

Design a campaign, conference or an organisation with a view towards enacting social change in line with the theoretical and activist concerns of Feminist Dissent.

IL033/IL133: Feminist Dissent: Theory, Practice and Resistance

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Campaign for social change

Introduction

For my campaign enacting social change in line with the concerns of Feminist Dissent, I chose to design an app for school children to teach them about Relationships and Sex Education (RSE).

The app is named RED, which stands for Relationships Education. This name is



deliberately discrete- it is not overtly obvious what the app is about in case some children need to hide it from their parents who disapprove of RSE. This is also why the logo of the app too is subtle and could appear as a mental health app rather

than one teaching RSE.

When users first download and open RED, this screen is displayed. Users can personalise the app using their name and age and must select whether they are in Primary or Secondary School as this determines which version of the app they can access. This is important because the RSE national curriculum demands that Primary school children are only taught relationships education whereas Secondary school children are able to be taught relationships AND sex education.

I have deliberately colour co-ordinated the app, so that the Primary school version is orange and the Secondary school

version is purple. This is to make it easier for parents, teachers and carers to spot



which version of the app their child is accessing and ensure that it is age appropriate.

Primary School Version

When the Primary school version is selected, children will be asked to choose what they want to learn about from the topics of friendships, families, relationships, online safety and staying safe. These topics fully incorporate all aspects of the RSE curriculum for Primary school pupils.



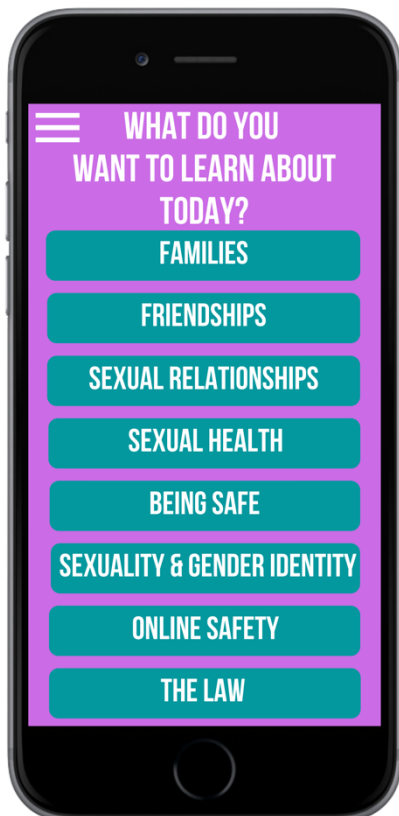
Once a topic is selected, for example 'families', children will then be able to access the lessons within the topic. The app charts their progress which enables children to see which lessons they have yet to complete. They will not be able to move from the Primary to the Secondary school version of the app without completing all of the lessons. This ensures that the children have learnt all of the compulsory content for their age before moving onto more mature subjects. Each lesson can be read by children at their own pace or listened to using the audio feature. Illustrations are used to break up the text and keywords are displayed

in bold so that they can be clicked on for their meaning. All lessons have been based on curriculum content.

The Primary school version also features 'My Learning'. Here children should select their school so that their teachers can post assignments, discussion topics or activities for them to complete. This therefore links the learning on the app to RSE lessons in school which not only reinforces the lessons learned in the classroom but also enables children to take more independence in their education. It also means that parents can see what their children are learning about and supplement their learning if they choose to.

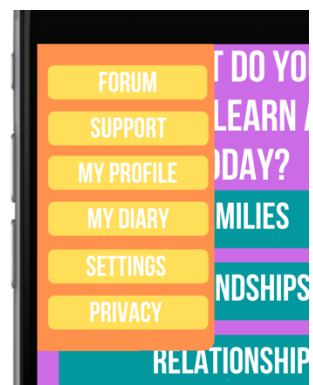


Secondary School Version



The Secondary school version of the app follows on from the Primary school version. However, it incorporates both relationship and sex education.

