Making Space for Queer Identifying Religious Youth: Politics, Policies and Public imaginations

Professor Yvette Taylor and Dr Emily Falconer

Weeks Centre for Social and Policy Research

About the Authors

Yvette Taylor is Professor in Social and Policy Studies and Head of the Weeks Centre for Social and Policy Studies, London South Bank University (LSBU). She is Principal Investigator on the ESRC funded project 'Making Space for Queer Identifying Religious Youth' (Grant no. RES-062-23-2489). She has published widely in the field of sexuality, gender and class, including *Queering Religion, Religious Queers* (2014, Routledge).

Contact:
Weeks Centre for Social and Policy Research
London South Bank University
103 Borough Road
London, SE1 OAA
Tel: 020 7815 5850
Email: taylory@lsbu.ac.uk
Website: http://weekscentreforsocialandpolicyresearch.wordpress.com
Twitter: @WeeksCentre @YvetteTaylor0

Dr Emily Falconer is a Senior Research Assistant at the Weeks Centre for Social and Policy Research, London South Bank University (LSBU). Her research amalgamates theories of gender and sexuality with geographies of embodiment, emotion and affect. With Professor Yvette Taylor, she has published findings from the project 'Making Space for Queer Identifying Religious Youth' in *New Media and Society* (2014), *Ecclesial Practices* (2014) and *Gender and Education.*

Contact:
Weeks Centre for Social and Policy Research
London South Bank University
103 Borough Road
London, SE1 OAA
Tel: 020 7815 5427
Email: falconee@lsbu.ac.uk
Website: http://weekscentreforsocialandpolicyresearch.wordpress.com
Twitter: @WeeksCentre @EmilyJSFalconer

Acknowledgements

CONTENTS

1. Making Space for Queer Identifying Religious Youth: Politics, Policies and Public imaginations

Making space for queer-identifying religious youth is an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) funded project, shedding light on youth cultures, queer community and religiosity. There is a lack of empirical research that examines queer Christian youth, their experiences, perspectives and perceptions, with some sources casting religion as *automatically* negative or harmful to the realisation of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) identity (or 'coming out'). Rather than assume that sexuality and religion – and in our case Christianity – are separate and divergent paths, the project event explores how they might mutually and complexly construct one another.

The Policy Context

The British – and indeed international - context has seen large-scale political changes impacting on LGBTQ lives. In 2001, the age of consent for sex between males was lowered to sixteen. The Conservative government's infamous Section 2a/28 was repealed in 2001/2003 and in 2004 came the Gender Recognition Act that enabled transgender people to be legally recognised as the gender to which they transitioned. Discrimination based upon both sexual orientation and gender identity in housing, employment and the provision of goods and services was made illegal in 2007. Same-sex attracted people serve openly in the British Armed Forces and same sex couples have been able to adopt since 2002. In 2005 the U.K government introduced the Civil Partnership Act, which enabled same-sex couples to enter into legally recognised relationships. In 2010 Equality Act made it unlawful to discriminate against employees on the basis of sexual orientation. The first legally recognised same sex marriages took place in the UK on 29th March 2014 following a change to the law brought about by the current coalition government of the Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties. Despite such far-reaching political changes, research shows that 22% of respondents to the British Social Attitudes survey think that homosexuality is 'always wrong'.

Frequently provisions around 'Sexuality' and 'Religion' are positioned in contestation, with awkward imbalances between these two 'protected characteristics', as exemplified in The Equality and Human Rights Commission guidelines:

> A Baptist church was asked by a lesbian and gay support group if they could use its hall for training sessions for new volunteers. The church said that it could not let them use the hall because its doctrine rejects homosexuality and it would cause upset to a significant number of its members. This would not be unlawful discrimination (*Equality Act 2010: What do I need to know? A quick start guide on religion or belief discrimination in service provision for voluntary and community organisations,* Page 9)

In January 2013, the European Court of Human Rights published judgments in four combined cases about religious rights in the workplace, brought by Christians. The implications of the judgment apply to employees with any religion or belief, or none. The judgment affects employer responsibilities for policies and practices protecting religion or belief rights in the workplace, the rights of employees (including job applicants) and the rights of customers (see: http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/your-rights/equal-rights/religion-and-belief).

Dismantling categories
How the terms 'Religious' and 'Queer' are defined and understood are of critical importance to the young people involved in the project. Some participants who felt painfully rejected or out of place in the Church, yet still retained significant spiritual beliefs and a personal relationship with God, preferred not to be constrained or 'boxed' within the typology of 'Christian' and its institutional associations. The term 'religious' enabled these young people to demonstrate their spiritual beliefs whilst choosing which parts of 'religion' they felt reflected their own experiences. Similarly, those who felt they did not neatly fit in to the identities of 'lesbian', 'gay', 'bisexual' or 'transgender' preferred to be identified under the more fluid term so sexuality: 'queer'.

Equality Act 2010
Equality Act 2010 protects people from discrimination on the basis of religion and belief; like Sexuality, it constitutes a 'protected characteristic' Religion and belief means any religion and a reference to religion.

The protected characteristic of religion or belief:

A reference to a person who has a particular protected characteristic is a reference to a person of a particular religion or belief;

A reference to persons who share a protected characteristic is a reference to persons who are of the same religion or belief.

Making Space: Implications for Politics, Policies and Public imaginations

Making space for queer-identifying religious youth brings religious and sexual identities and positions together, to explore how young people experience identifying as *both* religious and queer, and how they situate themselves within, and begin to reconcile religion and sexuality in their lives.

Religion is often depicted as the conservative element that prevents the advancement of sexual freedoms and the right to be lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender. A small but active religious minority has received much attention for its anti-gay political activity, but much less attention has been paid to the more positive, supportive role that religious-based groups can play. At the same time, a substantial body of work on the LGBT population entirely disregards any religious aspect of LGBT lives or refers to such associations as negative, harmful or superficial. In conducting the research, it became clear that more research into bridging the divide between religion and sexuality was urgently necessary.

This report will highlight the importance of including the voices of queer identifying religious youth, and how this research can shape implications for politics, policies and public imaginations. We argue that an understanding of how these identities can fit with one another constitutes an urgent response to contemporary social policy and timely campaigns that address equalities and human rights for LGBT people, and aim to provide social, cultural and education information and resources. This understanding will greatly enhance the lives of young people living with both religious and queer identities, and would shape the policy and practice of the following:

- School Teachers

- Health Care Professionals (Counselling services, Psychologists, General practitioners)

- Relationship counselling and services (Relate, OnePlusOne)

- Inclusive Churches (e.g. Metropolitan Community Church, Diverse Church)

- Traditional Churches

- MPs working in the areas of Religion and Education

- MPs working in the areas Equalities legislation

- Equality organisations (Commission for Equality and Human Rights)

- Inter-faith dialogues/forums

- Gender and Leadership organisations (Engender, The Centre for Gender Psychology)

- LGBT organisations and activist groups (Stonewall, Queer Youth Network, Equality Network)

- Specific campaign issues (No Outsiders, Stonewall's Gay By Degree Poll, Schools OUT)

- Universities

This project is based on findings from interviews; diary and mind-map exercises across 3 UK locations (see Appendix A)

2. Researching Sexuality, Religion and Youth: Capturing Complex Experiences

Who are 'queer religious youth'?

