

‘It is not all about sex’:

Young people’s views about sexuality and relationships education

Bruce Johnson, Lyn Harrison, Deb Ollis, Jane Flentje, Peter Arnold, & Clare Bartholomaeus



Engaging
Young People in
Sexuality Education
Research Project





Australian Government
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Executive Summary

The *Engaging Young People in Sexuality Education (EYPSE)* research project addresses two questions:

1. What are young people's views on school-based sexuality and relationships education?
2. In what ways could sexuality and relationships education be improved?

This report focuses on findings from the first stage of the research project, consisting of an online survey of over 2,000 students in 31 secondary schools in South Australia and Victoria. The research was conducted in government secondary schools in South Australia (14) and Victoria (17). A detailed online survey was constructed and administered to students aged 13 to 16+ years old. The survey used similar terminology and language to that used in sexuality and relationships education classes.

A total of 2,325 students undertook the survey. Demographic information about the students includes:

- Age – 13 years (18%), 14 years (40%), 15 years (32%), 16+ years (10%)
- Location – Victoria (63%), South Australia (37%)
- Gender – Female (49%), Male (50%), 'Other' (1%)
- Sexual attraction – opposite sex (83.5%), same sex (1.4%), both sexes (5.5%), unsure (5.2%), preferred not to disclose (4.3%)
- Socio-economic status of the school – low (25.8%), middle (41.9%), high (25.8%), not ranked (6.5%)

Summary of findings

School-based sexuality and relationships education programs were a significantly used and trusted source of information for the majority of students in this study. However, students offered a number of suggestions to improve sexuality and relationships education. They wanted less repetition of the biological aspects of human sexuality, and more explicit and accurate information about gender diversity, violence in relationships, intimacy, sexual pleasure and love. While a number of students (particularly girls) felt uncomfortable or embarrassed during sexuality and relationships education lessons, many still viewed the lessons to be important and relevant to their present and future lives. The findings of this study clearly show that students want to have some input into what and how they learn in sexuality and relationships education. They highlight the importance of continuing to engage with students about these issues.

Most used and trusted sources of information on sexuality and relationships

- School programs were cited by 77% of girls and 74% of boys as the most used source of information about sexuality and relationships.
- The second most used source of information overall was 'friends' (girls: 64%; boys 60%).

- When asked about the sources of information they trusted most, 'school programs' was first for boys (68%) and second for girls (64%) while 'Mum' was rated as the most trustworthy source by girls (67%) and second most trustworthy by boys (49%).
- While pornography was not a highly used or trusted source of information, it was trusted by more boys (16%) than girls (3%).

Discussing sexuality and relationships issues

- Both girls (72%) and boys (58%) reported feeling 'comfortable' talking about sexuality issues with friends of the same gender.
- Girls (63%) were more likely to report feeling 'comfortable' talking to their mothers about sexuality issues than were boys (42%).
- Boys (41%) were equally comfortable talking to their mothers and fathers about sexuality issues while fewer girls (22%) were comfortable talking to their fathers.
- Victorian students were far more uncomfortable discussing sexuality issues with a range of people compared with South Australian students.

What is taught in sexuality and relationships education

- The most taught topics were 'respect in relationships', 'the physical, emotional and social changes during puberty', and the idea that 'our bodies are our own'.
- Three quarters of boys (77%) and girls (77%) named 'respect in relationships' as the most taught topic.
- Girls (75%) reported learning more about the female reproductive system than boys (68%), whereas boys (74%) reported learning more about the male reproductive system than girls (63%).
- More boys (66%) than girls (60%) reported being taught about 'sexual intercourse'.
- Few other gender differences were reported in the top ten 'most taught' topics.
- More students in South Australia (81%) reported being taught about 'respect in relationships' than students in Victoria (75%).
- Other state-based differences included topics about 'power in relationships' (SA: 72%; Victoria: 63%), 'choices about sex' (SA: 75%; Victoria: 68%), and 'sexually transmitted infections' (SA: 74%; Victoria: 67%).

Teaching and learning activities

- Discussion-based learning activities were used most frequently in sexuality and relationships lessons.
- More girls (49%) recalled participating in 'discussions' than boys (40%).
- Few other gender differences were reported for the top ten learning activities.

- Significant differences in the frequency of use of learning activities existed between South Australian and Victorian students for 'discussions' (SA: 62%; Victoria: 34%), 'watching DVDs' (SA: 33%; Victoria: 16%), 'responding to scenarios' (SA: 26%; Victoria: 12%), 'small group work' (SA: 30%; Victoria: 17%), and 'brainstorming' (SA: 22%; Victoria: 15%).

