Negotiating and constructing religious identities in English secondary schools: a study of the reported experiences of adolescent Christians, Jews, and Muslims

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Abstract

The increasing diversity of societies is one of the most important educational issues of the globalised era. However, while some attention has been paid to the schooling experiences of racial, ethnic and immigrant minorities in Western societies, little research has been conducted with religious adolescents.

This thesis explores the complexities of religious adolescents’ experiences of English secondary schools. As an exploratory study, I employed an emergent research design carrying out loosely-structured, group and single interviews at eleven places of worship to investigate the schooling experiences of 99 adolescent Christians, Jews and Muslims. In order to interpret their reported experiences, I applied a theoretical model based on the Students’ Multiple World Framework in conjunction with concepts of religious identity negotiation and construction.

The interview data show how Christians, Jews and Muslims negotiate their religious identities in the context of the numerous challenges presented by secondary schools in a religiously plural and largely secular society. In classroom worlds participants perceived their religious traditions to be distorted, inaccurately or unfairly represented. In peer worlds participants reported that they could experience prejudice, and criticism of their beliefs. Christians, Jews and Muslims reported two principal management strategies in the face of these challenges, either: declaring their religious identity openly, or by masking it in public.

The findings of this study are highly relevant to debates about the role of religion in education, including those concerning faith and Church schools and the nature and purpose of the curriculum subject Religious Education.

Keywords: religion; faith; religious identity; secondary school; England; Christians; Jews; Muslims; adolescents; identity; negotiation; construction; development; formation
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Building bridges with religious communities was not straightforward. Thanks to those Christians, Muslims, and Jews who enabled the research to happen. I remain in awe of those youth workers who cannot be named, but even more so of those young people who keep going in difficult circumstances.

In my desk draw I have my original DPhil research proposal submitted in 2007 to be supervised by my then Farmington Tutor, inspiration, and mentor, Terence Copley. It is entitled ‘What is the effect of non-confessional Religious Education on non-denominational secondary school students’ values and beliefs?’ Thanks to those who have helped me take this project forward to its present form in this thesis since Terence’s sad and untimely death, in particular, Geoffrey Walford and Nigel Fancourt.

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In Memoriam

Terence Copley D.D.

1947-2011
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Prologue

Researcher orientations

Qualitative research is a ‘process’ behind which, at every stage, ‘stands the personal biography of the researcher’ (Denzin & Lincoln 2003, p. 29). At the beginning of a transparent account of this study, it is therefore germane to provide the reader with some indication of my motivations, and how they relate to my own biography. Reflexivity and transparency are important in all qualitative research – but perhaps particularly so in an area such as religion and education, where there is much perception of, and opportunity for, bias and partisan opinion. This opening reflection was stimulated by my experiences in the field, and the need to think consciously through my ‘researcher orientations’ during every stage of the project (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007, p. 15). My relevant previous experiences and memories sketched out here – although in some sense central to the study’s genesis – were re-encountered and recognised during, and as part, of the research process.

When I was in my first Year of secondary school, I took up a paper round in my village. One day, early in the morning, as I cycled my round, I became aware of the smell of smoke. I thought it must be from a bonfire, but it seemed to permeate all the streets. It was not until I looked up – following the hoses of two parked fire engines – that I noticed the smoke seeping out of the Church belfry. This was a beautiful medieval Anglican Church, where I had been christened, my sister was married, and my grandmother and auntie were regulars. Later, it transpired it had been set on fire by one of my secondary school peers. This same student had always taunted me for my (or my parents’) religious views at school, and was sometimes violent. My parents had been involved in a Messianic Free-Church movement, which had, among other things, prohibited the celebration of
Christmas. This had been the source of relentless interest at school, some teasing, and, with some, such as the arsonist, the cause of open hostility.

Religion, particularly Christianity, often seemed to be the subject of derision at my secondary school, and was never taken seriously by teachers or students, even in Religious Education. It was partly for this reason after reading Philosophy at University and encountering religious traditions other than Christianity overseas, I later decided to become a teacher of Religious Education in order to try and make the subject interesting for students. What to me had become one of the most fascinating areas of human activity, had seemed to have been dealt with unsatisfactorily at school in my personal experience – not an uncommon reason for wanting to become a teacher of Religious Education (Sikes & Everington, 2003, 2004).

During my time in secondary schools (of a non-religious character) as a teacher of Religious Education, however, I came across similar attitudes and issues as I did as a pupil – even though by this time (the early Years of the new millennium) Religious Education had become more firmly set on the social and political agenda than when I was a student (Copley, 2008). I began to notice that the ‘religious’ students in my school were quite often the subject of fascination, ridicule or, in some extreme cases persistent bullying by their peers. Somewhat intriguingly, and in contrast to students who did not profess or practise a religion, they could also be those most personally challenged by the content of the Religious Education curriculum.

A trial lesson when I was interviewing for a job at a school exemplifies the casual anti-Semitism I encountered among some adolescents. As part of an activity to illustrate religious pluralism I had given out cards to each student with a designated religion. One of the students, who had been given a card for Judaism, immediately received audible laughter and anti-Semitic derision from their peers. Fairly regularly, in other schools, I
overheard students calling each other ‘terrorists’, and students using ‘Muslim’ and ‘Jew’
as terms of abuse.

There were issues other than prejudicial put-downs – which although shocking –
were relatively straight-forward to respond to as a practitioner given their obvious
inappropriateness. A more nuanced dilemma concerned the experiences of religious
students in Religious Education lessons. One particularly memorable interaction with a
six-day creationist student serves as a good example of this. In my lesson, we had been
discussing origins and different accounts of the existence of the universe and world,
including theistic evolutionism. I did not know that any of the students in my class were
creationists, but when marking books at home, a DVD fell out of one the students’ books.
The student’s essay expressed a desire for me to watch this DVD. I did, and it was of an
American evangelist who claimed that not only was evolution false, but that anyone who
taught it to be true was damned. The most salient aspect of this incident for me as a
practitioner was, that, despite knowing the student for three Years, I did not know that she
or her family held such views. She had never aired her views publically in lessons, even
during the numerous opportunities for debate and discussion that I provided. On reflection
it occurred to me that I had not even allowed for the possibility of creationism, but had
merely mildly expounded the merits of theistic evolutionism as though it was the only
credible option for a religious believer. This experience and others like it prompted me to
undertake some action research in order to answer the question: ‘How should Christianity
be taught in the third millennium?’ (Moulin, 2006).

Around the same time, my work teaching a broad curriculum of Religious
Education, and my Master’s course in Continuing Professional Development, led me to
read more and more around the disciplines of Religious Studies and Theology as well as
liaising with a number of faith communities. This gradually became a personal interest
rather than just a professional one. My encounter with visitors representing several
religious traditions, and trips to their places of worship in addition to the reflections and questions of my students (who would frequently ask about my own religious beliefs) furthered my interest in theological questions. Pondering these questions led me to consider my stance towards religion, not only in my professional role, but in regard to my personal religious beliefs. Thinking through these issues coincided with the beginning of my research career, and eventually led to my reception into full communion with the Catholic Church.

Partly motivated by my experiences professionally and personally, this thesis is an account of the exploratory qualitative study I undertook to try and capture, analyse and understand religious adolescents’ experiences of secondary schools: to bring the experiences of a small purposive sample of this diverse group of secondary school students under scrutiny in a exploratory interview study. In this thesis I have set out to coherently and cogently render the perspectives and experiences that my participants raised in our numerous conversations, and to have explored, and to have begun to answer, an important educational question about how secondary schooling may impact upon the construction and negotiation of adolescents’ religious identities.
Chapter One

The case for engaging with religious adolescents

Introduction: the origins and aims of the study

What is it like for a religious adolescent to attend a secondary school in England? This broad, exploratory, aim set the research process in motion and lies at the heart of this thesis. It had its origins in my professional experiences as a secondary school teacher of Religious Education, and is situated in my own ‘position’ as a religious believer and practitioner (see prologue). As such, this research aim is primarily concerned not with the relationship between religious affiliation and attainment, or attitude towards school, but how secondary schooling may impact upon religious adolescents as religious adherents or believers. This aim was further informed by a previous research project undertaken as part of a Master of Science Degree that explored religious students’ perspectives of Religious Education lessons in secondary schools (Moulin, 2009a; Moulin, 2011). In that study, Christians and Jews reported the content of Religious Education lessons as problematic. Lessons were considered to present inaccurate portrayals of participants’ own religions, challenged their religious beliefs and practices, and presented religious stereotypes to their peers – which could prompt misunderstanding and bullying.

An important impetus for investigating the schooling experiences of religious adolescents, in both this study and its precursor, was the work of Terence Copley. The findings of The Biblos Project suggest that the Bible can be distorted, secularised and divorced from religious interpretations in the classroom (Copley, 1998; Copley et al., 2001; Copley et al., 2004). Drawing upon this research and extensive professional experience of working in schools and with teachers, Copley (2005) argues that
schooling could constitute a form of secular indoctrination. In a society divided over
the role of Christianity in public life, religion remains in education but in such a way
that the possibility of God has been all but removed.

Education is visibly preserving the discourse of religion, but sometimes rather like a fish
that has been filleted. God, the backbone of religion, has too often been neatly excised
from the presentation. A spineless dead fish on a slab is too often the result.

Copley 2005, p. 148

Copley does not address or consider the experience of religious students in schools.
But, if, as he argues, schools affirm secular values and worldviews at the expense of
religious ones – purporting to represent religious truth claims and traditions but only
giving a caricature of them – it would suggest that religious adolescents may find
schooling difficult. In the case of Religious Education lessons specifically, my previous
study confirmed this pre-supposition in group interviews with a small purposive sample
of practising Christians and Jews.

Following the insights of my earlier research, the present study was widened to
incorporate religious adolescents’ perspectives of other curriculum subjects, their
reported interactions with, and their perspectives of, their peers, and school life in
general. In order to explore these perspectives and reported experiences, as part of an
emergent design (Morgan, Fellows & Guevara, 2008; Charmaz, 2008), I conducted a
series of unstructured and loosely structured group, triple, pair and individual
interviews with 99 adolescent Christians, Jews and Muslims at their respective places
of worship, or affiliated community centres. These included youth groups and
congregations belonging to mainstream denominations: Sunni Islam; Orthodox and
Reform Judaism; the Catholic, Anglican and Baptist Churches; and the minority
movements of the Church of Latter Day Saints of Jesus Christ (Mormonism); the
Religious Society of Friends (Quakers); Ahmadiyya Islam; and, Liberal Judaism.
Interview data can be understood and interpreted in many ways (Silverman, 2003). As the fieldwork progressed I developed a conceptual framework inspired by the Students Multiple Worlds Framework (Phelan, et al. 1991, 1994, 1998). I used this in conjunction with concepts of identity negotiation and construction drawn from sociologists, social theorists and educational researchers in the symbolic interactionist, social constructionist and cultural studies traditions in order to use ‘identity as an important analytic tool for understanding schools and society’(Gee, 2000, p. 99).

The increasing diversity of societies is recognised as one of the most important educational issues of the globalised era (Suárez-Orozco, 2007). In recent Years researchers have utilized the concepts of identity, identity negotiation and construction to give theoretical underpinning to understand the impact of schooling experiences upon ethnic minorities and immigrants in Western societies (e.g. Cummins, 2000; Forman, 2001; Bailey, 2002; Nasir & Saxe, 2003; Suárez-Orozco 2004; Strikitus & Nguyen, 2007; Awokoya, 2012). Studies of this kind give insights into cultural clashes with peers and the curriculum, and how minorities construct their self-understandings, or ‘negotiate’ identities in ‘conflicting contexts of socialization’ (Awokoya, 2012) – between their homes, parents, and minority ethnic, national, and cultural communities on one hand, and experiences at educational institutions on the other. In this thesis I use similar concepts and methods to studies of ethnic, racial and national minorities in order to investigate the schooling experiences of religious adolescents: not as ‘immigrants’ or ‘ethnic’ minorities, but as those who adhere to, identify with, and practise a religion as members of mainstream or minority denominations of Christianity, Judaism or Islam.

The Students Multiple Worlds Framework posits that everyday adolescents move between different ‘worlds’ – the three principal worlds being that of family, the
peer group, and school classrooms. In these worlds adolescents ‘negotiate and construct their realities’ (Phelan et al., 1991, p. 224), but as distinct social worlds these contexts make different demands on adolescents and rest upon different notions of accepted norms and values and thus have borders between them. Navigating these worlds and their borders can be challenging for adolescents where there is a high level of discrepancy between ‘norms, values, beliefs, expectations and actions’ (Phelan et al., 1994, p. 418) of family and peer worlds, and those of the classroom. Phelan et al. (1994) suggest that discrepancies between the identities of learners and their schools can cause psychosocial pressure on adolescents and may have a negative impact on school engagement and learning – leading some adolescents to ‘hide’ who they are in school and peer worlds (Phelan et al., 1991, p. 237). Phelan et al., writing elsewhere, also accept, however, that cultural difference may also provide individual students with ‘assets’ that aid border transitions – depending upon which culture is considered superior in classroom worlds (Phelan et al. 1998, p. 11). Other studies also suggest that identity is an important factor in students’ reported schooling experiences. For example, in a study of disaffected students in high school English classes, Faircloth (2012) found that when students’ identities are not ‘connected’ with learning, they can feel as though they are ‘wearing a mask’(to use the words of one of her participants) instead of being themselves and therefore not participate fully in lessons (p. 192).

The Students Multiple Worlds Framework has proven to be valuable in understanding the schooling experiences of minority students in terms of the construction and negotiation of identity. For example, Awokoya (2012), with the addition of the media world, uses Phelan et al.’s framework to interpret the identity negotiations and constructions of Nigerian Americans, exploring how different worlds present Nigerian Americans with conflicting representations of identity. Negotiating
tokenism in school, for example, can incur considerable emotional costs. Researchers interested in the construction of religious identity in schools have yet to conduct studies utilising the Students’ Multiple Worlds’ Framework. However, researchers have begun to conceptualise the difficulties that religious students may encounter in a similar way. Østberg (2000), employs the concept of ‘lifeworlds’ in order to interpret Norwegian Muslim children’s experiences of their homes in contrast to their school worlds, and the ‘identity management’ strategies they develop as a result of the difference between the two.

While studies exploring ethnic and immigrant minorities’ educational experiences and identity construction have often tended to ignore religious identity, in the last decade notable attention has been directed at understanding how young Muslims may negotiate and construct their identities in Western education systems (e.g. Østberg, 2000; Zine, 2001; Archer, 2003; Peek, 2005; Chaudhury & Miller, 2008; Hassan, 2010). In these studies Muslims are identified by religion rather than ethnic or national attachments as they had been in previous research (e.g. Murshid, 1990; Tomlinson, 1992; McIntyre, Bhatti & Fuller, 1993). This change in identification reflects both a real change among Muslims’ self-understanding in Western countries (Jacobson, 1997; Peek, 2005) and a new focus of researchers caused by the political circumstances following the events of September 11th 2001 (Mirza et al., 2007; Shaw, 2010; Verkuyten & Yildoz, 2010).

Studies of the educational experiences of adolescent Muslims suggest they have to find ways of negotiating or managing their religious identities in schools – which can be the site of negative experiences and present challenges to their religious beliefs and practices. They also suggest that socio-political circumstances can dramatically affect religious identity construction in schools and educational institutions.
Archer (2003) argues that studies of ethnic identity can define minorities in opposition to the ‘white’ norm (p. 28) and focus on Muslim identity in particular as a ‘special case’ (p. 29). The studies of Muslim religious identity construction referred to above assume that the differences between the values, norms and beliefs of Muslim homes, religious communities, and those of educational institutions and public life are stark. While not underestimating the specific challenges that may be presented to adolescent Muslims in western societies, it is telling to observe that similar studies have not been conducted into the identity constructions of Christians and Jews. Focus on Muslims reflects socio-political concerns about Muslim adolescents’ religious identity construction, and an increase in interest in, and stigmatisation of, Muslim youth specifically in educational policy and research following the events of September 11\(^{th}\) 2001 (Moulin, 2012).

This study widens academic enquiry about religious identity construction and negotiation in schools from the experiences of Muslims, to those of a variety of religious denominations of the Abrahamic traditions. As adolescents who adhere or belong to comparable monotheistic religious traditions in a plural context, this study takes as its premise that adolescent Christians and Jews may also encounter ‘conflicting contexts of socialization’ (Awokoya, 2012) as they move from their homes and religious communities to their secondary schools. While allowing for the analysis of differences between the schooling experiences of adherents of different religious traditions and denominations, this study identifies Christians, Jews and Muslims as having something in common in that they are religious adherents in a secular and plural society– albeit as belonging to distinct religious traditions (and usually in the context of England, distinct ethnic groups). Drawing upon the concepts of identity construction and negotiation used in studies of Muslim adolescents and other minority groups,
during the fieldwork and data analysis, I began to conceptualise the data gathered in my conversations with religious adolescents in terms of religious identity negotiations and constructions so as to further explore and understand ‘what it is like to be a religious adolescent in an English secondary school.’

The relevance of the study

Historically, in the research literature about religion, adolescents and schools in England, religious adolescents, particularly practising Christians, have sometimes been ignored in a discourse that has often centred on a growing lack of adherence in a secularising society (Loukes, 1961) and the ‘drift from the churches’ (Francis & Kay, 1996).

In the last decade, however, it has been recognised that there has been limited, or not sufficient, attention given to religious adherents in educational research in England and in Northern Europe (Streib, 2001; Visser-Vogel et al., 2012; Thanissaro, 2012). For example, Streib (2001) argues that in the field of research into religion and education, pedagogical innovation has ignored students’ experiences, their religious perspectives, and the impact of inter-faith education on their own religious positions. Other researchers (Bertram-Troost et al. 2006; Thanissaro, 2012; Visser-Vogel et al., 2012) have observed there has also been a focus on quantitative methodologies in studies examining attitudes towards religion among young people that may not account fully for the religion and denomination of participants in survey measures and theoretical frameworks.

The focus of this study on the schooling experiences of practising members of religions is therefore timely and innovative. With the exception of some research on the experiences of single religions – either Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs (Nesbitt, 1998, 2001; Ipgrave, 1999; Hassan, 2010) – and a body of literature advocating the needs of
Muslim students (Parker-Jenkins, 1991, 1995; Parker-Jenkins & Haw, 1998; Muslim Council of Great Britain, 2007; Coles, 2008), there has been very little research conducted in England examining the schooling experiences of religious adolescents as a group comprising of a number of religious traditions and denominations. Excluding the work of Nesbitt concerning the experiences of Sikhs and Hindus, and my previous study (Moulin, 2009a, 2011), there have been no studies that have sought to explore religious adolescents’ perspectives and experiences of English secondary schools by conducting interviews at locations outside of schools themselves.

The relevance of this study, however, is more than academic: it is also highly relevant to on-going public debates surrounding religion, education and society, and for members of religious communities and education professionals. In the new millennium, issues concerning religion have become of increased political, social and educational, import. The attacks on New York and Washington on September 11th 2001 and their aftermath triggered renewed attention to religion in public and political life – including renewed debate on the role of religion in liberal democracies (Habermas, 2006; Ratzinger, 2006; Sacks, 2009). The importance of religion to international and national politics in the subsequent decade led it to be described as ‘an age defined by identity’ in which ‘[m]any British people assert their faith as one of their primary forms of self-understanding’ (Cooper & Lodge, 2008, p. 3). In this context, religion entered fully into the ‘identity politics’ surrounding the representation of minorities in English society. Consequently, the term ‘religious identity’ has become often used in policy documents and in the focus of new academic research (e.g. Home Office, 2001; Weller et al., 2001; Mirza et al., 2007; Cooper & Lodge, 2008; AHRC/ESRC, 2012).

A good example of the emphasis placed upon the importance of religious identity in educational policy and provision is the *Diversity and Citizenship Curriculum*
Review or ‘Ajegbo report’ (DfES, 2007). The Ajegbo report was commissioned because of the impact of the events of September 11th, the London bombings of July 7th 2005, and due to concerns of disharmony and resentment in English society following race riots in 2001 (in which religious prejudice and discrimination were considered to be a potential factor in inequality and resentment (Home Office, 2004)). In the report the concept of identity is fundamental, and one of its key findings was that issues relating to religion were less often addressed in schools than those of race and ethnicity. The report concludes that schools should encourage the ‘exploration of identities’ broadly, and as part of activities in schools entitled ‘Who Do We Think We Are’ (DfES 2007, p. 13). The Ajegbo report was part of a wider strategy of the Labour Government to promote social and community cohesion, a task in which schools, and Religious Education, were to play an important role (DCSF, 2007a; Grimmitt, 2010).

More recently, the Coalition Government has removed social cohesion from school inspection regimes and placed an emphasis on traditional subjects, with a lack of focus on Religious Education (Moulin, 2012; Chater & Erricker, 2013). Yet in the second decade of the third millennium, issues surrounding the role of religion in education are still hotly contested and controversial (Hand, 2012; Archbishops’ Council Education Division, 2012). Controversy in the field of education can be considered symptomatic of a wider conflict between religious believers and atheists (Cooling, 2010), reminiscent of the ‘culture wars’ of the United States where ideological factions polarised over critical issues considered to define the nature of American society (Hunter, 1991). Two of the most debated issues concerning the role of religion in English education are the state funding of schools of religious character, or ‘faith schools’ (for example, see Gardener, Cairns & Lawton, 2005; BHA, 2012a) and the nature, purpose, aims and future of the role of religion in state-maintained schools in
the form of collective worship and Religious Education (for example, see White, 2004; Grimmitt, 2010; BHA, 2012b; Chater & Erricker, 2013). As one group of stake-holders in society, the perspectives and experiences of religious adolescents are largely ignored in these debates and their associated academic research literatures. Moreover, little empirical research has been undertaken to explore how English secondary schools may impact upon Christian, Jewish and Muslim students’ religious beliefs, practices and self-understandings – even though as school-goers, the way religion is approached in schools is likely to affect them daily.

Since the late 1990s, there has been an increase in the popularity and political support for state-funded schools of a religious character (Grace, 2001; Chadwick, 2001; Miller, 2001; Jackson, 2003). Prompted by increasing demand among parents, the turn of the millennium has seen an increase in the provision of new Church schools, and schools for other faiths (DCSF, 2007b; Walford, 2010). This policy continues to draw criticism from secularist pressure groups and educationists. The British Humanist Association runs a campaign against faith schools (BHA, 2012a), while educationists remain divided upon the legitimacy of their existence (Jackson, 2003; Gardener, Cairns & Lawton, 2005; King, 2010).

Critics of faith schools argue that they can be indoctrinatory, or are unfair in principle (Humanist Philosopher’s Group, 2001). For example, Norman (2012) claims that educational institutions should be neutral in regard to worldviews and faith schools are unfair because they select staff and students according to religious background. Hand’s (2003) objection to faith schools is based on the lack of objective credibility that religious truth-claims possess: as no religious proposition is known to be true, it follows that to teach religious propositions as though they are true is a form of indoctrination. Two other important criticisms are that faith schools are discriminatory.
because they select both staff and students on religious grounds, and that because of this they segregate communities (Halstead & McLaughlin, 2005) – when ‘common schools’ could provide for the needs of students of all religious backgrounds (Pring, 2008). Those in defence of faith schools, on the other hand, argue that they provide for the needs of religious minorities, and preserve their traditions in an otherwise largely secular society at odds with their distinct religious values (Mustafa, 1999; Miller, 2001). Or that schools administered by mainstream Christian denominations, do not indoctrinate, but enrich the experience of schooling for Christians and non-Christians alike (Chadwick, 2001; Cooling, 2010).

Also the subject of debate, and integral to the treatment of religions in English secondary school life, and therefore of potential importance to religious adolescents, is the discrete curriculum subject, Religious Education – which is mandatory in all English state-funded schools (HM Government, 1988). With some notable exceptions (e.g. Cooling, 1994a, 1994b), the trend of research and innovation in English Religious Education in the latter part of the twentieth century has largely been preoccupied with finding ways to accommodate religion in a secular school system (Grimmitt, 2000; Copley, 2008). This has resulted in a range of innovative pedagogical strategies (Grimmitt, 2000; Stern, 2006) These pedagogical strategies attempt to account for pluralism in some respect and can be considered as ‘post-confessional’ in comparison to the historical aim of the subject as a form of Christian nurture (Barnes, 2009).

The post-confessional pedagogical strategies developed to accommodate religious pluralism differ in their epistemological assumptions (Moulin 2009, 2009a, 2011). For example, Wright (2000, 2001, 2007, 2008) argues that conflicting religious truth claims should be weighed up by pupils using the philosophical position of critical realism as a fair under-labourer (an approach also endorsed by Cooling, 2010). Erricker
and Erricker (2000) suggest that students should be encouraged to reject the grand narratives of religious traditions and to construct and explore their own understandings of spiritual matters – a view restated by Clive Erricker in a more recent contribution to the debate (Chater & Erricker, 2013). While Jackson (2004), on the other hand, has promulgated an interpretive approach that seeks to reflexively explore the relationships between individuals and their religious traditions. In Jackson’s view religions should not be reified as part of the curriculum. Instead, the views and experiences of religious adherents, including students, should be emphasised and explored in a carefully managed dialogical pedagogy.

Despite intense debate between the proponents of these positions (e.g. Erricker, 2001; Jackson, 2004, 2008; Wright, 2001, 2008) little empirical work has been conducted to evaluate pedagogic strategies (Grimmitt, 2000; Barnes, 2009; Moulin, 2011). Recently, however, a large project based at the University of Glasgow sought to investigate ‘Does RE work?’ (Lundie, 2010; Baumfield at al., 2012). The authors of this study conclude that the profusion of approaches to Religious Education are confusing for practitioners and students and result in muddled aims in the classroom. The ‘Does RE work?’ project adds weight to a growing body of literature that criticises contemporary approaches to Religious Education, suggesting the subject could present inaccurate and misrepresentative accounts of religion, and that it does not fulfil its often stated purpose of promoting social cohesion and respect for religions in a multi-faith society (Copley, 2005; Barnes, 2009; Strhan, 2010).

In the same period that some religious educationists began to robustly critique English approaches to Religious Education, however, there was an increase of interest in religion and education internationally caused by the events of September 11th 2001 and their aftermath (Jackson, 2010). In these political circumstances some English
religious educationists sought to promote English-style post-confessional approaches in Europe as part as what Barnes dubs ‘the rhetoric of success’ (Barnes, 2009, p. 18). Religious educators in collaboration with the cold-war security organizations, Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and the Council of Europe issued guidance in order to promote cohesion and understanding between members of different religions in schools (Keast, 2007; OSCE, 2007; Council of Europe, 2008). Similar aims contributed to the implementation of the ‘REDCo’ project – Religion in Education. A contribution to Dialogue or a factor of Conflict in transforming societies of European countries (Jackson, 2011). This was an international research project conducted by a collaboration of researchers in eight European countries: Estonia, Russia, Norway, Germany, The Netherlands, France, England and Spain.

The consensus behind the REDCo project illustrates the political, educational and security concerns of the new millennia, in particular the desire to promote cohesion through the inclusion of religion in public education in what was, or was perceived to be, a conflictual social and political situation across Europe (Moulin, 2012). With the focus of understanding how education could prevent conflict and support peaceful coexistence between members of different religions in plural societies, studies conducted as part of the REDCo project sought to understand the attitudes of youth towards religion and education across Europe (Knauth et al., 2008; Valk et al., 2009). Some of the research conducted as part of the REDCo project is relevant to this study (e.g. Ipgrave & McKenna, 2008; ter Avest et al, 2008; Fancourt, 2009), but few REDCo studies are concerned with the schooling experiences of adolescent religious adherents specifically. Consequently, REDCo projects do not employ methodologies explicitly designed for this purpose. As Béraud observes of REDCo quantitative studies, rather than collecting information about participants’ religious background, or
focusing on specific religious denominations, ‘most of the samples indicated a great variety of religions and worldviews… too small for reliable analyses’ (Béraud, 2009, p. 26).

While this study does not set out to evaluate or advocate any specific pedagogical strategy, policy development, or the instrumental utility of religion in public education *per se*, the identity negotiations and constructions of religious adolescents are relevant to debates about faith schools, and how religion may be included in secondary school classrooms, and for what purpose. My earlier study of religious students’ reported experiences of Religious Education lessons (Moulin, 2011) has been of much interest to practitioners. The study was summarised as a National Association of Teachers of Religious Education research poster (NATRE, 2012) and at the time of writing is one of the ‘most read’ articles in the *British Journal of Religious Education* (Taylor & Francis, 2012). Moreover, concern about the future nature and purpose of Religious Education has increased since the completion of that study. From 2010 onwards, the Coalition Government’s education policies have had a significant negative impact upon the subject (Moulin, 2012). The new English Baccalaureate excludes Religious Education, while academies may place less emphasis on providing it in the curriculum (DfE, 2010a, 2010b). This has led to further, unresolved, debate about the future of the subject, and what kind of approach may be appropriate in schools (Chater & Erricker, 2013).

By considering the question ‘what is it to be like a religious adolescent at a secondary school in England?’ as this thesis does, I believe educational practitioners and policy makers can become more informed in order to begin to make judgements about how secondary schools of all kinds can accommodate religious adolescents and deal appropriately with religion in the public square of education. In this way, the tools
of the social sciences can be used to further explore educational questions (Pring, 2004). However, ideological differences over the role of religion in schools can make the implications of the study problematic to apply to the professional and practical concerns of educators. The body of research that examines the experiences of ethnic, national and racial minorities in schools using concepts of ethnic and racial identities referred to previously, fits into an acknowledged project of multi-culturalism and anti-racism in educational praxis. Unlike these goals, the acknowledgement or endorsement of religion in schools – particularly religious beliefs – is not recognised as unanimously legitimate or desirable, and is controversial in a plural society divided over the role of religion. It is for this reason when considering ‘doing God in education’ Cooling (2010) relates the principal challenges for educators regarding religion in today’s society to wider issues of religious diversity and democracy:

How is religious belief to be handled when there is such diversity of views in society? Since education is largely funded by the state, should religious beliefs have any place in the educational institutions of a religiously diverse democracy? Should teachers and lecturers be free to express their views on matters of faith or should professional integrity mean that they keep quiet?

Cooling, 2010, p. 12

The quandaries presented by these questions are reflected in the different settlements that have been reached across nation states internationally (Hunter-Henin, 2011). In countries where there is separation of Church and state, for example, attempts to include religion in the curriculum can be considered illegal. In other national contexts, churches and religious authorities, established by the state or independent of it, have a key role in schooling. In England, although the churches have been highly influential in educational provision historically, this has been brokered as part of a compromise (Cruickshank, 1964). In the present day, this has led to a largely secular approach to Religious Education with prominent educators favouring and advocating pedagogies that encourage ‘critical’ Religious Education, using a philosophical
methods of inquiry, rather than focusing on supporting the beliefs and practices of religious adherents (e.g. Hand, 2004; Wright, 2007, 2010).

In its aim to investigate the reported experiences of religious adolescents at secondary school, this study is similar in some respects to research into ‘student voice’ – a tradition of research that seeks to explore students’ perspectives in order to effect change in schools (Arnot et al., 2004; DfES, 2004; Fielding, 2004; Rudduck & McIntyre, 2007; Lumby & Morrison, 2009). Unlike student voice research based upon a comprehensive liberal aim of promoting human rights, well-being and equality through democratic education, however, this study is concerned in part with what religious adolescents may perceive their schools to ‘have done to God’ (Copley, 2005, p. vii). It is therefore open to exploring a potential clash between prevailing secular norms and values that may underpin the curriculum and educational discourse, and the perspectives of religious believers. Members of religious minorities may not share the values of dominant discourses held by educational researchers. For example, when considering a conceptual framework for researching disaffected young people, Lumby (2012) identifies a possible clash between comprehensive liberal universalism in the discourse of well-being in schools, and the values of minority groups such as Muslims. The Students Multiple Worlds Framework can also be seen as resting on secular premises. In the discussion of their findings, Phelan et al. (1991, 1994, 1998) assume religious background to be an impediment to students’ successful transitions from home to school, rather than considering if secular norms and values of peers and the curriculum may impede religious practice, belief and identity construction.

In conducting the research and writing this thesis, both as a religious practitioner and a researcher of religion, the principle of reflexivity has been essential (Bailey, 2001; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). I have tried to be transparent in my
thinking and positioning – religious or otherwise. My approach rests on the premise that voluntary adherence to, and familial affiliation or upbringing according to, religious traditions and organisations (in a weak or strong sense), is a fundamental human right in an open, liberal society – justifiable given the nature and reasonableness of religious beliefs and of religious upbringing (Popper, 1945; UN, 1948; Rawls, 1993; Habermas, 2006). I therefore assume a conception of liberalism that allows for distinctive religious values to co-exist in society, as opposed to a liberalism conceived as a set of comprehensive values (Moulin, 2009b; Moulin & Robson, 2012). Minority religious groups have the right to hold their own religious, political and moral perspectives even if they may contradict mainstream values. This assumption about the nature of a liberal society underpins and presupposes the study’s aim to listen and give voice to members of religious minorities.

Recently, the importance of understanding religious adherents’ educational experiences, particularly in religiously plural contexts, has become recognised as an important task. Seymour (2012) argues that religious identity and its negotiation in diverse public spaces have become the most urgent and universal issues for religious educators, administrators and practitioners, particularly concerning how adolescents can learn to remain faithful to their religious commitments in varying contexts when encountering a spectrum of religious perspectives.

…multiple identities, religious traditions, and deep commitments all tend to divide. How do we educate persons to build and negotiate identities? None of us fully know. Yet we do know that premature unity is simply not an answer and neither is ignoring difference. … We also know that formation in religious faith and commitment are essential for people to engage the profound questions and commitments shaping living. Our task: Living religious identities in public spaces where multiple identities vie.

Seymour 2012, p. 3-4

In this passage, Seymour is referring not only to the identity negotiations of students growing up in differing cultural environments, but also to the related enterprise of educators who seek to find a way of negotiating their own religious identities in
plural contexts as professionals. Copley uses the analogy of the ‘tightrope walk’ (2005, p. 128) to describe this issue – how to fairly deal with, approach and acknowledge religion in the public square – more specifically, the difficulty facing an Religious Education teacher attempting to acknowledge the potential legitimacy of religion in the English classroom while not seeming to be proselytising. Cooling also sees the issue of education professionals handling ‘their own commitment to strongly held beliefs’ – religious or otherwise – as a highly pertinent challenge when dealing with religion in education (Cooling, 2010, p. 61). In recent years researchers have become interested in examining these issues, as they may affect teachers’ public identity and practice (e.g. Sikes & Everington, 2003, 2004; Ipgrave, 2010), and how educational institutions may accommodate religious perspectives, particularly those of Muslim students (e.g. Parker-Jenkins, 1998; Ipgrave, Miller & Hopkins, 2010).

It is the aim of this present study to further understand some of the complexities and processes surrounding these pressing issues – to explore the reported experiences of religious adolescents of their schools in order to discern how they may negotiate and construct ‘religious identities in public spaces where multiple identities vie’ (Seymour, 2012, p. 4). I believe that in understanding these social processes, educational practitioners and policy makers can further reflect and act upon the often-debated question of how to deal with religion in the plural, and largely secular, public square, including the vexing issue of how professionals should negotiate their own religious commitments in secondary schools.

The structure of this thesis

An inductive study that followed a complex iterative procedure rather than a linear one (Morgan et al., 2008; Charmaz, 2008), this study was not straightforward to organise into a written report (Wellington et al. 2005). To aid its coherent exposition, while
accounting for its intricacy, this thesis is organised according to Denzin and Lincoln’s model of the process of qualitative research (for an outline, see Denzin & Lincoln 2003, p. 32). It has begun with a consideration of my position as researcher, the study’s origins and its situation in the ‘politics’ of research and its possible contribution to a growing discourse (Prologue, Chapter One). The next phase, ‘Theoretical Paradigms and Perspectives’ is explained in Chapter Two, Conceptualising religious identity. This chapter gives an explication of the study’s theoretical paradigm, including my epistemological, conceptual and methodological assumptions. In particular, Chapter Two explains the concepts of religious identity, religious identity negotiation and construction and the use of the Students’ Multiple World Framework.

Further in-depth understanding of the issues raised in Chapters One and Two is given in Chapter Three, Religion and adolescents’ school worlds. This chapter presents an overview of the substantive findings and research trends in relevant literature that form the scholarly context of the study. Because of the centrality of the Students Multiple Worlds Framework to the thesis, this framework is used as a guide to present the review of relevant literature given in Chapter Three, and the findings of the study presented in Chapters Six, Seven, and Eight.

Denzin and Lincoln’s (2003) phases three and four, ‘Research Strategies’ and ‘Methods of Collection and Analysis’ are explained and described in Chapter Four, Engaging with religious adolescents and Chapter Five, Conducting the fieldwork. These chapters give a detailed account of how the fieldwork was conducted and its rationale, including an overview of the interviews conducted, the study’s participants, and its research sites in Chapter Five.

The results of the final, fifth phase of the process, ‘The Art, Practices, and Politics of Interpretation and Presentation’ are presented in three chapters which display
the findings of the research (Chapters Six, Seven, and Eight), and a discussion of their implications, Chapter Nine, *What do religious adolescents have to tell us?* Chapters Six, Seven, and Eight are structured to reflect the assumptions of the theoretical framework and the research questions that derive from it. Consequently, Chapter Six, *Crossing the borders of classroom worlds* explores the identity negotiations and constructions of religious adolescents’ classroom worlds; Chapter Seven, *Negotiating and constructing religious identities in peer worlds*, of negotiations and constructions of peer worlds. Following the examination of religious adolescents’ multiple worlds given in Chapters Six and Seven, Chapter Eight, *Religious identity choices in English secondary schools*, presents an interpretation of the data concerning participants’ reported identity negotiations and constructions in response to the representations and messages presented to them at school. Chapter Nine, *What do religious adolescents have to tell us?*, consists of a discussion of these findings and their implications for researchers, practitioners, policy makers, their bearing on contemporary debates, and an evaluation of the study in regard to its original aims.

**Conclusion**

In this opening chapter and the prologue that precedes it, I have introduced the origins, aims, and relevance of this study – indicating important aspects of the context of the study in the sense of my being a ‘socially situated researcher’ (Denzin & Lincoln 2003, p. 31) working within a highly contested area of education.

While focusing on the identity negotiations and constructions of religious adolescents, this study is situated in the context of wider debates about the role of religion in education, particularly the legitimacy of faith schools and the nature, purpose and future of Religious Education as a curriculum subject. It is influenced by a growing body of research examining the experiences of ethnic, racial and national
minorities in secondary schools. By applying the concepts and methods used in these studies to the reported experiences of religious adolescents, this thesis provides a significant contribution to the on-going debates about religion and education in English society, which are also relevant to other comparable national contexts.

The relevance and timeliness of the study has been stressed for two reasons. Firstly, studying the schooling experiences of religious adolescents has been neglected historically and has only in the last decade been acknowledged as an important area for research. Secondly, the schooling experiences of religious adolescents are key to gaining some insight into issues facing educators concerning the handling of religion in the public square – something also recognised of pressing importance.

In introducing the study in this chapter, I have briefly pointed out my chosen research method of individual and group interviews following an emergent design, and how this engagement with religious adolescents informed the construction of a conceptual framework influenced by the Students Multiple Worlds Framework that focused on religious identity construction and identity negotiation in secondary school worlds. In Chapter Two, I turn to the concept of religious identity – an explication of which will provide further understanding of the structure, content and import of this thesis.
Chapter Two

Conceptualising religious identity

Introduction

All social research rests upon philosophical foundations (Crotty, 1998). Epistemological, theoretical, and methodological assumptions can be conceived as a conceptual ‘net’ that ‘shape how the qualitative researcher sees the world and acts in it’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 33). Broadly, in this study, I assume the epistemological stance of social constructionism – that ‘meanings are born of co-ordinations among persons – agreements, negotiations, affirmations’ (Gergen, 1999, p. 48). More specifically, I use the concept of identity to theorise the development of religious self-understanding and self-representation through relations and interactions with others. Identity is conceived as a socially constructed process-phenomenon, ‘unintelligible unless it is located in a world’ (Berger & Luckman, 1967, p. 195).

The assumption of social constructionism informed the use of an inductive, emergent research design from the outset, focusing on the constructions of religious adolescents as articulated in loosely-structured interviews, while the latter, more specific conceptual paradigm developed as data generation and interpretation progressed. Although I did not begin fieldwork with a fully developed conceptual framework, at the beginning of this exploratory study the notion of religious identity was implicit in the broad aim to understand the schooling-experiences of groups of adolescents who may be recognised as, or represent and understand themselves as ‘Christians’, ‘Jews’ or ‘Muslims.’ As the fieldwork progressed, I developed a more complex and nuanced understanding of religious identity that fitted the data as part of an inductive procedure (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2008; Morgan et al., 2008). In this
manner, I appropriated the framework of Student Multiple Worlds (Phelan et al., 1991, 1994, 1998), and the concepts of ‘religious identity’ (Seul, 1999), ‘identity construction’ and ‘identity negotiation’ (Taylor, 1994; Hall, 1996; Peek, 2005) as powerful tools to further interpret the data I generated and collected.

The concepts of religious identity negotiation and construction used in this study have their intellectual roots in a mixture of historically and conceptually linked scholarly traditions – symbolic interactionism (Mead, 1934; Swann, 1987; Taylor, 1994), social constructionism (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Gergen, 1999), and cultural studies (Hall, 1996; Gee, 2000). It is the purpose of this chapter to give an account of what the concepts of religious identity negotiation and construction are, what particular nuances they may hold in this study, how they may differ and share similarities with concepts of (religious) identity in other relevant studies, and, above all, why they are appropriate. Once these assumptions and distinctions are made clear, precise research questions that also relate to, and derive from, the conceptual framework are presented in order to guide, structure and make transparent the account of the study that follows in the remainder of this thesis (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

**Conceptions of religious identity in educational research**

‘Identity’ is one of the most widely used terms in the social sciences (Phinney, 1990; Hall, 1996; Kaplan & Flum, 2012). Consequently, it has taken on a number of meanings in educational research (Gee, 2000). However, studies in the field of educational research concerning religious identity are comparatively few. Educational researchers interested in religious identity have acknowledged this oversight (Hunsberger et al., 2001; Peek, 2005; Bertram-Troost et al., 2006, 2007; Good & Willoughby, 2007; Chaudhury & Miller, 2008; Hemming & Madge, 2011), and over
the last decade broadly two kinds of conceptual framework have been employed for its investigation in educational contexts.

Reflecting a dichotomy in identity theory more widely, conceptions of religious identity in educational research can be separated into two principal groups: those that assume a psychological conception of identity, and those that assume an anthropological or cultural studies conception of identity. The former, (e.g. Markstrom-Adams & Smith, 1996; Hunsberger et al., 2001; Rymarz & Graham, 2006; Bertram-Troost et al., 2006, 2007; Armet, 2009), adopt methodologies and essentialist concepts of religion that typically rely on the notion of religious identity *development* or *formation* as a psychological process, while the latter assume a conception of religious identity *construction* as a social process (e.g. Østberg, 2000; Zine, 2001; Peek, 2005).

Studies of religious identity development in the psychological tradition (Markstrom-Adams & Smith, 1996; Hunsberger et al., 2001; Bertram-Troost et al., 2006, 2007; Good & Willoughby, 2007; Armet, 2009) use the adolescent identity development theory of the Freudian psychologist Erikson (1968) as their reference point by employing frameworks or measures derived from Marcia’s (1966, 1980) operationalization of Erikson’s theory. Marcia focused upon the psychological content of Erikson theory that posited adolescence as a crucial time in the human life-cycle consisting of a psychosocial ‘identity crisis’ whereby identity diffusion is overcome by adolescents’ ‘growing occupational and ideological commitment’ (Marcia, 1966, p. 551).

Studies of religious identity development in the Marcian mould typically assume that there are four basic identity statuses through which adolescents may progress in order to achieve a coherent self-image and healthy psychological unity: *foreclosure*, that a choice of identity is made but without exploration; *diffusion*, no
identity is formed and there has been no exploration; moratorium, no identity has been formed, but exploration has taken place; and identity achievement, identity has been formed after exploration has taken place. Quantitative studies of religious identity development use measures of identity status based on this model in statistical tests with measures of religiosity in order to understand the relationship between measures of religious socialization, or of religiosity, and identity status (Markstrom-Adams & Smith, 1996; Hunsberger et al., 2001; Bertram-Troost et al., 2007; Armet, 2009).

Studies of this kind can be criticised on account of the assumptions of their conceptual frameworks (Archer, 2003; Schacter, 2005; Visser-Vogel et al., 2012). Eriksonian-Marcian frameworks (and studies using other positivist models of religiosity) focus upon participants’ interior psychological self-concept, rather than the cultural processes and causal factors within schools that shape religious identity. Schachter (2005) and Vissel-Vogel et al. (2012) argue that these models of development can therefore fail to adequately account for the content and context of religious development. Schachter (2005) also demonstrates, through use of a counter-example case-study, that the assumption of a standardised, universal structure to identity development in the Marcian paradigm may also fail to capture individual courses of religious identity development in adolescence.

Marcia’s appropriation of Erikson’s theory has drawn substantial criticism because it fails to adequately account for Erikson’s own view of the importance of cultural and contextual factors in identity development (Schachter, 2005; Faircloth, 2012; Flum & Kaplan, 2012). A reading of Erikson’s classics: Young Man Luther (1958); Identity, Youth and Crisis (1968); Gandhi’s Truth (1969); and, Life History and the Historical Moment (1975), confirm this critique, and Erikson’s interest in the development of religious identity specifically. Erikson’s original concept of identity
was actually both about individual psychological processes and processes of cultural identification. For example, Erikson attributes the inspiration of his conception of psychological ‘sameness and continuity’ to William James (1968, p. 19; Erikson’s emphasis), but his wider conception of identity also drew influence from Freud’s understanding of Jewish identity, which Erikson considered to be defined by Freud ‘in a most central ethnic sense’ (Erikson, 1968, p. 21). Erikson stresses that to examine identity is to explore:

quote: a process ‘located’ in the core of the individual and yet also in the core of his communal culture, a process which establishes, in fact, the identities or those two identities

Erikson, 1968, p. 22; Erikson’s emphasis

It is because of the relational complexity between context, culture and the individual that Erikson considers the concept of identity as ‘unfathomable’ as it is ‘indispensable’ and ‘all-pervasive’ (1968, p. 9). Recognition of Erikson’s original complex and context-specific theory of identity development has led religious identity theorists, while avoiding Marcia’s paradigm specifically, to re-appropriate his theories to examine religious identity development in contemporary contexts (Schachter, 2005; Rich & Schachter, 2012; Visser-Vogel et al., 2012). Researchers have also modified the Marcian framework to accommodate additional measures to evaluate contextual factors (Betram-Troost et al., 2007); while others have used observation, semi-structured interviews or unstructured ‘life-story’ interviews in order to explore the causal and contextual factors and processes in religious identity formation (Streib, 2001; Schachter, 2005; Good & Willoughby, 2007; Visser-Vogel et al., 2012).

Paradigms of identity status development in the psychological tradition entail the existence of an ‘achieved’ identity. Archer (2003) makes a criticism of studies of ethnic identity using the Marcian paradigm that is also pertinent to a critique of its application to religious identity. She observes that when ethnicity is incorporated in an
Eriksonian-Marcian or positivist model it becomes an essentialised ‘fixed’ and ‘static’ concept, susceptible to stereotypical and neo-colonial biases (Archer 2003, p. 28). Studies of religious identity using an Eriksonian-Marcian framework (or those resting upon other psychological measures based upon essentialised notions of religiosity) also assume religious identity is a psychological commitment to measurable (orthodox or stereotypical) beliefs and practices. This criticism also applies to conceptions of religious identity such as Rymarz and Graham’s (2006) notion of ‘characteristic practices’, a whole body of research in the tradition of Leslie Francis (e.g. Francis 1988, 1992, 2001; Francis & Kay, 1996) and theories of ‘faith development’ in the tradition of Goldman (1964) and Fowler (1981). Although not necessarily using the terminology of ‘religious identity’ per se, studies in these traditions conceptualise religiosity and faith development as uniform processes that are primarily concerned with individuals’ assent to largely static beliefs and practices. They can therefore also be criticised on account of their theological and psychological assumptions, particularly apparent in the case of Goldman (1964) and Fowler (1981), who, following Piaget’s theory of cognitive development posit religious understanding necessarily develops more complexity with age (Hyde, 1990).

In contrast to studies that conceive of religious identity in terms of exploration or commitment at the psychological ‘core’ of the individual (Markstrom-Adams & Smith, 1996; Hunsberger et al. 2001; Bertram-Troost et al., 2006, 2007; Good & Willoughby, 2007; Armet, 2009; Visser-Vogel et al., 2012), some researchers have conceptualised religious identity by drawing upon the research traditions of cultural anthropology and symbolic interactionism and concepts related to role-performance (Goffman, 1959) and boundary maintenance (Barth, 1969). Studies using sociological and anthropological frameworks to investigate religious identity (e.g. Jacobson, 1997;
Østberg, 2000; Zine, 2001; Peek, 2005) focus on cultural and social processes that impact upon, and constitute, the construction of religious identities, particularly upon Muslim children or adolescents in Western societies and educational institutions. The difference in conceptual frameworks employed between these and psychological studies is reflected in the use of terminology. Identity ‘development’ and ‘formation’ (terms that have connotations of a universal identity-teleology) are used less than terms that seek to express a more dynamic, dialogic, and transient conception of identity as a socially located process. Religious identities are ‘constructed’ by adolescents (Jacobson, 1997, p. 248; Zine, 2001, p. 399; Peek, 2005, p. 217), ‘managed’ (Østberg, 2000, p. 98), ‘negotiated’ (Zine, 2001, p. 399; Peek, 2005, p. 237), or ‘declared’ (Peek, 2005, p. 233).

Studies of young Muslims in diaspora contexts are concerned with Muslim identity construction in postmodern socio-political contexts of globalised diversity. For example, Østberg (2000) explores the ‘identity management’ of Pakistani heritage children (p. 98) in Norway by interviewing and observing families in school, at home, and in Mosques. She considers the children as having two distinct experiences of socialisation: at home and in the Mosque, of being ‘Muslim’ or ‘Pakistani’ on one hand; and at school and through the media, of being ‘Norwegian’ on the other. This led to an important identification with Islam which was strong, despite varying degrees of religiosity and participation, but because of conflicting norms and values at school these children needed to manage their religious identities by developing ‘multiple cultural competence’ as the result of ‘a continuous interpretation of their own position’ across conflicting contexts (Østberg, 2000, p. 100).

Studies such as Østberg’s rest on conceptual premises that hold religious identity construction cannot be meaningfully divorced from social context. The findings
of these studies suggest that this is the case when considering the impact of the representation of Islam in Western societies upon adolescent Muslims’ religious identity construction. Peek (2005) demonstrates that Muslim identity construction among adolescents in the United States was acutely affected by the depiction of Islam in the media, and the attitudes of non-Muslims in American society following the attacks on New York and Washington on September 11th 2001. By interviewing Muslim College students, Peek (2005) identified a pattern of religious identity construction through the education system. In each stage religiosity increased in terms of belief and practice. This began with having an ‘ascribed identity’ (Peek, 2005, p. 223). In childhood Muslim children took on and practised the religion of their parents, usually unreflectively, and were ascribed as ‘Muslims’ by their teachers and peers according to their peers and teachers recognition of Muslim identity. The second stage was ‘chosen identity’ (Peek, 2005, p. 226) – usually at the time of entering college – when students actively engaged in their religion as a considered choice. The third stage is ‘declared identity’ (Peek, 2005, p. 233), an identity forged by the particular circumstances of the aftermath of the events of September 11th 2001 and its impact on American society.

Declared identity is a public assertion of religious identity. The desire to speak up about Islam, to explain and debate it with others, to show visible signs of religious belief, to gain a greater understanding of it in order to explicate it to others in order to combat negative stereotypes, and act as positive examples of Muslims to non-Muslims in reaction to the crisis of September 11th. Its main features, and the sense it is later employed in this study, is for an individual to consider religion a ‘defining characteristic’ (p. 231) in asserting religious identity publically, relying on religious teachings and practices privately, and to engage with the resources of a religious
tradition in order to find the answers to questions – either one’s own, or of those raised by others. Declaring identity takes place, in part, in order to counteract negative images or misrepresentations. In Peek’s study, the third stage of development was closely connected with the influence of September 11th and cannot be seen as a universal part of a psychological model development but a common reaction to a particular event among adolescents of that generation – an identity formed in what Erikson would call ‘the historical moment’(1975).

The notion of religious identity as a kind of performance shaped by social context is also employed by Jacobson (1997). Jacobson, following Barth’s (1969) notion of ethnic boundary maintenance, considers second generation English Muslim adolescents’ identification with Islam as a way of perpetuating an ethnic boundary between immigrant groups and wider society. She suggests that second-generation British Pakistanis use religious identities rather than national or ethnic criteria to differentiate between ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ because of Islam’s clearer but more universal boundaries – a relatively new ‘binary’ of difference also observed by Archer (2003, p. 34). Ethnic boundaries are replaced by religious ones because ethnic boundaries are too permeable in the context of a secular, plural society. Zine (2000) applies this concept further and suggests that Muslim high school students in Canada use Muslim identity as a boundary to form resistance to school authorities and teachers in order to compensate for their marginalization and stigmatisation. Bartkowski and Ghazal Read’s (2000) study of identity negotiation of Muslim women in Texas, in a comparable way, utilises the notion of cultural symbols, such as the hijab, which are used to mark the boundaries of Muslim identities in diaspora.

Although these studies of religious identity are limited to Muslim identities, they suggest an alternative way of conceptualising religious identity from essentialist
conceptions. Rather than as a hierarchy of psychological statuses, or individuals’ commitment to fixed, beliefs and practices, these studies assume and reveal the flexible nature and mutability of religious identities in their socio-cultural contexts, and how religious identities are shaped by socio-political processes and phenomena, including educational institutions. One significant aspect of studies such as Zine (2001) and Peek (2005) is that they show religious identities can be constructed in response to society’s representation of religious adolescents’ traditions as part of a process of role-performance. The authors interpret this process as one necessary to maintain ethnic and religious identities either as shifting boundaries between groups (Jacobson, 1997), or in order to preserve religious beliefs and practices (Zine, 2001; Peek, 2005).

**Identity negotiation and construction**

The term ‘identity negotiation’ originated in social psychology (Swann, 1987). Influenced by the symbolic interactionists (e.g. Mead, 1934; Goffman, 1959), Swann first used the term after investigating the process of behavioural confirmation. Previously psychologists had thought, for example, when labelled ‘hostile’, individuals would become aggressive, when labelled ‘extravert’, individuals become sociable etc. In his study, Swann observed how in this process ‘perceiver’ and ‘target’ individuals sometimes acted to reject the perceiver’s expectancies rather than purely according to the perspectives of the perceiver. From this observation, Swann surmised, drawing upon symbolic interactionist thought, that social reality was constructed as an interaction between perceivers and targets in a process of negotiation. Swann’s framework of identity negotiation assumes the self-concept of individuals develops in accordance with others’ perceptions of them – a two-way process through interaction that confirms or challenges their beliefs about themselves. In his framework, Swann
uses the notion of ‘cues’, such as clothing, as a way for individuals to project their identity and preserve self-concept.

Swann was concerned with the processes that affected changes to personal identity. His terminology and a similar concept of ‘negotiation’ as a socially located process of identity construction, has been appropriated and further developed by identity theorists interested in issues of political and cultural representation. For example, in his classic text on identity, *The Politics of Recognition* (1994), Charles Taylor, also drawing on the work of Mead (1934), appeals to the dialogic aspect of identity negotiation:

> My discovering my own identity doesn’t mean that I work it out in isolation, but that I negotiate it through dialogue, partly overt, partly internal, with others… My own identity crucially depends on my dialogical relations with others.

Taylor, 1994, p. 34

Scholars in the field of cultural studies interested in issues surrounding race and ethnicity in particular, (e.g. Hall ed., 1997) also conceptualise identity as a negotiated process. Fixed notions of identity cannot account for the impact of individuals’ changing and conflicting experiences in the unsettled cultural and diverse contexts of postmodern societies. Hall (1996), argues that in the context of globalisation and post-colonialism, essentialist and modernist concepts of identity are not viable in understanding how ‘fragmented and fractured’ concepts of self are ‘multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions’ (Hall 1996, p. 4) that enable identity construction as part of the postmodern ‘endlessly performative self’ (Hall, 1996, p. 1).

A key assumption of this critique is that ‘identity’ makes no sense outside of a system of representation in social space (Taylor, 1994; Hall, 1996; Gee, 2000). To have an identity is to be recognised as such, and to represent oneself as such, as part of an on-going dialogic process within a culturally determined system of representation. The
multifaceted nature of postmodern societies means that identity is therefore constantly constructed across conflicting systems of representation and recognition. It is for these reasons that Hall defines identity as a

process of becoming rather than being: not ‘who we are’ or ‘where we came from’, so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves.

Hall, 1996, p. 4.

Because identity-processes are concerned with how individuals construct their sense of self in dialogue with systems of representation in a plural society, harm can be caused through mis-representation, Taylor argues.

our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by misrecognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Non-recognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being

Taylor 1994, p. 25

A body of literature concerning ethnic, national and racial identity construction among adolescent minorities in educational contexts (often in diaspora) draws upon this concept of identity negotiation (e.g. Jackson, 1999; Stritikus & Nguyen, 2007; Stewart, 2008; Chen, 2010; Awokoya, 2012). These studies provide, or apply, a conceptual framework that can account for the impact of conflicting systems of representation and their power structures upon minority groups’ identity construction in schools. The process of identity in these studies can be summarised as:

the product of the negotiation between an individual’s identity claims and the availability of identity choices determined by the power relations in certain contexts.

Chen, 2010, p. 165

Awokoya’s (2012) study of migrant and second-generation Nigerian American adolescents serves as a good example of how conflicting identity choices and representations may be presented to minority adolescents in schools. Awokoya, also drawing on the Student Multiple Worlds Framework (Phelan et al., 1991, 1994, 1998),
seeks to understand identity construction and negotiation across the different worlds of the family, peers, school and the media. In each of these worlds Nigerian American adolescents were caught between different identity representations, particularly between ‘black’ African American identities and ‘African’ stereotypes. At home they were encouraged to be proud of their Nigerian heritage; at school their teachers would expect them to become token ‘African Ambassadors’ (p. 268) – while their peers would deride them for being ‘backward’ (p. 270) or ‘Black but Not African American enough’ (p. 271). Participants’ identities changed from context to context depending upon the perceivers’ (teachers and peers) recognition and expectation of ethnic, racial or national identity according to established systems of representation related to sources of authority, primarily located in the media and curriculum.

Social researchers in the cultural studies tradition have utilised the notion of identity ‘cues’ to further conceptualise this process. Conflicting contexts present challenging cues for members of minorities to negotiate. For example, in Kibria’s (2000) study of Korean and Chinese Americans, the racial marker ‘Asian’ is conceptualised as a ‘cue’ or potential social obstacle, that prompts Korean and Chinese Americans’ identity negotiations.

Gee (2000) gives further theoretical insight into how such identity processes may be conceptualised in school settings, and how they can be recognised as relating to different systems of authority. ‘Identity’ can be defined as ‘what kind of person’ someone is recognised as, or presents themselves as, in a given circumstance (Gee, 2000, p. 99). In the sense of identity as ‘kind-of-person’, Gee suggests there is fourfold typology of identities that are underwritten by different sources of socially constructed power: ‘Nature-identity (from a state in nature); ‘Institution-identity’ (a position within institutions); ‘Discourse-identity’ (individual character traits as recognised in the
dialogue or discourse of individuals, such as being ‘charismatic’); and, ‘Affinity-identity’ (shared in the practice of affinity groups) (Gee, 2000, p. 100).

According to Gee, being African American can be an Institutional identity (I-identity) because social and educational institutions may ascribe certain positions to African American students, for example, by direct discrimination or institutional racism. It can also be understood as a Nature identity (N-identity) when considered in a racial or biological sense. African American identity can be recognised and represented in the way people talk and act in dialogue as a Discourse (D-identity), or by performing practices or holding beliefs that show an affinity with other African Americans (A-identity). All of these kinds of identity rely upon social and historical systems of representation and recognition (Discourses), but an individual has some agency in terms of which kind of identity they may seek to be recognised as, perform or emphasise. While Gee uses ‘identity’ in a performative sense in this typology, he does not dispense with the idea of a ‘core’ identity altogether (Gee, 2000, p. 111). Gee explains that an individual’s ‘core’ identity can be thought of their ‘unique trajectory’ through these shifting forms of identity – a series of multiple episodes of ‘being recognized, at a time and place, one way and not another’ (Gee, 2000, p. 111).

**Conceptualising religion**

In conceptualising religious identity construction and negotiation in educational contexts, it is necessary to further define how the concepts of identity construction and negotiation may apply to religious difference as well as, or opposed to, ethnic and racial difference. One important aspect of the concept of identity as expounded by Hall (1996) and Gee (2000) is that it is always situated in ‘Discourses’ – socially and historically constructed ‘ways of being “certain kinds of people”’ (Gee, 2000, p. 110). In the lives of what this study refers to as ‘religious adolescents’ one particularly
powerful and important Discourse is that of religion. The term ‘religious adolescent’ refers to individuals between the ages of 11 and 19 who regularly attend a religious organisation and take part in religious activities. This definition serves as a proxy for several factors (see discussion on sampling, p. 97) but principally it identifies adolescents that have been, and are being, socialised into a religious tradition at home and as part of a religious community.

Belonging to, or being socialised by, a religious community can have a powerful influence upon individuals. The use of the term ‘religious identity’ to refer to the identification of an individual with a religious tradition was first introduced by Hans Mol (1976, 1979) and later expounded by Seul (1999). These scholars argue that because religions rest on metaphysical and ethical beliefs drawn from a shared religious tradition, they form a key influence on an individual’s perspectives of themselves and the world. Seul (1999) argues that religion provides the strongest kind of identity for individuals and groups. Religious norms and values are communicated through texts and practices and because of their appeal to the transcendent they have a greater influence on people than other kinds of influences. For Seul therefore religion is a unique, particularly strong group identity marker:

Religious meaning systems define the contours of the broadest possible range of relationships – to the self; to others near and distant, friendly and unfriendly; to the non-human world; to the universe; and to God, or that which one considers ultimately real and true. No other repositories of cultural meaning have historically offered so much in response to the human need to develop a secure identity.

