies in my 30s. The centrality of my relationship with my 6yo son in my daily life also pushes my relationship with the outside world to the periphery. I no longer spend my time adorning my body for imagined judgement, or staring into mirrors as if to find the truth of myself in my reflection. If I have time I will brush my teeth before dropping my son off to school, still wearing my pyjamas. This letting go is a relief and a loss. I spend my time in bed, reading and writing, not out in the world working in a public-facing role. A shift from wanting to be seen to wanting a space of my own. I have spent the past few years fit and strong, lifting weights to a soundtrack of loud hip-hop music, imagining a virile journey through middle age. But my body, my relentlessly strong body, has begun to betray me. Sciatica and insomnia haunt my nighntimes, causing my concentration to flicker in the daylight. My knees are arthritic and torn - one of them locks up painfully and won't straighten for days, so that sometimes I am bedridden. Waiting for a surgery that seems to be endlessly deferred.*

*The weakening of my body has led to a newfound fear of old age, and of the consequences of punishing my body for so long. I imagine joint replacement surgeries, a hunched back, meagre items placed carefully into a shopping trolley, incontinence and destitution (I should perhaps attempt a re-imagining). Years spent standing on concrete floors, making coffee, rushing back and forward from tables where people waited to be served, pouring drinks till the grimy early hours of the morning, mopping and sweeping, lifting rubbish bins and boxes of beer. Drugs, liquor, chain-smoking, sex-work, abortions, traumatic grief, hepatitis C, Ribavirin, Interferon, pregnancy, cesarean, sleeplessness, self-lossness, reinvention and reclaiming. My particular body requires much unpacking. Still, I feel more embodied now than ever before. The feeling of being inside myself, looking out, and looking back with affection. Tracing my memories I sense the disembodiment of my youth, the feeling of being somehow outside myself - of seeing myself through someone else's eyes. The scars I carry, on my belly and my arms and my knees and my face, reminders of the inchoate*

## Developing Relationships that Matter

*agency of a young woman's body let loose in the world. I mourn the lack of gentleness with which my body has been worn, as much as I admire the fearlessness and curiosity with which I embraced my experiences.*

Sharon Lamb (2010), in her critique of feminist ideals regarding adolescent sexuality, sums up my unease with the process of embodiment nicely when she troubles the idea that 'authentic' embodiment is something we should expect young women to achieve, when many grown women still aspire to it. As a middle-aged woman interested in exploring the possibilities for sexuality education to provoke a dialogue regarding the implications of heteronormativity here in Aotearoa, acknowledging my feelings of ambivalence is a necessary step toward reflexively engaging in this project. However, this ambivalence doesn't negate my ability to envision (from a partial perspective) a space wherein young women can explore the heteronormative, postfeminist, and neoliberal scaffolding on which the fabric of their sexualities is negotiated, and re-imagine new possibilities for what they can do in the world (see Brown-Bowers et al., 2015; Butler, 2006; Gavey, 2012; Meenagh, 2017). Haraway (1988) describes a kind of re-embodied vision that resists the gaze of an internalised "panoptical male connoisseur" (Bartky, 1998, p. 34) by looking outwards from a situated and critical perspective, and it is this kind of embodiment that I hope will evolve as the research progresses. Thusly inspired, and despite my apprehension, I will now attempt to situate myself somewhere - here, where I stand. Rich (1985) argued for a feminist approach that acknowledges the *politics of location*, an exploration into our positionality wherein the fluid ways in which we locate ourselves helps us to understand how power (and especially privilege) informs our worldview and lived experiences. Claiming that "all privilege is ignorant to the core" (1985, p. 18), Rich examined her own whiteness, and the limitations, possibilities and responsibilities her positioning engendered.

Here, it would seem fitting to locate myself as a white woman, a white feminist, embodying the privileges enabled by this positioning. Yet this positioning feels inauthentic to me, with the 'white feminist' of my imagination belonging elsewhere - America perhaps, in a middle-class neighbourhood, educated and empowered with the confidence of her relative wealth. In this way she becomes homogenous, lacking in the particularity of her becoming, and of the particular ways her whiteness should be accounted for. Aimee Carrillo Rowe (2005) unpacks Rich's politics of location and the way it produces a subject (an 'I') devoid of the meaning that evolves out of being in relationship, and of how our relationships constitute

## Developing Relationships that Matter

our becoming and belonging. She argues instead for a *feminist politics of relation*, a location that allows us to be held accountable for the “collective conditions out of which our agency, experience, and consciousness emerge” (2005, p. 15).

Instead of positioning myself as white, I acknowledge that my experiences emerge from a particular geographical location. Where I stand is in my homeland of Aotearoa - a bi-cultural (and multicultural) island nation at the bottom of the world. Although in the broader context of my global citizenship I can be categorised as white, when I am at home I am Pākehā. By positioning myself as Pākehā I acknowledge the principles of partnership, participation, and protection founded in Te Tiriti o Waitangi/The Treaty of Waitangi (Te Tiriti), and the ways in which Māori ways of being in the world inform my sense of belonging. This process of situating myself also acknowledges the history of colonisation and its ongoing effects on Māori well-being (Durie, 2003; Love, 2008; Waitere & Johnston, 2009), and the privilege of living out my daily life within dominant institutions and social structures that share my language, and recognise me at face value as someone who belongs (albeit a belonging that interacts in particular ways with gender and class). Black and Huygens (2016) promote the claiming of a Pākehā culture as a crucial step towards ensuring that marginalised groups are meaningfully included in our institutions, by making the cultural markers and privileges of Pākehā identity visible, and troubling the values of individuality and independence. By locating myself as Pākehā within a feminist politics of relation, and by weaving narratives of the relationships that shape my belonging throughout this project, my aim is to disrupt the invisibility and homogeneity of my whiteness.

Dr Catherine Love (2008) reminds us that Māori are already required to develop a bicultural vision, and make difficult spiritual, emotional, and professional decisions when negotiating institutions embedded within colonial discourses. Love acknowledges both the blessings and burdens that emerge from negotiating her bicultural vision, both of which I believe should be shared by Pākehā in order for meaningfully reciprocal relationships to be built. Although I have experienced many of the blessings of living in a bicultural nation, my journey toward understanding the burdens of a bicultural vision is an evolving one. Here I acknowledge Waitere and Johnston’s (2009) call for a space wherein Māori women can explore their own particularity, so that a reflexive turn toward my negotiation of a Pākehā identity also acknowledges Māori aspirations for the self-governing of their own research spaces. Thus, my position as Pākehā becomes a location wherein I continue to listen, and

## Developing Relationships that Matter

reflexively examine how my own culture shapes the ideologies that inform our educational institutions – an approach that attempts to work in its own small way toward decolonisation.

Having recently returned, my relationship to my homeland is fragmented, and made even more disconnected by the social distancing required during a global pandemic. Isolated with my family in the rural Far North of my childhood while we recover from Omicron, my Facebook feed is a stream of images capturing the floods that have devastated the community I called home for 14 years (in the Bundjalung Nation/Northern Rivers region of Australia) - a daily reminder of global warming and impending doom. Significantly, this panorama also provides a backdrop for the lives our young people are attempting to carve out, and the unsettling historical moment that contextualises this project.

I returned home after my own anxieties heightened in response to catastrophic bushfires, a crippling housing crisis, uncertainty around how COVID would play out - and how these issues would impact my ability to provide a stable home for my young child. As a middle-aged, Pākehā woman with few material resources, I am currently negotiating my own long-term heterosexual relationship. These categories provide a starting point for me to locate myself; however, the woman they paint a picture of still seems an imaginary one. A more textured account seems necessary in order to describe my relationship to this research, and to connect my particular embodied vision to the “problems to be explained” (Harding, 1992, p. 443). In this way, the sprinkling of my own storied experiences throughout this text becomes a process for exploring my own particularity, and the way my relationship to the research informs the possibilities I am hoping to find.

Already, these excerpts reveal my location as a working-class woman employed in low-paid hospitality positions for the past 25 years, but it was becoming a mother that brought sharply into focus the material reality of compulsory heteronormativity. Sandra Bartky (1998) describes the way heteronormativity exerts its disciplinary power from everywhere and nowhere, as internalised as it is institutional. The sheer number of women in my inner-circle who have left their marriages as they enter their 40s has further cemented my interest in the problems women encounter in heterosexual relationships. Citing a variety of reasons for leaving, including their inequitable share of domestic labour, a lack of sexual interest from or in their partner (or sexual coercion from their partner), and financial, verbal and emotional abuse, my amazing friends are now negotiating single and co-parenting, a change in economic status, and feelings of loss and failure. Often, the women I love are also

## Developing Relationships that Matter

made to feel ashamed for leaving, losing friends who judge them for breaking up what were perceived to be perfectly good homes.

The disempowering effects of the shame that women inequitably experience is traced by Bartky, who defines shame as a “pervasive affective attunement to the social environment” positioned within the “larger universe of patriarchal social relations” (1990, p.85) that manifests diffusely through general feelings of inadequacy. Jennifer Manion (2003) identifies the role as moral agents in the maintenance of interpersonal relationships as one that makes women particularly vulnerable to feelings of shame. For Margaret Wetherell (2015) affect and emotion are always institutionally, socially, and historically entangled in an *affective practice*, and it is the experience of shame in the context of compulsory heterosexuality that is of interest to me here.

One might think, when tracing my re-remembered feelings of shameful embodiment, that I might arrive back to my years of drug addiction, sex-work, or hepatitis C infection, and there are traces of shame that emerge from these experiences. However, it is the *stigma* attached to these experiences that made me question their inclusion in this text, along with a wariness that my imagined reader might expect some kind of redemption narrative that I do not choose to centre in my daily life. I decided to include them as an action toward opening up the dialogue I am trying to attend to in this research, wherein speaking about our embodied experiences becomes normative within institutional spaces. This is a reflexive attempt toward disrupting the transmission of shame onto young women’s bodies, and a entry point into discussing how my own embodied experiences can be explored in relation to themes of resistance and constraint. However, it is within the more mundane context of my heterosexual relationships that I sense most acutely my own embodied experiences of shame.

*At the age of 15 I began visiting the same café everyday, located on a notorious stretch of road in Auckland’s red-light district. The music was loud, the aesthetics industrial - with a lever-handled coffee machine stripped down and re-fitted with tortured metal-work so that the making of coffee became a performance. The frenetic energy of the space, which was nestled on a busy intersection, resembled a train station or a factory or a theatre. This was in the 1990s, when ‘heroin chic’, grunge music, hip-hop and rave parties were emerging as the cornerstones of youth culture. The café was known to be a meeting space for drug addicts and musicians – although its customer base was diverse. I ended up working there, forming*

## Developing Relationships that Matter

*relationships with my employers that gave me a sense of family, so that it became a kind of home to me.*

*I worked most of my shifts with my boyfriend, who had introduced me to intravenous drug use. Eventually, we hitchhiked to the immense mountains of the South, cleaning up our act. After we returned we set up house together in a warehouse downtown. We would cook dinner, and I would watch him play video games with his friends or clean the house. I began to feel restless – a common theme in my future experiences of living with men. After a few months I went to a party with some friends from school and drank a bottle of vodka. There was a band playing punk rock music, with a lead singer that looked to me like a god - stage-lit with blue eyes that found me in the crowd. One of those moments straight out of a movie where our eyes lock with a recognition of desire and the world around us fades away. I wanted him.*

*We spent the night together, and a couple of days later I confessed to my boyfriend. I moved out of the flat, we started working separate shifts, and my bosses stopped looking me in the eye. My exes' friends would come and heckle me at work, and I lost contact with our mutual friends. I was in(side) the wrong, unfaithful, a girl who had failed to act with propriety. At the same time, I was being stalked by a middle-aged customer, a social worker who would bring me gifts and wait on the street for me to pass by. My bosses laughed at my discomfort (he was such a nice guy!), not believing me until years later when they found posters he had hung on streetlights and bus stops, demanding the right to date me. I left my job, the place that had felt like a home, and started working late nights at a bar. My intention was to live alone, attend University, and maybe see the punk-rock singer once or twice a week. I craved independence. Instead, I stopped eating, started using heavy drugs again, and avoided familiar faces - walking quickly with my head down in the shadows of buildings, making myself small.*

Sandra Harding (1992) mobilises an approach that centres the context of discovery, in order to begin research with the *strong objectivity* required of standpoint theory. In this way, the broader social structures that inform my situatedness can be made visible in the research question. However, standpoint theory is not only about situating the researcher - it also describes a political stance concerned with disrupting the subject/object relationship and the question of who can know and who can be known (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1992). Thus, knowledge is produced by identifying the problems experienced by disenfranchised groups,

## Developing Relationships that Matter

whose voices have been silenced within dominant institutions. With its roots grounded in Marxism, standpoint theory questions the validity of knowledge produced by those in power and instead locates the context of discovery within oppressed groups whose deeper understandings about themselves and their oppressors emerge from their experiences of negotiating the power imbalances that shape their lives (Rutherford et al., 2015).

By reflexively positioning ourselves as researchers in relationship to these missing voices, new questions can be asked that make trouble for the assumed objectivity of knowledge produced within dominant institutions. Here, I find myself circling back to Lamb's (2010) concerns regarding feminist explorations into adolescent embodiment, and my own positioning as a mature woman interested in exploring a space wherein the voices of young women themselves are often omitted (see Allen, 2008; Fine & McClelland, 2006; Jackson & Weatherall, 2010a; Morison & Herbert, 2020). By reflecting on my own embodied experiences, a connection has also been made between the social transmission of shame, and how this exerts power over young women's bodies. Simone de Beauvoir (1949/1988) traces the way shame interacts with power and femininity, and how gendered social meanings become embodied. In particular, de Beauvoir explains the way women's bodies act as signifiers of difference and inferiority, which informs the way girls' experiences of adolescent development can be linked to the embodiment of shame.

*Despite the Aunty-Mother's walking me around their gardens and showing me which of the beautiful flowers might resemble my vulva, and the conspicuous placement of 'Our Bodies, Ourselves' (The Boston Women's Health Book Collective, 1976) on our coffee table, my menarche experience was still an experience I associate with feelings of shame. I remember lying in my cast iron bed after telling my mother, and begging her not to call her sisters. Shortly thereafter, the Aunty-Mother's and a few family friends paraded into my bedroom, bearing flowers and chocolates, as if they were wise-men making offerings to a bleeding messiah. I was furious. My mother had betrayed me to the wolves.*

*We had recently moved to the city, and I was attending intermediate school. We lived on the outside border of an affluent suburb, and the school I attended was very different to the small country schools I was used to. We would line up for uniform checks before class, and I formed no memorable connections with my teachers. The students were predominantly Pākehā, and when I visited their houses they were newly built, with special plastic holders for the paper towels and an excess of space. The mothers wore makeup with proper hairstyles*

## Developing Relationships that Matter

*and spoke in soft tones. The houses we lived in had crystals hanging in the windows casting rainbows on old couches covered with throws, and the Aunty-Mothers laughed loudly, snorting and swearing like sailors.*

*My brother, who had been briefly living with our father, returned home to us changed. He became violent, pushing my mother through the glass front door and punching holes in the walls. He was brought home by the police every weekend, for shoplifting and tagging and fighting. There were family group conferences with the police, and the other, older Cousin-Sister-Brothers were all doing the same. My mother didn't trust the police, or teachers or doctors or psychologists. We were given homeopathic sugar pills instead of vaccinations, alongside a heavy dose of mistrust in the status quo.*

*During this time, my stepdad had an affair, and Mum withdrew from us. We could hear her late at night drinking and crying and screaming but in the mornings she would stay asleep until we had left for school. I would wake up early, before anyone else was around, and listen to her old records - then steal some of her smokes before catching two buses to school. My mother and I started fighting, I remember the screaming but I don't remember what the arguments were about. Later, Mum told me that she felt as if I hated her.*

*I had always been a model student, but at the start of high school something changed. My intense friendships consumed my time, and we started drinking and smoking dope. We took magic mushrooms and datura and skipped school. My friends and I all started having sex at the age of twelve or thirteen (the very definition of an anti-climax), with the older boys competing to deflower us and us lying on our backs and letting them. I had expected something so forbidden to be more exciting, and instinctively felt there must be something more to it – pleasure or mystery or some kind of feeling. Although there had already been sexual play (the neighbour boy with his spaghetti breath, the role-playing and knicker showing with my girlfriends), this kind of stuff wasn't spoken about, and I began to feel as if there was something abnormally sexual about me. This must have been why my best-friends' Dad try to kiss me when he was drunk, and what made grown men look at me strangely so that I would blush without quite knowing why.*

My memories at this time reveal feelings of embodied shame that intersect with gender and class. Although I now realise that we weren't living in abject poverty, that we were privileged in our own way, it was the relative wealth and relatively conservative values

## Developing Relationships that Matter

of my schoolmates that made me feel different. As if I wasn't able to perform my whiteness or femininity in socially sanctioned ways. Bev Skeggs (1997) explicates the ways working-class women have historically been excluded from being categorised as feminine, and are constructed as robust and masculine in opposition to the docility and fragility that define a femininity associated with women of a higher socio-economic status. She continues by tracing the ways working-class women's sexuality is pathologised as excessive, and how a critical awareness of these judgements make them particularly resistant to the values of the dominant classes. Here I situate myself as a working-class woman, living in an Aotearoa informed by global capitalism, wherein the gap between rich and poor continues to widen (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017; Morley & Ablett, 2017). My interest is in how this situating informed my experiences within educational institutions during my adolescence, and continues to inform the context of discovery this research emerges from.

As a teenager, I lashed out at my teachers, feeling they were more concerned with controlling my behaviour than responding to my experiences. As a result of my resistance to accepting authority, I was indefinitely suspended from school for 'continual disobedience', ran away from home, and began living independently from a young age. My mistrust of authority figures can be traced back to the values my family had instilled in me, to my feelings of embodied shame (of not belonging), and the chaos I was experiencing at home. My failure to perform (or identify with) my femininity at this time also informed the 'type of girl' I was becoming – loud, disruptive, and hyper-sexualised. The sex education I was provided with at this time was centred around preventing pregnancy and STI's, and distinctly lacking in opportunities to critically engage with relationships, emotion, gender, pleasure, sexual diversity or the broader social structures that informed my experiences. My own storied experiences are echoed by a large body of feminist enquiry into the way adolescent sexuality is articulated as a social problem within the dominant understandings that inform sexuality education, with female adolescent sexuality in particular framed within discourses of vulnerability, victimisation, abuse, and objectification (see Fine, 1988, 2005; Jackson & Weatherall, 2010a, 2010b; Lamb, 2010; Morison & Herbert, 2020; Tolman, 2012; Tolman & McClelland, 2011). Embedded in a neoliberal postfeminist sensibility that demands women be held responsible for continually working toward improving their bodies and behaviours, young women's bodies become a risk to be managed through processes of individualisation and responsabilisation (see Bartky, 1998; Gill, 2007; Jackson & Weatherall, 2010a, 2010b; Morison & Herbert, 2020). My interest here is in how sexuality education becomes a site

## Developing Relationships that Matter

wherein the affective transmission of shame is enacted, embodied, (re)produced, and potentially resisted.

Feminist critiques have contributed to changes in sexual education policy in Aotearoa (Ministry of Education, 2020), and it is within this historical moment of apparent progress that my context of discovery takes shape. However, the gap between policy and practice and the (neo)liberal context in which these changes are embedded remains problematic (see ERO, 2018; Fitzpatrick, 2018; Garland-Levett, 2017; Jackson & Weatherall, 2010b). The world of my adolescence is a different one from the world our youth inhabit today, and my embodied vision emerges as a space wherein open conversations about relationships, gendered power, and sexuality can occur between adolescents and the adults entrusted with their care. My heart in this project belongs to the young women whose voices I seek to understand, and especially the young women who fail or refuse to conform. In this way, my political standpoint becomes a radical one. My interest is in the possibility of a space wherein young women can make sense of their own lived experiences, within a space that traditionally seeks to exert control over their bodies and behaviours. I acknowledge the privileges and responsibilities of entering this space, which must be ethically attended to. My journey toward this privilege is not an uncomplicated one, and my involvement in higher education has been intermittent - interrupted by a turbulent adolescence, financial instability, grief, chronic illness, chaotic relationships, and parental responsibilities. I do not arrive at this project from an ivory tower, but from an embodied knowing embedded within the broader power relationships this research seeks out to address.