The topics covered are families, friendships, sexual relationships, sexual health, being safe, sexuality and gender identity, online safety and the law- all of which are found in the RSE national curriculum. This version of the app also includes a



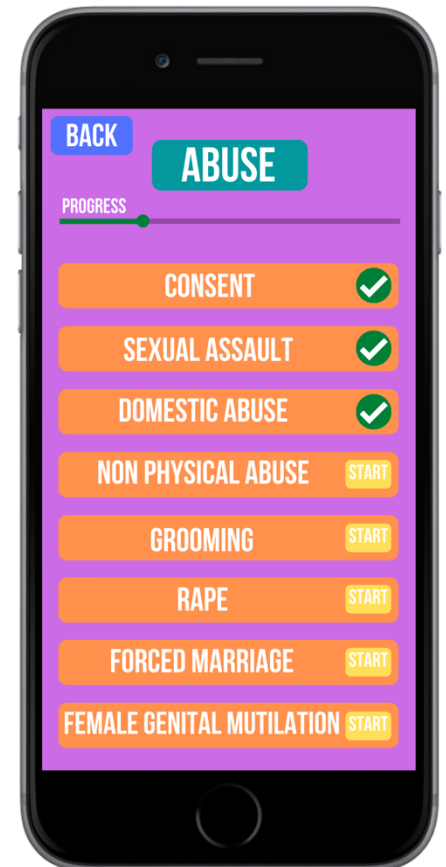
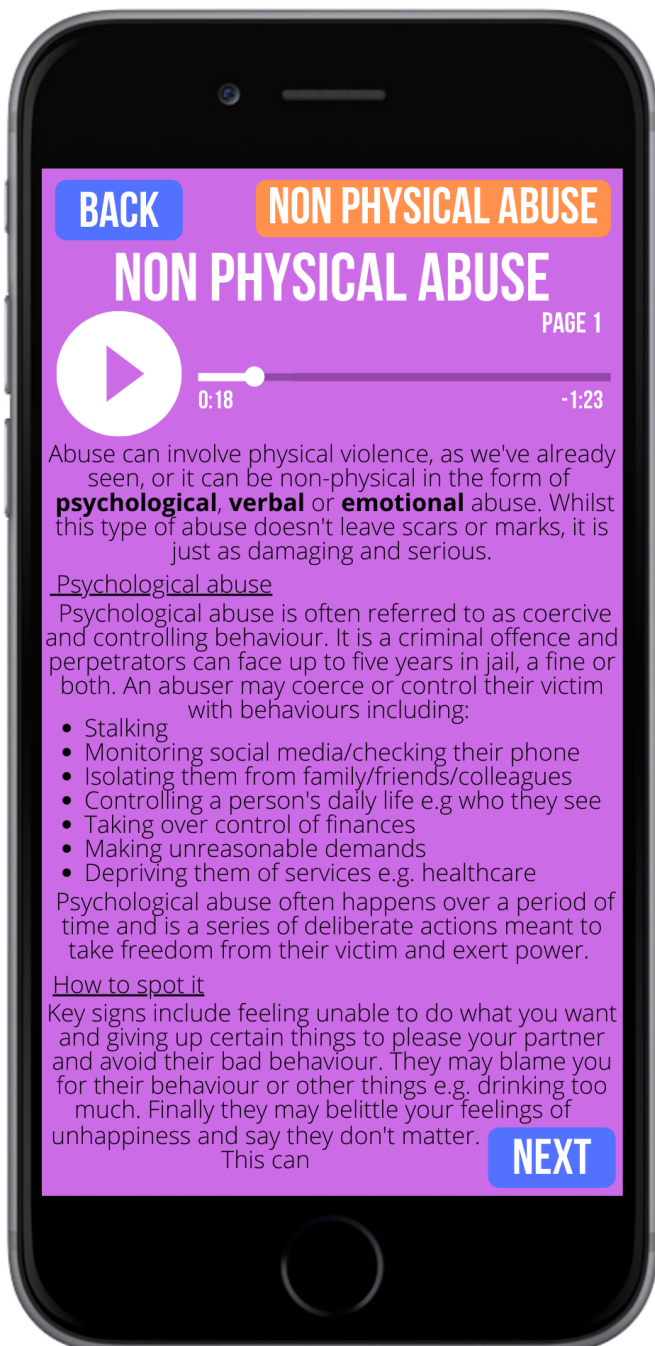
discussion forum, a support page with helplines and services, a profile page and a diary for making notes and saving lessons.