Seul, 1999, p. 558

Following Seul, the worlds of adolescents’ homes and religious communities, while not being the focus of this study, are conceptualised as providing particularly strong and binding traditions of values, norms, practices and expectations.

Qualitative studies of identity formation among adolescents explore how religious communities may nurture religious identity construction. For example, Good
and Willoughby (2007) conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with Christian adolescents about their experiences of school and church as factors in their identity formation. The authors conclude that the experience of attending church gave more opportunities for identity formation in comparison to school. In forming their identities, participants reported the importance of role models; ‘redemptive turning points’ (2007, p. 397) – key events reported by individuals following a period of exploration; and the theological and experiential aspect of ‘commitment to God and Christian morals’ encouraged and enabled by their churches (2007, p. 402).

Chaudhury and Miller (2008) also found that religious organisations had a significant influence upon identity construction in an interview study of religious identity formation among second generation adolescent Bangladeshi American Muslims. Participants reported that identity was formed from a young age, by parents and then private instruction in Mosques or from Imam. As they grew up, when confronted with mainstream American culture in schools and elsewhere, some became ‘external’ seekers (2008, p. 295) and looked for solutions to this discrepancy outside Islam. However, some became ‘internal’ seekers (2008, p. 295) and searched for answers within the tradition of Islam itself. This search was facilitated by ‘safe havens’ (2008, p. 401) – places that young people could talk about their religious beliefs and concerns. In Chaudhury and Miller’s study these safe-havens were voluntary religious organisations for Muslim youth in Colleges.

This study is concerned with the experiences of adolescents when they cross the borders of the worlds of homes and religious communities and enter classroom and peer worlds. Phelan et al. (1991, 1994, 1998) partly draw on Barth’s (1969) notion of ethnic boundaries (see Phelan et al. 1998, p. 10) to conceptualise the borders of students’ worlds. They then construct a typology for students’ abilities to cope with them. They
argue that some students may have ‘congruent worlds’ that may have little need for management as there are slight discrepancies in norms and values between home and school. Others may need to manage borders of worlds but adapt to different contexts successfully. Some find such border crossings more difficult, while some resist such transitions.

Phelan et al. (1991) use religion as a way of explaining their typology. They suggest that those students who may need to manage border transitions come from a family world ‘dominated by an all-encompassing religious doctrine in which values and beliefs are often contrary to those found in school and peers worlds’ (1991, p. 232), while those who find border crossing ‘hazardous’ may come from backgrounds that ‘are frequently more traditional, more religious or more constrained’ than those of their peers (1991, p. 237). Like the work of Phelan et al., this study utilises the same notion of classroom and peer worlds’ borders, and acknowledges the psychosocial costs of crossing them. However, unlike the work of Phelan et al., it is primarily concerned with religious identity construction in school worlds, as opposed to the impact of border crossings upon academic performance and engagement with schooling.

The importance of religious beliefs, practices and group identification to the conceptualisation of religious identity is recognised in studies in the psychological tradition of religious identity research which use measures of practices, beliefs etc. to analyse the development of religious identity. The criticism of these concepts of religious identity given above is not intended to dispute the impact of distinctive characteristics of religious traditions (beliefs, practices, ways-of-being and ways-of-seeing the world) on people’s lives, worldviews, self-concepts and self-representation. Instead, the above critique is intended to demonstrate that some concepts of religious identity are more sensitive and sophisticated in accounting for the complexity of
religious identity construction as an on-going social process in a plural or postmodern context. Identity is a useful concept in the study of religion because it ‘effectually unites a multiplicity of concerns’ (Bailey, 2001, p. 82). Principally, it provides a way of conceptualising adherence and affiliation to historical traditions that emphasise relationship to the transcendent, while remaining sensitive to varying contexts and their action upon individuals.

The role of religions as powerful discourses in adolescents’ lives can be thought as similar to ‘culture’ in Stritikus and Nguyen’s (2007) study of Vietnamese youth. Religions, like culture, can be ‘carried by individuals’ and ‘reconstructed’ in ‘moment-to-moment interactions’ (Nasir & Hand 2006, p. 458 in Stritikus & Nguyen, p. 862). Although religious identity is co-constructed by individuals and their social context, this is done by individuals drawing from, endorsing, or opposing, established religious traditions, their systems of representation and forms of recognition. For example, the studies of Islam in the lives of adolescents reviewed above do not suggest that the tenets and practices of Islam do not impact upon individuals’ worldviews and identities, but that adolescents’ identities as Muslims are constructed across contexts that view Islam and Muslims in different or opposing ways. In these different contexts not only does being Muslim mean different things to different people, but individuals may draw upon different resources from their religious tradition to perform or represent themselves in different ways. The use of symbols to create identity boundaries can be an important part of this process (Jacobson, 1997; Ajrouch, 2004). A pertinent visible example of this would be the decision of Muslim women to wear or not wear hijab in diaspora contexts – a topic of academic interest in recent years (e.g. Read & Bartkowski, 2000; Haw, 2011).
Gee’s typology may be used as a theoretical illustration of how religious identities could be contextually constructed in different ways, drawing upon, and reacting to, different sources of social authority. For example, applying it to the findings of studies of Muslim adolescents’ identity construction overviewed above demonstrates its explanatory power (although it must be stressed that Gee’s typology and terminology is not used by these authors). Studies show that adolescent Muslims could be recognised or represented by their teachers or peers (and the media) as ‘N-identities’ – belonging to racial groups (Jacobson, 1997; Zine, 2001) – and ‘A-identities’ belonging to the affinity group who share Muslim beliefs and practices (Peek, 2005). Both these identities could become highly stigmatised ‘I-identities’ in schools as part of institutional racism (Zine, 2000; 2001; Archer, 2003; Hassan, 2010).

Furthermore, Peek’s (2005) suggestion of identity declaration could be re-constructed using Gees’ typology in the following way. As a reaction to I-identities, Muslim adolescents may represent A-identities positively as part of D-identities – by establishing themselves as peaceful, good, friendly Muslims through dialogue with others. In this sense Peek’s declared Muslim participants can be considered as sharing a similar core identity as they share a particular course through multiple socially enacted identities in order to negotiate self-representation. Peek does not suggest such an identity process is universal (or final), and other studies show different trajectories among adolescent Muslims that can also be explained with reference to Gee’s framework. For example, Chaudhury and Miller observe that adolescent Bangladeshi Muslims could either reject or endorse religious A-identities by deliberately ‘seeking’ religious or non-religious affinities (2008, p. 405); while Jacobson (1997) suggests that Muslims could favour A-identities (‘Muslim’ as a religious identity) rather than N-
identities (‘Pakistani’ as an ethnic or national identity) in different socio-political contexts.

A similar application can be made speculatively to Christians and Jews who could also be assigned, or represent themselves, primarily as N-, A-, I- and D- identities in shifting contexts. For example, Christians could take on the N-identity of being ‘white’ in contexts where they were juxtaposed with Pakistani Muslims, or a D-identity of being ‘Christian’ in the sense of having a holy, moral or upstanding demeanour (similar meanings could be applied to Jews also depending upon context and who or what is underwriting the system of representation); while Jews and Christians could take on the A- identity of being monotheistic believers, or the I-identity of being the member of a minyan or congregation. Such distinction between N- identities and A- identities in particular, has some explanatory potential in understanding the complexity of Jewish identities as both ethnic and religious (Webber, 1997).

It is important to note that while Gee’s typology is useful in expressing the nature of shifting identities according to systems of representation, his concept of an A- identity – such as a ‘Star Trek fan’ (2000, p. 101) – can be considered weak in comparison to affinity with a religious tradition or community. Gee’s concept of A- Identity does not fully encapsulate the binding nature of religious affiliation upon individuals, in particular as a commitment to transcendental beliefs which exert a powerful impact upon the way individuals interpret reality. Jackson’s (1999) concept of identity negotiation may be relevant here as it incorporates the notion of worldview and self-definition as an integrated facet of identity negotiation. In his study of the experiences of African Americans, Jackson (1999) develops the concept of cultural identity negotiation to account for ‘a communication phenomenon among two or more individuals that is driven by message exchange over a period of time’ (1999, p. 4).
Jackson uses this concept to explain how participants gave up African American culture in order to fit in with European Americans in their college peer groups. Jackson argues African American college students may be forced to engage in a process of bartering and lose their distinctive cultural identity in order to assimilate with the white majority. In this sense identity negotiation is:

the gain, loss, or exchange of [African American students’] ability to interpret their own reality or worldview … the exchange or relinquishment or an interpretation of reality that serves to define self.

Jackson, 1999, p. 10

Given that religious identities are likely to draw from, and entail, comprehensive systems of meaning and understanding, Jackson’s definition of cultural identity negotiation captures a nuance that may be applicable to the experience of religious adolescents as it considers identity as a corollary and condition of worldview as well as a form of representation and performance.

**Defining key terms and the research questions**

The discussion above has introduced the origins and assumptions of the concepts of identity, religious identity, identity construction and identity negotiation. I now define how these and other key terms and concepts (indicated in italics) are used in the study and how they relate and link with each other to form the conceptual ‘net’ (Denzin & Lincoln 2003, p. 33) that was developed and used during the generation, interpretation and presentation of the data. Terms in italics will be used later in this thesis without repeated explanation of their origins in the literature outlined in this chapter. Using this conceptual framework and terminology, I then go on to set out the study’s research questions (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

*Religious adolescents* are young people between the ages of 11-19 who attend places of worship or community centres belonging to denominations of Christianity,
Judaism and Islam (this attendance usually indicates belonging to a household with one or more parent who also attended the same organisation). Religious adolescents move between *multiple worlds* (Phelan et al. 1991, 1994, 1998), principally those of their homes and religious communities, peers, and classrooms. These worlds can have conflicting ‘norms, values, beliefs, expectations, and actions’ (Phelan et al. 1991, p. 228). Religious adolescents are primarily socialized by parents belonging to, or adhering to a religious tradition and are induced into religious norms, values, beliefs, expectations, and actions. These can then be reinforced formally and informally by a religious organisation and its members.

When religious adolescents cross the *borders* of student worlds from home or religious community to that of their secondary school classrooms and peers, they may be presented with different sets of norms, values, beliefs, expectations and actions. This transition may cause emotional or ‘psychosocial’ costs (Phelan et al., 1994). People in these worlds – peers and teachers in secondary schools – may represent or recognise religious adolescents’ religious traditions in particular ways and *ascribe* (Peek, 2005) religious adolescents a particular religious identity through a system of representation and recognition underwritten by *institutional authority* (I-identity) (Gee, 2000). This could be in terms of *character traits* (D-identities) associated with a religious tradition, their *race, ethnicity or nationality* (N-identities), their identification with a religious group, organisation, or *affinities* (A-identities) with religious beliefs and practices (*religious* here means something associated with a religious tradition) (Gee, 2000). Similarly, religious adolescents may represent themselves or seek to be recognised as having particular affinities, beliefs, practices or character traits (Gee, 2000).

The process of *identity negotiation* takes place when adolescents seek and act to represent and define themselves to others, perhaps in order to change other people’s
perceptions as part of an exchange of identity presentation and recognition according to established *systems of representation* (Hall, 1996; Jackson, 1999; Gee, 2000; Chen, 2010). Systems of representation are the ways people recognise and represent identities by conventions of depiction and portrayal. Aspects of systems of representation may act as *cues* or *messages* that prompt religious identity negotiation (which in itself can become a form of representation and message exchange). Over time, the process of understanding oneself to be, or seeking to be recognised, or representing oneself in a particular way, as part of identity negotiation, contributes to *religious identity construction* – the *identification* with, rejection of, or partial or full integration, or presentation of elements of a religious tradition (or ties with members of that religious tradition) with an individual’s worldview, lifestyle, beliefs, practices, actions.

Religious identity construction can be a partly internal and external process (Taylor, 1994). In constructing religious identities, religious adolescents may use symbolic *boundaries* between them and others to show affinity or identification with, religious traditions or their adherents (Jacobson, 1997; Ajrouch, 2004). This may take the form of identity *declaration* whereby religious adolescents publically acknowledge and assert religious identity in order to negotiate boundaries and counteract prejudice and discrimination (Peek, 2005).

This study began with the broad aim to understand ‘what it is like to be a religious adolescent at an English secondary school’ with a focus on the impact of schooling upon adolescents as religious adherents. It is now possible, following the exposition of this conceptual net, to clarify this broad aim and define the study’s research questions that both emerged from, and guided the research process, and that are used to structure this thesis and the presentation of the study’s findings.
1) **What are religious adolescents’ reported experiences of their classroom worlds?**

This question articulates an intention to explore religious adolescents’ reported experiences of classroom worlds in order to investigate the perceived underlying norms, values and expectations of those worlds; how teachers may recognise or ascribe religious identity to religious adolescents; how the curriculum may act as a system of representation of religious identities; and, the psychosocial costs of crossing the borders of home and classroom worlds.

2) **What are religious adolescents’ reported experiences of their school peer worlds?**

This question indicates an aspect of the broad aim to explore religious adolescents’ reported experiences of peer worlds: the perceived norms, values and expectations of those worlds; how religious identities may be recognised and ascribed by peers according to systems of representation within them; and, how this may impact upon peer-interactions in terms of their psychosocial impact upon individuals. Classroom worlds are taken to be the formal aspects of school provision sanctioned and underwritten institutionally, such as the structure of the school day, arrangements for lunch, collective worship where provided, extra-curricular activities organised by the school, interactions with teachers, and the formal curriculum.

3) **How do religious adolescents act in response to identity cues and messages presented in secondary schools?**

Drawing upon the systems of representation and recognition explored in questions 1, and 2, this question focuses upon the way participants act in response to the cues presented in classroom and peer worlds. This question seeks to answer ‘what it is like for a religious adolescent at an English secondary school’ in terms of the impact
secondary schools may have upon the performance of religious identities – how systems of representation may affect religious self-presentation at school.

4) How may religious adolescents’ reported experiences in regard to research questions 1, 2, and 3 differ according to religious tradition and type of school?

This question sets out an intention to explore differences between reported experiences of participating religious adolescents in different contexts. It does this by examining patterns in the kinds of experiences reported by participants at different research sites belonging to different religious traditions, and those who attended different kinds of school.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have given an overview of the concept of religious identity I developed in order to further define the project of, and interpret the data I generated while, exploring ‘what it is like to be a religious adolescent at an English secondary school.’

The study of adolescent religious identity negotiation and construction concerns how religious adolescents are represented, who they are becoming and how: what they think of themselves, and how they act this out. In this study, I focus on exploring how secondary schools may impact upon this process. This thesis therefore presents an analysis of data relevant to religious identity negotiation and construction at English secondary schools: religious adolescents’ reported experiences about the representation and recognition of their religious traditions in classroom and peer worlds, and their sense-making of, and responses to these messages and cues.

The paradigm of religious identity construction and negotiation presented in this chapter is based upon two related assumptions: one about the nature of social reality, the other about concepts used to define identity. The first assumption is that this study
is concerned with adolescents growing up in the context of postmodern or globalised pluralism. In this kind of society because of diversity there may be considerable discrepancies between the worlds of adolescents’ religious communities and homes, and those of their schools. The second is that in, and because of these changing contexts, identities are not fixed, but always in a process of change. With this chapter given over to conceptualising religious identity, Chapter Three therefore goes on to explore the first assumption – the nature of a plural society, the scope of religious diversity within it, and how this may impact upon discrepancies between religious adolescents’ homes and communities, and the norms, values and expectations of school worlds.
Chapter Three

Religion and adolescents’ school worlds

Introduction

The concepts of identity negotiation and construction introduced in the previous chapter have been developed by theorists in order to account for social processes taking place in plural, postmodern societies. Studies of adolescents’ identity negotiations in educational contexts are typically concerned with the experiences of ethnic and racial minorities as members of historically discriminated groups or migrant communities in Western countries. As such, these studies are concerned with the racial and cultural prejudices present in systems of representation, messages and cues encountered by adolescents in school worlds, and how adolescents negotiate the borders between the ‘traditional’ values of home worlds and the values and norms of classroom and peer worlds. In many respects comparable, this study takes as its focus adolescents’ reported negotiations of the borders between the religious values, norms and expectations of home, classroom, and peer worlds.

By surveying relevant scholarly literature, this chapter considers the norms, values, beliefs and expectations of religious adolescents’ school worlds in the wider social context of religious plurality and secularisation in England. The literature reviewed is selected in order to explore issues concerning the representation of, and attitudes towards, religions in a plural, secular society, and how they may impact upon the values, norms and practices of school worlds. Studies referred to are largely from England, but where relevant, studies conducted in other comparable national contexts are also cited (such as North America and Northern Europe).
Religious diversity in English society

In order to survey the borders between the values, norms and expectations of religious adolescents’ homes and religious communities on one hand, and their classroom and peer-worlds in English secondary schools on the other, it is important to consider the nature of the religious diversity and plurality of contemporary English society. Jackson (2004) following Skeie (1995, 2002) uses two concepts to explain religious diversity in England – that of ‘traditional plurality’ and ‘modern plurality.’ Traditional plurality is caused by the migration of peoples and has resulted in communities of diaspora religions settling in England, such as Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs, mainly concentrated in urban areas (Office of National Statistics, 2012). ‘Modern plurality’ on the other hand, is the diversity of late or post modernity caused by rapid communications and media resulting in the ‘exposure of individuals to a flow of competing ideas and values’ (Jackson, 2004, p. 1). Despite its terminology, ‘modern’ plurality is best considered as a postmodern phenomenon. It can be understood as the ‘The profusion of alternative lifestyles – the exploding ‘supernova’ of ‘galloping pluralism’ as Taylor (2007, p.300) describes it – that has increased the range of religious beliefs, practices and spiritualties available to individuals, and their freedom to follow them in plural, Western societies.

In addition to Jackson and Skeie’s analysis, I would like to suggest three further nuances that relate to traditional and modern plurality: the presence of historical, and new religious minorities, and the secularised nature of English society. Alongside the religious plurality caused by relatively recent migration, there are long-standing historical religious minorities in English society, namely: Roman Catholics; dissenters and nonconformists; and, Jews. The majority of the English population who identify as Christian are affiliated to the established Church of England (Weller, 2008; Office of National Statistics, 2012). A persecuted minority following the Protestant Reformation,
and only granted emancipation in 1829, Roman Catholics account for 13.8 per cent of Christian community membership in the United Kingdom (Weller, 2008). Dissenters and nonconformists were Protestant Christians who did not adhere to the Church of England, such as Baptists, Quakers and Congregationalists. Denominations originating from these movements now each account for no more than 7 per cent to 1 per cent of the total Christian community membership (Weller 2008, p. 25). Persecuted and expelled in the Middle Ages, a substantial Jewish community returned to England in the 17th century and have been politically represented since the founding of the Board of Deputies of British Jews in 1760. Currently, the Jewish population numbers 263,000 or 0.5 per cent of the total population concentrated in Jewish communities in several major cities, particularly London (Office of National Statistics, 2012).

In addition to these significant historical religious minorities, there are also new minority groups, sometimes referred to as ‘new religious movements’ (Barker, 1989). Sociologists typically use this term to denote the modern and heterodox origins of closely-knit religious groups that hold views distinct from mainstream society, usually based upon new revelation. In the Christian tradition, new religious movements include the Church of Latter Day Saints (Mormons) and Jehovah’s Witnesses.

There has been a decline in adherence to Christianity among the traditionally Christian indigenous population in England (Brown, 2001). A comparison of the 2001 and 2011 census data supports this long-term hypothesis. In ten years, identification with Christianity declined 12 per cent, from 71.7 per cent of the population reporting themselves as Christian in 2001, to 59.3 per cent in 2011(Office of National Statistics, 2013). Furthermore, during the same period, the proportion of the population reporting no religion increased from 14.8 per cent in 2001, to 25.1 per cent in 2011 (Office of
National Statistics, 2013). In keeping with these data, research also suggests adolescents are even less likely to practise Christianity than adults (Park et al., 2004).

While sociologists are in agreement that there has been decline in Church attendance in Britain and other western countries, there is a divergence of views about the nature and extent of this decline, what it may mean in regard to people’s beliefs, and what it may tell us about the future of society. This ranges from Bruce’s Nietzschean ‘God is Dead’ hypothesis (Bruce, 2001), to notions of decline in religious practice while belief and identification remain (Davie, 1994), or of the prevalence of ‘implicit’ religion (Bailey, 1997, 2001) and ‘vicarious’ religion (Davie, 2000). These models assume that religious adherence, as well as declining statistically, has changed in nature. It has mutated in postmodern societies to become more of an individual choice than in previous eras. Bruce (1996), for example, suggests that the minority of those who continue to practise a religion do so in ‘an increasingly individualistic and idiosyncratic manner’ (1996, p. 233). Bailey (1997, 2001) also argues religious practice is more complex in postmodern societies than often acknowledged, in what he calls the ‘small scale ecologies… the unorganized religiosity of contemporary culture’ (2001, p.78).

Other scholars, arguing that the secularisation thesis has only been partly realised, use terms such as ‘desecularisation’ (Berger, 1999) or ‘post-secular’ (Habermas, 2006) to describe the resurgence or continued presence of religions as a ‘fact of reasonable pluralism’ in contemporary western societies (Rawls, 1993). In the context of secularisation, religion may be able to renew itself through the creation of cults and new religious movements (Stark & Bainbridge, 1985), by contributing to post-secular society as part of a ‘complementary learning process’ (Habermas, 2006, p. 61).
47), or because of the increasingly politicised nature religious identities spurred by the end of the cold war and globalisation (Berger, 1999).

The terms ‘secularisation’, ‘secular’ and ‘secularity’ can therefore have a number of meanings. Sommerville (1998) suggests it can be understood in terms of the differentiation (separation between the religious from the non-religious) of different aspects of society: institutions, activities, populations, societies, and mentalities. Taylor (2007) makes similar distinctions in his three kinds of secularity: ‘secularity 1’ and ‘secularity 2’ are the ‘emptying out’ (p. 2) of God from public institutions, and the decline in belief and practice respectively; whereas ‘secularity 3’ is what Taylor refers to the ‘conditions of belief’ in a secularised society, including the challenge of alternative beliefs and spiritualties and the effect this choice has on individuals’ ways of believing as ‘one choice among others’ (Taylor, 2007, p. 3). In this thesis, the complex nature of secularity is explored in reference to all three (related) aspects of Taylor’s conceptual analysis.

Sociologists of religion agree that in addition to falling rates of participation, secularisation also entails privatisation of religion. For Taylor, Western societies now have an atheistic ‘default position’, but upon this rests a radical pluralism. The objective moral order has declined, and society is commonly held as being merely constituted of individuals living for mutual benefit, with increasingly interior concepts of spirituality. This has led to a condition in which individuals are continually subjected to a number of different incommensurable views of reality. Because of their increasing minority status, in a secular society those who do adhere to, or practise Christianity, do so more privately than in the past (Davie, 2000; Bruce, 2002). The liberal democratic state, Bruce declares, has ‘pushed religious identity (and with it all but the blandest
religious ideas) ... out of the public arena and into the private sphere’ (Bruce 2002, p. 36).

The complexity of religious diversity, and the proximity of old and new religious traditions and secular alternatives living side-by-side in Western societies such as England, has been considered the hallmark of ‘A Secular Age’ (Taylor, 2007). This is not a cultural milieu where religion is not something of importance, but a radically plural environment where naïve belief is not possible in circumstances of constant comparison.

We live in a condition where we cannot help but be aware that there are a number of different construals, views which intelligent, reasonable undeluded people, of good will, can and do disagree on. We cannot help looking over our shoulder from time to time, looking sideways, living our faith also in a condition of doubt and uncertainty.

Taylor, 2007, p. 11

Modern and traditional plurality present the opportunity for the co-existence of a variety of contiguous secular, religious, traditional (and new) social worlds – each with their own sets of values, norms and expectations and associated boundaries and borders – sometimes, as in the case of traditional and historical minorities – concentrated in particular geographical (urban) areas.

In the remainder of this thesis the term ‘plural’ is used to indicate traditional, modern, historical and new forms of religious pluralism surveyed in this section. Although Taylor points out the reasonableness of these competing narratives and their adherents, the proximity of these worlds and their border-crossings can also present religious adherents with potentially threatening and challenging situations, attitudes, and behaviours.

**Religious prejudice and discrimination**

In a plural, secular society, religious adherents from all traditions can be victims of prejudice and discrimination (Weller et al., 2001). Religious prejudice can be defined as
unfavourable sentiment, attitude or judgements made about someone because of their religion, often by stereotyping, such as in the cases of Islamophobia and anti-Semitism (Runnymede Trust, 1994, 1997). Religious discrimination on the other hand, takes place when an individual is treated unfairly because of their religion or belief, or in the case of ‘institutional religionism’, when an organisation fails to provide for, or protect, the reasonable needs of a religious group (Weller, 2008, p. 188). When the established Church has privileges over other religions, institutional religionism can be referred to as ‘religious disadvantage’ (Weller et al., 2001, p. 8). Religious prejudice and discrimination can take place in classroom and peer worlds. In a study of religious discrimination in England and Wales, Weller et al. (2001) found that schools are a cause for concern among communities of all religious traditions. They were reported to discriminate and treat religious students unfairly, or not provide for their religious needs, while the behaviour of secondary school students was also considered a problem.

Following different kinds of religious diversity, religious prejudices have varying historical precedents, and the nature, intensity and impact of prejudices and inequalities differ between religions (Purdam et al., 2007). For example, in England, Muslims are more likely to have poor housing and employment prospects than Christians and Jews (Purdam et al., 2007), and attend poor quality schools (Tomlinson, 1992; Kingdon & Cassen, 2010). This inequality was considered a contributory factor to the race riots in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham in the summer of 2001, and can be considered to have several causes – some related to ethnic and racial prejudice and discrimination (Home Office, 2001).

Islamophobia, as a distinctly religious form of prejudice, can be classified as the perception of Islam as a monolithic entity, and Muslims as separate, inferior, or the
enemy of the West (Runnymede Trust, 1997, p. 5). For Jews, prejudice can be separated into three principal kinds: anti-Judaism, prejudice towards religious practices and beliefs of Judaism; anti-Semitic racism, prejudice against Jews based on race and ethnicity; and anti-Zionism, hostility towards the Jewish national state, Israel (Runnymede Trust, 1994, p. 23). The French philosopher, Maritain (1953) used the term ‘antitheism’ to describe intellectual hostility to the belief in God, such as found in the works of Nietzsche; but there is no commonly-used terminology for anti-Christian prejudice or hatred in sociological literature. There is evidence, however, that Christians also encounter prejudice and discrimination because of their religion (Weller et al., 2001; National Church Watch, 2002).

Religious prejudice is often regarded as being influenced by cultural stereotypes. Western popular and literary culture has been noted for its presentation of inferior, negative images of the ‘otherness’ of Muslims, Arabs (Said, 2003) and historically, anti-Semitic stereotypes of Jews (Felsenstein, 1995). Geopolitical circumstances and events in recent years have been shown to exacerbate new negative stereotypes in the media (Parfitt & Egorova, 2004; Moore et al., 2008). For example, whereas the greater proportion of 299 reported incidents of anti-Semitism in 2012 were associated with far right extremist ideologies, a significant proportion of these incidents were associated with political motivation against Israel and correlated with events in the Middle East, such as the Israeli invasion of Gaza (CST, 2012).

The tragedies that occurred in Manhattan and Washington in September 2001 and the London bombings of July 2005 also had a significant impact, increasing prejudice and negative views of Muslims and the media stigmatisation and demonization of Islam (Archer, 2003; Mirza et al., 2007; Moore et al., 2008). It should be noted that although research suggests there are negative stereotypes in the
mainstream media, other media sources provide distinct products for religious adherents, such as Islam Channel, an internet-based TV channel designed for British Muslims (Islam Channel, 2013). Research also suggests the media may be an important source of information about religion for adolescents. In a survey of English, secondary school students, McKenna, Neill and Jackson (2009) found that a significant proportion of adolescents considered the media and the internet as ‘very important’ sources of information about religion.

The controversies surrounding Islam in public life have had the corollary effect of galvanising other religious groups’ political voices and identities, some even being resentful of perceived unfair attention and preferential treatment given to Muslims (Weller et al., 2001; Mirza et al., 2007; Cooper & Lodge, 2008). Alongside on-going controversies in the media surrounding violent representations of Islam and the actions of the state of Israel, negative images of Christianity have also become widespread in the media as public awareness of the child abuse scandals in the Christian churches has grown, particularly affecting the Catholic Church (Nolan, 2001). A further phenomenon related to these crises was a surge of protest against religious belief in the new millennium by the ‘New Atheists’ who re-invigorated Enlightenment arguments claiming the irrationality of religious belief, and the call for its removal from public and political life (Harris, 2004; Dawkins, 2006; Dennett, 2006; Hitchens, 2007).

The media have been shown to be powerful systems of representation in the lives of adolescents, likely to affect both peer and classroom worlds by reinforcing prejudices. Studies of minority groups’ schooling experiences show that the media can impact on teachers’ and peers’ perspectives and attitudes towards them. For example, Awokoya (2012) found that stereotypes of Africa were often presented in classrooms by teachers using resources such as films taken directly from popular media. These
presented peers with negative stereotypes that were then used to tease African students. They were often an important source of subject-knowledge for teachers. While Archer (2003) explains how Muslim youth, particularly boys, have become demonized in English media and how this has impacted upon teacher’s expectations of them, and possibly upon the extent of racism reported by them in schools.

Classroom worlds: Church and faith schools

In order to understand the values, norms and expectations that may permeate classroom worlds and the borders that they may pose for religious adolescents, it is necessary to consider how secondary schools in England may differ according to their religious affiliation and approaches to religion.

Secondary schools in England can be divided into three broad groups: independent schools, state-funded schools not of a religious character, and state-funded schools of a religious character. Independent schools charge fees and are independent of Government control. They can have a religious character due to historic foundations – which in the case of the older, prestigious institutions is usually Anglican. They also adhere to national systems of examinations, and often have similar policies, practices and syllabuses for Religious Education and collective worship as state-funded institutions.

State-funded schools not of a religious character have traditionally been referred to as ‘county schools’ because the 1944 and 1988 Education Acts stipulated these schools were to be administered by Local Authorities. These kinds of schools include comprehensive, community and, in some counties, grammar schools (which have selective student intakes). The 2010 Academies Act has enabled significant numbers of this kind of school to become semi-autonomous, sometimes new schools being created with the backing of a religious sponsor, such as the Church of England. Historically,
however, county schools have no specific denominational character, although the 1944 and 1988 Education Acts require they teach ‘Religious Education’, provide ‘collective worship’ and promote ‘spiritual development.’ These requirements are still legally binding (DCSF, 2010; DfE, 2011; DfE, 2012) even though the duty to provide daily collective worship is often not upheld in practice (Culham College Institute, 1998; Gill, 2004).

The third group of schools are state-funded and of a religious character – referred to as ‘Church’ or ‘faith’ schools. Church schools are state-funded but either ‘voluntary aided’ or ‘voluntary controlled’ by the Anglican or Catholic churches, with a few affiliated to other denominations, or are co-denominational (HM Government, 1944, 1988). In the 1990s, the New Labour Government expanded this ‘dual system’ to allow for religions other than the Churches to run state schools, which I refer to in this thesis as ‘faith’ schools (DCSF, 2007). By 2007, one third of all state-maintained schools were of a religious character: over four thousand affiliated to the Church of England, over two thousand Roman Catholic, 37 Jewish schools, and seven affiliated to Islamic organisations (Walford, 2010).

The distribution of faith schools geographically and in proportion to religious adherents is currently unequal to demand and the religious affiliation of pupils, with a bias towards historical religious minorities rather than migrant religious communities (Purdam et al., 2007). This means that substantial numbers of students attend Church schools that are not affiliated to their own religious tradition or denomination – thus presenting religious adolescents with classroom worlds upholding religious values and norms quite different from their homes and families.

The religious group most likely to attend a faith school of their own religious tradition are Jews. Over the last 30 years, there has been significant growth in demand
and provision of Jewish schools. More than half of all Jewish children attended Jewish schools in 2001, in comparison with one fifth in 1975 (Miller, 2001). Miller (2001) sees this growth driven by fears of assimilation, the desire of Jewish families to counteract the harmful influences of wider society on their children by attending schools based on Jewish values and ethos, and to receive a higher quality of general education in comparison to other available state-funded schools. Similar arguments have been given for the provision of Muslim state-funded faith schools. Muslim parents desire to improve educational attainment and ensure schools offer suitable Islamic religious education, the opportunity for continuing cultural traditions, and the provision of single-sex education (Mustafa, 1999).

In relation to the religious values, norms and beliefs presented by religiously affiliated school worlds, a general distinction may be made between Church schools and faith schools. The former tend to cater for the whole local community and typically admit a proportion of students from any religious background. Since the Second World War, the secularisation of English society, the profusion of liberal theology and increasing religious diversity of pupils, has led to a weakening of the Christian ethos and mission of Catholic and Anglican schools (Walford, 2010). The ‘distinctiveness’ of Anglican Church schools being ‘diluted’ and ‘compromised’ while remaining inclusive to a diverse intake of students is recognised as a significant challenge by the Church (Archbishops’ Council Education Division, 2012, p. 3).

Faith schools, on the other hand, tend to admit students of the affiliated religion of that school only. The religious character and ethos of faith schools can vary, however. For example, the classification of Jewish schools in England is recognised to be complex. Due to demographic changes some Jewish schools can also have a religiously diverse in-take (Jackson et al., 2010). A broad distinction can be made
between ‘mainstream’ and ‘strictly Orthodox’ Jewish schools – strictly Orthodox schools having a more religious ethos due to the rabbinical authority that oversees them, and the religious communities from which their student populations originate (Jewish Leadership Council, 2008).

There may be a difference in the ‘identity climate’ (Rich & Schachter, 2012) offered by Church schools in secularised contexts, and faith schools of minority religions in plural societies. International studies suggest Jewish schools can have a significant effect upon Jewish identity construction (e.g. Hartman & Hartman, 2003; Rich & Schachter, 2012); while small-scale exploratory research suggests Christian schools with diverse or non-practising student populations are not efficacious in the formation of Christian identity (Bertram-Troost et al., 2006, 2007). The influence of faith schools upon religious identity construction – and the congruence between a school’s ethos and those of the families and homes of its students – may be complex, however. An ethnographic case study of a Jewish school in England (Scholefield, 2004) demonstrates this.

‘Mount Sinai High School’ (a pseudonym) upheld a number of what Scholefield (2004) identifies as identity ‘boundaries.’ It only admitted students who could prove they were Jewish according to the stipulations of the Hebrew Congregation of the Commonwealth; it served kosher food; religious symbols were displayed; Yiddish and Hebrew words were used frequently by staff; and the Israeli flag was also displayed prominently. Yet despite this environment, Scholefield found that the schools’ students and parents understood their Jewish identity differently, and contested the boundaries that were imposed by the ‘frummers’ (observant Orthodox Jews) in senior management (p. 245). Scholefield concludes that Jewish identity boundaries are ‘fuzzy frontiers’ that have to be negotiated by adolescent Jews moving between the different values and
norms of school and home. This ethnographic study suggests that in the context of contemporary English society, even in the circumstances of a faith school serving a community affiliated to one religious tradition, there can be discrepancies between the religious norms and values of classroom worlds and those of adolescents’ family and homes.

Of all faith schools, Muslim schools are the least represented in relation to the number of children of that religion of school age (Purdam et al., 2007). Studies focusing on the experience and perceptions of Muslim students in England and other Western countries suggest that the curriculum and structure of mainstream schools present considerable challenges for Muslim students (Zine, 2001; Peek, 2005; Ipgrave & McKenna, 2008; Ipgrave, 2010; Miller & McKenna, 2011). The lack of provision of prayer spaces, limited leave of absence for Islamic festivals and fasting are of concern to Muslim students, parents and communities (McIntyre et al., 1993; Weller et al., 2001; Østberg, 2001; Ipgrave & McKenna, 2008).

By conducting focus groups with Year 11 Muslim students at two religiously unaffiliated, mainstream London schools, Hassan (2010) found that schools were perceived as hostile environments by Muslim adolescents. Hassan’s participants considered school as an impediment to the expression of their religious identity. Although some teachers led prayer at lunchtime and encouraged Islamic practices, others disapproved or questioned them. Some participants also found that fasting was difficult and were questioned by staff when it interfered with aspects of the school day, as in one school was the wearing of hijab. The scarcity of Islamic culture in the curriculum, and the inaccurate portrayal of Islam when it is included in the curriculum were also of concern.
Negative relationships with teachers, and perceptions of bias, unfairness, prejudice, discrimination, and stereotyping featured in Muslim participants’ perspectives in several studies in Western countries (Weller et al., 2001; Zine, 2001; Peek, 2005); while studies of secondary school teachers suggest they may be prejudiced against Muslims, admit to being ignorant of Islam, or report feeling challenged when teaching Muslims. For example, Miller and McKenna (2011) noted in their study of an English school with a high proportion of Muslim students, that some teacher participants made negative comments about the influence of religion in public life, and only reported talking about religion in the context of conflict. While Niyozov (2010) found that Canadian teachers, who were predominantly Anglo-Saxon, acknowledged their own racism and stereotyping of Muslims due to terrorism and the war on terror.

**Classroom worlds: Religious Education and collective worship**

Two important aspects of classroom worlds relating to religion are the curriculum subject Religious Education and the provision of school-based worship, often referred to as collective worship (HM Government, 1988). Voluntary aided and controlled schools can teach Religious Education and hold worship in accordance with the religious character of that school. For Church schools this can follow the syllabus set by the Diocese, but in many voluntary aided and voluntary controlled Anglican schools, the Local Authority’s Agreed Syllabus is followed. The Agreed Syllabus is also used in state-schools not of a religious character and is determined by an Agreed Syllabus Conference, usually consisting of members of the Standing Advisory Committee for Religious Education (SACRE). This consists of representatives of local religious communities, teachers and councillors and must include representatives of the Established church (DfE, 1994). SACREs draw upon examples of established classroom practice, legislation and non-statutory guidance to determine syllabuses.
Syllabuses must include Christianity and the other principal religions represented in Great Britain (HM Government, 1988).

Religious Education, as defined in Agreed Syllabuses and executed in professional practice, has evolved from its origins as non-denominational Christian nurture, to the multi-faith, non-confessional or postconfessional Religious Education taught today (Copley, 1997; 2000). The last 40 years have seen a trend for Religious Education to fulfil instrumental agendas of cultural integration, citizenship and social cohesion rather than the promotion of faith (Grimmitt, 2010): ‘Syllabuses must not be designed to convert pupils, or to urge a particular religion or religious belief on pupils’ (DfE, 1994, p. 15). Consequently few English religious educationists advance the view that Religious Education in religiously unaffiliated schools should nurture the faith of their students – Christian or otherwise – as Wright declares:

it is unreasonable to expect [schools with no religious foundation] will provide a confessional education designed to nurture the faith of their [religious communities’] children

Wright, 2010, p. 143

Instead, in England the project of accommodating religious diversity and increasing secularity has dominated academic discussion and local and national government policy in Religious Education since the 1970s (Grimmitt, 2000; Jackson, 2004; Copley, 2005; 2008). Contemporary Religious Education is therefore aimed at:

Challeng[ing] pupils to reflect on, consider, analyse, interpret and evaluate issues of truth, belief, faith and ethics … enab[ling] pupils to develop respect for and sensitivity to others, in particular those whose faiths and beliefs are different from their own.

QCA, 2004, p. 7

Several studies have found that members of religions are critical of this kind of Religious Education, particularly in the respect that it does not recognise the perspectives of minority religious groups, or represent religious traditions accurately or fairly (Ipgrave, 1999; Weller et al., 2001; Head, 2009; Jackson et al., 2010; Moulin,
Scholars have also argued that Religious Education can present inaccurate or distorted accounts of religions, or encourage its philosophical critique (Hayward, 2006; Barnes, 2009; Strahn, 2010; Lundie, 2010; Baumfield et al., 2012) – even becoming a form of confessional secular humanism (Thompson, 2004a, 2004b; Copley, 2005). Studies of Religious Education teachers’ professional identities also show that they can be hostile towards religion (Sikes & Everington, 2004; Robson, 2013). For example, Sikes and Everington (2004) found that trainee teachers could assert their atheism as a means to deal with religion in classrooms, one participant exclaiming when referring to introducing herself to a new class: ‘I like to get it in quick that I’m an atheist’ (trainee Religious Education teacher in Sikes & Everington, p. 21).

The teaching of Christianity has been considered a cause for concern in state-funded schools not of a religious character. Hayward (2006) analysed the content of 34 Locally Agreed Syllabuses to find that Christianity can be reified, simplified and often divorced from its theological foundations. The findings of The Biblos Project (Copley et al., 2004) suggest that the Bible is treated similarly: it can be stereotyped, simplified and secularised without demonstrating the diversity of its varied interpretations within and without of the Christian tradition. By secularised, Copley means that the main character of the Bible, God, is ignored. Instead, the Bible is presented as espousing ethical platitudes, without allowing for theological interpretations, or a meaningful exploration of its role in the Abrahamic religious traditions. In the famous stories of the Parable of the Good Samaritan or David and Goliath, for example, the texts’ supposed meanings are often expressed, in the former, in terms of the importance of helping others, and, in the latter, the success of the underdog – rather than considering what such narratives may say about God.
Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted, 2007, 2010) subject reports also stress that there are problems of simplification, stereotyping and insufficient representation of diversity in secondary school lessons. Fancourt (2012) concludes a comprehensive review of empirical studies into the teaching of Christianity, with three principal findings: the way Christianity is treated in classrooms cannot be separated from the way Christianity is treated in English society more generally (a hypothesis that resonates with the work of Copley (2005)); presenting Christianity clearly is not a common educational aim; and, relatively little research has been completed in understanding how students may learn about Christianity, particularly the more difficult concepts.

For the last 40 years religious educators have sought to enhance multi-faith or inter-faith understanding by teaching about world religions (Smart, 1968; Nesbitt, 2004; Jackson, 2007, 2009), most recently in order to promote ‘social cohesion’ (Grimmott, 2010). Celebrating culture and religion in English secondary schools has therefore been seen as a good practice (Parker-Jenkins, 1991, 1995; Khan-Chemma, 1996; Parker-Jenkins & Haw, 1998; Muslim Council of Great Britain, 2007; Coles, 2008; Nesbitt, 2004), yet this approach has also drawn criticism. It is argued that such strategies can lead to ‘pathologising’ pupil religion (Ipgrave, 2010), or privileging cultural difference instead of promoting integration and supporting marginalised groups within particular ethnic communities (Mirza et al., 2007).

It has been argued that minority ethnic and cultural groups could be inferiorised by a political agenda that seeks to make schools and society more equitable (Archer & Francis, 2006). Forms of education, such as multi-faith Religious Education, that seek to address prejudice and inequality could reinforce those differences rather than combatting them by creating a discourse of ‘the other’ in juxtaposition with the normal
This is because in creating a discourse of ‘otherness’, minority groups can be essentialised as static and inferior (Gore, 1992; Said, 2003). In the case of religions in Religious Education specifically, it has been argued that religions are presented as out-dated and dangerous (Copley, 2005).

Studies suggest that the representation of religions in Religious Education can be inauthentic and inaccurate. For example, Ipgrave (1999) found that Muslim students reported different explanations for religious practices and beliefs than those incorporated in Religious Education lessons. She observed power struggles between teachers and students in lessons when teachers’ knowledge seemed lacking in comparison with their students. Nesbitt (1998) also found that the content of curriculum materials and textbooks in Religious Education were perceived as inaccurate, generalised and stereotyped by Hindu and Sikh students. Hindus and Sikhs reported that teachers could mispronounce Indian words, or were perceived to be unable to present Hinduism and Sikhism in a way that religious students’ peers could understand without recourse to ridicule. An important theme in Nesbitt’s work is that there is a considerable discrepancy between adherents’ experiences of their religion and its representation in classroom worlds.

Students’ concern of the inaccurate representation of their own traditions was also reported in an evaluation of materials used by schools to teach about religions (Jackson et al., 2010). Christian students reported that textbooks made their faith unappealing and outdated. Jewish students felt that the representation of Jews was based on Orthodox traditions that were not maintained by many Orthodox Jews at home. For example, in a focus group with a group of Jews who attended a Jewish school, participants were concerned with the depiction of Judaism in textbooks which
had a latent Orthodox bias (resonating with Scholefield’s study reviewed earlier (2004)):

These books generalise a lot – but to what the majority thinks. When they say ‘all Jews keep a kosher kitchen’ what they mean is ‘all Jews should keep a kosher kitchen.’

Jewish focus group participant, Jackson et al. 2010, p. 165; Jackson et al.’s emphasis

Studies also suggest there are problems with the provision of collective worship in secondary schools. In schools of no religious character, the ambiguous definition of collective worship (HM Government, 1988; DfE, 1994) is widely regarded as confusing for students and teachers, and its statutory status remains controversial in addition to frequent non-compliance (Culham College Institute, 1998; Copley 2000; Webster, 2000; British Humanist Association, 2012). In a small-scale study, Gill (2004) found that collective worship in English secondary schools was either entirely flouted, was not overtly Christian, or did not resemble acts of worship. While Weller et al. (2001) observe that the provision of collective worship could often clash with the beliefs and perspectives of religious minorities, including minority Christian groups.

Several studies have been conducted into student attitudes toward Religious Education and collective worship using measures developed by Francis (1988, 1992; Francis & Kay, 1996). These surveys suggest that in comparison with non-religious students, religious students are more likely to hold Religious Education and collective worship in positive regard, but their enthusiasm for the subject is not necessarily strong (Kay & Francis, 2001; Kay & Smith, 2002). Making a speculative inference from their data, Kay and Francis (2001) contend that the religious minorities perhaps find Religious Education and collective worship ‘affirms’ their religious identities because of its multi-faith character and may ‘serve’ their interests as they promote respect (Kay & Francis, 2001, p. 125-126).
Kay and Francis’ (2001) conclusions have been contested by other researchers interested in the schooling experiences of religious minorities, however. Head (2009) conducted a survey of Mormon students followed by a group discussion. Comparing his findings with the work of Kay and Francis (2001), he concluded Mormons’ support for Religious Education and collective worship was weak, and that when Mormonism was included in school it was brief and perceived as inaccurate or negative. He suggests that members of new religious movements such as Mormonism may find the Religious Education curriculum problematic because it ignores their religion or represents it negatively.

Thanissaro (2012) claims that work in the tradition of Kay and Francis (1996) does not take into account pupils’ religious background, and that one questionnaire item to assess attitude to Religious Education is insufficient. He suggests that his measure “Short Form of the Scale of Attitude towards Religious Education ‘ScAttRES-S’” is more nuanced than the traditional studies in that it accounts for pupils’ home religious background (Thanissaro, 2012, p. 209). Thanissaro’s study of secondary school pupils’ attitudes towards Religious Education revealed that there was more overall support and positive attitude to Religious Education than reported in Kay and Francis (1996). However, like previous studies, positive attitude towards Religious Education dropped with the age of participants: as they became older, their attitudes were less favourable. The correlates of frequency of prayer and attendance at places of worship were positively correlated with positive attitudes of Religious Education, and pupils of no religion were significantly less positive to Religious Education. Those of non-Christian religion, however, were less likely to report that Religious Education helped them understand and learn about their own tradition. The findings indicated that the more the
pupils reported praying and attendance at places of worship, the more they would perceive a difference between the presentation of religion in the home and at school.

The work of Thanissaro (2012) and Head (2009) suggests that religious adolescents do not consider the Religious Education curriculum as accurately portraying their religious tradition. A comparison between these studies and the work of Kay and Francis (2001) suggest that survey methods can fail to capture the complex perspectives religious adolescents may hold of Religious Education, providing little insight into how schools’ curricula may be perceived to influence religious identity construction.

The body of research reviewed so far suggests that classroom worlds may clash with the values and norms of religious adolescents’ homes and religious communities, and the representation of religion in classroom worlds may be at odds with religious adolescents’ own understanding of their religious tradition, and even reinforce harmful stereotypes. However, in addition to the studies critiquing Religious Education in these respects, educators have also argued that the challenges facing members of religions in plural contexts can be surmounted in school. Religious adolescents can learn effective strategies to manage religious identities through secondary schools’ formal Religious Education curriculum (Østberg, 2000; Streib, 2001; Nesbitt, 2001; Fancourt, 2009; Miller & McKenna, 2011).

Nesbitt conceives schools’ curricula as aiding children’s cultural competence. Some Hindu participants reported Religious Education lessons as helping them develop their own faith in Hinduism through an exposition of scripture and key beliefs that had not been given at home. Miller and McKenna (2011) found that participants in their study reported benefitting from the opportunity to take part in dialogue and developed respect for others as a consequence. Fancourt (2009) argues that Religious Education
classrooms can function as a ‘safe forum’ (p. 206) where students can discuss similarities and differences between religious perspectives. Streib (2001) gives a conceptual model of how such a process may take place and how multi-faith Religious Education may impact upon religious identity development.

Streib (2001), adopting a developmental framework based on Fowler (1981) and Selman and Schultz (1988), interprets two case studies of inter-religious dialogue in classrooms. By comparing a case study of the secondary school (Knauth et al., 2000) with his own research in a primary school, Streib constructs a tentative developmental model of ‘inter-religious negotiation styles.’ He argues that challenge is only one stage in a developmental process. A multi-faith setting ‘does not destroy young people’s religious identity, but helps to develop religious identity’ (2001, p. 133). However, the development of individuals’ own religious identities can only take place if ‘diversity can be negotiated’ by them (2001, p. 133) after they have developed a sufficient sense of their own religious identity.

It should be noted that studies such as Streib (2001), Ipgrave and McKenna (2008), Fancourt (2009), and Miller and McKenna (2011) all draw on data collected in schools. This typically has been generated with groups of participants consisting of a mixture of religious adolescents and non-religious adolescents. This raises methodological and ethical problems about revealing religious identities. From the published reports of these studies, it is not known to what extent or where participants practised their religion, or if the researchers ascertained this information. Furthermore, the selection and recruitment of participants in the context of a school may not account for those who may not wish for their religious identity to be revealed in school, or who may be ‘masking’ (Faircloth, 2012) their religious identity in order to participate.
Adolescents interviewed in this context are those likely to consider schools to be ‘safe’—or at least safe enough to take part in the research.

Interviews conducted with religious adolescents out of school as part of my earlier study (Moulin 2009; 2011) showed that some religious adolescents were not comfortable publically acknowledging their religious identity in school because they did not feel it safe to do so. For example, a Jewish participant interviewed in a synagogue reported her concern with an incident when a teacher had told her class that she was Jewish as there were ‘people in there you do not want to know’ (Moulin, 2011, p. 322) because of anti-Semitic abuse, threats and violence. My previous study also revealed that for many Christians and Jews, their religious communities and places of worship were ‘safe havens’ as Chaudhury and Miller found in their study of American Muslims (2008, p. 401). Their schools, on the contrary, could be the site of intimidation and the challenging of religious beliefs, particularly from their peers.

**Religious adolescents and their school-peer worlds**

The two previous sections have focused on secondary school classroom worlds and the values, attitudes, and norms that they may present religious adolescents. This section focuses upon literature relevant to religious adolescents’ secondary school peer-worlds.

English secondary school students who regularly attend and participate in religious activities outside of school are a minority (Kay & Francis, 2001). Depending on the local context, religious participation can be considered abnormal by adolescents who do not have religious commitments, risking ‘social exclusion’ (Ipgrave, 2012, p. 265). Research suggests that as minorities, the values of religious adolescents who have had a traditional religious upbringing can clash with those of largely secular secondary school peer groups in Western societies. For example, Nesbitt (2001) found that young Hindus in English society are ‘faced with the on-going choices between alternative
value systems and behaviours’ (2001, p. 152). Zine (2001) found that Muslim youths who attended Canadian high schools reported that it was difficult to maintain religious lifestyles in a culture with secular values that posed the challenges of peer pressure, racism and Islamophobia. Participants described the ‘negative’ peer pressure of both Muslim and non-Muslim peers’ attempts to ‘fit in’ to popular youth culture. This pressure, and experiences of Islamophobia among peers, led to the formation of friendship ties along religious and ethnic boundaries, and a strong, and sometimes defensive, personal identification with Islam. Participants in Hassan’s (2010) study also described the influence of the secular culture of their schools and peer-group, particularly drinking and night clubbing, as a challenge to their religious practice and traditional beliefs. The findings of these studies resonate with Chaudhury and Miller’s study (2008) which found that schools were reported by adolescent Muslims to ‘inhibit’ the process of religious identity formation – partly because Muslims did not feel comfortable identifying themselves as such in schools because they were in the minority.

Being among a largely secular peer group may also affect Christians’ comfort in expressing their religion and observing religious practices. In a study of attitudes to collective worship in England, Gill (2004) found that some practising Christian students did not wish to pray in front of their non-believing and critical secondary school peers. Similarly, in group interviews with English secondary school students, Ipgrave and Mckenna (2008) noted that religious Christians felt there were a number of peer group influences, such as sexuality and crime that undermined and threatened their religious commitments and interests. Ipgrave (2012) found that in one school in her study, ‘Dawkinsmania’ had made a significant impact on the beliefs of a whole-school peer group (Ipgrave, 2012, p. 263).
Religious identity can also be the cause of bullying and prejudice based on stereotypes held among religious adolescents’ peers, although in the case of religious and ethnic minorities, this prejudice can sometimes be difficult to differentiate from racism (Weller et al., 2001). The association of Islam with terrorism among peers can cause name-calling. Peek (2005) noted after the September 11th attacks most of her interviewees were subject to varying degrees of intimidation, from verbal insults to physical violence. Likewise, in England, in the years after the London bombings of July 7th 2005, Mirza et al. (2007) found that numerous young Muslim participants reported being labelled as a ‘terrorist’ (p. 78).

Practising Christian adolescents can face name-calling on account of their religious identity in secular and plural contexts. In a study of practising Catholic adolescents in Australia (Rymarz & Graham, 2006), some participants reported being picked upon because of their religious commitment at school, particularly those who identified as more strongly religious. For example, one participant who was an altar server in his parish reported that he was nicknamed ‘church boy’ (2006, p. 83).

Adolescent Jews can be the victims of anti-Semitic prejudice at the hands of their school peers. There were 30 anti-Semitic incidents in schools reported to an independent Jewish community organisation in the first half of 2012 (CST, 2012). This is an on-going phenomenon. In a small-scale interview study of primary and secondary school children’s attitudes to Jewish identity, Short and Carrington (1992) found that older children in the study (from age ten and upwards) had knowledge of anti-Semitic stereotypes. The reported negative stereotypes were concerned with meanness and wealth. One participant described how at his secondary school if someone were to pick up money off the floor they would be called a Jew. However, the one child interviewed
who was Jewish reported no incidences of negative stereotyping. The authors found little reference to anti-Judaism, such as the blaming of Jews for the death of Jesus.

While studies show that religious adolescents can be picked upon or subject to negative experiences with secular peers on account of their religious identity, research also suggests that adolescents can discuss religion with their peers. Studies suggest that religion can be discussed, sometimes frequently, between peers and friends at school. In an online poll of 371 young people in the UK, 45 per cent reported discussing ‘God or faith’ with friends on at least a monthly basis (Roehlkepartain et al., 2008, p. 17). Of the same young people, when asked ‘who helps most in your spiritual life?’, 18 per cent cited their friends as the most helpful.

Ipgrave and McKenna (2008) conducted a qualitative questionnaire and interview study in four secondary schools with young people aged 13-16 and found that just under half of participants reported discussing religion with their friends. The schools were selected to contrast in terms of their ethnic, religious and socio-economic intakes and their location. Discussions about religion could stem from Religious Education lessons, involve sharing different perspectives between those of another faith, or arise out of peers’ desire to challenge religion. The authors noted that those with a religious belief were more likely to discuss religion as were students in the school with the largest proportion of believers. The school with a very low number of students of ethnic backgrounds other than white British only had a small minority of participants who ‘admitted’ talking about religion, and these were all girls. The authors report that this contrasted with urban schools with Muslim and Black Pentecostal Christian students who reported having conversations with peers of the same and different religions about religious issues. In a study comparing the views of 10 teachers with 27 students (22 of these being Muslims of Pakistani-heritage) in a multicultural
secondary school in northern England, Miller and McKenna (2011) also found that students reported talking about religion regularly with friends.

The studies reviewed in this section indicate some potential characteristics of religious adolescents’ peer-interactions, the norms, values and expectations of peer worlds and the challenges that may be presented to religious adolescents when they cross the borders of home worlds to school peer worlds. There is religious prejudice and hostility among secondary school students in Western countries: Islamophobia (Zine, 2001; Peek, 2005), anti-Semitism (Short & Carrington, 1992; CST, 2012), and anti-religious sentiment directed at practising Christians (Rymarz & Graham, 2006; Weller et al., 2001). These problems were of concern to participants of my earlier study who suggested religion was the subject of conversation, or the topic of debate but also the cause of bullying at school (Moulin, 2009a, 2011).

Despite the existence of prejudice, religion can be the topic of debate between friends and peers of the same and different religions (Ipgrave & McKenna, 2008). However, in comparison to studies about ethnic and religious minorities representing traditional diversity (e.g. Zine, 2001; Nesbitt, 1998, 2001; Peek, 2005; Hassan, 2010), there are few studies that explore the reported experiences of peer interactions among minorities representing other forms of religious diversity, such as Jews or religious Christians.

**Conclusion**

English society has become more secular in recent decades, but is also religiously diverse – with communities of historical religious minorities, migrant religions and new religious movements. Research conducted in England suggests that members of all religions can suffer from prejudice and discrimination. This can be exacerbated by systems of representation presented by the media.
While some researchers, drawing upon empirical research conducted in schools have argued that Religious Education classes and adolescents’ encounter with young people of other faiths can strengthen religious participants’ religious identity and promote social cohesion, in a plural and secularised society, the norms, values, attitudes and practices of secondary school worlds can present challenging borders for religious adolescents to navigate and negotiate. There is a potential clash between the religious or secular values of classroom worlds and peer worlds and those of students’ homes and communities (in some circumstances presented by faith and Church schools). Peers can also be prejudiced and abusive, anti-Semitic and Islamophobic. In classroom worlds, however, there may be a confused approach towards, or no provision made for prayer and worship; and there may be a misrepresentation or stereotyped portrayal of religions in Religious Education. Alternatively, the Religious Education curriculum may promote secular views or critiques of religions.

Studies of Muslim adolescents’ experiences of secondary schools demonstrate that in adverse conditions religious adolescents develop strategies to manage their religious identities in schools. These can include developing resistance to school authorities, or learning methods of inter-religious dialogue. While there are several studies of adolescent Muslim’s schooling experiences, few have been conducted in England. Apart from surveys of attitudes towards Religious Education, more generally, there is a lack of research focusing explicitly on the experiences of Christians and Jews in English secondary schools, and how adolescent Christians and Jews may construct and negotiate their religious identities in these contexts.

In this chapter I have surveyed literature that documents the potential discrepancies in values and norms between religious adolescents’ home and school worlds. Research suggests that in a plural and secular society, religious adherents may
encounter hostility and prejudice because of their religious identities. In the following chapter I consider how a sensitive and specially adapted method of research may be enacted in order to engage with religious adolescents to explore experiences of secondary school worlds in this wider context.
Chapter Four

Engaging with religious adolescents

Introduction

The prejudice and discrimination facing adolescent Christians, Jews and Muslims in English society and secondary schools (as overviewed in the previous chapter) had significant ramifications for the research design of this study. Exploring religious adolescents’ reported experiences of prejudice and discrimination in a secular and plural society were part of the study’s original aim, but these issues could also present challenges in regard to engaging with religious adolescents in the first place.

Exploring the perspectives of religiously affiliated young people in the social context of twenty-first century England can be compared with other forms of educational research that have sought to explore and address imbalances of rights and inequalities in society, such as Critical Race Theory and Feminist research. These intellectual movements led to studies that explored the perspectives and concerns of minorities and the under-represented, and also to the development of innovative, flexible research designs to investigate marginalized groups in society (Parker & Lynn, 2002; Rosser, 2008; Sorsoli & Tolman, 2008).

In researching religious identity construction and negotiation among adolescents in secondary schools a sensitive research design was necessary to explore the perspectives of minority groups in a potentially hostile social environment where religious identity has become privatised, but also of increased controversy and political significance. This task included allowing for enough breadth to explore the complexity of religious identities constructed across a range of minority communities and kinds of schools, and enough depth to sensitively account for individuals’ particular contexts,
emotional commitments to their religious tradition and the potential traumas of schooling. There was also good reason to create a research design that would compensate for the lack of empowerment some young people perceive in schools (Lumby, 2012) which could be potentially exacerbated by their religious or ethnic identities.

In engaging with religious adolescents, I assumed that religion could be a taboo topic with similar implications for research design as other taboos. For example, in the case of adolescent girls’ sexuality it has been argued that adolescent girls’ sexuality has been overlooked because of the patriarchal assumptions of researchers (Sorsoli & Tolman, 2008). In the case of research into religion and schools, the instrumentalist agendas of researchers in the field of Religious Education, such as the emphasis on ‘social cohesion’ both prior to, and following the events of September 11th (Moulin, 2012), could mean that researchers have prioritised methods that could overlook the views of religious adherents – as acknowledged by some religious educationists (e.g. Streib, 2001; Visser-Vogel et al., 2012; Thanissaro, 2012).

One aspect of research design that may reflect researchers’ assumptions, and that certainly impacts on the data generated in interviews, is the location that fieldwork takes place (Fontana & Frey, 2000). As reviewed in Chapter Three, research into young people’s perspectives about religion and experiences of school has almost exclusively taken place in schools. Yet conducting interviews in schools may be inappropriate for engaging with religious adolescents. Hay and Morisy (1985) found that religious experiences among adults are ‘kept secret’ due to a hostile secular culture that does not acknowledge the possibility of their validity. Since Hay and Morisy’s study was conducted, religious prejudice and stigmatisation, particularly of Muslims, has become acknowledged as widely prevalent in English society. Recent research suggests,
including my previous study, that secondary schools can be hostile environments for religious adolescents, with possible ethical implications for revealing students’ religious identity in tense contexts (see Chapters One and Three). Of pressing importance, therefore, was the need to conduct interviews in an environment where young people with religious commitment could feel safe to talk about their schooling experiences as religious adherents and affiliates.

In response to these ethical and methodological issues, and because of the lack of research in this area (and the schooling experiences of Christians in particular), I decided to implement an exploratory emergent qualitative design that ‘followed’ (Brown & Gilligan, 1992) the concerns of religious adolescents through a series of group, pair and individual interviews conducted at the ‘safe-havens’ (Chaudhury & Miller, 2008) of religious adolescents’ places of worship or affiliated youth groups. I assumed that the use of standardised practices of research design such as surveys, structured interviews and structured observation could prevent the formation of positive connections with study participants (Sorsoli & Tolman, 2008). The method of data generation was therefore fluid and sympathetic to the demands of the field, and responsive to the articulations of individuals and groups of participants (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2008; Morgan et al., 2008).