Feelings during sexuality and relationships education

- More Victorian students (51%) than South Australian students (40%) felt 'uncomfortable, embarrassed, or annoyed' during sexuality and relationship education lessons.
- More girls (55%) than boys (38%) felt 'uncomfortable, embarrassed, or annoyed' during sexuality and relationship education lessons.
- Generally, girls felt more uncomfortable than boys when 'talking about masturbation' (girls: 56%; boys: 43%), 'talking about sexual practices' (girls: 48%; boys: 35%), and 'talking about pornography' (girls: 45%; boys: 31%).
- A higher percentage of girls (26%) than boys (12%) reported that they felt embarrassed when 'learning in mixed-sex classes'. Girls were also more embarrassed by 'other students' behaviour' than boys (girls: 25%; boys: 19%).

The 'best teachers' of sexuality and relationships education

- Overall, students reported that the 'best teachers' of sexuality and relationships education were 'respectful', 'have a sense of humour', and 'relate well to students'.
- However, when divided by gender, two of the top three responses were different. Girls rated 'respectful' (55%), 'approachable' (53%), and 'having a sense of humour' (52%) as the most important characteristics of the 'best teachers'. Boys rated 'having a sense of humour' (52%), 'experienced' (47%), 'respectful' (45%), and 'relate well to students' (44%) as most important.

What should be taught in greater depth

- Overall, the two topics students most wanted greater depth on were 'Gender diversity' and 'Violent relationships'.
- 'Love' and 'starting a relationship' were also identified by both boys and girls as topics that should be taught in greater depth.
- More girls than boys wanted further information about 'gender diversity' (girls: 52%; boys: 41%), 'violent relationships' (girls: 54%; boys: 38%), 'staying safe online' (girls: 44%; boys: 41%), and 'ending a relationship' (girls: 44%; boys: 38%).
- More boys than girls wanted further information about 'how to have sex' (boys: 38%; girls: 25%), 'sexual pleasure' (boys: 38%; girls: 19%), 'masturbation' (boys: 37%; girls: 17%), 'different sexual acts' (boys: 32%; girls: 19%), and 'pornography' (boys: 32%; girls: 14%).
- Students' reasons for wanting more information frequently centred on their need to be knowledgeable about sexuality issues when they become involved in relationships.

Ideas to improve sexuality and relationships education

- Around a quarter of students strongly agreed that 'having more say about content', 'having more say about teaching methods', and 'having fewer secrets about sexuality' would improve sexuality and relationships education.
- More boys than girls strongly agreed that 'more visual materials' (boys: 27%; girls: 21%), more information about 'the impact of alcohol' on sexual decision making (boys: 26%; girls: 21%), 'better teachers' (boys: 26%; girls: 22%), and the greater use of 'peer mentoring' (boys: 22%; girls: 17%) would improve sexuality and relationships education.
- While the responses of students from South Australia and Victoria were very similar, more Victorian students than South Australian students identified the need for 'better teachers' (Victoria: 26% strongly agreed; SA: 19%) and 'more teacher training' (Victoria: 24% strongly agreed; SA: 20%).

Introduction

I enjoyed learning about rights and responsibility most because it is not all about sex; it's about love and equality. (14 year old boy)

It is a very exciting time in the history of sexuality and relationships education in Australia. Australia has a national curriculum that endorses sexuality and relationships education through a positive strengths-based approach, drawing on the World Health Organisation's definition of sexuality:

[Sexuality is] a central aspect of being human throughout life and encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction. Sexuality is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours, practices, roles and relationships. While sexuality can include all of these dimensions, not all of them are always experienced or expressed. Sexuality is influenced by the interaction of biological, psychological, social, economic, political, cultural, legal, historical, religious and spiritual factors.

(World Health Organisation, 2014, p. 1)

The Australian national curriculum acknowledges the need to include issues such as gender and sexual diversity, love, intimacy, sexual desire, and pleasure, as well as including knowledge and understandings about the physiological, social, and sexual health issues which are important to making informed choices about sex and relationships. This signals a huge shift in how sexuality and relationships education has been positioned and taught in schools in the past.

This shift recognises the complexity of modern life for young people. In the context of a highly sexualised, instant online world characterised by a growing debate about the role of pornography in sexuality education and an awareness of gender inequality and violence, racism, homophobia, and transphobia, young people must negotiate their relationships and sexual experiences in communities where discomfort and fear of sex and sexuality still persists. Never before has it been so important to find out from young people how they experience sexuality and relationships education in schools.

The study

The *Engaging Young People in Sexuality and Relationships Education (EYPSE)* research project aims to enhance the sexual health of young people in Australia by improving sexuality and relationships education in secondary schools. Young people are rarely involved in discussions about sexuality and relationships education. Adults typically decide what content is covered and how it is taught, meaning that young people's concerns may not be addressed (Thomas and Aggleton, 2016). Furthermore, the effectiveness of sexuality and relationships education is usually measured by adults rather than by young people (Allen, 2005). Using a variety of research approaches, the *EYPSE* research project aims to give young people the opportunity to both provide feedback on the sexuality and relationships education they have experienced and explore what they would like to learn in sexuality and relationships education, and how they would like to learn it. These insights will have the potential to

inform the redesign of school-based sexuality and relationships education programs that promote the sexual health and wellbeing of young Australians.