Over the course of the fieldwork (2011-2013) 38 respondents were recruited across 3 sites: Newcastle, Manchester, and London, drawing on a fairly middle-class sample[1]. All participants identified as White British or White Other. Five participants have disabilities (two used electronic wheelchairs; one had Asperger's Syndrome and used walking sticks; one participant was deaf and one claimed Disability Living Allowance because of their specific disabilities).

Gender

Female	Male	Gender-Queer	Gender Queer and Transgender	Transsexual female-to-male	Total
19	15	2	1	1	**38**

Sexual Identification

Gay	Lesbian	Bisexual	Queer	Asexual	Total
15	13	5	4	1	**38**

Where did we find them?

We recruited potential participants through our website http://queerreligiousyouth.wordpress.com/ and Facebook group, and also through inclusive churches, university LGBT societies, LGBT youth groups, support services, and publications. Most participants were recruited from the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC), which is a church organisation which specifically includes LGBTQ young people.

Denomination	
Church of England	6
Methodist	3
Catholic	2
Quaker	2
Charismatic	1
Ecumenical	1
Evangelical	1
Unitarian	2
Metropolitan Community church	15
Non-denominational	5
Total	**38**

> **How young is 'youth'?**
>
> Young people were broadly defined as under-35 years, with the youngest respondent being 17 and the oldest being 34 years old (the mean age of respondents was 24 years old). In line with comparable youth studies, our first call for LGBT Christians to participate in the project defined 'young' adults as 16 to 24 years of age. But 'youth' is a contested term and can signify a very wide age range, and the experiences and meanings associated with it are socially constituted, varying both cross-culturally and historically. By increasing the upper age range of our participants to 35 we acknowledged this complexity in defining 'youth' and the significance of this (expanding) point in the life-course.

---

[1] In previous work (Taylor, 2007) there has been attention to the classed divide within LGBT communities, identities and material-subjective resources, which all impact on the policy arenas identified here (including e.g. educational provision, participation in 'scene space', health and emotional well-being etc.). In terms of our middle-class, mostly HE educated sample here, there are questions about how those without HE access negotiate sexuality/religion.

3. To be Young, Religious and Queer: a Contradiction in Terms?

The Policy Context

The NatCen Social Research Report on British Social Attitudes (2011-2012 edition) concludes that Britain is becoming less religious. According to the report, this continuing trend is largely due to older religious generations being replaced by younger, less religious ones, with 65% of 18-24 year olds not affiliating with a religion, compared with 55% of the same age group in 1983. The findings from the project respond to the British Social Attitudes predications of what this may mean for public imaginations regarding issues of sexuality, gender and leadership in churches as well as, for example, same-sex marriage. We disrupt an *automatic* association of non-heterosexuality with secularism and an assumed disinterest between 'youth' and 'religion'.

'What does this decline mean for Society and Social policy more generally? On the one hand, we can expect to see a continued increase in liberal attitudes towards a range of issues such as abortion, homosexuality, same-sex marriage, and euthanasia, as the influence of considerations grounded in religion declines. Moreover, we may see an increased reluctance, particularly among the younger age groups, for matters of faith to enter the social and public sphere at all. The recently expressed sentiment of the current coalition government to 'do' and 'get' God (Warsi, 2011) therefore may not sit well with, and could alienate, certain sections of the population' **NatCen Social Research Report on British Social Attitudes (2011-2012 edition), p.182-183**

The NatCen Social Research Report on British Social Attitudes implies a direct correlation between youth, secularisation and 'liberal' attitudes to non-heterosexuality which were in fact much more complex in the findings of the project.

Ideas of age, entering young adulthood, and changing attitudes towards the church emerged as a strong theme in the findings of the project. In some cases, there remained a common but contested misperception that religion is incompatible with the lives of teenagers and young people, as it is seen as 'old fashioned', 'stuffy', 'boring' 'backwards' or 'uncool'. Claire (24, Newcastle) called for a mix of the traditional and modern in churches to make them more relevant and engaging to young people, *'to just think outside the box a little bit'* to communicate '*that God isn't boring'.* But whilst our participants looked to the church to 'mix it up' and attract a new generation of congregants, many feared that the heteronormative leadership structure of the church had already made it an irrelevant space in young peoples' lives.

'I don't know many people who when they've got to be a teenager, have gone, 'Right, I'm going to start going to church.' It's kind of not the done thing' (Evelyn, 26, Manchester).

'We don't want to go to church because it's just full of old people and that's not cool' (Nicola, 21, Newcastle)

'I think young people never really see it as a cool thing' (Lucy, 19, Newcastle).

This highlights that for queer youth in particular, the doctrines and practices of religious institutions can seem all the more alienating and disjointed from their lived experiences. This is of interest to organisations such as the Evangelical Alliance, UK (eauk.org), who has conducted studies into what it is about church that 'puts off' young people. Former Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Carey, warned in 2013 that the Church of England was "one generation away from extinction." (Independent.co.uk). There has been a growing concern to examine the relationship between youth and religion, and what changes need to be made to make religion more attractive to

new generations, such questions have implications for both internal congregations and practices, as well as external public debates and concerns on civic and religious (dis)engagement.

Gender, Sexuality and Leadership in Churches

One such issue that presented the church as 'backwards' or 'irrelevant' to the lives of young, queer people was the long-standing question of the role of women in religious institutions. In July 2014, the Church of England's governing body, the General Synod, voted to allow women to become bishops for the first time in history, prompting the media to reflect on decades of coverage about this high profile debate (BBC News, 11th July 2014). At the time of the project research, the decision to allow women bishops had been rejected. The young women participating in the project were deeply angered. They expressed strong views about the traditional gender and religious roles (and 'role models'), whereby leadership and public presences were male. This also questions the 'coming forward' of young lesbian Christians in making religious space relevant to their lives.

Andrea (24, Newcastle) was writing in her project diary when news of the vote was broadcast live, she interrupted her entry with the following:

> *Wait – I've just been watching the BBC News live news feed from the CofE general synod and just heard that they have rejected the introduction of women bishops. I cannot believe it. What makes even less sense is that the house of laity[1] voted against it whilst the Bishops and the Clergy were overwhelmingly in favour. I've just looked at the stats apparently a 2/3 majority is needed and the laity voted 132 for and 74 against if another 6 had voted the other way we'd be looking at a world with women bishops in the CofE! I can't quite believe it. I'm worried now the CofE will look even more irrelevant and I think it will really struggle to justify it's [sic] union with the State now. If we can't even have women bishops what's the hope for same-sex marriage?* (Andrea, 24, Newcastle)

Like other participants, Andrea was in the process of reconciling both her sexual and religious identity but felt this ruling undermined the progress she had made and would alienate friends who might see her Christian faith as archaic and irrelevant, further reflecting in her diary: *'it is entirely possible to be young queer and Christian. Sometimes it is easier than others (eg it will be embarrassing to be a Christian within my social groups following the rejection of women bishops – hopefully this will ease).'* The passing of the law to allow women bishops will have a deep impact of the lives of young people who at best, may be looking for positive gender 'role models (Taylor and Snowdon, 2014) or, at worst, desperately trying to justify their perceived 'backwards' Christian identities to their peers. The place of gender equality in the Church remains an on-going concern both substantively and symbolically.

Women Bishops and Same-Sex Marriage: Is the church now 'up to date' and fully inclusive?