In this chapter I give a rationale for, and an evaluation of the credibility of, the research design that emerged as I engaged with religious adolescents, including my chosen methods of loosely structured interviews, theoretical sampling and data interpretation. Following this, in Chapter Five, I give a more detailed account of how I conducted the interviews, and responded to, dilemmas in the field.
Loosely structured group and individual interviews

The epistemological stance of social constructionism undergirded the use of loosely structured interviews as a method of data generation. From the outset, I assumed that religious adolescents construct the meanings of their schooling experiences by drawing upon social interaction, this process taking place in schools, religious communities, homes, and in the interviews themselves. As I began to apply the Multiple Worlds Framework to the interview data, this assumption became further clarified. I conceived participant Christians, Jews and Muslims as the ‘mediator[s] and integrator[s] of meaning and experience’ (Phelan et al., 1994, p. 419) when they moved across the different, possibly conflictual, social worlds of home, Church, Mosque, Synagogue and school. As the integrators of multiple experiences and message exchanges in different social contexts, interviews provided opportunities for adolescents to reflect and make sense of their worlds and self-understanding, and for the interviewer to explore and interpret that data.

The worth of the interview is “to understand the world from the subjects’ point of view, to unfold the meaning of their experiences” (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009, p. 1). An advantage of loosely-structured interviews in particular is the detail and depth of information they allow (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). My earlier study of religious students’ experiences of Religious Education (Moulin, 2009, 2011) had successfully used group interviews to first unearth pertinent issues and matters of debate and then in-depth single and pair interviews to explore these leads further. I wished to build upon the success of the earlier study to capture the perspectives and experiences of young people concerning their religion and secondary schools in general.

The use of group interviews with religious minorities in politically sensitive contexts to explore common experiences has been demonstrated as highly effective
(Peek & Fothergill, 2009). The selection of interview groups according to a common religious tradition gave the group interviews the character and function of ‘cultural interviews’ – where participants decide what is important to relay about shared norms and values to an interviewer who may be from a different cultural background (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Participating in group discussions encouraged participants to attach reasons for their consent or dissent on key issues (Fontana & Frey, 2000), promoting a greater depth to participants’ articulations, and useful in determining ‘consensus beliefs’ (Lewis, 1992).

Lewis (1992) identifies group interviews as allowing for more ‘breadth and depth’ than individual interviews. Participants in the group may provoke each other into stating points of view they may not have had done otherwise; they may work together to suggest new ideas, and they provide insights into why certain groups of people may share common beliefs, or indeed, why they may disagree. Lewis argues that in group interviews these tensions and similarities may come to the fore, quite possibly also articulated with attached reasons for participants’ views.

As a study that sought to understand religious adherents’ perspectives, and from my position as a religious believer investigating schooling and religious identity and construction, it was important a methodology was developed that was sympathetic to the concerns of religious adolescents. Interviews offer privileged insights into the lived experience of religious identity construction and development (Schachter, 2005; Good & Willoughby, 2007; Visser-Vogel et al., 2012), allowing for a greater understanding of the influence of individual agency and context upon identity development (Schachter, 2005; Hemming & Madge, 2011). Jacobson (1997) demonstrates this effectively in her interview-based study of Muslim adolescents: interpreting the perspectives of members of religious communities can give distinctive insights into the
construction of identity, and the wider structural factors that may influence identity processes.

An important component in developing a sympathetic research method for engaging with religious adolescents, inextricable from the study’s original aim, was to allow for an exploration for the significance of God in participants’ lives. Religious practice and experience is often thought of something set apart from the rest of human endeavour and behaviour (for example as in the thought of Otto (1958) and Eliade (1987)). As a *sui generis*, care is required when making a sociological analysis of religion, particularly as the social sciences developed in ideological opposition to it – often offering reductionist accounts that render God redundant (Bellah, 1970; Millbank, 2006). The research design and conceptual framework of religious identity construction of this study allowed for this by assuming that in interviews religious adolescents may be able to articulate their identification with, or rejection of, religious beliefs and practices, or group ties with members of religious or ethnic groups (Mol, 1976, 1979; Bailey, 2001).

My earlier study had demonstrated how interviews with religious adolescents could often become of a theological nature – engaging in what Astley (2002) refers to as ‘God-talk’ or ‘ordinary theology.’ The exploration of Christians, Jews and Muslims’ identity negotiations involved aspects of identity construction concerning participants’ relationships to God, or ‘the transcendent’ in terms of the incorporation of religious teachings as part of the way they interpreted reality (Jackson, 1999; Seul, 1999). In developing the methodology, I therefore drew inspiration from the tradition of ‘practical’ or ‘empirical theology’ (Browning, 1991; Cameron et al., 2005). Interviewing participants at places of worship was designed to, and became a way of,
sympathetically collecting and exploring the god-talk or ordinary theology of school-going Christians, Jews and Muslims.

A major difference between this project and the discipline of practical theology as advocated by Browning (1991) and Astley (2002) is that it involves the communities of non-Christian religions and minority denominations in the Christian tradition. I therefore developed a methodology that was applicable across religious traditions, but that drew on aspects of practical theology. I could not presume that all the participants’ utterances would constitute a form theological reflection, but I could not rule this out either. It was essential that a theologically exploratory method was created, rather than one which was constraining because it was based on static, stereotypical or orthodox theological positions, such as (interview) questions that characterise (or caricature) religious beliefs and practices (Chapter Two). It is for this reason that I used unstructured open prompts as the basis for interviews with all participants.

Bailey argues researchers of religion should avoid “‘stereotyped ‘interpretations’ of (projections onto) other people’s behaviour” (Bailey, 2001, p. 13). As part of a reflexive, inductive method I chose in-depth, loosely-structured interviews as the best way of sensitively negotiating these issues. Loosely structured interviews were suited to capturing the complexity of participants’ relationships to their own tradition, avoiding problems of reification of religions and the difference between individuals’ relationships to their traditions – issues that other educational researchers have also highlighted of religion (Jackson, 2004; Smith, 2005). As my goal was to explore the perceived relationship between participants’ religious identity and their experiences of school, the opportunity of discussing these issues with co-religious peers – who had similar backgrounds, but possibly contrasting perspectives – was again considered beneficial in understanding the perspectives of religious adherents.
Researching adolescent religious identity construction and negotiation in twenty-first century England can be considered as a ‘sensitive topic’ (Lee, 1993). The data generation process could be considered an ‘intrusive threat’ by participants because the project explores a ‘private, stressful or sacred’ area of life (Lee, 1993, p. 4). Participants may also have to divulge information that is not usually public or talk about issues that are emotional. At the time the fieldwork was conducted, religion was also a political issue at local, national and international levels and often featured in the news and popular media. The fieldwork took place, to use Lee’s terminology, in a ‘conflictual’ environment (Lee, 1993, p. 7). The project could be considered a ‘political threat’ (Lee, 1993, p. 5-7) because it may be perceived by participants (or community leaders) as producing findings that may favour one group or another – particularly by Muslim communities in the socio-political environment of the early twenty-first century (Gilliat-Ray, 2005).

Putting young people at ease in interviews was of primary importance in dealing with the sensitive topic of religion. I also chose group interviews as the initial form of data generation because they ‘make the interview situation less threatening for interviewees and thus encourage them to be more forthcoming’ (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p.111). However, the group interviews were not classic ‘focus groups’, such as those suggested by Krueger (1994): the questions and process of interviewing used in this study were not intended to be strictly pre-determined and logical in their approach. In addition, the group interviews were not conducted with strangers, or in a ‘neutral’ environment, but with participants who were, in most cases, already used to participating in group activities with each other in their places of worship. It is for this reason that I call the kind of interview conducted in this study ‘loosely structured group interviews’ rather than ‘focus groups.’
Morgan, Fellows and Guevara (2008) argue the case for a flexible, hybrid form of group interview. I drew upon some of these ideas, in particular their suggestion for an alternative, ‘emergent’ design that does not follow the traditional ‘design-collect-analyse’ paradigm. They argue that Krueger’s (1994) insistence upon prescribed questions and carefully planned sessions can be altered to allow for a more inductive approach: the analysis of one focus group can be used to inform the questions and general construction of the next. The advantage of conducting repeated interviews concurrent with other group interviews, at times across different religious traditions, meant that additional questions generated by one group interview could then be raised with others, contributing to the reliability of the findings. In this sense the ‘design-collect-analyse paradigm’ referred to by Morgan et al. was reconstructed both as ‘collect-analyse-design’ and ‘analyse-design-collect.’

A researcher may have less control over the group than an individual interview, and the data can be difficult to interpret because the participants’ utterances are often in reaction to other participants’ views (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Hammersely and Atkinson (2007) also note that the effectiveness of the group to relax participants depends on the group, and that group dynamics could lead to possible distortion. In a group with members of their religion, religious adolescents may also feel compelled to narrate their experiences in terms of common narratives drawn from the wider community (Peek, 2005). For these reasons, and also for the purpose of generating more in-depth data, in addition to the group interviews, I conducted secondary and tertiary individual or smaller group interviews, and on some occasions single interviews with one participant from the outset.

Individual interviews combined with group interviews have proven to be effective in researching religious minorities in politically sensitive contexts (Peek &
Fothergill, 2009). As the additional and follow-up interviews were conducted from between a week and two months from the initial group interviews, participants had also had time to reflect further on the issues raised – giving ‘participants time to react to information before meeting again’ (Morgan et al. 2008, p. 195). The follow-up interviews allowed for the corroboration and further exploration of accounts and perspectives they had already given in the group interview. For this reason they served the purpose of enhancing rich data generation and the reliability of the data generated.

The individual interviews were inspired by Douglas’ (1985) ‘creative’ loosely-structured interviews in similarly sensitive areas of social investigation, which allowed participants to explore sensitive and complex issues in their own time and at their own pace. Individual interviews also mitigated for the possible influence of ‘group think’ upon data generation where it was possible that individual views were suppressed in the group interviews.

**Purposeful sampling**

This study sought to pursue the research aim by exploring ‘information-rich cases’ of the phenomenon under scrutiny through a process of ‘purposeful sampling’ (Patton, 1990). Overall, the method of sampling is best understood as what Miles and Huberman (1994) refer to as ‘Multiple-case Sampling’ whereby a range of cases are examined and compared and further cases sought on the basis of the emerging theoretical model, not dissimilar to Yin’s (2009) notion of a replication strategy, or theoretical sampling common to a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1968).

The main criterion of the sampling procedure was that further exploration of cases is sought for conceptual clarification of findings in relation to the study’s research questions. The participants of this study were adolescents who attended a secondary school (five participants attended ‘sixth form’ at further education colleges) and who
attended a religious organisation or place of worship outside of school. Religious adherence and affiliation in terms of participation in community activities is considered as a proxy identifier of socialization according to, the values, norms and beliefs of a religious tradition at home and within a religious community. Religious organisations, for the purposes of this study, are defined as places of worship or supplementary educational provision affiliated officially or unofficially to a religious body, hierarchy, community or tradition.

Recruiting at, and sampling participants according to, places of worship rather than according to school (as the majority of other studies in this area have done, e.g. Ipgrave, 1999; Ipgrave & McKenna, 2008; Hassan, 2010) enabled me to explore the concerns of members of specific religious traditions and denominations. As fieldwork sites, I selected places of worship belonging to denominations of the three principal Abrahamic religions: Christianity, Judaism and Islam. I chose these religious traditions as they share some common characteristics, such as monotheism and a basis in the revelation of scripture, and because adherents of these religious traditions also have some distinguishing and distinct challenges in contemporary English society, relating to their statuses as traditional, new or historical minorities (which are also likely to have a considerable bearing on the construction and negotiation of adolescents’ religious identities in secondary schools – as suggested by the overview or relevant literature in Chapter Three).

Using places of worship as fieldwork sites aided purposeful sampling. Interviewing at places of worship enabled me to identify religious adolescents who practised regularly and belonged to particular denominations. The location of fieldwork sites also made it possible in some cases to select participants according to the kinds of schools they attended, given a consideration of the schools available in the geographical
area in which the place of worship was located. This became important as I began to 
examine reported experiences in terms of the border crossings between home worlds 
and those of different kinds of secondary schools.

The procedure of interviewing at places of worship enabled me to locate young 
people who had some degree of religious affiliation, association and practice. This 
follows a similar definition of ‘religious’ as Rymarz and Graham’s (2006) study of 
‘core Catholic youth’ – who were identified by their Church attendance. This method of 
sampling does not mean that assumptions prior to the interviews could be made about 
the intensity of the religious beliefs of participants, however. Researchers have used 
measures of religiosity in order to identify ‘religious’ adolescents when sampling. For 
example, Visser-Vogel et al. (2012) developed a framework for highly committed 
religious young people by ignoring liberal adherents and concentrating upon Christians 
and Muslims who believe scripture to be inerrant and exclusive; religion to be the 
proper end for all human activity; and, who are critical towards mainstream society. 
Using such criteria, however, is not sensitive to establishing how religious identities 
may be constructed and negotiated as part of a dynamic or performed social process in 
different contexts. For example, Jacobson (1997) found ‘less’ religious Muslims 
adolescents used ‘minimal gestures’, such as avoiding alcohol or occasionally attending 
mosques in order to maintain group ties and boundaries (Jacobson, 1997, p. 249). 
Criteria based upon attitude or assent to measures of theological orthodoxy are 
therefore not used in this study to demarcate the sample of participants.

To go about selecting the sample, collecting and interpreting the data, it was 
important to ‘define the case’ in terms of what was the focus of the investigation and its 
corresponding units of analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). One important ‘unit’ is the 
individual religious adherent interviewed, yet beneath this level are the experiences,
perspectives and incidents reported by the participants. In addition to these, above the level of the case of the individual participant, was the religious community of which the individual participants were part. An added complexity across these levels of analysis was the religious affiliation of the school attended in relation to the religion of the participants. These different ‘levels’ were explored in conjunction (taking the kind of school into consideration), and the emerging data generated from them – between and across their levels of enquiry – were judged against each other as part of the construction of an emerging theory.

Once I had interviewed a number of groups and individuals at one site, I would move on to another site selected for its religious affiliation, and the kinds of schools attended by religious adolescents at that site, in order to ‘confirm and disconfirm cases’ as part of a ‘theory-based’ sampling procedure (Patton, 1990; Miles and Huberman, 1994). For example, having discovered certain patterns and commonalities in events and perspectives reported by Jewish participants in different school types, I then sought to see if these cases were similar to those reported by other Jewish participants at those kinds of schools, in other sites – the sample becoming ‘representative of the phenomenon of interest’ (Patton, 1990, p. 177). I would therefore take a sample of young people according to religious affiliation and school attended and approach a new site accordingly in order to procure that sample.

Interpreting identity negotiations and constructions

The Students Multiple Worlds Framework and the concepts of religious identity negotiation and construction played a key role in the interpretation of the interview data and its presentation in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight of this thesis. However, I did not set out to conduct this study with a well-developed, pre-existing theoretical framework,
favouring an initial inductive approach that grounded findings in the data generated
(Glasser & Strauss, 1969; Charmaz, 2005, 2008; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2008).

Emphasis was first placed on a ‘bottom-up’ approach of analysis according to
tradition and research site. After patterns and themes in reported experiences had been
derived and compared with other sites and the data as a whole, a theoretical model of
religious identity negotiation and construction in classroom and peer worlds was
applied in the form of the research questions, and further tested as part of the inductive
and iterative process of data interpretation and generation. Insights from research
literature using similar concepts then also further informed the data interpretation and
presentation (Stritikus & Nguyen, 2007).

Interpretation first began as part of the data generation process. Consensus
opinion in group interviews and common themes between different groups were
observed and noted. Early on in the data collection and analysis it became clear there
were some commonalities between the reported experiences of Christians, Jews and
Muslims in these contexts – such as reported prejudice and identity ascription. Yet
within this unity of common experiences that transcended religious denominations,
there were contrasts and distinctions to be made that were related to specific features of
the separate religious traditions, their denominations, and the reported border crossings
of participants attending different kinds of school.

As part of the process of data interpretation I was continually assessing,
corroborating and re-formulating tentative findings in response to the articulations of
the participants to create an ‘emergent design’ (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2008). This
involved transcription and partial transcription of the audio recordings, and referring
back to notes made during the interviews and coding significant themes in the data with
a focus on refining and answering the research questions. A system of storing data was
established whereby the electronic audio files, field notes, transcriptions and memos were kept together in an easily accessible format. At first, I originally used a popular qualitative data analysis software programme, but I found that this was incompatible with a foot pedal necessary for transcription and easy negotiation of audio files. I therefore contrived a system of folders, audio files in the programme ExpressScribe and documents in MicrosoftWord, so that using a system of highlighting and search functions I could perform the same tasks in conjunction with a foot pedal. In this way data could then be accessed, examined or checked as necessary at all stages of the analysis. An example of a group interview transcript and an individual interview transcript are given in Appendix 1 (p. 277) and Appendix 2 (p. 301).

After it became apparent from my on-going records of key themes and issues of concern that saturation of themes across sites was being achieved (Glaser & Strauss, 1968), I terminated data generation and began a more detailed and summative analysis of the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). More analyses were undertaken by re-coding the interview transcripts. The process of coding was guided by the research literature, the emerging conceptual framework and the research questions. This analysis followed Huberman and Miles’ three stage iterative process, consisting of: ‘data reduction’, ‘data display’ and ‘conclusion drawing’ (Huberman & Miles, 1994, p. 429). This procedure was on-going and cyclical. The first stage of the analysis conducted consisted of a collation and overview of the participants’ reported experiences (Vaughn et al., 1996). For the data reduction, therefore, I began with ‘open’ coding, annotating completed or partial transcripts, or creating memos or notes attached to audio files with the ‘units’ of data. This is similar to what Vaughn et al. (1996) describe as ‘unitizing’ the data. In this stage of analysis, reported experiences were considered the basic ‘units’ of the data, which were characterized as the ‘smallest amount of information that is informative by
itself’ (Vaughn et al. 1996, p. 106). The grouping of these units led to the creation of thematic categories. This data reduction strategy made a survey of the entire data manageable. The third stage of the analysis, ‘Conclusion drawing’ consisted of comparing and contrasting examples and observing and recording ‘patterns and themes’ in the coded incidents and perspectives across individuals’ interview data, and looking for negative evidence.

The strategy of cross-analysis between individual participants and individual research sites can be best understood as what Huberman and Miles identify as a ‘Cross-case analysis’ as it is concerned with ‘multiple actors in multiple settings’ (1994, p. 435). At one level, the individual ‘case’ is the individual religious participant. In this way, the group interviews were a form of cross-case investigation as participants themselves would note differences and observe similarities between themselves. These perspectives were then further explored in the individual interviews conducted on different occasions. But on another level, each fieldwork site became, what Huberman and Miles consider, a ‘molar unit’ – another case, a collection of individuals with at least one shared characteristic, their religious affiliation by denomination. The analysis followed an examination of individual participants, across all individuals, and also between groups of individuals according to religious denomination, religious tradition and kind of school attended.

The interview data used in this study was therefore conceived as consisting of different levels of analysis: that of the individual participant, religious denomination (indicated by participants’ reported religious affiliation and the religious community they were interviewed in), the wider religious tradition of that denomination (Christianity, Judaism or Islam), and the participants of the study as a whole, considered as a heterogeneous group of adolescent religious adherents. Across these
levels of analysis, another important variable taken into account was the religious character of the school attended by participants in relations to their religious tradition.

The method of data interpretation and generation can be seen to represent what Huberman and Miles identify as ‘Case orientated strategies’, methods of analysis and design that construct an emerging theory inductively, while testing and revising it in accordance with comparisons with multiple cases. In the later stages, this analysis became the joining of themes across cases and sites to become ‘pattern clarification’ (Huberman & Miles, 1994, p. 436). Finally, the Students Multiple Worlds Framework and the concepts of religious identity and border crossing that I developed to interpret the data in conjunction with relevant literature were applied and used to interpret individuals’ reported experiences across all the interviews in which they took part.

In order not to lose the detailed personal stories captured by the in-depth interview methods, having discerned the main themes of reported experiences, and how school type was related to these, I sought exemplary illustrations of the kinds of experience. These were checked carefully with other units of data for their representativeness and clarity. As part of preparing the data display for Chapters Five, Six and Seven, I used direct quotations from transcripts derived from this process to “provide evidence for the themes and at the same time … evoke the interviewees’ world accurately and vividly” (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 271).

The credibility of the interview data
The interview data generated in this study consist of identity negotiations and constructions. In the interviews, while recounting their experiences of schools, religious adolescents were also embarking on the task of constructing and negotiating their religious identities, either individually or collaboratively, in a process of sense-making and selective representation of their reported experiences. It is for this reason
researchers use the nouns ‘negotiations’ and ‘constructions’ to refer to interview data concerning participants’ articulations and perspectives on identity processes (e.g. Kibria, 2000; Archer, 2003; Awokoya, 2012; Archer, 2012).

Peek (2005) chose to conduct focus groups and individual interviews in Muslim student associations in American college campuses. As I did, Peek believed religious organisations were safe and appropriate places for adolescents to discuss religious beliefs and experiences relating to their religious identity. But during her study, Peek (2005) observed that through formal learning and peer interactions in student religious associations, adolescent members of religious organisations learnt ‘common narratives’ and ‘appropriate’ verbal accounts (Beckford, 1978). I do not deny that participants’ contribution to group (or individual) interviews in this study may be influenced by identification or affinity with co-participants and adult members of the same religious community in the contexts of their places of worship, but as the focus of the study is concerned with adolescents in their capacity as members or affiliates of religious traditions and communities, the interpretation of the identity negotiations and constructions of participants generated in this manner is appropriate to the aims of the study.

The present study, in one sense, is a study of the common narratives of the schooling experiences of religious adolescents – ways of perceiving and reporting schooling experiences as religious adherents from the perspectives of members of particular religious traditions. It was as members of these communities and adherents to their respective religious traditions that I sought to explore participants’ experiences of school. However, the process of identity negotiation could be seen as a confounding factor in the generation of data, particularly because of the effect of the interviewer on participants’ contributions. Participants may construct their religious identity in
negotiation to the identities ascribed to them by the interviewer. Given the tense contexts in which the research took place, my identity (and my assumptions of others’ religious identities) as a white, male, Catholic Christian may have inhibited or provoked particular identity negotiations. It is for this reason multiple interviews were conducted within and across religious communities with minimal prompts, and the interview data were conceived and interpreted as a ‘negotiated text’ (Fontana & Frey, 2000) co-generated and co-constructed by participants with a religiously motivated researcher – albeit a reflective one.

A limitation of the study is that the research design uses what Hammersley (1998) dubs as ‘informants’ accounts’ – the reported experiences of religious adolescents of otherwise unobserved social interactions. Hammersley argues that if we wish to use informants’ accounts in such a way, then respondents become ‘surrogate’ researchers themselves. Using students’ perceptions of their experiences as a method of evaluating or ‘proving’ the existence of phenomena in the education system, such as prejudice and discrimination, is problematic. However, Hammersley also suggests that there is a second use of such evidence. Informant accounts can be seen as a window into respondents’ own ‘subjective orientations’: we can use them to ‘understand people’s own rationales for why they think and behave the way that they do’ (1998, p. 24).

Hammersley’s comments are relevant to a study that aims to explore the schooling experience of religious adolescents through their own perceptions. Importantly, we should note that a research design that uses interviews, and no other form of data collection, cannot claim to uncover anything more than students’ constructions of their experiences. However, while granting this concession, we should not devalue the importance of student perceptions in regard to the study’s research aim.
Indeed, Hammersley does not consider ‘the selection of research projects ... in accordance with the interest of a particular interest group’ (2002, p. 33) as conflicting with his view of ‘value neutrality’. He merely maintains that social research, although guided by practical needs and values, must focus on ‘factual investigation’: a researcher has a duty not to distort or influence this factual process because of political motivations. As this study is concerned with identity negotiation and construction, while noting that reported experiences do not constitute ‘neutral’ data, and that in this study they are corroborated with researcher’s observation, interview data is considered the most relevant kind of data in exploring how religious adolescents’ negotiate the borders of school worlds. Furthermore, as the design emerged, given the congruence of the informants’ accounts with research literature, it was not deemed necessary to use another data source.

Miles and Huberman (1994) give a number of ‘queries’ by which qualitative researchers can assess the worth of their findings. In terms of the ‘objectivity’ or ‘confirmability’ of the findings, the present description of the methods of data generation and interpretation utilised in the study are transparent and well documented, along with due credence to reflexivity – the context and background of the researcher, the aims of the study, and how these may have impacted upon the data collection are explicitly stated (Hammersely & Atkinson, 2007). The appendices provide an overview and details of all the data used in the study – allowing for an ‘audit trail’ (Schwandt & Halpern, 1988).

The ‘reliability’, ‘dependability’ or ‘auditability’ of the study is also congruent with Miles and Huberman’s stipulations: the research questions are ‘clear’ and fit with the aims of the study and the methods of data collection (partly because they were developed in conjunction with participants’ concerns); the findings demonstrate
‘meaning parallelism across the data sources’ (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 278). The process of data interpretation is coherent with the nature of the findings and research arena, and is well defined and demonstrated (Glaser & Strauss, 1968; Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

The study also satisfies a number of the criteria for ‘internal validity’, ‘credibility’ or ‘authenticity.’ Negative evidence was searched for and evaluated in the data analysis; ‘respondent validation’ in the form of follow-up interviews enabled emerging theories and themes to be further explored and judged against participants’ own views (Lincoln & Guba, 1985); and the findings have conceptual coherence, unity and cogency – they “‘ring true’, make sense, seem convincing ... and enable a ‘vicarious presence’ for the reader” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 279).

The cross-site and cross-case character of the study also aids its credibility. In many group interviews, the participants came from different schools and therefore represented single cases involved in dialogue, often resulting in consensus. These data were then brought together in cross-site analyses. Group interviews with young people also arguably enhance reliability and validity because they are more likely to be at ease in a group with their peers than in a formal one-to-one interview (Lewis, 1992).

The methods and findings fulfil a number of Miles and Huberman’s queries in terms of the ‘external validity’, ‘transferability’ or ‘fittingness.’ The nature of the phenomena explored is also relevant to this assumption of transferability. School worlds have many normative characteristics and are bound to statutory requirements and curricula that also have standardised values and expectations. Places of worship belonging to particular denominations also adhere to discernible historic traditions, doctrines, authority structures, practices, norms and beliefs. The findings therefore relate to a transferable theory generated from, and tested in, several different, unrelated
contexts. This was aided by the method of sampling (Patton, 1990). Enquiry across multiple ‘settings’ and ‘actors’ enhances generalizability because ‘the key processes, constructs, and explanations … can be considered a replication of the process or questions under study’ and therefore contribute to the understanding of the ‘generic processes’ at work (Huberman & Miles, 1994, p. 435).

The perspectives and attitudes of religious adolescents are also often considered to follow trends structurally related to political world events and historic forms of prejudice (e.g. Jacobson, 1997; Peek, 2005). The study aimed to explore some of these relationships, and the causal connections between them. Given these connections, it is conceivable that these relationships between phenomena exist elsewhere. It is on this premise that the seeking of structures and patterns within the data is presumed legitimate in creating a transferable theoretical model, particularly as the conclusions are ‘generic enough’ to be apply to different situations (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 279). This is not to say that the findings can be generalised to further cases beyond the sample with any calculated degree of confidence. The interview data generated only provide examples of reported phenomena, not the extent to which they may take place. However, derived from these reported experiences, the analysis renders a coherent emergent theoretical model which can be seen as an exploratory theory, ready to be compared with further cases (Glaser & Strauss, 1968; Yin, 2009).

**Conclusion**

This study was designed to be sensitive and sympathetic to the worldviews and perspectives of adolescent religious adherents. In addition to the problems associated with the understanding of any sensitive topic, and aside from the political issues surrounding the Abrahamic religions in early twenty-first century England, the design
had to capture theological nuances in adolescents’ identity negotiations and constructions.

The research design, a series of loosely structured group, and pair and individual interviews conducted in participants’ places of worship, and the conceptual framework used to interpret the data generated by it, were developed as fieldwork and interpretation took place. This emergent design allowed for the depth needed for participants to comfortably talk about religion, and breadth to pursue important concerns and themes with participants across a range of religious denominations and school types. Due to its open and emergent characteristics the research design allowed the exploration of concerns of religious adolescents that may have otherwise gone unexamined using other methods.

The study was inductive in nature but as the research design emerged a conceptual framework and research questions based upon it were applied in an iterative fashion. As preliminary themes in the findings emerged, it was apparent that the informants’ accounts given in loosely structured interviews provided valuable insights into the experiences and perspectives of religious adolescents and the negotiation and construction of their religious identities in secondary schools. Consequently, the Students Multiple Worlds Framework and the concept of religious identity became powerful ways of theorising religious adolescents’ reported schooling experiences.

Engaging religious adolescents in multiple group and individual interviews at sites where participants all shared the same denominational affiliation, but often attended different schools, aided the reliability of the emerging theory: the ‘case’ of the individual often related to a different school or educational context, so common themes in experience were thus drawn from a wider field than of a study of one or two schools. The themes and patterns in the data are considered as reliable and transferable in that
they contributed to an explanatory theory that could account for all the data. The theoretical model generated by the investigation is therefore available for further testing against more cases (Yin, 2009).
Chapter Five

Conducting the fieldwork

Introduction

In the previous chapter I gave a clear justification for why I chose an emergent design, based upon multiple loosely-structured interviews with religious adolescents at their places of worship. In this chapter I describe in more detail how this design was implemented practically and my researcher experiences engaging with religious communities and adolescents. I give an overview of the fieldwork sites, the participants I recruited, and the duration and nature of the interviews that took place at each fieldwork site. I then go onto explain how access was gained to the religious communities, how the interviews were conducted, and how ethical concerns were addressed as the fieldwork progressed.

Sociologists of religion have argued that experiences of researchers gained during fieldwork in religious communities can constitute a valuable form of supplementary data. Peek and Fothergill (2009) argue that conducting focus groups with minority religious participants can enable observations to be made aside from the interview data, as well as forging friendships that enable greater understanding of religious communities through informal social opportunities. When interviewing young Muslims in New York following the events of September 11th 2001, Peek found that she was invited to several dinners and to attend prayers in a Mosque. She considered these similar to researcher experiences described by Warner (1997). Experiences of sharing food, ritual and prayer in religious communities as corollary activities other than formal research while conducting fieldwork led Warner to develop a theory of
‘bridging’ – that sharing food and ritual act as much needed bridges across religious boundaries in a plural society.

In describing the fieldwork sites and my experiences during the processes of accessing and interviewing, this chapter aids this study’s transparency by explaining how the fieldwork was implemented. It also documents some relevant and pertinent researcher experiences gained during the research process. In addition to the findings chapters, these researcher experiences shed light upon significant social and political issues relevant to the study’s broad aim. The significance of some of these experiences is later referred to in Chapter Nine in relation to the study’s findings.

**Selecting the fieldwork sites**

Fieldwork took place in three English cities: Southville, Westville, and Eastville. These pseudonyms are used to protect the anonymity of religious communities where the interviews took place, and the anonymity of the participating religious adolescents, religious communities’ gate-keepers, the sponsors that enabled fieldwork access, the secondary schools participants attended, and the teachers who worked in them. The cities cannot be named given the easy identification of minority communities in any given city, and the sensitivities surrounding the research topic. For example, there are only eleven Ahmadiyya Mission Houses in England and never two in the same geographical area (Ahmadiyya Community, 2013).

The research was particularly sensitive in light of potential religious and ethnic tension and religious persecution – between ethnic groups divided on religious lines (Home Office, 2001), between different Muslim organisations (Ensor, 2007), between Jewish communities and other religious groups (CST, 2012) and due to counter-terrorism surveillance (HM Government, 2009). A high level of anonymity was (and continues to be) essential in maintaining research ethics and protecting participants’
identities. Participants’ pseudonyms have been selected in order to reflect the religious identities associated with their real names, i.e. Jews with Jewish names have retained Jewish pseudonyms; Christians, Christian pseudonyms; and Muslims likewise.

Southville and Eastville are cities in the south of England; Westville is located in the Midlands. (In addition to these three cities, fieldwork was also conducted at a Jewish youth event which was attended by adolescent Jews who lived and attended schools all over the country.) The cities were chosen because of the population of religious communities, including traditional and historical minorities. Southville has a relatively large proportion of Churches with thriving communities; Eastville, a minority population of Jews; and Westville, a large population of Muslims. Overall, Muslims and Jews were interviewed who attended schools across more than one geographical area; Christians interviewed attended schools solely in Southville and its suburban and rural environs.

The sections below describe the locations and characteristics of the fieldwork sites and the participants recruited and interviewed at them, including the kinds of schools attended. The proportion of school-peers of the same religion was reported as an important factor in determining schooling experiences by participants. As geographical location of schools is an important factor in the distribution of religious groups within them, where appropriate and without breaching anonymity, this is noted below and in the findings chapters in order to aid the transparency of the study.

**Christian fieldwork sites**

For the purposes of this study, Christian communities are those that regard themselves as in the Christian tradition – although some of the traditions have specific denominational characteristics and identities, and are considered heterodox by other groups (in particular, Mormons and Quakers who do not subscribe to the doctrine of the
Fieldwork was conducted with forty-six Christian participants (Appendix 3, p. 310) at mainstream Christian churches in and around Southville. These are given the following pseudonyms: St Mary’s Roman Catholic Church, St Luke’s Church of England Church, and Northstreet Baptist Church. In addition to these sites, fieldwork was also conducted at Southville Mormon Chapel and Southville Quaker Meeting House. The Mormon Chapel was chosen as an example of a new religious movement in the Christian tradition as Mormonism bases its teaching on new revelation (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1930/1981). The Society of Friends was chosen as an example of a historical dissenting minority.

Group interviews conducted with Catholic, Anglican, Baptist and Quaker adolescents consisted of a mixture of participants who attended schools with a Church affiliation and those who did not (Mormon participants only attended religiously unaffiliated schools). In group interviews with those who attended different school types, participants’ perspectives created a discussion that encouraged participants to share diverse and common experiences, often giving greater depth and explanation (Lewis 1992; Peek & Fothergill 2009). In the cases of Christians who attended comprehensive schools, community schools, and academies on one hand, and their counter-parts who attended Church and Church-affiliated independent schools, on the other, however, there was often a high degree of consensus in group interviews, and similarities between individual’s reported experiences – regardless of school type, particular in the reported experiences of peer-worlds.

St Mary’s Catholic Church

St Mary’s Catholic Church is located in a suburb of Southville. Eight interviews were conducted between November 7th 2010 and 20th February 2011 with ten participants (three males and seven females; see Appendix 3, p. 310). These comprised of three
group interviews between 41 and 24 minutes in duration, and five individual interviews (conducted with members of earlier group interviews) lasting between 19 and 9 minutes. Two participants were only interviewed once in a group interview, but other participants were interviewed on one or two separate occasions either as part of a group or as a group and individually. Interviews took place in the parish hall directly after Sunday Mass when the congregation had coffee and biscuits. Three Catholic participants attended comprehensive or Community Schools not of a religious character or foundation in an urban area; four attended a voluntary aided Catholic comprehensive school which admitted a large proportion of non-Catholic students. Three participants attended Anglican foundation independent schools. One group interview was conducted solely with participants who attended a voluntary-aided Catholic school.

All of the participants had at least one parent or older family member who attended the Church and all participated in Mass before the interviews. During the fieldwork period I attended Mass at the church eleven times, to conduct interviews and also to introduce myself and gain consent from participants and their parents. One difference in conducting these interviews than those at other sites was that during the Mass participants may have been aware that I received communion, although my own religious perspectives were not later referred to in conversation with participants and parents or in the interviews. Up to three interviews with the same participants were conducted in order to counteract researcher bias and I was careful not to suggest or direct discussion in any way differently to a non-Catholic research site.

Northstreet Baptist Church

Northstreet Baptist Church is an evangelical church, affiliated to the Baptist Union of Great Britain and a member of the Evangelical Alliance. It is situated in a suburb of Southville. I conducted fieldwork at this site between November 14th 2010 and January
28th 2011. A total of 11 participants took part, six of whom were interviewed on more than one occasion (see Appendix 3, p. 310). Eight participants attended religiously unaffiliated comprehensive or Community Schools, two attended independent schools with Anglican foundations, and one participant attended a further education college. Three group interviews were conducted on Sunday mornings alongside the main Sunday service. Seven additional individual interviews were conducted on a weekday evening during a youth club with the same participants. Group interviews lasted between 54 minutes and 40 minutes; individual interviews between 20 and 7 minutes. These follow-up individual interviews were short because activities taking place at the youth club meant there was limited time to conduct interviews. Group interviews contained participants who attended a range of school types. Most participants had one or more parent who attended the church. As with St Mary’s Church, I attended the service and joined in with youth activities at the youth club both before conducting interviews and when I visited to conduct interviews. However, none of these activities necessitated or resulted in revealing or discussing my denominational affiliation.

St Luke’s Anglican Church

St Luke’s Church is a Church of England parish church in the charismatic tradition located in the centre of Southville. Participants identified with evangelical Christianity with a charismatic worship style. Three interviews were conducted here between 12th February and 19th March 2011. Unlike other churches, interviews and recruitment took place solely at the Church’s youth club. For this reason I did not meet many of the participants’ parents and gained written consent only through letters sent via participants. Four female participants took part in two group interviews, and one stand-alone interview was conducted with a male participant (Appendix 3, p. 310). These interviews were between 70 to 48 minutes in duration. Three participants attended
Anglican state-funded schools in rural areas, one an urban voluntary aided Catholic school, and one a suburban comprehensive school.

*Southville Mormon Chapel*

Eight interviews were conducted with 16 adolescent members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints at Southville Mormon Chapel between March and May 2011. Two of these interviews were group interviews between 33 and 30 minutes in duration with 6-7 participants. On two further occasions, five pair interviews were conducted between 29 and 11 minutes in duration with the same participants (and one newcomer). Mormon participants attended rural and urban community or comprehensive schools with no religious affiliation, one attending a further education college (Appendix 3, p. 310). All participants had one or more parent who attended the chapel regularly. The interviews were conducted at Mormon youth meetings during the weekday evenings. These meetings included various activities and always began with prayers led by the participants, and sometimes included hymn singing. In these situations I joined in with the congregation, such as standing during hymns and responding ‘Amen’ when appropriate.

*Southville Quaker Meeting House*

One group interview was conducted at Southville Religious Society of Friends (Quaker) Meeting House in May 2011. Three participants attended urban comprehensive schools, the other an Anglican independent school (Appendix 3, p. 310). The interview took place in the Meeting House after the Sunday Meeting and lasted 38 minutes. Prior to conducting the interview I also attended the Sunday Meeting. Further interviews were not conducted at this site because of the saturation of themes in this interview with those conducted with other Christian participants.
Jewish fieldwork sites

Interviews with thirty-eight Jewish participants (Appendix 4, p. 312) were conducted at three sites: a national Jewish youth event, ‘Countrywide Jewish Youth Club’, and a Liberal and Reform Synagogue in Eastville. The cross-community event was selected because I could not gain access into an Orthodox synagogue. At the cross-community event the majority of participants identified as Orthodox with varying degrees of religiosity – although it is unlikely that adolescents from strict Orthodox families attended this event (further information cannot be supplied for this reasoning without breaching anonymity). Eastville Liberal and Reform Synagogues were selected for denominational affiliation and in geographical areas so as to achieve a mix of participants who attended Jewish and non-Jewish schools.

Ten participants interviewed at Countrywide Jewish Youth Club and Eastville Liberal Synagogue attended voluntary aided Jewish secondary schools. Exploring the religious identity construction and negotiation of Jewish adolescents in voluntary-aided Jewish schools was not an original research aim, but as the fieldwork and data analysis progressed, it became obvious that there were marked differences between the reported experiences of participants who attended Jewish schools from their group interview counter-parts who attended non-Jewish schools. The exploration of the reported experiences of Jewish adolescents in Jewish schools, however, provided an illuminating example of the reported experiences of adolescents that attended exclusive faith schools. It provided a contrast to the experiences of Jewish adolescents in non-Jewish schools and Christians in Christian schools while also providing useful data concerning the processes and nature of religious identity negotiation and construction. Of the four Jewish schools attended by participants, two are ‘mainstream’ Orthodox, the other ‘strict’ Orthodox (Jewish Leadership Council, 2008). Researcher participation at the
Jewish sites revolved around sharing food, coffee and conversation rather than in religious ceremonies, but this was often sufficient in signalling openness to informal conversations with parents of participants and other members of the congregation.

Countrywide Jewish Youth Club

Eight interviews were conducted at the Countrywide Jewish Youth Club on two days in 2010 (exact dates cannot be given for reasons of anonymity). These comprised of two group interviews of 27 minutes, three interviews with three participants between one hour and ten minutes and 36 minutes, one pair interview of 42 minutes, and two individual interviews of 30 and 46 minutes respectively. Participants attended a range of secondary schools and stated varying degrees of religiosity and different denominational affiliations. Six attended voluntary-aided Jewish schools, eight attended state-funded schools (including one voluntary-aided Anglican school), and two attended independent schools (Appendix 4, p. 312). While the majority of the interview data were generated in mixed interviews with Jewish adolescents who attended Jewish and non-Jewish schools, one triple interview was conducted with participants that solely attended Jewish schools.

Eastville Reform Synagogue

Interviews took place in Eastville Reform Synagogue during Cheder classes on a Sunday. The participants of Eastville Reform Synagogue Cheder can be split into two pools: a group of ten Year 8 students aged either 12 or 13 attending a Bar Mitzvah and Bat Mitzvah preparation course, and another group of five older Cheder attendees who were studying for a Jewish Studies qualification (in total 8 female, 7 male; see Appendix 4, p. 312). Six interviews were conducted between February and May 2011: one hour-long group interview as part of the Cheder class for Bar Mitzvah and Bat Mitzvah preparation, three pair or triple interviews with members of this group.
conducted at a later date (18 to 25 minutes), and a pair (32 minutes) and triple (14 minutes) interview conducted with older participants. All participants attended independent schools, the majority of these being single-sex and four having Anglican foundations. Participants regularly attended the Synagogue along with one or more of their parents and self-identified as Reform Jews.

Eastville Liberal Synagogue

In May 2011, I conducted one hour-long group interview at Eastville Liberal synagogue Cheder with six participants (four female, two male; see Appendix 4, p. 312). These participants were regular attendees and strongly identified with Liberal Judaism. Three attended a mainstream Orthodox Jewish school and three attended community Schools. Like Southville Quaker Meeting House, further interviews were not conducted at this site because of the saturation of themes in this interview, in comparison with those conducted with other Jewish participants, taking into consideration the denominational affiliation as a minority within contemporary English Judaism.

Muslim fieldwork sites

Interviews with Muslim participants were conducted between December 2010 and March 2011. I conducted seven group interviews, one pair and one individual interview at two community centres in Westville with (Sunni) Muslim participants, and one group, one pair and one individual interview with Ahmadiyya participants at a Mission House in Southville. The Ahmadiyya Mission House was selected because Ahmadiyya Islam can be classified as a new religious movement because it is based upon new revelation (Ahmad, 1896/1979).

All Muslim participants attended state-maintained schools of a non-religious character in urban areas. Participants interviewed at the community centres in Westville believed Islam to be one religion and did not acknowledge, or were not
aware of, any denominational division other than Sunni and Shia. Male Sunni participants reported practising Salah inside and outside of school every day, or at least on Fridays (at the Masjid, interviews were arranged around Maghrib [evening] prayer which all participants took part). The participants also reported observing the Ramadan fast. Some also attended lessons of Qur’anic study outside of school, either concurrent with the fieldwork or when they were younger. The Ahmadiyya participants attended instruction at Southville Mission House also attended by members of their families.

**Westville Sunni Masjid**

Westville Sunni Masjid was situated in an urban area with well-documented incidents of ethnic and religious tension. Gaining access was particularly problematic and the first interview was unrecorded. After the success of this interview, however, I was able to conduct one further audio recorded group interview (47 minutes) and an individual interview (22 minutes). Participants were male and were second or third generation immigrants from Pakistan and Somalia (Appendix 5, p. 314).

**Westville Muslim Women’s Community Centre**

Westville Muslim Women’s Community Centre was selected because it had not been possible to gain access to interview girls at Westville Masjid or Southville Ahmadiyya Mission House. It was located in an area of Westville with a high proportion of Muslim residents. The community centre was unaffiliated to a Masjid, and catered largely for Muslim women. The organiser of the centre facilitated recruiting three girls who attended secondary schools and also four adolescent boys who lived nearby. Participants (Appendix 5, p. 314) interviewed self-identified as Pakistani or Asian Muslims. The female participants attended a non-religiously affiliated urban comprehensive girls’ school with a mix of ethnic and religious groups, and a large proportion of Asian or Muslim peers. All girls identified as ‘Muslim.’ But two of the
girls, Yasmeen and Fatima, did not consider themselves particularly religious: Yasmeen did not wear hijab or pray; Fatima wore hijab at Ramadan, but said she did not pray. Khadija had stronger religious views and wore hijab more frequently, but not all of the time. Male participants reported attending the local Masjid, praying and observing the Ramadan fast. In duration, interviews at this site lasted between one hour and five minutes, and 38 minutes, and comprised of two or more participants.

Southville Ahmadiyya Mission House

The Ahmadiyya participants (Appendix 5, p. 314) were interviewed in the prayer room at an Ahmadiyya Mission House. The interviews were arranged by the Ahmadiyya Missionary (a representative who runs the Mission House) and the participants were regular attendees where they attended prayers and received religious instruction. The distinctiveness of the Ahmadiyya tradition was noted by Ahmadiyya participants who self-identified as Ahmadi, Muslim and Asian. The participants attended religiously unaffiliated comprehensive schools and an academy in urban areas. Two group interviews and one individual interview were conducted each lasting around 45 minutes.

Accessing religious communities

One of the most important aspects of the research design was the capturing of privileged data – the informant accounts of religious believers given in a context sympathetic to their religiosity. For the study to be successful it was crucial that I gained both ‘physical’ access – entering the organisation, explaining the research and recruiting volunteers to take part, and ‘social access’ – closing the gap between researcher and researched sufficiently for an open exchange of perspectives and information (Lee, 1993, p. 133).
Researcher experiences of gaining access may also reveal useful information relevant to research aims. For example, Gilliat-Ray (2005) describes problems with access to Muslim communities and argues that the impossibility of researching Deobandi dar ul-uloom (seminaries) constituted valuable data in itself. She argues, following Geaves (1996), that the Deobandi tradition – one of the traditions whose organisations I also attempted to gain access to – was formed in colonial India in the context of political oppression and has therefore always been in opposition to British political power, and any external influence, engagement or investigation. She cites a number of examples of failed access to these institutions in Britain and argues that the detention and investigation of clerics associated with these seminaries since September 11th has impacted negatively on relations with outsiders: the term ‘research’ itself could be construed as ‘investigation’ the association with Universities also being interpreted as working for the Government. She also argues that the tradition of the social sciences is ‘anathema’ (2005, p. 17) to the traditions of scholarship practised by such communities.

As required by my sampling criteria and chosen method of data generation, I sought to gain access to school-going Christians, Muslims and Jews through their places of worship. Volunteer or professional youth workers and religious ministers were the ‘gatekeepers’ for access to the religious communities where I conducted the research. Negotiation of access was a lengthy process that involved formal meetings, informal meetings, lunches, coffees, ice creams as well as phone calls, emails and other ‘exchanges’ to build trust (Lee, 1993). For five of the sites where interviews were conducted, I approached gatekeepers through one or more ‘sponsors’ to the research – third parties that could vouch for my credentials and who had an association with the research sites (Lee, 1993).
I successfully completed research at four Christian sites. I initially approached four others, but after initial face-to-face meetings with youth workers at three of those, my calls were not returned. Of the successful sites, I made contact with the Baptist and Catholic Church groups through a youth work organisation. I was referred to this organisation by a youth worker through whom I had conducted prior research and with whom I had stayed in contact. (I did not conduct research at the same sites as I had previously, however). This ‘exchange’ was facilitated by my association with C.S. Lewis’ former residence in Oxford, now functioning as a study centre, where I entertained both youth workers.

I met with the youth leaders outside of their Churches on two occasions before I met them again at the research sites – where they introduced me to the religious ministers of those organisations. I was then granted physical access to the youth groups, and I was given the opportunity to gain parents’ and young peoples’ consent to take part in the research. This was achieved by approaching parents and distributing the consent forms (Appendix 6, p. 315). This process was lengthy and involved returning to both Churches on multiple occasions to make myself known and to explain what I was doing. In these venues I did this by mingling with parents and young people during the coffee break after the Church services.

Even though I had gained consent for the research to take place in these Church groups, this access was still conditional in the first instance on being supervised in interviews by a chaperone. For the first Catholic Church group interview, a youth worker was present in the room; for the first Baptist interview likewise. However, as I returned on subsequent occasions to both sites I was not supervised and I was able to conduct multiple interviews, including follow-up interviews with individual participants unchaperoned.
The Anglican and Mormon Churches were contacted by email and telephone. For the Anglican Church I invited the youth worker to lunch; for the Mormon Chapel I had to meet the Bishop in person at the Mormon Chapel before a service to discuss the research. In both venues I then had to gain consent from parents and the young people. In the Anglican Church this involved attending a social dinner for the youth group which involved a cabaret act and an audience of over a hundred young people. I was given the opportunity to explain my research project in between entertainment acts and I took to the stage with the microphone. After the dinner a number of interested young people approached me; we then arranged times for the interviews to take place on another occasion convenient for the young people. These interviews then took place without further conditions set by the gatekeeper.

In the Mormon Chapel I gained access in a similar fashion. I was given the opportunity to explain my research to all the women of the congregation, and to all the men of the congregation before the sacrament meeting on a Sunday (in addition to communal worship, the Mormon Church has a number of sub-groups according to age and gender). The congregation as a whole then agreed for the research to take place. Like many of the other sites, the initial group interviews were chaperoned, but subsequent follow-up interviews were conducted without supervision, although as with all the interviews conducted, youth workers (in this case volunteers) were present nearby.

The three Jewish organisations which took part in the project were contacted initially by email. The choice of organisations was aided by a Jewish Cheder teacher whom I had met while conducting fieldwork for my earlier study. One of the sites was a national cross-denominational event and the organiser called me following an email to discuss the project. The other two sites were synagogues and I arranged the interviews
entirely by email. The youth workers – in this case Cheder teachers – organised the consent of parents and young people by emailing information about the study to young people and their parents prior to my visit and then distributing and collecting the consent forms (Appendix 6, p. 315). I was chaperoned during one initial interview at one of these three sites, but on other occasions I was able to conduct the interviews with no supervision, although there were adult members of the community in adjacent rooms. In addition to the three successful sites, I failed to gain access to three Orthodox Jewish sites, two after having face-to-face meetings with community leaders.

When approaching religious organisations to gain access I found the most striking difficulties were encountered when trying was access to Muslim communities. There was real suspicion of counter-terrorism surveillance, and concern that the research could reinforce inequality by investigating participants’ negative experiences of the education system. Gilliat-Ray (2005) found access to Muslim education institutions problematic and was denied access despite using a range of methods including approaching gatekeepers, sending letters and organising face-to-face meetings. She found that a personal recommendation from a senior cleric was the only way she could successfully gain access to one institution.

I gained access to three sites with Muslim participants: a Masjid, a prayer room in a Mission House, and, a community centre for Muslim women. At the Masjid and Mission House I interviewed boys only. I therefore approached the community centre for the opportunity of interviewing girls. For the Ahmadiyya Mission House I approached a senior member of the national organisation who then liaised with a local community leader who organised a group of boys for me to meet. I met them in the Masjid and explained the research and some of them expressed the desire to take part,
while some refused. The subsequent interviews took place unchaperoned with those boys who wished to take part in the prayer room.

For the mainstream Sunni Masjid, I approached a sponsor, who following a meeting, put me in touch with another sponsor who, following another meeting, arranged a meeting with a youth worker. This youth worker gave conditional access: I was not to ask questions about terrorism or audio record the interviews, and a member of the organisation was to be present at the interview. He then spoke to the youth group and on a subsequent occasion provided me with five volunteers with whom he had secured parental and participant consent. After the first interview, which I did not audio record as requested, I asked if I could return to conduct the interview on another occasion and record it. The participants agreed and the chaperone did also. I then returned twice to record interviews, the last being unchaperoned.

I secured access to the women’s community centre through another sponsor, and following a lengthy telephone conversation and email exchange, the project manager arranged for volunteers from her youth group to be interviewed – both young men and young women. These interviews were all unchaperoned and were grouped on gender, but I was not permitted to conduct individual interviews.

In addition to these sites I was declined access to six Muslim organisations by three Muslim clerics following face to face meetings, and three Muslim community workers, two after a face to face meeting, and another after a telephone call. Other organisations I attempted to cold-call and email did not respond. The meetings with community leaders and clerics were illuminating of the concerns in Muslim communities about surveillance and espionage.

One gate-keeper said that if I were not a spy, his community would think I was; another declined because the participants were not willing to take part. One explained
that there was much suspicion after one of his colleagues was placed under a terrorist control order and that interviewing Muslim children in Masjids would not be possible anywhere in Britain. Another community leader with whom I met on two occasions gave a long explanation of why Pakistani parents and young people would not be happy to be interviewed because of long-term experiences of prejudice in English society. These are similar to Gilliat-Ray’s (2005) experiences who also found that Muslim organisations suspected she could be working for another agency.

Access to Muslim sites coincided with the broadcast of an undercover documentary *Lessons in Hatred and Violence* (Channel 4, 2011) which raised concerns about surveillance and negative media attention and undercover reporting. This was referred to by one gate-keeper as an unfair portrayal of Islam. Attempting to gain access with Muslim communities led to some interesting experiences. For example, one gate-keeper, a Deobandi cleric, entertained me in his house, denied me access to conduct fieldwork, but then took me out to dinner. His rationale for this was so I did not think that ‘people of his kind only bombed people.’ Over dinner we discussed many things concerning what it is like to be a Muslim in England.

The reasons cited by gatekeepers of those sites where I was granted access are relevant to understanding the political and cultural context in which the research was conducted. Some gatekeepers and community leaders were concerned about the plight of their young people. In the Protestant Christian communities, some of the youth workers and parents expressed a concern over Religious Education and felt that the research was worthwhile; whereas the Bishop of the Mormon community worried about the bullying of Mormon children. He felt that the research should be conducted to gain greater understanding of this phenomenon, and I was offered recommendation to more Mormon churches to conduct further research into this if needed. Similarly, a number
of the Jewish gatekeepers and sponsors were concerned about anti-Semitism in schools and felt that any research that highlighted this should be permitted. I was later asked to attend a conference on Jewish education to share my findings because of this concern. The gatekeeper at one of the Muslim sites as a parent felt that the schools in the area could be Islamophobic and also felt that the research was valuable in order to illuminate and make public insidious prejudice in the system. For these reasons, when interviewing it was important to ensure that gatekeepers and sponsors did not explain the research to participants. The printed materials (Appendix 6, p. 315), the loosely structured nature of the interviews, in addition to the design of multiple interviews (especially those unchaperoned conducted for the purposes of ensuring internal reliability) were intended to mitigate for any influence other adults at the community centres could possibly have.

There were also other motives for the assistance of gatekeepers and sponsors that further demonstrate the political environment surrounding faith communities which illustrate a ‘strategic match’ (Harrington, 2003, p. 613 in Gilliat-Ray, 2005, p. 25) between the researcher’s interests and the gatekeeper or organisation. One such match was the desire of some groups to appear open, with the intention of my own religious conversion, recruitment or in order to promote positive public relations. One Muslim sponsor told me that unlike other Muslim communities, his organisation was open and therefore he would assist me on principle; another Muslim gatekeeper called me on the day of the interview to stress, among other conditions of the research, ‘how much he had given’ to enable the research to take place because he felt that it was worthwhile. Some venues, on the other hand, wanted to have some association with Oxford University and felt that the research would benefit their young people.
The research project was considered of both intrinsic and extrinsic benefit and interest to some of the religious communities that took part. At one venue I was asked to give advice on a university application, at another, the interviews themselves were considered to be some kind of useful discussion of ‘how to cope with school’ – aided by a qualified person. In both cases I stressed that I was not authorised to perform either of these functions, although this was not heeded by community leaders, some of whom liked to think of me as an ‘expert’ because I studied at Oxford University.

Researcher experiences of religious communities often reflected the specific issues facing those communities. For example, Synagogues operated tight security for fear of anti-Semitic attacks. I was on one occasion searched before entry and usually had to sign my name for security reasons. Some Christian organisations were particularly concerned about having sight of my Criminal Record Bureau Disclosure and chaperoning (although I also showed, and was asked to show, this to Muslim and Jewish organisations). Access to Muslim organisations, as discussed above, could be affected by suspicions of counter-terrorism surveillance.

In terms of gatekeepers’ motivations to grant access for the research (or enter into communication with me following my enquiries) there were instances when gatekeepers and sponsors sought to proselytise, or canvas for my religious conversion or conversion to a political cause. In a synagogue, I was given material about the state of Israel by one member of the community who wished me not to be influenced by what he claimed to be the BBC’s biased reporting. The Mormon Bishop after discussing the research project, was keen to invite me to attend the Mormon communion service, and in the Catholic parish, after observing from a distance an interview I conducted in the corner of the Parish Centre, I was approached by a visiting Priest who enquired if I had ever thought of taking up a religious vocation.
Another instance of this kind of engagement by gatekeepers was my attempt to gain access into two Jehovah’s Witnesses Kingdom Halls, where my enquiries were treated as an opportunity by community leaders to seek for my conversion. After lengthy conversations, access was denied on the theological grounds that Witnesses did not wish to engage in political actions such as engaging in research that would yield to a change in the educational system – but not before asking me to reconsider my own beliefs. They were thus opposed to research on religious grounds as found by social researchers with other groups (Gilliat-Ray, 2005). In these interactions with gatekeepers, the process of recruitment seemed to invert, and the ‘exchange’ between researcher and researched took on added complexity. These invitations were declined, but as part of my commitment to respecting the religious beliefs of the participants and their communities, they were declined graciously and subtly.

My researcher experiences in engaging with religious communities illustrated some of the issues facing religious adherents in twenty-first century England. For example, when meeting a Muslim gatekeeper in Westville for coffee outside the place of worship, he was racially abused in the car park by some white adolescents. This was obviously humiliating for him, and I did not know how I should act as a white researcher engaging in research concerning similar issues. He played down the incident, so I did not mention it further.

In religious communities I encountered parents, gatekeepers and members of congregations who would also make comments about members of other religions. These often showed the (perceived) tense relations between religions. For example, a member of a Jewish congregation explained how Catholics believed Jews had horns and that this was taught in Catholic schools. A Catholic gatekeeper made comments about how he would not want to have to attend Jewish Synagogues, as I did to conduct
the study, because he did not want to be around Jews. Jewish parents, on the other hand, reported concerns over the number of Muslims in schools and the problems this caused, while a Muslim gatekeeper made a joke about the ability of Jews to make money, and how they would from me.

Creating good field relations

With the exception of one site (Liberal Synagogue), I visited all locations on multiple occasions. This was in order to meet community organisers to gain access, establish the fully informed consent of participants and their parents; meet and build a rapport with participants; to keep a ‘continued presence’ to ‘undermine the maintenance of fronts’ (Lee, 1993) and also to collect more data by conducting interviews with several groups and individuals on a number of occasions. It also served the purpose of helping develop my knowledge and understanding of the ‘research arena’ (Rubin and Rubin, 1995) – in the case of this project, the nature of the religious communities participants belonged to, and therefore, the practices and belief traditions to which they were associated (Warner, 1997).

At each site, after explaining the research project to the young people, distributing letters with attached forms (Appendix 6, p. 315) in order to secure participants and their parents’ written consent, I then returned to conduct an initial group interview with volunteers from the attendees of the organisation. At some sites I conducted more than one group interview with different participants. These group interviews were loosely-structured. They were based on the main interview prompts, but they were also open and flexible to group discussion (Lewis, 1992) and individual respondents’ concerns (Douglas, 1985; Van Mannen, 1997). Appendix 1 (p. 277) gives a transcript of an example of a group interview.
Joining in with activities such as singing, eating and praying can be an important ‘bridge’ between the researcher and religious communities that can aid the research process by signalling openness and enabling the research to understand the worlds of religious adherents (Warner, 1997). An element of participation was required at all sites and the process of interviewing became an ‘adventure’ (Rubin & Rubin, 1995; Warner, 1997). At some of the Churches I was present at services before or during the research. Likewise at the Synagogues I was present after, before or during services. In the Ahmadiyya Mission House I interviewed before and after Friday prayers in the prayer hall. At the Mormon Church, all meetings were preceded by prayers said by the young people and hymns. At the Baptist Church, I interviewed participants during the main Sunday service.

In addition to these religious acts for which I was present, I was also involved in non-liturgical activities that played an important function within the faith communities. In one Muslim community centre I played table football, at a Christian youth group I played indoor football, at the two synagogues I joined worshippers for coffee and bagels. In different contexts this participation had different potential meanings for participants, but its intention was to signal openness to, and acceptance of, their religious adherence and affiliation. In the Christian groups, including the Mormons, I stood to sing hymns and carols and said ‘Amen’ at the end of prayers. In the Muslim and Jewish groups, I usually stayed outside the prayer halls themselves, but would mingle in the lobbies and catering areas and shared food with members of the community. These elements of participation and openness were crucial in gaining trust and ‘building conversational partnerships’ (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

In the field I remained conscious and vigilant of my position as researcher (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007), how this may have been interpreted by participants,
and the ramifications this may have upon their openness and their responses. In the Jewish communities I was sometimes assumed to be Jewish or asked if I were Jewish, mainly because of my first name; in Muslim communities I was often thought of as Christian and largely ignorant of Islam. In both, when it became apparent that I was not Jewish or Muslim, participants occasionally added explanations about their religious practices designed for the outsider, or they ‘dumbed down’ their answers, leaving out complexities that I would like to explore. These interviews sometimes functioned in a similar manner to the ‘cultural interviews’ envisaged by Rubin and Rubin (1995). An awareness of this helped me question participants accordingly, probing further if I felt that my identity was causing a block (Lee, 1993) and I needed to develop suitable ‘field relations’ (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007).