## **Ethical Considerations**

### ***Feminist Relational Ethics***

*There is always another story, a different avenue through which to travel back. As a child, my family described me as precocious, bookish, and serious. I taught my older brother how to tie his shoelaces, and he taught me how to fight and steal. I learnt to love reading at a young age, and books became the centre of my universe. My mother wasn't allowed books when she was small, so there was always an abundance of them lining the walls of her adult homes. I would read obsessively, the backs of tampon boxes, ingredient lists, the painted bottoms of my favourite Aunty-Mother's chipped teacups. Compulsively consuming words, sounding them out and copying them into personalised recipe books and meticulous to-do*

## Developing Relationships that Matter

*lists. In primary school my teachers gushed, putting extra time into teaching me how to write essays and develop my stories. I buried a time capsule for one school so that my future self, the one who would unearth the memories 50 years later, had already become someone to look up to. It was the pressure of becoming what this path set out for me that created in me resistance, so that by the time I was in high school I wanted none of it. I wanted instead to get high and throw fallen apples back at the tree, so close and yet always missing, collapsing into fits of laughter. I wanted moments. Spinning in circles until I was dizzy and the colours around me swirled into auras of the hidden world.*

*As a teenager I was still reading, loud men like Miller and Sartre and Bukowski. I could not yet relate to the women I attempted to read, skimming over de Beauvoir and Colette, uninterested in Brontë or romance. My love for Mad Bertha came later. One night, having taken LSD alone in the bare room of my first flat, I wept for hours after realising I would never be able to read all the worthy words that had been written - while periodically flame-throwing cockroaches with a can of fly spray and a Bic lighter. This was the (disordered?) way I made many of my decisions on how life should be lived, and some of these decisions, made as a 16yo, I still stand behind. To never again eat McDonalds or drink Coca-Cola, to travel as far and wide as possible, to never judge someone on mistakes made in romantic relationships (it seemed the most likely place to fail), to stop talking and start listening (this experiment lasted all of two weeks and left me with a boyfriend), and to always be open to experience. This last decision was made on the night I wept over beautiful words, and seemed a logical way to avoid the mundanity of family life, of bickering and planting gardens and bleaching the grout in the bathroom. What I wanted was to know more, to see everything, to become someone who could say with certainty who I was, to become a me made better with experience. How romantic I was! Imagining a Paris of old, unaware of the smallness of my world, and of the dubious (sometimes wonderful) doors that waited to open for me. In my own way I was always preoccupied with the ethics of it all. With the extent to which I could live freely without causing the kind of harm that follows from a failure to conform.*

Emerging from my storied experiences of adolescent sense-making is an everyday ethical engagement with the parameters of my own life, aligning with a feminist ethical concern with relationships, power, and care. Feminist ethics have evolved from critiques of the value institutional ethical research guidelines, informed by mainstream political

## Developing Relationships that Matter

philosophy, have traditionally placed on research outcomes and a justice and rights framework (Edwards & Mauthner, 2002; Gilligan, 1977; Fisher, 2000). Responding to the limitations of the abstract and universal ethical principles that guide scientific and social science research, feminist ethics are concerned with reflexive, contextual, practical, situated, relational and caring research that attends to the ways power and dialogical meaning-making can be acknowledged and accounted for (Edwards & Mauthner, 2002; Fine, 1994; Gilligan, 1977; Hill Collins, 2000). Having already established standpoint theory as my ontological and epistemological foundation, the situated and partial perspective I embody becomes the genesis of the ethical considerations that thread their way through this research. By also acknowledging the politics of location and relation as central to this project, the issues of power and privilege that feminist standpoint theory seeks to make visible can be expanded - anchoring the aims of this research and the ethical foundations on which it takes shape. In this way, the ethical issues that arise within this project can be traced back to the context of discovery, and to the epistemology that informs its political orientation (Edwards & Mauthner, 2002).

Michelle Fine (1994) discusses the integral part power plays within ethical considerations, arguing that the process of interpretation must be made visible within research projects if Donna Haraway's (1988) *God trick* - wherein claims of neutrality and objectivity work to deny the privileges and politics embodied by researchers - is to be avoided. Arguing that all feminist research is political in its attempt to disrupt existing ideological and institutional hegemonies, Fine invokes Joyce Ladner's (1971, as cited in Fine, 1994) observation that the researcher/participant relationship resembles that of the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed, with the researcher defining the problem to be explored and the quality of the research relationship, and thereby running the risk of (re)producing the Other within the social sciences. Fine identifies three stances (ventriloquy, voices, and activism) for feminist researchers to ruminate on, and examines how each attends to power relations. For Fine, *ventriloquy* most resembles that of Haraway's *God trick*, wherein the researcher remains anonymous and makes claims to truth while failing to take responsibility for their own politics. *Voices* describes a stance that attempts to centre the voice of participants in order to disrupt hegemonic ideologies and practices, but risks reproducing these same hegemonies if the experiences of participants are taken at face value without critical examination into the broader ideological and structural forces within which their voices are constituted. Within *feminist activist research*, researchers commit to

## Developing Relationships that Matter

explicating their own political stance, and to a consistent consideration of the changing positions of both themselves and research participants. In this way, “local meanings, changes over time, dominant frames, and contextual contradictions” (Fine, 1994, p. 34) can be attended to, and power relations can be re-considered by questioning that which is constructed as natural and inevitable. By listening closely, making explicit our own interpretive processes as researchers, being open to conflict and contradiction in our work, and considering the broader sociocultural and historical contexts that contain the voices we are attempting to hear, Fine envisions research that opens up possibilities for new understandings.

Carol Gilligan’s (1982) foundational work toward an *ethics of care* addresses the gender differences that emerge from the moral reasoning of boys and girls, and identifies a process of moral reasoning in girls that evolves from ethical dilemmas wherein the negotiation of their own desires conflict with the responsibility of caring for the needs of others within a gendered “web of connections” (Edwards & Mauthner, 2002, p. 22). Researching the ways women approach decisions regarding abortion and pregnancy using moral reasoning, Gilligan (1977) identified how a particular feminine voice had been excluded from developmental theories that explain moral development as progressing through stages from an egocentric to a universal ethical understanding. Tracing the ways the relational and contextual considerations centred in women’s ethical decision-making processes have been constructed as deficient and deviant within such understandings (thereby refusing women the status of adulthood), Gilligan highlights the complexities women encounter when attempting to take responsibility for ethical decision-making. Emerging from “girl’s ‘susceptibility’ to adverse judgments of others, which stems from her lack of power and consequent inability to do something in the world” (1977, p. 486), Gilligan traces how women must negotiate conventional ideals that define femininity (e.g. self-sacrifice and gentleness) when attempting to claim their (apparently socially sanctioned) right to make choices. Gilligan differentiates a particular pathway toward the moral development of women, who must first include their own needs within moral decision making in order for ethical dilemmas to be partially resolved when they are able to take responsibility for their own decisions. In this way, the tension between embodying adult power and maintaining feminine compassion can be grounded in an ethics concerned with inequitable power relations, empathy, connection, and care.

## Developing Relationships that Matter

Celia Fisher (2000) traces her own journey towards identifying ethical principles that might guide moral decision making - rather than relying on ethical principles that can be applied universally. Elaborating on Gilligan's ethics of care, Fisher emphasises the importance of a *relational ethics* that acknowledges the boundaries, competencies, moral codes, obligations and responsibilities of both researcher and participant. Highlighting *responsiveness* to the particular contexts and interpersonal connections that shape research relationships, Fisher also acknowledges the power imbalance that always arises if researchers are to be held responsible for the ethical decisions and procedures required of their research. For Margareta Hydén (2013), relational ethics inform the development of a *relational practice*, wherein the co-construction of knowledge by researchers and participants is centred. Hydén draws from her experience researching men's violence against women to outline a teller-based methodology that draws from narrative theory and a social constructionist perspective focused "not upon some object of reality but upon the different meanings with which one's worlds become invested, maintained and reaffirmed" (2013, p. 3). Circling back to Fines' (1994) argument that the interpretation of experiences by both participants and researchers must be made visible in order for meaning-making to be contextualised within social power relationships, Hydén's description of a relational practice provides us with methods for practically attending to the dialogical, reflexive, relational, and caring approach centred in feminist research ethics. In particular, Hydén engages with informed consent as an ongoing process "that does not start and finish with the consent form" (2013, p. 7), highlighting the importance of creating a relationally safe space for research interviewing, and the therapeutic effects of research interviews. The possibility for research interviews to promote ongoing conversations and new thinking post-research is also considered by Hydén, broadening the scope of ethical considerations to include the ongoing impact of psychological research on participant meaning-making.

Having already used standpoint theory to position myself as a working class, Pākehā psychology student and mother living in a bicultural nation during a global pandemic and climate emergency, my interest in exploring how sexuality education attends to the emotional needs of young women must be contextualised within a tradition of feminist ethical considerations that attend to power, responsibility, politics, connection, and care. Here, I find myself grappling with my first ethical conundrum, which has been advancing in my periphery since the inklings of this project began to take shape. I initially set out to centre the voices of young women, but in acknowledging the anxieties and uncertainties - due to COVID, climate

## Developing Relationships that Matter

catastrophe, the growing gap between rich and poor, and the increasing cost of living - that inform my own current experiences, I also acknowledge the possible effects of these broader issues on my participants. Although these contextual considerations frame the very question I hope to explore (in the broadest sense my interest is in the well-being of young women in this particular historical moment), feminist relational ethics also requires that I take responsibility for considering how these broader contexts might intensify feelings of vulnerability in my participants. In addition, my position as a novice researcher, with little experience counselling teenagers in any professional capacity, must also be acknowledged. However, it is my limited ability to provide an extensive support system for my participants during and after the research process that cements my decision to interview the educators who are in relationship with the young women I seek to understand, rather than the young women themselves. For me, simply providing adolescents with the contact details of support services would not fulfil the requirements of care and responsibility I wish to enact. Further, it is the *relationship* between young women and the adults that surround them - and how emotion is attended to and transmitted within these relationships - that is central to my research. As I venture through the process of understanding how relational ethics can be centred in this project, my decision to speak with educators has become the one I feel most comfortable with - and the most pragmatic one given the contested space I am attempting to enter.

Interviewing adults in order to explore adolescent sexuality comes with its own set of ethical issues that must be considered. Foremost is the risk of having adults speak for the young women who connect me to this project, in a kind of second-hand ventriloquy that risks reproducing and re-circulating existing hegemonic ideologies. Fine (1994) provides some clues regarding her negotiation of this dilemma in her own research, emphasising the importance of critically examining the way adults speak about the young people in their care within the historical, political and socio-cultural contexts that shape their stories, and of maintaining a reflexive and responsive position that allows for contradiction and conflict to emerge from the research. My ethical responsibility therefore becomes one of paying careful attention to the way the narratives produced within this research are interpreted, contextualised, and circulated, and balancing these ethical concerns with an ethics of care and relation that attends to both my adult participants and the young women they speak about. Here I acknowledge my alignment with Fine's (1994) feminist activist research, and the balance I will need to achieve between my (rebel-heart's) desire to disrupt existing narratives

## Developing Relationships that Matter

that position adolescent sexuality as only ever risky, and the empathy with which I will need to engage the educators I connect with in dialogical meaning-making.

What also emerges from locating myself within a tradition of feminist ethical philosophy is that all stages of the research process - from its ontological and epistemological foundations, through to a theoretical perspective informed by my own earned experiences, to the context of discovery, selected methodologies and methods, and the possibilities the research opens up for further conversation - require continual reflexive and responsive ethical consideration. Fine (1994) stretches ethical responsibility to encompass the interpretation of participant voices within broader social, historical, cultural and political contexts, and an awareness of how the narratives produced within research are disseminated. This critical awareness involves taking responsibility for how research can (re)produce, resist or disrupt the colonial and capitalist ideologies and practices that inform the injustices that inequitably effect marginalised and oppressed peoples. Fine (2017) extends the scope of ethical decision-making even further in her reflection on a collection of the interpreted narratives of South Africans sharing their experiences during and since apartheid, examining the ways narratives are circulated within the context of neoliberal globalisation. Fine's reflections acknowledge how the psy-complex has been complicit in appropriating and profiting from Black and Indigenous stories, memories, images, knowledges and experiences within a history of colonisation that risks re-inscribing oppressive and violent everyday assaults on marginalised bodies. Posing the question "what is Narrative desire in revolting times?" (2017, p. 110), Fine asks how narratives can be translated, interpreted and circulated in a way that provokes critical attention in order to promote responsiveness and collective radical action.

Fine's (1994, 2017) reflections echo criticisms of standpoint theory, and how intersectionality loses its radical power when it denies its origins in Black and Third World feminism and becomes co-opted by white feminists and neoliberal academic institutions (Salem, 2016). Invoking a Marxist feminist perspective, Sara Salem (2016) argues for a re-contextualising of class, race, sexuality, and gender within the context of transnational capitalism, (re)centring the focus on power relationships that enables radical possibilities to be promoted within intersectional approaches. In this way, the subsuming of marginal voices within liberal discourses of diversity can be avoided by identifying the way "capitalism is not an intersection but the context within which social categories such as gender, class, sexuality and race are constituted, and this context itself is analyzed as constituted by these categories"

## Developing Relationships that Matter

(Salem, 2016, p. 11). Patricia Hill Collins (2000), writing from her position as an African-American feminist, also questions the abstract values that inform Western patriarchal science. Arguing for empathy, lived experiences, everyday meaning-making, and accountability to be centred within ethical research paradigms, Hill Collins promotes the use of interconnected partial perspectives that can challenge how knowledge is validated within institutions controlled by “elite White men” (2000, p. 253). In particular, Hill Collins argues for knowledge verified within Black communities through dialogue to be legitimated, and for marginalised voices from across the globe to be recognised as sources of knowledge within Western institutions.

Here in Aotearoa, Māori academics and activists also continue to fight for a space within social and academic institutions wherein their particular, evolving, and heterogeneous ways of knowing can be acknowledged (Black & Huygens, 2016; Levy & Waitoki, 2016; Love, 2008; Waitere & Johnston, 2009). Just last year, seven academics working at The University of Auckland signed a letter to the editor of a popular local magazine opposing the proposal that *mātauranga Māori* (Māori ways of knowing) should be granted equal status within National Certificate of Educational Achievement qualifications (Clements et al., 2021). The authors cautioned against creating a space within the Māori school curriculum wherein the colonial agendas embedded in Western science can be critiqued, claiming it would result in the perpetuation of “disturbing misunderstandings of science” (2021, p.4). This letter exemplifies the ongoing (neo)colonial agendas that uphold hegemonic ways of knowing in institutional spaces, contributing to the inequitable socio-economic and well-being outcomes that affect Māori people (see Durie, 2003; Love, 2008; Walker et al., 2006). Of particular interest here is the colonisation of Māori women’s bodies, the history of which is eloquently traced by Ani Mikaere (1999). Mikaere examines the impacts of forgetting to remember that women shared equal power with men in traditional Indigenous societies, and aligns the imposition of patriarchal values onto Māori women’s bodies with colonial agendas that worked to disrupt collectivist negotiations of gender. By pronouncing Māori women’s autonomy as immoral, diminishing their powerful roles in creation stories to passive ones, and insisting that they engage in legal marriages, the support system that *whānau* (roughly translated as an extended family group) provided for women was also disrupted, resulting in a shift in power that limited agency and autonomy. This shared history reminds me that creating space within our institutions for Māori women to define their own particularity is a crucial step toward decolonisation (Waitere & Johnston, 2009), and gifts me with insights

## Developing Relationships that Matter

into the ways patriarchy and colonialism work together to exert power over women's bodies – understandings that emerge from women's knowledges and process ontologies developed within Indigenous spaces.

I am also reminded of Fine's (2017) insistence that researchers take account of the ways psychological research has been complicit in marginalising Black and Indigenous knowledges, and the importance of positioning *tino rangatiratanga* (the absolute sovereignty, autonomy, and self-determination of Māori) as central to ethical considerations in social science research in Aotearoa (Levy & Waitoki, 2016; Walker et al., 2006). The acknowledgement of *tino rangatiratanga* also highlights the limitations of the principles of protection, participation, and partnership that inform the *Code of Ethics for Psychologists Working in Aotearoa/New Zealand* (New Zealand Psychological Society, 2002), with its centring of inclusion, safety and diversity informing a deficit-based approach to Māori well-being (Levy & Waitoki, 2016). Levy and Waitoki (2016) instead argue for an ethics concerned with how value can be added to the lives of Māori people by increasing autonomy and promoting Māori values, in order to disrupt this deficit-based approach and promote the equal sharing of power within our institutions. Such 'by Māori, for Māori' approaches to psychological research are reflected in Indigenous movements across the globe. However, despite significant progress, Māori-led research remains underfunded and our educational institutions continue to underrepresent *mātauranga Māori* in their psychology training programmes (Levy & Waitoki, 2016).

The unequal sharing of power within the psy-complex reminds me of the privilege I embody as a Pākehā student of psychology. As a Pākehā woman living in a bicultural nation, the issue of how colonialism and patriarchy intersect is embedded within the politics of location and relation that ground this project. Māori knowledge is also embedded in the latest iteration of RSE guidelines (Ministry of Education, 2020), which will need to be ethically attended to in my research. In addition, the historical positioning of the bodies of Black and Indigenous women as particularly risky and at-risk (Burns & Torre, 2005; McClelland & Fine, 2013; Taylor et al., 1996), informed by the traces of colonial anxiety that continue to configure their sexualities as excessive and wonton (Crenshaw, 1997/2013; Hill Collins, 2000; Mikaere, 1999; Simmonds, 2011), needs to be acknowledged if my interest in the possibilities for sexuality education to promote critical enquiry into young women's feelings of embodied shame are to be ethically attended to. This process of becoming accountable also

## Developing Relationships that Matter

aligns with a broader shift within feminist, Black, LGBTQI+ and Indigenous critical approaches that seek to decolonise the way knowledge is produced within psychology, and disrupt the unified, individualist, and self-contained conception of self that is assumed within Western science paradigms in favour of approaches that centre fluid meaning-making and situated knowledge. Here, the decolonisation of psychology becomes an ethical consideration concerned with power, privilege, and social justice. What also emerges from centring feminist relational ethics is that the experiences my participants share and our co-constructed meaning-making will become the core stories that shape this research project. In this way, my ethical meandering has led to narrative theory as the theoretical foundation of my research methodology.

### *Ethical Procedures*

**Informed Consent and Confidentiality.** Following Hydén's (2013) assertion that informed consent is an on-going process that extends throughout (and beyond) the research process in a relational practice, consistent communication between myself and my participant/collaborators (prior to, during, and after our conversations) was required in order for issues of informed consent and confidentiality to be ethically attended to. Although I was unable to predict every ethical conundrum that might emerge through informed consent or privacy issues within this project, I attempted to respond relationally and responsibly to my collaborators throughout the entirety of the research process. This sometimes meant offering to omit sections of our conversations from the transcripts (when my collaborators requested that particular storied experiences remain private) or touching base after meeting with collaborators to ensure our conversations hadn't evoked any feelings of distress (with none of the educators reporting any negative effects). The releasing of transcribed conversations back to my collaborators for review ensured that we were in frequent communication. Only one educator requested the opportunity to review the particular transcribed extracts I would be using in the final draft of this thesis, and for her language to be 'tidied up' (e.g. editing out excessive verbal hesitations), which I obliged. Prior to signing a Participant or Group Consent Form (see Appendix), I ensured that the educators fully understood how informed consent would be enacted, and also assured my collaborators that they could contact me at any time to negotiate any issues of consent that emerged through the research process. As our conversations were founded on this on-going process of consent, privacy and confidentiality were negotiations that also emerged through this process – with some of my collaborators

## Developing Relationships that Matter

needing additional assurances that their names and places of work would be omitted from the final product of this research. I used pseudonyms for the transcribed conversations, and in all drafts of this text. The Information Sheet (see Appendix) included the details of the steps I would take to ensure that any identifying details about my collaborators would be kept private, and I also practised caution in the selection of excerpts I included in the final analysis to ensure that any identifying details were omitted from the final text. Because I live in a small community, I have redacted the name of the local library from the Information Sheet attached to this document, as a further step toward protecting the privacy of my collaborators.