In addition to the historical change of governing legislation allowing women bishops, Saturday the 29th March 2014 also celebrated the first same-sex marriages in the U.K after passing new parliament legislation in July 2013 which allowed same sex couples to 'upgrade' from Civil Partnerships to the same legally recognised marriage rights as heterosexual couples. This followed from high profile equality campaigns such as Equal Marriage Scotland (Established 2008), alongside conservative opposition such as the Coalition for Marriage (England and Wales 2012). U.K government endorsed same sex marriage as 'Creating a fairer and more equal society' (GOV.UK). However, despite this profound shift in the law demonstrating increased acceptability of gendered and LGBTQ equal rights and citizenship, much social debate still asks what implications this shift has for faith groups, religion and the church.

For example, other participants voiced frustration at a lack not only of women but non-heterosexual role models in the Church, which is a crucial contribution to public and media debates about the role of gender and sexuality within religion more broadly. At our Making Space for Queer Identifying Religious Youth: Politics, Policies and Public imaginations, panellist Rev Ray Andrews discussed his experiences of being a Gay Vicar (his experiences have been made into a Channel 4 documentary: **Father Ray Comes Out**. In Discussion with academics and representative of @Diverse_Church (a group supporting young people who identify as queer and Christian) he spoke openly about the role of the church in reflecting on, and welcoming, young people who identify as queer (see http://weekscentreforsocialandpolicyresearch.wordpress.com/2014/09/02/making-space-for-religion-youth-and-sexuality-implications-for-policies-politics-and-public-imaginations/). As with our event, is recommended that further public and media discussions with 'older' and 'younger' generations of LGBT religious people are facilitated through television, film and online documentaries, so that young people feel their experiences are not 'missing' from key figures and campaigns within the church.

> *'Perhaps it would be helpful for a paper or multimedia project to be produced as a co-effort from an academic and a member of the LGBT Christian community, as multiple stories. Often, one academic voice is easily mistaken as scientific. The day was a great 'rainbow' of voices and ideas'* **Participant Suggestion from *Making Space for Queer Identifying Religious Youth: Politics, Policies and Public imaginations***

Regarding same sex marriage, the law makes it clear that individuals and religious organisations are not compelled to conduct religious marriage ceremonies of same-sex couples, and can refuse to allow same sex marriages in churches without breaching the Equality Act 2010. This has significant implications for queer religious youth who may or may not wish to marry in churches.

The interviews with project participants took place prior to the passing of the same-sex marriage legislation, nevertheless the issues of whether same sex marriage could be fully reflective of their religious faith were still prominent in many of their concerns.

Some views highlight that the high profile media coverage of religious opposition to same sex marriage has had a damaging effect on public perceptions of Christians, and Evelyn complains that the voices of young, queer Christians were underrepresented in the debates:

> *'I think they've done themselves no favours at all with this equal marriage thing. Because the people who are getting publicity are the people saying, 'No, this will be the worst thing, this will tear the church apart. It will be the death of society.' No it won't. I think there are things going on in the world that the church should be far more bothered about putting their energies into, more than harping on about a few people getting married. Even for people who aren't gay, aren't involved in the church, I think the image it puts out about the church is just ridiculous. There are so many more important things going on, if people in the church are getting het up about people getting married...'* (Evelyn, 26, Manchester).

It is clear therefore, that despite winning the same- sex marriage legislation, the previously unrepresented voices of those who identify as young, religious and queer can still shape how the role of the church adopts the practice of same sex marriages, and will undoubtedly shape their own future relationships. More so, Equality campaigns, activist groups and governmental policy can do more to ensure that promoting 'progressive' ideas of equal rights for LGBT youth does not fall into the dangers of promoting the 'backwards' traditions of religion as 'against' the progress of a more equal society. An understanding of queer, religious issues if for young people will help LGBT rights campaigners inadvertently causing more damaging effects on the lives of young people with multiple identities.

So does being queer mean rejecting religious traditions?

It seems then, that the NatCen Social Research Report on British Social Attitudes claim that the decline of religion is inherently connected with the rise of 'liberal' attitudes and generations is not as clear.

In contrast to NatCen assumptions, the relationship with religious 'traditions' was found to be not as straight forward as the above examples would imply. In fact many young, queer participants found comfort, safety and reassurance in religious traditions.

One way in which these feelings were conveyed in the project was through the role of congregational music participation in the lives of many participants. 'Traditional' congregational music could be perceived as highly incompatible with the experiences of those identifying as queer religious youth. These assumptions are based on age, as well as potential connections with music scenes during periods of transitions and 'coming of age' for young queers, who are more likely to be interested in 'age appropriate' music such as contemporary pop and alternative music.

However, in contrast to these assumptions, the relationship with 'tradition' emerged in complex ways for participants. The assumption that both young and queer identities would reject 'stuffy' congregational music in favour of a fun, contemporary, dynamic and youthful culture is not always the case, and some participants preferred traditional hymns, and quiet music. For example, Stephanie (29, Newcastle) enjoys singing 'very traditional hymns'. Whilst rejecting some of the social scenes of their young peers, such as pubs and clubs, these participants felt closer to traditional forms of congregational music, preferring traditional hymns and quiet spaces.

Martin (21, Newcastle) expresses that '*musical worship is very important for me, singing hymns or playing quiet pieces during communion and that sort of thing'.*

Lesley (21, London): *'I like dancing, I don't dance very well but I like dancing, which makes a club a good place, but I like music and I like to be able to hear music with a bit more depth and like the sounds to be crisp and clear and quiet ... I've been in MCC a few years now and as that time has gone by I've realised that there are lots of different valid ways of worshipping and I'm more open to mixing it up a bit; to having some traditional songs - some of which are really beautiful - to having [some] that are quite loud. So I think what I prefer is still contemporary songs and stuff but I am more open to having that mixture and appreciating that there are lots of different ways of worshipping, now, than I was before'*

It is therefore important to continue to explore the role tradition plays in these young people's worship, their attitudes to 'progressive' and 'traditional' styles, and the approach taken by inclusive non-denominational churches, such as the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC), to reconcile the different, and at times conflicting identities of its members. In contrast to the assumption that young queers feel ill at ease with 'tradition'- a result of this being associated with a more conservative, inherent disapproval of non-heterosexuality- many of our participants felt pulled towards traditional religious practices despite their young and queer identities. Young adults' life experiences and priorities are not always at odds with the structures that religion seems to impose and demand, and religious faith and connections do matter for many young queer adults. Liberal attitudes are not necessarily due to the decline of religion, and policy campaigns on both the sides of protecting religious tradition and doctrines, as well as LGBT campaigns for equal rights, could benefit from a wider understanding of the dangers of dualistic thinking.

4. Educational Contexts

The Policy Context

In 2004, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) published updated guidelines on tackling bullying within schools entitled 'Bullying: Don't suffer in silence'. Unfortunately, homophobia and transphobia were not included. Guidelines for tackling the homophobic bullying of young people within schools were published later in 2004 in a document entitled 'Stand up for us'. In 2008, the Department for Children, Schools and Families (formerly DfES) released 'Safe to Learn', a set of guidelines on how teachers in the UK should tackle homophobic bullying within schools.

According to Stonewall, the British charity campaigning for equality and justice for lesbian, gay and bisexual people, in a survey of 1,614 lesbian, gay and bisexual young people aged 11-19 years, 55% of respondents reported experiencing direct bullying and 99% reported hearing the phrases 'that's so gay' or 'you're so gay' in school.