I developed suitable field relations verbally by making general conversation before the official interview, and also through a number of non-verbal means throughout the interview. Body-language, demeanour, dress, helping and attending in the youth group prior to the interview, generally being non-intrusive but sympathetic, were all essential to winning over the confidence of the young people and creating the circumstances for them to divulge personal views – what Hammersley and Atkinson call ‘impression management’ (2007, p. 66). Generally, this involved wearing casual clothes, although this was not appropriate at the Mormon Sunday service where those in the congregation of all ages wore formal clothes. This made me particularly conspicuous as I addressed a very smart congregation from a lectern wearing jeans and a T-shirt in order to elicit parental consent.

After gaining physical access and voluntary informed consent from participants and their parents, I could attempt to gain ‘social access’ – perceived to be especially difficult when researching minority groups, and emotional and political issues (Lee,
I attempted to break down possible ‘fronts’ or ‘barriers’ erected by participants through a number of methods: the use of group interviews to encourage discussion between and participants’ ease (Lewis, 1992); spending time in the field, joining in leisure activities, chatting informally prior to the interviews, interviewing on multiple occasions with the same participants (Rubin & Rubin, 1995); and, by approaching sensitive issues with carefully worded indirect prompts – what Rubin and Rubin describe as ‘throwing out the rabbit’ (1995, p. 220). This method was intended to gently tease out participants’ perspectives gradually without confronting them directly and forcing them to resort to fronts.

**Conducting the interviews**

A series of main questions (Rubin & Rubin, 1995), derived from the original research aim, and the findings of my earlier study, were used as a basis for the discussions of all the interviews:

- How you feel as a Catholic/Christian/Mormon/Jewish/Muslim/Ahmadiyya student at school?
- At what times in school do you feel that your religion becomes important to you and other people at school?
- How are Religious Education lessons for you?
- Do you think other students show a genuine interest or respect for your beliefs?
- How do you think other people perceive Catholicism/Christianity/Mormonism/Judaism/Islam/Ahmadiyya Islam at school?
- What benefits do you think there are to being a Catholic/Christian/Mormon/Jewish/Muslim/Ahmadiyya student when you are at school?
- What problems do you think there are for Catholic/Christian/Mormon/Jewish/Muslim/Ahmadiyya students at school?
- What influence do you think school has on your religious beliefs and spiritual life?
- Given that I want to know what it is like at school for a Catholic/Christian/Mormon/Jewish/Muslim/Ahmadiyya student – is there anything else I need to know?

Each of the ‘main questions’ was a starting point for a more lengthy discussion which would include prompts from participants or the interviewer. The questions are direct, personal and challenging and before the interviews took place I was sure to establish rapport with the young people involved – setting the conditions to explore sensitive issues (Brannen, 1988; Lee, 1993; Peek & Fothergill, 2009).
Initial interviews were audio recorded (except on three occasions when I was not permitted to audio record initially); I also took notes during and after the interviews of the most salient features or main themes – and of any other relevant information about the circumstances of the interview. After this I listened to and made notes on the interviews and picked out themes, and ambiguities, to inform the questions I would ask in any follow-up interviews as part of a ‘continuous’ or ‘emergent design’ (Rubin & Rubin, 1995; Morgan, et al., 2008). Appendix 2 (p. 301) gives an example of an individual follow-up interview. Appendix 7 (p. 319) gives a summary of the number of interviews completed by type and their duration.

In the follow-up interviews participants were often more forthcoming as they had typically already contributed to a group interview. Appendix 2 (p. 301) gives an example of a transcript of a follow-up interview with one participant. They were therefore prepared for the interview and in many cases a good rapport had been established. Nevertheless, due to unforeseen circumstances, some of the individual interviews conducted were with new participants. Usually they had volunteered to take part but could not be present at the group interview. As they made the effort to meet at another time, these participants were typically enthusiastic to take part in the research and gave in-depth responses. For these interviews, the same set of main questions was used, but rather than a group discussion, they followed a form of ‘guided conversation’ (Rubin & Rubin, 1994). Participants were encouraged to relax and discuss issues of concern to them in relation to the study’s research aims.

The structure of follow-up interviews and the questions used were highly contextual. They would consist of open questions based on reiterations of initial group questions; open or closed questions designed to probe or clarify data gathered in previous (or current) interviews with the same participants; and, issues raised by
participants in other interviews. For example, follow-up questions used in interviews with Jewish participants were:

**Open reiterations**
- I'm particularly interested in school and how it interacts in your life. I was wondering if you have any more thoughts about?
- Following our last discussion, did you have any further thoughts?
- I am just wondering what affect your school has on your spiritual life and religious beliefs?

**Probing and clarification**
- When you say yours is more relaxed is it a different kind of school or just a different attitude?
- And you think that is the direct influence of the school?
- OK, coz what I've got here is a list of things of what people spoke about last time. I think Hannah you talked about Jewish Studies just being about Jewish Studies and orthodox studies; Isobel you mentioned that issue as well but also said that people in school didn't seem to like Judaism but am I right in thinking that this is this rebellious streak?

**Questions formulated from other interviews**
- What about the influence of the media in school?
- Some of the girls were talking, not about the borat thing, but they mentioned in their school sometimes the word ‘Jew’ is used as an insult. Is that something you’ve come across?

In all interviews, it was important not to lead participants to give particular answers, but asking participants direct questions also gave opportunities to record objections to comments made by others or to invite more opinions on a subject. Sometimes closed questions provided a good way to explore issues raised previously in the interview or with other groups. After going through the main questions and the resulting discussion, which often necessitated more than one group session, I also ended with a statement of purpose and the opportunity of further reflection: “Given that the title of what I am going to write is ‘religious students experience of schools’, is there anything which you think, you know, sums up your experience in schools?” This ‘hour-glass’ shape of questioning further amplified the inductive, sensitive and emancipatory aspects of the group interview sessions and left the discussion open to be retrieved for the follow-up interviews on another occasion.

The follow-up group, triple, pair and individual interviews were used to corroborate, affirm and explore further perspectives aired in earlier interviews.
Appendix 8 (p. 320) shows the number of secondary and tertiary interviews completed with the same participant according to their religious affiliation. The secondary and tertiary interviews were of varying lengths, depending on external conditions – time, needs of the youth group leaders and activities with peers – but also on the reliability and depth of the data generated. As part of the continual cycle of analysis taking place while the field work was conducted, I assessed the need of further interviews (and their duration) at each site. This varied depending on the openness of the participants, and the development of any new themes or categories of experience, or negative or positive affirmation of emerging themes. For example, at one site I only conducted one group interview as the views of the participants were similar to those at other venues of the same religious tradition and there was a high degree of openness and consensus during the interview; at other sites I continued to return to interview multiple times because of possible ‘fronts’ to research or limiting conditions of access – particularly the presence of chaperones (Lee, 1993).

I began the group interviews by recording the basic information of respondents, what Krueger describes as the ‘opening question’. This was the name, school and school year of the participant. After this I reminded the respondents of the purpose and aims of the research as an attempt to sensitively ‘approach the topic’ (Brannen, 1988). I explained that the goal of the research was to give voice to their views, to sympathetically examine and explore their views and experiences of school as students of religious adherence. As well as sharing the purpose of the discussion and allowing the respondents to shape the course of the interview, it was also necessary to set the participants at ease.

In interviews, encouragement, humour and enthusiasm were also important in drawing out participants’ thoughts, for example by giving subtle praise when a
participant raised an in-depth, particularly sincere contribution. After each main question was raised, space was left to allow participants to debate with one another. When necessary, further questions – ‘prompts’, ‘probes’ or ‘follow-ups’ were used to confirm participants’ views or to explore any disagreement between respondents (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). It was also imperative at times to encourage respondents to give more information and to regulate the discussion. In the situations when many of the participants spoke at once, I would encourage them to listen to each other. My role as group interview convenor was thus of co-researcher, confidant, interested empathiser and chairperson, or ‘moderator’ (Vaughn, Schumm & Sinagub, 1996).

The interviewer can affect the validity of data generated in interviews on ‘sensitive topics’ (Lee, 1993) This originates from two problems: the social characteristics of the interviewer, and the researcher’s expectation about the interviews. A good example of the former arose with my cultural incompetency in some of the research sites. This was most obvious with my mispronunciation of names. In Jewish and Muslim venues, I made some mistakes with participants’ names and also some of the terminology used to describe religious and cultural practices. It was intended that the group and pair interviews would set participants at ease with the researcher and the project’s aims, and then on subsequent occasions allow for greater revelation. As for the problem of interviewer ‘effect’, there was a possibility that I could unduly influence participants by appearing to seek particular answers. It was to mitigate this problem that I chose (in circumstances that would allow) a schedule of multiple, repeat interviews with varying numbers of respondents, in order to confirm or disconfirm earlier responses.

The follow-up interviews were not conducted with all the initial participants, but in nine out of eleven of the sites, I returned between one and eight times to
complete interviews with some of the participants I had interviewed previously, either with individuals, pairs, or further groups of participants. The follow-up interviews gave opportunities for further exploration of individual participant’s views, and for a form of ‘triangulated’ respondent validation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007).

The method of data generation can be seen to have some limitations, however. It is germane to emphasise that identity construction and negotiation took place during the research process itself. That is, in interviews, adolescents constructed and negotiated their religious identities. The interview data can be seen as a collection of reported identity ‘negotiations’ and ‘constructions’ as participants sought to present themselves to the interviewer, or to their peers in group interviews according to established forms of representation and recognition. I have argued that this is not a confounding factor but brings to the fore issues relevant to the study’s research aim and research questions.

**Ethical dilemmas and solutions**

The research aims of this study were both politically and emotionally sensitive, and in the course of the fieldwork there were generic problems with research ethics across religious groups, and problems associated with the specific concerns of some religious groups. Negotiating access, storing data, recruiting and interviewing young people across a range of religious communities also raised some unexpected ethical issues.

This study was conducted in accordance with the protocols for research (particularly interviews) advised by the Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC, 2008); the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC, 2010); and the ethical guidelines of the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2011). These guidelines are based upon the principles of avoidance of harm, fully informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality.
Before embarking on fieldwork, I gained ethical approval from the University’s CUREC; when in the field, I sought the fully informed and voluntary consent of participants and their parents. I used forms and information sheets designed to ensure both participants and parents were aware of the nature and aims of the research, and to record their consent (Appendix 6, p. 315). I also took care to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of participants in the reporting and storage of data, and when conducting the interviews I aimed to do so as not to cause harm.

I also wished to conduct the study upon ethical principles that placed a ‘premium on human judgement in contrast to regulation’ (Flinders 1992, p. 112) that went further than the utilitarian focus on informed consent, avoidance of harm and confidentiality (Flinders, 1992). Ethical principles were fundamental to the design of the study as one sympathetic to religious young people; they underpinned key aspects of the research design and the research aim of the study. The use of loosely-structured interviews was driven by the desire to treat participants as individuals who may not wish to be defined by stereotypical activities or orthodox doctrines of their religious traditions. The exploration of young religious people’s views itself, particularly the views of minorities, also had an ethical dimension. The aim to articulate young people’s ‘voices’ through a qualitative study was located in, and designed to promote the values of civil society, particularly the human right of the freedom of belief (Bellah, 1996; Charmaz, 2005).

The interviews in themselves could also be valuable for participants and some visibly enjoyed taking part. Nesbitt (2001) observed that interviewing young Hindus ‘suggests the value (to the interviewee as well as to the researcher) of a space to vocalise thoughts free from the fear of interruption’ (2001, p. 158). Peek and Fothergill (2009) also argue that group interviews can be beneficial to participants. Peek found
that in her study of adolescent Muslims in New York, participants were often thankful for the opportunity to discuss pressing issues with peers who shared similar experiences. Several participants thanked me for what I was doing and thought that the research was much needed.

I chose well-resourced, well-attended faith communities as locations for the research to take place so young people could air their religious perspectives, but also because these sites provided support for the young people with trained youth workers, child protection officers, volunteers and parents who were often in close proximity. The intention was that the young people should be interviewed in a familiar, comfortable environment, and in the event of distress and welfare issues arising in interviews, there would be a functioning support system.

By recruiting participants in faith communities, however, there was a possible threat to voluntary participation, because of pressure from leaders in the organisations to take part through a hierarchy of consent. In order to mitigate for this possibility, on preliminary visits I explained the study to parents and young people to gain their consent. This was often welcomed as gatekeepers in most sites wished me to consult with young people and their parents as a precondition of conducting the interviews. This condition of access aided the ethical recruitment of participants because it secured fully informed consent.

When meeting gatekeepers and sponsors inside or outside of the research sites I always brought copies of the consent forms with accompanying information about the research. In addition to this I also took my Criminal Records Bureau Disclosure and passport for identification. I always showed these to youth workers, and where present, child protection officers. In most sites these were helpful in gaining access (although not always requested), but some of the gatekeepers of Muslim communities that denied
or allowed access expressed concern that the official forms did not help my access to their organisation. They believed the signing of forms would scare parents and participants due to concerns about surveillance and espionage. On two occasions I was offered access to Muslim communities on the condition that no consent from parents should be sought. In these cases I declined because I was unable to gain informed consent from parents and guardians.

To protect anonymity and retain confidentiality, in the presentation of this thesis, I do not refer to any of the organisations’, schools’ or participants’ real names or the locations in three unidentified English cities where the interviews took place. This is due to the small size of the religious communities in the cities which would make them easily identifiable, and the sensitive nature of the study in the current socio-political context, particularly surrounding minority communities.

As a result of conducting the fieldwork I was invited to a number of social events after the research took place as part of continuing reciprocal exchanges: the Ahmadiyya community leader invited me to a ‘Peace Conference’ at the UK Ahmadiyya headquarters; sponsors and gatekeepers invited me to dinner parties; and on two occasions I was asked to give academic papers at conferences organised by sponsors or their affiliates. At the time of the submission of this thesis, community leaders, sponsors and gatekeepers involved in the project contact me on a regular basis with issues of concern, or for academic purposes. Maintaining these connections demands continued ethical awareness in terms of participants’ privacy, anonymity and confidentiality.

An ethical issue also arose concerning the electronic storage of data. Data were stored on a password protected computer kept in a locked office with further copies stored at the University’s password protected online data storage facility. However, a
Microsoft Windows software programme collected sentences from my early drafts of data analysis and transcripts for the purposes of returning them for analysis by the programme designers (Appendix 9, p. 321). There seemed to be a correlation of these instances and when I included the word ‘terrorism’ during my work session. I was concerned about this as many of the Muslim sponsors, gatekeepers, participants and parents were worried that my project may be a form of surveillance. I therefore did not authorise Microsoft to access and store the data.

The most pressing unexpected ethical issue I experienced during the fieldwork arose during an interview when one participant became tearful in a group interview – illustrating how traumatic the border crossings of school worlds can be for some religious adolescents. The participant described how she was bullied at school for her beliefs and how upsetting she found this. The participant was being interviewed with her friends and they wished to console her. The dilemma that arose from this scenario was that the participant did not want to terminate the conversation or leave her friends, but to air her feelings and hear her friends’ views as they had comparable experiences at other schools. I had to make a decision very quickly, and I decided to allow the participant to remain with us in the room, but not to take part further in the conversation if she did not wish to. I also decided that it was in her interests that her mother was informed, and the youth worker present. After discussing the issue with her mother and youth worker, the participant felt that she wished to continue the research on another occasion, and I returned to interview her again and I have used the data generated by all the interviews in which she took part in this thesis.

Conclusion
I conducted interviews at eleven places of worship in three cities selected as part of purposive sampling based upon religious denomination. The access to the research sites
was a lengthy process that reflected the highly politicised research arena surrounding young people and religion. It was achieved mainly by the use of sponsors and developing close reciprocal relationships with gatekeepers. Often there was a strategic match between the views of gatekeepers and my aims in conducting the study.

Research ethics were an important aspect of the research design at all stages of its implementation. The use of interviews in places of worship with existing pastoral and professional support away from schools was considered an important feature of the study – driven by ethical concerns in addition to the aim of generating in-depth data. The experiences of accessing and liaising with religious communities and their gatekeepers could have significant associations with the interview data generated concerning the political circumstances and theological perspectives of the religious communities and their adolescent affiliates.

At all the research sites, data generation began with one or more group interview. In these interviews, I followed the discussion of the concerns and perspectives of participants about their experiences of secondary schools. At all sites other than the Liberal Synagogue and Quaker meeting house, these issues were revisited in subsequent initial, second and third group or individual interviews at the same site. Multiple interviews and individual interviews confirmed and further explored concerns aired in initial group interviews.

Depending upon the stage at which the interviews took place in the study, and the circumstances in which they took place, the number, type and duration of the interviews varied from research site to research site. This is because of the varied contexts interviews were conducted. As the data collection and generation progressed, on-going analyses also demonstrated a saturation of themes and concerns in some research sites. New research leads generated in one site could then be pursued in other
research sites or between participants. In the following chapters, the data generated in different kinds of interviews are presented together, combining themes and continuing personal narratives from different interviews.
Chapter Six

Crossing the borders of classroom worlds

Introduction

In this chapter I consider religious adolescents’ reported experiences of classroom worlds (research question 1). The interview data relate to four kinds of situations in regard to religious adolescents and classroom worlds, the reported experiences of: religious adolescents who attended Church or faith schools of their own denomination and religion; religious adolescents who attended Church or faith schools of their own religion, but of a different denominational affiliation; religious adolescents who attended Church schools, but were not Christian; and, religious adolescents who attended religiously unaffiliated schools (Appendix 10, p. 322).

In some cases where individuals attended schools of their own denominational affiliation, border crossings between school and home worlds were reported to be traversed with comparative ease. For many of the religious adolescents interviewed, however – who belonged to either the second, third and fourth kind of situation given above – the values, norms, beliefs and practices of classroom worlds were reported to conflict with the religious perspectives and practices of participants’ home or religious community worlds, and crossing the borders of these worlds could be reported as problematic (see appendices 11-13, pp. 323 - 326, for an overview of main themes in the interview data).

In order to account for the complexity of individual contexts and circumstances, and how they relate to denominational affiliation and school type (research question 4), the analysis given in this chapter is split into sections considering the reported experiences of Christians (Catholic, Anglican, Baptist, Mormon and Quaker) in
religiously unaffiliated schools; Christians’ reported experiences in Anglican and Catholic affiliated schools; Jews’ (Orthodox, Liberal and Reform) reported experiences of non-Jewish schools; Jews’ reported experiences of Jewish schools; and Muslims’ (Sunni and Ahmadiyya) reported experiences of religiously unaffiliated schools.

**Christians and the classroom worlds of religiously unaffiliated schools**

The school as a secular organisation (in the sense of Taylor’s ‘secularity 1’ – the ‘emptying out’ of God from public institutions) that could ascribe an inaccurate, biased or harmful Christian identity, and its major and minority denominations, was a common concern of those Christians who attended religiously unaffiliated schools (see Appendix 11, p. 323, for an overview of the main themes reported by Christians). Unlike Jews and Muslims – whose religious identities often presented racial and national (and political) affinities and ethnic and religious practices that could clash with values and norms in classroom worlds in religiously unaffiliated schools – differences in the values and norms between Christians’ classroom worlds and those of home often consisted in differences of religious belief and moral values. These identity boundaries were reported as pronounced in Religious Education lessons; other classroom worlds presented fewer problems.

Christians who attended religiously unaffiliated schools interviewed at St Mary’s Catholic Church, Northstreet Baptist Church, St Luke’s Anglican Church, Southville Mormon Chapel, and Quaker Meeting House were critical of the way Christianity was represented in the classroom worlds. Religious Education classroom worlds were considered to challenge religious interpretations of reality, in particular the existence of a Christian God. The means to practise Christian life were also not perceived to be sanctioned or supported in classroom worlds.
Approaches to Christianity in Religious Education based on Philosophy of Religion could challenge the core beliefs of Christians of all denominations (as found by Moulin, 2011). The discrepancy between the beliefs and values underpinning classroom worlds and the worlds of participants’ religious communities and homes could become stark during tasks set by teachers. These included writing essays about reasons for God’s non-existence, and classroom discussions about the incompatibility of the existence of a loving God, suffering and evil. For example, Meg who attended St Luke’s Anglican Church, found questions about the existence of God difficult to defend in classroom discussions and written exams.

> I find that hard [defending God], especially in PRE [Philosophy and Religious Education], they question you [teachers and peers] and all you can say is ‘that’s not true’ and they always ask ‘why isn’t that true?’ and it’s like I say ‘because I know it is’ but they still question everything. [...] I did my PRE mock [examination] on Friday and the question was ‘If God existed we would know it’ and you had to argue that statement from both points of view, but because our PRE teacher wasn’t very good I didn’t do very well. I think I can understand all the questions they are asking because I have quite a logical mind, so I think about things logically. It’s like I know the answers, but I don’t. Like they don’t understand it. I put it’s hard for people to believe what they can’t see, but then I put that Christians can see God. [...] I find RE quite hard

Meg, female, Year 10, Comprehensive School [St Luke’s Anglican Church, group interview]

As Meg’s perspective suggests, some participants criticised the impartiality and competence of their Religious Education teachers at community and comprehensive schools. Some participants felt discussions about the existence of God reflected the atheist values and assumptions of their teachers (as noted by Sikes and Everington in their studies of teacher identities, 2003, 2004). Anita’s perspective serves as another representative example of this view.

> Philosophy and religion [Religious Education] is hard for me because it’s against God rather than being for God. Our teacher is always going on about if God exists, then why does he let all these things happen, and he always has all these arguments and debates throughout … I don’t see how that is religion; he's pretty much telling us how there mustn’t be a God because of all these bad things that happen.

Anita, female, Year 9, Community School [Northstreet Baptist Church, group interview]
Anglican and Baptist Christians attending comprehensive and Community Schools reported their schools’ classroom worlds as biased against Christian beliefs. Debates were biased, and did not present the existence of God as a viable possibility. Peers using ‘Oh my God’ or ‘Jesus Christ’ as exclamations with impunity from teachers were considered unfair. Participants believed they were continually urged to respect religions other than Christianity, but not Christianity. These issues could contribute to an overall classroom ethos that challenged Christian life.

In addition to challenging belief in God, Christian participants also criticised the representation or exclusion of their particular denomination in Religious Education. Catholic participants who attended comprehensive schools perceived Religious Education to represent Catholicism as a stricter form of Christianity than other denominations, and emphasised its stance on issues contrary to secular values: Catholic teaching on sex before marriage, homosexuality, and female clergy (also found by Moulin, 2011). The portrayal of Catholicism was of an unethical religion (in the respect of its ruling on female priests and use of contraception in Africa despite the AIDS epidemic, for example) that clashed with mainstream values. This was considered problematic by participants who felt these negative values and affinities were ascribed to them as part of Catholic identity. Ambrose complained that Religious Education ‘labelled’ him a Catholic without considering why someone would adhere to the Church. In lessons there was no ‘exploration’ of why you are Christian or what it means’ (Ambrose). While for Rosemary, the approach to Religious Education at her religiously unaffiliated secondary school challenged the faith instilled in her at her Catholic primary school. She used the example of a lesson about the crucifixion as an example.

_I think when they put it into reality, it's kind of like... that Jesus was killed on a tree rather than on a cross... I think it made things really weird because on primary school I was taught this was how it was, and somebody's turning it around._
Catholic participants explained that criticism of Catholicism would arise in class discussions in other subjects such as Geography and History. In Geography, Catholic teaching on contraception could be raised when looking at the spread of AIDS in Africa. In History, Catholicism could feature in lessons when learning about the Reformation or the development of science. In these cases, Catholicism could receive a negative reception among non-Catholic students in an unsympathetic and hostile classroom environment, as Ambrose explained:

*The same kind of thing but in History lessons [as Religious Education] – when we’ve been talking religious issues like about medicine, people [peers] have been like ‘why are stupid Christians banning all this? Why are they hindering scientific development?’ But people don’t look at the bigger picture they just look at specific incidents.*

Ambrose, male, Year 11, Comprehensive School [St Mary’s Catholic Church, group interview]

While Catholics, as members of a historical minority complained about the identity ascribed to them, for the new religious minority of Mormonism, non-recognition was considered the main problem – Mormons were invisible in the curriculum. Mormon participants observed that Mormonism did not feature in Religious Education lessons and that therefore mainstream Trinitarian Christianity and non-Christian religions were privileged – supporting Head’s (2009) conclusion that new religious movements were not represented in the curriculum, reflecting the religious disadvantage (Weller, 2001) presented by a curriculum influenced by the Established church and other mainstream denominations (DfE, 1994).

Catherine explained ‘It’s [Mormonism] not talked about in the curriculum at all. If it’s mentioned it’s because we have talked about it’ (Catherine). Andy and some other participants felt this was because other religions were treated more favourably in comparison: ‘They never talk about Mormons, just Muslims, Sikhs, Christians and
Hindus’ (Andy). In keeping with the perspectives other Christian participants, some
Mormons complained that when they studied Islam in Religious Education they were
not allowed to make comments about it; but when Christianity was studied, it was
subject to the derision of their peers. In a group interview there was consensus when
Andy explained:

*Basically, say like, a school is mostly Islam [Muslim pupils], like my school, when you
study Christianity they just take the mick out of some stuff and then when you study another
religion and you say something funny or disrespectful, they go really, really mad*

**Andy, male, Year 7, Comprehensive School, [Southville Mormon Chapel, group
interview]**

One participant gave a slightly different scenario to explain this bias. When Muslims
disagreed with homosexuality, they were free to voice their opinion. However, when he
did the same as a Mormon, his peers were swift to criticise and debate the point. The
same participants explained that some Muslims in their school had refused to study
Christianity in Religious Education and were not forced to, which they felt was unfair
as non-Muslim students had to study Islam.

Older participants complained that Mormonism was not included in the GCSE
syllabus and reported that they had been told not to write about Mormonism in the
GCSE Religious Education exam. Jackie explained: ‘our teacher told us, do not write
about that [Mormonism] … if you write from the scriptures we have, the Book of
Mormon, you won’t get the top mark’ (Jackie). This was considered a problem because
Mormons considered themselves to be Christians, but this was not acknowledged in
lessons where Christians were presented as all believing in the Trinity. Some
participants acknowledged the efforts of teachers who had tried to readdress this. For
example, Catherine described the kindness of a teacher who became interested in
Mormonism and who acknowledged his prior ignorance, even though he had used
Mormonism as an example of a religion that recruited members door to door – an
identity that emphasised the annoyance potentially caused by efforts of Mormons to evangelise.

_He was talking about going around to people’s houses, like Jehovah’s witnesses and Mormons and I was like, ‘I’m a Mormon’ and he was so surprised and he was like ‘I’ve never met a Mormon’ and he was really interested in it. It was really nice of him to want to know about it._

Catherine, female, Year 12, Comprehensive School [Southville Mormon Chapel, pair interview]

However, despite often being an invisible identity, Religious Education lessons were considered to trigger interest in Mormonism even though Mormonism was never the object of study. For example, Heather and Alannah discussed how Religious Education lessons about other religions and denominations often provoked curiosity about their religious practice (as also found by Head, 2009).

_Heather: It’s like when it comes up [at school] about religions and churches and everyone sort of looks at you and they ask you questions_
_Interviewer: Is that something you would agree with?_
_Alannah: Yeah_
_Interviewer: What kind of questions do they ask?_
_Alannah: Questions like what are you allowed to do in your church? Why can’t you do this? What don’t you drink alcohol? Just stuff like what can you wear and [moral] standards and what days you go to Church and what we do there._

Heather and Alannah, female, Year 9, Girls’ Community School [Southville Mormon Chapel, pair interview]

Participants also explained that at Christmas-time debates arose about elements of Mormon teaching that conflicted with traditional Christmas narratives, such as Jesus’ birth in a cellar as opposed to the Nativity scene in the stable. These issues could arise in subjects other than Religious Education when Christmas came up as part of a Christmas quiz, for example. Throughout the rest of the year other curriculum subjects could prompt peers’ interest in Mormonism. Participants gave examples of this in History, Drama and English lessons. This curiosity was centred upon aspects of Mormon doctrine and participants’ personal beliefs relevant to the lesson: ‘whenever God is brought up, I’m usually questioned’ (Catherine, Year 12, Comprehensive School).
Sometimes other curriculum subjects would present challenges for Mormons because they conflicted with Mormon beliefs and values. For example, one female participant explained that she had been asked to swear as part of her role in a play in Drama which had caused her and her teacher a dilemma concerning what she should do in the performance of the play. While Jim found sex education lessons perplexing and at odds with Mormon teaching

*Sexual education is, I think, it’s a bit weird how they’re kinda like incentivizing [sic] people to have sex, and things like that. Which, instead of, like, things [here], like, warn people of what can happen and stuff*

Jim, male, Year 12, Further Education College [Southville Mormon Chapel, pair interview]

In the Meeting House, adolescent Quakers aired similar concerns about classroom worlds as other Christian tradition participants. As a non-Trinitarian minority like Mormonism, Quakerism could be excluded from the Religious Education curriculum, and like other forms of Christianity, it could also be portrayed inaccurately, both in Religious Education and in other subjects. Participants also described disagreements with teachers, and circumstances when they felt their beliefs were challenged or were not acknowledged as legitimate.

One exception to these criticisms of the curriculum was Sophia’s experience of attending Religious Education lessons taught by a Quaker teacher. Even though her school was a comprehensive school of no religious affiliation, Sophia explained how the teacher had included a satisfactory presentation of Quakerism.

*He made sure our class learned a little about Quakers. They got the right idea about Quakers because they got a Quaker teacher.*

Sophia, female, Year 11, Comprehensive School [Southville Quaker Meeting House, group interview]

Other participants in different circumstances, however, explained how Quaker curriculum identities were inaccurate. For example, one class was told that William Penn (the founder of Pennsylvania) founded Quakerism (rather than George Fox).
There was consensus among participants that when brought up in Religious Education, worshipping in silence, and adhering to a religion with no body of doctrine, appeared boring and perplexing to peers – who could confuse Quakerism with more authoritarian forms of Christianity. These perspectives were summarised by Bryony who explained how an English teacher’s ignorance caused her to be teased and how easily Quakerism was misconstrued due to teaching about Christian morality in Religious Education. This harmful identity was then ascribed to her by her peers.

*In Religious Education they always talk about Christians having rules and how they’re really strict, but people hear you’re Quaker they think you’re not allowed to drink or have sex or listen to music and stuff and we had a drama teacher and we were learning about the Crucible and they’re not Quakers, they’re Puritans. But she said it’s about Quakers and they all wear funny hats and they’re not allowed to have sex and they’re scared of witches and stuff and everyone was teasing me about that [laughter].*

**Bryony, female, Year 13, Comprehensive School [Southville Quaker Meeting House, group interview]**

Jack, on the other hand, explained that he liked being associated with Quakerism because it had a popular appeal. He described this in reference to his experience of Geography lessons where it was considered to match secular values:

*I think it is a good thing to be known as a Quaker because when it’s talked about in Geography it’s about humanitarian things in other countries because it is a reputation for being nice and good and a bit pacifistic so when I have to play rugby.. it’s like ‘you shouldn’t have to play rugby!’*

**Jack, male, Year 11, Boys’ Independent School [Southville Quaker Meeting House, group interview]**

Another concern for participants was teaching about ethics and arguments for just war in Religious Education lessons, pacifism being considered as an important element of their Quaker identity. There was a consensus that when taught in Religious Education lessons, just war theory was presented ‘just like fact’ (Jack). Sophia and Bryony explained how they had argued with their teachers on this point, and how they were the only pacifists in their classes. In these cases classroom worlds could challenge Quakers’ religious interpretation of reality.
I was the only one in the class that was pacifist and I had to argue against my class for an whole hour.

Bryony, female, Year 13, Comprehensive School [Southville Quaker Meeting House, group interview]

Other than these problems, there was a consensus among participants that Religious Education lessons were easier and more relevant to them because Quakerism was an inclusive religion that drew upon other traditions. Multi-faith Religious Education did not challenge Quaker beliefs. Bryony explained that ‘We [Quakers] get more out of Religious Education lessons’ (Bryony); because Quakerism was ‘a pick and choose faith … when you hear something about a Buddhist view or a Jewish view you take it all in’ (Bryony).

In addition to the classroom worlds of curriculum subjects, Christian participants also discussed their experiences of assemblies. Some observed that in classroom worlds, religious practices did not take place, representing a major difference in religious values and norms from their religious communities and for some who had attended primary schools, the values and norms of classroom worlds. Christian participants in comprehensive, community schools and academies found assemblies devoid of any religious or moral content, resonating with Gill’s study of collective worship (Gill, 2004). As Ambrose explained

It [assembly] is more ‘why don’t you pick up litter in the playground?’, or ‘you’re going to get banned from the year area’: it’s not like really moral and deep.

Ambrose, male, Year 11, Comprehensive School [St Mary’s Catholic Church, group interview]

Overall, the contrast between the religious nurture of primary school and his experience of comprehensive school was stark.

I don’t think I’d be a Catholic unless I’d been to my primary school I think I’d have lost my way in Christian sense – I’d be like ‘none of my friends go to church’ I’d probably stop ... ‘coz it is just a contrast with primary school – like we would sing hymns and pray and say grace every single day and at secondary school none of that happens and all the people saying like ‘Christians this, Catholics that’ – it’s kind of lessened my belief.
Ambrose, male, Year 11, Comprehensive School [St Mary’s Catholic Church, individual interview]

According to Ambrose, attending a secular school had diminished his belief because of the difference between the religious practices of a Catholic primary school and those of a secular secondary school which challenged a religious interpretation of reality by forgoing prayer and ascribing damaging curriculum identities. While for Kevin, interviewed at Northstreet Baptist Church, practising Christianity was impossible in his comprehensive school because of inadequate provision of a safe place to pray. He explained in comparison to his counterparts in Anglican foundation Independent Schools with functioning chapels:

_There are no places to pray in [Comprehensive School], people would beat you up._

Kevin, male, Year 10, Comprehensive School [Northstreet Baptist church, group interview]

The reported experiences of Christians at religiously unaffiliated schools show considerable discrepancies between the values, norms and beliefs of secondary school classroom worlds and their homes and churches. These reported experiences do not just concern a lack of provision for religious adolescents’ interests, and classroom worlds that harbour the anti-Christian sentiment of peers (considered further in Chapter 7), but classroom worlds that often challenged a Christian interpretation of reality. Classroom worlds were reported to ascribe religious adolescents a Christian identity that was philosophically or ethically untenable, or outmoded – and in the cases of a Christian new religious movement, and two Christian historical minorities, mis- or non-representative.

**Christians and Catholic and Anglican school classroom worlds**

With the exception of the provision of collective worship and prayer in Anglican affiliated schools, and the perspectives of some Catholics who attended Catholic
schools, there is little difference between the kinds of experiences reported by Christians who attended Church and religiously affiliated independent schools, and those who attended religiously unaffiliated academies, comprehensive and Community Schools. This analysis reflects the mission of Church schools to cater for a broad range of students and a weakening of Church schools’ Christian mission (Walford, 2010; Archbishop’s Council Education Division, 2012).

Christian participants, who attended Anglican affiliated schools interviewed at St Luke’s Church, felt the Christian identity ascribed in their Anglican affiliated schools – particularly materials used in Religious Education lessons – did not represent Christianity as they understood and experienced it (resonating with the findings of Jackson et al. (2010)). For example, Sheila and Anne who attended the same voluntary controlled Anglican school were concerned about the representation of their faith to their peers which could ascribe them an unfashionable and uncool Christian identity.

**Anne:** We were reading like a textbook in Religious Education, and they put a Christian guy in there, and I was just like: you’re a typical... comb-over, collared shirt but it was like checked, and it was all done up, and I was just like... and a sweater...

**Sheila:** Massive round glasses like this!

...  

**Anne:** That’s great, but we need something different.

**Anne, female, Year 10; Sheila, female, Year 12, Voluntary Controlled Anglican School [St Luke’s Anglican Church, group interview]**

Participants were also uneasy in regard to learning about Christianity among secular-minded peers in unsympathetic classroom worlds that did not share the values of their Church or home. For example, Ellen, who attended St Luke’s Anglican Church which had a Charismatic worship style, described her experience of studying the charismatic tradition at school as one of ‘attack.’

*I was in my [Religious Education] lesson, and, umm, you know, you know like [...] charismatic worship...Well we were learning about that, and I was like, ‘ok well that’s what, that’s what I do.’ And, umm, they showed like a video of some people doing it and stuff, and everyone was like: ‘oh, that’s really weird! That’s really really weird and stuff.’ And I kinda felt like that was me being attacked. And I felt like really really defensive...*
Ellen, female, Year 12, Comprehensive Foundation School [Anglican] [St Luke’s Anglican Church, group interview]

Anne felt that the values and norms of her Anglican school did not respect Christianity in the same way other religious beliefs were accommodated. She gave an example of bias taking place during a discussion in a Religious Education lesson.

There was this one time in my [Religious Education] lesson when this girl in my, umm, class, her family are like Pagans and she’s like into it and everything, and, umm, the guys behind – like, also at the lesson, they were all just like dissing Christianity all the time – and everyone knows that I’m a Christian so I was trying to back it up and everything, and then they started dissing Paganism. And the, she just blows, and it’s just like, umm, they, when she explains the reasons against it, they take it in and go: oh right, sorry. But I’m trying to explain things about Christianity, they don’t do that; they just keep going. And the thing is: I don’t understand how, when everyone’s all like: oh yeah, I respect other people’s beliefs and everything, when, obviously they can’t, like, understand Christianity; they just have to have a go at you for it.

Anne, female, Year 10, Voluntary Controlled Anglican School [St Luke’s Anglican Church, group interview]

While Anglicans reported concerns about the representation of Christianity in Anglican schools, Catholics attending Anglican affiliated schools also reported problems about the representation of Catholicism. For example, Joyce complained that the representation of Catholicism in Religious Education at her Anglican foundation school was of a more ‘extreme’ version of Christianity than other denominations, perhaps indicating the religious disadvantage (Weller et al., 2001) of attending an Anglican institution as an historical minority.

Sometimes when they teach Christianity, they’ll say like, if they’ll talking about Christianity in general, say communion, they’ll say that for Catholics it is the body and blood of Jesus or they say that Catholics believe that abortion is wrong under all circumstances but they only really pick it out when Catholics are being extreme in comparison with the rest of Christianity.

Joyce, female, Year 10, Independent Anglican Girls’ School [St Mary’s Roman Catholic Church, group interview]

Joyce also explained that in her school as a Catholic in an Anglican school, her teachers could also focus on her in lessons because of her minority denomination, ascribing her a Catholic identity (resonating with the findings of Moulin, 2011).

Actually in the first few years at school I got picked out [by teachers] for being Catholic. ‘Joyce, you’re Catholic, why don’t you tell us about the reformation?’
An important difference between the reported experiences of the participants who attended Anglican and Catholic affiliated schools, and those who attended community and comprehensive schools, was the provision of collective worship, and the presence of school Chaplains, Christian youth workers, and Christian teachers in Church schools.

Gary (Northstreet Baptist Church) was the only protestant Christian to unequivocally describe school worship as actively supporting his Christian identity; attending Chapel daily at his Anglican Independent School was important for him because ‘otherwise I forget I’m a Christian’ (Gary). For Gary, the values and norms of classroom worlds were congruent with those of his home and Church. Other participants at Christian affiliated schools noted challenges with the curriculum and worship (when provided). For Anglican participants attending schools with operating chapels, the forms of worship were considered dull and uninspirational in comparison to modern forms of worship at St Luke’s. Ellen explained how this represented Christianity as old fashioned and boring to her peers, which she did not consider true of her experience of St Luke’s Church.

"[Be]cause at my school, we have Chapel on Mondays, Tuesdays and Fridays, and people normally go, I think, once every two weeks, but I go the other days because I’m in the choir and it is the most boring thing and like me and [my friend], we’re obviously both Christian; and we’re like, ‘oh, do we have to go to Chapel?’ If even Christians think that..?"

Ellen, female, Year 12, Anglican Community School [St Luke’s Anglican Church, group interview]

Participants in other schools observed the lack of religious content of their Church school assemblies, which had no Christian prayer. For example, Anne described her school’s policy of ‘a moment of reflection’ rather than prayer, criticising the Church of England for its lack of enthusiastic worship resonating with problems recognised by the
Church in terms of losing its Christian mission (Archbishops’ Council Education Division, 2012).

It’s a Church of England school, so the only thing we do like we said is that we bow our heads at the end of assembly – have a moment of reflection...

Anne, female, Year 10, Voluntary Controlled Anglican School [St Luke’s Anglican Church, group interview]

For Catholics at Anglican schools, Anglican forms of worship could provoke a mixed reaction because of a difference in perspective, or a lack of Catholic authenticity.

In our chapel services which we have every morning you can see the difference between the Church of England and the Catholic Church, because it gets on my nerves that everyone listens to the Rev. And everyone thinks what the Rev says is right because I don’t think she is sometimes, but I just get annoyed.

Bob, male, Year 9, Independent Boys’ School [Anglican] [St Mary’s Catholic Church, group interview]

On another occasion, Bob explained further. The chapel did support his religious beliefs and values, but he was wary of differences between norms and values of his home and Church and those of his school.

....I do find chapel a place that supports my faith but whenever I am there I always remember that it is Church of England and there are a few differences. We say the same prayers as we do in Catholicism so it’s ok... the chaplain is a woman and that is a major thing for me otherwise no - I’m not really used to it but it’s not really a big deal. I wouldn’t really mind if the Catholic Church allowed that so I don’t really mind [individual interview]

Bob, male, Year 9, Independent Boys’ School [Anglican] [St Mary’s Catholic Church, individual interview]

The voluntary aided Catholic school attended by four Catholic participants had a youth worker who organised a variety of alternative activities of a religious or pastoral nature in and outside of school. These were considered more positively as ‘helping’ practising Catholics and providing opportunities for non-Catholics to understand religion in a more experiential way. Out of all the participants in the study, Catholics attending Catholic schools were those who reported the fewest concerns about crossing the borders between church, home and school worlds (although they did report some discrepancies). In particular, these participants believed that the
representation of Catholicism was more authentic in their school because it allowed for an experiential aspect.

Daniella: The things we do with [the youth worker] help, so she has taken people out of classes and had a kind of different religious experience like it is not all boring because the students are going away from it and not actually coming to the religious side then we're going to go to them and try and get on their level

Jodie: And it is really effective because it was the best part, like there was a prayer space and even people who weren't Christians were praying some were even crying and it gave them time to think about it

Jodie, female, Year 9; Daniella, female, Year 10, voluntary aided Catholic Comprehensive School [St Mary’s Catholic Church, group interview]

The participants who attended the Catholic school agreed that the provision of religious retreats by the Catholic youth worker was the most beneficial activity in this regard. This was because these events were voluntary and away from normal classroom worlds which could be hostile to religious practice. Daniella explained further.

[The youth worker] organises retreats as well and that is really good fun because you can get away from the negativity [at school] and you're only there with people who want to be there so you can think about it more because you can get away from the people who say 'this is stupid and so uncool' and you can think about what you think about it rather than what every one else thinks about it.

Daniella, female, Year 10, Voluntary Aided Catholic Comprehensive School [St Mary’s Catholic Church, group interview]

For practising Catholics in Catholic schools, however, Mass was a different, less reverent experience from that of the world of their parish Church. Peers could be confused about the meaning of the Mass or be deliberately disrespectful in it, and this could make worship more difficult and reverence harder to achieve. There was consensus that its compulsory status meant 'students aren’t interested in it and the whole energy of the room isn't there’ (Daniella). This was explained more fully by Jodie and Stacy:

Jodie: It’s different because half the people don’t go up to communion and they get confused ‘I don’t know if I’ve made my first communion, do I take this or not?’ They go up and put their hand out because they see everyone else doing it and usually in the end they have to eat it because they’ve taken it....They don’t get the bread represents the body [of Christ]. They just think it is bread in general.

Stacy: Yeah, they like at Mass half way during the day we’d all be sat in alphabetical order or something and when we’re praying and stuff I take it really seriously and all my friends is mucking about and they’re looking at me and I find it hard to concentrate.
As practising Catholics in a largely non-practising Catholic cohort, receiving communion and reverence at Mass became an important symbolic boundary. For Jodie, it became a way of determining those of her peers who were Catholic.

**Stacy**: They stare at me [when showing reverence at Mass]

**Jodie**: Also people know if you’re a catholic or not if they see you take the bread and they assume you are. I look at the people taking the bred and I didn’t know if they were Catholic or not.

In contrast to negative experiences of Catholics in non-Catholic schools, and most Christians in Anglican affiliated schools, overall classroom worlds were not perceived to clash with the values and norms of Catholic participants’ homes. However, for three out of four of the participants who attended the Catholic secondary school Catholic classroom worlds were not considered to strengthen their religious identity either. Gwenyth explained that her religious beliefs came ‘from my family not from school at all’ (Gwenyth), while Daniella felt that making a mental dichotomy between school and church worlds was the best way of approaching school: ‘they’re different things – you want to separate them’ (Daniella). For one participant, Jodie, however, school was a positive influence and provided her with resources with which to construct her religious identity. Jodie felt having ‘Christian teachers’ was an important aspect of school, and had supported the formation of her religious beliefs and practices. Jodie explained that studying the philosophy of religion in Religious Education in a Catholic school had helped her understand arguments for the existence of God. While the activities organised by the youth worker at school had helped her understand more about God in experiential and intellectual terms, and supported her faith, despite her finding Mass at school potentially awkward in comparison to Church.
experiences resonate with the findings of Good and Willoughby (2007) who found that role-models and experiential aspects of religious community membership were significant in the construction of Christian identities in adolescence.

**Jews and the classroom worlds of non-Jewish schools**

Jewish participants of all denominations interviewed at three sites reported several common concerns regarding the secondary school curriculum, collective worship, and the general structure of the school (Appendix 12, p. 325). For Christians in religious unaffiliated schools, Religious Education was often discussed as a critical site in school where there was a discrepancy between the values of classroom worlds and those of their religious communities and families. Jewish participants, on the other hand, reported non-Jewish secondary schools (including independent, Church, and county schools, see Appendix 10, p. 322) as presenting more varied discrepancies between the values, norms, practices and expectations of their homes and those of classroom worlds. These concerns were often reported as challenges that presented adolescent Jews with critical junctures when they became aware of their Jewish identities, usually as distinct and at odds to the ethos and culture of their secondary schools and wider society.

Festivals were an important aspect of Jewish identity for participants. A common theme of participants’ reported experiences was missing school days due to the Jewish Holy Days clashing with the school calendar – a problem not encountered by Christian participants. Some participants took these days off, which was sometimes considered as a benefit of the discrepancy between the norms and values of their homes and those of their classroom worlds. Jack and Seth explained.
Interviewer: OK. Given that I want to know what it’s like to be a Jewish student at school is there anything I need to know or ask about?

Seth: Umm. Not really. You might not be able to do to school because it’s a High Holy Day.

Jack: Awesome

Seth: And that’s the best ’coz you can just go back to Jack’s and mess about there, and you see the minibus, with all my school friends on that bus and you can go up to the window and say ‘waayyyy’... In the end you accept you’re at a Christian school.

Jack, male, Year 8, Reform, Independent Boys’ School; Seth, male, Year 8, Reform, Independent Boys’ School (Anglican) [Eastville Reform Cheder, pair interview]

Missing school could cause problems if something important was happening at school that day, however.

Sometimes the holidays can be inconvenient so because being Jewish I would take a day off on Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur like most other Jews in the school whereas everybody else would stay in school. Like I missed some drama controlled assessment because I was away and the problem was catching up.

Aaron, male, Year 10, Orthodox, Voluntary Aided School (Anglican) [Countrywide Jewish Youth Club, group interview]

Many of the participants interviewed who attended non-Jewish schools did not keep to the strictest interpretation of Jewish dietary laws. Those who took dietary laws more seriously reported taking a packed lunch to school or only ate vegetarian food. However, in regard to keeping some basic rules, such as abstinence from pork, some participants were concerned about the lack of provision of food in their schools’ canteen. Realising that kosher provision was not possible in mainstream schools contributed to Jews’ self-understanding of being a minority, and a sense of their school’s institutional religionism (Weller et al. 2001).

Because it’s such a minority, they’re not going to cater... at my school I’m such a minority, like the only one, and if I ate meat and not a packed lunch. I doubt that the make another meal options especially for me, if it was more... if it was more, like if Christianity had to keep kosher, it would all be kosher, it would, but for us its different...

Ruth, female, Year 8, Reform, Independent School [Reform cheder, triple interview]

Participants attending Church schools and Independent Schools with a Christian foundation or ethos, typically reported feeling uncomfortable in Christian collective worship. In these episodes nominal or unacknowledged adherence to Judaism came to the fore as participants felt that they should not participate, or they felt uncomfortable
doing so. For example, Elizabeth complained about the compulsory nature of collective worship which she felt unpleasant in partaking, while Joseph also thought it was unfair to have Christian prayers in his non-religiously affiliated independent schools.

*Well, my school is a member of the [Independent School Christian association] and they kind of make you go to church services and you don’t get a choice, so it’s not nice, and they always have a prayer after assemblies and we sing hymns in assemblies.*

Elizabeth, female, Year 8, Reform, Independent School (Anglican) [Reform cheder, group interview]

*There is a prayer every now and then that is said, which is quite a Christian prayer to be honest in some assemblies. It’s a bit annoying how they put a prayer into a school that isn’t meant to have a serious religious view or anything.*

Joseph, male, Year 8, Reform, Independent Boys’ School [Reform cheder, pair interview]

Christian assemblies could be potentially offensive for participants, although some participants felt that schools ‘toned-down’ (Lisa) the religious content to make them more palatable for a multi-cultural in-take. For Josephina, assemblies made her feel ‘cornered’ and ‘bombarded with all this Christian stuff’ (Josephina). When asked for more detail, she described a special Easter assembly that she found particularly memorable and offensive because it emphasised the exclusivity of Christ for salvation.

*At Easter they showed us a presentation where a man fell into a hole and all the people of different religions tried to get the man out of the hole. Nothing would work, and the man stayed there and just got worse and worse, and no other religion could help until Christianity came along, and the man just stayed there until Jesus threw himself down into the pit. And Jesus stayed down in the pit and the man got out.*

Josephina, female, Year 12, Liberal, Sixth-form college [Countrywide Jewish Youth Group, individual interview]

Another time when participants reported being uncomfortable in non-Jewish schools of all types, was during holocaust education. Holocaust education was another instance of their Jewish identity being brought to the fore and ascribed to them. This could take place in History or Religious Education classes. A common feature of this reported experience was being stared at, or receiving other forms of unwanted attention from peers. Alexander’s experience serves as a good example of this.
Experiences... um... I think as a Jewish student, yeah, the thing that crops up the most is the Holocaust especially when teaching about it in History, so the teacher will be talking about the discrimination against Jews from the Nazi’ point of view ... and it's kind of awkward at times because everyone is looking at you and, you know, it is an exchange of glances really.

Alexander, male, Year 10, Reform, Independent Boys’ School [Reform cheder, triple interview]

Holocaust education could prompt reactions from peers, such as contrition and sympathy which could also be alienating and odd for some participants.

It's really weird and happens in all subjects that whenever anyone talks about in History or RS, whenever they talk about the Holocaust. Everyone says 'sorry, sorry, sorry'. Anytime anyone mentions it, they look at me; they say 'I'm sorry', but I say that it didn’t affect me particularly, so you should be saying it someone else. Lucky for me, none of my family were in the Holocaust, and this is really weird, because everyone asks me questions: ‘did you know anybody?’ and I wasn't even born then! So it’s just really weird.

Ruth, female, Year 8, Reform, Independent School [Reform cheder, group interview]

Despite feeling uncomfortable, participants were pleased that Holocaust education took place and they typically considered it necessary for their peers to understand what it was like to be Jewish. Josephina’s perspective serves as a good example. Holocaust education enabled others to understand a key aspect of Jewish identity.

I think it [Holocaust education] helped quite a few [peers] understand where some of my views came from ... People who have never understood anything like that or been through anything like that ... I’m quite glad that they do [Holocaust education]; it helps people understand and connect to how you're feeling, so it gets people on the same level.

Josephina, female, Year 12, Liberal, Sixth-form college [Countrywide Jewish Youth Club, individual interview]

Judaism did not feature in the Religious Education curriculum in some participants’ schools: the Religious Education curriculum was given over to Christianity in some Christian-foundation schools, and principally Christianity and Islam in some schools not of a religious character. Some participants who attended community and comprehensive schools also reported Religious Education lessons as being devoid of recognisable religious content which reaffirmed the rareness of their religious practice in secular society. The secular values of Religious Education did not match those of religious nurture at the Cheder.
We have to do [Religious Education]. That's the thing, but half the time I don't actually know what we're doing. We're never talking about religion. I don't know what we're doing in that lesson to be honest; you see, I think, it's a bit of a waste of time.

Saphire, female, Year 10, Liberal, Community School [Liberal cheder, group interview]

Participants that attended schools with and without a Christian affiliation reported a perceived bias in the teaching of Religious Education that favoured a Christian interpretation. This could also contribute to a sense of institutional religionism. As described by Claire, for example.

Well, my [Religious Education] teacher she is always like, ‘well I don't believe in a religion’ but she's always siding with Christianity and she only...like if there's an opinion she'll say ‘oh but Jesus would have said this’ and ‘Mark, Luke and John would have said this’, and she's kind of leaning towards Christianity. Rather than taking inbetween sides.

Claire, female, Independent Girls’ School [Countrywide Jewish Youth Club, group interview]

When Judaism featured in the Religious Education curriculum, its perceived misrepresentation was one of Jewish participants’ primary concerns. Teaching materials were considered inaccurate, out of date and did not depict the normal lives of Jewish people. This misrecognition of participants’ beliefs and practices was often considered problematic. It reinforced the dominance of Christianity and the ignorance of modern Judaism in society, particularly progressive Judaism.

the videos they show [of Judaism], they're all really ancient, and they're really ancient, so you [students] can't relate to them and ... so [for example] they're like invite people into your home at Rosh Hashanah and you're like that doesn't really happen.

Lisa, female, Year 8, Reform, Independent School (Anglican) [Eastville Reform Synagogue, group interview]

Religious Education lessons were also widely considered as biased towards Orthodoxy. Participants at the Reform and Liberal synagogue found this especially problematic.

Jasper’s experience serves as a good example of this.

In my school I think I am the only Jew in my whole school and its quite a big school as well so basically I've got friends that aren't Jewish and they go to the classes of Religious Education and RS and they [teachers] say I'm [Jews are] like Orthodox and stuff, and all these people come and ask me stereotypical stuff like ‘Do you do this?’ and ‘Do you have two kitchens?’ and ‘Do keep kosher?’ and... and I say ‘no’

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While it may be expected that Reform and Liberal Jews would find the depiction of Judaism as Orthodox problematic, Orthodox participants also complained that when Judaism appeared in the curriculum it was typically represented in its most ‘religious’ Orthodox form. This could also confuse their peers.

I know a lot about Judaism and sometimes what was written in the textbook wasn’t really right. ...first of all the textbooks are quite old and they are written by a non-Jew ... One example is usually festivals, and the words they use to describe things...People in my school who are not Jewish have one image in their head who they think Jews are... they have this image in their head of really religious people and they have hats and beards.

A common concern of participants’ experiences of Religious Education was teachers’ reported inability to pronounce words for Jewish festivals and other religious terminology correctly. This was not considered offensive, but it was widely-perceived as frustrating or annoying. When faced with mispronunciations, participants were sometimes reluctant to correct teachers, while others would try to teach their teachers or explain to the rest of the class. Joseph and Rosanna’s discussion serves as a good example of this problem.

Rosanna: In my school the teachers mispronounce it wrong - all the names of the festivals and sometimes which can be quite annoying sometimes. It’s quite picky but for Pesach they say ‘Pesatch’ but if you try to correct them they think they’re always really right, which can be really annoying and you can’t stand up and say you know more than them because they’re a teacher, but they did get it wrong.
Interviewer: Are there any other examples?
Joseph: It does get annoying. They say Kipper

Rosanna: Yom Kippur they say ‘Yom Kipper’
Joseph: I think it’s just because of the spellings I suppose, and how it’s pronounced in Hebrew and how it’s pronounced in English but it does get a little bit annoying, sometimes.
Rosanna: It’s quite frustrating, because you feel quite stuck because like I said, you can’t stand up to a teacher
Joseph: It’s not offensive
Rosanna: Yeah, I’m not offended
Joseph: But it’s just a little bit annoying but I find I sometimes can just raise my hand and say actually it is pronounced this way. Otherwise, I notice it but I don’t mind that much.
Interviewer: [to Joseph] You’ve actually challenged the teacher and said, ‘Hang on’ ... [to Rosanna] How would you feel about that?
Rosanna: I would feel fine but [my school] it’s quite strict and old-fashioned. And um, I don’t think that the teachers would react well. Because I think they might take it the wrong way and think it’s rude and like insulting the teacher.

Joseph, male, Year 8, Reform, Independent Boys’ School; Rosanna, female, Year 8, Reform, Independent Girls’ School [Reform cheder, pair interview]

Mispronunciation reaffirmed teachers’ misrecognition and ignorance of Judaism, even though they reputedly taught about it. Teachers defined the representation of Judaism, but even though participants possessed the linguistic expertise of adolescents who had been instructed in their religious tradition, this did not necessarily enable them to challenge teachers’ authority. These findings are similar to those of Nesbitt’s (1998) study of Hindu and Sikh children. Nesbitt found that the content of curriculum materials and textbooks in Religious Education were perceived as inaccurate, generalised and stereotyped by Hindu and Sikh students. Hindus and Sikhs also reported that teachers could mispronounce Indian words, or were perceived to be unable to present Hinduism and Sikhism in a way that religious students’ peers could understand without recourse to ridicule.

Jews and Jewish school classroom worlds

Adolescent Jews (Appendix 4, p. 312) interviewed at Countrywide Jewish Youth Club and Eastville Liberal synagogue attended strict Orthodox and mainstream Orthodox Jewish faith schools – as defined by the Jewish Leadership Council (2008). When crossing the borders between the worlds of their homes and religious communities, and the norms, values and beliefs of Jewish school classroom worlds, participants who attended strict Orthodox schools explained that morning (Shacharit) and afternoon (Minchah) prayers and Jewish Studies lessons were the most religious aspects of school life. At less strict schools, where there was no compulsory prayer, participants saw Jewish Studies lessons as the most ‘Jewish’ aspect of the school (see Appendix 12, p. 325, for an overview of main themes). Prayers and Jewish Studies lessons in both
schools were perceived to centre on Orthodox teaching and could therefore present a difference in the norms and values of home and religious communities with those of school, particularly by Jewish adolescents who held unorthodox or progressive beliefs. These findings resonate with those of Scholefield (2004) who found that the curriculum identities of Jewish schools could differ significantly from those of parents and students.

The adolescent Jews interviewed in this study who attended Jewish schools reported to like attending Jewish schools and identified benefits of attending them, but they also had concerns that schools were too strict, or did not prepare students for a secular and plural society. The perceived effects of attending Jewish schools were sometimes considered critically, particularly in terms of learning about and being prepared for the ‘outside’ world and the different ethnic and religious groups it holds. They were critical of Jewish Studies lessons as a vehicle for the confessional transmission of religious beliefs, as they were of enforced prayers, but the same participants also considered these aspects of their Jewish education as beneficial at times.

Some participants reported the expectations of classroom worlds challenging or irritating. There was a perception that some Jewish Studies teachers did not accept unorthodox or progressive opinions in lessons. Incidents such of these show how systems of religious identity representation in classroom worlds are institutionally endorsed and underwritten by the curriculum and teachers. For example, Abigail who attended a strict Orthodox girls’ school, felt as though the teachers ‘looked down’ at her because of her agnosticism and therefore feared articulating her views. Esther explained a similar perspective of her mainstream Jewish school.

[The Jewish Studies teacher] just tells it from what he thinks and he’s, like, very passionate about it ... if you wanted to say something else that is not Orthodox, they’ll just be like ‘this
is Orthodox and you have to learn the Orthodox way’ and you’ll be like ‘yeah, Judaism is not just Orthodox.’

Esther, female, Year 11, Orthodox, mainstream Orthodox Jewish School [Countrywide Jewish Youth Club, triple interview]

Participants felt that this kind of teaching in their school was counter-productive; it did not allow for a genuine engagement with the questions of religion or being Jewish as a minority in a plural, secular society. Some participants expressed a desire to study world religions thoroughly in addition to Jewish Studies. Participants in strict Orthodox schools also voiced concern that homosexuality and contraception were not talked about openly or fairly (although this could depend on the teacher), and there were no opportunities to learn about other religions. For example, Isobel relayed her disquiet about a lesson on homosexuality in a Jewish Studies lesson:

We were learning about gay people and what Judaism says about gay people ... and the other teacher who is ‘This is how Judaism is; this is how our Judaism should be’ – he was trying really hard to not to offend anybody but it didn't really work because he said the Orthodox view, the Orthodox view was that gay people were ‘abominations!’ A lot of the people in our class were really angry and upset about that because I know a couple of gay people and I think it is wrong to say they are abominations or that they are not proper people and I had a really big debate with the teacher.

Isobel, female, Year 11, Masorti, mainstream Orthodox Jewish School [Countrywide Jewish Youth Club, group interview]

Prayer at school was a cause of concern to participants at the stricter schools. Abigail explained her initiation into prayer with some embitterment.

Yeah, and they like sit there. And when I was in Year 7 I really didn't pray at all, like ‘Why would I pray in a different language, if I didn’t understand it?’ And I just sat there quietly and just sat there. And every day in assembly I'd have a teacher come up to me: 'Open your mouth!' and stand by me until I moved, like: 'Why are you forcing me to pray!?'

Abigail, female, Year 9, Orthodox, strict Orthodox Jewish girl’s School [Countrywide Jewish Youth Club, triple interview]

In Esther and Isobel’s school, the format of prayer had recently been changed to allow standing in silence. They both explained that this was beneficial and allowed for genuine religious or spiritual reflection, albeit in Isobel’s case more of an individual nature.
Isobel, female, Year 11, Masorti, mainstream Orthodox Jewish School [Countrywide Jewish Youth Club, triple interview]

Participants who identified as Orthodox perceived discrepancies between the Jewish identities authorised by Orthodox affiliated schools and their own self-understanding as Orthodox Jews. Participants interviewed at the Liberal Cheder, however, felt that there was prejudice towards Liberal Judaism implicit in teachers’ attitudes, and reflected in the GCSE Jewish Studies lessons, which did not sufficiently engage with progressive forms of Judaism. When Liberal Judaism was represented ‘it was from an Orthodox point of view, compared with what Orthodox people would do’ (Dan). This finding echoes with focus group research which shows Jewish students can perceive an Orthodox bias in classroom materials (Jackson et al., 2010). Matthew did not wish to articulate his Liberal views in lessons, claiming that he had revealed his Liberal beliefs but it was ‘not a good experience’ because the teachers ‘like you and then they don't’ and as a result ‘teach you slightly differently.’ He feared being caught out in argument with his articulate teacher.