**Ethics Committee Approval.** This research was evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it was not reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. This meant that the ethical conduct of this research was my responsibility, under the guidance of my supervisor. No significant ethical issues emerged from the research process, so that no further steps toward gaining ethical approval became necessary.

**Power Relationships.** Throughout the research process I continually reflected on any ethical issues that had the potential to become salient, and the empathy with which I engaged in conversation and analysed my collaborators' narratives became the impetus of my ethical decision-making. This resulted in a careful approach to storying the narratives together, contextualising them within broader social power relationships, and reflexively considering my own responses to the narratives. By including my own storied experiences within this text (and leaving them open to interpretation), I aimed to attend to the power imbalances that are inherent in research practices by troubling the question of who can know and who can be known in research relationships (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1992). Establishing a relationally safe space (Hydén, 2013) proved logistically difficult, with my rural location and limited resources requiring that most of the conversations occurred via ZOOM – which evoked a feeling of distance between myself and my collaborators. I attended to this technologically mediated distance by introducing the storied experiences that connect me to this project, hoping to unsettle the professional boundaries that may have been augmented within the context of an online meeting traditionally associated with the workplace. I also made explicit that the conversations would be unstructured and conversational, with a focus on listening to the narratives my collaborators chose to share with me. As the research progressed, I made efforts to engage my collaborators in ongoing communication to ensure that the final product

## Developing Relationships that Matter

maintained its collaborative intentions, while also being responsive to the educator's busy schedules. This was a balancing act between holding space for my collaborators to meaningfully contribute to the research process, while also attempting to leave enough space so that they would not feel coerced into continually engaging with me.

## Narrative Theory

*After a particularly vehement argument with Mum one morning, I failed to return home after school. There was a house around the corner from my high school where I used to buy dope, run by a strikingly beautiful fa'afafine who was kind enough to take me in. I hid out at her house for two weeks – another busy house where sex-workers and random men drifted in and out, subsisting on chocolate biscuits, PepsiMax, and pharmaceuticals. I loved sitting on the brown couch in the living room and listening to their laughter, the way they described themselves as 'trick' when they put on makeup or 'misinformed' when they got high. When I moved out of home for good, these were the people who kept an eye on me as I walked the city streets, who would pick me up from a puddle of vomit and hand me 'a tissue for my issue' before stumbling me home. Somehow Mum found me at the house, and a decision was made that I would move in with an older Cousin-Sister-Brother, in a tiny room under the stairs. Her boyfriend at the time always carried a large black duffel bag, and I don't remember much except vomiting magic mushrooms on the carpet.*

*I briefly returned to Mum's house before putting my mind to acquiring the Independent Youth Benefit and moving into my first flat. I had hoped that if I moved out I could take a breath, and maybe finish school. It was a boarding house with twenty small white bedrooms and an industrial kitchen that I never used. The benefit didn't leave me much, so I lived off one creaming-soda milkshake a day, coffee, and cigarettes. I found a weekend job as a receptionist at a motel, but it was an early shift too far away, and I could never quite make it there on time. One day, a couple of girls came to the flat with nitrous oxide and amyl nitrate, and we stood in a circle passing them around, giggling and exuberant. We started hanging out every day, dressing in heavy combat boots with floral dresses to sit around in cafes and bars. I officially dropped out of school. One of the girls was sleeping in her car, so we decided to move in together, into a proper flat like the older people we were trying to become. We applied for bond from Work and Income but making rent was hard, and the rooms were all empty of furniture except for an old spacey-machine*

## Developing Relationships that Matter

*blaring a constant stream of static, and mattresses on the floor. I don't remember seeing my family much, not until sometime in my mid-twenties.*

*I got a job for a few of hours a week at a restaurant up the road, cash-in hand and still not enough to pay the bills. We decided to get creative, visiting dismal strip bars to pickpocket drunk men distracted by nubile flesh. They let us in free and underage. My friend's Dad would give her weed which she would sell in fifty-dollar portions, packaged in balloons and little cardboard Smarties boxes, which helped. One day I was wandering the streets, listless, when a friend asked if we should look for work at one of the parlours. I don't remember thinking about it much. It was just another thing that we could do.*

Reading back through my memories two things stand out to me - the way drug-use and counterculture were normalised in my world from a young age, and the absence of emotion expressed in my storied experiences. If I was talking to myself back then perhaps I would ask how I *felt*, and as I write this I remember the way my body recoiled when my supervisor advised that I emotionally connect to this work. There are hints - a reference to crying over beautiful words and Mum's stories about my tantrums as a child. I remember feeling as if my emotions were always too much, excessive at home and at school. Mum always described herself as particularly emotional, as if it were a virtue, so I held my feelings in - believing I was strong and not wanting to make her cry. When I did cry the Aunty-Mothers would roll their eyes, I was just dramatic and hormonal, just a teenager. At school I raged, and was punished. There didn't seem to be a place where my feelings were valid, or a name for my sense of unease in the world. Sitting here now, I become aware that the process of writing has slowly brought my remembered feelings to the surface, and that through narration my resistance is yielding to a desire for connection. I am also forced to re-examine the ostensible choices I made in my youth, and re-consider the ways my particular location informed what I felt that I could *do* in the world.

Narrative research is a multidisciplinary approach to knowledge production, wherein storytelling is centred as a relational and embodied activity that emotionally connects people (individually and collectively) in a way that promotes listening, empathy and social action (Bamberg, 2006; Riessman, 2001; Sools & Murray, 2014; Tamboukou, 2008). Here I will discuss how a narrative approach aligns with the relational ethics that inform the aim of this project - to engage with the storied experiences of sexuality educators working in Aotearoa, and how their relationships with students are negotiated within their narratives.

## Developing Relationships that Matter

PJ Manney highlights the importance of narratives in a world increasingly dependent on technology, tracing the way “empathy is created through storytelling” (2008, p. 51), and arguing that narrative should inform transhuman technologies. This relational potential is central to narrative theory, which draws from both humanist, person-centred approaches within the social sciences and structuralist, poststructuralist, postmodern, deconstructionist and psychoanalytic approaches in the humanities (Squire et al., 2013). Some researchers choose to work between and within the contradictions of these diverging ontological and epistemological foundations, maintaining “a humanist conception of a singular, unified subject, at the same time as the promotion of an idea of narrative as always multiple, socially constructed, reinterpreted, and reinterpretable” (Squire et al., 2013, p. 5). This latter conception of narrative aligns with Fine’s (1994) reminder to contextualise stories within the broader contexts that inform their becoming in order to avoid producing research that does little more than re-circulate dominant narratives. My inclination is to allow these conflicting ontological positions to co-exist for now, enabling me to acknowledge the lived experiences of the educators I engage with and the responsibility of accepting their stories as a gift (Limerick et al., 1996; Oakley, 2016), while also attending to the broader contexts that encompass their voices. However, both positions come with their own problematics, and with political and ethical implications that will need to be explored.

First, the intrinsically relational nature of narrative must be considered, with the speaker/writer/participant always addressing someone, whether an imagined audience or an embodied listener, which shifts the focus away from finding the truth of a story and toward an exploration of who is speaking (and why), who is listening (and why), and what the narrative *does* (Bamberg, 2006; Gilligan, 1982; Gilligan et al., 2003; Taylor et al., 1996). In this way, narrative enquiry privileges positionality rather than claiming objectivity (Riessman, 2001), allowing for the politics of location and relation that inform the theoretical basis of this project to be articulated in its methodology. Listening to narratives can be conceptualised as a process, wherein empathy, reflexivity, and careful interpretation inform relational meaning-making (Gilligan et al., 2003; Hydén, 2013; Taylor et al., 1996). Narrative has also been conceptualised as a performance that draws from a multiplicity of voices to reveal issues of power, shifting subjectivities, and the social and institutional structures wherein our positioning is continually negotiated (Loots et al., 2013; Phoenix, 2013; Riessman, 2001). An acknowledgement of the polyphony of voices that emerge from storied experiences is central to my research, wherein I hope to explore the way institutional,

## Developing Relationships that Matter

sociocultural, and student voices are embodied and transmitted by educators within the context of a research project that makes visible the way my own positioning informs the interpretive process.

Drawing from the philosophical explorations of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, some researchers have developed a rhizome approach in order to attend to the multiplicity of voices that emerge from narratives (see Loots et al., 2013; Sermijn et al., 2008; Tamboukou, 2008). These approaches to narrative enquiry conceptualise stories as “socio-cultural embedded performances, which continuously and multifariously construct and reconstruct experiences, human subjectivity and selfhood” (Loots et al., 2013, p.15). Deleuze and Guattari (1987) describe rhizomatic thinking using the analogy of a decentralised root system that branches out unpredictably toward a multitude of possible connections and points of entry, departing from the hierarchical and categorical way knowledge has historically been produced and focusing on the process of meaning-making, rather than the product (see also Loots et al., 2013; Tamboukou, 2008). A rhizomatic approach to knowledge also accounts for singularity, difference, and points of departure that allow for the endless deferral of meaning and ever-emerging possibilities (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Tamboukou, 2008).

In her study of the artist Gwen John, Maria Tamboukou (2008) maps the ever-emerging possibilities that can be conceptualised using Deleuzo-Guattarian (1987) *lines of flight*, and locates her research as a feminist political project that seeks to disrupt gender binaries and deterministic essentialisms. Rather than focusing on the sequential structure of narrative, Tamboukou traces connections between an archive of letters, mapping her process and the relationship between power, politics, and narrative desire. Although time constraints preclude my ability to connect narratives from multiple sources within this project, I draw from Tamboukou’s focus on the possibilities of narrative ‘becoming other’ through the interpretive process. By reflexively mapping connections between participant voices, my own storied narrative, the interpretation process, the theoretical foundations of this project, sexuality education policy, and the socio-cultural context this research is embedded in, I engage with lines of flight wherein the possibility for adolescent sexuality to be re-framed as other than just a risk to be managed can become potentialised.

My approach to knowledge production takes into account the political and ethical implications of this project, and explores the ways in which rhizomatic thinking can be actualised. Rosi Braidotti’s (2012) nomadic theory is useful for connecting the affective,

## Developing Relationships that Matter

political and ethical implications of narrative, and for extending standpoint theory, relational ethics and the politics of location into an approach that “privileges change and motion over stability” (p. 29). Drawing from French philosophy (in particular Foucault and Deleuze), Braidotti maps out the historical effects of colonisation, technological advancement, neoliberal capitalism and globalisation within a cartography of the present, and centres desire, critical engagement, affect, hope, the personal, and the local as starting points for positive transitions that emerge from negative experiences and critiques. Articulating power relations as both restrictive and productive, nomadic theory extends social constructionist understandings of a non-unitary and socially constituted self into an affirmative politics that mobilises critical inquiry as a creative force, broadening considerations of situatedness and positionality, and allowing for transformative accounts of lived experiences and selfhood. The transformation of the negative effects of marginalisation into *affirmative passions* describes a process of becoming political, and a desire for connection wherein collective and ethical engagement with the present promotes sustainable futures that resist the “injustice, violence, and vulgarity of the times” (Braidotti, 2012, p. 268). Through processes of becoming political, accountability for producing ‘horizons of hope’ for future generations becomes possible. Central to this process is the critique of how difference and desire are commodified within a global capitalism that “reasserts individualism as the norm while reducing it to consumerism” (Braidotti, 2012, p. 275), in a self-destructive process that diminishes the very source of its power - the disposable bodies of the marginalised and dispossessed. Further, the trauma, pain, fear, inertia and melancholy that are outcomes of the rapidly changing times must be transformed into collective and embodied imaginings, wherein the personal becomes political through critical engagement and relations of affirmation that are multiple and inter-subjective. Here, the unified self of humanism is transformed into a relational self whose ethical imperative is “the actualization of our increased ability to act and interact in the world” (Braidotti, 2012, p. 287), producing capacities for politically engaged, thinking and active subjects to connect through shared imaginings of new ways of being and becoming.

Reading Braidotti has helped me to make sense of my own process of becoming political, and clarified the connection between my own lived experiences, feminist critical theory, and the aims of this project. By reframing the uncertainty and anxiety that catalysed my move back to Aotearoa as an affirmative response to increasingly confusing times, the acknowledgement that my potential participants may have increased feelings of vulnerability

## Developing Relationships that Matter

in response to the global pandemic, economic instability, and global warming can also be interpreted as an opening up of new possibilities for shared imaginings of transformative becoming. Put plainly, the mandatory lockdowns that forced changes in my daily life led me to re-evaluate how I had been living, bringing into focus the absurdity of working to make my employers richer, in order to pay rent to make my landlord wealthier, while also caring for my child and our home in a constant loop that left little time for relationship-building, self-reflection, or engagement with the politics of our times. Escaping this endless loop of survival meant returning home to live in a shed on my parent's property, reconnecting with my homeland and its people, and finally giving myself the opportunity to re-group and re-think. I imagine this experience of transformative thinking must also be a shared one, creating possibilities to connect with others in re-imagining sustainable futures and affirmative desires within this particularly strange moment in time.

Braidotti also reminds me that my own storied experiences as an adolescent can be connected to a body of feminist critical enquiry that seeks to understand how young women negotiate sexuality and relationships within a neoliberal capitalism informed by technological advances, heteronormativity, and the postfeminist assumption that gender equality has already been achieved. The inclusion of mātauranga Māori, relationships, social media, and pornography in the latest iteration of RSE Guidelines (Ministry of Education, 2020) reflects a transition from a conservative sex education concerned with morality and risk-management to a more holistic approach with the potential to promote critical engagement that examines heteronormativity, technology, and intersecting power relationships. Although the gap between policy and practice has proven to be problematic within sexuality education in Aotearoa (Ellis & Bentham, 2021; ERO, 2018; Jackson & Weatherall, 2010b) and the embedding of sexuality education within a health curriculum informed by (neo)liberal ideals of individual achievement has also been critiqued (Garland-Levett, 2017; Quinlivan et al., 2014), at face value the guidelines suggest an institutional responsiveness to marginalised voices - and feminist, queer, and Indigenous critiques. This transition to a holistic approach to sexuality education acknowledges the complexities and possibilities that emerge when sexuality is positioned as a political locus wherein power relations are resisted and (re)produced. Braidotti observes that “how to undo the sovereignty of phallogocentric sex in favour of multiple other connections is the ethical impulse that sustains Foucault’s work on the technologies of self-other relations” (2012, p. 280). Here, the racialised, sexualised, and

## Developing Relationships that Matter

disposable bodies of neoliberal capitalism can be embedded within broader conversations about power and relationships, and the political context of the present.

Campbell et al. (2010) explore the way successful social movements have effected change for economically impoverished communities by building strong voices and receptive social environments. Highlighting the way collective agency can be actualised by promoting critical engagement that links personal experiences to broader social structures, narrative is mobilised as a powerful force through which the voices of the disenfranchised can reach stakeholders who are in a position to enact change. This building of receptive social environments also relies on forming relationships with politically and economically powerful actors (both locally and internationally), who provide resources, access to legal and political networks, the media, and the symbolic realm of moral accountability to engage decision-makers and carve out a space wherein the collective voices of marginalised communities can become a force of change.

The power of narrative to enact change exemplifies the possibilities of accepting narratives as a gift, and taking responsibility for listening to, interpreting, and being moved by narratives in a way that creates space for people to make sense of their own experiences (Sools & Murray, 2014). Sools and Murray (2014) explore the potential for narrative practice to promote well-being in healthcare settings, and for a collective narrative to mobilise communities by “emotionally connecting people with its version of events and also with orienting them to certain actions” (2014, p. 247). The authors also highlight the way social change ebbs and flows in circular phases, a reminder that the work of producing counter-narratives to dominant hegemonies is a slow process. Within the context of sexuality education, my voice connects to a body of feminist work that explores how young women negotiate gender and sexuality. By connecting with educators, supporting them in telling their stories, and reflexively engaging with their narratives in a way that centres the research relationship and the relationship between educators and their students, I explore possibilities for the building of intergenerational relationships that promote connection, transformation, and affirmative desires. My aim is to connect with educators in conversation, forming relationships that build on a body of voices concerned with producing hopeful horizons for future generations of young women. In this way, I hope to potentialise a re-imagining of the conversations and relationships educators can have with their students, which becomes a line of flight that traces a trajectory for the questions this research sets out to address.

## **Research Questions**

What can this research do? What if we assumed that young people were already becoming critically engaged experts of their own experiences? Have the changes in sexuality education guidelines actualised new possibilities for actual change? What happens if we centre the relationships between educators and their students? What are the affective flows that move through sexuality education and produce capacities for what young women can do in the world? How can we connect with each other across generations in a way that promotes affirmative passions, desire for change, and collective action? How can the conversations we have now promote collective visions of possibility for future generations?

## **Methods**

### *Sampling*

Given my anticipation that the in-depth, qualitative nature of this research would require a large investment of time, I aimed to speak to a small number of educators (5-10), and focus on rich processes of meaning-making, rather than generalisability (see Coyle, 2007; Hesse-Biber, 2014). As I read through theory toward posthuman research (St. Pierre, 2016), the project evolved into a mapping between theory, policy, social power relationships, institutions, and both my own and the educator's narratives - wherein the small sample of collaborators aligned with my attempt to centre the relational, and the affective flows that move between bodies and entities to constitute sexuality education capacities.

I sought out participants who were interested in collaborating with me in conversations that centred the relationships between educators and students within the context of sexuality education. Therefore, I required my collaborators to have experience as educators, counsellors or facilitators who attend to the needs of their students when sexuality and relationships come into view. In this way, the differential approaches to the provision of sexuality education in schools (with outside providers often being called upon to supplement RSE in Aotearoa) were acknowledged, with school counsellors included because their role supporting students potentially includes attending to issues involving sexuality, relationships and sexual well-being. As I was not specifically researching the relationship between the gender, culture, sexuality, age or race of my collaborators and the effects of these categorisations on educators' relationships with young people, I explicitly resisted the sampling of participants in order to increase the generalisability of this research. This aligned

## Developing Relationships that Matter

with the collaborative, activist approach that informs this project, and a concern with what research can do, rather than what it sets out to explain. However, generational differences (emerging through digital technologies) were often cited as a barrier to building relationships with students, and culture emerged as a salient force that affected relationship building within the context of RSE – both of which I approached as ethical considerations in my final analyses.

### *Recruitment*

I chose purposeful sampling for this project, wherein the accessibility of participants, their ability to share knowledge and experiences that speak to the particular research question, and the resources available to the researcher establish an approach to connecting with participants (Hesse-Biber, 2014). I had not anticipated the difficulty I would experience in finding educators and counsellors who had the time to collaborate with me, and after reaching out to people using informal social networks, I also reached out to potential collaborators and organisations with whom I had no prior relationship with, or who were recommended to me without the offer of a personal referral. These recommendations proved unsuccessful, and ultimately all of my collaborators were recruited via informal social networks (friends, and associates at Massey University). The Information Sheet contained my contact details, and potential collaborators invariably contacted me by replying to my emails, after being explicitly informed that participation was voluntary. Although the people who put me in contact with potential collaborators were not informed of who had participated in the research, this was sometimes a sticky situation to negotiate, with many of my friends asking if the potential collaborators they had put me in contact with had gotten back to me. I negotiated this by emphasising the privacy required of psychological research, a response that was often met with surprise.

Because of my rural location (resulting in a small pool of potential collaborators to draw from in my local area), limited resources, and the ongoing uncertainties regarding face-to-face meetings during a global pandemic, one-off ZOOM meetings were offered alongside a private conference room at the local library, my collaborators homes, walk-and-talk options – or wherever else the educators would feel most comfortable. This approach was intended to attend to the power imbalances inherent in research relationships, by having my collaborators choose the environment that best suited them, and in this way make decisions that would affect the research from the outset. I offered to meet with potential collaborators prior to our

## Developing Relationships that Matter

conversations, to discuss the research aims and procedures and answer any questions before obtaining written informed consent. All of my collaborators declined this opportunity, and expressed that the Information Sheet had provided them with enough information to cement their interest in meeting with me. I described the research to my collaborators and my relationship to the research, and offered opportunities for the educators to ask questions prior to obtaining written informed consent at the time of our conversations. I engaged in conversation with six collaborators, and had the opportunity to speak with more, but ethical issues emerged that informed my decision (under consultation with my supervisor) to decline speaking with collaborators who worked for institutions that attempted to regulate the parameters of our potential conversations, or appoint particular spokespeople from their organisations. I also attempted to ensure that enough time would be allowed for the narratives of the educators to be analysed ethically, relationally, and in-depth, so ended recruitment after six collaborators had gifted me with an abundance of connections to story together.