As this is a continuation of the Primary school version of the app, each topic is still split into lessons. For example, the topic of 'abuse' includes lessons on consent, rape and female

genital mutilation (FGM). However as it is aimed at an older demographic, there are a greater number of lessons within

each topic. The topics covered are deemed age appropriate by the RSE national curriculum and are handled with sensitivity.

Lessons still have audio clips, making the app fully accessible to all students, no matter their reading ability. There is also a greater focus on practical advice within the lessons, such as showing students how to spot signs of certain issues (such as non-physical abuse) and how they can help themselves and others (with all of the



support resources listed in the support section of the app).

The Secondary School version of the app does not contain the same 'My Learning'

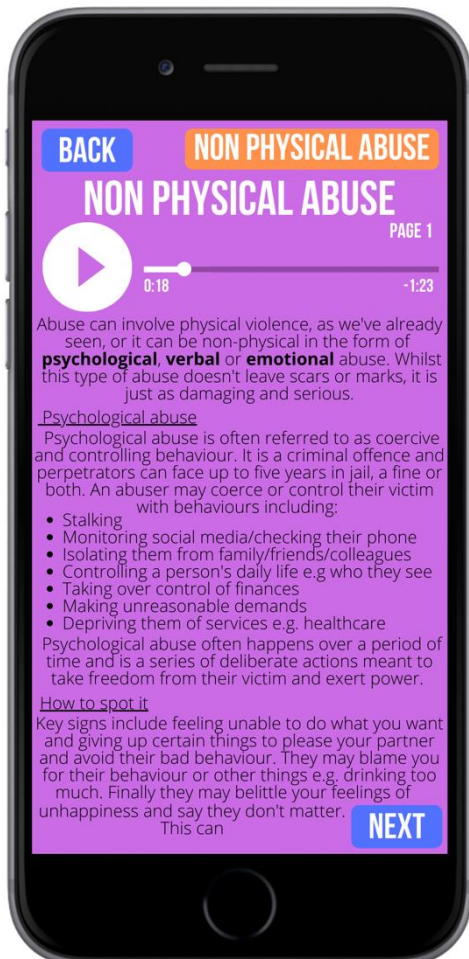
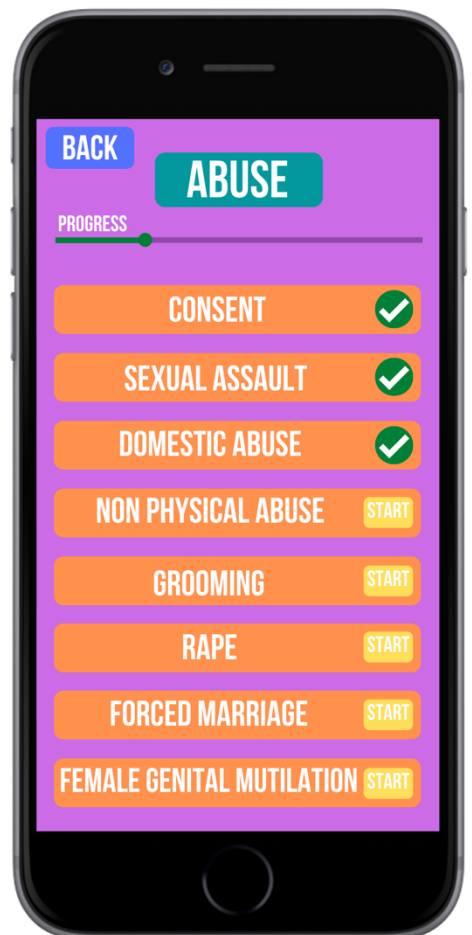
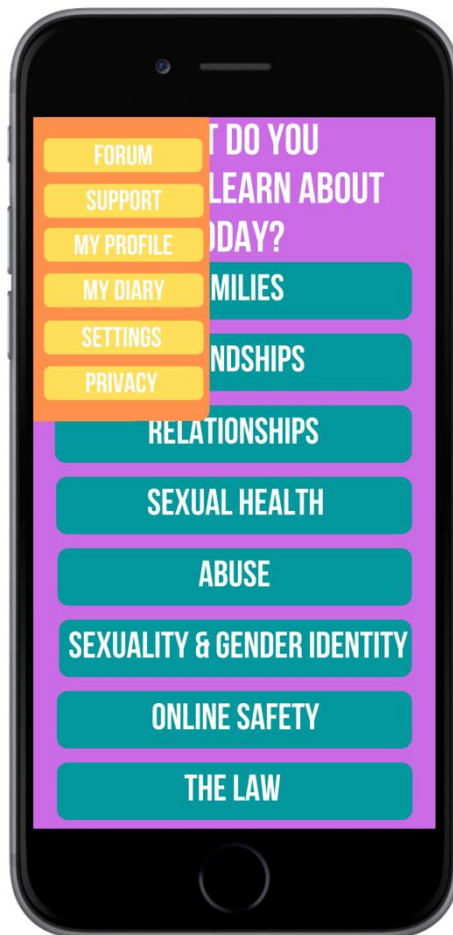