Identity formation was perceived by participants as one of the purposes and aims of Jewish schools, in keeping with literature that advocates Jewish schools, and international research literature concerning the effect of Jewish education on identity formation (e.g. Miller, 2001; Hartman & Hartman, 2003; Jewish Leadership Council, 2008; Rich & Schachter, 2012). However, participants’ perspectives sometimes resonated with criticisms of faith schools, such as those who claim they segregate communities and indoctrinate students (e.g. Halstead & McLaughlin, 2005; Norman, 2012). Some participants felt that attending Jewish schools had strengthened their sense of Jewish ethnic affinity and cultural identity overall; but others felt that, on reflection,
school could weaken their religious faith in Judaism as a religion, or at least not strengthen it. For example, Abigail claimed that her strict Orthodox school clashed with her own considered views, and therefore ‘turned her away’ from Judaism. She gave her experience of learning about the justification of Jewish ritual slaughter as an example.

*I think sometimes when they [teachers] say things, like for instance, like, ‘animals love it when you kill them and eat them’; ‘when we kill them in a different way animals love it’. It’s like ‘NO!’ then I say, then I’m a bit rebellious, like, it’s so weird they’re not thinking, like, about stuff. Sometimes it does turn me away. Sometimes it turns me.*

**Abigail, female, Year 9, Orthodox, strict Orthodox Jewish Girls’ School [cross-community event, triple interview]**

Dan felt that the ‘the most Jewish thing’ his school did was to take him to Israel – a significant aspect of Jewish identity in the modern era (Sacks, 1999). He felt that this was an important experience, where he and his friends ‘connected’ with their Judaism, after what he found to be a negative experience of Jewish primary school.

*Everyone who I know who went to [Jewish Primary school] completely hated Judaism and I hated it, because all we were told about is Orthodox, and before my parents started here that’s all I knew about it. And I thought to be Jewish, you have to be really Orthodox and it drove us all so much away from it, and when I went [mainstream Jewish secondary school], I was so relaxed and we all became a bit more like, it’s not that bad really, and I came here because I realised I have a choice. And when we went to Israel, we used to, like, our forms go [lists form names] and after Israel – that’s how it used to separate – but after Israel we all combined, and we lived these experiences, and I think everyone I know who went to [Jewish Primary school] – we all became a little bit more religious, and we all cared and wear necklaces like this one – even the people who weren’t religious like [my friend] who used to go here. He doesn’t anymore, because doesn’t believe in God, he still wears a [necklace]: he wants to stay Jewish, but he doesn’t believe in it.*

**Dan, male, Year 11, Liberal, mainstream Orthodox Jewish School [Liberal cheder, group interview]**

Matthew, on the other hand, felt that secondary school – in contrast to primary school – was more relaxed, and therefore liberated him from his childhood faith. Examples such as this show the complexity of identity processes contrary to Marcian-Eriksonian models that assume ‘achieved’ identity follow periods of exploration. Matthew felt the opposite:

*From Jewish school to Jewish school, I think actually it’s turned me away from Judaism; it’s the constant pushing Judaism into me, especially my primary school. I was a firm believer in my primary school but the second it was slightly laid-off in year seven, it was as if I had a bit of leeway and I pushed my way out and escaped my mental block.*
Matthew, male, Year 11, Liberal, mainstream Orthodox Jewish School [Liberal cheder, group interview]

Participants indicated degrees of comfort associated with attending a Jewish school, but they also voiced concerns over the mono-cultural aspects of this experience. Most salient was the opinion that only Orthodox perspectives were given any credence – even in schools which cater for the wider community and few of their students were considered to be practicing fully. The more strict Orthodox schools could clash with the secular values outside of school; of their families; in the media, or wider society – in particular mainstream society’s emphasis on individual choice, freedom of morality, and acceptance of religious diversity. Jewish schools could form a barrier with the rest of society and not prepare them for life outside the Jewish world, as Esther explained. This could have a negative effect for the future and formed an impression of Orthodox Jewish identity as necessarily insular.

Esther: female, Year 11, Orthodox, mainstream Orthodox Jewish School [cross-community event, triple interview]

The examples of reported experiences given above show a perceived anomaly and injustice surrounding aspects of Orthodox teachings encountered at school that conflicted with secular ethical values. These included homosexuality, attitudes towards other religions, animal rights, and the right to decide one’s own religious practice. These negotiations can be understood in terms of adolescents Jews’ minority position in a secular, plural society on the one hand, and the religious traditions and expectations of school worlds, on the other. Both of these factors were perceived as challenging. Schools represented a traditional view of Judaism at odds with their families’ practices.
or denomination, but protected them from wider society – which was both appreciated; in the sense participants esteemed the community and shared cultural affinity of their Jewish schools, and a cause of concern. For the small group of participants who attended Jewish schools, this paradox formed an important task in negotiating their Jewish identities. The reported conflicts between their Jewish values, norms and practices outside of school, and the religious aspects of school worlds are indicative of the “‘fuzzy frontiers’ [of Jewish identity] which have to be negotiated by young people learning what it is to be Jewish in Britain today” (Scholefield, 2004, p. 246).

**Muslims and comprehensive and community School classroom worlds**

Muslim participants (Appendix 5, p. 314) interviewed in Southville and Westville reported several common concerns about classroom worlds in comprehensive and community schools (Appendix 13, p. 326). Participants interviewed in Westville were more critical of their schools than the Ahmadiyya participants who went to school in Southville, perhaps reflecting the racial tension well-documented in the city (further reference cannot be given here to protect anonymity). Although none of the participants attended Church schools, participants typically regarded their schools as Christian in ethos and that they therefore could suffer from institutional religionism as practising Muslims (as also perceived by some Jews in non-Jewish schools).

The interview data I generated in this study resound strongly with those of a number of studies concerning the schooling experiences of Muslims (e.g. Zine, 2000, 2001; Archer, 2003; Ipgrave & McKenna, 2008; Ipgrave, 2010; Hassan, 2010; Miller & McKenna, 2011). The identity negotiations and constructions of Muslim participants suggest that some Muslims can find navigating borders between classroom worlds problematic or hazardous, and may show some resistance to teachers in order to
negotiate discrepancies norms and values of school worlds and those of their homes and religious communities.

Participants observed a number of challenges in regards to maintaining religious practices in school worlds as schools were ‘biased towards Christianity’ (Jamal). These often concerned practices that constituted significant identity boundaries. Participants reported hindrances observing daily Salah or weekly Jumu’ah [Friday prayers]; maintaining the Ramadan fast; eating halal food; and, taking time off to celebrate Eid ul-Fitr with their families. Participants could regard their teachers and school administration as not taking these requirements seriously, or not fully understanding their importance. Schools, head teachers and teachers could be considered as unsympathetic to the needs of Muslim students, be it provision for Salah, Ramadan or Eid ul-Fitr, this could be attributed to Islamophobia or racism, particularly by participants in Westville. For example, Amir described a dialogue with a teacher who complained at his absence during Eid. Amir who saw the comparative length of the Christmas holidays as unfair in comparison to the day allowed for Eid, had said ‘I’m sure Christmas is not two weeks!’ to which the teacher replied: ‘It’s a Christian country’, which Amir felt was unfair (Amir, paraphrasing a teacher). These kinds of narratives – of negative relationships with teachers, bias and prejudice – are similar to those in other studies of the reported experiences of Muslims in secondary schools (e.g. Weller et al., 2001; Zine, 2001; Hassan, 2010).

Muslim participants perceived racism and Islamophobia among white or ‘Christian’ teachers. Some felt that religion could be more of an issue than race in terms of this prejudice. Participants reported teachers holding stereotypes about Muslims and Asians as poor achievers (‘Our science teacher didn’t used to teach us properly because our class was mainly Asian – he used to think they won’t get it anyway’ (Khadija));
ignoring prejudice and racial abuse against Muslims and Pakistani heritage students by other pupils; and, not being given the benefit of the doubt when they were late, were not in school uniform, or got into fights with other students. Assim even reported his science teacher calling a religious-looking Asian pupil ‘Osama Bin Laden’ as a joke, a stereotype reflecting a well-known stigmatisation of Muslim youth in the media (Archer, 2003; Mirza, et al. 2007; Moore et al., 2008).

A salient example of perceived unfair treatment was that of Fatima when she complained about racist comments made by white peers over the ‘Muslims against Crusades’ poppy burning in 2010 (Bloxham, 2010).

And I went up to the teacher [to explain about racist comments], she was like ‘leave it, leave it don’t doing anything about it.’ And I was like ‘Ok why should I not do anything about it?’ [...] and all the teachers were like ‘leave her alone’ who are coincidentally white and I was left out because I didn’t know what to do then, and the head teacher called me to her room and said: ‘why are you starting arguments?’ and stuff, and I only asked her a simple question.

Fatima, female, 11, Comprehensive Girls’ School [Westville Muslim Women’s community Centre, pair interview]

Fatima believed that this episode illustrated the lack of will of her white teachers to tackle racism. Similar perspectives were held by other participants. Khadija also explained, following an attack with a compass, how her teacher did not seem to be interested in dealing with the incident as a racist incident.

I tried to tell the teacher and she was like ‘oh just be quiet, its nothing, sit down’ and my hand was properly bleeding and I was trying to show her but she wasn’t listening to me, so then I said. And I was sitting in the lesson quietly and the girl was behind me and kept kicking my chair and I couldn’t tell the teacher because she wouldn’t listen, and then I went home and my mum saw it and my mum called up the school and then they realised and the teacher said ‘oh, it’s because we thought you were messing around in the class’ and I’m always, I never mess around and um then she said ‘we thought you were just messing around and joking’ and that’s what she did and didn’t say anything else.

Khadija, female, 12, Comprehensive Girls’ School [Westville Muslim Women’s community Centre, triple interview]

The lack of provision of prayer spaces, limited leave of absence for Islamic festivals and fasting have been found to be common concern to Muslim students and Muslim communities in a number of studies (McIntyre et al., 1993; Weller et al., 2001;
Østberg, 2001; Ipgrave & McKenna, 2008). Participants reported that arrangements for Salah varied from school to school: one had a dedicated permanent prayer space; another had no prayer space at all. Some participants reported that prayer took place every day in a classroom or school gym at lunchtime, some only on a Friday. When Salah or Jumu’ah took place, this could be led by a teacher or an older student. Some participants reported Muslim teachers giving a short khutbah [sermon] on Fridays. While participants where provisions were made were pleased that efforts had been made, the provisions of facilities for Salah were usually considered unsatisfactory. One participant wanted separate rooms for women and a place to perform wuzu [washing before prayer]. The khutbah was also not considered as authentic or lengthy as that of a Masjid. Teachers would also complain if students were late to lessons after lunchtime prayers. One participant believed the head teacher deliberately organised sporting events to clash with Friday lunch time prayers ‘to tempt people away from it’ (Amir). Ahmadiyya participants reported not attending prayers at school because they were not permitted to pray with mainstream Muslims.

Observing the Ramadan fast was considered problematic at school, mainly because non-Muslim staff were perceived to be unsympathetic, or hostile to fasting. Examples reported by participants portray teachers who were ignorant of the significance of Ramadan. For example, in a music lesson, Assim explained the teacher had ignored Muslim students’ protests against playing the piano during Ramadan, saying ‘stay at home if you’re not allowed to’ (Assim). The next music lesson, some Muslim students tried to ‘wag’ the lesson only to be told that they would get detention. In response to this, the teacher asked ‘why they couldn’t fast [observe Ramadan] on Saturdays and Sundays instead?’ Amir gave a similar example: during Ramadan he found it hard to give a group presentation in a science lesson. When he responded to the
teacher’s questioning of his lack of participation by saying he was fasting, he reported
the teacher as saying: ‘well, I’ve been up since six in the morning, so get over it’ (Amir,
paraphrasing a teacher). Those on free school meals explained that the school allowed
them to take food at lunchtime during Ramadan so they could save it to break their fast
later. Some of the staff would perceive this as breaking the fast and told the students not
to take the food, other participants claimed that queuing up in the canteen was hard
when fasting.

As in the reported experiences of Jews in non-Jewish schools, classroom worlds
clashed with Islamic religious festivals. Secondary schools’ arrangements for the
festival of Eid ul-Fitr were considered difficult because participants could not take
sufficient time off. Taking days off was limited to one day, where participants would
need three days for the celebration. One participant had been told that this absence
would be marked on his reference as unauthorised absence. The scheduling of exams
during Eid was also problematic. One participant explained that a teacher had asked
him to change the day he celebrated Eid to another day which the participant felt was
unfair. The same teacher had also attempted to encourage him to take the exam on Eid
by expressing the choice between failure in life or success: ‘What would you rather:
pray and fail in life, or get the best education and then pray as much as you like?’
(Assim, paraphrasing a teacher). Some Masjids held Eid on different days of which the
school’s management had been unaware. Participants explained that their head teacher
had telephoned one Masjid, or consulted one teacher about the date of Eid, and
therefore thought all Muslim students would be celebrating it on one day.

Participants reported problems with the canteen and the provision of halal food,
food laws presenting a significant boundary between home and school worlds. Staff
were not hospitable to their needs, and desserts could have gelatine in them, leaving
only one choice available. Food items were also not considered well labelled. Some participants were suspicious of the food provided. For instance, Jamal did not believe staff always told the truth as real halal food could not be produced so cheaply.

Participants appreciated the inclusion of Islam in the Religious Education curriculum, and the provision of a discrete Islamic Studies lesson in some schools. But participants reported that they would check what the teacher had told them about Islam with their parents. The version of Islam presented in classroom worlds was not to be trusted, like the perspectives of Christian and Jewish participants, curriculum identities were not authentic, but raised questions that would be discussed at home:

*You don’t rely too much on your teacher, you go to your parents… what the teacher tells you is probably wrong*

_ Akram, male, Year 13, Community School [Westville Sunni Masjid, group interview]_

Participants reported ‘checking up’ Islamic teaching on prayer, fasting and the crucifixion of Jesus (which is denied by Muslim scholars). There was a perception that text books could be inaccurate and that Asian teachers knew more about Islam – ‘Christian’ teachers did not use the correct pronunciation of Arabic terms (as noted of Hebrew by Jewish participants who attended non-Jewish schools in this study, and also reported by Hindus elsewhere (Nesbitt, 1998)). One participant explained that his Sikh teacher was balanced explaining both Islam and Christianity fairly: he ‘didn’t clarify with one religion only’ (Assim).

Participants agreed that learning about religions other than Islam was interesting, necessary and that the school needed lessons to explain faith to different religious groups in the school. Ahmed explained that ‘people’ (including the interviewer) may assume that Muslims would not want to learn about other religions in Religious Education, but he felt that other people’s religions were worth understanding. Participants’ views on the inclusion of Islam in Religious Education resonated strongly
with the findings of other studies that conclude there are discrepancies between adherents’ views of their own religion and as it were depicted in lessons (Ipgrave, 1999; Jackson et al., 2010; Ipgrave, 2010; Thanissaro, 2012). In Religious Education only the basics of Islam were covered: ‘they give you one quote, that’s it’ (Amir). Ahmadiyya participants noted that the Religious Education curriculum never included Ahmadiyya Islam which meant their peers never gained an understanding of their faith, and peers would therefore assume that all Muslims were the same. The representation of Islam as a whole could also be too simple and stereotypical – described in terms of negatives in contrast to Christian culture: ‘They [Muslims] do not eat pork, they don’t drink and they don’t go out to parties’ (Amir). Conversely, participants also felt that some teachers ascribed a more knowledgeable religious identity to Muslims than they had in actuality. For example, teachers could assume Muslim students would know the Hadith, when in reality only a few did.

Due to the security concerns surrounding terrorism, Muslim adolescents may be under suspicion of being vulnerable to ‘radicalisation’ at secondary school (HM Government, 2008; DCSF, 2008). Consequently, some resources and approaches have been advocated by religious educationists to approach the issue of terrorism (Moulin, 2012). Participants were concerned with Islam being associated with the September 11th attacks and the war on terror in Religious Education lessons and as a consequence being ascribed with a violent (Muslim) affinity identity. For example, Amir reported an introductory class to Islam. The Religious Education teacher had used a picture of the September 11th attacks alongside that of the Qur’an which he considered inappropriate, biased and offensive. On the next occasion I interviewed Amir, he reported with a wry smile that since the last interview, an image used in connection with Islam in his
Religious Education lesson was not the September 11th attacks, but the London bombings of July 7th 2005.

There was a perception that the secondary school curriculum marginalised the perspectives and political views of Muslims. Participants reported concerns with Religious Education, Science, History, English and Critical Studies curricula in this respect. One participant believed that science lessons were designed to challenge religious beliefs:

*I think they make it to try and effect what you believe, like for instance if you're a Muslim then they try to enforce this is what it is – English believe this … the big bang theory was put across as an argument, not just stating the facts*

_Jamal, male, 12, Further education college [Westville Muslim Women’s community Centre, group interview]_

Participants were suspicious of teachers’ attempts to limit Muslims’ political expression, such as protest against the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. This was considered as part of a wider conspiracy governed by the media to misrepresent Islam and promote a political agenda concerning issues such as the plight of the Palestinians and the blame for the attacks of September 11th 2001. For example, Amir disputed the evidence for the September 11th attacks being perpetrated by Muslims, and was unhappy that the truth about American violence in Muslim countries was never truthfully represented in classroom worlds. It was important that this conspiracy was uncovered in lessons by challenging the teacher when she talked about terrorism because his peers and teachers ‘didn’t understand because they get their views from the media’ (Amir).

Studying topics such as the Holocaust and September 11th attacks was resented by participants and they did not see the purpose of teachers setting up debates if they could not express their views. Participants reported teachers being unfair in classroom discussion about contentious issues. Jamal believed the teacher would limit the
expression of Muslim’s political views by reducing the time they could talk in
discussions. He also did not appreciate what he considered to be the ethnocentrism of
holocaust education. In an English lesson in which students were invited to write war
poetry, the sheet he was given was entitled: ‘The Extermination of the Jews’: ‘It just
mentioned Jews, Jews, Jews were the ones that were dying but if you look at it many
atheists, Christians and Muslims were actually killed as well’ (Jamal). Jamal explained
that the teacher was defensive when he challenged her on this issue and he compared
the Holocaust to the situation in Gaza. He claimed that she ‘brushed this to the side’
because teachers and the rest of English society did not want to be open about the
situation in Palestine.

Another example of a clash of political values in classroom worlds was given
by Amir who explained that when the British Army came into school for a careers
event, they were mobbed by students who called them ‘baby killers, terrorists and
murderers’ (Amir) while throwing sandwiches at them. Amir explained that white
students did this but also but the head teacher blamed Muslims in an assembly about
the incident.

Participants in Westville also believed that their schools were complicit in the
state security apparatus. One school had recently installed a method of paying for food
in the canteen using an electronic scan of finger prints. This was considered suspicious:
the school was chosen by the police because the majority of the students were
Muslims, and the scheme was made compulsory ‘to get everybody on the [police]
database’ (Amir). Participants believed that this could potentially lead to them to being
‘framed’ for crimes they did not commit. Moreover, teachers were considered
unsympathetic to this infringement of their liberty. Amir, who explained he did not eat
during the school day because of this system, reported a teacher saying to his class:
We'll see who isn’t using the fingerprint service, it’ll show; people who aren’t using it are going to get really skinny over the next few weeks [paraphrasing teacher]

Amir, male, 11, Foundation School [Westville Muslim Women’s Community Centre, group interviews]

Adolescent Muslims’ identity negotiations and constructions consisted of concerns over the representation of Islam in curriculum subjects, particularly in Religious Education; how Muslim beliefs and practices could be challenged by the structure and ethos of classroom worlds; and, participants’ reported experiences of interactions with teachers, including how misrepresentative religious identities could be ascribed in the context of the classroom, and they could be treated unfairly by teachers. These perspectives have some similarities with the reported experiences of Christians and Jews in religious unaffiliated schools – who also perceived the curriculum (and teachers) to be biased, and for little accommodation of their religious interpretations of reality.

However, the reported experiences of Muslims of classroom worlds illustrate the perception of a particularly strong form of institutional religionism encountered as members of a traditional (migrant) religious minority: teacher prejudice and the lack of provision of suitable food, places to pray, or the option to fast for Ramadan. Being Muslim was not reported as a cultural ‘asset’ in schools that aided border crossings (Phelan et al., 1998). The suspicion of security surveillance, and the extent of the lack of trust in schools and teachers, reflected the well-documented stigmatisation of Muslim youth after the terrorist attacks in New York in 2001, and in London in 2005 (Archer, 2003; Mirza, 2007; Moore et al., 2008; Moulin, 2012). Furthermore, Muslim participants were also critical of the political agenda of their schools. Classroom worlds typically did not tolerate political opinions that criticised Western foreign policy, for example. These findings are in keeping with studies that suggest Muslims are the most stigmatised and unfairly treated of all religious adherents in English society and the
education system (Weller et al., 2001; Purdam et al., 2007). The interview data also show how in this kind of context, a strong sense of religious identity can be constructed among Muslim adolescents (Jacobson, 1997; Peek, 2005).

**Conclusion**

The data presented in this chapter show how clashes of religious values, norms and perspectives between classroom worlds and those of home and religious communities could result in threats to religious adolescents’ ‘ability to interpret their own reality or worldview... that serves to define self’ (Jackson, 1999, p.10). Classroom worlds in religiously unaffiliated schools could challenge core beliefs at the heart of religious adolescents’ identities, and limit religious practices at school. For Christians, Religious Education could be perceived to undermine Christian beliefs, such as the experiences of Anita and Meg in Philosophy of Religion lessons, for example. For Muslims, the values and norms of classroom worlds could be perceived as Islamophobic and discriminatory. Jews in non-Jewish schools reported inaccurate and potentially harmful identity ascriptions. Crossing the borders of school worlds in these circumstances could lead to psychosocial pressure (Phelan et al., 1994) and religious adolescents not perceiving to be ‘connected’ with classroom worlds (Faircloth, 2012). Discrepancies and reported problems in border crossing reflect inherent imbalance in ‘power relations’ (Chen, 2010) between members of religious traditions and others in schools that were perceived to misrecognise or ascribe a misrepresentative identity due to the source of authority that underwrote the systems of representation.

In some cases, however, there was a coincidence between the norms, values and beliefs of a participants’ religious tradition and their classroom worlds. In a minority of cases there were perceived similarities between the norms and values of faith and Church schools and religious communities. Church and faith schools can sometimes
reinforce and provide resources for religious adolescents with which to construct their religious identities according to those values and representations. Some participants who attended Church and faith schools did not report problems with the representation of their religion (although this is not true of all participants who attended Church or faith schools). For example, Jodie, felt her Catholic school supported the values instilled by her Catholic parish and family, and she regarded the youth worker there to represent the Catholic tradition well. Jews who attended mainstream Jewish schools also reported schools as supporting their religious identity construction either occasionally, or in the long-term. These participants reported extra-curricular activities in particular (retreats and a trip to Israel) as providing valuable ‘identity choices’ (Chen, 2010, p. 165). However, for some Jews who attended more strict Orthodox schools, classroom worlds could present religious beliefs and values that clashed with their families’ values and norms – again showing how systems of representation and ascription of religious identities could be ‘determined by power relations in certain contexts’ (Chen, 2010, p. 165).

The impact of classroom worlds upon religious adolescents’ lives is explored in two ways in the remainder of this thesis. Firstly, Chapter Seven considers how representations of religion in classroom worlds may impact upon religious adolescents’ relationships and interactions with peers. Secondly, Chapter Eight explores how participants negotiate and construct their religious identities in the context of the systems of representation, identity choices and challenges presented by classroom worlds.
Chapter Seven

Negotiating and constructing religious identities in peer worlds

Introduction

This chapter explores religious adolescents’ identity negotiations of secondary school peer worlds (research question 2). As in Chapter Six, the analysis of religious adolescents’ reported experiences is divided into sections according to participants’ religious tradition and type of school (research question 4) and is derived from common themes in the interview data (Appendices 11-13, pp. 323 - 326), the application of the conceptual framework, and relevant research literature.

With the exception of Jews who attended Jewish schools, participants perceived themselves to be a minority in their schools as young people who regularly attend and participate in religious activities outside of school. Muslims who attended schools with a majority of Asians, like Christians who attended majority-white schools, found that although their peers could be nominally ‘Muslim’ or ‘Christian’, they were often non-practising. This was also the case for some of the Jewish participants in Jewish schools. The identity negotiations of these participants resonate with studies of Muslim adolescents who reported it difficult to maintain religious lifestyles in school worlds with largely secular values that could pose challenges of peer pressure, racism and prejudice (Zine, 2001; Peek, 2005; Hassan, 2010). Participants found swearing, smoking, drinking and attitudes towards sex in peer worlds problematic – perspectives also noted by Ipgrave and Mckenna (2008). While the reported fears of expressing religious beliefs in front of non-religious peers resonate with Gill’s study of attitudes to collective worship (2004).
Reported experiences of peer worlds involved accounts of peers ascribing inaccurate or stereotyped religious identities derived from schools’ curriculum or the popular media. A particularly unpleasant form of identity ascription was taunting and bullying from peers, as also found by Weller et al. (2001) and Rymarz and Graham (2006). Taunts and prejudices differed according to religion and denomination. Participants of all faiths perceived a causal connection between peers’ behaviour and attitudes, and the media. This could be the lack of positive role models, specific examples of stereotypes, and incidences of jokes and taunts based on characters and episodes in popular culture.

Although the negative experiences of participants are striking, not all the reported experiences of peer-group interactions were negative. Some participants reported instances of curiosity about their religious beliefs and practices. They also reported instances as acting as sources of information, support, or encouragement for less practising or inquiring peers. Christians, Jews and Muslims reported experiences of their peers’ curiosity towards their practice and beliefs. This can be considered as interest for interest’s sake, rather than critique, challenge or ridicule – although peers could be bemused, quizzical or slightly sceptical in their well-intended questioning. Participants’ reflections on the meaning of positive experiences also have some coherence with negative reported experiences in terms of setting them apart from dominant secular culture. The participants, who relayed experiences of positive curiosity and respect, also reflected on the nature of the secular world of school, their place within it as religious adherents, and the attraction of their faith to others at times of need, or its importance at a time of obligation.
Christians and comprehensive, community, Church and Anglican foundation school peer worlds

The reported experiences of Christians in Church and non-Church schools are presented together because, unlike the values and norms of classroom worlds (Chapter Six), there were no differences between the kinds of experiences reported of peer interactions in Church schools, and those of non-Church schools – reflecting the diverse and secular student populations of these schools. Reported peer interactions did not vary significantly between these contexts – or in the reported experiences of two Christian participants who attended further education colleges, also included in the data analysis.

The challenges of being recognised as a practising Christian among a largely non-Christian, secular, peer group were a major concern among Christians of all denominations, and in all kinds of school. Christian participants typically considered themselves as being alone, or belonging to a minority group, in their schools because they regularly attended church and held Christian beliefs (Park, Philip & Johnson, 2004; Ipgrave, 2012). Participants reported non-Christian friends who were accepting of their religious identities, but voiced numerous challenges posed by their wider peer groups.

Participants’ accounts of their interactions with their peers often comprised of peers’ reactions to their perceived differences as religiously adhering and identifying young people whose values clashed with their largely secular peer worlds. One challenge was the indifference and ignorance of peers in regard to Christianity. For example, Martha was surprised to find that when she joined her secondary school, she was the only Christian in her class.

*In year seven, [I discovered] I was the only one in my class that knew anything about Christianity. The only Christian in there!*

**Martha, female, Year 8, Community School [Northstreet Baptist church, group interview]**
For Martha, a corollary concern of being in this minority position was the blasphemy of her peers who would use the phrase ‘Oh my God’ frequently. She considered this disrespectful and indicative of the lack of respect paid to Christianity in peer worlds. Other participants also observed the irrelevance of Christianity to their peers, and perceived this to be symptomatic of the secularised nature of society. Brian explained.

*I don’t think [peers] even think about it [Christianity] to be honest. I don’t think it even enters their minds ... the attitude, you can tell, it’s a worldly attitude, it’s not... they don’t care, it’s ‘whatever.’*

**Brian, male, Year 12, Further Education College [Northstreet Baptist church, individual interview]**

School peers with a ‘worldly attitude’ who did not adhere to Christian moral principles could create norms challenging for Christians who wished to practise Christian morality, as Meg explained.

*[Christians] really should try to be different in a good way, like not swear, not join in the conversations, not put people down, and look at things from a different point of view, but you try to take that on board, but when you get to school you just can’t do it.*

**Meg, female, Year 10, Comprehensive School [St Luke’s Anglican church, group interview]**

Christian identity was perceived by participants of all denominations as being regarded as ‘uncool’ by their peers. Christians frequently reported the use of taunts at their expense which were often based on denominational stereotypes. Catholic stereotypes were based on the Pope or the Catholic Church’s teachings on sex; Protestant Christians were called ‘Bible basher’ because of the importance of the Bible to their religious belief and practice; Quakers were associated with pacifism and Oats; and Mormons with anti-Mormon stereotypes such as polygamy.

Christian participants reported being teased, or feared being teased, about or because of their religious identity, resonating with Rymarz and Graham’s (2006) study of practising Catholic adolescents in Australian Catholic schools. Sometimes this could be related to violence or fear of violence. A pertinent example of this was the
experiences of Toni. Toni was worried about being seen as the ‘teacher’s pet.’ She found that her Christian identity was a contributory factor to emotionally traumatic incidences of bullying. She broke down in tears when she described her experiences in a group interview (see Chapter 5, p. 143, for a discussion of the ethical implications of this episode).

_For me being Christian, everyone thinks you’re the teacher’s pet, and everyone does something really mean, like what they did to me in French. We have this thing if you forget something three times you get a detention and they took my French book and they kept for nearly a week so I had two marks off before I even took… and I told my French teacher and everyone had to open their lockers. It was really upsetting because everyone thinks you can’t be anything fun, they just hate you. And every time I get teased for being Christian, like, everyone’s playing and they say you shouldn’t join in because they say I’ll go crying to God._

_Toni, female, Year 7, Community School [Northstreet Baptist church, group interview]_

Participants who attended Church schools also reported similar anxieties about their peer groups. Schools with Christian foundations were perceived to be nominally Christian, but other students posed similar challenges and threats to participants’ Christian identities as other school types. Participants considered their frequent participation at Church as something that set them apart from their peers. Their beliefs were difficult to understand because they were brought up in religious households while their peers were not. For example, Daniella (a Catholic who attended a Catholic school), explained that being ‘religious’ (i.e. attending Church) was ‘not cool’ and not the norm among her school peers, and would attract attention from them.

_Daniella: Religion [at school] is still seen as uncool like, it’s a really not cool thing to believe in, or whatever._

_Interviewer: How about your interactions with these people [school peers] who think religion is uncool?_

_Jodie: It is hard for them to understand … and like they would ask questions like ‘why do you believe in God?’ and ‘do you believe God rose again in heaven?’ and stuff because they haven’t been grown [brought] up …_

_Daniella [interrupting]: in the same environment we have. Like we’ve been brought up going to church pretty much every week whereas a lot of the Catholic people in our school don’t go to church and it’s quite a small percentage of us that do._

_Jodie, female, Year 9; Daniella, female, Year 10, Voluntary Aided Catholic Comprehensive School [St Mary’s Roman Catholic Church, group interview]_
Anglicans in Church schools also reported teasing from their peer groups. Tobias and Sheila told narratives in different interviews with striking similarities about being called a ‘Bible-basher.’

Tobias: I, I’ve had the odd issue with a few people in Year 10 before, where they’ve mocked me for it [being Christian], but, I just choose to ignore them, umm. For example, in a classroom that my form is, where I am registered every day, is also their English classroom. So on the backs of some of the tables, they might have written some things about it [being Christian]...

Interviewer: What kind of things do they write?
Tobias: Umm, it’s normally, it’s just normally petty stuff like: Bible-basher, and other things of that sort of nature.

Sheila: I went on my [school] ski trip last year – last week – I mean. A couple of guys played with my phone, and on my phone I have a Bible app, so I don’t have to bring my Bible to church every week, so, umm, umm, they were looking through my phone, looking at all the games, and they saw the Bible app. And they mentioned something and they were quite rude about it and I was like, to be honest, it didn’t really affect me anymore because I was getting so used it; they were like, ‘Oh do you read this all the time? Have you, do you memorise, do you know the whole Bible? Most books have a beginning and an end, and the Bible never ends, the Bible’s so weird.’

Interviewer: You said, they said they ‘mentioned something’ – what exactly did they say?
Sheila: They called me a – can I say it? – they called me a ‘Bible-basher.’ I’ve been called that quite a lot so I get used to it.

Sheila, female, Year 12, Voluntary Controlled Anglican School [St Luke’s Anglican Church, group interview]

Jokes and taunts about Christian identity reported by participants followed denominational differences. While for protestant Christians, the taunt was ‘Bible basher’ relating to protestant emphasis on the Bible; for Catholics, taunts were often based upon allegiance to the Pope or other distinctive aspects of Catholic teaching. Catholics who attended comprehensive or Anglican schools noted the strong reaction their Catholic identity could draw from their peers. An example of this was the reported experiences of Ambrose. He felt the challenging comments and criticism of his peers were symptomatic of a cultural lack of respect for Christianity in general, but Catholicism was berated in particular.

People [school peers] are just like, ‘Arrrgh, you’re Christian! You don’t believe in abortion!’ and things like that. It’s just like ‘Christian’ is almost a derogatory word at the moment. Especially Catholics because of the Pope, and the laws are a lot stricter.
Salient aspects of Catholic identity such as Catholic teaching on contraception, abortion and allegiance to the Pope, could form the basis of participants’ peers’ perceptions of Catholicism. Consequently these aspects of Catholic identity could dictate the interactions between Catholics and their peers. These reported experiences included potentially offensive jokes, hostile questioning and criticism, or instances of peers’ genuine curiosity. Anti-papal sentiment was common, which could be combined with criticism of the Church for the sexual abuse scandals. Peers’ questions were considered to challenge Catholics’ beliefs and could be more ‘like accusations’ (Ambrose) rather than attempts at discussions. One striking example of a challenge based upon a stereotype that Ben experienced on a sporadic basis from some boys in his wider peer group (as opposed to his close friends), was a taunt about the sexual abuse scandal in the Church.

**Ben:** I mean as I said you get the odd people joking about you being a Catholic, saying a joke and being silly.

**Interviewer:** Could you tell me a phrase they might use?

**Ben:** Oh, just stuff like Catholics are not allowed to use condoms or giving the world Aids and stuff, or ‘Ben, did you get raped by the Pope?’

As well as name-calling and bullying, peers could also be curious or critical of belief in God. Christian participants reported peers’ critique of monotheistic belief – also a key concern of curriculum worlds. Those of all denominations, and in all kinds of schools, found their beliefs to be under scrutiny because they were perceived to be ‘religious’ or believing Christians. The antitheism reported by participants, rather than being based on cultural or racial prejudices, centred on doctrinal positions – particularly the question of God, and the validity of monotheistic belief.
Joyce’s experience given below is an illustration of reports common to Christian participants of debates with peers who were convinced of the non-existence of God. It also serves as another example of anti-papal sentiment among non-Catholic peers reported by Catholic participants. The referencing of the New Atheist Richard Dawkins by name concurs with the findings of Ipgrave (2012).

*I have a particular friend who is very atheist and she’ll at any opportunity challenge my religion. A conversation we were having the other day she said how it was funny that I could fall for this whole God thing and she like claims that she wishes Richard Dawkins had arrested the Pope and stuff…*

**Joyce, Year 10, Catholic, Girls’ Independent School (Anglican) [St Mary’s Catholic Church, group interview]**

Participants from all kinds of schools explained how peers could challenge Christian beliefs by philosophical or theological argument and questioning. Peers would ask them ‘why is there suffering?’ or ‘how did God make the world?’ Some participants found the secular reasoning of their peers and their hostile questioning as extremely challenging to their beliefs. At worst, peers’ criticisms could be considered a form of antitheism (Maritain, 1953). For example, Toni explained her peers saw ‘Christianity as a waste of time’, she was therefore:

*torn between two different ways: everyone’s saying he’s [God] not real, everyone saying I’m wasting my time and I should be an atheist like them*

**Toni, female, Year 7, Community School [Northstreet Baptist Church, group interview]**

A striking illustration of peers’ reported philosophical challenges reported by Christians was given by Brian and Toni. They concurred over the difficulty in answering their peers’ challenges over the ‘Problem of Evil’ – the conceptual and spiritual contradiction between the goodness of God and the existence of suffering.

**Brian:** The biggest problem is why do bad things happen... and they ask you all these questions... if there is a God, why does this happen?

**Toni:** I agree with Brian, since like so many people ask me that question and I just say, ‘I’m not like the internet, I don’t know everything’ all I know is that everything happens for a reason and God must have allowed it to happen, and I believe that if you are a good person then God will have forgiven you, and if you had died God would have forgiven you, and everything happens for a good reason, may be if a car crashed, God would have his reasons. It’s not going to happen because he’s bored or anything.
Responding to the philosophical challenges of peers was considered difficult by participants because they did not feel equipped to answer the challenges, or their peers would not be prepared to listen to the answers. For example, Joyce was dismayed that her peers would ‘expect me [her] to know about science and deeply philosophical arguments and stuff’ (Joyce) while Jodie explained that the ‘questions that would be hard for anyone to answer’ (Jodie). There was consensus that philosophical challenges came mainly from atheist peers who did not understand theistic beliefs because they had not been brought up with them. Joyce’s perspective serves as a good example of these reported experiences.

"I think one of the more annoying things about atheists, why they are more challenging is that their view is quite a simplistic view 'oh there can't be God because there is bad in the world' and that's the end of it - so they won't actually think about it at all. Whereas if they actually have a religious background they would actually like to think about it."

Joyce, female, Year 10, Independent Anglican Girls’ School [St Mary's Roman Catholic Church, group interview]

Mormon participants in particular emphasised the discrepancy between the values of their religious community and families, and those of their school peers. Attending school made it obvious to them that Mormon values were set apart from the values of the world.

"We’re made more aware of other people [at school] and what their life is like and how we’re different and how we are among that but not really of it, if you know what I mean?"

Jackie, female, Year 12, Comprehensive School [Southville Mormon Chapel, pair interview]

Mormons considered the teachings of Mormonism as a stable basis to live good lives, and this set them apart from the values, norms and beliefs of peer worlds. Jackie continued.

"we are more optimistic [than non-Mormons], I think we have been told by scripture about the plan of salvation and the plan of life after death and we have this view"
Jackie, female, Year 12, Comprehensive School [Southville Mormon Chapel, pair interview]

Participants explained how Mormon identity could therefore be a shock to their peers because of their beliefs and higher moral values – referred to as ‘standards.’ Mormons observed that their morality was stricter than other Christians and that in comparison to their non-religious peers, their ways of life could be very different, as Lyndall explained: ‘some people think we are so different from them because our lifestyle is so different’ (Lyndall). Several differences were perceived by Mormons. Some boys observed that their school peers could be violent (although not specifically directed at them for religious reasons). Participants of both genders explained how other students could be disruptive and inattentive in comparison to their own Mormon work ethic: ‘we [three Mormons at school] are ahead of people academically’ (Nathan). While some believed Mormon instruction out of school helped them at school. For example, Catherine explained how the programme she was on helped her and other Mormons focus: ‘we’ve had seminary in the morning – Bible study… at 7 o’clock [and by the time we get to school] we’re ready to learn’ (Catherine).

Like Christians of other denominations, a common theme among Mormons was concern of swearing. There was strong consensus that swearing was endemic in secondary schools. This presented a challenge to some participants who explained how their peers would sometimes encourage them to swear. Mormon participants of both sexes found the swearing of their peers a problem at school and in contrast to their upbringing, way of life and identity. For example, Nathan believed Mormon identity set him apart and made him happier and a better person which he would and could not be without Mormonism. To explain this he used the example of swearing.

*if you were to take that [Mormonism] away from me… the principles are so much different and make me feel better [than not being Mormon], like with swearing, people don’t think it’s wrong, but I’ve been taught it’s been bad*
A similar issue surrounded consumption of alcohol outside of school with school peers. Mormon standards precluded them for partaking in this. Older participants explained Mormon prohibition of alcohol meant that they could not socialise outside of school with school peers:

they [school peers] organise a lot of sixth form parties which are 'come along get drunk and dance' – it’s not an atmosphere that we want to put ourselves in so we don’t usually go to those parties

Jackie, female, Year 12, Comprehensive School [Southville Mormon Chapel, pair interview]

...because we don’t drink or we don’t party people exclude you from their friendship circle and they don’t include you because they believe different things

Phoebe, female, Year 12, Comprehensive School [Southville Mormon Chapel, pair interview]

Among Quaker participants, there was also agreement that the values of school peers were far removed from Quaker values, and that being at school and Quaker meetings were completely different with little ‘connection.’

For me it’s completely detached. Most of the time I’ve got school here and everything else over there. When you go on the Quaker weeks in the summer, it’s just completely different and then when I come back to school it’s completely gone again so I don’t feel there is much of a connection

Jack, male, Year 11, boys’ Independent School [Southville Quaker Meeting House, group interview]

Bryony explained that isolation and being an extreme minority contributed to this phenomenon: ‘Nearly every young Quaker is the only Quaker in the school’ (Bryony).

Mormon participants found their peers’ questioning hostile, and considered it taunting or teasing. This could be antitheistic prejudice in a general-sense or anti-Mormon prejudice. For example, Andy explained criticism of belief in God: “They were asking me if I had ever seen God … [paraphrasing peers]: ‘there is no point going to Church because all you do is sing’” (Andy). Andy and some other participants also explained their shock at how their peers had ‘took the mick out of Jews’ (Andy) by
using the word ‘Jew’ as an insult. This was perhaps considered offensive to Mormons because Judaism is seen as closely aligned with Mormonism. Other participants perceived their peers’ derision as only light-hearted, while others considered joking about religion as always offensive. Matthew and Jim’s discussion in a pair interview serves as a good example of this.

Matthew: But I guess, my other Christian friends, they’ll kinda like make fun of the differences of our beliefs.  
Interviewer: But is this good-hearted fun, or on the edge of not being fun anymore?  
Matthew: I’d say it would be good hearted fun, but if they’re taking the mick out of your religion, it’s not good, ever.  
Jim: I haven’t experienced anything like that, on the edge, as such. It’s always just like, pretty light-hearted as such.  
Interviewer: What sort of jokes?  
Matthew: Well, once I was, like, trying to explain to my friend the plan of salvation. That’s basically what happens, life in general. And when I was talking about what happens after you die, judgment and stuff, we believe that you can go to three different places – the celestial kingdom, the terrestrial kingdom – and when I said like “terrestrial kingdom”, he goes, like: oh, what like ET? Cause of extra-terrestrial. So, stuff like that.

Matthew, male, Year 9, Comprehensive School; Jim, male, Year 12, Further Education College [Southville Mormon Chapel, pair interview]

Like other Christian Tradition participants, Quaker participants described their peers’ curiosity concerning their religion and jokes made by their peers at their expense. These involved stereotypes, or the critique of belief in God, “God’s a Joke’ jokes” (Bryony). For Quakers, peers’ jokes were based upon the well-known Quaker Oats brand. There was consensus in the group over this, as Sophia explained: “Lots of jokes about hats and porridge. My friend always says ‘you’re going to make me porridge with your Quaker oats’” (Sophia). The participants agreed that this kind of attention could be ‘annoying’ (Mark) but it was not hostile bullying.

Quakers also reported debates about God outside of lessons between peers, but according to Quakers, criticism of theistic beliefs was easier for them, than for Christians who followed a doctrinal creed. As Jack explained, he was ‘in the middle between atheists and Christians’ (Jack) in these situations. Rather than the existence of God, pacifism, perceived by participants to be one of the most important aspects of
Quaker identity, was difficult to explain to some peers who did not share those views, as was the Quaker practice of sitting in silence. In keeping with other Christian tradition participants, there were reported experiences of peers’ curiosity about Quakerism from some peers, although not all, as Sophia summarised:

*After teasing you about porridge, they [peers] are quite interested, but there are other people who see it as just another religion and they take the piss out of all religions.*

**Sophia, female, Year 11, Comprehensive School [Southville Quaker Meeting House, group interview]**

Sophia explained that all religions and religious students received negative attention from peers that could impact on their well-being, but perhaps Quakerism the least because of its liberal nature.

*School makes you think about things and question things, but because it’s [Quakerism] is so relaxed you don’t feel bad [peers] questioning your religion. Because there is a Muslim girl in my class and because she is questioned all the time, she feels a little uncomfortable.*

**Sophia, female, Year 11, Comprehensive School [Southville Quaker Meeting House, group interview]**

While Christian participants often reported negative experiences, some participants reported genuine curiosity in their religious identity. Religious identity made them exotic. Rosemary, for example, gave an account of her friends’ curiosity in her faith. She described their response to her trip to see the Pope during his State visit to the UK in 2010. This curiosity was a positive experience for her.

*When I went to see the Pope, I said to my friends, and they were all kind of excited: they were asking me ‘why?’... like ‘what was it like?’, what I would do and what I thought about it.*

**Rosemary, female, Year 9, Comprehensive School [St Mary’s Catholic Church, individual interview]**

Mormons in particular reported instances of the curiosity of their peers. These questions often stemmed from curiosity about Mormon teaching on smoking, alcohol, caffeine, pre-marital sex and homosexuality (all of which are proscribed by the Mormon Church) or misconceptions about polygamy and other aspects of Mormonism. As Catherine described it:
those who know us, they think well of it; others, they say ‘oh there is this girl in my class, oh don’t talk to her she’s got loads of mums and stuff... and you have to be ‘no, I don’t have loads of mums’

Catherine, female, Year 12, Comprehensive School [Southville Mormon Chapel, pair interview]

The ignorance of peers and the higher standards of Mormonism were the reasons commonly given for peers’ curiosity: ‘Everyone does things that Mormons can’t do and they are curious to know why’ (Alannah). In addition, some participants considered their peers’ view of Mormonism as authoritarian and abnormal rather than a source of consolation and support as they perceived it. Nathan explained this: ‘when they think of religion they think of strict rules and stuff’ (Nathan). These resonated with Jacob’s words, ‘it’s not normal, it’s weird, that’s what they all think’ (Jacob). Some participants who attended girls’ schools felt that their Mormon identity attracted respectful interest rather than hostile curiosity. They perceived Christianity to be generally respected and did not feel it was a necessarily a challenge to be a Christian or Mormon among their peer group. For some of the girls, the higher standards of Mormonism were reported to be considered a positive ‘breath of fresh air’ (Catherine) by their female peers. Jackie explained how family values were respected and peers’ would be interested and admire accounts of this in Mormon practice in contrast to their experiences of their own family life.

they like it when we say like when our sisters got married, they got married and went to the temple to be sealed for time in eternity and they liked that because they’ll be together forever and they liked that and because they become from broken homes it’s sort of amazing

Jackie, female, Year 12, Comprehensive School [Southville Mormon Chapel, pair interview]

Respect of Mormon values could also be manifest in times of trouble, when peers might ask about Mormon beliefs or for support at times of bereavement, for example. Catherine explained:

I would say that people find us [Mormons] easier to talk to may be if they have a problem because we are so separate from that kind of life they have
For some Christian participants, the religious diversity of their school peers was a recurrent theme in their reported experiences. Participants in inner-city state funded schools explained that Islam was the most visible religion in their schools. Some believed this kind of plural environment made it easier to be a Christian because in this context everyone was entitled to hold their own views, and it helped Christians and non-Christians understand other perspectives. Other Christian participants, however, stated that mixing with friends from different religions could be a challenge to their beliefs, and they felt unable to articulate their faith in fear of being perceived as racist.

Some Christian participants also voiced concern over their peers’ treatment of Muslims in school. A prevalent theme, however, was that it was easier for Muslims to practise their religion or appear religious because that was an accepted part of their identity. Ambrose explained.

Ambrose, male, Year 11, Catholic, Comprehensive School [St Mary's Catholic Church, individual interview]

Like some other Christian tradition participants, Ambrose believed that the Muslims in his school (although suffering from other forms of prejudice) were not criticised for their beliefs in the same way as Christians; he felt that this was because of political correctness; but, the inequity of treatment of religions in his case was a form of anti-Catholic ‘racism.’
Members of Christian denominations felt that Christianity was ridiculed in the media and this had an impact on their peers’ attitudes towards them. Mormon participants believed their peers’ curiosity and misconception of Mormonism stemmed from the media or a misunderstanding and conflation of religions, such as the case of Jacob whose classmate had probably seen footage of Muslims praying.

> It’s interesting talking to people about being Mormon because it is interesting to hear what they think. One of them thought we sat on these prayer mats and rocked back and forth, that what’s one person said in my class and I said ‘what have you been watching?’

_Jacob, male, Year 7, Boys’ Community School [pair interview]_

Mormon participants reported that myths and stereotypes about their Church abounded among school peers. These could often originate from ‘anti-Mormon websites’ as well as popular TV programmes such as *The Simpsons* that may make reference to Mormonism in ‘passing comments’ (Catherine). Popular misconceptions given by participants were baptism of the dead, racism and homophobia. Catholics, on the other hand, felt that the media focused on scandals within the Church as opposed to acts of charity or goodness committed by laity and clergy. Participants interviewed at St Luke’s Anglican Church cited the characters in the BBC’s mockumentary *Come Fly with Me* as an example of anti-Christian sentiment in the media that lent some impetus and acceptability to their peers’ ridicule. The same participants also felt that fashionable, stylish Christians were absent in popular culture, a culture that glorified hedonism rather than Christian values.

**Jews and non-Jewish school peer worlds**

This section examines Jewish participants’ (Appendix 9, p. 321) reported experiences of peer-interactions in non-Jewish schools (Appendix 12, p. 325). The identity negotiations of adolescent Jews attending Jewish schools are presented in a separate section because of the differences in reported experiences between individuals who
formed a minority in non-Jewish schools, in comparison with those attending schools with exclusive, or majority, Jewish peer-groups.

Participants’ reported experiences often concerned being a minority and were related to, or defined, the boundaries of Jewish identity, such as celebrating Jewish festivals and rites of passage, food laws, believing in Judaic monotheism, association with the Jewish state, and victimhood of the holocaust or anti-Semitism. These boundaries – and peers’ reported understanding of them – often relate to the curriculum identities reported by participants of their classroom worlds.

Modern Jewish identity can be considered an ethnic as well as religious category (Webber, 1997). The complex relationship between ethnic and religious identity can present problems when analysing reported experiences of religious communities (Weller et al., 2001). The analyses presented in this chapter aim to account for this complexity, by demarcating specifically religious or ethnic aspects of identity experiences when they can be confidently separated. This is achieved by using the term ‘Judaism’ to refer to religious aspects of Jewish identity.

Jews in non-Jewish schools often described themselves as the ‘only Jew’ in their peer group or school. For some, particularly the religiously practising, this could be an isolating and alienating experience.

"I'm like the only Jew in the school – well, the only practising Jew in the school, although there may be others who don’t do it [Judaism] and don’t know they’re Jews. But, yeah, it's weird because no-one understands anything."

Jacob, male, Year 8, Orthodox, Foundation School [Countrywide Jewish Youth Club, pair interview]

"I'm the only Jew in my whole school. And that is actually really surprising because in my school there are about 800 boys there and so far I've yet to find someone who is another Jew."

Seth, male, Year 8, Reform, Independent Boys’ School (Anglican) [Eastville Reform Synagogue, group interview]
A corollary of being a minority was peers’ reported curiosity in perceived exotic Judaic practices and beliefs. For some participants, peers’ curiosity could become irksome. A good example of this commonly-reported experience is given by Lisa.

**Lisa**: Yeah also at my school like other than the year above me, I’m the only Jewish girl in my Year and they always ask me questions … [peers] just ask me questions ask me ask me and it’s really annoying

**Lisa, female, Year 8, Reform, Independent School (Anglican) [Eastville Reform Synagogue, group interview]**

The boundaries of adolescent Jews’ religious identity – the rites of passage, festivals and food laws of Judaism – were reported to be of intense interest to participants’ non-Jewish peers. This could be reported as a positive experience, as it was for Seth who explained his school peers’ interest in his impending Bar Mitzvah. Episodes such as this support Phelan et al.’s (1998) supposition that sociocultural borders need not be an impediment at school, but an ‘asset’ if that culture is not considered inferior, as Judaism was not at Seth’s independent school.

What I love about my friends is that they know I’m Jewish and that it’s a big part of who I am and they’re really into it. Like one of my friends is really excited for the Bar Mitzvah and not just for the party but for the service as well … they see it and they realise it is a big part of me and so they’re just into it in a way. It’s not just they’re interested, it’s like they’re excited for it.

**Seth, male, Year 8, Reform, Independent Boys’ School (Anglican) [Eastville Reform Synagogue, group interview]**

A common theme of participants who took time off for festivals was that their peers’ curiosity would be roused by their absence – festivals being an interesting part of Judaism, and a symbolic boundary. Explaining Judaism through explanation to peers in these circumstances could be an enjoyable experience for some participants.

Well in my school it does come up, so say if a I miss a day because of Yom Kippor or whatever, they want to know about it – They want to know about my religious beliefs because there are such different religions [among peers], it can be quite interesting.

**Tal, female, Year 10, Orthodox, Independent Girls’ School [Countrywide Jewish Youth Club, group interview]**

Some participants found the attention they received as unwanted, however. Jewish participants in non-Jewish schools reported that curiosity could take the form of staring
at, or whispering about, them during lessons that touched upon, or were about Judaism. This could cause problems for Jews who did not want to be singled out, or that did not feel they could answer their peers’ questions accurately. These instances could also result in Jews constructing and negotiating their identities in reaction to their non-Jewish peer worlds, or realizing that they knew little about Judaism as it appeared in the school curriculum. Sara’s experience serves as a good example of this: her ethnic identity was revealed in a lesson, which led to peers’ questioning that made her feel awkward because of her lack of religious knowledge. This episode also demonstrates the possible overlap between classroom and peer worlds (Phelan et al. 1998) and the causal relationship between curriculum identities and peer-group interactions.

... last year [Judaism] came up [in RE] ‘Oh Sara is Jewish and she knows’ and everyone turned around and looked at me and I went red. And someone [who] didn't know I was Jewish and came right up to me and said ‘oh you're Jewish, I didn't realise so [is that] what do you do?’ and I didn't know, or have information about it. ... And I was the only Jew there and everyone was asking me things and I didn't know.

Sara, female, Year 9, no denomination; Comprehensive School [Countrywide Jewish youth club, group interview]

In a comparable episode, for Seth, it was not until his peers questioned him about circumcision during a lesson on Brit Milah that they became aware of this distinctive aspect of Judaism and identity boundary.

Jack: I mean, when we're learning about circumcision in [RE] and about how Abraham circumcised Isaac and quite a few girls were whispering to me, ‘Are you circumcised?’ And then they were 'OOOH'.

Seth: Boys were doing that to me too 'coz I go to an all boys’ school and boys were asking me that too, but I learned things I didn’t know [in an RE lesson]. You have it after 7 or 8 days, and I went home and asked my mum, ‘Did I have that after 8 days?’ and she said yes. You’re doing actually traditional stuff [in RE]. But it does make eyes stare at you. It’s quite odd.

Jack, male, Year 8, Reform, Independent School; Seth, male, Year 8, Reform, Independent Boys’ School (Anglican) [Eastville Reform Synagogue, pair interview]

Anti-Semitic prejudice, abuse and stereotypes were integral to many participants’ reported peer experiences of secondary school. The term ‘Jew’ was widely reported as being used in schools as a nick name, or insult, to mean something or
someone substandard, or of poor quality or low class – a form of anti-Semitic racism (Runnymede Trust, 1994). Most of these were ethnic slurs as opposed to religious prejudice, although one participant reported ‘Rabbi’ being used in a similar way, perhaps suggesting anti-Judaism as well as anti-Semitism.

_I don’t know where it started from, but they [peers] would end up using the insult ‘You Jew’ or if you do something stupid they say ‘You rabbi’, which in itself doesn’t make sense._

_I don’t know really, they’re words that those people using them didn’t really understand the meaning behind. That might be the reasons they use them. But I don’t know._

**Josephina, female, Year 12, Liberal, Sixth-Form College [Countywide Jewish Youth Club, individual interview]**

The use of ‘Jew’ as an insult was reported as occasional to frequent in occurrence by participants, but it was not always reported as offensive. Participants could ‘play-down’ or not realise that their peers’ comments or actions could be considered as anti-Semitic. Sara’s report of the use of ‘Jew’ serves as a good example of this.

**Interviewer:** OK. Some people say the word 'Jew' is used as an insult or joke? I wondered if this happens in your school?

**Sara:** Quite a lot. I don’t think it is a bad thing to be Jewish, so the laugh is on them. But it is used as a slang word, like: ’oh shut-up, Jew!’ ... they sort of say it like its nothing. It’s tossed around, just as an insult. It doesn’t really make sense. It’s a bit stupid. It’s a bit like ‘gay’. It is used so much now, it’s become like another rude word which you call someone.

**Sara, female, Year 9, Jewish, no denomination; Comprehensive School [Countywide Jewish Youth Club, group interview]**

For others, incidents of name-calling or ‘jokes’ based on anti-Semitic stereotypes were recognised and reported as anti-Semitic and offensive. One participant described a game in his school when someone would roll a coin down their foot to see if a ‘Jew would pick it up’ – an incident bearing similarities to the anti-Semitic prejudice described by Short and Carrington (1992) and the historic stereotypes encounter by Jews as a long-standing minority in English (and European) society (Felsenstein, 1995). Eliza reported examples of anti-Semitic bullying in her school similar to the anti-Semitic episodes recorded by Jewish communities (CST, 2012).
For no reason they [peers] would bring up the word [Jew] – they would say to you ‘because you’re Jewish’, but there was no reason for them to say that, or make comments that you are Jewish. It had nothing to do with the situation. One example: I lent a pen to my friend in Year 7 and he lost the pen and it was an expensive pen so I got annoyed and he said ‘You’re so stingy. All the Jews are stingy’. Not really. But it was an expensive pen. If someone who wasn’t Jewish had this pen lost they wouldn’t say ‘Yeah OK it doesn’t matter.’ It was an expensive pen. And other comments too. It happened a few times and it got quite serious … It was so unnecessary to bring up these anti-Semitic comments.

Eliza, female, Year 12, Orthodox, Comprehensive School [Countywide Jewish Youth Club, individual interview]

Peers were reported to want to debate the political issue of Israel – a key affinity of modern Jewish identity (Sacks, 1999). Criticism of Israel voiced by non-Jewish peers could also be considered anti-Semitic when it was assumed by peers that Jewish students were responsible for acts of perceived injustice by the Israeli state. Several participants reported this kind of criticism came from Muslim peers in particular.

there is a Muslim boy in my class and he asks me about my opinion all the time because he’s got a really strong opinion about it [Israel] and I don’t have one and he is – sort of – bemused by the fact that I would rather not start a big debate about Israel

Judith, female, Reform, Year 11, Independent School [Eastville Reform Synagogue, pair interview]

Some participants felt their adherence to Judaism was respected among non-Jews at school, but only when separated from the issue of Israel with whose violent actions they could be associated. Simon explained.

Whenever I tell my friends that I can’t go out with them on a Friday because I am with my family, then that is fine with them. Umm... [But] when topics about more serious matters come up, so about Israel, then the respect question becomes a bit different because of what they have read in the newspapers about maybe what the Israeli army has done or equally what the Palestinian army has done and so it becomes a bit harder to respect Israel in that sense, and then they think then there’s this guy in school who is Jewish so I’d assume he’d share the same views that a lot of these radical Israelis do and so that’s I suppose when their respect might dwindle.

Simon, male, Year 11, Orthodox, Comprehensive School [Countywide Jewish Youth Club, group interview]

Participants sometimes felt that debates about Israel were accusatory. For example, Jack’s Jewish identity had prompted an accusation that he was in some way culpable for Israel’s invasion of Gaza in 2008 – a form of anti-Semitism according to some definitions (Iganski & Sweiry, 2009, p. 34).
This is about two years ago there was a war between Israel and Gaza and my friend was like my uncle is in Gaza and it's all your fault, and I thought that was really mean because I'm not actually doing anything.

**Jack, male, Year 8, Reform, Independent School [Eastville Reform Synagogue, group interview]**

Jews commonly reported that the media was biased in its presentation of conflict in Palestine and this made life difficult for them at school. Jews also described the influence of films *Meet the Fockers* (Universal Studios, 2004) and *Borat* (Twentieth Century Fox, 2006) on their peers’ perceptions of Jewish identity. Participants would often refer to the media and popular culture when explaining the behaviour and opinions of their peers. For example, Jacob described how one of his peers would ‘quote’ *Borat* at him, while Zvi who attended a different school, also had comparable experiences. Similar incidents relating to *Borat* were also reported by participants in my earlier study (Moulin, 2009).

**Interviewer:** You mentioned *Borat* [in a previous interview]. I’ve only mentioned it now because you mentioned it. Is this a common thing? ...

**Jacob:** Oh yes, … [but] It’s hard to be offended by it because it was written by a Jew.

**Interviewer:** Is it gone and past, because the film is quite old now?

**Jacob:** It doesn’t really happen now.

**Zvi:** No, it happened more when it first came out. [Impersonating Borat] ‘I like it, it's nice’.

**Jacob:** I think there’s one person in school who still does it, but he's generally not very funny.

**Interviewer:** You say ‘do it’ – what does he do?

**Jacob:** He's quoting it.

**Zvi:** Yeah, quoting it.

**Jacob:** And the chasing the Jew - the whole Jew-horn thing, - which I find kind of funny - with chasing the Jews; he shouts odd things at me from Borat, but no-one really finds it funny.

**Zvi, male, Year 8, Orthodox, Community School; Jacob male, Year 10, Orthodox, Foundation School [Countrywide Jewish Youth Club, pair interview]**

In addition to negative peer experiences and anti-Semitism, participants also reported positive experiences of interactions with their peers and a favourable attitude to being in environments with religious diversity. For example, Jasper explained his friendship with a Hindu.
One of my best friends is a Hindu, and he says prayers at night and he does Tamil, and I'm quite interested in is Tamil studies so he teaches me a bit of Tamil and I teach him a bit of Hebrew.