## *Interviews*

I chose an unstructured, conversational approach to interviewing, with the aim of promoting collaboration in conversation rather than seeking objective answers to subjectively prescribed questions. This approach draws from a feminist troubling of the positivist assumption that bias can be controlled by researchers, by acknowledging the co-constructed sense-making that emerges from the relational within particular research contexts (Hydén, 2013; Oakley, 1981). I would have preferred to engage in multiple interviews with each of my collaborators in order to promote relationship-building and enrich the conversational approach; however, time-constraints (both my own and my collaborators) prevented multiple conversations from occurring. Burgess-Limerick and Burgess-Limerick (1998) describe the usefulness of conversational interviewing when collaboration and co-constructed meaning-making are prioritised, and when the researcher accepts responsibility for weaving narratives from multiple sources together in order to produce rich understandings. A conversational approach also aligned with my acknowledgement of the educators' everyday expertise in making-sense of a space that I had yet to enter, opening up possibilities for me to listen for the multiplicity of voices that emerged from our conversations. My focus on listening to my collaborators also meant that the conversations became iterative, with the understandings produced in earlier conversations informing both the later conversations and the evolution of the research process - reflecting the collaborative desire that informs this project. Because the

## Developing Relationships that Matter

conversations occurred in different locations chosen by my collaborators (via ZOOM, at workplaces, or at my collaborators' homes), the contexts that informed our co-constructed sense-making also varied, with differential levels of intimacy and distance emerging from the places and spaces we connected within. Although I had estimated that my collaborators would speak with me for one hour, this also varied (45min - 2hrs), with the face-to-face meetings invariably lasting longer than the virtual ones. One of the conversations was with a group that included two educators (as requested by my collaborators), which provided me with rich differences to negotiate within our conversation. I digitally recorded all of the interviews, and when listening back became aware that my own nervousness affected the first interviews to a greater degree than the later ones, reflecting my own learning process and the ways the iterative nature of this research increased my feelings of confidence in negotiating the content of our conversations as the research progressed. Following Hydén's (2013) guidance on encouraging a relational practice, I used expansive (e.g. 'Interesting, tell me more...') and generalisable (e.g. 'Some of the other educators I have spoken with have said....') questioning, provoking my collaborators to produce descriptive and reflective accounts of their experiences. As the conversations progressed, I sometimes challenged my collaborators to take responsibility for becoming knowing (see Hydén, 2013), especially when I became frustrated at the lack of attention paid to gendered power relationships and the relational within our conversations. However, my aim was to engage in authentic conversations that centred my collaborators' experiences, and our conversations often evolved organically, with the direction of our sense-making emerging from the educator's initial responses - and the particular and idiosyncratic ways in which we interacted in conversation with each other.

### *Transcription*

As I painstakingly transcribed each interview into a Word document, I included every pause, giggle, interruption, hesitation, and stutter, alongside my own questions and contributions, in order to preserve every potentially interpretable detail, and capture the conversations as authentically as possible. In this way, I hoped to transcribe the conversations mindfully and with care; however, the nuances of voice tone and tempo, gesticulation, and emotional response were unable to be captured in their entirety. My particular rapport with each collaborator survived the process of transcription, travelling through my analytical processes so that my continual reflexivity was required in order to ethically attend to these

## Developing Relationships that Matter

relational differences. Although I attempted to transcribe the conversations verbatim, my aim to map out the affective flows that constitute sexuality education assemblages meant that my focus was on the broader social power relationships and narrative desires that were evoked in our conversations, so that in the final product of this research the “idiosyncratic elements of speech” (Oliver et al., 2005, pp. 1273) have been partially edited. This also improved the flow of the writing, and responded to a request from one collaborator to remove her excessive repetitions and verbal hesitations in my final analyses (aligning with the collaborative nature of this project). I did keep the pauses and hesitations that signalled a particular response to that which was being spoken about, and chose to include punctuation and pauses that worked to convey the overall flow of the conversations. I signalled pauses, emphases, and omissions using transcript notations (Table 1). Transcribing the interviews helped me to come into close relationship with the narratives, and my repeated listening of the recorded conversations - following the first steps of the *Listening Guide* (Gilligan et al., 2003) - meant that my analytical processes involved a combination of listening to recorded conversations and reading the transcriptions, with the excerpts used in the final product emerging from this process. The transcribed conversations were returned to my collaborators for review, and released for publication via a signed Transcript Release Form (see Appendix). Only one collaborator requested the aforementioned changes to our transcribed conversation, with the majority of my collaborators signing the forms without further questions or requests. All of my collaborators signed the release form, agreeing to the use of our transcribed conversations in this text.

**Table 1**  
*Transcription Notations*

<b>Notation</b>	<b>Description</b>
(...)	Speaker pauses
(-)	Portion of text deleted - not relevant to final analysis
<u>Underlined</u>	Emphasised speech
...	Excerpt begins or ends in the middle of a sentence
(redacted for privacy)	Excerpt has been redacted to ensure that identifying details about the participant/collaborator have been removed.

*Processes of Analysis*

**Plotting the Narratives.** After transcribing the conversations, returning them to my collaborators for revision, and reading each of them again, a number of questions were circling in my mind. I used mind mapping to attend to my own feelings of being overwhelmed by the task of storying the narratives into relationship with each other, and of responsibly identifying the affective flows that emerged from the conversations. After ruminating on how to start this process, and receiving less feedback from my collaborators than I had hoped for (I had asked the educators if our conversations had produced any further reflection, and if any changes had been made to RSE in their schools since we had spoken, but mostly received signed transcript release forms with friendly but short responses back), I read the transcripts again to identify what was being said, what the narratives were *doing*, the broader contexts in which the conversations were embedded, and my own relationship to the narratives. This process is the first step of the *Listening Guide* (Gilligan et al., 2003), and is an approach to identifying the plot of a narrative within its larger social context, the relational context of the researcher and participant, and the responses of the researcher. In this way, I attempted to make explicit the process of meaning-making, and enhance my ability to listen to participants. This was an important step toward continually attending to the relational ethics that inform this project, and to ensuring that the educators' narratives were carefully interpreted and disseminated (see Fine, 2017). Of note here is my use of a conversational approach to interviewing and a concern with what research *does*, rather than what it sets out to explain. I struggled with this approach throughout the research process, and how it informed the narratives of the educators I spoke with (when the conversation flowed well, my standpoint was sometimes difficult to disentangle from the voices of the educators, and when it didn't I felt myself asking questions that may have directed their narratives in order to keep the conversation going). This is important to note in relation to this first step of the *Listening Guide*, wherein the aim is to acknowledge my responses in order to enhance my ability to listen to participants, as although my collaborators voices were strong and distinct, the conversational nature of the interviews meant that I also found their voices echoing my own - and what I hoped this research would *do*. My investment in this research meant that I was continually reflecting on the conversations, extending my thinking, and seeking out new literature that would help me to make sense of what was being said. As the research progressed, I found myself wondering how our conversations were travelling with the

educators, and how possibilities for promoting change through conversation had become potentialised.

**Affective Flows.** After identifying the narrative plots that emerged from my conversations with educators, I deviated from the *Listening Guide* (Gilligan et al., 2003) and turned to Alldred and Fox (2018) for guidance on how to map the affective flows that inform capacities for relationship building within the context of RSE. This merging of two approaches made sense - by tracing the narrative plots of the educators I was able to listen closely to the educators' voices, acknowledging the gift of their narratives, and making visible the way the conversational approach to interviewing informed a sharing of ideas that shaped how the research evolved. This allowed the broader relational, sociocultural, and political forces that inform sexuality education to emerge through a collaborative process. In this way, I was able to attend to the relational ethics that inform the foundation of this research, while storying the threads of theory that inform its ethico-onto-epistemology back into relationship with the narratives.

Alldred and Fox (2018) articulate sexuality education as a relational assemblage, wherein a range of relationships constitute the affective flows that produce sexual capacities in young people. Drawing from Deleuze and Guattari (1987), the authors map the way sexual capacities emerge through the affective assemblage of bodies, things, ideas and social institutions, rather than from within individual bodies - with the always emerging affective flows between entities producing intensities and occlusions that produce sexual capacities. For Alldred and Fox, the first step toward identifying the relations that inform sexuality education assemblages is by close reading, in order to proactively imagine new possibilities that emerge from the constraining forces that have been mapped. The focus on relationships, pornography, social media, and diversity that emerged from my close reading of the educator's storying strongly echoed the latest iteration of RSE guidelines (Ministry of Education, 2020), informing my decision to map the way educators interact with policy in a relationship that becomes part of a sexuality education assemblage. Before mapping the relationship between policy and the way educators put it into practice, I needed to identify the affective flows that inform RSE policy, so the next step was a close reading of the current guidelines. While weaving together the narratives that emerged from my conversations with educators, my responses to them, the RSE guidelines, the feminist theory this project is positioned within, and the broader sociocultural contexts in which this assemblage is

## Developing Relationships that Matter

embedded, the particular institutional contexts (schools) in which students and educators interact also emerged as salient entities that push and pull through bodies in affective flows that both territorialise and have the potential to deterritorialise sexuality education in Aotearoa. By mapping these relationships and the affective flows and constraining forces that emerged from them, Deleuzo-Guattarian (1987) 'lines of flight' emerged that potentialise change within the context of RSE. I also put Maria Tamboukou's (2008) approach to work by tracing the connections between texts, making explicit the way narratives become other through interpretive processes, and mapping the relationship between power, politics, and narrative desire. Rosi Braidotti's nomadic theory proved useful for connecting the affective, political and ethical implications of exploring these narratives, reminding me to take a stance that "privileges change and motion over stability" (2012, p. 29). Through these processes, I produced a cartography of the present landscape of RSE in Aotearoa, and by centring desire, critical engagement, affect, hope, the personal, and the local I hoped to uncover positive transitions that emerge from negative critiques. Finally, I considered Braidotti's appeal to become accountable for producing horizons of hope for future generations, and extended my analysis to envision possibilities for promoting relationships within the context of RSE that centre the embodied experiences and desires of young people.

In the following analyses, my process of coming into relationship with my collaborators narratives, and the ways these narratives engender particular relationships with students, is explained - before the historical contingencies that flow through current sexuality education policy are traced. Emerging from the process of bringing the educators narratives together through policy, theory, and my own (situated) interpretations, an in-depth analysis of the affective occlusions that constrain the relational within sexuality education praxis is then mapped. Finally, horizons of hope are identified by bringing the educators voices together in a process of collaborative sense-making, where our collective imaginings open up lines of flight that potentialise relational capacities within the context of sexuality education.

## Analyses

### **Collaborative Desire and My Responses to the Conversations**

I came into the conversations nervous, battling with my own feelings of being an imposter, an adult-student working on her first research project meeting with professionals who functioned in the real world outside of the theory where I had existed for over a year. I introduced myself broadly, hoping to open up a space that the educators could fill with whatever responses came to the forefront of their minds, aware that my aim was to engage in collaborative conversation rather than to interview participants. I attended to the imbalance of power inherent in research relationships by revealing how my own experiences as a teenager informed the context of discovery, bringing the standpoint theory that informs the theoretical beginnings of this project into a relational practice. This was both an ethical and a political manoeuvre, intended to disrupt the question of who can know and who can be known by locating my own storied experiences within the research (see Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1992). I then explained my desire to collaborate in conversation, and asked about the complexities, changes, limitations, and possibilities of RSE - and in particular the possibilities for connecting with students in this space. My collaborators responded with equally broad descriptions of their roles, their experiences within schools, and the changing space of RSE – with consent, pornography, digital culture and diversity often emerging as the topical starting points of our conversations.

The conversations generally flowed well; however, my location as a student (with a thesis to complete) evoked a tension between my aim of engaging in collaborative, unstructured conversations and the feminist activism that informs the politics of this project. This meant that I would sometimes direct the conversation toward heteronormativity, or the relationships educators can develop with their students, areas of interest that did not emerge spontaneously from most of the conversations. After listening to the recorded conversations, I was relieved to find that the educators spoke extensively without me interrupting them (too much) and that their particular voices were diverse and distinct. My own response to the process of speaking with educators formed its own narrative journey - at times I became frustrated and disillusioned by the absence of references to the relationships between educators and their students in our conversations (despite my persistence), and the lack of attention paid to gendered power relationships. As I reflexively worked through these

## Developing Relationships that Matter

feelings, I remembered Anne Oakley's (2016) reminder to accept the narratives of participants in research relationships as a gift, and that power is negotiated in research within complex political and ethical relationships that the researcher must take responsibility for. I was also reminded that narratives can be conceptualised as performative, and listened for the multiplicity of voices that revealed the deeply embedded location within institutions and power relations that the educators were negotiating in their narratives (see Loots et al., 2013; Phoenix, 2013; Riessman, 2001). With this in mind, I reflected on Oakley's observation that participants choose the storied experiences that they share with researchers, and that my frustration at not finding the stories I had been looking for could be transformed into an ethical responsibility for storying the narratives that my collaborators had chosen to share with empathy. This empathy also helped me to take accountability for the power inherent in producing the final product of this research, a product that I envision as a beginning to developing future relationships and thinking within this space.

## **Narrative Plots and the Relationships They Engender**

Mapping out the educators' narrative plots helped me to come into relationship with their voices and gave me a foundation to build my analyses on, aligning with the collaborative, relational desire that informs this project. The empathy I developed for my collaborators informed my decision to plot the affective flows that produce relational capacities within the context RSE (rather than attempting to analyse the educators as fixed individuals), which became an ethical pathway toward acknowledging that narratives are always embedded within broader relational assemblages. A link between the educators' narrative plots and the kinds of relationships they felt they could build with their students also emerged from my close reading of the transcripts (Table 2), which I continually returned to as I traced the affective flows that produce relational capacities within the context of RSE. In this way, the collaborative nature of this research shaped the focus of my analytical processes, and the affective flows that emerged from my storying of the educators' narratives.

**Table 2***Educators' Narrative Plots and the Relationships They Engender*

<b>Collaborator</b>	<b>Narrative Plot</b>	<b>Building relationships with students</b>
Collaborator one	I am an educator, I need to teach students skills so that they can make good decisions, but most educators feel uncomfortable teaching in this space.	My job is to educate, not counsel – there are other people who students can go to for support (e.g peers, counsellors, deans).
Collaborator two	I don't know what the most important topics to teach are, or what a good Health programme should look like – none of us do because of insufficient training.	As a form teacher I am invested in my relationships with students – not as a classroom (Health) teacher for one hour a week.
Collaborator three	I am worried about promiscuity and online spaces and want to do more for senior students – but parents, BOT's and senior management decide what I should talk about.	I have open relationships with my junior students, where they can come to me for support – but we don't do enough for senior students in this space.
Collaborator four	RSE is valuable - why wouldn't we want students having these conversations? We need to have straightforward, fun conversations (not teach and tell).	I feel like I could build really good relationships with students, but don't see them for long enough, and how comfortable students feel depends on the existing school environment.
Collaborator five	We need to change the narrative (away from telling students what they should be learning) and make RSE a safe space where young people can tell us what they need to be learning.	The relationships we build with students, and the classroom environments we create together, are prerequisite for teaching RSE well.
Collaborator six	We need to normalise speaking about emotions and mental health, and there needs to be better communication between RSE educators, counsellors and senior leadership.	Building relationships with students is easy if you talk to them in the right way; however, cultural, legal and bureaucratic constraints limit the relationships I can build with young people.

**Affective Flows: Politics, Policy, People, and Places**

*“...it’s massively changed I’d say, even since I’ve been here. I’ve been here for about 10 years I think, umm, yeah, massively changed. It was a bit more ‘This is an STI and this is contraception’, but really good still that we were talking about, that this is what a healthy relationship looks like. But I think even in the last couple of years it’s, it’s massively changed...”*. Lily

Rosi Braidotti (2012) highlights the political power of desiring change, and the need to live within complexity and transition in order to hold space for processes of becoming. For the educators I spoke with, the changing landscape of sexuality education in Aotearoa contextualises both their uncertainties and new possibilities for what RSE can do. The period of transition highlighted in their narratives makes RSE, in this particular historical moment, a site wherein change can be both potentialised and constrained – a tension that I trace throughout my analysis. Braidotti (1993) also highlights the importance of considering the histories that converge and disperse within cartographies of the present, and of dis-identifying with the centre (from my own position somewhere in the borderlands) in order to articulate new desires and becomings. Although I briefly traced the history of sexuality education in my literature review, a broader mapping of education and policy-making in Aotearoa is required before the historically contingent affective flows that inform the current RSE guidelines can emerge from the conversations I had with educators.

The emphasis on relationships, consent, pornography, digital technologies and gender and sexual diversity in the latest iteration of RSE guidelines (Ministry of Education, 2020) was clearly echoed in the narratives of my collaborators, making visible the way technological, cultural, social, and political changes (e.g. gay marriage legislation, digital communication practices, LGBTQI+ activism, the #MeToo Movement) and policy interact in affective flows. These affective flows constitute capacities that have the potential to be both restrictive and productive, connecting with students and educators to (re)produce or resist gendered power relationships and the heteronormative practices embedded in schools – wherein a disconnection emerges from the situating of sexuality education within institutional spaces that delimit and prioritise the mind as separate from matters of the body (Garland-Levitt, 2020; Paechter, 2004).

## Developing Relationships that Matter

The relationship between the four concepts of hauora, attitudes and values, a social-ecological approach, and health promotion that form the foundation of sexuality education policy in Aotearoa (Ministry of Education, 2020) became the affective flows that emerged from the educator's storying of their own embodied experiences within educational institutions. The RSE guidelines are also embedded within a health and physical education curriculum concerned with mental health, drug and alcohol, food and nutrition, and safety and violence-prevention education, wherein learning is intended to address the well-being of communities (Ministry of Education, 2020) - highlighting the location of RSE at the intersection of public health goals and education (Garland-Levitt, 2020; Smyth, 2000; Fitzpatrick & Burrows, 2017). The situating of sexuality education at this intersection aligns with the assumption that the provision of knowledge will result in changes to individual behaviours, a response that fails to account for the social determinants of health that produce inequalities in the conditions of everyday life (Garland-Levitt, 2020), and the particular ways in which gendered power relationships affect the application of sexual knowledge to embodied sexual practices (Allen, 2001). Historically concerned with preventing unwanted pregnancy and STI's (and governing the risky bodies of young women and girls), the emphasis my collaborators placed on the period of rapid change within the context of RSE suggested a shift away from risk-prevention toward a comprehensive approach to sexualities that are embedded in the relational, although this ostensible change becomes problematised through my storying of the narratives.

The holistic approach to sexuality education outlined in the RSE guidelines draws from Sir Mason Durie's (1982/1994) articulation of hauora through the Te Whare Tapa Whā model, that my collaborators often cited as the foundation on which their health and physical education curriculums were built upon. This holistic approach positions sexuality education in Aotearoa as a progressive curriculum that has been lauded for attending to diversity, promoting social justice, and centring critical engagement (Fitzpatrick & Burrows, 2017; Fitzpatrick et al., 2022), and can be contextualised within the broader history of educational policy in Aotearoa. Founded on an "egalitarian and liberal-progressive philosophy that permeated social, political and educational thought and which maintains a strong legacy in New Zealand today" (Mutch, 2013, p. 99), the politics that inform RSE can be traced to the foundation of government in Aotearoa, with the signing of Te Tiriti in 1840 informing a unique bi-cultural policyscape. However, schooling for Māori at this time was explicitly intent on colonising Māori ways of knowing, and by the end of the 1800s a rapid decline in

## Developing Relationships that Matter

the Māori population, poor health and well-being outcomes, and the loss of tribal land emerged as outcomes of contested and unfulfilled treaty obligations (Mutch, 2013). The enduring effects of colonisation continue to ensure inequitable socio-economic, educational, and well-being outcomes for Māori, underscoring the importance of efforts that work to decolonise the structures and institutions that inform the conditions of everyday life in Aotearoa (Durie, 2003; Love, 2008; Walker et al., 2006). Thus, the signing of Te Tiriti can be conceptualised as a placeholder, contributing to the development of a unique policyscape informed by values of social justice and egalitarianism that have yet to be fully realised. Still, a history of progressive legislation (e.g. being the first country to give women the vote) does provide a broad context for approaches to education in Aotearoa, with unprecedented social reform following the Great Depression also resulting in a welfare state that was lauded for its successes, and an emphasis on providing liberal and holistic education to all students informing educational policy at this time (Mutch, 2013).