Targeting homophobia in schools has become a major issue for policy makers and campaigners of LGBT equal rights. Stonewall, one of the U.K's leading LGBT charities, provides educational resources, events and teacher training in issues of sexuality in order to tackle homophobic bullying in schools and 'celebrate difference'. Schools OUT, a UK membership based organisation, aim to make schools and other educational institutions safer spaces for all LGBT staff and students. As well as providing classroom resources and curriculum development to be more inclusive of non-heterosexuality, Schools OUT also work with the Department for Education, OFSTED, The Equality and Human Rights Commission and local authorities.

> *'Stonewall's Train the Trainer courses provide pastoral, PSHE (Personal, Social and Health education) and antibullying leads with all the tools and techniques needed to train other staff on tackling homophobic bullying and celebrating difference'* **Stonewall Train the Trainer Series**

Meanwhile, OFSTED, The U.K's independent Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills provided a report in 2013 highlighting the importance of Religious Education (RE) in schools for 'releasing the potential' of students.

> *'Religious education (RE) makes a significant contribution to pupils' academic and personal development. It also plays a key role in promoting social cohesion and the virtues of respect and empathy, which are important in our diverse society'* **OFSTED.GOV.UK**

However, there is currently a lack of educational resources that address issues of both religion and sexuality for young people in schools, and once again this runs the risk of promoting ideas of oppositional differences. Recent research suggests that sex education centres on normative subjects, treating categories of difference, including religious or cultural diversity as 'added on' and deviant from the unchallenged norm. The priorities and concerns of religious, cultural and ethnic minority youth are not reflected within sex and relationships education across a range of contexts. Further, faith-based schools are free to exempt their pupils from Sex and Relationship Education (SRE) in schools.

How far do these resources 'celebrate difference' and 'promote social cohesion' for those who identify with multiple identities?

School experiences: whose identities are missing from the curriculum?

John (21, Newcastle) speaks of being taught Religious Studies at his Catholic secondary school. When debating homosexuality, a topic on the syllabus, the teacher in 'support' of it referred to the commandment 'love your neighbour as yourself'. But to John this didn't go far enough, as it didn't say that homosexuality is 'right', just that it's not that bad:

> *'...they never once did a pro view on it and it's actually the subtleties of it that make you... They didn't preach in that class about gay being wrong but they didn't even introduce the idea for a second that it might actually be just completely fine... And subtleties like that really got to me... I was like, "This is clearly what people think" because all my friends were in that class, mindlessly taking it in "This is what people think about gays", all my friends were being indoctrinated... and then therefore all my friends, I sort of presumed, had got a high chance of potentially being homophobic because of the institutionalised way they've been taught and so it felt harder to tell them...* (John, 21, Newcastle)

Claire and Sandra, both 24, spoke of a lack or 'absence' of educational resources on non-heterosexual relationships and a reliance on RE textbooks for information in their respective Catholic schools, a private day girls school in the south and a comprehensive in the north of England. Similar, comments were made referring to '*a rubbish educational film*' (Thomas, 34, Manchester) and a paragraph in biology textbook on homosexuality (Norman, 29, Manchester). In contrast, where school experiences focused positively on LGBT experiences of coming out, for example putting up Stonewall posters, many participants felt as though this wasn't meeting their identities as both queer *and* religious.

In June 2013 MPs (Labour and Green parties) tabled an amendment - New Clause 20 - to the Children and Families Bill 2013 to make PSHE (Personal, Social and Health Education), and in particular, SRE compulsory in all state-maintained schools. This would have included making information about same-sex relationships, sexual violence, domestic violence and sexual consent part of the national curriculum. New Clause 20 was defeated in the House of Commons. Conservative MP Edward Timpson responded for the government:

> *'The expectation that all schools should teach PSHE is outlined in the introduction to the framework of the proposed new national curriculum. It is not a statutory requirement, however, as we strongly believe that teachers need the flexibility to use their professional judgment to decide when and how best to provide PSHE in their local circumstances'* (Timpson, 2013).

In 2014, The Department for Education agreed to promote supplementary advice to the SRE Guidance of 2000: *Sex and Relationships Education for the 21st Century*, in discussing inclusive SRE, states that schools have a duty to ensure that "teaching is accessible to all children and young people, including those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT). Inclusive SRE will foster good relations between pupils, tackle all types of prejudice – including homophobia – and promote understanding and respect".

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) now provides a Good Practice Resource (Ofsted, 2012b) on its website, based on a programme entitled 'Educate and Celebrate', (London, 2005), which 'gives teachers the confidence and resources to challenge homophobia, biphobia and transphobia by engaging students and staff in an inclusive LGBT curriculum' (www.ellybarnes.com)

In the UK, most teachers are expected to deliver some aspect of sex and relationships education. Sex and relationships education is not currently statutory, nor are the subjects within which it might most frequently be taught, such as Personal, Social and Health Education, Personal Development or Life Education. Teacher training programmes do not systematically include education about sex education and existing research

suggests that teachers lack confidence to teach about these issues. Further, The lack of time given to SRE within school timetables and confusion about what should be taught further compounds this (Sex Education Forum, 2008). Knowledge about teachers' feelings towards delivering SRE remains limited but teachers can interrupt heteronormative discursive milieu of the school and the participants themselves offered valuable points of interruption to the sex and gender regimes present within their schools. It has been argued that the collective spaces of schools, such as staffrooms, are often difficult sites for queer teachers because of the way in which heteronormativity dominates them (Day et al. 1997; Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Gray, 2013).It is important to also consider the role of LGBTQ teachers experience as educators and as employees. A large body of the project findings focused on the educational experiences of queer religious youth in the UK. An awareness of the issues affecting young people who identify as both queer and religious would be particularly beneficial to educational resources that address sexuality and religion, both in school classrooms and curriculums, as well as in institutions of Higher Education.

5. Relationships, Health and Emotional Wellbeing

The Policy Context

Every Child Matters (ECM) was a UK government initiative that was introduced in 2003 and applied to England and Wales. ECM concerns the well – being of children and young people from birth to 19 and states that,

The Government's aim is for every child (http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/aims/), whatever their background or their circumstances, is to have the support they need to:

Be healthy

Make a positive contribution

Stay safe

Achieve economic well- being

Enjoy and achieve

Considering the impact of living with both queer and religious identities can be of critical importance to young people's personal life, relationships and wellbeing. The emotional, mental and physical health and safety of queer youth has been identified as a primary concern for policy makers and campaigners across various sectors. The significance of this policy intervention is a response to the high level of poor mental health, self-harm, higher rate of suicide figures and violence and hate crimes associated with queer youth.

GoodTherapy.org reports that suicide is the leading cause of death among young people, and that LGBT and gender-nonconforming teens and young people (15-24) are two to five times more likely than their peers to attempt suicide or self-harm. A survey on homophobic hate crime and violent incidents towards LGBT people, conducted by the LGBT Charity Stonewall, found that three in five LGBT people have been a victim of homophobic hate crimes in the last three years (*The Gay British Crime Survey 2008 on Homophobic Hate Crime*, Stonewall.org, p.3).

These figures have resulted in high profile policy interventions and activist campaigns to target parental support for young people affected by issues of gender and sexuality, school bullying, societal harassment and psychological wellbeing. Examples include:

- IT GETS BETTER PROJECT (http://www.itgetsbetter.org/): An online project aimed at communicating to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth around the world who may be experiencing bullying, harassment, violence or psychological torment that 'it gets better'. Online media and resource material includes the voices of celebrities, religious leaders, politicians, parents, educators and youth just out of high school. Diverse Church have made a Christian Version of 'It Gets better' in their documentary http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5sB2yVi7QRg.