Jasper, male, Year 8, Reform, Independent Boys’ School [Eastville Reform Synagogue, group interview]

In these episodes, Jews could become aware of aspects of Judaism in contrast to those of their peers in a religiously plural society. Participants often reported enjoying these kinds of peer interactions with those of other religions in plural schools.

...we will have discussions – all of us together – but most of my friends are atheists and they will argue the point that religion doesn't have any place in the modern world or whatever. And I've got one friend who is a really strict Jehovah's Witness and he doesn't come outside school; he is not allowed out by his parents, and we have a joke in our group we’re like: there's an Indian, Muslim, Buddhist, a Jew, a Christian and an atheist.

Deborah, female, Year 11, Liberal, Community School [Eastville Liberal Synagogue, group interview]

Participants described how they learnt about, and contributed the plural environment of their schools. Eliza described her peer group ‘always’ discussing religion; their religious differences being a common talking point.

With my friends I am always asking them about religion. Always. With my friends I hang out with we often talk about religion. Most of my friends I hang out with are Muslims or Christians. I’m usually always asking them about their religion and their festivals like Ramadan. ... I don’t mind it. It’s good that I’m friends with Muslim people as well – [they] don’t mind being friends with me. I like learning about their religion, and they like learning about mine. It’s mutual.

Eliza, female, Year 12, Orthodox, Comprehensive School [Countywide Jewish Youth Club, individual interview]

These positive experiences of negotiating identity boundaries in secondary schools, as well as those negative experiences described earlier, contrast with those reported by Jews in voluntary aided Jewish schools who typically did not encounter non-Jews in school peer-worlds – the subject of the next section.

Jews and Jewish school peer worlds

Jewish participants who attended Jewish schools discussed the range and diversity of Jewish religious observance they encountered in their peer groups at school (Appendix 12, p. 325). Encountering differences of religious identity among peers could be
challenging for participants, either because peers were more religious, or because they were less. For example, Jacob found the lack of observance among his secondary school peers ‘shocking’ in comparison to his experience of primary school and family life:

_In my school, although my school is officially Orthodox, I am pretty sure a large chunk of our year don’t keep Kosher, or what I see as basic things of being Jewish; others don’t do it at all. I think some are there because they are born Jewish … and I found it quite shocking._

_Jacob, male, Year 9, Orthodox, mainstream Orthodox Jewish School [Countrywide Jewish Youth Club, group interview]._

Religiosity could lead to teasing in Jewish schools. Esther explained that at her school, although prayer was compulsory, more observant students could be ‘teased’ if they wanted to ‘be religious and pray and stuff’ (Esther). In contrast, Abigail and Sara, who attended a strict Orthodox school, considered themselves less religious than some of their peers. This could also lead to minor concern about airing doubts among religious peers.

Participants at Eastville Liberal Synagogue found their denominational affiliation as contentious among Orthodox-identifying peers. This could be problematic for them. Dan and Matthew were religious in the sense they were committed to Liberal Judaism, but they were not ‘religious’ in the traditional Orthodox sense of observance to the Torah and so were not really ‘religious’ to their peers. Their peers’ lack of acknowledgement and ignorance led to irritation.

**Matthew:** But some people [school peers] say you're not a real Jew, which really annoys the hell out of me, because they're saying 'You're Orthodox'; [and as though to another person] 'You're not a real Jew because you're Liberal'. Orthodox! They go to Orthodox Synagogues once a year.

**Dan:** [nodding in agreement] To be honest I know more about Orthodox than they do; I know more about religion than they do, but they still say you're a bit of a lazy Jew and I'm not.

**Dan, male, Year 11, Liberal, mainstream Orthodox Jewish School; Matthew, male, Year 11, Liberal, mainstream Orthodox Jewish School [Eastville Liberal Synagogue, group interview]**
Matthew described how he was mistakenly labelled as a ‘frum’ (practising Orthodox Jew) because of his peers’ ignorance of Liberal Judaism.

*So I say [said] ‘So you’re orthodox? How often do you go to Shul? [synagogue]’ [the peer answers] ‘Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and maybe Pesach’ and they was like ‘Okay and how often do you go to Shul?’ ‘Every week’, ‘Oh, you’re religious, you’re frum, you’re frum’ and then you have to go on the whole spiel about telling them… and that’s where it gets complicated.*

**Matthew, male, Year 11, Liberal, mainstream Orthodox Jewish School [Eastville Liberal Synagogue, group interview]**

Dan explained that at the time of their Bar Mitzvah services, Orthodox peers had assumed superiority because of the length of their readings, but he explained that two years later it was Liberal Judaism that had kept his adherence in comparison to his peers’ non-attendance at Orthodox Synagogues: ‘we say we're the better Jews now, carry on going [to Synagogue] and we actually teach now [at Cheder]’ (Dan).

Apart from religious differences, participants reported being happy among their peers in their Jewish schools because they shared a cultural identity. Participants described a sense of community and shared purpose beyond religious division. For example, Heather explained the Jewish exclusivity of her school made it a happier, more cohesive environment, describing it ‘almost like a social club’ (Heather):

*it is because we’re all Jewish – that is the reason … I think it makes our school more like a community. ... I’ve always thought I loved going to [Orthodox] Jewish school. I think it’s really good, like – even though I’m like really involved in here, like [Liberal] Shul – but, anyway, I’ve always loved going to Jewish school. You might talk about festivals, or whatever, and everyone knows whatever, and everyone is the same.*

**Heather, female, Year 12, Liberal, mainstream Orthodox Jewish School [Eastville Liberal Synagogue, group interview]**

Participants who attended Jewish schools also reflected that they would probably feel awkward or ‘left out’, if they were to attend another kind of school. For example, Abigail, although critical of school at times, believed overall that a Christian school would be inappropriate for her:

*a school that is mainly Christian, like, and there they don’t really agree with Judaism - I don't know then; if they are not open, then I’d feel a bit, like, left out’*
Abigail, female, Year 9, Orthodox, strict Orthodox Jewish Girl’s School [Countrywide Jewish Youth Club, group interview].

However, being surrounded by other Jews at school was considered isolating by some Orthodox participants interviewed at Countrywide Jewish Youth Club. It was like ‘being wrapped in bubble wrap’ (Isobel) or being in a ‘Jewish bubble’ (Gabbi). Participants at both sites aired concern about their peers’ ignorance of other religions, latent prejudice against other races and unrecognised homophobia. When discussing the use of the word ‘Jew’ as an insult with a participant who attended a non-Jewish school, Abigail explained that this word was not used in Jewish schools, rather, the word ‘gay’ was used instead.

For us [at the Jewish school] its ‘gay’, like, always, everyone is ‘Oh my God, you’re Gay’, ‘That’s so gay’, always, everyone says it.

Abigail, female, Year 9, Orthodox, strict Orthodox Jewish Girl’s School [Countrywide Jewish Youth Club, group interview]

In one of the Jewish schools attended by members of Eastville Liberal Synagogue, there had recently been an intake of non-Jewish students, a similar circumstance to ‘Ben Gurion’ school in Jackson et al.’s study of classroom materials (2010, p. 124). Participants discussed this new diversity in their school. Heather asserted that she was not ‘racist’, but the school was ‘different’ to how it had been when it was exclusively Jewish (Heather). Matthew felt that the way the Jewish students dealt with the non-Jewish students could be ‘extremely racist.’ Matthew went on to comment that although he felt the older years could treat the younger students differently, the Year 7 Jewish intake was integrating better with their peers.

Muslims and community and comprehensive school peer worlds

Muslim participants in Eastville and Southville attended religiously unaffiliated state schools in urban areas with large proportions of Muslim or Asian students (Appendix 10, p. 322). Participants typically reported division between peers of different religious
and racial backgrounds. Friendship groups could be segregated into groups of Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, and Christians, or white, black, and Asian students. Akram’s description was typical.

*Muslims stick together, Hindus stick together; they’re separate, they don’t interact with each other. They don’t speak to each other. They just stick to whatever: Muslims, Hindus, Christians.*

**Akram, male, 13, Community School [Westville Sunni Masjid, group interview]**

Participants reported incidents of racism and racial tension in their school peer-groups. They reported feeling comfortable and less threatened by racism from peers or potential racial conflict with peers in Muslim or Asian-majority contexts – which most perceived their schools to be. Even so, participants observed that racial slurs, in particular ‘Paki’, could be heard on a frequent basis in their schools, in addition to numerous references to terrorism or name-calling of Muslims as ‘terrorists’, which could be intended by peers as a joke, or as an insult, as also found by Peek (2005) and Mirza et al. (2007). These can be identified as Islamophobic (Runneymede Trust, 1997).

There was a conflation of racial and religious identities in these reported experiences. While participants perceived racism to be a problem, they identified it as being directed at ‘Muslims’ or perpetrated by ‘Christians.’ For example, Aadil perceived racial identity to be the cause of prejudice, but then assumed racial identity to be synonymous with religious identity – the Muslim majority of his school mitigating for occasional racism.

*Race is a problem rather than religion, but most of the school is Muslim anyway*

**Aadil, male, Ahmadi, Year 9, Comprehensive School [Southville Ahmadiyya Mission House, pair interview]**

Clashes between white peers and Muslims could follow political issues which then became racialized in school. For example, Fatima explained that when the media reported the ‘Muslims against Crusades’ poppy burning in 2010 (Bloxham, 2010), a
white peer made comments on a social media website after school, clearly visible to her classmates which then became a confrontation in school.

\[\text{OK, basically this past year there was them Muslims who burned the poppy or whatever and there was this one [white] girl who put on her status on facebook ‘Oh why are all of the pakis doing this?’ and I was thinking it is not all of the pakis, it’s only them. [...] And then the next day she said it again, and so I went up to her and I said ‘it’s not all of us, why have you been saying this stuff?’ and she said, ‘I didn’t say all’, but she clearly did say all, and every single Pakistani in the school noticed it and everybody went up to her [...]}\]

Fatima, female, 11, Comprehensive Girls’ School [Westville Muslim Women’s community Centre, pair interview]

Muslim participants felt that violent negative stereotypes about Islam among their peers were driven by the media. For Muslim participants, it was association with terrorism that formed the basis of perceived media stereotypes that led to the jokes and taunts reported. When asked of the cause of his peers’ attitudes, Muhab explained the persuasive, all-encompassing effect of the popular media which only contained negative images of Islam. He referred in particular to a well-publicised case concerning a teacher, Gillian Gibbons, who, while teaching in Sudan had named a teddy bear Muhammad causing a riot (Day, 2007).

\[\text{Because the way the media uses its propaganda sort of thing, [it] really affects people; I mean it has a large influence, because you’re around media every day, you’re around media all the time, so those views are being drilled into you, so if you’re only getting these bad points of view about Islam, obviously you’re going to think these things.... I mean you can see on TV, in the media, where they show Muslims rampaging and rioting about certain things like, umm, that woman that named the teddy bear Muhammad.}\]

Muhab, male, Year 13, Comprehensive School [Ahmadiyya Mission House, individual interview]

Participants in Southville would use ‘Christian’ interchangeably with ‘white’, as ‘Muslim’ and ‘Pakistani’ could also be used as synonyms. For example, Khadija felt being a competent Muslim in Maths made her the target of a hate attack by a ‘Christian’ [white] girl. This was perceived as racially motivated, rather than a religious matter, despite the perpetrator being described as Christian and herself as Muslim. This example shows the interchangeable use of ‘Asian’, ‘Pakistani’, ‘Muslim’ identities and ‘Christian’ and ‘White’ often used by Muslim participants in interviews.
Khadija: I think it was in Maths and somebody poked me with a compass and scratched my hand. […]

Interviewer: So who did the jabbing?
Khadija: It was this girl in my class, I don’t know why she did it, it was a while ago. She had the jacket and the pin and she actually scraped it across my hand and it hurt […]

Interviewer: Do you believe that was racially motivated?
Khadija: Yeah, I think so. It was a Christian.

Interviewer: Do you think that was motivated by religion or race?
Khadija: I think it was by race coz I’m…In the class, in Maths I used to know what I was doing and I always used to help everyone else and just because I was Muslim and I knew what I was doing and that’s why she did it.

Khadija, female, 12, Comprehensive Girls’ School [Westville Muslim Women’s Community Centre, group interview]

For other participants, becoming aware that white people were generally not Christian was an important realisation. Jamal explained that most white people were atheists and had no interest in religion, and this was ‘shocking’: ‘one of the biggest misconceptions is thinking a white person is a Christian’ (Jamal). In that group interview, friction over the war in Afghanistan was described between ‘white atheists’ and ‘Muslim’ pupils. Amir also described how a black non-Muslim student had referred to a textbook picture of a Muslim woman in hijab as a ‘monster’ which then precipitated a brawl between a number of students divided between black students and Asian Muslims. Some participants also reported arguments with secular peers over the existence of God. These could take place in classroom worlds and matched their (prejudiced) norms and values. Amir described a Religious Education lesson where a discussion about God’s existence became ‘personal.’

Amir: With us in RE, it’s us Muslims versus the atheists all the time, because it was like half and half split atheists/Muslims. And at one point we annoyed the atheists so bad because we threw all these facts at him [an atheist] and he said ‘Go waste your time in the Mosque’

….  

Interviewer: So, this is one example of an argument with somebody that starts off theoretical?
Amir: It started off well, but once we started asking the questions, the pressure got to him and like and he was still answering them, but he wasn’t as confident as he thought he would be and it just started getting personal and he started saying ‘Go waste your time in the Mosque, Go waste your time there!’

Jamal: Whereas we would see that as a racist comment the teacher would not, you see.

Amir, male, 11, Foundation School; Jamal, male, 12, Further Education College [Westville Muslim Women’s community Centre, group interview]
In this episode, as with Khadija’s narrative, the racism of the teacher and those of peers are combined and perceived as doubly oppressive.

Violence was often reported as retaliation or protection from racism. Amir pointed out that if a white person had attended his Asian-majority school it was likely they would get bullied or ‘battered’ because it was nearly all ‘Pakistani.’ Muhab explained that prejudice about terrorism was commonplace in his school until he put a stop to it by fighting those who taunted him, although he felt the underlying attitudes that caused the jokes and taunts were still harboured among his peers.

**Muhab:** Umm, well, people didn’t really say anything to me, but, like they’d make little jokes [about terrorism], and it got to a certain point where, you’d have a fight about it, and nobody would say anything. But, umm, I mean, people do say it, so... people don’t say it anymore to me, but obviously you know that’s what their views are. So, just ‘coz they don’t say... just ‘coz someone doesn’t say anything to you, it doesn’t mean that’s not what they think.

**Interviewer:** And these were white kids, were they?

**Muhab:** Yeah, yeah. Like, I was the only Asian kid there, so...

**Interviewer:** What kind of jokes would they say?

**Muhab:** Umm, just like, bomb-related jokes, suicide bomber-related jokes, and stuff like that.[...]

I'm a very hard person to, like, piss off, so, it was like, I let it go for quite some time. And near the end of my first year there, I’m thinking, well they’re saying stuff about me, I should do something about it. So that was when I had my first fight there, and then I had, like, two or three fights after that, and it completely stopped.

**Muhab, male, Year 13, Comprehensive School [Ahmadiyya Mission House, individual interview]**

In the group interviews with female participants, Khadija and Fatima both reported incidents of abuse motivated by religious or racial prejudice. Yasmeen, on the other hand, did not believe these were an issue for her. This was because she and her friends were not ‘really religious people’ (Yasmeen) and that her girls’ school could be an accepting place. Her peer group and friends were from different ethnic backgrounds and would exchange colloquial language from their different cultures. She explained that she ignored racist white girls as she did not want to attract further attention. She did find one event disconcerting, however:
My mate was praying near the sports hall and this other girl a year younger, a white girl, recorded her praying because she thought that was funny – something like that is offensive

Yasmeen, female, 10, Comprehensive Girls’ School [Westville Muslim Women’s Community Centre, pair interview]

She believed that it would be harder for more religious Muslims to go to her school, or to go to a school with fewer Asians herself.

Muslim participants in Westville also reported occasional conflicts between different ethnic and national groups, such as Somalians, Bangladeshis, Pakistanis and Afghans. These fights varied in frequency depending upon the schools participants attended. One such reported fight between Afghans and Pakistanis led to the police being called to the school to deal with the situation. Participants (who considered themselves more religious than these school peers) believed that these kinds of conflicts should not really take place because ‘they’re all Muslims at the end of the day’ (Akram).

Like the participants in Østberg’s (2000) study of Norwegian Muslims, participants believed that home was the greatest religious influence in their lives. They explained that their parents and Islamic TV channels had a strong influence in forming their religious beliefs and views, the Islamic teaching about judgement day [Yawm al-Qiyāma] being reported as particularly influential. There was consensus among Muslims participants at all three research sites that home was a more religious place than school and that school peers challenged Muslim practices, religious beliefs, and political perspectives. Jamal summarized the influence of school:

\[
\text{it [school] stunts your awareness of your own religion. When you’re at home it’s quite a religious place but when you get to school it just goes out of the window – that’s [religion’s] not part of your life anymore... you become confused}
\]

Jamal, male, Year 12, Further Education College [Westville Muslim Women’s Community Centre, group interview]
Participants believed that school provided the opportunity to stray from Islam: at school, ‘the people around you, made it harder’ to be religious (Ahmed). This could come from atheists, who would challenge core Muslim beliefs:

*Most people in my class are atheists and sometimes they do challenge my beliefs*

**Taj, male, Year 13, Academy [Ahmadiyya Mission House, group interview]**

But more often challenges could also come from less-adhering Muslim-peers. Muslim peers could have ‘different personalities’ (Yasser) in their Masjid than in school. Participants explained that many of their Muslim school peers were not religiously observant. Some were ‘gangsters’ (Ahmed) who engaged in drugs, smoking, chasing girls and violence. Some participants aired concern that only a very small proportion attended Friday prayers when available at school, and most did not fast properly during Ramadan: ‘after school, you’ll see them at the chip shop eating’ (Ahmed). Ahmed was concerned that this gave non-Muslims a bad impression of the religion, as he did of a ‘Muslim girl’ in his school that got in a fight and showed her body despite wearing hear covering [hijab]. It was easier to ‘stray’ in school than at home or the Masjid or home. Outside of school, Muslim peers would wear Islamic clothing and be well behaved; inside school they could behave inappropriately. For this reason, some participants would have preferred not to study with girls. In one of the group interviews, participants made jokes about sitting next to girls, and Muslim boys chasing girls.

Despite the challenges of school, among less observant, but self-identifying Muslim peers, participants reported that their own religious adherence was generally respected. Muslims considered Islam to be held in high regard among Muslim peers; participants, their religious and nominal peers were ‘proud to be Muslim’ (Ahmed). Some participants felt pressured by Muslim peers who were forceful over religious matters, however. For example, Fatima (who described herself as a ‘Pakistani’), found
Muslims more religious than herself and from a different cultural background, could be too assertive about religion. She explained that during Ramadan she started to wear a headscarf, and as a result a group of ‘Arabic girls’ approached her a number of times and told her that she should wear a headscarf every day and not just during Ramadan. She found this intrusive and unwanted. After a teacher failed to take the incident seriously, she informed a school Prefect who was able to stop them. At the Ahmadiyya Mission House, on the other hand, there was consensus over the interest that peers of all backgrounds had in Ahmadiyya Islam, but that Ahmadiyya Islam could be looked down upon by other Muslims.

**Conclusion**

The perspectives of religious adolescents of their peer worlds were primarily concerned with the boundaries of their religious identities and how these may clash with the values, norms and actions of peer worlds. Similar kinds of identity negotiations were reported by participants in all kinds of schools (some Jews in strict Orthodox schools perceived themselves as less religious than their peers, but reported negotiating and constructing their identities in response to these different values and norms). For religious adolescents, non-religious peers were often perceived to be a negative influence. They could challenge core beliefs and ascribe stigmatised religious identities. Participants sometimes felt pressure in non-religious peer groups to conform to their secular values. One salient aspect of peers’ challenges was the critique of the belief in the existence of God, particularly for Christian participants. These incidents can be interpreted as examples of antitheistic sentiment.

The more positive reported experiences of curiosity in the data followed some patterns according to religious tradition and circumstance. Jews attributed curiosity to their minority status. The Ahmadiyya Muslims and Mormons who took part in the
study supposed that their identity provoked curiosity because it did not fit into peers’ existing understanding.

The reported beliefs, values, and norms of peer worlds coincide with those of classroom worlds (Chapter Six). Challenges to theocentric interpretations of reality, misrepresentation of religious traditions based on stereotypes, and in the case of Muslims, racism and Islamophobia, were often present in the curriculum and structure of classroom worlds as well as in peer worlds. Together, curriculum worlds and peer worlds can be considered as two different, but related, aspects of secondary schooling that can present similar challenges to religious adolescents’ values and beliefs. Participants’ responses to these messages and experiences in the form of identity choices, strategies and negotiations are considered further in Chapter Eight.
Chapter Eight

Religious identity choices in secondary schools

Introduction

The Christians, Jews and Muslims who participated in this study either identified with traditional, modern, new or historic religious minorities, or practised Christianity in a society where Church attendance is acknowledged to be in decline – but where religion (or religious controversy) is prominent in public life, popular media and politics (Chapter Three). Religious adolescents’ reported experiences of classroom worlds (Chapter Six) and peer worlds (Chapter Seven) give examples of identity cues and messages in these social and political circumstances. Messages and cues in classroom worlds and peer worlds were often perceived to be related because of ascription by teachers, the influence of the media, or historic stereotypes. For example, philosophical critique of Christianity in classroom worlds could be perceived by Christians to influence attitudes in peer worlds. While Muslims reported similar Islamophobic attitudes among teachers as they did with peers. This chapter focuses upon how religious adolescents reported to act and construct religious identities in response to these experiences, (research question 3) in different circumstances and contexts (research question 4), in order to negotiate border crossings between home, community and school worlds.

The data presented in this chapter builds upon the analysis described in preceding chapters to develop a theoretical understanding of how identity cues, messages and ascribed identities at secondary school are negotiated to construct stronger, more public, or weaker less public affinity identities or character traits. In response to the challenges posed by their secondary schools, Christians, Jews and
Muslims explained how they acted to maintain their beliefs, practices, group affinities and identity boundaries. The chapter is divided into three sections that explore thematically grouped ‘identity management’ (Østberg, 2000) strategies or ‘identity choices’ (Chen, 2010). The first explores how religious adolescents may draw upon the resources of their religious traditions to make sense of their experiences of secondary schools – that is, how adolescents identify with, or draw upon a religious tradition in their worldview, lifestyle, beliefs and practices, and how this process may be influenced by school worlds. The second section explores how religious adolescents seek to act and represent themselves as in secondary school worlds by declaring or signalling their religious identity. The third section explores how Christians, Jews and Muslims may ‘wear a mask’ (Faircloth, 2012) and hide their religious identities at school.

**The resources of faith**

Christians, Jews and Muslims at all research sites and who attended all kinds of schools considered their homes and religious communities as the most important factors in their construction of religious identity. However, participants often used religious teachings and practices drawn from their religious traditions, either to make sense of their schooling experiences, or to provide them with comfort and support at secondary schools – what Chaudhury and Miller (2008, p. 394) identify as ‘internal’ seeking in religious identity construction. This section examines how the resources of religious traditions were used by participants to make sense of, manage, or report their schooling experiences, focusing upon what could be called their ‘God-talk’ or ‘ordinary theology’ (Astley, 2002). Key resources of faith cited were prayer, theological explanations for their experiences, and the support of other students, adults or teachers of the same religious tradition either inside or outside of school (Appendices 11-12, pp. 323 - 326).
Christians reported that personal prayer said privately was beneficial at religiously unaffiliated schools where there was no formal provision of prayer. For example, Lauren explained her strategy in the absence of school prayers in her new secondary school: ‘If I need to I will say a little prayer in my head’ (Lauren, Northstreet Baptist Church). Helen explained how, although uncertain of her faith, at secondary school ‘It helps you to know someone is with you’ (Helen, Northstreet Baptist Church) – implicitly referring to the Christian belief in a personal, loving God present through life’s trials. While Anne felt that her relationship with God also helped her overcome problems of peer pressure presented in school worlds.

_I have a way of coping with things which I think is good because at school there’s a lot [...] there’s an awful lot of pressure from all angles, and there’s also just a lot of stress generally. And if I just have some time to God, then it’s a lot better [...]Especially if you feel like alone, so like, not a lot of friends, you know. Err especially if you’re kinda close with God, I guess. Umm, you’ve always got God to turn to, so you’re never kinda really fully alone. Stops me worrying as much, again...

Anne, female, Year 10, Voluntary Controlled Anglican School [St Luke’s Anglican Church, group interview]

Some Christian participants understood the challenges posed to them at secondary schools in terms of a dichotomy of Christian life and that of the ‘world’ – a recurrent theme in Christian thought originating in the Gospel of John. In the Gospel of John ‘the world’ does not recognise Christ because of the cruel and corrupt nature of human society in comparison with God’s will. It was ‘hard being a Christian’, Brian explained, because of the behaviour of college peers, paraphrasing John 17:14-16: ‘you have God’s way; they have their way’ (Brian, Northstreet Baptist Church). Being a Mormon among non-Mormon school peers was also described by Mormon participants as being ‘in the world but not of the world’ (Phoebe, Southville Mormon Chapel). Consequently some Christian participants considered this a good opportunity for developing spiritual strength, as Jackie explained.
We’re taught to resist temptation ... and that comes up at school... we need to learn to make these decisions and if we weren’t at school... we wouldn’t have that opportunity to be tested.

Jackie, female, Year 12, Comprehensive School [Southville Mormon Chapel, pair interview]

Christian participants also described how they managed their relationships with others by living out Christian teachings. At group interviews in Northstreet Baptist Church there was consensus that it was not Christian to retaliate to taunts. The solution to peer problems was to ‘Treat everyone as your neighbour’ (Anita, Northstreet Baptist Church). Some believed that a Christian conscience should be engaged, and could help when there was peer pressure: ‘It’s tough, it’s difficult, but if you rely on faith you are fine’ (Brian, Northstreet Baptist Church). Such private belief was valuable when presented with different values and norms of behaviour in school worlds, as Ambrose explained.

It [Catholicism] keeps you on, like, it keeps you on the, the straight and narrow... So if some of your friends are going off the rails or whatever, and it can kind of keep you. Yeah ...

Ambrose, male, Year 11, Comprehensive School [St Mary’s Catholic Church, individual interview]

In the face of challenges to the validity of Christianity from their peers, participants justified their religious positions in contrast to their peers’ views. Their peers were mistaken, they did not understand Christianity, so they would criticise it. The ignorance of peers was caused by the negative portrayal of Christianity in the media, Religious Education lessons, and in the case of Ellen, the dull school chapel services at her Anglican Foundation Comprehensive School. Christian participants also explained there were emotional reasons for their peers’ hostility to God. People could be selfish, or some personal trauma had led them to blame God. Sin could also be a barrier to accepting God. Or peers were jealous of faith and were in admiration of Christians’ moral values, behaviour and emotional stability.
And [peers’ criticism of Christianity] could be because, like, bad experiences and stuff – because a lot of the reasons why people don’t, umm, believe in God, have faith in God, is because of bad experiences they’ve had, you know, like, which is understandable. They need somebody to blame.

Ellen, female, Year 12, Comprehensive Foundation School [St Luke’s Anglican Church, group interview]

For some participants, the challenge of the curriculum could also serve to strengthen their beliefs, as explained by Sheila. Being provoked by Religious Education lessons only made her resolve stronger.

I come away from [Religious Education] stronger I think, because I question things, and think, ‘no: I still believe what I believe’

Sheila, female, Year 12, Voluntary Controlled Anglican School [St Luke’s Anglican School, group interviews]

Christians found supportive adults of the same religion as crucial resources to maintain their religious beliefs. For example, Ben explained how in his Anglican school his participation at his Catholic lunch-club run by a Catholic member of staff helped him cope with being Catholic at school and be open about it.

I don’t hide away that I am Catholic. I’m quite open... [but] it helps to discuss things [with a Catholic teacher] you couldn’t talk to a non-Catholic about, or at least a non-religious person about.

Ben, Year 9, Catholic, Anglican Boys’ Independent School [individual interview]

He, and other Catholics in non-Catholic schools, believed that being openly Catholic at his sometimes hostile school was preparing him for life after school. To learn to defend his faith was a valuable exercise in the construction of a deeper personal Catholic faith and public identity in a secular society.

I often find I need to justify the religion because otherwise I might not seem like I actually believe it if I don’t have the answers to it, if I believe things are this way.... I don’t question my faith because I’ve been brought up with it, but at the [Catholic lunch club] we get a resounding answer [to the questions posed by peers] which helps you come back with an answer... I think it helps me live in the real world like when I leave school I will be able to voice my feelings on things...I think it helps going out into a secular country.

Ben, Year 9, Catholic, Anglican Boys’ Independent School [St Mary’s Catholic Church, individual interview]

Participants at the Catholic school found the work of a Catholic youth worker invaluable in comparison with other parts of the school curriculum – findings that
resonate with other studies that stress the importance of role-models in religious identity construction (Good & Willoughby, 2007; Rich & Schachter, 2012). She ‘helped’ practising Catholics and provided opportunities for non-practising Catholics to understand religion in a more experiential way. Participants felt this presented a positive representation of their Catholic identity.

The things we do with [the youth worker] help, so she has taken people out of classes and had a kind of different religious experience like it is not all boring because the students are going away from it and not actually coming to the religious side then we’re going to go to them and try and get on their level.

Daniella, female, Year 10, Voluntary Aided Catholic Comprehensive School [group interview, St Mary’s Catholic Church]

In addition to the support of adults in religious identity construction, Christians also found identifying with religious peers as important. This could happen in or outside of school. For example, Sophia explained how other Quakers at different schools also found being Quaker problematic at times, and that meeting them at Summer Camp had helped her not feel so unique as she did among her peers at school where she was the only one.

If you go to a Quaker group in the summer and everyone is like ‘how do you explain being a Quaker?’ and no one can come up with the right answer and so that is quite nice because there are people like you.

Sophia, female, Year 11, Comprehensive School [group interview, Quaker Meeting House]

Unlike Quaker participants, who attended different schools (and therefore all perceived themselves to be an extreme minority as the only Quaker), some Mormon participants attended the same school. They explained that having close Mormon friends was beneficial in maintaining a Mormon identity. It meant that ‘you not trying to explain the Church on your own’ (Jackie, Southville Mormon Chapel). Mormons also felt prayer and faith was crucial as was the support of their Church leaders outside of school.

In our church we have leaders that are so supportive of our problems and they’re there to try and support us and build us up…we’ve got friends and Jesus Christ
Other Mormon participants found that being selective of the company they kept would help them. They therefore made friends with peers who shared some of their values, even if they were not Mormons.

*people swear, people do stuff that I, we wouldn’t dream of and you just have to get on with it because you can’t tell them not to use… just don’t do it yourself and try to get the right peers. I don’t mind [being Mormon] at all when I’m with the people I am close to.*

**Jacob, male, Year 7, Boys’ Community School [Southville Mormon Chapel, pair interview]**

Being set apart was difficult at times but, it was ultimately worth maintaining Mormon identity boundaries according to the older Mormon participants. Jackie explained that after time, she discovered that being Mormon was well worth it.

*when you’re younger you don’t feel part of the crowd doing these things [smoking, drinking, swearing and having sex] but when you get older you realise you’re a lot better for it*

**Jackie, female, Year 12, Comprehensive School [Southville Mormon Chapel, pair interview]**

The reported experiences of Jews also show how religious identities may be negotiated in response to messages and cues in school worlds. In non-Jewish schools, this could be brought about when school worlds conflicted with aspects of Jewish identity, for example, when peers criticised Israel, school clashed with Holy Days, or when Jews were asked to participate in Christian prayer. These experiences were challenging for participants, and sometimes unpleasant, but they could result in a more pronounced understanding of Jewish identity as a unique minority. Joseph explained.

*I think it’s good [being a Jew in a non-Jewish school] because you could say being a Jew is slightly unique because it’s one of the smaller religions - much smaller than Christianity or Islam and I think that’s good because you feel you’re part of a slightly smaller community and because of that you feel much more unique and more involved.*

**Joseph, male, Year 8, Reform, Independent Boys’ School [Eastville Reform Synagogue, pair interview]**
Eliza had a similar perspective. Although sometimes experiencing anti-Semitism, attending a Comprehensive School had strengthened her sense of Jewish identity.

*Oh I don't know the word..., you're..., you're.. You're original, you're... unique - there’s one in 20 who is a Jew. Everyone knows that’s you. You’re not like everyone else who is the same religion. Yeah, that’s a benefit. Huum, what else? Obviously the bad thing about it is you always get some anti-Semitic comments, ummh, you will always get something from someone, there’s no doubt. That’s the drawback of being a Jewish student. Unless there is a lot of Jewish students in one place, you will always get that. Yeah. also one side of being the only person in a group of friends being Jewish, that is Jewish is that it’s good, everyone can learn from you.*

**Eliza, female, Year 12, Orthodox, Comprehensive School [Countrywide Jewish Youth Club, individual interview]**

Jews who attended Jewish schools also reported school worlds as contributing to religious identity construction. Being in an all-Jewish environment was considered an important factor in this. For example, Heather believed that attending a Jewish secondary school had strengthened her faith in God by a process of identification with a community of believers.

*I feel, like, completely opposite, like, going from a non-Jewish primary school to a Jewish school. No but I feel like I’ve become much more believing in God and believing in everything; it’s being around more Jewish people that’s kind of made it, because then I can discuss things more about Judaism with my friends and it’s definitely going to a Jewish school has made me so much, like, I don’t know, like, picking there’s only 20 people in my Year who are doing Jewish studies A-level and they’re like the people that find it important, [...] it’s definitely influenced me a lot. I still like to come here [Cheder] and everything, but, it’s being at school which is, because, obviously you’re there all the time. It’s made an impact.*

**Heather, female, Year 12, Liberal, mainstream Orthodox Jewish School [Eastville Liberal Synagogue, group interview]**

Other participants, who were critical of their Jewish schools could negotiate their identities in opposition to the messages presented in Jewish school worlds. Much of the discussion in group interviews concerned the differences between denominations and varying degrees of religious practice among their peers, recognised as a common antagonism among British Jewry (Scholefield, 2004). Jewish participants used school peers’ identities to provide a framework to negotiate and explain their own identities. Sara’s explanation serves as a good example:

*There are all different levels [of Jewish religious practice] in our school ... like some don’t keep anything they’re meant to keep, and some keep a lot, and they learn every night with*
their families, and some of their parents are Rabbis and stuff like that. And some of them really aren't religious and I'd say I'm in the middle I would guess.

Sara, female, Year 9, Orthodox, strict Orthodox Jewish Girls’ School [Countrywide Jewish Youth Club, group interview]

The religious views of parents were often thought to be those that were most significant in determining levels of religious practice, however. Sara explained that when confronted with two different kinds of Judaism, that of her home and that of her school worlds, her family’s values and norms were more important than those of the school.

I've learnt now, go with it; go with what you’re taught [in school]. My family is not as religious as some families and I'm not going to be like them; I'm going to be what my family is like.

Sara, female, Year 9, Orthodox, strict Orthodox Jewish Girls’ School [Countrywide Jewish Youth Club, group interview]

The importance of family upbringing in the construction of religious identity was typically acknowledged by adolescent Jews, but some participants also voiced a strong degree of choice and agency in their religious identity. For example, Isobel defied denominational allegiance, describing her religious practice as one of personal selection, resonating with theories of religious adherence that claim in a secular age religious practice has become more individualistic (Bruce, 1996; Bailey, 2001).

I keep some parts of shabbat but not others. I use electricity but I don't go shopping. I keep kosher, but not hechsher kosher ... I don’t really fall into any particular branch of Judaism; I just kind of pick and choose the bits I like.

Isobel, female, Year 11, mainstream Orthodox Jewish School [Countrywide Jewish Youth Club, group interview].

Muslim participants reported that supportive adults and prayer were important in school worlds. Muslim participants valued the advice and support of Muslim staff. Muslim teachers at school could be of help in times of need because they understood the problems of racism and Islamophobia. For example, Jamal explained an incident concerning leave of absence for Eid.

My family was following my grandma who follows a local Mosque and we were doing it [Eid] on Thursday and we said we are going to have Thursday off and my teacher was like, you absolutely can’t have Thursday off. I don’t see what the harm of it was. So I went to one of my PE teachers, [teacher’s name], and he is a Muslim and he was angry with the
teacher too and he was like ‘take the day off, I will cover you if you get into any trouble or anything’ and that was pretty good, but generally the teachers are pretty rough.

Jamal, male, Year 12, Further Education College [Westville Muslim Women’s community Centre, group interview]

For Muslim participants with access to prayer facilities at school, taking part in Salah was also reported as beneficial: it gave them confidence, and had a calming effect that could be beneficial for studying. The knowledge imparted by Muslim teachers from a short khutbah [sermon] given during lunchtime could also help their understanding of Islam.

Religious identity declaration

A theme shared in the identity negotiations of participants of all faiths and denominations was that of ‘identity declaration’ (Peek, 2005). Departing from a strict interpretation of Peek’s definition used to explain the identity negotiations of adolescent Muslims, I include reported experiences of Christians and Jews that range from subtle messages to more obvious identity choices enacted in order to justify, defend, or signal religious identity in the face of challenges presented by classroom and peer worlds upheld by unequal power relations (Appendices 11- 13, pp. 323 - 326). The process of identity declaration could also rely on the resources of faith, as some examples above show, but it rarely constituted a form of evangelisation.

Christians described declaring religious identities in the context of secular values and norms of school peer worlds. For example, Anita (Northstreet Baptist Church) described as part of her migration from Australia to England the process of declaring her identity – one of the few examples in the interview data that could also be seen to reflect a Marcian-Eriksonian model of identity development progressing through ‘foreclosure’ to ‘identity achievement.’ Anita had felt challenged by the diversity of her peers, or their secular beliefs and behaviours in Australian schools. She
had tried to hide her Christian beliefs and explored other beliefs, but since encountering similar problems in her English secondary school she had decided to be open about her Christian identity at school. This gave her a ‘sense of peace – knowing nothing’s going to let me budge’ (Anita, Northstreet Baptist Church). Some participants reported that declaring their Christian faith more confidently among peers became easier as they got older. Embarrassment faded over time or among friends, but they needed ‘guts’ (Anne, St Luke’s Anglican Church) to be public about it in the first instance.

For participants in Catholic schools, religious identity could be revealed and actively declared in participation in Mass, an important identity boundary for Catholics among non-practising peers, Jodie explained.

People know I am [religious] because I help out a lot at Masses and stuff... Also people know if you’re a Catholic or not if they see you take the bread, and they assume you are.

Jodie, female, Year 9, Voluntary Aided Catholic Comprehensive School [group interview]

Catholic identity could also be declared by reference to practice in non-Catholic schools, when peers’ questions or criticism would ensue. For example, Joyce explained that her friends learned of her religious identity when her school peers invited her to meet them on Sunday. Declaring this religious practice inevitably led to peers’ questioning.

I think at my school you don’t really notice if someone is religious. It’s normally what you do in practice. So if someone asks you what to do in practice and you say you can’t because you’ve got church. Going to church every week because it is necessary makes you really religious and makes you really dedicated so therefore if people have questions about Christianity in general then they ask you, like ‘why don’t Catholics have women priests?’

Joyce, female, Year 10, Independent Anglican Girls’ School [St Mary’s Catholic School, group interview]

Mormon participants explained how they publicly professed their faith at school. For some, in order to counteract non-recognition in the curriculum despite being highly visible at school prompted them to speak up in lessons and explain the differences between orthodox Christian doctrine and practice and that of the Mormon Church.
Declaring Mormon identity was ‘more evidence of the ... good reputation of the Church’ (Jackie). This could be an effective strategy in negotiating religious identity and coping with school, but not with the aim of converting others.

*I think it helps if we talk about it openly and explain what we think and things...I love being a member of this church, I wouldn’t give it up for anything and I’m so blessed that I’ve been able to have the knowledge I have so I try and share the little bits I have with them.*

**Lyndall, female, Year 10, Girls’ Comprehensive School [Southville Mormon chapel, pair interview]**

*I helps quite a lot [being Mormon at school]. I’m proud to be a Mormon and go to school and say that, I’m not bothered, usually they [peers] are interested [in Mormonism]*

**Jacob, male, Year 7, Boys’ Community School [Southville Mormon chapel, pair interview pair interview]**

Jews in non-Jewish schools described incidences of identity declaration in order to help teachers teach about Judaism to younger school peers, or informally explaining Jewish practices and beliefs to their peers. For example, Eliza set up a ‘J Soc’ [Jewish society] for the purposes of educating non-Jewish peers about Judaism in her Comprehensive School.

*As I said [my friends and I] have started a J Soc which is good. That is an extra input for other students to learn about our religion. Our first one was for Hanukkah. ... So every month we did something on a Judaism topic. Whenever a festival is, whichever month it’s in, we could do J Soc on that. So whoever comes, the majority are non-Jewish people, so it’s good we have something for them to learn about. I think that’s good.*

**Eliza, female, Year 12, Orthodox, Comprehensive School [Countrywide Jewish Youth Club, group interview]**

A more subtle form of identity declaration, described by Simon, was to adopt certain character traits in order to counter-act anti-Semitic prejudice. He felt that the image of stinginess ascribed by his school peers was best solved by trying to be generous to his non-Jewish peers. This example shows the potential effect of negative religious identity ascription in school worlds upon religious adolescents’ identities.

*But as people say that joke's gone on for a while and it’s not nice to hear all these jokes [about the meanness of Jews]. And I feel a bit more, like, to be charitable, [not] like a stereotype*

**Simon, male, Year 11, Orthodox, Comprehensive School [Countrywide Jewish Youth Club, group interview]**
To negotiate the Christian worship in his school, Seth described a passive form of identity declaration. Seth sung in the school choir at his Anglican foundation school, and decided between the initial interview at Eastville Reform Synagogue in February, and the follow-up in May, that he would participate in prayers he considered non-Christological, such as the Lord’s Prayer, but he would not say the Grace (2 Corinthians 13:14), which includes an affirmation of Jesus as Christ, because as a Jew, he did not believe in Jesus. This example shows the theological reflection that could take place in interviews and the possible impact of the research process on identity construction.

Assemblies when they’re doing the Grace – I used to [before initial group interview] sort of join in because everyone else did it. Now I don’t do it. After that discussion [initial group interview], I just don’t do it now....They can’t really tell you off for not doing it, and I don’t believe in Jesus, simply, so I don’t say the Grace... I don’t mind ... the Lord’s Prayer, because it doesn’t mention Jesus. No it doesn’t. It’s being debated that you can actually say it. It’s talking about the God. It’s the same God.... Christianity and Judaism are pretty much the same thing... I don’t have a problem with hymns. I mentioned last time, as a singer, I just sing. It’s just singing and that’s what I do.

Seth, male, Year 8, Reform, Independent Boys’ School (Anglican) [Eastville Reform Synagogue, pair interview]

Humour was also reported to be used as a form of identity negotiation among Jews in non-Jewish schools again illustrating how religious identity could be performed as a character trait. Rachel explained how she would allow some of her non-Jewish friends to call her ‘Ginger Jew’ (Rachel, Eastville Liberal Synagogue) in order to distinguish her from the number of girls called ‘Rachel’ in her class and as an assertion of her religious identity. She explained that this was acceptable to her because they were her friends and that she had called herself this first. Saphire reported ‘banter’ aimed to diffuse possible tensions with Muslim peers in a ‘jokey way’ recalling how she and a Muslim girl would greet each other with ‘Shalom’ when they passed in the corridor – a humorous episode in the school day according to Saphire, but one that acknowledged affinity boundaries in the context of possible antagonism.
I have little jokes with people [about being Jewish] but to me, nothing would offend me. Like if somebody offended me, I’d say something... Like me and this girl, she's Muslim: when we see each other in the corridors we say ‘Shalom’ to each other and a few other things like that. But things in a jokey way.

Saphire, female, Year 10, Liberal, Community School [Eastville Liberal Synagogue, group interview]

Among Muslim participants, examples of identity declaration were similar in kind to those described by Peek (2005) of adolescent Muslims responding to Islamophobia and violent stereotypes in American society following the events of September 11th. This could lead to the performance of particular character traits. For example, Jamal explained that the negative representation of Muslims in the media had made him consciously ‘more friendly and open with people’ at his sixth form college because he hoped people would ‘judge me on that quality not ‘he’s a Muslim so obviously he’s a terrorist’ (Jamal, Westville Muslim Women’s Community Centre). Taj in Southville gave a similar perspective, resonating strongly with the findings of Peek (2005).

I share my beliefs sometimes when an issue comes up about my religion or background comes up, I give them a better understanding of my religion and race than is perceived in the media who I am and the people that we are. I think it is important [to explain Islam], some people still believe Muslims have big beards and extremist views and [are]disrespectful to women, you need to change their views because many of them are influenced by the media. The media perceives Muslims as terrorists really.

Taj, male, Year 13, Academy [Southville Ahmadiyya Mission House, group interview]

In order to negotiate the identity cue of being a terrorist, some Muslim participants also reported using humour. For example, Adil explained that a Muslim peer in his school would refer to himself as a ‘terrorist’ as a joke.

I do Urdu at school and everyone [in the optional Urdu class] is Muslim and my friend says ‘I’m going to my terrorist class’

Aadil, male, Year 10, Comprehensive School [Southville Ahmadiyya Mission House, group interview]

Instead of declaring religious identity for the purposes of promoting understanding among those of a different or no religious faith, Ahmed (Westville Sunni Masjid) explained how he would act as a positive example to his less observant Muslim peers.
He persuaded them to pray on Friday lunchtimes, and also not to break their fast during Ramadan. Ahmed reported that he had a similar influence over attendance at Friday prayers in school throughout the year. When he did this he built up ‘good deeds’ [hasanat] – rewards in the afterlife. This example shows how theological resources were used in order to maintain group boundaries and religious identity construction through identification with religious practices, as also found by Jacobson (1997).

**Religious identity masking**

While some participants actively declared their religious identity, other participants reported an opposite strategy: cloaking religious identity at school – ‘wearing a mask’ (Faircloth, 2012) or ‘hiding’ (Phelan et al., 1991) who they were. Rather than relying on the sources of their religious traditions, identity masking typically involved ‘differentiation’ or distancing from religious activities and religious mentalities (Sommerville, 1998). Some Christian participants did not think that declaring identity could change the attitudes and outlook of their schools or peers; it was therefore easier to ignore the challenges of peers and not take the time to explain and promote an understanding of Christian beliefs.

*I just to choose ignore [criticism of Christian beliefs] because they might not understand maybe why I believe what I believe, and if I tried to explain it, they don’t have the time for it, so I’m not going to try and understand it. So if they’re like it, then I say I’m not going to have time for them, if that’s how they’re going to be about it.*

*Tobias, male, Year 11, Voluntary Aided Catholic Comprehensive School [St Luke’s Anglican Church, individual interview]*

For some Christians, the incessant questioning meant they would avoid debates and discussions as these had become tiresome and pointless. Identity declaration had been attempted, but explaining Christianity had proven fruitless, Ambrose explained.

*I used to [discuss and debate], but now I’m a bit tired of it. It’s the same questions over and over again and it it’s...if I try and explain, they won’t have respect for what I say to them...*

*Ambrose, Year 11, Catholic, Comprehensive School [St Mary’s Catholic Church, individual interview]*
Bob too found declaring his Catholic identity as unfruitful. He described a situation with a hostile peer who sat next to him in History. The repetitive nature of questioning and hostility to the notion of God wore him down and led to him not discussing the questions anymore.

*I like the word annoy - it is frustrating because he [hostile peer] keeps asking all of these questions to try and change the way I am thinking, and I know I am not going to change the way I’m thinking... I have engaged in a meaningful conversation to try and address his questions even if they are stupid, but I've been over the same things a number of times and explained my views on it.*

**Bob, male, Year 9, Independent Boys’ School (Anglican)** [St Mary’s Catholic Church, individual interview]

Some Mormons also found it helpful if their religious identity was largely disregarded, Nathan’s explanation of becoming ‘normal’ by masking his religious identity shows how harmful identity ascription could be in peer worlds: ‘some people don’t know I’m Mormon, well most people, well they forget about it and treat me as a normal person’ (Nathan). Fear of identity ascription and negative peer behaviours meant some Mormons routinely masked their identity, in Phoebe’s words: ‘it’s not like you go around telling everyone you’re a Mormon’ (Phoebe). Others found it beneficial to ignore any offensive or challenging behaviour of their peers rather than speak out about it, Andy explained: ‘If they do something, that might offend me, I just ignore them’ (Andy).

Christian participants reported how they would moderate or play down their beliefs to communicate with their peers, a form of semi-masking in order to negotiate their identities. For example, when Catherine’s peers came to her in times of trouble, she felt that she had to be ‘neutral’ about her beliefs, despite Mormon values underpinning her care for her friends and providing a source of solace for them.

*As long as you are neutral so they can kind of talk to you about it and we are able to be a bit more objective of what they’re doing. Because they do come to you, and they feel OK and that because they feel it is an objective third party and that we’re not going to spread their [problems].*
Catherine, female, Year 12, Community School Sixth Form [Southville Mormon chapel, pair interview]

While Brian, who sometimes openly declared his Christian faith, also professed an apologetic strategy of using secular analogies for religious argumentation, ‘Never say anything from the Bible without backing it up with something from the world’ (Brian, Northstreet Baptist Church).

**Interviewer:** What do they [your peers] think about Christianity?

**Brian:** What do they think? I don’t think they even think about it to be honest. I don’t think it even enters their minds – unless its brought up, of course, but then when its brought up they’re not very... the attitude, you can tell it’s a worldly attitude, it’s not... they don’t care, it’s ‘whatever.’ It’s a bit annoying.

**Interviewer:** And does that cause you problems?

**Brian:** Yes, inside. But I don’t let it out, you know. I mean everyone’s entitled to their own opinions, and God tells us to reach out to people but it’s hard when it’s you versus about 12 other people, it’s quite freaky to go up to them right, and obviously you’ve got to learn that sometimes, but I don’t really mind.

Brian, male, Year 12, Baptist, Further Education College [Northstreet Baptist Church, individual interview]

For Jews in Comprehensive and Community Schools, wearing a mask could mean becoming less engaged with religious practices and hide public affinity identities. It was easier not to be too religious and to not declare adherence to Judaism too openly, Zvi explained.

Sometimes I think I should be more Jewish and, like, because I don't wear the Kippah and I don't pray in the morning and evening. I think maybe I should, but If I maybe came to school one day Jewed-up, completely religious, I think people would find it hard to adjust to that.

**Zvi, male, Year 8, Orthodox Jew, Community School [Countrywide Jewish Youth Club, pair interview]**

Other Jewish participants also concurred it was best not to be open about being Jewish – for Ruth, the representation and ascription of a distorted Jewish identity in the curriculum had made her identity too difficult to manage with her peer group apart from close friends.

*I think the problem of Jewish teaching [in Religious Education lessons] at school is that I feel really singled out and made to seem really weird and stuff, so its a bit of a joke to everyone, so that's why I don't really talk to anyone about my religion in school, except to my friends who are desperate to come to my Bat Mitzvah.*
Cloaking identity was not always possible or desirable for Jewish participants, however, as peers were perceived to be quick to ascribe Jewish identity and participants reported their identities could be revealed despite exercising caution in school worlds. When their identity was discerned, however, it was not acceptable to deny religious identity. Saphire’s explanation serves as a good example of this.

I wouldn't hide it, but I wouldn’t bring it up straightaway. Just if it came up in conversation, then I would mention it. I wouldn’t be like around with ‘Jew’ on my top wooooooo. [laughter] I wouldn't hide it. … Sometimes at school if someone says something I think I’d rather they didn’t know, but I think it’d be a hard thing to hide from people; I wouldn't want it to be a secret because that would feel a bit weird, but it’s not something I would choose to tell people – it’s just something that gets around doesn’t it.

Muslims interviewed in Westville did not report instances of religious identity cloaking, only of religious practices being inhibited. Ahmadiyya Muslims interviewed in Southville, however, reported instances of wearing masks with teachers and peers. Aadil explained how he had learnt to not ‘discuss Palestine with teachers’ because his opinion was not accepted. With Muslim peers who adhered or identified with mainstream Islam, Ahmadiyya participants also reported exercising caution because of possible hostility due to theological differences and a history of persecution. Aadil explained that when ‘Asians ask questions, I try to avoid them’ (Aadil, Ahmadiyya Mission House). For Muhab cloaking Ahamdi identity was a dilemma that needed subtle management (like that of Saphire reported above): ‘You don’t want to bring attention to yourself, but you don’t want to be like you’re not there’ (Muhab, Ahmadiyya Mission House). It was not right to pretend not to be Ahmadi, and be invisible, but it was not wise to make a show of it either. The experiences of Ahmadi show the difficulties of both belonging to a stigmatised Muslim minority, and a minority within that minority.
Conclusion

In this chapter I have considered how Christians, Jews and Muslims negotiate and construct their religious identities in the context of the messages and cues presented in secondary schools. When confronted with challenges to their religious beliefs and practices at school, adolescent Christians, Muslims and Jews faced conscious choices as to how to negotiate and construct their religious identities in secondary schools. While contexts and circumstances are different for individuals, the processes involved in the construction and negotiation of identities bear some similarities across religious traditions and types of schools. Identity choices for religious adolescents in secondary schools relate to the power relations between them and their peers and teachers, often in reaction to identity ascription underwritten by systems of representation authorised by the media or the religious character or affiliation of the school.

Christians, Jews, and Muslims reported relying on adults of their own tradition, either in, or outside of school, to provide answers to the challenges of peers and the curriculum. A common strategy described by Christian and Muslim participants was to rely on ‘faith’ in order to maintain core beliefs and abstain from prohibitive behaviours endorsed or encouraged by peers. This response involved actively choosing one of two ways, to use the Christian terminology used by some participants: that of ‘the world’, or that of God. Making this commitment helped religious adolescents withstand identity challenges and threats posed by the curriculum and by their peers. This could be internal and private, or include declaring their religious identities in whole or part to their peers and teachers. Jews also reported using the resources of their religious communities to negotiate and construct a strong religious identity by declaring their religious identity. A contrary, but also common strategy described by participants was to privatise or cloak their religious identity by partially or wholly concealing religious
beliefs and practices. This could involve a subtle form of mediation between the secular world and the Christian, Muslim and Jewish worldviews, or a more deliberate masking of religious identity to avoid conflict or persecution.
Chapter Nine
What do religious adolescents have to tell us?

Introduction
The data presented in the last three chapters give a thick description of Christians, Jews and Muslims’ reported experiences of classroom and peer worlds (research questions 1 and 2), and a theoretical account of the processes of identity construction and negotiation that take place in them – across several kinds of secondary school (research questions 3 and 4). In this concluding chapter, I reflect on the educational and social problems these findings raise and what implications they may have for educational practitioners and religious communities – the ‘utilization/application/action orientation’ of the study (Miles & Huberman, 1994, pp. 277-280). Or what Denzin and Lincoln call the final phase of ‘the art and politics of interpretation and evaluation’ of qualitative data – as presented by a politically (and religiously) situated social researcher (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 37).

The application of the findings to educational praxis should be approached with a degree of caution. The relationship between educational research and practice is complex: ‘research based knowledge cannot be applied to practice like paint to a wall’ (Edwards, 2002, p.161). In regard to the implications of this study, it is important to establish from the outset that the findings of this study cannot conclude wider, ideological culture wars about the role of religion in English society. Nor can the findings tell of the extent of the problems it has explored. It consists, after-all, only of a study of the informant accounts and identity negotiations and constructions of a small group of adolescent religious adherents: examples of how Christians, Jews and Muslims may report to construct and negotiate religious identities in English secondary
schools. But, as this study does bring to the fore highly relevant information concerning the schooling experiences of religious adolescents and the ways they may make sense of those experiences, it can inform the debates concerning ‘doing God in education’ (Cooling, 2010).

After surveying some of the educational and social problems raised by the findings of this study, I reflect on their implications in regard to Cooling’s vexed question: ‘how is religious belief to be handled [in education] when there is such diversity of views in society?’ (Cooling, 2010, p. 12). I do this by focusing on the debates over Church and faith schools, the nature and purpose of Religious Education, and, in conclusion, a consideration of how religious adolescents may be better accommodated in secondary schools (including how individual educational practitioners could deal with their own religious commitments in the public square of education).

Social and educational problems raised by the findings

The findings of this study contribute to a body of literature that show racial and ethnic minority groups in plural contexts and diasporas can experience difficulties in secondary schools, such as racism, stereotyping, and discrepancies between the values of home and school worlds (e.g. Cummins, 2000; Forman, 2001; Bailey, 2002; Nasir & Saxe, 2003; Suárez-Orozco, 2004; Stitikus & Nguyen, 2007; Awokoya, 2012). However, by taking religious diversity as the focus of this study rather than ethnicity, nationality or race, this thesis broadens understanding of identity construction and negotiation in schools from the area of traditional plurality, such as the study of Muslim youth in western countries (e.g. Jacobson, 1997; Østberg, 2000; Zine, 2000; Peek, 2005; Chaudhury & Miller, 2008; Hassan, 2010), to religious adolescents in general in the context of modern plurality and secularity.
In this study, I have explored the reported experiences of adolescent members of the Established Church, historical religious minorities (Catholics, Baptists, Quakers, Jews), and new religious minorities (Mormons, Ahmadiyya Muslims). As the data show, it is not always possible to separate issues concerning ethnic and racial identity from religious identity – also observed by Weller et al. (2001). But I have shown similar kinds of prejudice, discrimination, and problems reported by religious adherents in wider English society (Weller et al., 2001) and those reported by highly stigmatised groups such as Muslim youth of their schools (Archer, 2003), are also reported by secondary school students who identify with new and historical religious minorities, the Established Church and other Christian denominations. These data give an insight into the norms and values of school worlds. They are indicative of a secularised society on one hand, but also of how religion has become of increased prominence in public life, politics and the media, on the other (Berger, 1999; Cooper & Lodge, 2008). Considering together, interview data generated with adolescent Christian, Jews, and Muslims give a valuable insight into how religious adolescents may construct and negotiate their religious identities in this context, in particular, how boundaries are maintained between religious adolescents and their peers, and how challenges to their religious beliefs and misrepresentation in the curriculum are negotiated.

The accounts of participants consist of the narratives of religious adolescents learning to make sense of life in a plural and largely ‘secular age’, not one where religion is dead, but continually contested (Taylor, 2007) – a context which perhaps supports the construction of both secular and religious identities in a dialectic process of identity negotiation. They are narratives of the schooling experiences of adolescents ‘looking over the shoulders’ (Taylor, 2007, p.11) of others of different backgrounds, and of those of other backgrounds looking over Christians, Jews and Muslims’
shoulders, inevitably encountering, and reacting to, a multiplicity of religious perspectives. The identity negotiations and constructions of religious adolescents describe a plural context where competing religious traditions, their secular alternatives, and their adherents are in conflict. Religious identities, and the issues surrounding them, are fascinating, contentious, bewildering, and, disputed.

These findings are pertinent to religious communities and their leaders. They show, despite inequalities between religions (Purdam et al., 2007), adolescents from all traditions can encounter similar kinds of problems. According to participants, schools, rather than being seen to demonstrate how the accommodation of traditional and modern religious diversity are possible in a plural society, could instead be perceived to reinforce alienation, discrimination and prejudice. Reports of prejudice, hostility and discrimination resonate with my researcher experiences in conducting the study, including the reasons given by sponsors, gatekeepers and community members for allowing the research to take place, and in the case of Muslim communities in particular, why access was sometimes denied (Gilliat-Ray, 2005).

Religious adolescents could report suffering from a lack of fair representation in secondary schooling. The curriculum could distort and undermine their religious traditions, while their peers could be hostile and misapply religious identities. Participants’ reported experiences give some illustration of what Taylor may mean by the ‘real damage’ that ‘confining or demeaning or contemptible’ representations may have upon minority groups in society (Taylor, 1994, p.25). The impact of the media upon school worlds was a key concern in this respect. Religious adolescents considered media as a causal factor in the attitudes and prejudices of their peers and teachers. This supports the conclusions of studies of minority groups’ schooling experiences that suggest media stereotypes can influence peers, teachers and curriculum resources (e.g.
Østberg, 2000; Peek, 2005; Awokoya, 2012). In this study, Christians’ reported experiences show some impact of the media prominence of the new atheists (e.g. Harris, 2004; Dawkins, 2006; Dennett, 2006; Hitchens, 2007) upon the attitudes of secondary school students – some of whom could be highly critical of theistic belief creating an antitheistic climate for religious adolescents. These findings resonate with the observations of ‘Dawkinsmania’ reported by Ipgrave (2012). Jews reported experiences that showed non-Jewish peers were influenced by the representation of Jews in popular culture, such as the film *Borat* (Twentieth Century Fox, 2006) as also found in my earlier study (Moulin 2009a). Muslims and Jews both reported being ascribed identities influenced by media representations of the conflict in the Middle East (Parfitt & Egorova, 2004).

Weller et al. (2001) found that Muslims reported more concerns about religious prejudice and discrimination than other groups in English society. The identity negotiations of Muslim participants give some illustration of the nature of these problems. These are similar to the findings of other studies that explore the racialisation of Muslim religious identity in schools (Zine, 2001; Archer, 2003). They also compare with analyses of Islamophobia in wider society and in the media (Moore et al., 2008). According to the accounts given earlier in this thesis, even in the curriculum and the ascriptions of teachers, as well as by non-Muslim peers, Islam could be represented and recognised as a violent religion opposed to Western civilisation (Runnymede Trust, 1997).

Many of the reported experiences of perceived Islamophobia among teachers in this study can be considered as examples of bad teaching or professional mal-practice, but they also reflect a more systemic institutional religionism concerning the structure of schools (such as the calendar and availability of prayer facilities), perhaps...
exacerbated by the limited proportion of religious and ethnic minorities in the teacher-
workforce – even in areas such as Westville where Muslim students represent the
religious majority in some schools. This data could be interpreted to support the claims
of those who argue for provision for the distinctive ‘needs’ of Muslim pupils in schools
(Parker-Jenkins, 1991, 1995; Parker-Jenkins & Haw, 1998; Muslim Council of Great
Britain, 2007; Coles, 2008).