feature. Instead, it has been replaced by the Forum. This is a safe space for students to ask each other questions and share their own personal views and experiences, which is arguably more important for older students than being set tasks by teachers. All comments are made anonymously to enable students to truthfully express themselves.

Inappropriate language, abuse or general disrespect towards the views of others will not be tolerated on the Forum and will result in being temporarily or even permanently banned from using the Forum.

All app designs were created as graphics on the website Canva.








Critical reflection

The RED app was created to tackle the issue of religious fundamentalists campaigning against RSE being taught in schools, a concern of Feminist Dissent. In September 2020, the new Relationships and Sex Education curriculum came into effect in Great Britain. It was introduced as an attempt to teach children and young people to be 'safe and healthy, and manage their academic, personal and social lives in a positive way.'¹ However the introduction of compulsory RSE faced a backlash from religious fundamentalists who argued that the state had no right to teach children about RSE as its curriculum undermined religious traditions and family values. Furthermore they claimed that moral values were being usurped by state-imposed secularism and liberalism.

Protests against RSE are usually highly vocal and often aggressive. One prominent example was the Anderton Park School protests in Birmingham in 2019. Local religious leaders and parents at the majority-Muslim school protested outside of the gates of the school for eight weeks. They were outraged by the LGBT content of the curriculum, which consisted of children having access to storybooks that showed families with same-sex parents. Headteacher Sarah Hewitt-Clarkson received threatening messages from the protesters, and LGBT- inclusivity campaigners were egged when trying to show their support for the teaching by tying rainbow ribbons to

¹ 'Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education: Statutory guidance for governing bodies, proprietors, head teachers, principals, senior leadership teams, teachers', *Department for Education*, 2019.
<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/908013/Relationships_Education__Relationships_and_Sex_Education__RSE__and_Health_Education_.pdf> (accessed 10th December 2020).



the school gates. Half of the pupils in the school were taken out of the lessons amongst fears that teachers were ‘terrorising children and upsetting them’.²


A central ideologist behind the anti-RSE movement is the British Muslim convert Kate Godfrey Fausset. She attempts to synthesise right wing political views with the expression of supposedly ‘Islamic’ values. At the Islamic Unity Conference in London in 2018, she argued that RSE is a ‘totalitarian endeavour to indoctrinate our children into secular ideologies regarding relationships’ and that ‘at its core, RSE is an assault on the family and everything that a Muslim holds dear.’³ Parallels can be drawn between her language, and the rhetoric used by American Christian evangelicals and other right-wing anti-state conspiracy theorists, such as her claims that RSE is a ‘social engineering programme to corrupt children’ that originates from the sexual revolution of the 1960s.⁴

Anti-RSE protests are highly problematic because they silence the diversity of voices within faiths such as Islam and allow the fundamentalists to occupy the space of being the authentic representation of communities. This enables them to promote their ultra-conservative agenda which often has the adverse effect of furthering female subordination. It also encourages public debate to pit religious values against British liberal values, creating a misconceived binary that perceives the two to be incompatible.