- Relate (www.relate.org.uk): Relationship and counselling advice that address issues within LGBT relationships, and offer Children and Young people's counselling services in schools. This service provides support for young people experiencing a range of emotional and mental health problems in adolescence, which has been directly linked with levels of educational achievement. (Relate report: *Class of 2011 Yearbook: How happy are young people and why does it matter?)*

These campaigns are crucial for improving the health, safety and wellbeing of queer youth, yet there is room for a better understanding of how religious identities may fit with this work. There is currently very little mention of religious identity in these reports and policy documents, which runs the risk of assuming that religion is **invisible** in the lives of queer youth. Where religion is mentioned, this is assumed to be in opposition to the sexual identities of LGBT people and, and can be a cause of alienation and harm for queer youth:

'The local police are extremely poor on homophobia, perpetrators are excused because of their 'culture' or their 'religion''. **Ciarán, 35, West Midlands in** *Stonewall; Homophobic Hate crime: The Gay British Crime Survey* **2008, p.23**

Nicola (21, Newcastle) blanks out a page on her diary, leaving the words: Confused, Broken, Lost, Scared, Alone, Abandoned.

'The idea of having an LGBT child is no longer a horrifying possibility for many parents, and many educated young parents in particular would not dream of shaming their male child for liking dresses or their girl for refusing to wear them. This trend will only continue and grow stronger. You can help in your personal life by educating those around you. Although some **parental rejection comes from strict religious beliefs**, much also is predicated on the belief that the child has chosen to be gay or transgender, and that they can change' (GoodTherapy.org http://www.goodtherapy.org/blog/LGBT-youth-suicide-as-serious-as-it-is-preventable-0916134, emphasis added).

Making sense of religious and queer identities: Implications for good practice

This report suggests that organisations, institutions and campaigns working with the health and wellbeing of queer youth and their relationships could broaden their attentions to consider how religious identities may impact, and at times alienate, young people from the positive portrayals of LGBT communities who remain underrepresented in religious spheres.

Whilst the findings for 'Making Space for Queer Identifying Religious Youth' highlighted many positive strategies used by young people to reconcile their often conflicting identities of queer and religious, there also emerged stories of difficulty and trauma in such complicated identities. Some participants struggled with self-harm, trauma, depression and attempted suicide, and described experiences with counselling services:

'I told my counsellor when I got to University, the first thing I did was book a counselling appointment; normally you find out where the pubs are, well, I booked a counselling appointment and it was like, 'If I can't come and see you I'm going to kill myself' and so yeah, I went to talk to a counsellor and I was like, 'Every time I go to church I just cut myself' and she was like, 'Okay. Now I know this probably isn't what you want to hear but try not going to church for a bit and see if that helps' and it did and I was relived. I still cut myself and was still an emotional wreck but it wasn't religiously every Sunday that I'd cut myself, it was just occasionally. But it did take some of the stress away because I didn't have that feeling of guilt' (Nicola, 21, Newcastle)

'Young people should have awareness about the public services that can help them with the various issues that they have to deal with. Young people should have more access to resources, information and perhaps through the internet and social media. GPs. Hospitals and health staff have to be more inclusive and non-judgemental achieved through training and seminars'
Participant Feedback and Reflections from *Making Space for Queer Identifying Religious Youth: Politics, Policies and Public imaginations*

This report highlights the important measures that need to be undertaken in order to address the health and wellbeing of young people who identify as religious and queer, and calls for a greater understanding of how multiple and co-existing identities impact on young people and the services they access. This would influence organisations who work specifically with young people, such as youth counselling services, teachers and youth workers, as well as wider LGBT campaigns and charities that advise public sectors workers, the police, and general practitioners.

Exclusions and belonging: Which community do queer religious youth feel part of?

When the issue of tensions, exclusions and rejections arise surrounding the relationship between sexuality, youth and religion, it is often assumed that religion is primarily to blame for such exclusions. However, what is also important to remember is that identifying as religious can impact on feelings of belonging and emotional wellbeing in the LGBT and queer youth communities, which are often integral to people's lives, friendships, connections and sense of self. Therefore many participants felt 'out of place' in spaces and during activities enjoyed by their young, queer peers.

Susan (19, Durham) for example, believes that the LGBT and religious community operate in two completely different spheres, and in her experience the two are both very hostile to the other. This hostility leads to pre-empting difficult tensions when it comes to negotiating her role in both communities:

> **Interviewer:** *Is your involvement with the Chapel something you're happy for people to know about?*
>
> **Susan:** *Yes. If nothing else I can say it's because I'm in the choir, it's easy to say I'm going to Evening Song because I'm in the choir. But I'm not ashamed of saying - if someone said 'do you want to go to the pub on Sunday', I'd go 'no, I've got Evening Song'. And I won't say 'it's not because I'm Christian, I'm in the choir', I'll just say 'no, I've got Evening Song' fine, simple, leave it at that. I'm not at all ashamed.*

It is clear that the Chapel choir is of great importance to Susan, yet the mention of 'shame' to be Christian and part of a Christian Choir highlights some of the difficulties in living with both queer social scenes and those of the church. Other queer religious young participants, such as John (21, Newcastle), also describe being in a church choir as a 'social taboo' in his social circles. Susan is adamant that she is 'not ashamed' of being part of the choir, yet omits information about the Christian nature of this involvement to friends who may be part of her emerging queer social circles. This also indicates that at times, within the queer community, involvement with the church may indeed be something hidden or at least partially cordoned off.

Returning to our policy context, young people who identify as both religious and queer may at times feel there is something missing, misunderstood, or wrongly perceived about the role of religion and sexuality in the recommendations made by LGBT political and advisory campaigns. A broader understanding of the complex and multiple issues for queer identifying religious youth would enhance LGBT charities, counselling and public service that provide policies to protect the mental, emotional and physical safety of queer youth at risk of harm.

6. Online Use and Social Networking

There has been a growing interest in the use of digital technologies in the lives of young people, with social media sites and online networking such as Facebook and Twitter becoming central to the identities and connections of young people in their everyday lives.

For youth-centered research projects to be relevant, digital methodologies are often integral. For example, CelebYouth.org explored the role of celebrity in young people's classed and gendered aspirations through online forums to generate discussions about celebrity and aspiration and allow participants to initiate 'threads' and react to topical developments. Religiously-themed iPhone and Android applications are becoming increasingly popular amongst the young and IT savvy, such as digital Bibles through Youversion or the Carry Your Faith app which rebroadcasts morning Mass throughout the day. Therefore the role of digital technology is a crucial resource for any policy organisation working with young people.

However, the rapid pace of this digital development has lead to many active policies that aim to safeguard young people from online harm, cyber abuse and associated risks. Organisations such as Safe Network and the National Foundation for Educational Research (nfer) have produced report documents identifying the risks solutions for protecting children and young people.

We recommend that organisations working with the impacts of online technology take into account the crucial importance of online forums for the more positive role of 'showing' how queer and religious identities can co-exist. With regard to the profiling of the young participants in our study who identified, sometimes awkwardly, as both Christian and queer, the feature of their Facebook profiles were of significant importance. The 'About' page on Facebook was perceived as a culmination of key characteristics which were seen as constructing a particular public and personal persona. Many participants suggested that religious views and 'Interested in' (ie men, women, men and women) were important in showing their religious and queer identities, as well as photographs and 'liking' particular interest and groups. In some cases, Social Media was a central way to display both religious and queer identities to the public world.