Another concern for Muslim communities raised in this study is that of
surveillance by the state for the purposes of counter-terrorism in secondary schools, and
the infringement of liberty and racial and religious stigmatisation that accompany it.
For example, some participants in Westville believed their schools were complicit in
taking their fingerprints for a police database. The denial of my access to Muslim
communities and the possibility of this denial being important data relevant to my
research aims (Gilliat-Ray, 2005) led me to analyse the education policy initiatives
surrounding the government’s counter-terrorism ‘Prevent’ agenda (HM Government,
2008). One gatekeeper had been particularly suspicious of my association with a
‘Department of Education’ and my interest in Religious Education – thinking that the
Oxford University Department of Education logo on the consent forms (Appendix 6, p.
315) could mean affiliation, funding from, or my sharing the findings with the
government Department of Education, which was at the time involved with counter-
terrorism measures, including the mandatory reporting of young people at risk of
‘radicalisation’ (DCSF, 2008).

I subsequently discovered that the Religious Education Council of Great Britain
had been in the receipt of counter-terrorism funding (over £500,000) for an initiative in
Religious Education specifically, the R_Esilience project. This was focused on ‘Prevent’
initiative areas, i.e. those with high Muslim populations (REC, 2011). The materials it
recommends may constitute systems of representation that further stigmatise Muslim youth in a similar manner to the classroom episodes reported by Muslim participants when Islam was represented as a violent or fanatical religion (Moulin, 2012). REsilience raises questions concerning the appropriateness of educators’ collusion with the security services. My researcher experiences, and the reported suspicions of the adolescent Muslims of their secondary schools described earlier, show how such programmes may lead to distrust between racial and religious groups in society and between schools and their communities.

Political views institutionally underwritten in classroom worlds could clash with the affinity-identities of Muslims. Participants were concerned about the lack of voice they had when issues such as the holocaust, terrorism and the state of Israel were discussed. These issues, and teachers’ stances towards them, demonstrated the injustices and ethnocentrism of the curriculum. An acute example of this was the problems surrounding the British Army giving a talk about careers in one school. This illustrates a dilemma for educational practitioners. From one point of view, it could be expected that educators should endorse and enforce the political views of the democratic government, but from another perspective, the ethical and political controversies surrounding the invasion and occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan (and torture, civilian casualties caused by them) are precisely the kind of ethical issues raised elsewhere in the curriculum. This was perceived as problematic by some participants who found emphasis on the holocaust as hypocritical, for example, as it was perceived to privilege the suffering of one group over another. This dilemma raises questions about the political allegiances of educators and the legitimacy of schools to enforce political viewpoints, particularly among diaspora minorities that may have familial or ethnic ties to groups involved in conflicts overseas.
The findings suggest religiously unaffiliated secondary schools with diverse student populations can also present significant problems for Jewish adolescents, in particular, anti-Semitism in peer worlds and misrepresentative Jewish curriculum identities in classroom worlds. These findings resonate with those of my earlier study (Moulin, 2011). In that study I found that anti-Semitic name-calling, prejudice and harassment from school peers, or fear of it, was a concern for Jews – as also recorded by Jewish communities (CST, 2012). Blame for the occupation of Palestine by Israel could also be ascribed to Jews at school, considered by some as the ‘new’ anti-Semitism (Iganski & Sweiry, 2009). The curriculum in non-Jewish schools was also seen to act as negative system of representation, confirming critiques of classroom materials (Jackson et al., 2010) and concerns about reification of religious traditions in Religious Education lessons (Jackson, 2004; Moulin, 2011). While these findings support the arguments given for Jewish schools (Miller, 2001), the reported experiences of Jews in Jewish schools are also likely to be of concern for Jewish educators, reflecting the diversity and range of Jewish identities in comparison to those represented in secondary schools (Scholefield, 2004).

A valuable contribution of this study is the insight it gives regarding the experiences of religious adolescents belonging to minority groups within Christianity, Judaism and Islam. In peer worlds, members of minority denominations could suffer from the double burden of being Christian, Jewish or Muslim and being Mormon, Liberal or Ahmadiyya. For these adolescents, not only could they report encountering the same problems as those from mainstream denominations, they also had the additional problems of prejudices and non-recognition by their peers because they did not belong to mainstream denominations. In classroom worlds, members of minority denominations could also go un-represented in the curriculum, and religious
disadvantage could mean that their beliefs were undermined and challenged by their schools’ secular or religious orthodoxy that could be at odds with their own beliefs and traditions. These difficulties are perhaps most obvious in the reported experiences of Liberal and Reform Jews attending Orthodox Jewish schools – who could at times find the criticism of their peers and teachers as challenging to their strongly-held progressive beliefs and identification. Similar issues of non-recognition and stigmatisation are likely to be of concern to members of other minority groups within religious minorities and their leaders – whose views may not be ordinarily considered in society because dominant groups within minorities may be considered to represent minority populations (Mirza et al., 2007).

Islamophobia and anti-Semitism are well-documented historical prejudices towards Muslims and Jews which can be difficult to distinguish from racism and ethnic prejudice (Runnymede Trust, 1994, 1997). By exploring the schooling experiences of Christian adolescents in addition to ethnic minorities, this study presents findings relating to religious prejudice in the context of secularisation that may be of particular concern to Christian communities. Copley (2005), writing from the perspective of a Christian educator interested in the undenominational state-funded education system, argues that God has been removed from educational discourse. Copley argues this is both indicative of, and possibly a contributory factor towards, secularisation.

The potential longitudinal effects of secondary schooling upon religious identity construction cannot be surmised from the data generated in this study. However, the findings of this study do lend some support to Copley’s views. One striking element of Christians’ reported experiences of secondary schools in particular is their concern with the ‘attack’ on their belief in God in some contexts, sustained not only by their non-Christian peers, but also by the curriculum and their teachers, particularly in Religious
Education lessons. This reflects a body of research that suggests Christianity is simplified, stereotyped and poorly represented in Religious Education (Fancourt, 2012). For Christian adolescents (with the exception of some Catholics in Catholic schools) a ‘spineless dead fish on a slab’ is an apt metaphor for their perception of the role of God in the curriculum (Copley, 2005, p. 148). This criticism can be seen as symptomatic of the development of the Religious Education curriculum and the changing ethos of Church schools. However, this is not just the perceived difference between a confessional approach and a ‘non-’ or ‘post’- confessional one. At times Religious Education was considered to actively challenge belief and represent Christianity as intellectual indefensible – lending some credence to the views of religious educators such as Thompson (2004a, 2004b), who has argued that Religious Education has become a form of confessional secular humanism.

It is not inconceivable that schooling according to such principles could be contributing to a Copleyian secularising effect. The concept of identity masking explored in this study posits that when entering school worlds, religious adolescents can give up, or hide, their beliefs and practices. For Christians who mask their identity, lives become divided between the private and religious, and the public and secular – an analysis congruent with most accounts of secularisation (e.g. Davie, 2000; Bruce, 2001; Brown, 2001). As curricula can challenge religious interpretations of reality and antitheism among peers can lead to the ridicule of religious beliefs, in school worlds, adolescents may feel less able to publically acknowledge their faith, making it more likely that others will also mask their religious identities. This could be understood in terms of ‘Secularity 1’, to use Taylor’s (2007, p. 2) terminology, leading to ‘secularity 2’ and ‘secularity 3.’ As educational institutions have become devoid of God, so too have practices and beliefs within them, resulting in secular public spaces that yield
different (and more difficult) ‘conditions of belief’ for those who may believe in God than in the past.

The religious adolescents I interviewed could voice serious concerns about their secondary schools, including some who reported emotional and psychosocial costs of crossing the borders of religious home worlds to hostile, antitheistic secondary school peer and classroom worlds. However, it cannot be inferred from these data as to whether the impact of attending secondary school may or may not deter adolescents from attending a place of worship or identifying or practising a religion in general – although such an effect remains a possibility.

Although showing religious identities may be privatised in secondary schools, the theoretical model I present also accounts for how religious identity may be sustained and maintained in school worlds. The concept of identity declaration taken from Peek’s (2005) study of Muslim adolescents and developed and applied to other religions in this thesis, suggests religious identities can be forged in adverse conditions in reaction to stigmatisation, critique and secularity present in a social and political context where religion has become an important identity marker (Berger, 1999; Cooper & Lodge, 2008). Religious adolescents explained how they used the resources of their tradition to negotiate their way through school, such as prayer, the support of adults, and learning about suitable answers to criticisms levied at them. They also used religious identity boundaries to maintain ethnic and religious group ties and affinities.

The interview data generated with Mormon participants in particular show how identity construction may take place among adherents of new religious movements to renew and maintain religious identities, despite otherwise hostile conditions and little (positive) recognition in public life, lending support to theories of the persistence of religions in secularised societies (e.g. Stark & Bainbridge, 1985)
For religious communities concerned about the welfare and future adherence of adolescent members, the findings of this study indicate the importance of supporting adolescent members during secondary schooling. Appreciation for support from adults of the same religion was noted by several participants across several denominations – suggesting that Christian, Jewish and Muslim youth workers may be of benefit for religious communities to help adolescent members either in or out of school. The in-depth data suggest some likely issues that religious communities may wish to address with adolescent members in order to aid their navigation of school worlds and their borders. For Christians, for example, this may be equipping their adolescent members with knowledge about theodicies and counter-arguments concerning critiques of the existence of God – areas cited by some participants as popular contentions with their peers, and also presented by the curriculum.

**Church and faith schools**

The identity negotiations and constructions of religious adolescents give some insight into issues that may be pertinent to the on-going debates about faith and Church schools. It is of import that few participants attending religiously unaffiliated schools reported crossing the borders of their home and school worlds as smooth and congruent in regard to religious norms, values and beliefs. These findings present a challenge to those, such as Norman (2012), who argue that religiously unaffiliated schools are fair, neutral and present a more equitable solution to education provision in principle than the present dual system. The identity negotiations of religious adolescents presented in this thesis problematise the application of a ‘difference blind liberalism’ (Taylor, 1994, p.44) to secondary education in regard to religion. Religiously unaffiliated schools were perceived not only to be unable to foster the values and beliefs of any religious
tradition, but also undermine and critique mainstream and minority beliefs, practices and norms of religious traditions.

Religious adolescents reported several kinds of problem presented by religious unaffiliated independent, community, comprehensive schools and academies: clashes with religious festivals, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism among peers, problems of representation in the curriculum, and poor teacher understanding of Christianity, Islam and Judaism. These perspectives show that English secondary schools can be challenging environments for religious adolescents – being neither ‘fair’ nor ‘neutral’ in their eyes. Both Muslims and Jews could perceive secondary schools as biased towards Christianity even in cases when schools were religiously unaffiliated. Charges of institutional religionism were levied by Muslim participants; while Christians could report peer and classroom worlds as unwelcoming and un-sympathetic to Christianity (Weller et al., 2001). These findings perhaps reflect the underlying Christian culture of religiously unaffiliated schools, which, while having Christian holidays and practices (such as the celebration of Christmas), do not uphold and promote (Christian) religious beliefs and practices – indicative of a secularisation of ‘mentalities’ if not practices (Sommerville, 1998).

This study’s findings do not demonstrate that a ‘common school’ (Pring, 2008) open and welcoming to those of all religions is conceptually or practically impossible. But they do show how English comprehensive, community Schools and academies – as currently administered in contemporary society – may be unwelcoming and unsupportive of the religious identities of their students. Drawing on the perspectives of the religious adolescents interviewed, ‘fairness’ would seem to imply equal representation and provision, not secular ‘neutrality’ as expounded by secular groups (Humanist Philosopher’s Group, 2001; BHA, 2012a). Challenges to the creation of ‘fair’
schools for religious adolescents – implied by their concerns raised in this study – would include addressing issues commonly recognised by advocates of faiths schools, such as the provision of prayer spaces, halal and kosher food, arrangements for religious festivals and fasting (Mustafa, 1999; Miller, 2001). Fairness would also require a curriculum that represented (or referred to) religious traditions authentically without appearing to undermine or stereotype them in subjects such as History or Geography, even if Religious Education were to be no longer taught.

In addition to these issues, this study gives some insight into the deeper challenges that social and cultural norms and values in English society may pose for educators and religious adolescents in common schools: those of secularisation, religious prejudice and discrimination (Weller et al., 2001). The identity negotiations and reported experiences of religious adolescents suggest that teachers, perhaps unknowingly, and schools as a whole, perpetuate religious prejudices, including hostility towards Christianity, by presenting harmful systems of representation, by not successfully tackling incidents of anti-Semitism or Islamophobia, or even because of teachers’ own religious biases – resonating with the findings of Niyozov (2010), Hassan (2010), and McKenna (2011), for example, who found evidence of prejudice against Islam among teachers.

An application of the Students Multiple Worlds Framework to the interview data could also be used to support arguments for Church and faith schools. The reported ease with which the borders between home and school worlds were crossed could depend on the religious affiliation of the school, and of the student. In some cases, where there was a discrepancy between the religious values and norms of homes and those of their classroom or peer worlds, secondary schools were reported to be the cause of psychosocial and emotional harm and distress to religious adolescents (Phelan
et al., 1994). When there was an alignment of the values and norms of school worlds and of participants’ religious values and beliefs, however, participants were more positive and less critical of their schools. Among those participants who attended faith or Church schools there are salient examples of religious adolescents who reported a smooth transition from home to school: for example, Jodie, a Catholic who attended a Catholic school, and Heather, a Jew who attended a Jewish school. Both of these participants reported positive aspects about peer or classroom worlds that supported them because of the character and ethos of their Jewish and Christian schools.

The findings of this study also present some problems for proponents of faith schools, however. The identity negotiations and constructions of Jews in Jewish schools are an interesting example. Jewish schools were largely perceived to strengthen Jewish identity and cultural values, but students also reported challenges to their denominational identities and personal perspectives as suggested by the findings of Scholefield (2004). They could also be perceived to be unable to accommodate for the religious diversity of their student body, and to prepare Jews for life in a plural society. Those in strict Orthodox schools reported experiences of prayer being compulsory, and Jewish Studies lessons that did not recognise non-Orthodox perspectives, which may be of concern to some educators, particularly surrounding issues such as homosexuality. Such informant accounts may lend credence to the arguments of critics of faith schools who are concerned with indoctrination, such as Hand (2003) – although it is perhaps pertinent that participants who reported concern over these issues did not appear to have been indoctrinated, but rather negotiated their identities in resistance to such views (this is also true of the participants who negotiated challenges to their beliefs presented by Religious Education in religiously unaffiliated schools).
A similarly interesting finding was that Christians who attended church schools could often find classroom and peer worlds at odds with their religious norms and values. Church schools could be perceived to have a weak religious ethos by Christian participants, supporting literature that suggest Church schools with diverse student intakes are not conducive for Christian identity formation or do not set out with that purpose (Bertram-Troost et al. 2006, 2007; Walford, 2010; Archbishops Council Education Division, 2012). The interview data also illustrate the complexities of Church schooling provision by showing that the styles of worship and ethos of some Church schools could conflict with the religious norms and practices of students – even those of the same denomination. Moreover, there could be significant problems for participants who attended Church schools of a tradition or denomination different from their own. This is illustrated by the reported experiences of Jews and Catholics in Anglican affiliated schools. In these cases, Church schools can present problematic borders for Jews to cross because of their Christian norms and values, but also Anglican schools can present difficult transitions for Christians because of a perceived failing of schools to nurture a Christian environment in peer and classroom worlds.

**Religious Education**

Religious adolescents’ identity negotiations of Religious Education lessons are relevant to on-going debates about the aims, character and future of the curriculum subject and are likely to be of much interest to religious educators. In particular, how the curriculum may act as a system of representation of religious identities, and how it may, or may not, combat some of the social problems experienced by religious adherents in English society, and religious adolescents in English secondary schools discussed in the previous section.
Educators often argue that Religious Education provides a much needed opportunity to educate students about ‘beliefs … different from their own’ (QCA, 2004, p.7.) and promote awareness of religious diversity in order to ensure social cohesion (Jackson, 2004; Keast, 2007; Grimmitt, 2000, 2010). It is important to observe that while participants of all religious traditions voiced their interest in learning about other religious traditions as part of a multi-faith curriculum, religious adolescents could be critical of how their own religious traditions were represented in Religious Education lessons. This resounds with the findings of a number of other studies (Nesbitt, 1998; Ipgrave, 1999; Head, 2009; Jackson et al., 2010; Thanissaro, 2012). At worse, Religious Education was considered to reinforce stereotypes and inaccuracies rather than promote understanding, even ‘pathologising’ pupil religion (Ipgrave, 2010). The findings contradict the supposition of Kay and Francis (2001) that Religious Education may serve the interests of religious adolescents, and therefore illustrates how small-scale qualitative research methods may be more suited to sensitively explore issues concerning religion in education than large questionnaire-based studies.

Acute examples of inaccurate and inauthentic representations of traditions were given in the experiences of Jews and Muslims – who could see little resemblance between their own understanding of their tradition and that of its presentation at school. Christians could also perceive a secular bias in Religious Education that undermined the legitimacy and possibility of the existence of God. These findings resonate with those of Copley (2005) and other critiques of contemporary Religious Education (Thompson, 2004a, 2004b; Hayward, 2006; Barnes, 2009; Strahn, 2010; Lundie, 2010; Baumfield et al., 2012).

The problems encountered by religious adolescents in Religious Education again signal a possible problem with what Taylor identifies as ‘difference blind
liberalism’ – that the policies of secondary schools for inclusivity and cohesion, in this case in the form of multi-faith Religious Education – actually reflect particular cultural views and assumptions, rather than allowing for equality of representation and accommodation of plural views. In the case of Religious Education, there would seem to be an assertion about the political value of ‘learning about others’ in literature about pedagogy – an aim accepted by religious adolescents – but that stated aim does not necessarily result in classroom worlds that actually account for, and engage with, or even tolerate the authentic beliefs and traditions of those ‘others.’

The findings of this study concerning peers’ negative attitudes towards religions and their religious prejudices raise issues to be addressed with all adolescents, not just those adhering to a religion. They could be seen to imply that a genuine, high quality Religious Education may be needed to combat religious stereotypes and misunderstanding – not between adolescents of different religions perhaps inasmuch as between religious adolescents and their secular peers. For Christians in particular this would seem to be a need for the reasonableness of belief in God to be articulated to peers who saw theistic belief as something to ridicule – sometimes fuelled by the arguments presented in Religious Education lessons. The need to educate about religion because of secularity or modern pluralism may contradict the arguments of those such as White (2004) who claim that Religious Education has no future in a largely secular society.

This study did not set out to evaluate any pedagogical strategy or classroom practice, but to understand religious adolescents’ sense-making and identity constructions of school worlds. However the data do have some implications for the pedagogical debates concerning Religious Education, and they raise issues for religious educators and teachers. A crucial issue is that of the representation of religions in the
curriculum. The curriculum was often criticised on account of its representation of religions and teachers criticised for bias and lack of subject knowledge. Jackson (2004) observes that a reflexive and carefully managed pedagogy should be constructed that sensitively accounts for the differences between religions as reified curriculum artefacts and religion in the lives of individuals. The findings can be seen to support these stipulations as participants were critical of classroom worlds that presented religions as monolithic stereotypes with no acknowledgement that there may be differences between religious curriculum identities and their own. However, the ascription of religious identities, religious prejudice among peers and the phenomenon of religious identity masking – as found in this study – raise problems for Jackson’s vision of a classroom where adolescents share their own experiences and perspectives as part of the representation of religious traditions. Religious minorities interviewed in this study suggested that because of the hostility of their peers, and ignorance or bias of their teachers, the classroom was not always a safe place to be open about their religious identity.

Fancourt (2009) argues that the Religious Education classroom should function as a safe place for dialogue about religions. However, for many of the religious adolescents interviewed in this study, it would seem that it was their religious communities that were perceived as ‘safe spaces’ to express their religious views and perspectives, not their classroom worlds where they could face ridicule and criticism. This study, however, does have some implications as to how such a safe place may be created. It suggests that religious adolescents may be more forthcoming in contexts where their beliefs are not criticised, where they may be shared by knowledgeable adults, or after such time when, following Streib (2001), religious adolescents may have already developed a sense of their own religious identity. The findings also imply there
may be a problem with pedagogical approaches that favour either critical evaluation of religious truth claims, such as advocated by Wright (2001, 2007, 2008) or those that centre upon students’ perspectives (Erricker & Erricker, 2000; Chater & Erricker, 2013).

The problem encountered in classroom worlds that applied philosophical critique to religion was that religious adolescents, in this case Christians (Muslim and Jews did not report the same level of philosophical interrogation), did not have the knowledge to rebut the challenges to their faith presented, such as the problem of evil. This meant that some believed they were under ‘attack’ and their reasons for identifying with a religious tradition went unacknowledged. This represents a problem for religious educators who advocate critical realism as the most appropriate pedagogical approach to religion in multicultural classroom worlds (Wright, 2007). Adolescents’ religious identity is not necessarily constructed as the result of philosophical enquiry, but through the processes and experiences of cultural identification, identity ascription, and socialization according to the values and practices (such as prayer and worship) of religious adolescents’ home and community worlds. The self-understandings of religious adolescents were therefore at considerable odds with the assumptions of philosophy of religion in classroom worlds. Moreover, this kind of pedagogical approach failed to communicate the nature of their religious identity to their peers.

The problems surrounding more experiential engagement of religion in the provision of worship and prayer in schools are also illustrated by the data generated in this study. Participants who attended non-denominational, ‘county’ community or comprehensive schools, or academies did not report instances of ‘collective worship’ at school, supporting research by Gill (2004) that found secondary schools flouted the
legal requirement to provide daily acts of collective worship of a broadly Christian nature. In schools where there was provision for prayer, Christian, Jewish and Muslim participants reported feeling uncomfortable or dissatisfied with it – including Anglicans who attended schools affiliated to the Church of England, Catholics who attended Catholic schools, and Jews who attended strict Orthodox schools. However, some participants found the opportunity to pray highly beneficial, both in terms of their personal practice and also in how experience of prayer could provide an authentic representation, and explanation for, their religious beliefs to their peers. The experiences of Jodie, a Catholic in a Catholic school, and Gary, a Baptist in an Anglican school, are pertinent examples here along with the views of some Jews in Jewish schools.

Pedagogical approaches that favour the exploration of religious identity by examining the perspectives of students, like those suggested by the Ajegbo report (DfES, 2007) and by Chater and Erricker (2013) may fail to equip religious adolescents and their peers with suitable knowledge and understanding to undertake such a venture. The reported experiences of religious adolescents in this study show numerous examples of media-derived stereotypes and misinformed peer (and teacher) ‘knowledge’ of religions. They also show that religious adolescents may themselves not know how to explain or justify their religious beliefs and identifications in the context of the classroom. These findings suggest that an important aspect of the provision of quality Religious Education are knowledgeable teachers who understand the complexities of religious traditions, their adolescent members, and have a greater subject knowledge than their students. They also suggest that religious adolescents may benefit from being provided with resources and arguments in classrooms that help them defend or support their religious beliefs and traditions. This is, of course, a great
challenge to educators in the context of a radically plural society where there may be religious adolescents from communities representing traditional, new and historical religious minorities – thus multiplying the number of traditions that teachers need to competently represent and understand.

**Conclusion**

*What is it like to be a religious adolescent at an English secondary school?* In order to answer this question, I set out to engage with Christians, Jews and Muslims to understand their experiences of secondary schools. This project was founded on the assumption that, given the ‘fact of reasonable pluralism’ (Rawls, 1993), in an open, liberal society, individuals, families and communities have the right to adhere to, practise, and believe in a religion (Popper, 1945; UN, 1948). As such, in listening to religious voices, I have sought to explore the politics of recognition and representation (Taylor, 1994) surrounding Christian, Jewish and Muslim identities in secondary school worlds.

This study’s implications can be understood in terms of the important question raised by Habermas in his reappraisal of the relationship between the religious and the non-religious in a post-secular society: ‘How should believing and unbelieving citizens treat one another?’ (2006, p. 48). To begin to answer this question in relation to the perplexing sphere of secondary education, this thesis has presented a theoretical model of religious identity construction and negotiation that can be used when considering professional and practical issues surrounding religion in secondary schools (and perhaps other contexts). The interview data displayed in this thesis give the voices of religious adolescents a ‘vicarious presence’ (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 279), a consideration of which can inform readers – such as members of religious communities,
policy makers and educators – who may then seek to enact change, as argued by researchers in the tradition of ‘student voice’ (e.g. Fielding, 2004).

My conversations with religious adolescents, interpreted according to the Students Multiple Worlds Framework, give some insightful answers to the original research aim. There can be considerable discrepancies between the norms, values, beliefs, and practices of religious adolescents’ homes and religious communities, and those of their school worlds. Although some participants reported smooth and congruent transitions to school worlds, the data show that secondary school worlds can present difficult border crossings for religious adolescents – whether they be in the peer and classroom worlds of faith, Church or religiously unaffiliated schools.

Problems experienced by religious adolescents as they traverse the worlds of their classroom and peers were reported as most difficult in Church schools and schools of non-religious characters where the assumptions of curriculum and peer worlds clashed with an individual’s religious values, and where they were in a context of unequal power-relations due to their minority status. For Jews in non-Jewish schools it was being ‘the only Jew in the school.’ For Catholic participants in a Catholic school, their experiences were perceived to be connected to their minority status as being ‘religious’ young people who went to Church. Christians from other denominations also reported their minority status as a causal factor of their experiences, as did those Muslims not attending what they perceived as Muslim majority schools in terms of student population. Being a minority was offered as an explanation of hostility and bullying in peer worlds, or, for historical and new minorities and migrant religions particularly, the perceived institutional religionism and religious disadvantage presented by some secondary school classroom worlds.
In school worlds, participants did not consider all differences in values and norms necessarily a problem, however. For example, participants typically expressed a desire to experience and engage with religious diversity. While differing circumstances meant some participants’ religious norms, practices and values clashed less between school worlds than others. Jews in Jewish schools and Christians in Church schools felt their religious beliefs and practices could be supported by classroom worlds and accepted in peer worlds: religious identity could become an ‘asset’ depending on the power relations in that context (Phelan et al., 1998). Nevertheless, participants in these circumstances also reported that the curriculum and peer worlds of their schools could present challenges and clashes, particularly where there was a denominational discrepancy between an individual’s religious affiliation and that of their school – contexts where denominational affiliation could lead to differences in power relations due to institutional authorities underwriting the representation and endorsement of religious identities.

In conclusion to their research of students’ adaptation to different worlds of school, home and peers, although not referring to religion specifically, Phelan et al. (1991) suggest that more emphasis needs to be given in educational practice to facilitate students’ management of school worlds without expecting them to mask their identities.

we need to identify institutional structures that operate to facilitate [border] crossing strategies and that do not require students to give up or hide important features of their lives. This requires more than understanding other cultures. It means students must acquire skills and strategies to work comfortably and successfully with different people in divergent social settings. Teachers and administrators in all of our schools talk about the importance of fostering school environments where differences are valued rather than feared. This line of work supports efforts to achieve this goal.

Phelan et al. 1991, p. 246

Given that is highly improbable that, due to traditional and modern plurality, Church, faith or religiously unaffiliated schools in England are likely to have student populations that wholly reflect, or exactly match, the religious character of the school,
it is the purpose of this final section to focus on how border-crossing may be facilitated in all kinds of schools, and how educators may assist in this role. The findings of this study reveal some insights into the complexity of catering for religious adolescents – a consideration of which may help educators to improve schools’ accommodation of them.

The issue of equipping students with skills and strategies to overcome school world borders is difficult. This study shows that the curriculum subject often tasked to foster social cohesion in such a way, Religious Education, could often be perceived to present religious adolescents with problematic borders, and further stigmatisation, similar to the problems identified by researchers and scholars interested in issues concerning the representation of minorities elsewhere (e.g. Archer & Francis, 2006: Keddie & Niesche, 2012). Furthermore, this study shows that classroom and peer worlds could often be perceived to replicate and reinforce religious prejudices and discrimination (with long historical precedents) existent in wider society, often with little perceived efficacy in counter-acting them.

Religious adolescents voiced concern about systems of representation in classroom worlds that undermined their own beliefs or misrepresented their traditions, particularly because of the impact these systems of representation may have on their peer worlds. One implication here is that educators and teachers of all curriculum subjects should approach the problem of the interpretation and representation of religions carefully both pedagogically and in the content of the curriculum. This resonates with the recommendations of religious educators who have conducted ethnographic research, such as Jackson (2004) and Nesbitt (2004) who stress the dangers of reification, as Nesbitt puts it: ‘educationists need to be on guard for tendencies to harden or soften [identity] boundaries by the ways in which they
generalise or emphasise distinctions between groups’ (Nesbitt, 2004, p. 153). The interview data generated in this study give a litany of incidences of boundaries and distinctions being erected or strengthened in classroom worlds. They are comparable with the findings of researchers exploring schooling experiences of ethnic minorities, such as Chen (2010), who argues teachers should consider carefully the kinds of resources used in classrooms, and how they may represent minorities.

The concept of identity negotiation developed in this study posits that identity recognition and ascription takes place in school worlds. Relationships with teachers – either negative or positive – were often considered important by participants, as found by Phelan et al. (1998) and others researching identity construction (e.g. Rich & Schachter, 2012). The findings of the study imply that, while recognising the religious traditions of students, educators should exercise sensitivity in order to not falsely ascribe religious affiliation or practice and make such ascription public without good reason. In short, in their interactions and pedagogical strategies, teachers should resist making assumptions about religious adolescents’ beliefs and practices. In the context of a plural society, these could well be inaccurate and misrepresentative, due to an educator’s lack of knowledge of a religious tradition, or an individual’s particular circumstances – the ‘small scale-ecologies’ (Bailey, 2001) of the changed nature of religious belief in a secular, plural society. Because of this educators should not assume that religious adolescents may necessarily wish to act as representatives or spokespeople for their tradition in classroom worlds themselves. Although the opportunity to do this may be welcomed by some, such pedagogical strategies could end in tokenism (Awokoya, 2012). Here it may be stressed that the right to freedom of belief, and distance from a religious tradition, holds as much for religious adolescents as much as it may be assumed it would for those of no religion: the ascription of
religious identities could be considered as one of the most embarrassing or difficult of incidents in classroom worlds – as I had also previously found (Moulin, 2009a, 2011). It is important to note here that this present study found that religious identity ascription took place in peer and classroom worlds – with some connection between curriculum identities and those ascribed by peers – in all kinds of schools.

The reported experiences of Jews in Jewish schools provide examples of the complexities of catering for religious adolescents in faith schools. Although absent of problems such as anti-Semitism among peers (that could be difficult for Jews in other kinds of schools), Jewish schools could still present challenging borders and discrepancies in religious norms and practices between multiple worlds. Because of the personal way Jewish adolescents constructed their religious identities, particularly in terms of belief, Jewish classroom worlds could often represent curriculum identities, or even urge values or beliefs, that clashed with their own perspectives. This suggests that in the context of a society in which religious belief and practice has become more privatised, idiosyncratic, individualistic (Bruce, 1996) and unorganised (Bailey, 2001), educators in faith schools cannot assume the process of identification and religious identity construction among student populations of a shared tradition are straightforward or of a uniform or orthodox nature. The findings of this study suggest that even in the context of Jewish schools where the process of enculturation into a religious tradition is a recognised as a legitimate educational aim (legally and by some parents and teachers at least), borders between home and school worlds need to be carefully managed, with pedagogical strategies between students and adults that are not coercive, and teachers that do not ‘preach’ – as also recommended by Phelan et al. (1998, p. 198).
One aspect that may aid border transitions, mentioned by several participants was the presence of adults at school that were available to support them. Religious adolescents expressed appreciation for teachers who acknowledged their religious beliefs and affiliations – such as the Quaker teacher who expounded Quakerism, the Muslim teacher who was there to listen to problems of Muslim students, and the Catholic teacher who held a lunch club for Catholics. These episodes were reported as a benefit by some participants. They relate to the issue of ‘negotiating’ religion in educational institutions, and how educational practitioners should position themselves publically – a problem identified by Copley (2005), Cooling (2010) and Seymour (2012). Certainly, from the perspective of religious adolescents, a teacher who was known to be of a particular religion and was available to go to, and was also open about their religion publically, could be of help. Conversely, however, as already discussed, participants were critical of teachers when they appeared biased or ignorant, or assumed, or argued for a theological or political position – such as the examples given by some Jews in Jewish schools and by some Muslims in ‘Christian’ schools. The difference, in these cases, would appear to be that of a teacher acknowledging their own religious identity, and one that urged their religious views on others. The difference may also consist between that of private and optional advice, in comparison with classroom episodes of perceived bias underwritten by the institutional authority of the curriculum, and supported by unequal power relations.

In schools of all kinds, it would seem the challenge remains for educators – as Copley (2005) and I, following him, have identified by the metaphor of a tightrope walk (Moulin, 2006, 2009b) – to balance between defending the interests of religious believers, credibly representing religious beliefs and practices without compromising the freedom of religion for others. By listening to religious voices, this study has shown
how difficult this balancing act can be. In order to remain balanced, it would seem fair and thoughtful educators are needed who, as Habermas surmises, ‘must not deny in principle that religious images of the world have the potential to express truth’ (2006, p.51). For educators acting in a plural society, listening to the voices of religious adolescents (and understanding the impact of secondary school worlds upon their religious identity construction and negotiation) is one step that can be taken in order for denial of this kind to be righted, and how the tightrope walk may be aided, and suitably crossed.
Epilogue

Negotiating and constructing a researcher’s religious identity

This study had its genesis in my experience as both a pupil and a teacher. But as well as the impact of my own ‘biography’ on the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003), the study has also had its impact upon my biography. In this epilogue, I reflect upon the findings of the study and how they may relate to my own religious identity negotiation and construction.

Erikson and those identity researchers in his tradition posit that our identities are formed in a quest for ideological commitment by a process of engagement with our environments, educational or otherwise. In the postmodern era, identity researchers have suggested that adolescence continues until the early thirties, and in this identity-conscious age, we represent and recognise ourselves through endless performances in an on-going process of identity construction. The prospect of further education to conduct this study after a five year period teaching gave renewed opportunities for my own exploration of ideological and religious causes, and presented varied circumstances in which I had to negotiate my own religious identity. During the process of researching and writing this thesis I was challenged to choose how to represent myself, professionally and personally, as a research practitioner, and educational practitioner, and to explore further my commitment to values and beliefs, as a religious practitioner.

During the course of this study I engaged in conversation and dialogue with eleven religious communities. In doing this, like my participants at their schools, as part of my experiences as a student at University, I was placed in a variety of contexts that involved intensive identity negotiation and choice-making as a researcher. In gaining access and conducting interviews I had to judicially exercise agency in ‘identity management’ (Østberg, 2000). Participants, gate keepers and sponsors would ask me about my religious, political and institutional affiliations. Did I tell them I was a Christian, or
Catholic, or convert? Which identity would be advantageous to me? Were there times when it was better to mask my religious identity? In retrospect, reflecting upon the findings of this study, I notice I tended to act expediently to achieve my goals. This religious identity negotiation was subtle and intended to engender good field relations in order to complete the study (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). During fieldwork or access negotiations in Christian and Catholic communities I subtly signalled my Christian or Catholic identity, while in other communities, although not wearing a mask, I did not declare my Christian identity but took on the character trait and institutional identity of a sympathetic researcher. Other than at St. Mary’s Catholic Church, I judged it was not prudent to refer to my denominational allegiance given historical anti-Catholic prejudice and perceptions of Catholic prejudice reported in faith communities.

By conducting this study I have become more conscious of the processes of religious identity construction and negotiation. Although many of the religious adolescents were critical of their secondary schools’ accommodation of their religious identity, exploring these issues has increased my understanding (and therefore ability) to deal with religion in the public square of education. Looking back now on my experiences as a pupil and teacher in secondary school, I think of what could have been different. As a teacher, I could have acted with more sensitivity and understanding towards religious students, anticipating in particular the perspectives of those anonymous students who were perhaps wearing a mask in my lessons. As a pupil, looking back, I perhaps would have been comforted to know that those systems of representation and (non)recognition at secondary school, particularly those that presented Christianity as intellectually weak, were perhaps not as accurate and authentic as they could be. Attacks and criticisms of Christianity represent just one side of a wider conflict over the role of religion in society, a social trend that, like the cause of the smoking Church tower, could be considered a form of anti-intellectual hostility that could be challenged rather than just accepted. Studying at Oxford
where Christian values and beliefs are still institutionally underwritten in the form of
college chapels, and by a number of prominent Christian intellectuals, has given me a rich
source of answers to those who may challenge the reasonableness of Christianity, and role
models with whom to identify.

I hope the findings of this study may contribute to educational practitioners’
professional practice by informing them of the schooling experiences of religious
adolescents. I also hope that the theoretical model I have suggested in this thesis of identity
negotiation and construction contributes to educational discourse by encouraging
educators and educationists of all persuasions to try and think from the (religious) other’s
point of view. As my theoretical work also posits, by thinking of the perspectives of those of
different religious opinions, we should seek to fairly accommodate religious and non-
religious traditions and perspectives in the education system by appropriately representing
religious viewpoints as credible and reasonable (Moulin, 2009; Moulin & Robson, 2012).

One consequence of the study upon my biography is how it prompted me to serve as
a volunteer committee member with an inter-faith organisation, and part-time employment
at a college in the University as director of an inter-religious programme for a college
chapel. I was motivated to become involved with this because encounters with gate-
keepers, sponsors and members of religious communities across the different contexts of
Southville, Eastville and Westville (and participants’ experiences of religious prejudice and
discrimination) made me aware of the need for inter-religious dialogue and understanding.
In taking on this task, I therefore became an educational practitioner negotiating religion
and religions in the context of a higher education institution. While this study informed my
understanding of managing such a programme with students’ perspectives in mind, the
experiences provided by this professional role also furthered my own interest in that
difficult issue identified by Cooling and others of how to manage one’s own religious
commitment in a plural, educational context.
Personally, the writing of this thesis has been liberating. Reflecting on religious identity construction has enabled me to become more conscious of the on-going process of becoming – what it is to be the locus and agent of identity construction in diverse situations among conflicting systems of representation and recognition. It has thus granted me greater awareness and agency to direct further personal and professional development. In the often secular worlds of educational research, policy, and practice, therefore, this thesis can be read, in part, as a negotiation of my own religious identity.
Appendix 1: A group interview transcript

Eastville Liberal Synagogue; March, 2011; duration, 1:03.09

Initial group interview, participants:
Deborah, female, Year 11, Community School [group interview]
Dan, male, Y11, Liberal, mainstream Orthodox Jewish School [group interview]
Heather, female, Y12, Liberal, mainstream Orthodox Jewish School [group interview]
Matthew, male, Y11, Liberal, mainstream Orthodox Jewish School [group interview]
Saphire, female, Year 10, Community School [group interview]
Tal, female, Year 11, Girls’ Community School [group interview]

[…Introductions, names, schools…]

How do you feel as a Jewish student at school?

HEATHER: What generally?

[Interruption: Sorry I just wondered if you wanted some more food?]

[laughter]

SAPHIRE: This is how you know you're in a Jewish place.

TAL: That’s exactly what I was going to say.

Let's start with a better question: what times in school does religion come up?

DAN: in our school quite a lot.

MATTHEW: In our school, we have to learn JS – Jewish Studies – so we get a lot.

DAN: But like, most other Jewish schools are more religious, so they'll do prayers and stuff like that, but our school - they have a morning service … But they don't force it on us.

HEATHER: Yeah, they don't force what you eat or anything. It's a Jewish school and we have the festivals and stuff but I don't know if I'm just when you're in it the whole time. You don't always feel like you're religious.

DAN: They don't put religion on you. We can still make our own choices, not like in my primary school: literally you say prayers before you eat, after you eat; you say prayers in the morning every day… but this is a lot more relaxed.

MATTHEW: The most Jewish thing our school does is buses take just to Israel in Year nine.

SAPHIRE: Did you go to Israel?

MATTHEW: Yeah, on tour. That’s where most of us connected to our…

DAN: we have the festivals so here but. But it wasn't very Jewish

MATTHEW: we just had a laugh.

HEATHER: Yeah, but it was Purim
DAN: The teachers got dressed stuff and we laughed at them basically.

DEBORAH: We laughed at you [laughter] because you were wearing a dress

TAL: That was at the synagogue. Not at school.

HEATHER: We'll put on a play with Josh and Ben as well on Sunday.

DEBORAH: A modern-day take on the story of Purim - a futuristic take on the story of Purim

That was here?

TAL: Yes that was here. At their school they had Purim as well because they go to a Jewish school.

Okay, how about those of you who don't go to a Jewish school?

DEBORAH: I don't think it really affects me my day-to-day Jewishness.

TAL: Yeah, Same, it doesn’t…we only do Christian RE in school. I’ve never done Jewish RE.

DEBORAH: We learn about all of them.

SAPHIRE: We don't really do anything.

TAL: At my school we've only ever learnt Christian.

SAPHIRE: I got in the cupboard in RE the other day [laughter].

DEBORAH: I don't take RE any more.

TAL: Neither do I.

SAPHIRE: We have to do it. That's the thing, but half the time I don't actually know what we're doing. We're never talking about religion. I don't know what we're doing in that lesson to be honest; you see, I think, it's a bit of a waste of time

TAL: Same

SAPHIRE: It’s a bit like having a free lesson our school because it’s meant to be RE/PSHE. I think its meant to be: one week you do one, on the other you do the other. PSHE is like the personal stuff, but half of the time I don't know we don't I don't see us doing RE really any more. But we are meant to be doing it, but I don't actually know what we're doing.

So, you're in the classroom. It's on the timetable?

SAPHIRE: I just sit there really.

TAL: I don't think RE and Citizenship… in my experience are the two worst taught subjects at my school… out of everything I've been taught in the past – out of all other subjects. I'm just saying I do think that they're the two worst taught subjects. I think because… like when people get into Years 10 and 11 … children act up because they're not interested in it anymore because they think they've learnt everything in younger Years.
SAPHIRE: There are some nutter teachers.

DEBORAH: When I used to do RE, it would turn to me to teach the class about Judaism because the teacher didn't know anything.

**That's interesting which school that you say?**

DEBORAH: It that was [Community School]; it's a good RS department, but they just had Orthodox notes and stuff so they could only teach about Orthodox Judaism.

TAL: They don't teach different denominations.

DEBORAH: So the teachers are like: ‘you do this”? Do you have curly bits?

SAPHIRE: Is that what they say to you? Really? It sounds quite ignorant.

DEBORAH: When I meet them and I go in and I talk to them and it comes up my dad's a Rabbi, they say ‘oh does he wear a top hat?’ No.

**When you say they ask you, who asks you?**

SAPHIRE: The teachers ask you that?

DEBORAH: The teachers wouldn't phrase it like that

HEATHER: Not rudely they just don't know anything about Liberal Judaism

DEBORAH: Because the only notes they get sent are all about Orthodox.

MATTHEW: That happened to me in my school recently. My JS teacher said that to me: one or two things about Liberal, because she was quite Orthodox and she was trying to describe it.

HEATHER: That’s because you go to an Orthodox school.

MATTHEW: I was like no it doesn't work like that.

HEATHER: I've never brought up but I'm Liberal, because…

DAN: I have, and it is not a good experience …

MATTHEW: They turn on you - oh my God!

DAN: They like you and then they don't.

HEATHER: Because I'm like doing JS A-level, it's like….

SAPHIRE: That's really bad; no it actually is.

MATTHEW: ‘Do any of you know anything about Liberal?’ ‘Yeah, I am Liberal’ and…

DAN: The teachers they teach you slightly differently.

SAPHIRE: Seriously?

MATTHEW: Like my friend…
DAN: It's not is not amazingly obvious, they don't give you a lower mark.

SAPHIRE: It's like racism; it actually is.

DAN: I wouldn't consider it that bad. It's just they expect us to be Orthodox because we go to an Orthodox synagogue.

HEATHER: But us being liberal, we take a much more active role than most of the people that that say they're Orthodox. Because they go to an Orthodox shul, they say they’re Orthodox, but actually we contribute more to the community and stuff. There's always that thing.

MATTHEW: The thing is with [my Jewish secondary school] is most of the other teachers - I don't think they’re Jewish.

TAL: I think the attitude to RE in my school, is the teachers have to do it, but they really don't want to. All of our teachers, they’re like maths teachers who have been made teach citizenship and RE, and they really don't want to do; and they tell us they don’t want to do it. They are like we just hate it, we don't want to do it. We don't actually know what we're doing.

DEBORAH: We have an RE department but then we have a like a PSHE lesson and they’ll just dump any teacher who is on a free period.

TAL: PSHE is worse than RE

DEBORAH: We just do coursework.

DAN: We don't even do RS or RE; we've never have the option.

SAPHIRE: I did learn RE in Year seven Years seven, eight and nine, though. I did do it then but this Year, I don't know why was still being made to do it, I think that hour would be better used doing English or something.

TAL: I did a half GCSE in RE last Year, because we have to do a half an RE and a half and citizenship in Year 10 and 11, but everyone's attitude was get it out of the way, and don't think about it again, basically.

DAN: We’re forced to do JS; its not forced as such, but it's compulsory.

What's the difference?

[laughter].

DAN: There isn’t much.

MATTHEW: To be fair, it is easy… even I find it easy and I’m not particularly an A* student and I get an A in it.

SAPHIRE: Really?

HEATHER: I think it's important that we still do it. Because me personally, I've been at [my Jewish Secondary school] since Year seven and I felt it was really important for me to do it for A level because, I felt I was in a Jewish school and I wanted to carry on. Yeah, I think without JS, our school isn’t that Jewish - without learning JS.
DAN: I’d be quite happy for it not to be Jewish.

SAPHIRE: Well you see we wouldn't have the option to do that, would we? Because we don’t go to a Jewish school.

TAL: You can’t do Jewish studies, but you can do RE generally.

DEBORAH: You can do a GCSE in it; you just have to do it outside of school.

SAPHIRE: But where would that be?

TAL: It would just be outside of school.

DEBORAH: Sorry – obviously, I think this doesn't really apply to you guys, because you're still lovely and grounded, but like a lot of them - you just learn about Jewishness (it’s not a word). But don't learn about… I think I disagree with you guys not learning about any other religion.

DAN: Yeah, definitely.

DEBORAH: I think it makes people a lot less accepting of other people. So when you step out of your Jewish school environment and so if you go to uni, and then all these different religions and cultures are suddenly thrust upon you, without any .. warning.

MATTHEW: You'd be surprised how we react in our Year, through I don't know about your Year Jasmine but in my Year everyone's just a chav or normal.

HEATHER: What do you mean?

MATTHEW: Well that's it, that's it. They just don't care what religion you are.

HEATHER: Oh.

DAN: We’re not that religious. If you actually look at it, our school is extremely racist. It's not strong hatred, it’s casual or racism - which is so bad! Do you not feel?

DEBORAH: What?

HEATHER: I am like: ‘Do I go to the Same school as this?’

DAN: No, but have you seen the Year sevens. All the Year sevens in school - they've not been able to get enough Jews and so they're getting other cultures in and the comments which are naturally made from the kids in our Year, but if you go to one of their schools, they're not going to get that.

HEATHER: Because everybody’s used to it being a Jewish school?

DAN: We're not being nice to them; we’re not being accepting.

HEATHER: We're not being horrible. We might set to each other we don't set in front of them.

DAN: I know, but it's still casual racism.

HEATHER: What do you mean?

That's what I wanted to ask!
HEATHER: OK, so basically, our school, there's not enough Jewish people. There's not enough Jewish kids anymore, so this Year with the Year seven, more than half of the Year seven isn't Jewish; they're Indians, Black, whatever…um, Christians, like all religions, and for us, for me, it was really weird. So I went to a mixed faith primary school and then when I came to [Jewish Secondary school] I thought it was so weird how I'm in a mixed school and now I'm in a Jewish school it was just really weird not in a way not enough bad way. So I was used to someone having, like, an Indian name and you didn't think anything of it, but now there's someone in one of our classes with different name: it's more weird than in a normal school.

TAL: All the other schools in [area of city]. … [area of city] is very like, its very Jewish or Asian area, so like everybody's there is Asian and then [my secondary school] always used to be everybody was Jewish, but now people are becoming more mixed together, because there's not enough of everybody.

HEATHER: But it's still a Jewish school; and they have to do Jewish studies - which I think is right. I think that is right: they've chosen to come to our school, so they have to do stuff but we're doing.

SAPHIRE: I bet everyone keeps their little groups though.

DAN: Actually they haven't; that's what I think is so surprising about it. Our Year we haven't accepted them anywhere as much as we'd like to. No, we don't have any in our Year, but if you look in Year seven. There are so many white Jewish kids who are mixing in with them multicultural kids, and it's brilliant because they're growing up with the multifaith.

SAPHIRE: Why is it a Jewish school?

DAN: But is isn't a Jewish school, that’s the problem: you can’t really have both.

TAL: I don't really agree with you can have faith schools really.

DEBORAH: I don't either.

TAL: I don't think faith schools for example, [Jewish secondary school], I think its corrupt: they don't go to church and they get someone to sign the form. I know [Jewish secondary school] is a bit different because you're Jewish by blood, but I think the way people choose to get into schools is a bit unfair. You have to pay tax and some people can't get in. [Jewish secondary school] is different now because it's opened up to everybody… and I don't know. I don't know if I necessarily think that, I think if you go to school with only one kind of person, when you come out the other end, you’re not going to know all – that there are, other cultures.

Right. 13.59.

HEATHER: I see that, but I think I've always thought I loved going to Jewish school – I think its really good like - even though I'm like really involved in here – like shul – but anyway I've always loved going to Jewish school - you might talk about festivals or whatever and everyone knows whatever and everyone is the same. I’m not racist, I don't mind about other people, but it's just that's always what it's been like, and it's different now, because most people go to [Jewish Primary school] and then they go to [Jewish Secondary school] but because I didn't go to Jewish school and then… I don’t know its weird.

DEBORAH: Yeah, in my school like, one of my friends is an evangelical Christian - like a Christian who likes converting others to Christianity - she attempted in Year seven didn't work!
TAL: That would scare me that would scare me – because we’re Jews as well.

DEBORAH: I said my grandad's a Rabbi, my Dad’s training: I'm not going to be a Christian [laughter]

TAL: It's just not going to happen!

DEBORAH: No, I enjoy listening to what she says, so I'm going to her baptism soon, and I invited a few of my friends to my Kobalat Torah and we all enjoy learning about in each other's faiths and I think it is what makes us such good friends - we all have differences and we accept each other's differences.

TAL: Like our friends coming to our KT, it's nice that we can all... like, one of my friends is Hindu – she’s not a practising Hindu, but like she has Divallu, and we will all say happy Diwali to her… I know someone who's Muslim who does Ramadan

DEBORAH: And you give them Eid Cards instead of Merry Christmas cards.

MATTHEW: I remember in Y9, when, every week it was another person's bar mitzvah I had to go to. Every week there was another big Party and we were all so tired! So we were just knackered.

HEATHER: Yeah, you'll miss it; you'll miss it when you don't have it!

It's really interesting. I haven't had to ask any questions but there's a couple of things. I'm interested in the curriculum - so what you think about the curriculum, like RE ... but I’m also the interested in the interactions with other people: you mentioned racism and comments and I just wondered what come kind of comments and how often you might hear?

MATTHEW: It's not like that. It’s just because there is only like three kids in our Year who come from a little bit of a mixture of races - so we’re just not used to it so it’ll come out by accident like. So two kids in our Year … three kids have someone in the family who isn't Jewish.

TAL: It must be quite difficult.

MATTHEW: They’re not used to these other kind of kids coming in. It will come out more accidental rather than on purpose.

HEATHER: We're not racist towards them.

DAN: We’re just scared of what we don't know, and a way of tackling that is acting like we are better, which is just seem to come naturally.

MATTHEW: Because all our Year, people come from the school down the road - a Jewish feeder school - so we’ve always been in a Jewish school; it’s always been Jewish. I come from that school.

TAL: Redbridge has always been very segregated in schools; there’s Asian schools and there’s Jewish schools: it must be quite weird when it’s all suddenly mixed.
MATTHEW: There was no warning. It was the beginning of the Year and all these Year sevens walk-in.

HEATHER: It’s not weird for the Year sevens because they come from mixed schools and they go to mixed schools and they’re used to it. I don't think we’re racist towards them: I really don't think we are.

DAN: It's not racist as in I hate this culture because...

TAL: It’s a strangeness

DAN: Exactly

HEATHER: Yeah, it's just like we’re getting used to it.

DAN: We don't act as though we would to each other.

SAPHIRE: You mean you act different differently to people?

HEATHER: It's like a barrier.

DAN: I, personally, don't. I've really tried to resist that. But lots of my friends will make snide comments about the Year sevens, oh this Year seven that, this Year seven that. I’m sure you've had the same, Matthew?

MATTHEW: It's not is not like having a go at them. No, no …

SAPHIRE: They’re only little.

DAN: But they're not like us.

MATTHEW: Yeah, it's just not like… like we do stereotype but we know it's a stereotype so we joke about it instead.

TAL: So, give us an example like…

MATTHEW: So you know people say black kids are fast. So we see these really tall Year seven and we say we ‘I bet he’s going to win the Olympics one day’. This is a joke, this is like.

HEATHER: It’s not nasty.

I don't mean this question just to mean the Jewish school; I mean, how about other schools in the other schools?

SAPHIRE: What was the question,

What kind of interactions, for example: do people make comments about being Jewish for example, is that something you've ever encountered.?

TAL: Yeah, but positively. Sometimes people say to each other ‘Oh you're a Jew’ as an insult and then they’ll see me and be like, ‘I'm really sorry; I didn't mean to say that.’

SAPHIRE: I think people have said stuff to me, but in a joking way. So sometimes people… I have little jokes with people but to me, nothing would offend me. Like if somebody offended me, I'd say something... Like me and this girl, she's Muslim: when we see each other in the
corridors we say ‘Shalom’ to each other and a few other things like that. But things in a jokey way.

DEBORAH: I just get jokes like, if there’s banter between me and a teacher, one of my friends all go it's just because you're Jewish? You know, I get the Same with she's Ginger just in the Same way.

TAL: If somebody said something like ‘Yid’ to me, I’d find it offensive but other than that.

HEATHER: But if I say something like, you know there’s a thing like all Jews all have big noses, or like all Jews are rich, do you correct it?

20 min 36 seconds

DEBORAH: Like, I get this a lot. Like some of my friends have only found out I'm Jewish this Year because it doesn't really come up in conversation, and when I say it, they say ‘really, you don't look Jewish’

HEATHER: How could that never come up in conversation: your dad is a Rabbi.

DEBORAH: If they come around my house, he’s in his kippa, you know

SAPHIRE: My friends have known since Y7 – the whole Year know actually. No one really says anything. I think at first people might have said something, but nothing really.

TAL: I think me and my brother are probably – of how I know of – practising – we’re not really practising, but people who come to synagogue and who identify the fact that they’re Jewish, go to Synagogue and have Jewish culture, in my school. I don’t know anyone else.

DEBORAH: It’s only me and one of the teachers. And now my sister left, it is just me and the teacher and that's it.


DEBORAH: I like being different because it's sort of…

TAL: yeah

SAPHIRE: I wouldn't say so really, I don't think it's a problem but I wouldn't mind if there are a few other kids who are Jewish at my school because I don't know … it just seems you're the only one, doesn't it? Obviously, there's me and my sister but,… I don't know.

TAL: Everyone is very positive. I think about it. It's nice because as my school is predominantly white; it’s not very mixed culture. Its predominantly white British – we’re all British obviously - no cultural background really. There's a few Asian people, like one of my best friend is Asian, but she doesn’t practice a religion. There's one other girl in my class whose Muslim and she's like, a very strict Muslim, but I don't really know why she moved. She used to live in [another town] but now she lives in [my town], so she should really go to school in [City area] - you know I mean. If she technically went to where she lived, she would be going to school [City area]. It's not, to me, I don't stand out like they do; they stand out because they got darker colour skin and it is quite obvious that they are of a different religion, but unless I told somebody I was religious, I wouldn't stand up particularly. I think it’s probably more difficult for Asian people than I'd say for the Jewish people. I’d say at my school there is quite a lot of abuse for Asian people.
SAPHIRE: I don't think in my school it is. I think there is quite a lot of Asian kids so they can all stick together a bit but there's only me. I mean I've experience slight racism, when people first found out, but now people don't make a big deal out of it because everyone knows me now.

**So what kind of things are joked about? Because somebody was calling somebody a Jew…?**

TAL: Yeah, like people say things to each other like though it’s an insult; like have an insult between them, and then one of them will be like ‘oh, you're such a Jew.’

**And that's between non-Jewish people?**

TAL: Yeah, that's between non-Jewish people and then they'll be like ‘God really sorry, I shouldn't have said that.’

**So is that common language then?**

HEATHER: People say that in my school.

TAL: People say that in my school.

HEATHER: For us it’s more of a joke because we're all Jewish.

MATTHEW: Yeah, if you won’t buy something at lunch people are like, ‘you stingy Jew’. ‘oh you are such a stingy Jew’

HEATHER: ‘Stingy Jew!’ but that’s funny!

DAN: Yeah, that phrase is used so much you could record it and it’d save so much breath instead of having to say it every time.

TAL: People say like the ‘P’ word a lot more than they do about Judaism at my school.

‘P’ word?

TAL: ‘Paki’ - I think that's worse. I don't really find it offensive when…, because they're my friends I've known the my whole life. I know they shouldn't really say it. But if they saw a Jewish person they wouldn't have prejudice against them, and they just use against because are ignorant and they don’t really realise…

SAPHIRE: People don't really know much. When people think of Jews, they just think of the big hats and when people find out, they ask: ‘does your dad have little curls?’ and stuff and I’ll be like : ‘No, because they're like the strict people.’ I guess…

TAL: It’s more funny than anything, I just laugh. I find it quite funny.

SAPHIRE: I think it's more that people don't know about them about the other bits of it, like they just know about the strictest Jews but no one knows about ...

DEBORAH: Yes, I think that’s because when they're walking down the street, that’s the ones they see and recognise.

DAN: Exactly, Jews assimilate quite well into society. They always have done. And the only Jews that stand out are the ultraorthodox and the pious and the hats and the talit bag[?]
SAPHIRE: But if you tell somebody you're Jewish, that’s what they’ll expect you to be like – that’s what they will think of.

TAL: I think people are very careful about they say, more about people who are Jewish... because, I find, because people are so aware, because people are a lot more aware of the Holocaust and things like that now because of everything that happened, I think people are... In my experience it’s Asian people that get more stick and people are more careful about racism towards Jewish people.

Okay, so what about we've been talking about racism, because race and religion are often connected, but they are different, so what about religion, like actual religious belief and practices - do you ever talk about these things?

MATTHEW: If someone is, like we mentioned once, just to say that you are.

HEATHER: There was this new girl. We’ve only got three non-Jewish people in our Year and one of them - I think she's like Buddhism, Buddhist or Hindu or Sikh one of them

[laughter]

DAN: This is the Jewish view..

HEATHER: I think it's Sikh ....and I’ve asked her and she doesn't seem to care. I don’t know. I mean, would you all say you’re religious? Because people say ‘religious’ but I'd say I’m quite religious but in a Liberal way not an Orthodox way. But when you say religious everyone automatically thinks Orthodox.

DEBORAH: That's why I tend to explain what I mean.

HEATHER: yeah, like, we were speaking, like, ‘What religion are you? Or something.’ and she was like I can’t remember what she said. She said Buddhism or Sikh, she didn’t know, she didn’t say a different one herself which I thought was really weird. And then I was like: do you, ever go to...

DAN: Mosque, Temple

HEATHER: Mosque, Temple – whatever.. [laughter] I'm such an example of what you've been saying [ignorant of other religions] and she was like ‘no, I never do’ and I don't know. I think it's such a waste. I think it's such a waste – this is how I feel, especially if you're Jewish - I think it's important to carry on your religion and to educate people and... because otherwise it's going to die out and I think it is quite sad when people don't coz it's like ‘what are you doing?’.

TAL: All this culture and History

HEATHER: Yes, culture’s what makes us different, like I don't say this to her, but.

It's interesting you mentioned being from the Liberal tradition... How do you think other people perceive Judaism in your school?

MATTHEW: At our school, if you say religious it just means orthodox; but then everybody - if you put everyone on a scale everyone would be Liberal

HEATHER: Yeah, but there is like two people, three people - there's not that many Orthodox, religious Jews in our school because if you’re really Orthodox, like they say it’s an Orthodox school, but it's not really.
MATTHEW: For example, I think there's more vegetarians in idea than kosher people.

DAN: Yup, I'm sure.

HEATHER: I think I'm probably one of the only people in our school his kosher.

TAL: My friend went to [Jewish Secondary school] and she went out at lunch, and she's - my cousin she's like 21 – when it very first opened and she went out for lunch and had some chips and she got caught because you're only allowed to eat kosher food – is it the Sam e now? Anyway, she nearly got expelled for eating non-kosher food. It used to be more strict; she nearly got expelled for eating non-kosher food.

MATTHEW: When we’re out and stuff we don’t even ask; we just assume

DAN: Year we just assume most people are not

HEATHER: I am.

What about the canteen? So everything is kosher in your school?

DAN: There’s no meat

HEATHER: There’s no milk

DAN: It’s all nothing, and the flavour follows.

HEATHER: It’s all kosher but it’s not meaty and it’s not milky

How about your school?

DEBORAH: Mines anything but they don't put pork in the canteen because so many religions don’t eat pork, so they don't.

So is never a problem?

DEBORAH: We don't get school lunches anyway.

TAL: I go out at lunch to the [shops], but if I wanted kosher stuff I'd have to make myself and bring into school; there's no for any religion, they put pork, they put anything.

But that doesn't bother anybody?

DEBORAH: I'm of the opinion that - like my birthday party for example - I wouldn't I be happy to have a pepperoni pizza in my house, but somebody else's party like I have had people come up to me and ask if they get pepperoni pizza, I don’t mind if people eat in front of me. This is like Josh, my brother, who's the headteacher didn't want to have to prawns in his car.

TAL: I don't keep kosher anyway.

DEBORAH: He just said…[youth worker enters the room]…I was talking about Wales and how you didn’t want prawns in the car.

Prawns in a hot car – that’s not a good idea, is it?
[youth worker] No, it’s a Jewish car; it’s a kosher car.

[laughter]

TAL: My dad keeps kosher; he's the only one in my family keeps kosher yet he comes to synagogue least among family - so I don't know, with Liberal, it's more about what you do, with Liberal, yeah, exactly.

Is this a problem, or does it come up, that people perceive Judaism as Orthodox, ultraorthodox?

DEBORAH: At my school unless some of my friends have seen my dad come and pick me up from school in jeans, they'll assume because he's a Rabbi, he wanders around in the suit wearing a Talit all the time.

TAL: You don't eat kosher chicken though do you, only you don’t eat pork.

DEBORAH: Sainsbury’s chicken. [laughter]

Do think the lessons about Judaism show the diversity in Judaism?