² Donna Ferguson, ‘We can’t give in’: the Birmingham school on the frontline of anti-LGBT protests’, *The Guardian*, 26th May 2019, < <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/may/26/birmingham-anderton-park-primary-muslim-protests-lgbt-teaching-rights>> (accessed 10th December 2020).

³ AIM Islam, *Kate Godfrey: Islamic Unity Conference 2018*, online video recording, YouTube, 25th November 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r_eKRLfNIPc> (accessed 10th December 2020).


⁴ Ibid.



However, what is more crucial is that anti-RSE protests have a profound impact on children who are prevented from having access to vital education and resources that they will need later in life. The main purpose of RSE is not to promote homosexuality or sexual promiscuity, as fundamentalists claim, but it is to teach children how to form healthy and safe relationships with each other by showing qualities such as kindness, tolerance and trustworthiness. It then teaches older students how to form intimate relationships that display these qualities, as well as giving them practical advice that will help them to keep safe.

This is why I chose to create the RED app. It gives children the chance to learn about RSE in a safe environment free from fundamentalist protests and it provides age-appropriate content based on the stage of education that a child is in. Children must complete all of the topics and lessons in the Primary school version of the app before moving onto the Secondary school version, meaning that they will build a strong foundation before learning about more sensitive topics. RED covers the full RSE curriculum so once the app has been completed, students will be full equipped with the knowledge needed to be respectful members of a kinder and more tolerant society.


The app itself is clear and easy to use, with bright colours to make it attractive and progress bars that allow children to track their own progress. Using an app rather than a textbook makes learning more enjoyable and encourages students to actively engage with the content. Apps can also be more easily and affordably updated than books so any changes to the RSE curriculum can swiftly be incorporated, and apps are more accessible to those who have difficulty reading or are unable to see,



because they can use the audio feature. For Secondary school pupils, the app enables them to be more independent and learn from discussion with others using the forum feature. It focuses on practical advice and can easily be used during an emergency as all relevant helplines and services are listed in the support section.

RED is not only for use in the classroom, but it can also be downloaded by children at home on their own devices so that they can supplement their school RSE lessons using the 'My Learning' feature. Having the app at home enables parents to see what their children are actually learning about which helps to remove the stigma around RSE that can originate from a place of ignorance surrounding the content. If parents do not approve of RSE, the app can still be downloaded by children without parental consent and hidden from them, because the logo was deliberately designed to look discreet. Whilst this is not encouraged, it is essential that all children have access to RSE. Moreover, if children are home-schooled it means that they are not missing out on RSE as the whole curriculum is taught through the app.

As well as directly addressing the issue of religious fundamentalism, RED fully speaks to the other key issues of Feminist Dissent such as secularism, which is the belief in the separation of the state from religion and religious institutions. The app provides a safe and secular environment for RSE and teaches children from a young age that everyone in society is equal, regardless of their belief or faith. Furthermore, by teaching children from a young age about key values of kindness, integrity and respect, it creates a more secular society that reduces female subjugation and creates a safer space for the private practice of religion. The app takes a universal



approach and encourages children to respect the fundamental human rights that we all possess, simply by virtue of being human.

Therefore overall, RED will make a huge contribution to society and will enact social change. This is because by teaching children how to respect others and create healthy relationships, the wider community will be a safer and more tolerant place to live. The protests of religious fundamentalists will fall on deaf ears because children and parents can get involved with RSE and see how its content is crucial for children and young people. The app could then be rolled out in different countries such as Nigeria and India which would help to address the prevalent religious fundamentalism in these areas. Thus it can be concluded that the RED app will enact social change and is fully in line with the theoretical and activist concerns of Feminist Dissent.