'Coming out' as queer and religious online: 'I just said it on Facebook, typed in 'I'm gay' and I hit 'enter'

He's probably picked it up, like I'm on Twitter and I think that's part of my description, so he'd be a bit dim if he hadn't picked it up by now but he just hasn't mentioned it'. (Gloria, 20, London)

I just worked myself up to the point where I couldn't deal with telling anyone face to face and......I was chatting [online to her friend] about something but her boyfriend had said something about where he worked in the summer there was only two women and they were both gay, and I made some references and basically told her (Evelyn, 26, Manchester).

Obviously when I started seeing my current boyfriend it went on Facebook for all of my friends there, and they then knew (James, 17, Manchester).

In contrast with online technologies creating difficulties and unwelcome exposure, many of the participants in 'making space for queer-identifying religious youth' worked with these new spaces in order to produce opportunities for reconciliation between their religious and queer identities. Online technologies are a crucial tool for Queer Identifying religious youth to regain control over their identity profiling, and provides a 'virtual space' to be both religious and queer where other spaces seem restrictive.

7. Conclusions: implications for policy and suggestions for future research

This report highlights some key issues that need to be addressed in order to tackle the at time adverse public, private and institutional experiences of young people who identify as religious and queer. It calls for a greater understanding of how multiple and co-existing identities impact on young people and the services they access. Such understandings can usefully inform and influence individuals, institutions and organisations who work specifically with young people, such as student counselling services, teachers and youth workers, as well as more general practitioners.

Key Findings

To be Young, Religious and Queer: A Contradiction in terms?

In exploring young queer connections with Christianity, it is necessary to disrupt an *automatic* association of non-heterosexuality with secularism and an assumed disinterest between 'youth' and 'religion'.

Educational Contexts

Educational resources must address issues of both religion and sexuality for young people in schools. This amalgamation must be present in PSHE, SRE, staff training and anti-bullying measures in order to avoid the risk of promoting ideas of oppositional differences.

Relationships, Health and Emotional Wellbeing

A broader understanding of the complex and multiple issues for queer identifying religious youth would enhance LGBT charities, counselling and public service that provide policies to protect the mental, emotional and physical safety of queer youth at risk of harm.

Online Use and Social Networking

Online technologies are a crucial tool for Queer Identifying religious youth to regain control over their identity profiling, and provides a 'virtual space' to be both religious and queer where other spaces seem restrictive.

Future research

There are further policy implications that reach beyond the scope of this report and project findings. The impact of sexuality and religion can shape:

- **Gaining entry to employment**
- **Experiences, inclusions and exclusions in the workplace**
- **Access to housing**

The future of whether to assign, act on, and choose queer *or* religious identities, in practical service provisions, policy formation, educational delivery, and, importantly, for young people themselves, may no longer need to be such a turbulent dilemma.

'Maybe forming alliances with other religious and LGBT projects to see what strategies they have for dissemination of information and encouraging inclusion, for example, the Imam project (for LGBT Muslims)' **Participant Suggestion from *Making Space for Queer Identifying Religious Youth: Politics, Policies and Public imaginations***

'I would just like to say thank you for creating this space. I lead a small non-denominational Church in Luton where there is a large Muslim population. I would love for faith groups to have more exposure to research which addresses the relationship between faith/religion and wider society. I think your work and that of those on the panel could make a huge difference to faith communities and how they handle these issues and provide space where people feel accepted and loved. Thank you!' **Participant Suggestion from *Making Space for Queer Identifying Religious Youth: Politics, Policies and Public imaginations***

Project Publications

Books

Taylor, Y. and Snowdon, R. (eds), (2014) *Queering Religion, Religious Queers* Routledge

Chapters

Taylor, Y. and Snowdon, R. (2014) 'Introduction' Taylor, Y. and Snowdon, R. (eds) *Queering Religion, Religious Queers* Routledge

Taylor, Y. and Snowdon, R. (2013) 'Mapping Queer, Mapping Me: Visualising Queer Religious Identity' Shipley, H. (ed) *Globalized Religion and Sexuality.* Brill

Special Journal Issues

Taylor, Y. and Snowdon, R. (eds), Special Issue 'Sexuality and Religion', 2014 *Sexualities*

Page, S.J., Guest, M., Taylor. Y. (eds) (in progress) 'Christianity and Class'

Journal Articles

Falconer, E. and Taylor, Y. (Forthcoming) What type of student will you choose to be? Negotiating queer and religious identities in Higher Education and the University experience *Gender and Education*

Taylor, Y. Falconer, E., and Snowdon, R. (2014) 'Queer Youth, Facebook and Faith: Facebook Methodologies and Online Identities' *New Media and Society*

Taylor, Y. Falconer, E., and Snowdon, R. (2014) 'Sounding Religious, Sounding Queer: Sexuality, Religion and Music' *Journal of Ecclesial Practices*

Taylor, Y. and Snowdon, R. (2014) 'Young Lesbians in Church' *Journal of Lesbian Studies*

Taylor, Y. and Snowdon, R. (2014) 'Introduction' Special Issue 'Sexuality and Religion', Taylor, Y. and Snowdon, R. (eds) *Sexualities*

Resources

Case Study: Embodying Religion, Hearing, Senses; Case study: Embodying Religion, LGBT, Sexuality in *Embodying Religion: Essays and Case studies* http://embodyingreligion.org/

Newsletters

Issue 4 (July 2013):
http://queerreligiousyouth.files.
wordpress.com/2011/12/newsletter-issue-4-v-8.pdf
Issue 3 (October 2012):
http://queerreligiousyouth.files.wordpress.com/2011/12/newsletter-issue-3-v31.pdf
Issue 2 (April-May 2012):
http://queerreligiousyouth.files.wordpress.com/2011/12/newsletter-issue-2-making-space-for-queer-identifying-religious-youth-may-20121.pdf

Blogs (available on the Weeks Centre and GEA blogs):

- 'Report from the Gender and Education Association's 2013 Conference'
- 'Making Space for the Straight Talking/Acting Interviewer?'
- 'Making Space for Queer-Identifying Religious Youth (2011-2013)'
- Making Space for Religion, Youth and Sexuality? Implications for policies, Politics and Public Imaginations.