DAN: No, in my school they tend to stick to the Orthodox beliefs.

HEATHER: But if someone were to say that, they would say it’s an Orthodox school, just like that Cheder says something, like there is that, but I suppose it’s the Same: our school is only Orthodox; our Cheder is only liberal, and therefore we only teach…. Kids at our Cheder might not know about Orthodox Judaism.

SAPHIRE: It's quite possible they don't.

DAN: It’s the Same with me. I went to a Jewish primary school; my Jewish education was very thorough and you learn a lot about Judaism and I still do now and Josh was teaching me when I first came, well not when I first came and I would say my Orthodox point of view as I know it and then he’d say that is Orthodox - don't bring into the synagogue, basically, because it is so different, and I had only ever learnt Orthodox and I’d never been Orthodox and I don't believe in Orthodox: but that is just what I know and it's very hard to contrast.

DEBORAH: In my school when I learnt about Judaism in Year seven, eight and nine, it was all Orthodox until I had an argument with the teacher about it. She was under the impression that was Judaism, so I just told.

TAL: Our lives aren’t Orthodox - like the way we live them. I don't think any of us live Orthodox lives, so it's weird when we hear ‘this what Jews do’ this is not what we do.

[Interruption]

MATTHEW: Even when we did about Liberal, it was from an Orthodox point of view, compared with Orthodox people would do.

See did learn about Liberal?

MATTHEW: Yeah, but only this Year; this is the first time - for half a lesson.

HEATHER: The GCSE syllabus part of it is part of about the different movements, but I must admit the teachers, they don't, you might think they change their ways, but they don't say to
you, they never say ‘Orthodox is good’, they never say ‘Liberal is bad’, they never say it. It’s just think, I think it's because we think they're going to do it, we imagine their behaviour will change. It’s not major thing, it’s really not: they're not allowed to put their views across.

DAN: It's not a major thing, but I don’t generally like my JS teachers anyway

MATTHEW: I like my JS teachers. I know I’m only bottom group right. Before I came here I wasn't so religious and I didn’t know that much, but now I have started to learn more and care more, and I was still stuck in a bottom JS class, but now I get almost all As. They say that I am the best in my class... but since I said I’m Liberal she cares more about what I say because she's very open to all that stuff, so she taught me that in science evolution going from animals to humans also follows the Same way as the Torah does - created the animals and humans, it never said God changed it anything, she taught me all that and I've always taken on board.

35:02.6

HEATHER: Maybe she's interested to learn ‘coz maybe she didn't know about... so, at first, they might think ‘oh they're Liberal’, but when they get to know... like my mum always said to Mr [teacher's name] – he’s our headteacher and he knows we’re Liberal but they don't ever say it to me... but they like my mum because she is really involved and stuff but, I think they don't like to like her - does that makes sense. They don't like that they like someone who is Liberal, but they realise that now they’re letting in non-Jews, they realise that any form of Judaism is good.

TAL: It’s good; there’s not many Jewish people left now, really, so.

HEATHER: Exactly

SAPHIRE: So it’s a little like, even though you’re at a Jewish school, you're still, like, different to a lot of people?

HEATHER: I don't feel different at all

MATTHEW: No in RS our teachers, our JS teachers compare to everyone, but I think we might be the most religious people in our yeah, we might not be Orthodox, but we go to shul once a week.

DAN: I say to people, I say I’m not religious just for ease. But then I say so you’re orthodox; ‘How often do you go to shul?’”Roshhann, Yom Kippor and maybe Pesach and I was like ‘okay and how often do you go to shul?’ ‘Every week’, ‘Oh, you’re religious, ’you’re frum, you’re frum’ and then you have to go on the whole spiel about telling them... and that’s where it gets complicated.

SAPHIRE: It’s true, it’s true, the fact...

DEBORAH: I’m sorry Daniel, you are so Jewish! You just chucked the word frum and spiel in the same sentence.

I was going to say this this word frum – does it come up?

DEBORAH: It comes from Hasidic Judaism.

TAL: My granddad is the only person I know who says frum.

DAN: I just enjoy the word frum.
Does it come up in school?

HEATHER: Yeah, like ‘are you frum?’

MATTHEW: Jewish…anything remotely connected.

DAN: You don't learn you don't learn the word frum in JS, it’s just there!

So what do you need to do to be labelled a frum?

DAN: Wear sicit all the time, big hat, tillit, Shabbat, Kosher

HEATHER: To observe Shabat, to observe kosher.

DEBORAH: So, would you say I’m frum then just because I light candles at home?

HEATHER: No, because you don't stick to Shabbat, but you break Shabbat.

MATTHEW: It is more like a joke thing when somebody does something kind of Jewishy, like say ‘I’m going to shul this weekend?’

TAL: Orthodox is basically literal - It's when you take everything literally, it's like you practice everything.

Sorry, I'm just interested - is this kind of a derogatory term? If you call somebody frum? Is it kind of like, taking the Mick out of them?

DAN: It isn't really. It's just one of those things, it is so hard to explain because I don’t think I could give an example in another religion - is it Yiddish?

MATTHEW: Coz you know earlier we said we call each other like ‘Jew boys’ and stuff.

You call each other?

MATTHEW: Yeah, like if you do something bad like you're play football and you miss the ball or something. They say you say ‘you stupid Jew boy’ we’re not having a go each other. Coz it's offensive when someone else calls us it, but were turning around and making a joke out so its not offensive – that’s the point.

DEBORAH: Because there are so many Rachels in my school, my friend will just be like ‘Ginger Jew’ and then I'll turn around; if you say Rachel, about 12 people turn around.

Is that something you laugh off?

DEBORAH: Yeah

SAPHIRE: From your friends it is a joke.

HEATHER: There is a line, though, isn't there?

DEBORAH: Yeah, but if I say it; like, I might, for example, say that first, so then my friends would know I was fine, but they would never say ‘oh, you're a Ginger Jew!’
TAL: It depends. One of my best friends is a boy; he’s black and I'll say things like go have a rind and say 'empty your pockets' or something like that – jokily, but we know where to draw the line.

So, that's kind of acknowledging your minority status with each other right?

TAL: Yeah, about money, yeah.

TAL: You have to know, obviously, when its appropriate to say it though; he's one of these people who even if you didn't know that well, you could say it to him 'coz he’s very light hearted – he wouldn’t take it seriously.

So is humour a good strategy?

HEATHER: Yeah I think it is for breaking the ice.

MATTHEW: If somebody in [a non-Jewish school] came up to us and said you ‘Jew boy’ I think he’d get really annoyed, but the somebody who you knew was Jewish came up and said the Same, you would shrug it off.

SAPHIRE: You know what you said before about the humour thing, because I think when I first started school, like, in primary school no one had ever really thought about it, but in secondary school at first people make little jokes, and at first they would offend me, but then we started to take things as a joke.

SAPHIRE: No we joke about with each other, like if somebody else was joking at me, then I wouldn't be happy, but if we're joking with you with each other, then it's okay. I think.

HEATHER: You have to know if it's okay with the person first and then.

DAN: It is hard though because one more my best friends, if not my best friends, isn't Jewish and he will say ‘oh, give me someone I need to buy a chocolate bar’, and I say ‘no I’m a stingy Jew’ and he’ll take it as a joke and laugh. Next time it happens, he says… ‘but oh you are stingy Jew!’ I'd get a bit offended at that. And I hate that because if I can say it to myself somebody else should be able to say it to me it’s one of those feelings, it's complicated.

MATTHEW: If in any religion though, if you say no I can't do that because I'm stupid, everyone laughs about it, but if this someone goes to you and says ‘you can’t do that because you're stupid’, you get really annoyed

SAPHIRE: It’s just the Same thing really.

Interesting.

TAL: It's easier to take the Mick out of yourself than listen to other people taking the mick out of you.

40:52.7

So, is there ever - joking aside - any friction between people of different religions, do you think?

DEBORAH: I wouldn't call it friction, but my friend [name] – who is the Christian – will have heated discussions, right, and about 10 min later, we will be going on for hours, but oh well, we're still friends.
TAL: Yeah, we will have discussions - all of us together – but most of my friends are atheists and they will argue the point that religion doesn't have any place in the modern world or whatever. And I've got one friend who is a really strict Jehovah's Witness and he doesn't come out aside school; he is not allowed out by his parents, and we have a joke in our group we’re like: there's an Indian, Muslim, Buddhist, a Jew, a Christian and an atheist

And that's your a group of friends? And you said you had heated debates, is this outside of lessons?

TAL: No I had it in lessons once.

DEBORAH: We have it in this lesson called extension which is like, because our school doesn't really fill the quota for PSHE so they give us an extra period where we do coursework, so we still don't fill the quota for PSHE, but we have heated discussions, like the teachers will get involved and they’ll be arguing their point of view.

TAL: We had a discussion with a scientist teacher who is a really strict Christian. She's a science teacher but she's a strict Christian, a Jehovah's Witness, a Muslim, a Jew, a Hindu, a Christian and a load of atheists. And all the atheists were just, like, 'all of what you are saying is complete rubbish' and my friend who is Hindu was saying that to because she doesn't believe in any of it, and the science teacher was saying she's both, because she thinks there is merit in both ways, and then the Jehovah's Witness was getting really offended because he’s so literal about everything. I think one of our maths teachers once said was like, he said evolution was wrong - the boy - and he got really upset because the maths teacher said there is proof for evolution, so how can you believe that things are literal still and this really upset the boy - I think is worse of teachers to be honest because yeah, he got really upset.

SAPHIRE: Yeah, that’s out of order, because he can't believe what he wants to believe at the end of the day.

TAL: I think it is worse at the end of the day, because the teachers think that - there is a line like some teachers are scared to say any opinion in case they get into trouble and other teachers will just say whatever they want and that offends people.

DAN: Our JS lessons are teacher is very philosophical, he is very Jewish, and at least once every two lessons we will have a heated debate with everyone in the class. I will often, if not all the time, disagree with him. I don't put up my hand because he has an answer for everything, so I find it hard to… if I was to have a one-on-one debate it would be so much easier, but getting one point in an hour – that is just not the sort of debate I need; it's very, very… when you have to sort of debate you actually see the kids in our class – they’re Jewish, but they don't believe in Judaism; the Jewish laws the they don't think it makes sense.

DEBORAH: If there is a questionnaire, they’ll just tick the Jewish box, that's it.

DAN: Exactly. Which is pretty much the Same as me.

MATTHEW: In my class, like, I realised ages ago that our teacher will do these big discussions and waste a lot of time, and me and my friend Mikey who sit next to each other, we realised that when she said anything remotely Jewishy we’d argue against it and then we’d sit back and then the rest of the class would argue away for the rest of the lesson until the finish [laughter].

So that's another coping strategy.
TAL: What I get, is a lot of people - if you're Liberal and you don't believe these things are literal, then why - I say this because of the morals and the things which are teaches us – and they say well is a bit simplistic isn't it, we all know that it's good and bad, for example, or you could say that it's a favouritism thing with Josef...[Interruption] But the favouritism thing with Josef, we know favouritism is bad, why are we looking at something that may or may not have happened thousands of Years ago to prove a point - I think people think it's simplistic.

DEBORAH: Even when we did our Kabala Torah course a while ago, and even when we were having our sessions with Richard, even he was saying ah well we will just go along with this stuff! And you're the Rabbi!

TAL: I think it is simplistic, but for me it's more like coming together as a community like Daniel said; it's not about the religious side. I don't know if I am, if I believe or God or not.

MATTHEW: I never believe this stuff; I always thought, because our teacher says these things happened I thought its probably never happened and someone wrote this story down to prove a point. Because the story has a good point, but I don't think this stuff can never actually happen, but it is still a good story to prove a point.

HEATHER: They always ask the question: does it matter and none of it is true? And it’s like ‘No, because it teaches us lessons and like … religion’s belief, it’s not proof to a certain point, so.

SAPHIRE: Daniel, you know you're saying before about you arguing with your JS teachers, that's not even just in Judaism because my Catholic friend argues with the priest when she doesn't agree with him, and I'll say ‘don't argue!'

TAL: But you should argue, though, because that’s how you form opinions when you argue; you see two sides of the coin.

46:09

DEBORAH: I think it all comes down to the fact, if we were all the same, it would be boring and we wouldn’t be very interesting people. I think, it's good we all have different opinions and even around this table, I think we are all very different Jews.

DAN: We can have a huge debate just about points of view.

DEBORAH: Just about our views within Judaism.

DAN: Overall, we’re all Liberal and proud of it.

MATTHEW: Actually, to think of it, my art teacher isn't Jewish. I think he's an atheist, and he says he loves teaching in the school because he really likes Jews and the way we think about stuff.

SAPHIRE: He likes Jews!

DAN: That scares me.

MATTHEW: He says all the schools he's taught at, he’s gone to different religious schools, and is gone to 2 different Jewish schools, and he says he likes Jewish people more.

HEATHER: A lot of my teachers said they loved teaching in a Jewish school - not Jewish teachers.
MATTHEW: There’s something different about Jewish kids; the way they think about stuff.

HEATHER: I've always thought our school – I don’t know whether I feel it – it’s so shielded, I can't describe what I mean, it is because we're all Jewish – that is the reason. It's like we’re a community, rather than like different people, different religions and everything and I think it makes our school more like a community.

TAL: I think that's really nice people, but what people a lot of people always said to me, is that why do you bother with the religious side saying prayers to God, if you don't believe God literally did these things?

DAN: I don't.

HEATHER: Like it's almost like a social club almost

TAL: yeah but I always says just because it's tradition, it’s not.

HEATHER: You can be Jewish without observing, it's a Jewish school, it's not…

TAL: I was watching Question Time, there was this big … ‘can you be in a religion and not believe in God?’ and a lot of people say it's hypocritical.

SAPHIRE: I think you can.

DEBORAH: I don't know if I believe in God.

SAPHIRE: No

DEBORAH: My mum says she doesn't.

DAN: I don't.

SAPHIRE: I wouldn't say I don't.

DAN: I've looked into it, and I've studied it and I formed my opinion, but I’d like to think I can see where other people are coming from.

MATTHEW: I like to, I like to always see like, to see different… earlier me and Ruth were teaching about Karma, and me and Ruth: both agree with the idea of Karma

HEATHER: I believe it's God. I have a really, really strong belief in God…

MATTHEW: If I could put my beliefs down, I’d say something like, I believe in Karma: good things will happen to me and if someone said to me ‘do you believe in Karma?’, I'd say ‘no, I’m still Jewish.’

HEATHER: Do you believe that’s God or Karma?

MATTHEW: I just believe that is how it works.

HEATHER: But surely there’s someone?

SAPHIRE: This is too deep for the brain.
All this goes to really interesting questions ... I just wondered what extent your school may impact your religious views, or what we might call spiritual life?

DAN: From Jewish school to Jewish school, I think actually it’s turned me away from Judaism; it's the constant pushing Judaism into me, especially my primary school, I was a firm believer in my primary school but the secondary school it was slightly laid-off in Year seven as if I had a bit of leeway and I pushed my way out and escaped my mental block.

HEATHER: I feel, like, completely opposite, like, going from a non-Jewish primary school to a Jewish school. No but I feel like I've become much more believing in God and believing in everything; its being... it's being around more Jewish people that’s kind of made it, because then I can discuss things more about Judaism with my friends and it’s definately going to a Jewish school has made me so much, like, I don't know, like, picking there's only 20 people in my Year who are doing Jewish studies A-level and they're like the people that find it important, probably a lot of people haven't gone to a Jewish primary school, actually probably half haven’t, and half have, and I don't know, but it's definitely influenced me a lot. I'd still like to come here and everything, but, it's being at school which is, because, obviously you’re there all the time. It's made an impact.

So you think that supported your religious belief?

HEATHER: Yes, definitely.

And how about other people?

DEBORAH: I like being able to separate it: like having a Jewish me and a me at school, because I'm not like all calm at school, I’m hyperactive - but I don’t think it affects my Judaism.

TAL: Same. Yeah, Same. I don't... I wouldn't say it separate lives because it comes in with my friends and my culture, but in my school work in my school life I don’t think my Judaism has a place, may be, and sometimes I think my school is school. It's always nice to come to synagogue on the weekend, because if you've had a really horrible week at school you just don't think about it and a way to distract yourself and be with other people.

MATTHEW: I’m opposite to Daniel, because when I went to [Jewish] primary school because they pushed it on me and in the morning they make you pray even though you’re tired and can’t be bothered and they made you wear sicit under the thing and it was really hot in the summer. Everyone who I know who went to [Jewish Primary school] completely hated Judaism and I hated it, because all we were told about is Orthodox, and before my parents started here that’s all I knew about it. And I thought to be Jewish, you have to be really Orthodox and it drove us all so much away from it, and when I went [to a Jewish secondary] school, I was so relaxed and we all became a bit more like, it's not that bad really, and I came here because I realised I have a choice. And when we went to Israel, we used to, like, our forms go [code names] after Israel – that’s how it used to separate – but after Israel we all combined and we lived these experiences and I think everyone I know who I went [Jewish Primary school] we all became a little bit more religious, and we all cared and wear necklaces like this one - even the people who weren’t religious like [friend’s name] who used to go here. He doesn't anymore, because doesn't believe in God, he still wears a yam; he wants to stay Jewish, but he doesn't believe in it.

So, that's because of your experience of school?

TAL: I think it's the culture of Judaism.

SAPHIRE: I agree with that. It's not just a religion. It's a culture as well.
TAL: For Orthodox it is a religion.

SAPHIRE: Yeah but in a nice way completely.

**Do you think there's any problems of being a Liberal Jewish student at school other the ones we have explained?**

DAN: After explanation, nothing. No problem

**After explanation?**

DAN: Yeah, you need to explain what Liberal Judaism is; not many people know actually.

TAL: But that's fair enough because people don’t know.

DAN: But some people say you're not a real Jew, which really annoys the hell out of me, because they’re saying ‘your Orthodox’, you’re not a real Jew because you're Liberal. Orthodox! They they go to Orthodox synagogues once a Year.

MATTHEW: To be honest I know more about Orthodox than they do; I know more about religion than they do, but they still say you're a bit of a lazy Jew and I'm not.

SAPHIRE: People have said that to me, someone said to me ‘if you're a real Jew, you wouldn't swear, you wouldn't do this, you wouldn’t do that – that’s not really how it works.

54:08

DAN: You should come to [Jewish school]!!!

TAL: Yeah like my friends – they say it as a joke- if I swear sometimes – they’ll say, you’re not being a very good Jew today, are you?

DAN: We've say that to each other.

**Are you ever reluctant to tell people you're Jewish? Or Liberal Jewish?**

HEATHER: I'm proud to say that I'm Jewish.

TAL: Yes Same.

MATTHEW: Only if it comes up: I won’t go up to someone and say I'm Jewish.

DEBORAH: I don't say I'm Rachel; I'm Jewish. [laughter]

MATTHEW: I wouldn't do that, but I wait for it to come up.

SAPHIRE: I wouldn't hide it, but I wouldn’t bring it up straightaway. Just if it came up in conversation, then I would mention it. I wouldn’t be like around with ‘Jew’ on my top wooooo. [laughter] I wouldn't hide it.

DAN: There is Jew here [laughter]

DEBORAH: Hug me I’m Jewish [laughter]
Is it ever something you might not other people might not want other people to know in school?

HEATHER: No, not in school but sometimes when you're out.

MATTHEW: In school they kind of know already

TAL: If you're in a bar or somewhere like that, you might not want somebody to know

SAPHIRE: Sometimes a school if someone says something I think I'd rather they didn't know, but I think it'd be a hard thing to hide from people; I wouldn't want it to be a secret because that would feel a bit weird, but it’s not something I would choose to tell people – it’s just something that gets around doesn't it.

Okay.

SAPHIRE: Sometimes it can be difficult with people knowing but it would be more difficult to hide it.

Right.

MATTHEW: The only reason guys have a bit of a go as for being Liberals because when they came to our bar mitzvahs they were constantly in shul and doing all this hard stuff, but here it is a bit more relaxed because we were doing more Liberal stuff.

DAN: 20 lines

MATTHEW: Yeah, we were doing 20 lines and they were doing these huge paragraphs and they got a bit annoyed with us because we did this little thing.

TAL: Yeah, but you practice more because you kept on going afterwards.

MATTHEW: Yeah, now we say we're the better Jews now, carry on going and we actually teach now.

DEBORAH: I did quite a lot though, like, I did 20 verses

DAN: I did 20+13 in Israel.

SAPHIRE: Serious, I did 10

DEBORAH: That's because you had two

DAN: yeah I know but

TAL: I did ten.

HEATHER: I probably did about 9

TAL: Yeah, it took us weeks to learn, like four lines each.

SAPHIRE: It's hard though.
TAL: It’s not like we were like really stressing out; we don't know it.

SAPHIRE: When it’s something you're not used to, like, it's not like we’re at home reading Hebrew anything. We only do it when we come here really.

TAL: I don't do it yeah.

MATTHEW: I keep it for here.

SAPHIRE: Not like some mini-Torah bible by our beds, study….

TAL: When I did my bat mitzvah, I had I kept it by my bed and I read it every night before I went to bed in Hebrew.

DEBORAH: Yeah, do you like a bit of light reading before you get to bed?!

MATTHEW: If you went to any of our rooms, any of our houses, like you’d say ‘this is just a normal kid.’

SAPHIRE: That’s a bit random! [laughter]

**Yeah, don’t worry that is not part of the research.**

SAPHIRE: It’s quite random: we're talking about what books we have by our bed.

MATTHEW: If you looked for any clues in our room you wouldn’t know I’m Jewish.

HEATHER: You’d probably know from my room.

DAN: You wouldn’t be able to see anything in my room.

SAPHIRE: I have my bat mitzvah certificate on my wall.

TAL: You’d know if you went into my jewellery box.

HEATHER: Exactly my jewellery box – you’d know.

MATTHEW: I’ve got lots of physics books, I know that sounds weird

HEATHER: I’ve got random Hebrew sheet laying around my room; not on show.

**...last question.. anything else?**

DAN: I’ve said everything; I said my point.

HEATHER: I’ve said everything.

DAN: We could still go on for hours though.

MATTHEW: Yeah, because when we were here actually learning, remember we used to have these really long arguments;... used to argue for, like, two hours.

...
TAL: The most important thing in school with a religion, is that everyone knows all different religions so everyone’s accepting.

So you think being in a school with different religions kind of helps?

TAL: I didn’t see the point of doing Christian RE - what was the point of having an exam on Christianity - just one denomination, one religion when there are so many in the world.

SAPHIRE: That's so weird [referring to staples]
Appendix 2: An individual interview transcript

Southville Ahmadiyya Mission house; February, 2011; duration, 47:39 minutes

An individual interview with a participant previously interviewed in a group:
Muhab, male, Year 13, Ahmadiyya Muslim, Community School

Last time I asked you how you feel about being a young Muslim in school and I wondered whether you had any more thoughts about this?

MUHAB: Umm well it’s like umm, how do I put this, in primary school it was like a big part of your identity, who you were. People were a lot more focussed on it back then. And as you grow up, people don’t see that as much, but sometimes there are fights within school, between different children, and of different religions. I don’t know if that’s because they’ve been brought up with those norms and values or if that’s just them looking for a fight. But it is mainly based around race or religion, fights out of school. So, umm, I don’t know, I think, maybe when you’re in primary school – I remember when we did RE subjects, there wasn’t a lot about Islam or other religions, it was mainly about Christianity. So maybe if in primary school they start teaching about different religions, different cultures, people will be more understanding. So, umm, so like, when they get to secondary school or high school, these problems can be resolved, fights within the children. And also that the school can understand certain holidays. Cause umm I’ve actually been asked in secondary school, by the teacher, about what a certain holiday is. So like Eid, and like Ramadan, and things like that. So maybe teachers could, when they’re doing their course, as part of their, I don’t know, as part of their course, they can be taught these things, just like equality sort of thing within the school. But umm yeah as I say, it’s like in primary school, it was part of your identity; it was important. But like people didn’t really go fighting about it. When you get to secondary school, it’s not like that important, but it gets more serious. So, I don’t know, it’s just like weird – people start to grow up and get more aggressive, you know. Again I think it’s more the person itself.

So you say that these fights are about religion, or between religions. Is it a specifically religious thing, or is it a racial thing?

MUHAB: I think it’s generally a racial thing, I think religion is just a subtitle of that. But umm like when these fights do happen, obviously they don’t openly say it’s because, oh yeah he’s this race or he’s that race. It’s just more like they look for another reason maybe. It’s like… everyone knows it’s because of this.

So you’re at college now, aren’t you?

MUHAB: Umm I’m in the sixth form, doing my second Year… at [Comprehensive School].

So does that happen there?

MUHAB: Umm it’s happened once or twice since I’ve been there, and I’ve been there since September, so…

Could you describe one of these incidents?

MUHAB: Umm well there’s an incident within the school, but it was with another school, children from other schools and from this school. It’s like umm basically there’s a Blackberry list or something and umm a couple of my friends’ names were added onto it, and err, basically they started arguing over Facebook and Internet and it sort of escalated into this massive fight.
And it got to the point where the children, the boys from this school, Community School, they actually went to [another Community School] to fight these boys. And it got to the point where the police already knew about it, so they were there waiting. They basically got there, saw the police, kinda waited around to see if the boys would come, then went back. But it’s like there was no need to do that in the first place. But yeah, I mean, it does happen. Sometimes it may not happen for a couple of months, but it will happen maybe three times within the week. And so it’s like you can’t really count the number of times it happens. But I mean, it would be naïve to say it doesn’t happen.

**And what were the two groups, were they racially different?**

MUHAB: There were a group of Asians, Muslims, Hindus. The others were all White Christians.

**And were these, when you say Muslims or Hindus, was this their background or do you think they are practising religiously – and for the Christians?**

MUHAB: I wouldn’t say they were strictly religious, but I know they do practise their religion to a certain extent. They pray, they read the scriptures, they have all the beliefs – but I wouldn’t say they follow all of the rules. It’s like, no sex before marriage – I know for a fact some of them have had sex. But it’s just the way it goes really.

**And what about in school itself – are there any divisions?**

MUHAB: Well, in Community School, and where I was living in [another city], you could see there was division; the racial groups and the religious groups, they tend to keep to themselves, so there’s division there. And like… where I was, I was the only Asian person there, so… I had to fit in. But generally, me and the black people got on, a lot quicker, we clicked a lot quicker, became closer friends quicker, than I did maybe with the white people. But umm the area I was living in is notorious for being racist, so… not the area I was living in, but the school I was going to. [Other city] is kinda split up, with like [area name] Area for the white people, then you have like [area name] For the black and Asian people there. And I was living in the town centre – over there, I can’t really say about over there. But over here, like, you don’t notice it until you actually think about it, and, like, the group of friends that I have, they’re all ethnic minorities; like, I can only think of one or two white people that are in our group of friends. I mean, obviously you have friends, outside that group, but you don't speak to them on a regular basis. And then, umm, if you look through the younger Years, there is, the cut is more distinct. So all the Asian boys would be together, and all the white boy together, and all the black people would be together.

**Why do you think that is?**

MUHAB: Umm, I think it’s cause you feel you fit in more, with your own people. Like, you have something to relate to with them, already. So subconsciously you feel more inclined to speak to this person, more than that person. I remember a study was done actually on three Year-old children, and they had, like, four pictures of different raced children. And the children themselves, they were like different races, different religious backgrounds. And they asked – which child would you like to play with more? And they chose – they picked up – the child which was of their own colour, race. So I think it is like, you feel maybe safer around your own people, but I don’t know. It’s like, umm, like when you go to a new school, you look to fit in, so you find maybe make friends with the group you fit in most, and, so, race can be a big part of that. But, you don’t know for definite – that’s just my opinion.
And so, this is something that’s going on all the time…

MUHAB: Yeah.

**But how does religion affect it?**

MUHAB: Well, sometimes within the groups themselves, boys or girls start arguing about the religion. So umm I remember when I was like, a couple of weeks ago, me and my friend started arguing about religious views. And it got to a point where we were, like, nearly fighting each other – we were that worked up about it. And umm afterwards we realised what we were doing… But at that moment, it was like, well, why does religion need to be something to argue about? It was like we were just arguing about different things but trying to prove each other wrong. So I think when it comes to what’s the right religion, if there is one, people can feel proper, really strongly about that. So I think, that’s when arguments start, in the older generations, because you… everyone wants to prove that their religion is the right religion, the true one. But… I don’t know actually.

**So what was your argument about?**

MUHAB: Umm… it was just about certain views – like Jesus, if he did die on the cross and things like that. Umm Muhammad, how he wrote the Qur’an and things like that. But, just general things really.

**So the person you were discussing with wasn’t Ahmadiyya?**

MUHAB: No, no, he was a Hindu.

**So was it do with what happened to Jesus?**

MUHAB: Yeah.

**And were you… because the Ahmadiyya have a particular view on this?**

MUHAB: We believe that he died on the cross, so… I mean, we believe that he was, umm, a prophet- but that’s where all the similarity stops. Umm, I’m not really the best person to ask about the whole thing, about it.

**No, I’m interested in what you think – and your Hindu friend was arguing…**

MUHAB: Umm, well, basically he was saying something like – oh, how do you know for certain that he died on the cross, and if he’s a prophet, how come God didn’t resurrect him… so like, his views were understandable. But… obviously they don’t fall in line with mine, so, but, it wasn’t something we should have argued about to be honest.

**So how do you think other people perceive Islam at school?**

MUHAB: Umm, well, it, I think it depends upon the majority of the school that’s a certain race or religion, and uhh, in Community School, I’d say that most of the, at least three quarters of the children there out of like an Asian background, are most probably Muslim or Hindu. So, there, you can’t really say… obviously the view on Islam, is like a positive one. But umm, if you relate that to where I was living before, in [the other city], they just thought, oh all Muslims are terrorists; a very hostile view of Muslims.
How did that play out at school; did that ever come out in school?

MUHAB: Umm, well, people didn’t really say anything to me, but, like they’d make little jokes, and it got to a certain point where, you’d have a fight about it, and nobody would say anything. But, umm, I mean, people do say it, so... people don’t say it anymore to me, but obviously you know that’s what their views are. So, just cause they don’t say... just cause someone doesn’t say anything to you, it doesn’t mean that’s not what they think.

And these were white kids, were they?

MUHAB: Yeah, yeah. Like, I was the only Asian kid there, so...

What kind of jokes would they say?

MUHAB: Umm, just like, bomb-related jokes, suicide bomber-related jokes, and stuff like that.

How did that make you feel?

MUHAB: Umm, well, I’m a very hard person to, like, piss off, so, it was like, I let it go for quite some time. And near the end of my first Year there, I’m thinking, well they’re saying stuff about me, I should do something about it. So that was when I had my first fight there, and then I had like two or three fights after that, and it completely stopped, so like...

So you’d say fighting is a...

MUHAB: Yeah, I would say it’s a good thing – obviously my religion doesn’t allow that, so...!

And what about Community School, is that something that ever comes up?

MUHAB: Community school, it’s not, not a problem for me, but maybe you might need to ask a few Christian person there, because they are the minority there, so...

One of the interesting things for me is it’s quite difficult to get hold of... people who practise Christians. When you described the fight, when you say Muslims, Hindus, Christians...

MUHAB: Yeah, I wouldn’t say they’re practising Christians.

But that’s interesting that we use these terms, but what they might mean...

MUHAB: Yeah. I mean, again, I think if you’re a strictly, like, a strict follower of a religion, most religions preach peace. So, violence, or any insults, go against that. So, if you are a strict follower, I don’t think you tend to, you don’t tend to get into fights about racial things, or religious views, or... Maybe about sexuality. But nothing to do with like, race or religion. So, I think, it depends on the person’s faith as well, like, how much faith they have in their religion. Like, how strictly they follow the religion itself. I know a load of people who call themselves Muslims or Christians, but they don’t, you know, follow, they’re not, like, practising, so, I don’t know, maybe, if they should be counted as Christians, so, well, as the race, well, religion they are.

So does this terrorist thing come up; do people label people as terrorists still?

MUHAB: Umm, it hasn’t come up, umm, in [Community School], but when the bombings originally happened, I went to [other Community School] and it came up there, and then it followed on from there, to, to, when I moved to [other city], I was labelled there as well. It was
used quite broadly there, it was quite a big group there. There’s always going to be conflict, maybe, because I think the terrorist bombings sort of tainted, the Islam name; I think people just stereotype around that now.

And how do you think Muslims respond to that?

MUHAB: Well, real Muslims, they’re not supposed to act to it. The only thing we can do is perhaps preach what our actual views are, like, what real Muslims do. But I mean you can see on TV, in the media, where they show Muslims rampaging and rioting about certain things like, umm, that woman that named the teddy bear Muhammad. I think she was, I don’t know what happened with that, there was something serious going on with her thing; she was going to be hanged for something. But that’s, it’s little things like that. Islam itself would not tell you to do that. I mean, its views on like naming things Muhammad are quite strong, but, when it’s something quite small like that, then, you’re doing such a big thing about it, it doesn’t fit in.

Do you think those sort of media stories cause problems for people?

MUHAB: Oh, definitely, because the way the media uses its propaganda sort of thing, really affects people; I mean it has a large influence, because you’re around media every day, you’re around media all the time, so those views are being drilled into you, so if you’re only getting these bad points of view about Islam, obviously you’re going to think these things. For someone who doesn’t do their research, just looks at the media, they’re obviously going to have this point of view about Islam.

Do you think the school has any effect on trying to stop these views?

MUHAB: The school as far as I know, the primary school, they were quite biased in RE as I said. There were only like Christian views that we studied really. At secondary school, they don’t really do anything about it; they don’t see if there’s a religious or racial arguments going on. What they do is if a fight arises, they see it, and they maybe suspend the student in question, or expel the student. But they don’t do anything to prevent it in the first place, so I mean, like, the students at Community School have a fight out of the view of teachers, there’s no consequences really. The, I think definitely in secondary school, or maybe even in primary schools to start off there, teach about religions more, more and more. I know… picking our GCSEs, RE was an option, a lot of people don’t want to choose it. I mean, it was just a subject, it was nothing of importance to them. So maybe if, like, primary school time till GCSEs time, RE could be a bigger impact, like, maybe, in the curriculum.

So you don’t do RE, now?

MUHAB: No.

When you did do it, how did you feel Islam was dealt with? Did the teacher know what they were talking about?

MUHAB: To a certain extent, yeah. But umm obviously Ahmadiyya views are slightly different to Muslim views, so, umm, I think it just generalised what the Islam view. I mean, they don’t explain that Islam has sub-sects; they explain that Christianity does, Catholic, Protestants; in Islam, they just say Islam, they don’t say Sunni, Shia. There’s a load of sects in Islam.

Do you think that’s a problem, or is that a good thing?

MUHAB: It’s definitely a problem, because Muslims themselves don’t know about all the different sects. I mean, people ask me: are you Sunni or Shia? They are the only two sects they
know. They like don’t know Ahmadiyya; they’re like what’s that? So I think when you’re teaching about Islam, you need to go into some detail. I mean, I know it’s hard just because it’s a core subject, don’t have a lot of time, but, I don’t know, it’s something that needs to be reviewed.

[Man enters; discussion about mosque]

So in these lessons, if they go through the different divisions, do you think this might raise conflict?

MUHAB: I think that’s always going to be an issue, yeah, because people argue about the religion themselves; that’s always going to cause, arguing about the subgroups, I mean, that’s always going to happen, no matter what you do, so, I think maybe start it out at primary schools. I mean, this isn’t going to be a quick thing; it’s a long way in the future. The older generation, aren’t going to know this. I think if you start this out in the younger generation, as soon as they go to primary school, no matter what religion they are, they’ll know about these sort of things. I think it’ll teach them kids, themselves. I know, when I was growing up, my parents did teach me these things, about the different things, so I had, I mean minimum knowledge, but I had some knowledge. So when people asked me I could give them a reply, a minimum reply.

How do you get on with people of other groups?

MUHAB: Me, myself, I don’t think religion is a problem. Why should my views on you be affected by your religion? But that’s just the person I am, so, I mean, some people will be stereotyping. They won’t want to converse with somebody else, because of their religion or race, but…

But if your friend is Sunni or, do they ever challenge or criticise you?

MUHAB: Well, if they did that, they wouldn’t be my friend really. Well, we discuss it on many occasions, but we don’t argue about it generally. The only times we argue about it, is about other religions. But even then it’s more of a discussion, then, if it goes any further it becomes an argument. We have to stop the discussions!

Do you ever feel you want to convert them?

MUHAB: Not at all – I feel that should be their own option. Even my own children, obviously I’d teach them about Islam and [indistinguishable], but at the end of the day, I think it should be their decision what they want to, so I’m not going to force them into anything.

Do you think any of your friends have taken an interest in your religion?

MUHAB: Definitely back in [other city], because, even then like, people of other races only knew about Sunni and Shia. So when I said I was neither, they were like, what are you then? And when I said Ahmadiyya, and they were like yeah, what’s that? How is that different? What do you believe that’s different to them, and different sects? I mean, if people knew about it, it’s just sort of getting the word out there and like really.

And these are white kids are they?

MUHAB: Yeah, people of all backgrounds. I’ve been asked by black people, white people, Chinese people, Jews, Hindus, Christians. I mean, people do genuinely want to know; it’s just a case of when people... I’m going to be honest, I’m not most, like the best source of information. My parents when we were little, they were always working, so we had to kinda teach ourselves. But, so, my knowledge isn’t that big, but…
What influence do you think school has on your religious beliefs, if any?

MUHAB: Umm, I don’t think you realise it as you’re growing up, but when you’re at primary school, obviously, you’ve got a young mind, you’re gonna be easily influences, so I think at primary school it plays the largest part. But I think you have to look at the other things as well: it’s going to be the norms and values your parents have taught you, but then you have the general norms and values of society, so if you’re Christian, and the media say Muslims are terrorists and that, if you’re young, that’s going to impact you quite heavily. Especially if your parents are saying this to you as well. So there’s different factors, that affect your religious views. But definitely in primary schools, they do impact you a lot.

In what way?

MUHAB: It can be positive, or negative; I think that depends on the person themselves. So, in primary school, there was an argument actually, where we were asked to make a picture, draw a picture of what we thought God looked like. Now obviously Islam doesn’t allow this, so, there was a big argument about this, between like 7 Year-olds and 30 Year-olds, which if you think about it, is a weird situation, but, I mean, that’s what I mean: teachers should be educated on this. Cause otherwise, if they knew that, this argument wouldn’t have happened. It was really biased cause we were almost forced into doing it; we were almost forced against our religious beliefs. In the end, can’t even remember, they didn’t make us do it in the end; they made us draw a different picture of somebody else. So definitely where it comes to teachers, I think they should be educated on this.

Any other examples of things like that?

MUHAB: Again in primary school, when you took days off for religious events, teachers were unaware of what the event was. We’d, umm, the only event they knew about was Eid, which, they did assemblies on, which was, a plus. But, umm, when it gets to secondary school, there’s no religious events or anything like that, so, you take days off, you come back to school, but they don’t know why you’ve gone, so you have to… I know it sounds like a little problem, but you have to go through the hassle of getting your parents to write a letter in, or phoning in, so, they are always like looking for an excuse to have a go at you. I don’t know if it’s just me, but, I think that’s the case, like. My maths teacher, he doesn’t like me, so every time I take a day off, for a religious event, my granddad’s gone to hospital or something like that, he’s the first one there, mailing the head teacher, saying: yeah, he’s missing my lessons, then I have to explain to them, and they have to explain to him; he’s missing for this reason.

So you’re studying maths now?

MUHAB: Yeah, absolutely.

Do you think that could be racially or religiously motivated?

MUHAB: Maybe a little bit, not maybe, to a little extent at least. I mean, me and my friend, we’re the only Asians in the class, and we’re the ones he picks on the most. I don’t know if that, it could be just it’s us, because of what he was like previous Years – I don’t know what he’s like, I only just met him – it could be to do with religion or race.

Is there anything you would find supportive? What do you think the best solution would be?

MUHAB: I think, teachers themselves, should be educated. If they’re educated – especially RE teachers – if they’re educating children about other religions, then they should know the religions in detail, not just like the main facts. So, I think the three most important things to do
would be like: teach the teachers themselves; go into detail with different religions, don’t just list the main facts – I mean, in primary school, I was there for, what, six Years, and in that time, I’m pretty sure you could teach them about the detailed points of a religion. So, when you’re in primary school, the things that you learn about religion, it just gets repetitive. You learn the Same thing every Year, so, I find it hard to believe that they can’t, like, change the curriculum, like, give them more of an in-depth knowledge, instead of learning the Same thing over and over again, which is pointless. But then, umm, the third thing, I don’t know, probably have more, raise more of an awareness about the different religions and cultures, as it were. I know, this Year and last Year, has always had a religious leader. They’ve tried to have a big push of an awareness about Ahmadiyya. And it’s going quite well: I mean, Ahmadiyya has been mentioned on the radio, on the TVs, so, I mean it’s just a case of people knowing what’s what.

**What benefits might there be for you [as a Muslim in school]?**

MUHAB: Well, obviously there’s a benefit of the group of friends you fall into; obviously it’s a lot easier to make friends if you follow a religion or are a certain race, so, I think socialising, when it comes to that, you have something to relate to with people, but, as far as other benefits go, obviously you have extra days off! It can be a positive or a negative, this one: teachers can see you in a certain way, they judge, obviously you have an initial impression of someone, and so, this initial impression, when you’re a Muslim, can either be good or bad. In the teacher’s views. But as I say, I think these are all, subconscious. That’s a subconscious thing. Obviously you do make a judgment on someone, like some may not be judgmental, but it’s hard to believe that nobody would judge the person as soon as you’ve seen them, when you have that first impression.

**Is there anything else I need to know, or that we haven’t discussed?**

MUHAB: Summarise it, maybe? I think, there’s a problem, maybe like, the actual curriculum from primary school, all the way to GCSEs, RE should be, like, more of a key subject, you know, like English, Maths and Science. They’re required subjects, you have to take them to GCSE. So maybe have RE as, like, the fourth one. Cause religion in society now is playing a big part; especially with the media. But, umm, I would say it’s, schools need to have more of an awareness of these subjects. So the different sectors of Islam, cause, personally, growing up, primary school, religion played a big part of identity, who you were. Get to secondary school, and that’s not really an issue anymore, but it affects which social group you fall into, and your clique of friends. Your group of friends, who you’re surrounded by, is definitely affected by your religion or your race, generally speaking. But I think, even when you’re in lessons, it’s easy to judge someone based on their religion, especially if the media is giving a certain view. I find, for me I find, the older the teacher is, the sterner they are in their views. They have a definitive view about a Muslim, or Christian or something. So maybe I don’t know, it’s like, they just need to have more awareness really, to say the least. But it’s like, they just need to be educated, which is ironic, as they’re teachers. Yes, but I’d say, just that really.

**Do you have any advice to me; how do you feel taking part in the research has been?**

MUHAB: I mean, it’s, personally I think it’s good that someone is researching this. And I’m glad it’s being, an issue’s being based and someone’s looking to resolve it. So I think the research you’re doing is really good – hence why I’m so open about my answers. But, umm, I’d say it’s going to be a hard four Years for you!

**You think so?**

MUHAB: Especially if you’re doing it by yourself. It’s difficult to get detailed and in-depth views of everyone, and like, collect all this information. It’s going to take some time. I mean, to the extent of the detail that you want, perhaps. I mean, your area is quite broad, that you’re
researching, researching in. I think that’s a good thing, but I think, maybe you need to look at the city’s actual statistics of Muslims, Christian, Judaism ratios. So, it’s just a case… cause obviously each city has a different set of circumstances.

**Do you think that it makes a difference that I’m not a Muslim when interviewing people?**

MUHAB: Well, when I was doing psychology, we were looking at, like, questionnaires and surveys and like ways of collecting information. And, umm, people, they, depending on the interviewer, their answers are, said in a certain way. So like, you give the impression that you’re a genuine person, trying to find a resolution for this. So me in my answers, I tried to give as much detail as I can, as much truth behind them as I can. But depending on interviewer, it affects the answer that the person gives. But I think it depends upon the person as well, their personal feelings about it. We can’t just look at one area.
Appendix 3: Christian participants (n=46)

By research site, then in alphabetical order according to pseudonym

**St Mary’s Roman Catholic Church (n=10)**
Ambrose, male, Year 11, Comprehensive School [two group interviews, one individual interview]
Ben, male, Year 9, Independent Boys’ School [Anglican] [one group, one individual interview]
Bob, male, Year 9, Independent Boys’ School [Anglican] [two group interviews, one individual interview]
Daniella, female, Year 10, Voluntary Aided Catholic Comprehensive School [one group interview]
Jodie, female, Year 9, Voluntary Aided Catholic Comprehensive School [two group interviews, one individual interview]
Gwenyth, female, Year 13, Voluntary Aided Catholic Comprehensive School [one group interview]
Joyce, female, Year 10, Independent Girls’ School [Anglican] [two group interviews]
Rosemary, female, Year 9, Comprehensive School [two group interviews, one individual interview]
Sally, female, Year 12, Comprehensive School [group interview]
Stacy, female, Year 10, Voluntary Aided Catholic Comprehensive School [two group interviews]

**Northstreet Baptist Church (n=11)**
Anita, female, Year 9, Community School [group interview]
Brian, male, Year 12, Further Education College [two group interviews, one individual interview]
Charlie, male, Year 8, Comprehensive School [group interview]
Craig, male, Year 9, Comprehensive School [group interview]
Gary, male, Year 7, Independent Boys’ School [Anglican] [two group interviews]
Helen, female, Year 7, Comprehensive School [two group interviews, one short individual interview]
Kevin, male, Year 10, Comprehensive School [group interview]
Lauren, female, Year 7, Independent Girls’ School [Anglican] [one group interview]
Martha, female, Year 8, Community School [two group interviews]
Nadia, female, Year 7, Comprehensive School [two group interviews, one short individual interview]
Toni, female, Year 7, Community School [one group interview, one short individual interview]

**St Luke’s Anglican Church (n=5)**
Anne, female, Year 10, Voluntary Controlled Anglican School [two group interviews]
Ellen, female, Year 12, Comprehensive Foundation School [Anglican] [two group interviews]
Meg, female, Year 10, Comprehensive School [two group interviews]
Sheila, female, Year 12, Voluntary Controlled Anglican School [two group interviews]
Tobias, male, Year 11, Voluntary Aided Catholic Comprehensive School [individual interview]
Southville Mormon Chapel (n=16)
Aidan, male, Year 9, Boys’ Community School [group interview]
Alannah, female, Year 9, Girls’ Comprehensive School [one group interview; one pair interview]
Andy, male, Year 7, Comprehensive School [group interview]
Anne, female, Year 8, Academy [group interview]
Catherine, female, Year 12, Comprehensive School [one group interview; one pair interview]
Chris, male, Year 7, Comprehensive School [group interview; one pair interview]
Ellie, female, Year 12, Comprehensive School [group interview]
Heather, female, Year 9, Girls’ Comprehensive School [pair interview]
Jackie, female, Year 12, Comprehensive School [one group interview; one pair interview]
Jacob, male, Year 7, Boys’ Community School [one group interview; one pair interview]
Jill, female, Year 12, Further Education College [group interview]
Jim, male, Year 12, Further Education College [one group interview; one pair interview]
Lyndall, female, Year 10, Girls’ Comprehensive School [one group interview; one pair interview]
Matthew, male, Year 9, Comprehensive School [one group interview; one pair interview]
Nathan, male, Year 7, Boys’ Community School [one group interview; one pair interview]
Phoebe, female, Year 12, Comprehensive School [one group interview; one pair interview]

Southville Quaker Meeting House (n=4)
Bryony, female, Year 13, Comprehensive School [group interview]
Jack, male, Year 11, Boys’ Independent School (Anglican) [group interview]
Mark, male, Year 10, Comprehensive School [group interview]
Sophia, female, Year 11, Comprehensive School [group interview]
Appendix 4: Jewish participants (n=38)

By research site, then in alphabetical order according to pseudonym

**Countrywide Jewish Youth Club (n=17)**
Abigail, female, Y9, Orthodox, strict Orthodox Jewish girl’s School [group interview, triple interview].
Aron, male, Year 10, Orthodox, Voluntary Aided School (Anglican) [one group interview].
David: male, Y11, Orthodox, mainstream Orthodox Jewish School [group interview].
Eliza, female, Year 12, Orthodox, Comprehensive School [individual interview].
Esther: female, Y11, Orthodox, mainstream Orthodox Jewish School [group interview, triple interview].
Hannah, female, Y11, Orthodox, mainstream Orthodox Jewish School [group interview, triple interview].
Isobel, female, Y11, Masorti, mainstream Orthodox Jewish School [group interview, triple interview].
Jacob male, Year 10, Orthodox, Foundation School [one group, one pair interview].
Jacob, male, Y9, Orthodox, mainstream Orthodox Jewish School [group interview].
Joel, male, Year 9, Orthodox, Independent Boys’ School [group interview].
Josephina, female, Year 12, Liberal, Sixth-form College [one group, one individual interview].
Reuben, male, Year 12, Orthodox, Community School [one triple interview].
Sara, female, Year 9, Jewish, no denomination; Comprehensive School [one group, one triple interview].
Sara, female, Y9, Orthodox, strict Orthodox Jewish Girls’ School [group interview, triple interview].
Simon, male, Year 11, Orthodox, Comprehensive School [one triple interview].
Tal, female, Year 10, Orthodox, Independent Girls’ School [group interview].
Zvi, male, Year 8, Orthodox, Community School [one group, one pair interview].

**Eastville Reform Synagogue (n=15)**
*Year 8 girls and boys preparing for bar mitzvah and bat mitzvah (n=10)*
Claire, female, Independent Girls’ School [one group, one triple interview].
Elizabeth, female, Independent School (Anglican) [one group, one triple interview].
Isobel, female, Independent Girls’ School [one group interview].
Jack, male, Independent School [one group, one pair interview].
Jasper, male, Independent Boys’ School [group interview].
Joseph, male, Independent Boys’ School [one group, one pair interview].
Lisa, female, Independent School (Anglican) [one group interview].
Ruth, female, Independent School [one group; one triple interview].
Rosanna, female, Independent Girls’ School [pair interview].
Seth, male, Independent Boys’ School (Anglican) [one group, one pair interview].

*Other participants at the same site (n=5)*
Abigail, female, Year 10, Independent Girls’ School [triple interview].
Alexander, male, Year 10, Independent Boys’ School [triple interview].
David, male, Year 12, Independent School (Anglican) [pair interview].
Jethro, male, Year 10, Independent Boys’ School [triple interview].
Judith, female, Year 11, Independent School [pair interview].
Eastville Liberal Synagogue (n=6)
Deborah, female, Year 11, Community School [group interview]
Dan, male, Y11, Liberal, mainstream Orthodox Jewish School [group interview]
Heather, female, Y12, Liberal, mainstream Orthodox Jewish School [group interview]
Matthew, male, Y11, Liberal, mainstream Orthodox Jewish School [group interview]
Saphire, female, Year 10, Community School [group interview]
Tal, female, Year 11, Girls’ Community School [group interview]
Appendix 5: Muslim participants (n=15)

By research site, then in alphabetical order according to pseudonym

**Westville Sunni Masjid (n=4)**
Ahmed, male, 10, Foundation School [two group interviews, one individual interview]
Akram, male, 13, Community School [two group interviews]
Murad, male, 8, Community School [two group interviews]
Yasser, male, 8, Community School [two group interviews]

**Westville Muslim Women’s Community Centre (n=7)**
Amir, male, 11, Foundation School [three group interviews]
Faiz, male, 11, Comprehensive Boys’ School [three group interviews]
Fatima, female, 11, Comprehensive Girls’ School [two triple interviews, one pair]
Jamal, male, 12, Further Education College [three group interviews]
Khadija, female, 12, Comprehensive Girls’ School [two triple interviews]
Mushtaq, male, 7, Community School [three group interviews]
Yasmeen, female, 10, Comprehensive Girls’ School [two triple interviews, one pair]

**Southville Ahmadiyya Mission House (n=4)**
Aadil, male, Year 9, Comprehensive School [one group, one pair interview]
Faisal, male, Year 12, Comprehensive School [group interview]
Muhab, male, Year 13, Comprehensive School [one group, one individual interview]
Taj, male, Year 13, Academy [one group, one pair interview]
Appendix 6: Information and consent materials

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

15 Norham Gardens, Oxford OX2 6PY
Tel: +44(0)1865 274024 Fax: +44(0)1865 274027
general.enquiries@education.ox.ac.uk www.education.ox.ac.uk

Director Professor Anne Edwards

Respondent Consent Form

Young people’s experience of secondary school research project

I have been given information about the purpose of this study and I have had the opportunity to ask questions.

I understand how the information will be kept, who will have access to it, and what will happen to it at the end of the study.

I agree to take part and I understand that I can withdraw from the research later if I wish.

Name: ____________________________

Date: ____________________________

Signature: ________________________

Dan Moulin, Graduate Student, University of Oxford, Department of Education, 15 Norham Gardens, Oxford OX2 6PY Tel. 01865 274040 daniel.moulin@education.ox.ac.uk
Young people’s experience of secondary school research project

I am interested in your views and experiences at school, and I hope to ask you some questions about them. I am conducting the research at your place of worship/youth group because my study is focused on the views of young people from religious backgrounds. This research is not an assessment of your knowledge or ability, or an evaluation of your school or teachers. It is independent from your place of worship and your school.

The research will take the form of group and individual interviews where you will be asked some questions about school and how you feel about it. These conversations will be audio recorded and I will write down your views. I will then write a report about what I have learnt from everyone, but your answers will be kept anonymous and no one will know your names or who said what (this research follows the University’s code of conduct for ethical research).

It is hoped that your answers will provide useful information regarding your experience of school, and I very much hope that you can take part.

If you agree to take part in this research, please ask your parents to sign the attached form, and sign the other form yourself.

If you have any questions regarding this research, then please do not hesitate to ask me.

Dan Moulin

Dan Moulin, Graduate Research Student, University of Oxford, Department of Education, 15 Norham Gardens, Oxford OX2 6PY. Tel. 01865 274040 daniel.moulin@education.ox.ac.uk
Parent Consent Form

Young people’s experience of secondary school research project

I have been given information about the purpose of this study and I have the contact details of the researcher, if I have any questions.

I understand how the information will be kept, who will have access to it, and what will happen to it at the end of the study.

I understand that I can withdraw my child from the research at any time.

I give permission for my child to take part in the study.

Name: (parent) ______________________
Name: (child) ________________________
Date: _____________________________
Signature: _________________________

Dan Moulin, BA PGCE MEd MSc, Graduate Research Student, University of Oxford, Department of Education, 15 Norham Gardens, Oxford OX2 6PY. Tel. 01865 274040
daniel.moulin@education.ox.ac.uk
Dear Parent,

Young people’s experience of secondary school research project

I am conducting research into young people’s views and experiences of secondary school. The research is being conducted at your child’s place of worship/youth group because the study is focused on students from religious backgrounds. This research is not an assessment of your child’s knowledge or ability, or an evaluation of your child’s school or teachers. It is independent from your child’s place of worship and school.

The research will take the form of group and individual interviews where your child will be asked some questions about school, and how they feel about it. These conversations will be audio recorded. The answers will be kept anonymous and will form the basis of a DPhil thesis and academic papers. This research follows the University’s code of conduct for ethical research and all information will be kept in a locked office under the terms of the data protection act. The audio recordings will be destroyed on completion of the research.

It is hoped that this research will provide useful information regarding the experience of young people in secondary schools and I very much hope that your child can take part.

If you agree for your child to take part in this research, please sign both of the attached forms, keeping one for your own reference. If you have any questions regarding this research, then please do not hesitate to contact me.

With best wishes,

Dan Moulin

Dan Moulin, BA PGCE MEd MSc, Graduate Research Student, University of Oxford, Department of Education, 15 Norham Gardens, Oxford OX2 6PY. Tel. 01865 274040 daniel.moulin@education.ox.ac.uk
# Appendix 7: Type and duration of interviews at all sites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duration of interview in minutes</th>
<th>Number of participants in interview</th>
<th>Group (4-7)</th>
<th>Triple</th>
<th>Pair</th>
<th>Single</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>62</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66 (9 participants)</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total interviews (54)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 8: Number of interviews conducted with the same participants by type of interview and religious tradition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of interviews with/including the same participant</th>
<th>Christians</th>
<th>Jews</th>
<th>Muslims</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Just once</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>44</td>
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<tr>
<td>Just twice</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three times</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Redacted lines obscure real names taken from draft non-anonymised transcripts and documents.
### Appendix 10: Participants by religion and kinds of school attended

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Religiously unaffiliated schools (academy, comprehensive, community, independent, further education college)</th>
<th>Catholic voluntary aided school</th>
<th>Anglican affiliated schools (voluntary aided/controlled, independent, foundation)</th>
<th>Jewish schools (voluntary aided strict Orthodox, mainstream Orthodox)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Catholic Christians</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Catholic Christians</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orthodox Jews</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Orthodox Jews</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslims</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 11: Themes in the reported experiences of Christian participants

St Mary’s Roman Catholic Church (10 participants)
- Peer group indifferent towards/lack understanding of Catholicism
- Catholic beliefs/doctrine challenged/criticised by peers
- Friends curious/ask questions
- Easier for Muslims than Christians in peer groups
- Anti-Catholic attitude/incidents
- Inaccurate/stereotyped representation of Catholicism in curriculum
- School structure does not support/undermines faith
- Support from Catholic staff (particularly in Catholic schools)
- Name calling/bullying for being Catholic
- Arguing for Catholic doctrine
- Not wanting to be open/argue for Catholic values and norms

Northstreet Baptist Church (11 participants)
- Peer group indifferent towards/lack understanding of Christianity
- Christian beliefs/doctrine challenged/criticised by peers
- Easier for Muslims than Christians in peer groups
- Christian beliefs/doctrine challenged by teachers/curriculum
- Name calling/bullying for being Christian
- Peer group indifferent towards/lack understanding of Christianity
- Peer group swear/drink/smoke or do not adhere to Christian morals
- Christian beliefs/doctrine challenged/criticised by peers
- School structure does not support/undermines faith
- Not wanting to be open about being Christian
- Debating Christianity

St Luke’s Anglican Church (5 participants)
- Christian beliefs/doctrine challenged by teachers/curriculum
- Christian beliefs/doctrine challenged/criticised by peers
- Peer group swear/drink/smoke or do not adhere to Christian morals
- Name calling/bullying for being Christian
- Peer group indifferent towards/lack understanding of Christianity
- Peer group swear/drink/smoke or do not adhere to Christian morals
- Christian beliefs/doctrine challenged/criticised by peers
- School structure does not support/undermines faith
- Not wanting to be open about Christian identity
- Arguing for Christianity

Southville Mormon Chapel (16 participants)
- Mormonism unrepresented in the curriculum
- Peer group swear/drink/smoke or do not adhere to Christian morals
- Easier for Muslims than Christians in peer groups
- Peers curious about Mormonism
- Mormon beliefs/doctrine challenged/criticised by peers
• Not declaring Mormon identity
• Being open about being Mormon

Southville Quaker Meeting House (4 participants)
• Quakerism unrepresented or misrepresented in the curriculum
• Quaker teacher explained Quakerism well
• Beliefs, such as pacifism, undermined/critiqued in classroom
Appendix 12: Themes in the reported experiences of Jewish participants

Participants who attended non-Jewish schools

Countrywide Jewish youth club (10 participants), Eastville Reform Synagogue (15 participants), and Eastville Liberal Synagogue (3 participants)

- Jewish holidays clash with school
- Lack of kosher food
- Uncomfortable in Christian collective worship
- Uncomfortable in holocaust lessons
- Christian bias in teaching
- Representation of Judaism in Religious Education inaccurate/only Orthodox
- Feeling isolated/different as the only Jew in the school
- Peers ask questions about Judaism
- Debates between atheists and those of other religions out of lessons
- Debate/criticism about Israel/Palestine
- ‘Jew’ used as an insult/anti-Semitism
- Peers reference Jews in popular culture/media
- Favourable attitude/experience of religious diversity at school
- Explaining Jewish practices and norms to others
- Not wanting to be open about being Jewish
- Being a Jew was unique

Participants who attended Jewish schools

Countrywide Jewish youth club (7 participants), Eastville Liberal Synagogue (3 participants)

- Prayer and Jewish Studies lessons were important aspects of school
- Prayer in strict Orthodox schools was enforced
- Teaching in schools did not represent Reform and Liberal perspectives
- Attending Jewish schools could strengthen Jewish identity
- Peers have a range of religious observance
- Liberal Judaism is not understood by peers
- Jewish schools can limit understanding/contact of other religions/ethnicities
- Homophobia among peers
- Masking denominational identity
- Clashes with teachers over denominational differences
Appendix 13: Themes in the reported experiences of Muslim participants

Westville Sunni Masjid (4 participants), Westville Muslim Women’s Community Centre (7 participants), Southville Ahmadiyya Mission House (4 participants)

- Schools can prevent religious practices
- Teachers can be prejudiced/ignorant/biased
- Religious Education simplifies, misrepresents Islam/excludes Ahmadiyya Islam
- Schools reinforced ‘Western’ political values
- Finger printing system in the canteen could be a form of surveillance
- Racial/religious prejudice among white/Christian school peer-group
- Violence between different ethnic and racial groups
- Political issues discussed among peers
- Easier to make friends with Asians or Muslims/friendships formed on religious/ethnic lines
- Muslim peers not necessarily religiously observant, but politicized
- Biased media presentation of Islam affecting white/Christian peers’ perceptions
- Religion a topic of discussion and debate among peers
- Peers ask questions about Ahmadiyya Islam specifically
- Reluctance to tell Muslim friends about being Ahmadi/Ahmadi are looked down upon by other Muslims
- Prayer is beneficial
- Muslim/Asian teachers more understanding
- Being assertive religious beliefs and views
- Enjoy or value learning about other religions
References


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Fancourt, N. (2012) *Teaching about Christianity in Religious Education: a Review of Research* [Online] Available at https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&q=cache:lT1xsrE1aKIJ:www.aulre.org.uk/downloads/Fancourt_Christianity_Research.pdf+Teaching+about+Christianity+in+religious+education&hl=en&gl=uk&pid=bl&srcid=ADGEESgBK7pFC8oVntJRdpBktXKHnYDFcQyeskkEmiGP42KT0hAlyPcHA0uPuTmnGXfj5L0litRrUSwWIm0bV6_ISL1srsoYScntXdjiti04K-srE3m3VMRkeskShQ5plDPkAOrImNk6K&sig=AHIEtbTC7WOS7f62C7TDtzEpXPO4WIPoFQ [Accessed 25th January 2013]


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