The liberal-progressive context from which the RSE guidelines emerge pushed up against a conservatism informed by Christian-based morality, structural racism (Jackson & Weatherall, 2010a), and increasingly neoliberal and neoconservative agendas when an economic downturn in the late 1960s informed a restructuring of the welfare state in the 1980s that was intended to curb governmental spending and open up the economy to international market forces (McMaster, 2013; Mutch, 2013). This shift saw a decentralisation of regional school management that left the responsibility of the day-to-day running of individual schools in the hands of elected boards of trustees (BOT's), while the Ministry of Education was formed to control policy, curriculum, and assessment, and the ERO was established to evaluate and report on schools – a structuring that remains in place today.

The decentralisation of school management practices aligned with the neoliberal outsourcing of people and organisations that increasingly informed approaches to education, which alongside increased funding to private schools and a relaxing of school zoning rules was expected to promote consumer choice and drive schools to compete - creating a market that would produce a world-class schooling system (McMaster, 2013). These changing values led to inequitable educational opportunities for disenfranchised communities, while responsibility was placed on the individual (or individual school), rather than on the structural and systematic inequalities produced within neoliberal capitalism (Nash, 2007, as cited in McMaster, 2013). Adding to the tension between progressive, conservative, and neoliberal agendas was a Māori cultural resurgence in the 1970s, which would eventually see moves to

## Developing Relationships that Matter

include Māori ways of knowing in health and educational settings. However, by the 1990s, education based on principles of child-led and holistic learning were restricted by the newly conceived curriculum, wherein prescriptive achievement objectives were implemented in accordance with increasingly normative neoliberal values (MacMaster, 2013; Mutch, 2013).

The particular cultural and ideological landscape that informs policy in Aotearoa has also produced a resistance that has insulated our educational system from the extreme privatisation, standardisation and high-stakes testing that informs neoliberal schooling models seen overseas (e.g. in the US), with enrolment zones eventually being reinstated and our national qualifications maintaining an internal assessment component that resists standardisation (McMaster, 2013). The structural changes that see BOT's entrusted with the day-to-day running of schools also opens up possibilities for local campaigners to "explore values and create cultures that encourage the value of caring over selfish competition" (MacMaster, 2013, p. 529), a possibility that is encouraged within RSE guidelines (Ministry of Education, 2020) that promote community consultation and student activism, while also contributing to the historical inconsistency between policy and praxis.

This brief history of the relationship between education and the polycscape in Aotearoa provides me with a context for mapping out the narratives of my participants, and for tracing the affective flows that interact with RSE policy. Drawing from student voice alongside queer, Indigenous, disability, health, education, psychology, and a touch of feminist research, RSE policy in Aotearoa today becomes a site wherein issues of human rights and social justice assemble - in what my collaborators identify as a resurgence of holistic approaches to sexuality education. However, social democratic and neoliberal values continue to conflate within the guidelines, intersecting with public health goals to produce a complex space for educators to negotiate in their classrooms, and the convoluted cartography of the present that emerged through my co-constructed sense-making with educators.

### ***Where Does RSE Belong, Anyway?***

The underlying concepts of 'attitudes and values' (wherein students are encouraged to develop a sense of social justice and respect each other's rights), a 'socio-ecological perspective' (wherein students are expected to critically examine the broader structures that influence their sexualities), and 'hauora' (wherein well-being is considered along four dimensions - the spiritual, family/social, physical, and mental/emotional) that inform the

## Developing Relationships that Matter

latest RSE guidelines (Ministry of Education, 2020) create possibilities for engaging students in conversations that centre their own embodied experiences, and critical engagement with issues including media, gender, heteronormativity, diversity, desire, pleasure, and the cultural, political, and economical influences that inform their sexual and relational capacities. However, these concepts are framed within broad learning objectives, and how the guidelines are put into practice outside of compulsory RSE in Years 9 and 10 (when students are aged between 13-15) is left up to individual schools and their respective BOT's. Although the guidelines stipulate that all senior students should be offered learning programmes that align with student needs and RSE learning objectives, and suggestions are made as to how critical engagement with these objectives can be promoted within the broader curriculum (e.g. within English, Science etc.), these recommendations rely on the successful implementation of the ambitious whole-school approach to RSE outlined in the guidelines. The educators I spoke with acknowledged that this whole-school approach was a complex undertaking that was yet to be fully realised in their schools, with little communication between departments and token attempts at engaging the community (e.g. annual google surveying of the parents of Year 9 students) constraining its implementation - resulting in limited opportunities for students to critically engage in this space outside of optional senior Health classes. Lily (the head of a Health & PE department) had formed a relationship with the counsellor at her school that enabled a collaborative brainstorming of new ways to engage students outside of compulsory RSE classes. However, this interdepartmental collaboration was unique to Lily's narrative, and her attempts at realising the ideas developed in collaboration were constrained by bureaucratic processes that require new ideas to be appraised and authorised by school management and BOT's. For Iris (a school counsellor), her interest in contributing to RSE was constrained by the lack of relationship between departments at her school:

*Iris: I mean there was not a lot of um, (...) we were not very collegial in that way, you know, like it was, I would have thought that talking to these teachers would have been something basic to do, being in communication and, (-) just say, 'Hey, do you want to come in and, you know, have a bit of a chat about emotions' or, you know, something...*

Although Iris acknowledged that the creation of 'well-being spaces' within schools was a positive move toward attending to the emotional needs of students, her observation that

## Developing Relationships that Matter

the lack of cohesion within schools resulted in a missed opportunity to support students was reiterated in many of the educators' narratives. The question of how to integrate a whole-school approach to sexuality education without collaboration remained effectively unanswered, with educators unsure how to promote the value of RSE in schools. This lack of collective vision highlighted the way sexuality education is already embedded in disciplinary and exclusionary spaces, wherein Health and PE teachers bear the brunt of taking responsibility for successfully implementing holistic guidelines that depend on integration across school environments. The bureaucratic splitting of departments, teams and responsibilities was also highlighted in Kate's narrative, wherein the specificity of her role as a provider of sexuality education suggested that a whole-school approach was limited by an institutional lack of support in ensuring its universal implementation:

*Kate: ...not creating that space is probably because of umm, ignorance or yeah, lack of education for staff and I have, like, thought about you know, things like doing staff PD umm, around that space, but also around pornography because I think issues, issues of pornography should almost be, it should be known by all staff so that we can like support, always support students and reiterate the importance of umm consent and safe, yeah, safe sexual spaces. Because who knows what teacher (...) they're going to go to for support. And, umm yeah, so that's, that's definitely a limitation there. It's just having time and stuff to do that as well and, yeah, I, I think if it was offered teachers would put their hand up to be involved in this education because, you know, the more they know the better for themselves.*

The neoliberal outsourcing of services also means that outside providers (e.g. the police, Family Planning, 'Mates & Dates', 'BodySafe') or targeted one-off assemblies are generally relied upon to provide a 'one and done' approach to issues including consent, coercion, digital safety, and pornography for senior students who choose not to study Health as a National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) qualification, limiting the socio-ecological, holistic and critical approaches recommended in the guidelines (Ministry of Education, 2020). The potential for students to engage in embodied learning is constrained when they are expected to integrate knowledge that is delivered in spasmodic and targeted interventions designed to address the social issues identified as salient by the Ministry of Education, which were often framed as 'topics' that schools are obliged to attend to in the

## Developing Relationships that Matter

educators' narratives. For the most part, senior Health classes were designated as the place wherein critical engagement with gender and sexuality belongs:

*Carey: Do you get to talk much about umm, sort of like the broader structural issues around gender and umm socioeconomic status and race and how they play into relationships and you know, stuff like heteronormative relationships and how that plays into consent and all of, do you get to kind of discuss with older students anywhere more of that stuff so that they can critically think about how those broader structures might impact their own experiences and lives or...*

*Kate: Yeah, but only in probably Level 2 Health where it's looking at umm how society influences, or how people umm influence how we look at gender and sexuality through different lenses - so advertising, media, social media, umm culture, umm...*

Here, RSE is restricted for a majority of students, and educators often described a limited focus on media representations that dominated enquiry into gender and sexuality in optional senior Health classes. This results in a lack of opportunities to engage in embodied learning that begins to trouble gendered power relationships at an age when young people are becoming increasingly sexually active (Ministry of Education, 2020). The question of how to create space (including non-assessable and informal spaces) for senior students to continue these conversations emerged in my first meetings with educators, and the collaborative nature of this project informed my desire to carry this question through to later conversations. The educators' ability to carve out space for senior students to have ongoing conversations was constrained by the value schools, senior leadership, BOT's and parents attached to RSE, constituting the micro-political affective flows that Alldred and Fox (2018) describe as both producing and restricting sexuality education capacities:

*Lily: Umm, I would, I would like to do a bit more in the senior space umm, I dabbled in it last year with some senior assemblies but yeah, I think it is an area we can definitely improve on, and it's, it's, it's, again what I don't know, what value is, do we see in it as a school kind of thing. Like yeah, we're great at getting them out their NCEA stuff but, you know, are we, where does our role*

## Developing Relationships that Matter

*start and finish compared to the parents and in terms of raising (...), or, there's some people that can be great in our community kind of, you know it's, it's a bit of both and you know, who wants to talk about sexuality? Is it, should it be a parent thing? Do parents want us talking about it, you know, with them? You know, it's a whole, big picture stuff I guess.*

Lily's uncertainty as to where discussions around sexuality belong reveal a lingering moral conservatism that works to proscribe speaking with young people about sexuality, with adolescent sexuality located under the domain of parental authority, and therefore perhaps best situated outside of (not belonging in) school environments. Lily's uncertainty can also be read through Sarah Garland-Levitt's (2020) reminder that Health and PE curriculums have a history of being marginalised in schools, wherein developing the mind ('NCEA stuff') is prioritised and set in opposition to the always gendered and sexualised body - which is concealed within institutional spaces when it is considered a distraction from the goal of developing the mind in order to manufacture productive citizens. Although some educators identified that a greater focus on RSE in recent years meant that its status was also transitioning, at Lily's school there are currently no optional Health classes after mandatory RSE in Year 10. Her attempts to make changes that attend to this gap in senior level learning are often frustrated by bureaucratic processes and a top-down approach to curriculum decisions – exemplifying the way Health and PE are often awarded a low academic status in schools. This low status is not reflected in the rising popularity of Health as a NCEA qualification, with educators citing increased enrolment in senior Health classes as evidence of young people's growing interest in this space, and a tension emerged from the educators' narratives between what students' desire to learn and the opportunities that are provided to them within schools:

*Kate: I think that's why we've had more uptake of Health & PE at our school, they're just really interested in stuff that affects them day to day, umm but you know, there's so many pressures on kids to take certain subjects and, and you know, they wanna do engineering and thats all sciences and maths, so it kind of can be out of their control most of what they want, what they want to learn about.*

Here, Kate points to the pressures on senior students to take classes that will improve their future employment opportunities, and the way this restricts their desire to engage in learning around the 'stuff that affects them day to day'. This restriction to embodied learning

## Developing Relationships that Matter

is informed by neoliberal values of individual achievement that work to block the implementation of the Ministry of Education's (2020) recommendation that all students should be offered opportunities to engage in this learning.

While senior students are limited by the value placed on RSE in competitive educational environments, junior students are differentially restricted from considering their own sexual becoming. Lily describes engaging in open conversations with students around pornography and consent in junior classes but expressed doubt about the appropriateness of addressing pleasure with younger students - echoing the uncertainty of the educators I spoke with who questioned how and if they should speak with early adolescents about promiscuity, pornography and desire. Louisa Allen's observation that sexuality education "serves as a vehicle for addressing a plethora of social, economic and moral issues, a role that shapes what is considered appropriate curriculum content" (2008, p. 574) helped me to make sense of why discussing pleasure with young people is still prohibited - constrained by affective forces informed by moral conservatism, economic demands, and social anxieties despite its inclusion at all levels of learning in the RSE guidelines. Lily's apprehension was distinct from Kate's openness to talking about pleasure and desire with her students; however, pleasure was positioned as a segue into discussing good decision-making skills, or contained within the bounds of healthy relationships in Kate's narrative:

*Kate: ... gender and sexuality, umm like, we're like, yeah, we talk about why would you get into a healthy relationship and why would you want to be with someone you know. The positives are that, this is why people do have sex, you know, like this is why people want to share this intimacy.*

Despite her concerns around the derogatory way boys spoke about girls at her school, sexual behaviours enabled by online spaces, and the gendered violence normalised in pornography, when I asked Lily if she had conversations around pleasure or desire with her students she also responded by positioning good sexual decision-making as contingent on developing healthy heteronormative relationships. Evoking an intuitive understanding of Gavey's (1992, 2019) heteronormative continuum alongside a fear of becoming responsible for troubling it, a tension emerged in Lily's narrative between the gendered power relationships she observed within schools and the negotiation of her own location in an already disciplinary and exclusionary institution:

## Developing Relationships that Matter

*Lily : Yeah, we don't really talk about that.*

*Carey: You don't talk about pleasure?*

*Lily: Nah, not for Year 10's...*

*Carey: Or like the good...*

*Lily: We talk about healthy relationships and loving like umm, things like if you're not comfortable talking with your partner about contraception are you really in that trustful relationship where you could be thinking about having sex, like that, so that kind of thing. But we don't really talk about pleasure. I know that's an area that (...) it's one of those grey areas where we don't obviously, the age of consent in New Zealand is 16, is 16, so if we're, we don't want them to not know, but we want to promote good relationships, we don't necessarily want to promote sex in Year 10s. It's kind of a hard area because we don't want to (...) 'Oh, Miss said sex was great', but you know what I mean? Which it is but you don't want to...*

I continued by describing the concept of thick desire (Fine & McClelland, 2006), and its potential for shifting the focus away from the act of sex toward critical engagement with the politics of wanting, but Lily resisted this line of thought, and I was ultimately compelled to cede my desire to engage her in this thinking when the conversation came to an awkward standstill. Bringing to mind Jackson and Weatherall's (2010b) question of whether a feminist-based sexuality education belongs in school environments that are always already colonised within the patriarchy, this awkward moment in our conversation provoked me to reflect on the possibility of promoting opportunities for educators to engage in feminist ways of knowing, and the potentials for effecting change that could take flight from such an imagining.

The absence of, and resistance to, considerations of gendered power relationships emerged alongside a centring of a never fully defined conceptualisation of 'healthy relationships', interacting with the latest RSE guidelines (Ministry of Education, 2020), and becoming an affective flow that resonated throughout the narratives of my participants. The educators described a focus on relationships beginning in primary school, where discussions around consent, bullying, friendships, and family provide the foundation for progressing into conversations that centre romantic and sexual relationships in later years. Although this focus

## Developing Relationships that Matter

on the relational nature of sexuality opens up possibilities for critical engagement with gendered power, few of my collaborators referred to gender unless pressed. When asked if students get opportunities to examine heteronormativity the educators would inevitably circle back to gender and sexuality diversity - echoing the RSE guideline's emphasis on creating safe spaces for LGBTQI+ students by fixating on their schools acceptance of pronoun preferences. Although the educators generally claimed that their schools were becoming safe spaces, deeper reflections into their relationships with LGBTQI+ students were omitted from our conversations, with the students themselves often located within the boundaries of special interest groups. Some educators claimed that such groups (e.g. Rainbow groups) contributed meaningfully to school cultures; still, heterosexuality itself remained relatively unmarked outside of Lily and Iris's narratives - thus maintaining its privileged status, and *ipso facto* (re)positioning diversity as 'Other'. Here, the deeply embedded power of heteronormativity remained unattended to, seemingly so normative as to be hidden from view.

The centring of healthy relationships in RSE also evoked early arguments in the contested space of sexuality education in schools, reproducing a moral conservatism wherein the view that sex should be confined to marriage is re-articulated into a sexuality contingent on developing healthy heteronormative relationships. This worked alongside a lingering fear that talking about pleasurable sex is tantamount to promoting it to constrain sexuality education capacities, and adolescent sexuality continued to be territorialised as risky and abject - limiting the potential for the affective transmission of shame to be troubled when sexuality and girl's bodies come into view. Working to resist change, this affective occlusion also limited the holistic approach to RSE my collaborators wished to embody, reproducing a fear of the always already sexualised bodies of young women who continue to become a risk that needs to be managed and contained (within heteronormative relationships). In this way, critical engagement is constrained when risk-prevention and health promotion agendas informed by social anxieties around adolescent sexuality produce an affective force that works to limit relational capacities within the context of RSE, wherein teaching skills to promote good choices is prioritised over the learning that emerges from the embodied knowing of young people.

Lily's resistance to taking responsibility for talking to young people about sexuality also eludes the fact that sexuality education has held a formal position in schools in Aotearoa since the 1990s (Fitzpatrick & Burrows, 2017), and the decrease in parents opting their

## Developing Relationships that Matter

children out of RSE observed by my collaborators. Fitzpatrick and Burrows (2017) highlight the way the ‘Roastbusters’ case led to consistent media attention on sexuality education, resulting in pressure being put on government agencies to respond to a public demand that schools provide sexuality education in the interests of safety - especially for girls. This public concern with the safety of girls manifests in health promotion approaches informed by postfeminist and neoliberal assumptions, wherein young women are expected to take responsibility for their own safety - despite the inequitable gender relationships that inform the conditions of their everyday lives. The emphasis on consent in the latest iteration of the RSE guidelines reflect the increasing public interest in the safety of young girls, exemplifying the processes by which policy always reflects the sociocultural environments in which it is embedded (Fitzpatrick & Burrows 2017). Fitzpatrick and Burrow’s also describe the way policy can sometimes “push at the boundaries of what society might ostensibly be ready for” (2017, p. 552), and after spending months immersed in feminist theory, it was the discrepancy between policy-making and praxis that helped me to make sense of why the inclusion of pleasure and desire in the current RSE guidelines remained mostly absent in the narratives of my collaborators. Despite a policy that promotes a comprehensive approach to sexuality education, Lily’s concerns around the age of consent also worked to block the affective flows that have potential to open up capacities for what young people can imagine, do, and desire. For the educators I spoke with, critical engagement into the broader power relationships that inform sexuality is limited to media studies within optional senior Health classes, and while a shift away from centring assessment means that younger students do get opportunities to engage in open conversation, these conversations were limited to discussions around contraception, healthy relationships, biological changes, consent, and sometimes pornography - with health promotion continuing to dominate approaches to mandatory RSE. Despite the emphasis on critical engagement centred in the RSE guidelines (Ministry of Education, 2020), a lack of attention to the relationship between gender and power emerged from the educators’ narratives, with feminist ways of knowing still not meaningfully attended to (still not belonging) within RSE curriculums.

The amount of time schools are willing to invest in student learning outside of official achievement qualifications was questioned by educators, and a clear distinction between mandatory RSE and optional senior Health classes emerged from the educator’s narratives - alongside feelings of being overwhelmed by the task of attending to the massive scope of RSE:

*Tom: And it comes back to the question about, what, you know, what have you got time to actually deliver with the students, what's important, yeah, and nobody really said 'This is important, this is the, this is the key topics you should be covering', you know there's 50 topics you could cover in Year 9 and 10, you can only do so many, what, what, what's important right now I guess?*

For Tom, the disconnect between the ever-changing and all-encompassing potential of RSE and the time its value is accorded within schools makes taking responsibility for its provision an overwhelming task. Here, the ambitious goals of the RSE guidelines can only ever be undercooked when its status remains undervalued, with bureaucratic constraints and mutable social anxieties interacting with moral boundaries that must be breached in order for educators to take responsibility for building relationships that matter in this space. Evoking the question of whether sexuality education belongs in schools (or elsewhere?), educational institutions are also constrained by these same boundaries, and an educator's location becomes a risky one when sexuality, relationships, and young people converge.