References and Links

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/85027/vcs-religion-belief.pdf

http://www.goodtherapy.org/blog/LGBT-youth-suicide-as-serious-as-it-is-preventable-0916134

http://www.itgetsbetter.org/

http://www.relate.org.uk/files/relate/publication-class-2011-yearbook-2011.pdf

http://www.stonewall.org.uk/documents/homophobic_hate_crime__final_report.pdf

http://www.relate.org.uk/

http://www.eauk.org/idea/what-puts-young-people-off-church.cfm

http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/church-of-england-is-one-generation-away-from-extinction-time-to-end-arguments-says-archbishop-of-york-dr-johnsentamu-8949686.html

https://www.churchofengland.org/media-centre/news/2004/11/pr4504.aspx

http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-18702908

https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/creating-a-fairer-and-more-equal-society/supporting-pages/equal-marriage-for-gay-lesbian-bisexual-and-trans-people-and-protecting-lgbt-rights

http://www.equalmarriage.org.uk/

http://www.channel4.com/programmes/father-ray-comes-out

http://www.communitychannel.org/charities/queer-youth-network/

http://www.theguardian.com/teacher-network/teacher-blog/2014/aug/06/collective-worship-schools-students-religious-devotion

http://www.schools-out.org.uk/

http://www.stonewall.org.uk/at_school/teacher_training/default.asp

http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/religious-education-realising-potential

http://www.celebyouth.org/about/

http://www.safenetwork.org.uk/help_and_advice/Pages/potential_online_risks.aspx

http://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/COJ01/COJ01.pdf

http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2013/06/12/labours-clause-20-sex-education-amendment-fails-in-the-commons/

http://weekscentreforsocialandpolicyresearch.wordpress.com/2014/09/02/making-space-for-religion-youth-and-sexuality-implications-for-policies-politics-and-public-imaginations/
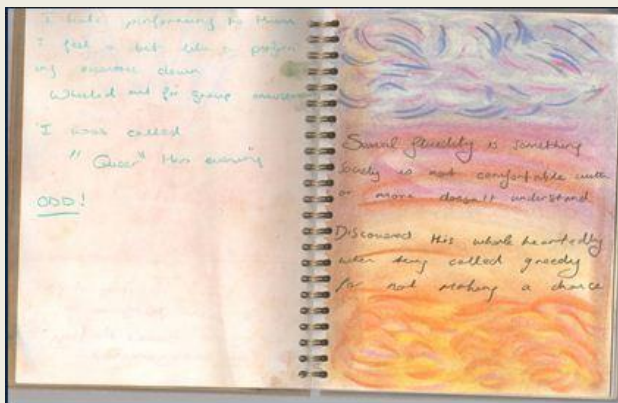
Appendix A

Methods

The project adopted a mixed-method research design, consisting of individual face-to-face interviews, diaries, and a mapping exercise.

Interviews: Researchers on the project carried out one to one interviews with participants. The interviews lasted between one and two hours and were conducted between October 2011 and November 2012 and took place in three locales: Newcastle, Manchester, and London, and were conducted in participants' homes, a church, a cathedral, a youth centre, universities, cafes, and through one Skype interview. Interviews were semi-structured, exploring the family, education, work, leisure, relationships and identity, religion, and the imagined future.

Diaries: Each participant was invited to keep a diary for one month after the interview, to record their reflections on their everyday life and events and thoughts relating to the interview themes. We were committed to enabling the participants to record their 'mundane' and significant reflections, including whatever everyday experiences may come up for them. Thus, only minimal guidelines were provided, with some examples of issues pertaining to religion and sexuality given but participants left to tell their story in their own way.

Mapping exercise: Participants were also asked to complete a mind-map, which was either done at a small group meeting, with the researcher, following the interview, or completed alone and later returned. The brief was to think about spaces they inhabit on a day-to-day basis and where they felt (un)comfortable to express their religious and sexual identities. This information was visually mapped onto a blank piece of paper with participants choosing different, creative, and often colourful ways to express themselves. These 'displays' of identity were expressed in a number of ways including keywords in the centre of the page with ideas, concepts, and pictures radiating from them; graphs; Venn diagrams; lists; and Mandalas. These methods allowed for more creative (re)interpretations of religion and sexuality and the 'spaces of reconciliation' which are so central to this paper.
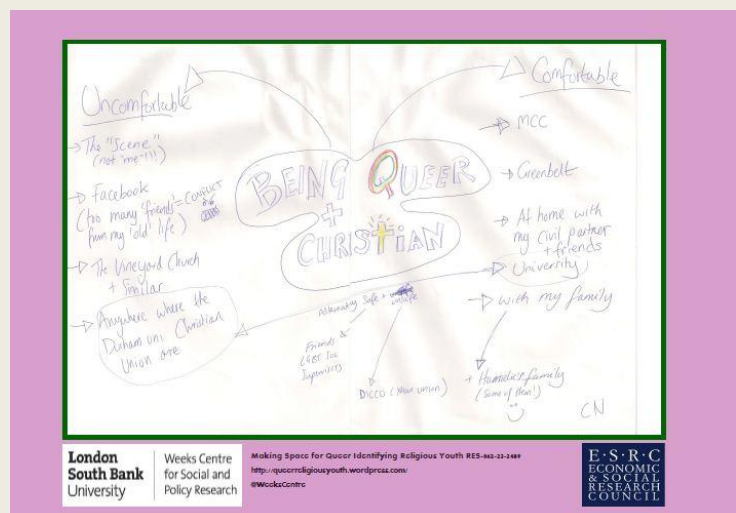
Appendix B

Indicative Interview Topics

Making space for queer identifying religious young people

Education

-Compulsory Education
-Higher/Further Education

Employment and Unemployment

Family

Leisure

Locale

Relationships and Identity

Religion

The Future

London South Bank University | Weeks Centre for Social and Policy Research

E·S·R·C ECONOMIC & SOCIAL RESEARCH COUNCIL

Making Space for Religion, Youth and Sexuality? Implications for Policies, Politics and Public Imaginations.

St George the Martyr Church, Borough, London, SE1,

Friday the 1st August, 3pm-7 pm.

Public event, All welcome, Entrance free.

<u>Overview of Event</u>

The **Weeks Centre for Social and Policy Research** and the **Feminist Library** are hosting a public event to discuss the complex relationship between religion, sexuality and youth, and what this may mean for policies, politics and public imaginations. There will be an opportunity to view the creative Mind map and Diary exhibition**: *Making Space for Queer Identifying Religious Youth*,** followed by a panel of speakers discussing their research, experiences, performances and identities. The panel debate will specifically address the impact of sexuality and religion on key public policies and imaginations, such as same sex marriage, education, religious belonging and feminism. There will then be an open Question and Answer session with audience members.

<u>Structure of Event</u>

3pm-4pm: View exhibition *Making Space for Queer Identifying Religious Youth*, Tea, Coffee and Biscuits.

4-4.30pm: Introduction to Exhibition and *Making Space for Queer Identifying Religious Youth* research project: What are the Implications for Policies, Politics and Public Imaginations?

Professor Yvette Taylor and Dr Emily Falconer, Weeks Centre for Social and Policy Research

4.30-5.30pm: Panel Discussion: Reflections, discussions and performances from panel representatives*.*

5.30-6.30pm: Q & A session and open discussion.

6.30pm- 6.45pm: Implications for the Future: Professor Yvette Taylor and Dr Emily Falconer. Close

The Panel

Reverend Ray Andrews

Rev Ray Andrews is the former practicing Vicar of St George in the Martyr, who identifies as Gay. His experiences of being a Gay Vicar have been made into a Channel 4 documentary: *Father Ray Comes Out.*

Professor Andrew Yip

Andrew Kam-Tuck Yip is Professor of Sociology at the University of Nottingham. His main research interest focuses on religion and sexuality. His recent publications include *Queer Spiritual Spaces: Sexuality and Sacred Places* (co-editor, 2010), *Religion, Youth and Sexuality: Selected Key Findings from a Multi-faith Exploration* (co-author, 2011), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Contemporary Religion and Sexuality* (co-editor, 2012), *Religion, Gender and Sexuality in Everyday Life* (co-editor, 2012), and *Religious and Sexual Identities: A Multi-faith Exploration of Young Adults* (co-author 2013).

Samuel Gaukroger

Samuel Gaukroger is our panel representative from the organisation *Diverse Church* (@Diverse_Church). Diverse Church is a supportive community of 70 young (18-30) LGBT+ Christians in UK evangelical churches. They have recently made a film called *Christian It Gets Better* (2014) which follows the experiences of young, LGBT Christians.

Dr Sarah-Jane Page

Sarah Jayne Page is a lecturer in Sociology at Aston University. Her research interests encompass religious identities, gender, feminism, sexuality, youth, clergy families and parenthood. Sarah was a Research Fellow on the project, *Religion, Youth and Sexuality: A Multi-faith Exploration,* which focused on 18 to 25 year olds from a variety of faith backgrounds in order to understand attitudes and practices around sexuality and how this was negotiated in relation to religious tradition.

Tim Goodwin/ Sister Shirley Divine

Tim Goodwin performs a comedy act as **Sister Shirley Divine**, who is a nun and presents herself as fulfilling the calling and responsibilities of one who lives in a religious order. She brings comedy to the audience from the perspective of her Christian faith. Taking on this comedy persona has allowed Tim to perform in both church and secular contexts and reflects his own deep beliefs on the need to live out the concept of 'inclusion', which is key aspect of his own integration of faith and sexuality. Tim uses his performance to challenge the status quo concerning attitudes towards gay people, trans people and also members of the Christian church.

Dr Kristin Aune

Kristin Aune is a Reader of Sociology at the University of Derby. Most of her research focuses on gender, religion and feminism. Kristin has looked at the role of single women in the contemporary church, and undertook a study of contemporary evangelical Christians and their approach to gender. She is currently working on feminists' approaches to religion and spirituality, has published **Reclaiming the F Word: The New Feminist Movement** and **Christianity and the University Experience: Understanding Student Faith** .

The Feminist Library is a large collection of Women's Liberation Movement literature also based locally in South London. Run by a collective of volunteers, they have been supporting research, activist and community projects since 1976. The Feminist library will be holding an information stall at the exhibition event.

Event Organisers

Professor Yvette Taylor and Dr Emily Falconer, Weeks Centre for Social and Policy Research**.** *Queering Religion, Religious Queers; Queer Youth, Facebook and Faith*

Appendix D

Youth, Sexuality and Religion: Questions of belonging: where the need comes from, understanding the politics and antagonisms between different social groups (e.g. religious and the LGBT community), finding yourself and growing.

Marginality as a possibility of creativity: does this marginality mean persevering within the religious group or breaking away from it – is it bad if it leads to leaving the original group of belonging and finding other meanings within non-religious contacts?

Further study on the idea of 'marginalisation as a gift', exploring the convergence between marginalisation and empowerment: How powerful could GBT community be in 20 yrs. time?

Are they –

Future presidents?

Future prime ministers?

Future Bishops?

Future Popes?

My reflections on the day – fantastic, great forum for discussion, good panellists who offered different backgrounds and opinions, well-organized, exhibition=challenging.

Reflections on policy areas – more acceptance of LGBT relationships in educational policy and counselling.

It was powerful to bring together academics and people of faith. Maybe partnering with a larger Church of group of LGBT Christian groups for a larger event to discuss these issues. Maybe theologians (queer ones) could offer theological resources/sessions at this?

I came into the discussion from a point of complete and utter neutrality. I am neither a representative of the LGBT or Christian communities and yet I felt very strongly that this is a hugely important discussion that our society needs to have. It seems to me that education is the key to creating an arena for discussion and growth. Yes, it is important for our Religions to address this in their congregations but for those who are religious then the school should be the place to broach the subject. I would think the next stage is to approach leaders in Education about how to make this topic an accepted part of the curriculum. Sorry if this is a really obvious thing to say, but it's just my two cents as an outsider of this subject.

Reflections on the event: very interesting and thought provoking event, good range of diverse contributions with some striking common ground:

- providing some space for LGBT people, actual or virtual
- encouraging people to 'tell their stories'
- the dangers of dualistic thought and perception re sexuality/religion.

I would just like to say thank you for creating this space. I think the blend on the panel was fantastic – priests, academics, comediennes etc. and if I could change one thing about the event it would be that there would be more people here to hear and see it. I lead a small non-denominational Church in Luton where there is a large Muslim population. I would love for faith groups to have more exposure to research which addresses the relationship between faith/religion and wider society. I think your work and that of those on the panel could make a huge difference to faith communities and how they handle these issues and provide space where people feel accepted and loved. Thank you!

I found today very interesting, the panellists were amazing and it was great to be here toady and hear so many encouraging and string stories. Thank you.

Really enjoyed the discussion today. In earlier years I was very one-tracked minded in y thoughts about homosexuality and religion. As I have got older, and through meeting various people from different walks of life, those views have changed. This event has further reassured me that there is hope for more acceptance of LGBT people.

Really enjoyed the discussion and event today. 'Making Space' to me means fitting in and assimilating to a mainstream culture. But the aim of your policy impact could be focussed on reinventing normativity, returning religious ideology back to its core values – acceptance and love.

Where and how to disseminate:

- Offer workshops to bible colleagues
- Via resources to faith schools, and other schools
- Via educational authorities, diocesan educational authorities, teacher training courses, different denominations, Schools Out, Educate & Celebrate, Stonewall.
- Offer presentations/resources to local ecumenical groups
- Through British Sociological Association Teaching Group, specific guidance to A level Belief and Society syllabus.

Press release to mainstream publications and possibly religious publications. Maybe forming alliances with other religious and LGBT projects to see what strategies they have for dissemination of information and encouraging inclusion, for example, the Imam project (for LGBT Muslims).

Very fascinating day. How about more theoretical discussions?

- Issues of theology
- Queer theory and religious studies

Presentations fed off each other very well. Perhaps there could be more conversation about the interlinking of gender and LGBT issues.

Perhaps it would be helpful for a paper or multimedia project to be produced as a co-effort from an academic and a member of the LGBT Christian community, as multiple stories. Often, one academic voice is easily mistaken as scientific. The day was a great 'rainbow' of voices and ideas.

Collaboration between academics and practitioners/activists is crucial, more events of this kind!

- organise dialogues within religious communities and LGBT communities about the relationship between religion and sexuality.

Young people should have awareness about the public services that can help them with the various issues that they have to deal with. Young people should have more access to resources, information and perhaps through the internet and social media. GPs. Hospitals and health staff have to be more inclusive and non-judgemental achieved through training and seminars.

Making Space for Religion, Youth and Sexuality? Implications for Policies, Politics and Public Imaginations.

St George the Martyr Church, Borough, London, SE1

Friday the 1st August, 3pm-7 pm.

Join in the debate, Public event, All welcome, Entrance free.

The Weeks Centre for Social and Policy Research and the Feminist Library are hosting a public event to discuss the complex relationship between religion, sexuality and youth, and what this may mean for policies, politics and public imaginations.

There will be an opportunity to view the creative Mind map and Diary exhibition: *Making Space for Queer Identifying Religious Youth,* followed by a panel of speakers discussing their research, experiences, performances and identities.

Panel: Yvette Taylor and Emily Falconer (Weeks Centre for Social and Policy Research), Rev Ray Andrews, Tim Goodwin/ Shirley Divine, Andrew Yip (University of Nottingham), Samuel Gaukroger (Diverse Church), Sarah-Jane Page (Aston University), Kristin Aune (University of Derby), The Feminist Library.

London South Bank University | Weeks Centre for Social and Policy Research

E·S·R·C ECONOMIC & SOCIAL RESEARCH COUNCIL