### ***Risky Subjects***

For Lily, the age of consent and anxieties around parental authority made pleasure a taboo subject for younger students, constraining the potential for desire to become other or more than just sex, and highlighting the risks involved in becoming responsible when a fear of breaching moral boundaries constrains relational capacities within the context of sexuality education. To make sense of the tensions that emerge when educators become responsible for providing sexuality education I turned to Donna Haraway, who maps the violent histories that inform the co-constitutive relationships between dogs and humans (2003), and the entanglements between Big Pharma, urine, oestrogen, horses, and the times (2012), in order to bring into view the accountabilities required for ethically attending to difference. For Haraway, the process of producing knowledge that promotes mutual acknowledgement within power relationships is contingent on becoming responsive to the relational (becoming *response-able*). Such collective responsiveness was problematised in the narratives of the educators I spoke with, wherein narratives of risk emerged as occlusions to building relationships with students or engaging with the social power relationships that produce relational capacities. The location of educators as at-risk mirrors (reflects back on) discursive approaches that position young women's sexuality as always dangerous (Fine, 1988), and a

## Developing Relationships that Matter

fear of taking the risk to build relationships with adolescents in the context of RSE was highlighted in my conversations with educators:

*Rose: I think because it's sexuality, period, teachers would sometimes get concerned that they'd get asked, you know, like a umm, you know a question, it kind of puts them in a position of risk, I suppose.*

In my review of the literature, my focus had been on the potential for RSE to disrupt the moral conservatism that transmits shame onto young women's bodies by locating adolescent sexuality as always risky and at-risk, and I hadn't considered the risk for educators engaging in this space. As I reflected on my frustration at the lack of the relational in the educator's narratives, their storying of being put in risky situations with their students evoked empathy, and this empathy helped me to make sense of their location. Revisiting the narratives, I listened for the educators' understandings of how a fear of risk effected the relationships they could build with their students, and in the process of making sense of the connections and differences between the transcripts a fear of breaching professional boundaries emerged. The process of becoming empathetic allowed me to map out three affective flows that worked to produce this risk, a risk that worked to constrain relational capacities between educators and their students: a binary distinction between the professional and the personal, a lack of teacher training leading to feelings of discomfort, and a lingering fear of taking risks that transgress the moral boundaries that (attempt to) deny adolescents the power to engage in processes of sexual becoming.

**It's Not Personal.** The educators I spoke with took their roles seriously and were invested in providing quality RSE to their students. However, their roles as sexuality educators were often constrained by the particular school and school management systems they interacted with, and a discontinuity emerged between their assigned role as experts in this space and the lack of power they had to develop relationships with students or put their ideas for engaging with students into practice:

*Iris: ...in that school there's a lot of umm, it gets really uh, bureaucratic, you know?  
There's a lot of umm hierarchy and...*

*Carey: Institutional boring...*

*Iris: Yeah, very, very, and also go through the, you know, the people to get to the, the top one and then the top one might be, it's either whether they want to go*

## Developing Relationships that Matter

*ahead with an idea, in a way well, they are open to listen to ideas but you have to go through a lot of hurdles, I guess. (-) But mostly with the senior leadership team and that sort of stuff you know, like the people above you, which I disagree with that as well, it's like we're all having a job here and we all have different positions, that doesn't make you better than me, but that, in that school there was quite a lot of that actually, a lot of the high rank and whether you do as, do as you're told, that kind of stuff.*

Although Iris speaks from her role as a school counsellor, her frustration was echoed by many of the educators I spoke with, who were constrained in their roles by various limitations (e.g. teaching in a parochial school where student activism is discouraged, time constraints, a lack of institutional support and collaboration) that obstruct educators from becoming response-able. For Iris, the top-down approach to implementing change in a school that resisted it informed her choice to leave her job, alongside the pressures involved in working as a mental health practitioner in an under-resourced school environment, with time-constraints and the demands of working as an educator also observed by Rose:

*Rose: Yeah, I mean, I think educators put it on the back burner. I, I mean, I know that they're flat out, they're so flat out, I don't know how teachers do it, umm, but I think it's a, it's a real kind of, it sits on the shelf and they've gotta do it every two years, so here, bring it out, you know, but everyone's a bit uncomfortable about it. I definitely think it needs to be, I guess brought to the forefront about why it's important, umm, I'm not sure that there's really any teacher education unless they actively seek it or like, you know, we would contact schools and let them know that we could offer this stuff, but realistically where do they find the time to fit a lot of that in? Umm, so it, it is a real tricky one.*

Rose's recognition that 'everyone is a bit uncomfortable about it' speaks back to the way the limited proportion of time allocated to delivering RSE is affected by a top-down approach, wherein the value accorded to sexuality education interacts with collective feelings of discomfort that are materialised in structural and institutional processes. Rose's reference to the way RSE 'sits on the shelf and they've gotta do it every two years' refers to the policy that positions health education as the only component of the curriculum that legally requires the BOT to consult with communities. Inherent in this legislation is the way sexuality education maintains its contested status as a field of knowledge that must be ratified by

## Developing Relationships that Matter

communities, producing a tension that informs the discomfort educators feel when attempting to take responsibility for delivering sexuality education. For Tom, the limited time allocated to RSE means that the ambitious scope of the RSE guidelines is constrained by the actual value (of time) it is accorded in the broader context of school curriculums. This value is embedded in the guidelines, wherein the ERO's (2007) claim that 12-15 hours a year is sufficient for sexuality education to be effectively delivered is cited, highlighting the way governmental and institutional barriers work to constrain possibilities for the becoming of RSE as space that can effect change within school environments. For the educators I spoke with, the limited time they spend with students as a Health or PE teacher was cited as a restriction to forming relationships, with multiple references to deans, homeroom teachers or counsellors as more appropriate adults for young people to form supportive relationships with. The status of RSE is also complicated by its differential location within schools, and the educational pathways to teaching RSE that follow either a sports or health major (or a combination of both) in universities in Aotearoa:

*Tom: Yeah, I mean there's some schools have separate Health departments and different PE departments, I think that that would go a long way to possibly raising the profile of the subject as well as having more time. I mean, there's so much, so many links, just so many things to look at, so many links to mental health and well-being and, and, but responsibility, if you, if you're like your average PE teacher to deliver one lesson a week, you know, if you, if you look at that in terms of your nineteen periods a week, it's a small percentage that one lesson for that class umm, so how much they can invest in that? I don't know.*

Tom's insight into the relationship between the value of time and the status of RSE in schools speaks to the question of response-ability. If there is not enough time to teach or respond relationally, who *is* responsible for building relationships that matter in this space? The educators interchangeably referred to themselves as Health or PE teachers, often identifying as PE teachers when describing the limitations to building relationships with their students, highlighting the peculiar situating of RSE at the intersection of sports, well-being, and sexuality. Some of the educators I spoke with reflected on their surprise when being told by senior management at the outset of their careers that the responsibility for teaching sexuality education would be theirs, after following their passion for sports into a learning

## Developing Relationships that Matter

pathway at university that omitted sexuality from its curriculum. Tom's recognition of the links between mental-health, well-being and RSE further complicate the location of educators in a role that straddles both public health agendas and education, raising the stakes for developing relationships with students when sexuality is involved. I turned to Alexandra Gunn and Lee Smith (2015) to make sense of this risk, who describe the dangerous terrain that must be negotiated when children and sexuality converge. Locating the conviction of Peter Ellis (posthumously overturned in October 2022) for the sexual abuse of children in a Christchurch crèche in 1991 as a turning point in education in Aotearoa, the authors describe how 'risk' was proliferated within representations of growing fears of the 'predatory sexual deviant' - with the hyper-sexualisation of young people augmented by technological advances also garnering increased attention at this time. For the educators I spoke with, and their respective schools, firm boundaries help to keep them safe - limiting the kinds of relationships that can be developed in this space:

*Kate: I mean, in terms of like educating them around it, sure, but I'm, 'cause I'm not, I'm not a trained counsellor so I can't, you know continue to, to guide them and their everyday life of like hard decisions they make you know, we can't give that to them, but I think (...) yeah, and so they, they kind of they need to go to people who like, deans and counsellors and stuff for that kind of support, umm...*

For Kate, firmly identifying as an educator who teaches skills so that young people can make their own good decisions works to distinguish her professional boundaries - and the personal remains largely absent from her narrative. These professional boundaries work to block relational affective flows, both within classrooms and with the professional voice that Kate brought into our conversation. Her location as a professional educator emerged as deeply embedded within neoliberal values of individual rights and responsibilities that inform a health pragmatism approach - wherein teaching good decision-making skills is assumed to promote changes in individual behaviour. Kate's location as a sexuality educator is constrained by the existing structural relations and institutional practices that produce and protect neoliberal approaches to sexuality education by individualising risk, while failing to account for the social determinants of health or open up space for relationship-building. Kate's strong identification as an educator also worked to protect her from taking responsibility for the well-being of her students, highlighting the peculiar hybrid space of

## Developing Relationships that Matter

RSE, wherein a nebulous distinction is made between teaching mental health, diversity, consent, relationships and sexuality and attending to the well-being of students - a distinction that constrains possibilities for relationship building to provide students with an everyday form of connection and support. Here, a binary distinction is articulated between teaching and counselling, academic and well-being disciplines, and the mind vs the embodied - a confusing distinction when considered against the consolidation of these categorisations within the holistic approach recommended in the RSE guidelines (Ministry of Health, 2020). Despite the location of sexuality educators as key knowledge providers around well-being within school environments, when it came to developing relationships with students they identified as 'just' PE teachers, and when asked about building supportive relationships with their students often associated my questions with issues of disclosure, safety, and harm:

*Carey: Do you, have you had any personal experience of kids approaching you?  
When they've got issues...*

*Lily: Yep, yeah, we get it, we, (-) quite frequently, especially a girl will realise,  
especially around consent, that, that that wasn't okay, I went through that and  
now I'm feeling shit about it, and so they quite often, umm let us know and  
then, depending on what it is, we'll, we'll forward them to the counsellors or  
let the counsellors know and, or suggest they go down there...*

Here, educators take responsibility for academic knowledge of well-being within school communities, but when this boundary is crossed (and embodied knowing comes into view) students are handed off to school counsellors, who the educators identified as appropriately trained to attend to the personal in school environments. However, as this responsibility gets passed on, further restrictions to supporting students are enacted. As a school counsellor, Iris too was limited in her ability to build relationships with students, with regular, ongoing meetings with students discouraged by her HOD, and procedures for referring students to outside services limiting the scope of what she could provide. The practice of the neoliberal outsourcing of people and services provoked me to imagine a shuffling of students through progressively strange sets of hands, away from the familiar faces they reach out to and toward increasingly unfamiliar organisations - in a system of risk-prevention procedures that highlight the influence of the psy-complex in schools. Iris expressed her frustration at the institutional processes that prevented her from developing

## Developing Relationships that Matter

relationships with her students – who she often met for the first time only when a problem had been identified by other staff members.

Although an extensive review of the relationship between psychology and education is beyond the scope of this analysis, the passing on of young people evoked a feeling of separation and detachment, and I turned to critiques of this relationship in order to help me make sense of my reflections. Drawing from Foucault to explain the way modern liberal governmentality interacts with knowledge produced within the psy-complex to discipline subjects into self-regulation, Petersen and Millei (2016) trace the powerful influence of psychology in educational practice and research. The author's also draw from Nicolas Rose (1999) to explicate the way psychology can be conceptualised as a technology for individualisation that works to categorise and diagnose children - while parents, teachers and the broader community are inculcated into its expertise within knowledges of the self that are embedded in categorical distinctions between the normal (white, hetero, male) and the abnormal (Other). For Harwood and Allan (2014), the knowledge produced within psychology is materialised in schools in risk management practices that intersect with race, gender and class, working through exclusionary practices that result in the overrepresentation of disadvantaged and minority students in remedial and disciplinary interventions – while failing to properly account for the way these racialised and discriminatory practices inform risk. Although Iris at first described her 'trust in the process' of risk assessment practices (e.g. reporting or referring students to Oranga Tamariki, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, or her HOD) when safety issues came into view, she later revealed her concerns regarding the impact it would have on the well-being of students when she reported them to outside authorities, and her desire to do more for the young people in her care:

*Iris: Many times I feel like I would, by me contacting or reporting something, it might have the, it might be worse, it might make things worse, and in my head I'm thinking, why do I need to make things worse for this kid when he actually had the guts to come into my office and open up about it...*

*Carey: And you could just spend some more time talking with them and, maybe...*

*Iris: Yeah, and I'd probably be able to, yeah, work with them in a, in a much more positive way, to get to a place rather than me turning sort of like, against them*

Developing Relationships that Matter

*and telling on them (-). Because I have to follow the law, you know, oh yeah, like I made a big problem for him...*

Iris's capacity to provide everyday forms of support for students is restricted by risk assessment procedures born out of the psy-complex, which become institutionalised by way of structural and economic exclusionary practices (Billington, 1996). My feelings here are viscerally conflicted and remain unresolved, and I could write a whole new thesis on the deeply problematic mental health and child welfare systems in Aotearoa. However, this research is concerned with the relationships educators are able to develop with their students, and although I understand that teachers are not mental health practitioners, an interaction between structural and institutional barriers, psychological knowledge production, and moral anxieties around adolescent sexuality was beginning to emerge from the educators narratives - in an affective assemblage that works to pathologise everyday forms of distress (see Nicholas Rose, 1999), and in particular the embodied experiences of young people (Fine, 1988; O'Sullivan & Thompson, 2014). Tom Billington (1996) maps the relationship between psychology, schools, and economic and governmental demands, drawing from his experiences as an educational psychologist to outline the way psychological expertise is mobilised in exclusionary risk management practices that often attend to the needs of individual schools, rather than the students they are ostensibly designed to support. For Iris, a lack of resources, the demands of the job, bureaucratic processes, and the broader cultural context in which speaking about mental health and emotions is prohibited exemplify the effects of these interactions, wherein multiple layers of structural, social and moral oppression produce the conditions of everyday life – blocking relational affective flows. Having moved here as an adult, Iris had a unique perspective on the way the values of the majority produce barriers to forming relationships in Aotearoa:

*Carey: And have the conversations...*

*Iris: Yeah, and, and open up and talk about it and not, because one thing, me coming from another culture as well, is that I find New Zealand, New Zealanders in general, they're quite ummm, there's structure, but most, mostly it's about being proper and saying what needs to be said and being politically correct and having this mask where that mask is always nice and saying you know, what needs to be said, but inside they might not be feeling like that and so I come...*

Developing Relationships that Matter

*Carey: Like, scared to be themselves?*

*Iris: Yes, scared to be themselves, to be different, to be themselves. I come from a culture where we are ourselves, I've got no mask, I'm being completely honest with you....*

*Carey: It's quite conservative?*

*Iris: Very*

Iris's description of the moral conservatism and political correctness that require New Zealanders to wear masks that prohibit open conversation evoked the social power relations that work to restrict the relational in multiple layers of oppression. Here, the political correctness Iris identifies masks risky feelings that must remain private - or at least be hidden in plain sight. In this way, the masks Iris describes work to restrict possibilities for having conversations that matter, when a fear of breaching social and moral boundaries block our relational capacities. Although Iris later cited feelings of anger and everyday forms of racism to exemplify what is masked, she also expressed the importance of normalising conversations around emotions, mental health and sexuality – especially with young boys. Here, the ongoing effects of gendered power relationships on the conditions of the everyday lives of young people emerged from her narrative as one of the tensions that are hidden in plain sight:

*Iris: It's almost like there is something wrong with you if you go into the counsellor, and in schools as well, 'You went to the counsellors, what's wrong with you?' That's the reason why counsellors don't go to the classrooms and fetch the kids, because then all the classmates will see the counsellor came to get you, 'What's wrong with you?'. There's this stigma about, yeah, something must be bad with you, so you know, boys especially need to learn how to be in tune with their emotions, it's fine, you know? And also there are so many kids that I feel that don't, they don't get the education that you would think they should get from parents, from, from their families, so they probably go about in their lives and when they're teenagers, not even knowing this stuff, you know, not knowing, even knowing that, you know, girls can be more sensitive or that, you know, they really umm, they, that they might, you know, like just encouraging, making them feel good about themselves or not being mean with their words or how impacting their words can be or...*

## Developing Relationships that Matter

*Carey: That emotional stuff, like how their actions actually make people feel...*

*Iris: Yeah, yeah! How would they know? How would they know if they say, for example, they come from parents that they don't even talk about this stuff, which are a lot, who's, who's talking to them about it you know, and especially boys.*

Speaking from her location as a mental health practitioner, and embedded within dominant processes of sense-making, Iris has difficulty expressing the connection between the emotional and the embodied, and located the responsibility for speaking with young boys about emotions and gender within the domain of the home. In the same breath, Iris identified her location as a counsellor as the relational context in which these conversations also belonged (while later acknowledging that boys rarely approached her), and identified a stigma that situates emotionality as pathology. This separation between education and the embodied experiences of young people informs the response that is lacking in school environments, with the passing on of students to outside agencies also initiating a response that fails to become responsible. The failure to take responsibility for emotions and mental health in school environments is embedded within structural and institutional barriers that constrain relational capacities, contributing to the risky location of sexuality educators, and the capacity for educators and their students to affect and be affected in institutional spaces.

These constraints informed the absence of relationships with students in many of the educators' narratives, leading me to feelings of despondence during the interview stage of this project, with the affective intensities of researching such a contested terrain flowing through me in waves of helplessness and doubt. This feeling of helplessness was intensified by the difficulty I had in finding educators who had the time to speak with me – with many of the counsellors I reached out to expressing enthusiasm for this project, but also citing the pressures of their jobs and their lack of involvement in RSE as reasons for not being able to participate. I had come into this research hoping to find change and possibility, and had instead found constraining forces that limit the ambitions of RSE policy – time constraints experienced by overworked and under-resourced educators, institutional barriers, moral boundaries, an enduring obsession with neoliberal health promotion, the privileging of a mind somehow separated from the body, and an adolescent sexuality still only ever at-risk – narratives of change reconstituted into sameness.

## Developing Relationships that Matter

My astute supervisor attuned to my despondency and took me back to Braidotti (2012), who re-energised my passion for this project. Reading with Braidotti helped me to make sense of my responses, a process that included working through my feelings of inertia and helplessness in order to transform my desire for change into collective response-ability. I extended my recruitment process by reaching out to old friends and new acquaintances, and found additional collaborators through informal networks who I chatted with via Facebook. In this way, I was able to develop less formal relationships than the previous conversations (which were restricted to scheduled one-off meetings) had enabled, informing the ease with which the ensuing conversations flowed. My new approach promoted a co-construction of sense-making with educators who storied their resistance to the institutional and structural barriers that preclude relationship building with students in different ways, eliciting my reflexivity so that I was able to listen to the traces of resistance I had missed in the narratives of all of my collaborators.

The reflective process helped me to make-sense of how Rose's role as an outside provider of sexuality education and teacher training allowed her to situate herself as a facilitator of conversations, rather than as a professional teacher whose task was to teach young people good decision-making skills. Her location as a specialist in relationship and sexuality education (outside of mainstream institutional education) also enabled Rose to detour the specific professional and institutional boundaries that educators within school environments encounter, and a confidence emerged from her narrative that she attempted to transmit to educators in the teacher education programmes she facilitated:

*Rose: ... And they (educators) were like, do we have to answer the silly questions? I'm like yes, you answer every question, 'cause you actually don't know if it's silly or not. Umm, and you can turn any silly question into a really boring straight up answer if it's a, you know, like a fact-based question. So you know like the, 'Can I get an STI from my sock'? I was just like, no. Ideally, it's going to be your own sock and you're going to be washing it, you'll be fine, you know, like boring, move on...*

This straightforward what matter-of-fact approach works to resist the moral anxieties that constrain sexuality education, opening up opportunities for students to contribute at all levels of learning, rather than restricting RSE to a health pragmatism approach. Rose's narrative moved away from the governing and surveillance of adolescent bodies, with her

## Developing Relationships that Matter

outside perspective bringing into view possibilities for supporting sexuality educators in order to promote feelings of confidence and comfortability in this space. The change of focus urged me to reflect on the social anxieties, moral boundaries, and feelings of shame that transmit through the bodies of adults in affective flows that produce sexual capacities in young people. Here, a line of flight emerged wherein speaking with young people about anything was legitimated, and the process of engaging in conversation was privileged over uncertainty around appropriate topics and the teaching of good decision-making skills. Like Daisy and Iris, Rose stressed the importance of changing the way we speak with young people, shifting away from a 'teach and tell' approach to RSE toward a facilitator approach that centres the embodied knowing of young people. When asked about her interactions with schools, Rose's location as an outside provider also informed her broad perspective, and she was able to identify alternative spaces wherein the already established relationships between educators and their students were distinct from the relationships made possible in mainstream educational institutions embedded within phallogentric and neoliberal exclusionary philosophies:

*Rose: It depends on the school and the area, some were incredible. Like umm, I worked at a Kura<sup>1</sup> down in (redacted for privacy), and it was probably one of the best experiences of my whole life, just an amazing, inclusive space, so much love and respect for everyone, uh regardless of their age, you could really feel it between the teachers and the students it was, it was a huge like umm, cultural component that they sometimes let me enter, which was like such a privilege (-). They were really open, umm, open to kind of, you know, just getting them that education and that's been the case in lots of schools, the special-Ed at the local high school have been amazing. But there have certainly been schools that I've attended where there have been teaching staff who haven't been open to some of the things or have, you know, of course questioned why its important, umm you know, and just scoffed a bit when we've talked about things like gender and diversity umm, yeah, so I, I think it really depends on the school and the school, umm ethos and the teaching staff and I guess their own, their own values...*

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<sup>1</sup> A Kura is a Māori immersion school.

## Developing Relationships that Matter

For Rose, the limited time she spent at schools restricted her ability to form ongoing relationships with students or take responsibility for responding relationally in a space that is ultimately governed by institutional constraints. However, her insights into the way differences between school environments and educator values interacted with RSE reminded me to be careful about the way I circulated my educators' narratives, and especially the way they voiced the concerns of their students (see Fine, 2017). Rose's focus on privileging conversation was also articulated by many of the educator's I spoke with, who questioned the importance of assessment in the context of mandatory RSE. The shift away from privileging assessment emerged as a possibility for transgressing professional boundaries and moving away from a 'teach & tell' approach to RSE, creating potentials for the holistic principles that inform the RSE guidelines to be promoted. The educators' insights into the potential of student-led conversation can be read as a positive response to critiques that critical engagement and embodied learning are constrained when they are subsumed within assessable achievement objectives informed by Eurocentric values of individual achievement (Garland-Levett, 2017; Quinlivan et al., 2014), opening up a line of flight wherein the distinction between the personal and the professional is blurred within conversations that centre the relational:

*Daisy: ...we need to be able to check ourselves at the door and put our kids first, they are the people that we are here to educate, they are the people that we are given the responsibility to look after and care for by whanau, they are with us more than they probably are with whanau throughout the day, umm, and if we can't help our, and support our kids, umm to manage and provide strategies and teach them strategies and help them to umm, be, feel real and connected with who they are, surely if I can do that then they, their education is going to be amazing and they're going to thrive - they work together. But so often we just jump to okay cool we're doing this, we need to do the credits, your assessment is in this and here's the stuff we're doing, and there's no connection, there's no relationship. I would hate to come to a class where I'm not seen for who I am.*

Daisy's resistance to distinguishing between the personal and the professional in her role as an educator allowed her to centre her relationships with students, while the spaces they created together were situated as essential prerequisites for engaging in RSE. Her refusal

## Developing Relationships that Matter

to distinguish between the professional and the personal opened up possibilities for students to critically engage with their own embodied knowing, and meaningfully contribute to the conversations that occur within the context of RSE. The relationships Daisy built with her students also allowed her to consider the way young people interact with the complexities of our times (e.g. COVID, the climate catastrophe, digital technologies), and collaborate with them in creating a space where their feelings and experiences are acknowledged. I was excited to speak with an educator who explicitly resisted institutional barriers to connecting with her students, and Daisy's passion for this space and the young people in her care gave me hope that relational capacities could be opened up within the context of RSE – a hope Daisy shared in her view that educators become activists who push for establishing RSE as a safe space for students to engage in processes of becoming.

As I moved through the process of storying the educators narratives together, I reflected on the relational and collaborative desires that inform this project, and my hopes for what this research could do. Coming into relationship with my educators had helped to clarify my embodied vision – bringing with me Rose's straightforward approach to sexuality, where plain talk between educators and their students resists moral anxieties around adolescent sexuality, Lily's hopes for creating space for senior students to connect, Kate's acknowledgement that teachers need better training and support, and Tom's insights into the lack of value and time accorded to sexuality education. My desire emerged as an urge to peel away the layers of separation insinuated by Iris's masks, and to see Daisy's demand that educators see their students and let themselves be seen become realised. I want to produce capacities for educators to hold a space where the young people in their care can become in Braidotti's (2012) horizons of hope. But we are not there yet, and must travel together further – through more layers of structural, moral and institutional boundaries that constrain capacities for educators to become response-able in this space.

**Insufficient Training and Feelings of Discomfort.** For the educators I spoke with, the neoliberal centring of individual responsibility also flowed through their own experiences of teaching, with a lack of institutional support for teacher education in RSE forcing educators to take responsibility for developing their own learning. This lack of investment in preparing sexuality educators emerged from the narratives, wherein my collaborators spoke of being thrown into teaching RSE, and developing their knowledge through teaching senior Health classes or searching for online resources. Despite the ambitions of the Ministry of

## Developing Relationships that Matter

Education's guidelines (2020), teacher training in sexuality was usually restricted to one unit at University level (if it was provided at all), with on-going training also lacking:

*Tom: I guess it's our job to try and read that minefield, umm in terms of PD and training, it's, it's quite limited, you know, like I, I would say that a high percentage of Health and PE teachers would probably say they're not comfortable, or they're not experts at delivering the Health part, just because of the lack of training I would say...*

The ongoing lack of training informs educators' experiences of discomfort and uncertainty when teaching RSE, feelings that constrain their ability to affect and be affected in their roles as educators. Interacting with what Alldred et al. (2003) identify as a culture of anxiety around sex in general, and particularly around sexuality education in schools, these feelings of discomfort and uncertainty emerged as a fear of taking risks that trouble the multiple layers of moral oppression that occlude capacities for connecting with students in this space. My collaborator's connected this fear to their negotiation of the micro-political flows that assemble within the contested space of sexuality education, but often referred to *other* educators (corporeal or imagined) as feeling uncomfortable – rather than claiming these feelings for themselves. I directly asked educators how they made sense of these collective feelings of discomfort, and the conservative values of particular communities and school environments often emerged as a constraining force in their responses. Lily shared her reflections on her reluctance to discuss desire with her junior students, switching between tenses so that the past emerged as the present within her sense-making:

*Lily: I guess it's sort of a social taboo as well, isn't it, that, umm, that that's not talked about in general or light conversation, you know what I mean, from, it's changing. Probably because historically it was, you know, talking about your sex life with people, it's not something that's discussed, so...*

For Lily, sexuality itself remains contained within private domains, but my own views and biases were preventing me from empathising with the discomfort and uncertainty that emerged from our co-constructed sense-making. Wasn't this 2022? Had we not, collectively, spent decades interacting within social and technological worlds informed by the politics of feminism, sexual liberation, hyper-sexualisation, pornography and sexual violence? What

## Developing Relationships that Matter

forces was I missing that continued to preclude us from connecting in this space? I had encountered Sara Ahmed's (2004) conceptualisation of *affective economies* early in this research, but the connection between her examination into the way collective emotions work to delimit racialised and marginalised bodies and this project remained inchoate in my mind. I returned to her when I was attempting to make sense of what the emotions that emerged from the educators' narratives were *doing*. For Ahmed, emotions are not merely contained within individual bodies, but travel between the surfaces of objects, subjects and places to become collectively embodied through processes of circulation. Ahmed's affective economies emerge from long histories, differentially sticking to marginalised bodies while opening up space for bodies that belong to move and expand. This sticking of collective bodies through the politics of emotion evoked the way sexuality, sexuality education, and the bodies of girls become stuck – especially within institutions where safety is individualised through health pragmatism approaches and risk prevention procedures. Ahmed traces the way fear and anxiety pass between signs, as responses to anticipated threats that stick to bodies through processes that produce both boundaries and collectives. While producing distances between bodies, fear circulates in the historical present, working to protect and preserve the values and social conventions of the majority. Here, fear is materialised in imagined threats that move toward and emerge from adolescent bodies, occluding the relational through affective economies that produce the sexualised, risky and abject bodies of young women and girls.

As fear emerges through the dangerous discourses, moral anxieties, and social practices that stick to adolescent bodies (in particular the bodies that sit at the intersections of gender, sexuality, race, and class), sexuality education itself becomes stuck – producing boundaries that preclude connection across gender and generation. These boundaries emerged in the educators narratives, wherein a focus on talking about diversity, pornography, and consent with students juxtaposed against a reluctance to talk about desire and embodied knowing - with changes to RSE policy failing to materialise in the situating of adolescent sexuality as always risky and at-risk. Lily's contextualising of conversations about sexuality within larger sociocultural norms that constrain relational capacities also brought to mind Sharon Lamb's (2010) observation that feminist desires for young women to achieve 'authentic' embodiment may be misplaced, with work at all levels of structural and institutional oppression still required before the circulation of fear and shame across bodies and generations can be displaced. Lines of flight emerge as a resistance to the surveillance of

## Developing Relationships that Matter

young people, in favour of a redirection of attention wherein processes of dis-identification in adults can become potentialised. Here, an imagining of better education for educators emerged from our conversations, opening up potentials for educators to become comfortable and respond responsibly in this space.

Such an imagining acknowledges the embeddedness of educators in dominant and institutionalised power relationships, a location that also emerged from the educators' narratives when I introduced Māori ways of knowing to our conversations. Although my collaborators described the Te Whare Tapa Whā model (Durie, 1982/1994) that forms the foundation of the health curriculum as a 'perfect fit' that allowed them to include emotions and holistic conceptions of self within RSE, a reluctance to speak beyond this surface affirmation also emerged, and Daisy remained unconvinced that it was being fully embraced or understood:

*Daisy: ...it's so hard for the educators, if you say for example, in science, if you have no idea about Māori astrology and how they got here using the stars and you try to teach that, you know, that's umm probably quite discriminating, and you aren't, it's not your knowledge to share and that could come across as westernising and stealing te ao Māori philosophy, whereas (...) yeah, and I would feel uncomfortable as a teacher trying to deliver something that I wasn't personally connected to...*

The subsuming of understandings of hauora within assessable curriculum, wherein Eurocentric values of individual achievement work to minimise the relational values that form the foundation of Māori ways of knowing, has been critiqued by researchers and academics who share Daisy's concerns (Garland-Levett, 2017; Quinlivan et al., 2014). Here, the potential for the life-affirming and humorous way sexuality is negotiated within Māori understandings to trouble the Western anxieties that materialise in sexualities (Le Grice & Braun, 2018) may become constrained when assessable achievement and individualised risk-prevention objectives and are valued over conversation. With the bi-cultural foundation of Aotearoa producing a unique polycscape informed by Māori ways of being in the world, a line of flight emerges as a lens through which to identify Pākehā understandings of adolescent sexuality, and possibilities for sexualities to become other through processes of decolonisation. However, my collaborators acknowledged that some educators still held negative attitudes toward including Māori knowledge in schools. After pressing Iris when I

## Developing Relationships that Matter

sensed her resistance to share her views on the Te Whare Tapa Whā model, she reminded me that although educators find it a useful model for conceptualising holistic and relational notions of selfhood, it is for Māori to decide how well it is being implemented in schools:

*Iris: So for me it's yeah, good. Yeah, but for, for Māori maybe it's not good. So yeah, that's why I'm saying I may not be the right person to talk about that...*

After re-reading the transcripts, I reflected on the way Iris's response emerged only after I had persisted in questioning her on the potential for Māori ways of knowing to trouble the existing power structures that inform our educational institutions, another awkward moment that provoked my reflexivity. The educators' reluctance to discuss the bi-cultural power relationships that constitute the conditions of everyday life in Aotearoa emerged from my reflections as another tension that was hidden in plain sight, with positive attitudes toward the Te Whare Tapa Whā model in the context of RSE existing on a surface level that resisted interrogation. Few considerations of the effectiveness of the model for attending to the needs of Māori students emerged from the conversations I had with educators, and although this could be read as an attempt to hold space for Māori aspirations toward sovereignty, a resistance to engaging in conversations that centred culture and race echoed the absence of gendered power relationships in the narratives of the educators – emerging as a fear of the riskiness that is hidden at the intersections of gender, sexuality, race and class.

**We Need to Keep the Children Safe.** The educators I spoke with were concerned about how technological advancements were affecting the sexual well-being of their students, and their determination to keep a majority of children safe until they reached adulthood worked to restrict mandatory RSE to a health pragmatism approach. This concern with safety emerged as a fear of the times, acknowledging a lack of knowledge concerning the online spaces and digital technologies that young people interact with. Producing an affective flow that diminished the capacity for RSE to provide a space wherein young people could critically engage with gendered power relationships through conversations that centre pornography and digital technology, the neoliberal obsession with teaching students how to make good choices worked alongside a moral conservatism that restricted potentials for conversation and embodied learning:

*Lily: I think umm, and, there definitely are massive gaps in terms of like the apps they're using umm, in that kind of area and the age that some of the kids are engaging in some of the behaviours. Umm, we moved away from teaching that*

## Developing Relationships that Matter

*as much in Year 9, but I think we're probably gonna have to go back to that just 'cause we've got to, and especially in terms of not, sexual behaviour, but umm, oh yeah, in a way I guess it's becoming younger and younger umm, again the minority, yeah, it's, do you teach so everyone knows what's going on? Or do you make sure you're trying to prevent poor decision-making for everyone kind of thing? So sometimes we're targeting, it feels like we're targeting just a minority 'cause most are making healthy decisions and making good choices. But there's definitely a lot that aren't. So yeah, it's, it's, then is that, yeah, do we open this up so we have all these conversations and then everyone thinks they're having sex, but actually they're not? Or do we make sure everyone is being safe, so it, so we're on that sort of boundary at the moment trying to figure out which, which would be safest to, to, go for.*

Lily's concern with preventing poor decision-making aligns with the reconstituted moral conservatism that flows through health promotion agendas, individualising risk and responsibility and dominating approaches to mandatory RSE. Emerging as a strong inclination toward protecting young people, decisions around what to include in the curriculum become contingent on targeting the specific behaviours of a minority of students, rather than responding to the lived experiences of young people and the structural inequalities that produce the conditions of their daily lives. Here, the protection of the presumed innocence of the majority is set in opposition to the troubles that emerge from a minority of students whose lived experiences are attributed to poor decision-making skills, and the question of whether or not these students are worth taking risks for is evoked. This targeting of specific behaviours also becomes fixated on the act of sex itself, and the moral boundaries that deny adolescents the power to engage in processes of sexual becoming.

Health promotion in the educators' narratives was a powerful affective flow, emerging out of feelings of fear that students were engaging in sexual behaviours (both virtual and corporeal) that would put them in a position of risk - especially to their self-esteem and their future ability to form healthy relationships - an affective flow that interacts with shame to pathologise adolescent sexuality. The individualising forces of neoliberal health promotion complicates the provision of health education, and a tension emerges between public health imperatives that seek to reduce the social and economic burdens of disease and a conceptualisation of health education as an academic pursuit that promotes creative and critical thinking (Fitzpatrick & Burrows, 2017). Fitzpatrick and Burrows (2017)

## Developing Relationships that Matter

contextualise this tension within the historical positioning of health promotion agendas in schools, wherein public health goals have informed a variety of interventions and campaigns (e.g obesity, dental health, immunisation) that have been targeted at children and their parents in an attempt to govern family systems - a neoliberal requisition to make healthy choices that conflicts with the social-ecological, social justice and holistic approaches to sexuality education that are embedded within the guidelines (Ministry of Education, 2020). Navigating the relationship between health promotion and health education emerged as a complex undertaking in the educators' narratives, with health promotion approaches dominating conversations around consent, pornography and digital technologies. This interaction underscores the distinction between the RSE mandated within the guidelines, and the gap between policy and practice that emerges when Health education becomes optional - restricting possibilities for connecting with students and constraining the potential for students and educators to affect and be affected in this space.

### ***Pornography, Social Media, Digital Communication, Consent, & Coercion.***

The salience of addressing pornography, social media and digital communication with younger students was differentially negotiated in my conversations with educators, with some positioning these conversations as essential while others questioned the relevance for a majority of students who they hoped to protect from learning about experiences they may not yet have engaged in. The desire to shield young people from becoming knowing centred around a belief that only a minority of students needed to be educated in making good decisions – with a ‘not my kids’ narrative emerging from some of the conversations that holds in place a moral code that works to contain and deny embodied knowing:

*Tom: Yeah, and this is, this is the, this is the problem with the pornography topic is that you've got, you might have 50% of the class that have never seen or heard anything to do with pornography and the other 50% might know all the terms or the phrases or the, whatever is related to the topic, and so you're kind of like, oh, do we, do we cover it, do we mention it? Do we you know, could we just ignore it? It's a, that's a real, real tricky question with pornography...*

In my literature review, I had attempted to make sense of the interaction between morality and adolescence through Jackson's (1990, as cited in O'Sullivan & Thompson,

2014) argument that the romanticisation of childhood innocence works to pathologise adolescent sexuality, but turned to Callaghan et al. (2018) to develop my understandings of how the contested space of sexuality education works to negate the lived experiences of young people – experiences that are already inextricable from the digital technologies they interact with (Ministry of Education, 2020; Office of Film and Literature Classification, 2018; Thorburn et al., 2021). Addressing the underrepresentation of children’s voices and experiences in domestic violence and abuse research, the authors interpret the responses of children to experiences of violence in the home. By redefining children who are ‘exposed’ to violence and controlling behaviours as direct victims of violence, Callaghan et al. acknowledge that children experience abuse with all of their senses, and argue for the recognition of children’s capacities for embodying agency and resistance. In this way, rather than passive witnesses to the worlds they inhabit, young people can be located as active participants in the co-construction of responses that meet their needs. Aligning with Garland-Levitt’s (2020) call to centre the embodied knowing of young people in sexuality education, this understanding of children’s capacities for experiencing the worlds they inhabit and making sense of their own experiences opens up possibilities for a shift away from teaching topics toward relational conversations that promote response-ability. Here, the acknowledgement that young people are already engaged in processes of becoming knowing potentialise relational capacities wherein gendered power and the embodiment of techno-sexualities can be explored. The hesitation to engage students in conversations that acknowledge the embodied knowing (and becoming) of young people in virtual worlds sat in opposition to concerns around students sending and distributing nude images, engaging in pornography, and the hook-up culture enabled by digital communication platforms that also emerged from the narratives of the educators. For Lily, the hook-up culture augmented by digital technologies presented a threat to heteronormative relations, wherein the casual sexual encounters enabled by online spaces are aligned with poor self-esteem, with the transmission of shame continuing to circulate between bodies:

*Lily: That’s the kind of thing that I worry about, this, as a human again, as an educator, I’m like right what can we do about it? Umm yeah, I think, yeah, and how, what is their self-esteem going to be like and are they going to be able to have healthy relationships, just with, just the yeah, the apps, the online stuff is so, umm, gotta have it right now and all this kind of stuff, are they going to be able to have, yeah, okay you didn’t, you might have had a disagreement with*

## Developing Relationships that Matter

*your boyfriend. That doesn't mean it's over, that you can't work through this. You can have healthy relationships, you can, I don't, yeah, it's like now, yeah...*

The contested space of RSE emerges as a lack of response, wherein educators who already embody dominant power relations require opportunities to disarticulate themselves in order to bridge the layers of separation and distance that locate young people as Other, unknowing, at-risk and somehow dis-embodied. Further complicating educators' feelings around what to include or omit from RSE are recommendations in the guidelines that position risk and violence as essential components of the health curriculum, but also stress that "RSE should not be framed by notions of risk and violence, because this can lead to programmes that are driven by fear and blame" (Ministry of Education, 2020, p. 31). The recommendation that issues of violence should not dominate RSE perhaps informs the 'one and done' approach to addressing these issues in senior spaces; however, the task of separating issues of safety and violence from conversations around healthy relationships, consent, coercion, pornography, and digital technology seems counterintuitive if we consider the heteronormative continuum on which gendered power relationships and sexual violence occur (Gavey, 1992, 2019). Here, gendered power relationships are again hidden in plain sight, and risk emerges in the performance of gender augmented by the technologies that exceed our relationships. The question of how to move away from risk and into healthy relationships without first attending to what is hidden at the intersections of race, gender, and class continued to emerge from the educator's narratives:

*Iris: Uh, young girls I have, I have two opinions because I dealt with two different umm socio-economic environments, you know, in, in (previous school) it's quite different to (current school). In (current school) I see quite a big trend, and girls being sexually active quite young (...) and I feel that it's more like, umm not necessarily because they want to, it's sort of like because they have to, (...) or because they feel that they, I, I notice a lot of control from boys to girls at a young age at (current school) and so it wouldn't surprise me that there is quite a lot of sexual activity happening, happening at a very young age, and that is not necessarily, we're not talking about, not, you know, like rape or anything like that, I'm talking more about these girls being active without being prepared, without wanting, without you know, but being sort of like...*

## Developing Relationships that Matter

*Carey: That grey area...*

*Iris: Manipulated into it.*

*Carey: Yeah, coercion and stuff like that?*

*Iris: Yeah, coercion...*

*Carey: That grey area of like what's normal and what's?*

*Iris: Yeah, and it's very normalised at (current school), I feel. At (previous school) no, I didn't see a lot of that, I didn't see any of that, umm from, from young girls, it was more about, it was more about their self-esteem and how socially they, they were seen, how others might, what others might think of them in their social world, it was more about social world rather than, and, and their, what, what they have to look like, and how you know, what clothes they wear or who they hang out with or that kind of stuff, yeah...*

Educators too are located within social power relations, and Iris's narrative evokes the riskiness that sits at hidden intersections, while the gendered power relations of the centre play out in plain sight. My response to Iris's observation that class (and implicitly race) intersects with sexuality to produce difference and inequality was an emotional one, bringing to mind my own experiences of feeling sexualised as an adolescent, and the privileging of a femininity differentiated by class that intersectionality attempts to disrupt. Iris's observation that issues of consent and coercion were particularly salient in schools with a lower socio-economic population was troubled in Lily's narrative, as she was similarly concerned about the girls in her higher decile school. Iris's observations also interact with the emergence of the #MeToo movement, that has resulted in increased public awareness of girl's experiences of coercive control and sexual violence, and that sits in tension with the 'not my kids' narrative that emerged from some of the educators' narratives. Although the #MeToo movement has also been criticised for privileging of the experiences of white, middle-class women (Harrington, 2022), its centring of women's storied experiences inform its affective power, which can be traced in the differences between the RSE guidelines released by the Ministry of Education in 2015 and the latest iteration (2020), with the latter version centring issues of consent and coercion that earlier iterations had skimmed over. The potential of the #MeToo movement to trouble gendered power relationships and postfeminist assumptions that gender equality has already been achieved lie in its recognition that gender inequality is

## Developing Relationships that Matter

deeply embedded in structural heteronormativity, and that neoliberal ideals of individual choice are insufficient for attending to the gendered power relationships that inform what we can do in the world (Gavey, 2019; Harrington, 2022). The question of whether speaking about consent within the context of RSE opens up possibilities for relational capacities or simply (re)produces risky bodies was differentially negotiated in my collaborators' narratives, wherein consent and coercion were centred as issues that students desired to explore:

*Lily: One of the topics that they, we spend, end up spending way more on than we ever thought is consent, that's a massive, it takes up three or four lessons now, just, I mean not getting the whole thing, it doesn't sound like that much, but they're, they're really interested in it. But we have really grown up conversations with them umm, just remind-, anyway for my, I take Year 10's, there's been three or four other teachers that teach Year 10's as well and really find that, so like...*

*Carey: And the boys and girls similarly...*

*Lily: Yeah it is, it is, umm, it can be a bit polarising, especially on the aspects around, umm, obviously the forced stuff is really obvious, drunk stuff's really obvious. It's more the umm, persuasive, umm...*

*Carey: Coercive?*

*Lily: Coercive kind of area. Boys are like, 'Uh, can I, can I not keep asking, can I... ', you know...*

This focus on what boys can and can't do to girls aligns with the traditional heteronormative 'male sexual drive' discourse described by Wendy Hollway (1984), and the potential for issues of consent, coercion, pornography, social media, and digital technologies to engage students in conversations that examine heteronormativity and gendered power varied in my collaborator's narratives. For the most part, educators framed these conversations around good decision-making skills within the context of healthy heteronormative relationships, wherein neoliberal approaches to talking about consent worked to individualise risk, amplifying the risky discourses traditionally associated with unwanted pregnancy and STI's. Informed by a lack of response to the way gendered power relationships constitute the conditions of student's everyday lives, this focus on good

## Developing Relationships that Matter

decision-making skills was troubled by some of the educators, who engaged in conversations with their students that potentialised broader discussions into the relationship between gender, power, and technology. Inspired by a research project conducted in Aotearoa, wherein peer group workshops were organised to engage boys in ethical considerations of online behaviours and gendered norms (Gavey et al., 2021), I brought into conversation with the educators imaginings of informal, non-assessable spaces wherein these conversations could occur. For some of my collaborators, the importance of boys and girls having these conversations together was highlighted, opening up possibilities for young women's embodied knowledge to affect relational capacities, and for students to contribute to RSE in meaningful ways:

*Carey: ...do you think the boys are interested, engaged in the ethics around, at all...*

*Daisy: They are, yeah, and the fact that you are in a class with girls who give their opinion about something, it's not me telling the boys, it's actually someone else. (-) We need to figure out how to engage our boys better so that they can see the relevance of it, so for example, this may not impact you, looking at pornography, but you may know someone else, because as soon as you say that, they are, actually it doesn't have to be about me - they're so self-centred they can't actually think about anyone else - so the way that we talk about, the way we question, the way we set up the narrative of things needs to not just be one dimensional 'this is about you' - it is about you, but also about others...*

Daisy's recognition that conversations about sexuality need to centre the relational, and not just sex, was echoed by some of the educators, who identified the disruption of gendered binaries in school environments as a starting point for promoting change - with unisex uniforms, co-ed RSE classes, and possibilities for learning about each other's embodied experiences considered as possibilities for promoting a dis-identification with gendered norms. Here, opportunities for recognising the other that is always within (Barad, 2019) potentialise lines of flight wherein difference can begin to be ethically attended to in schools, and students can meaningfully contribute to conversations that centre their own embodied experiences of gender.

***Student Voice***

*“I'm, I'm just like here trying to give some knowledge and, and help out with my experience. But they're it, they bring it in more, you know, they've got more stuff going on, they've got more knowledge of stuff that might be happening now, technology or whatever, you know... ”. Iris*

In 2017, hundreds of students marched outside parliament to protest the rape culture exemplified by a media exposé on a private Facebook group, wherein students at a local boys' college engaged in conversations promoting sexual violence against girls, revealing the powerful resistance embodied by young women and girls who are committed to disrupting the sexual violence and harassment that informs the conditions of their everyday, technologically mediated, lives. The promotion of student activism and student voice in the latest RSE guidelines (2020) responds to these efforts by young people who are fully engaged in efforts to trouble gendered power relationships. In the narratives of the educators I spoke with, institutional support for this desire for change was varied, with a lack of response emerging from our conversations. The educators I spoke with agreed that the embodied knowledge young people could contribute to understandings of the relationship between sexuality and digital technologies far exceeded their own, opening up possibilities for students to affect RSE that are yet to be fully realised. Student voice became a focus that emerged through my conversations with educators, and was often cited as the main take-away from our conversations. The differential responsiveness of schools to student voice also emerged from the educators' narratives, with some relying on surveys to ensure students contributed to curriculum decisions, while others centred receptivity to student interests within the classroom. Student activism was similarly differentiated in the educators' narratives, with some schools supporting student activist groups in contributing to school cultures, some schools reluctant to encourage student activism, and one educator unsure if their schools had activist groups at all - *‘We yeah, we, we, we did have a rainbow group. I think we've got a rainbow group still?’*. One educator identified a feminist group that was active in their school. For Daisy, establishing a safe space for RSE to occur enabled her to continually attend to her students' needs and interests, in a collaborative and adaptable approach that opened up potentials for RSE to become a space that promotes student voice and activism. For all of my educators, the possibility of promoting informal, non-assessable spaces in their schools for students to connect through conversation was an exciting prospect

Developing Relationships that Matter

– although how to carve out time to establish these spaces within institutions that undervalued their potential was questioned:

*Kate: I mean, if we're, if we were listening to the well-being and mental health stats, then having that space for senior students, and, but they, you know they get these study periods, umm dunno if they'd be, because they've got such an assessment heavy load, have time to fit in another, you know umm, time, I mean, even if it was once a week it would support them.*

*Carey: Yeah*

*Kate: It'd be cool (-), and there could be a lot more for them, umm at senior levels for sure. God, it's just trying to be, it's trying to do it at schools.*

*Carey: Yeah, 'cause there's such, that academic focus and that pressure to like be, yeah...*

*Kate: Yep. Not, and then, also to have service and to be involved in sports and extra curricular, and doing this group and this group, you know and, then music. So there's...*

*Carey: Their lives are full...*

*Kate: Yeah. Their lives are full...*

Doubt around establishing spaces for students to connect speaks to the intensities that congeal around the bodies of young people who become sexualised through individualising processes produced within the already gendered demands of neoliberal capitalism. Here, the pressure to succeed in performances of achievement produce restrictive schedules that limit opportunities to trouble the very same structures that constitute these conditions. This lack of time interacts with the (lack of) value allocated to RSE in academic institutions, constraining relational capacities and sitting in opposition to the voices of students who have expressed their desire for a more comprehensive sexuality education that includes considerations of their embodied experiences (Allen, 2001, 2007, 2008; Jackson & Weatherall, 2010a, 2010b;

Ministry of Education, 2020). Working to obscure the knowledge produced by young feminist activists who are already engaged in political movements (both online and through organised protests) that respond to the sexual violence, harassment, and gender inequality that shapes their daily lives (Gavey et al., 2021; Harris, 2005; Jackson, 2018), the affective flows of this powerful force are occluded when structural, moral, institutional, and professional boundaries restrict relational capacities within schools (so where does sexuality education belong?). The contested space of sexuality education in Aotearoa becomes partially resolved within the RSE guidelines, wherein an abundance of issues of social justice are opened up for discussion with young people. The way these issues are interpreted and circulated through existing social power relationships, institutions, and people becomes the assemblage that produces affective flows and occlusions that constitute sexuality education capacities. Jackson and Weatherall (2010b) explore the (im)possibilities of including feminist-based education in school environments, and as I attempt to story my educators' narratives into hopeful horizons I am still conflicted, a feeling that speaks to the complexities and intensities that assemble within this contested space. The ethico-onto-epistemology that informs this research maintains that holding space for contradiction and complexity precludes me from coming to fixed conclusions (Braidotti, 2012; Fine, 2005), and instead provoked me to map the forces that constrain change - in order to imagine hopeful horizons and new becomings.

### Hopeful Horizons?

The strangest affective flow that emerges from my sense-making with educators is the power of transnational capitalism, materialising through neoliberal health promotion agendas that produce their own moralities, containing sexualities within individual bodies that must learn how to discipline themselves in order to ensure their productive citizenship in global economies. At least, I hope to make it strange that the relational capacities that inform sexualities could ever exist in isolation. Further, I fear that feminist thinking gets lost in translation in academic institutions, wherein the connective tissue that entangles minds and bodies and ideas and high-speed fibre and desires and histories and generations is severed into bureaucratically portioned pockets of disconnection. What this research process has left me with is questions. Is 12-15 hours a year enough time to contain the scope of the RSE guidelines, and to build relationships that matter in this space? Are Health and PE classes the right places to have these conversations? Should sexuality be confined within conversations that prioritise the health agendas of governmental demands? A socioecological approach informed by social justice and critical engagement and health promotion and Māori ways of knowing and diversity and desire and pornography and consent and technologies and contraception and biological changes and gender and relationships and violence and wait...here comes lingering moral conservatism with old mate sexuality...no wonder our educators are discomfited.

Still, travelling with my collaborators' narratives has given us a starting point for future thinking, and possibilities for change that are already in processes of becoming. Our conversations have led to collective visions of informal spaces for students to engage in their own embodied thinking, free from the assessable achievement objectives that constrain creative imaginings – but where? Are schools the right place for these conversations to occur, and who should facilitate them? Health and PE teachers, or passionate specialists who, untethered from the particular constraints of educational institutions, feel confident in their ability to effect change? Can RSE continue to work at becoming this space, or can teachers only ever teach? Educators want more opportunities to learn - dare I imagine a feminist component to teacher training? If schools aren't yet ready for feminist-based sexuality education, surely our universities are. Or a stronger focus on gender and sexuality within teacher training programmes, at least? Relational desires sit in tension with the ongoing moral conservatism and relentless neoliberalism that work to constrain educator response-ability,

### Developing Relationships that Matter

and increasing the value accorded to RSE is a necessary step toward augmenting sexuality education capacities. Can educators come together to advocate for change (what is this research is doing?), joining the voices of their students? Within the RSE guidelines (2020), supporting student activism is recommended, and the potential of facilitating conversations between young people from different schools becomes a line of flight wherein students are given opportunities to affect their own collective becoming. Here, student voice and the capacities of young people to provoke and promote change emerge as the horizons of hope that this project set out to imagine, and the capacities for educators to support this imagining become contingent on the collective passions of educators who seek to learn and do more. By continuing these conversations with educators, and promoting opportunities for educators to dis-identify with the boundaries that preclude the relational in institutional spaces, capacities for increasing the value of RSE in schools also become potentialised – wherein educators become activists who can promote change, attend to difference, and build relationships that matter in this space.

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**Appendix**  
**Participant Information Sheets and Consent Forms**

**Educator experiences of delivering relationship and sexuality education in  
Aotearoa/New Zealand.**

**INFORMATION SHEET**

Hello, my name is Carey Robertson, and I hope this invitation finds you well. I am contacting you because I am interested in your experiences as an educator, as part of my Master of Arts research project. My curiosity is based on my own experiences of struggling to make sense of my relationships as a teenager (and making all sorts of trouble in the process), and my interest in the wellbeing of young people living in Aotearoa/New Zealand today. My hope is that this research will provide a space where you can share your experiences, stories, and knowledge, and that our conversations will promote collaborative understandings that open up new possibilities for supporting young people in making sense of their own relationships.

**Project Description:**

The aim of this project is to collaborate with educators through conversation, and bring our voices together to explore the possibilities of relationship and sexuality education providing a space to connect with students. Using a narrative approach, this research is interested in educator experiences, and is positioned within a broad cluster of research concerned with how gender, relationships, and sexuality are attended to within academic institutions. The focus of this project is on collaboration, and using our shared voices to promote changes that benefit students. This is an invitation to come together to explore the current issues young people are encountering within this space, and open up possibilities within relationship and sexuality education for developing relationships that promote connection, care, and critical engagement.

**Participants:**

I am hoping to collaborate with between 5-10 educators, counsellors, or facilitators who have experience in delivering sexuality education, or attending to the needs of students dealing

## Developing Relationships that Matter

with issues regarding their relationships and/or sexuality. By building relationships with a limited number of people, my aim is to centre the experiences of educators and pay careful attention to your perspectives. I am using purposeful sampling to contact potential participants, which means that if I have not met you already, I am reaching out to you because somebody I know thought you might be interested in this project. I see my role in this process as supporting conversational interviews, so that you can share your experiences of engaging in this space from your own particular location. I hope we can develop a research relationship that provides a space where you can feel comfortable sharing your perspectives, and that we can explore the possibilities of relationship and sexuality education together.

### **What happens if you choose to meet with me?**

This research involves unstructured conversations with me in a place of your choosing – wherever is most convenient for you. I could travel to your house or workplace, we could meet in a private room at the (*redacted for privacy*) Library or walk and talk if you prefer. Although face-to-face interviews are my preference, the option of speaking via Zoom is also available. My expectation is that the conversations will last for approximately one hour; however, I am hoping to initiate an ongoing collaborative process within the sector. Prior to our conversations, I can answer any questions you have before you give consent to participating in this project. If you have any further reflections that stem from our conversations, you are welcome to contact me at any time throughout the research process.

### **Protecting Your Privacy:**

Your privacy is important to me, so I will be using the following protocols to ensure that your stories are kept safe:

Our conversations will be sound recorded and stored on a password-protected cloud drive until their transcription, at which point they will be destroyed. If you decide to contribute to this research I will ask you to provide feedback on our transcribed conversation. Any notes you have, or requests for changes to the transcript, will be attended to at this time. Because this research is collaborative, you can also contact me at any stage between our conversations and the return of your transcript. If you agree to me using the transcript (or any excerpts from it) in my analysis, then you will be asked to sign a transcript release form before returning the

## Developing Relationships that Matter

transcript back to me. My supervisor and I will be the only people who have access to our transcribed conversations, and you can withdraw from the research at any time up until you have released the transcript for analysis.

I will be personally transcribing our conversations and using pseudonyms to ensure your privacy from this point of the research. The transcripts, along with any research notes, will be stored in a password-protected cloud until the grading of my thesis has been completed. Transcripts will be stored separately from any identifying forms (e.g. consent forms), and both will be stored under the care of my supervisor for a minimum of 5 years, in a secure location at the School of Psychology. When I have finished making sense of our conversations, a summary will be made available to you and you will have a chance to provide feedback if you choose to.

### **Participant's Rights:**

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question;
- ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview;
- withdraw from the study at any time up until the transcripts have been released for analysis;
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.

**Project Contacts:**

Thank you for taking the time to consider taking part in this research. My hope is that we will be able to discuss issues that are important both of us, and I am excited to connect with you to come up with new visions of what can be made possible within this space. If you have any further questions regarding this research, please feel free to contact me:

**Carey Robertson:** *(redacted for privacy)*

My supervisor on this project is Dr Leigh Coombes, who is an Associate Professor at the School of Psychology at Massey University, Manawatū:

**Dr Leigh Coombes:** +6469518075, [L.Coombes@massey.ac.nz](mailto:L.Coombes@massey.ac.nz)

*This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named above are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.*

*If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Prof Craig Johnson, Director, Research Ethics, telephone 06 356 9099 x 85271, email [humanethics@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethics@massey.ac.nz)*

**Educator experiences of delivering relationship and sexuality education in  
Aotearoa/New Zealand.**

**PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM - INDIVIDUAL**

I have read, or have had read to me in my first language, and I understand the Information Sheet. I have had the details of the study explained to me, any questions I had have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time. I have been given sufficient time to consider whether to participate in this study and I understand participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any time up until I have released my transcribed interview for analysis.

1. I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.
2. I agree/do not agree to the interview being sound recorded.
3. I understand that recordings of my conversations with the researcher will be destroyed once they have been transcribed and will not be returned to me.
4. I understand that I will have the opportunity to review the transcripts of my recorded conversations with the researcher.

**Declaration by Participant:**

I \_\_\_\_\_ hereby consent to take part in this study.  
(Print full name)

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

## **Educator experiences of delivering relationship and sexuality education in Aotearoa/New Zealand**

### **GROUP PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM**

I have read, or have had read to me in my first language, and I understand the Information Sheet I was provided with. I have had the details of the study explained to me, my questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time. I have been given sufficient time to consider whether to participate in this study and I understand participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any time.

1. I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.
2. I understand that I have an obligation to respect the privacy of the other members of the group by not disclosing any personal information that they share during our discussion.
3. I understand that all the information I provide will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law, and the names of all people in the study will be kept confidential by the researcher.

*Note: There are limits on confidentiality as there are no formal sanctions on other group participants from disclosing your involvement, identity or what you say to others in the focus group. There are risks in taking part in focus group research and taking part assumes that you are willing to assume those risks.*

4. I agree/do not agree to the interview being sound recorded.
5. I understand that recordings of my conversations with the researcher will be destroyed once they have been transcribed, and will not be returned to me.
6. I understand that I will have the opportunity to review the transcripts of my recorded conversations with the researcher.

**Declaration by Participant:**

I \_\_\_\_\_ [print full name]\_\_\_\_\_ hereby consent to take part in this study.

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

## **Educator experiences of delivering relationship and sexuality education in Aotearoa/New Zealand.**

### **AUTHORITY FOR THE RELEASE OF TRANSCRIPTS**

I confirm that I have had the opportunity to read and amend the transcript of the interview(s) conducted with me.

I agree that the edited transcript and extracts from this may be used in reports and publications arising from the research.

**Signature:**

**Date:**

.....

**Full Name - printed**

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