The *EYPSE* research project builds on earlier research commissioned by Sexual Health information networking and education SA (SHine SA), the peak sexual health agency in South Australia and developer of the South Australian Relationships and Sexual Health Curriculum (Johnson, 2012). That research found that there is 'a fascinating mismatch between what they [teachers] liked to teach and what they thought their students preferred to learn' in school-based sexuality and relationships education (Johnson, 2012, p. 45).

The *EYPSE* research project builds on the limited number of existing studies that seek the views of students about school-based sexuality and relationships education (Allen, 2005; Mitchell, Patrick, Heywood, Blackman and Pitts, 2014; Ollis, Harrison and Richardson, 2012). These previous studies have drawn attention to the importance of asking young people what they learn and what they want from sexuality and relationships education, and have highlighted the potential disjuncture between student and adult views. The impetus for this project arose from previous research highlighting many young people's concerns about sexuality and relationships education, as well as from the project team's previous research and teaching experiences in this area and a desire to improve sexuality and relationships education by engaging with young people.

Research Questions

1. What are young people's views on school-based sexuality and relationships education?
2. In what ways could sexuality and relationships education be improved?

The research approach

The research was conducted in schools in South Australia (14) and Victoria (17). Schools were invited to participate in the study if they satisfied the following selection criteria:

- Secondary school in South Australia or Victoria
- Taught sexuality and relationship education to Year 10 level
- Had the capacity to obtain parental consent for their students' participation in the study
- Had the computing capacity to enable classes of students to complete an online survey

A detailed on-line survey was constructed and administered to students aged 13 to 16+ years old. The survey contained questions about:

- Demographics
- Where students get most of their knowledge about sexuality and relationships
- What topics students were taught in sexuality and relationships education

- What learning activities students experienced
- What made students feel uncomfortable, embarrassed, or annoyed
- Students' views on what else should be included in the sexuality and relationships education program
- Students' ideas about how the sexuality and relationships education program, and how it is taught, could be improved

The survey used similar terminology and language to that used in sexuality and relationships education classes. The following table contains examples of the types of questions contained in the survey:

Type of question	Example	Type of analysis																		
Nominal	<p>Were there any times when you felt uncomfortable, embarrassed, or annoyed during sexuality education sessions?</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>No</p>	<p>Frequencies (%)</p> <p>Cross tabulations (age and gender)</p>																		
Ordinal	<p>The following should be included or dealt with in greater depth in the sexuality education curriculum:</p> <table><tr><td></td><td>Strongly Agree</td><td>Agree</td><td>Neither Agree nor Disagree</td><td>Disagree</td><td>Strongly Disagree</td></tr><tr><td>Masturbation</td><td><input type="checkbox"/></td><td><input type="checkbox"/></td><td><input type="checkbox"/></td><td><input type="checkbox"/></td><td><input type="checkbox"/></td></tr><tr><td>Practical information about how to have sex</td><td><input type="checkbox"/></td><td><input type="checkbox"/></td><td><input type="checkbox"/></td><td><input type="checkbox"/></td><td><input type="checkbox"/></td></tr></table>		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Masturbation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Practical information about how to have sex	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Frequencies (%)</p> <p>Cross tabulations (age and gender)</p>
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree															
Masturbation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>															
Practical information about how to have sex	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>															
Open ended	<p>What are your reasons for wanting to include or deal with these issues in greater detail?</p>	<p>Thematic</p>																		

The survey took approximately 15-20 minutes to complete and was completed in class-time.

It is important to note that the research received ethics approval from four institutional Human Research Ethics Committees (two university committees and two education department committees), albeit after protracted and difficult negotiations about key features of the project, including:

- How parental consent was obtained. 'Passive consent' or 'opt-out' procedures were rejected in South Australia (as a matter of policy) but accepted in Victoria.

- The nature and extent of information provided to parents. It was required that parents be provided with direct access to all survey questions via a link to the online survey.
- The use of gender categories outside the female/male binary. 'Transgender' and 'intersex' were rejected by one education department committee which required the use of a generic 'other' category (with no option for students to elaborate on this).
- Requesting information about students' sexual orientation. One education department committee questioned the need to ask students about this and also their ability to 'know' to whom they felt sexually attracted. It finally agreed to the inclusion of the same question about sexual attraction used in the *5th National Survey of Australian Secondary Students and Sexual Health 2013* (Mitchell et al., 2014, p. 23): opposite sex, same sex, both sexes, unsure, prefer not to disclose.

These and other issues to do with risk mitigation and institutional compliance delayed the research by more than 12 months. Importantly, they compromised our attempt to disrupt the heteronormative and cisgender bias inherent in most approaches to sexuality and relationships education. They also explain, to some extent, why the analyses presented here largely do not engage with the perspectives of the 1% of students who did not identify as male or female.

The students

A total of 2,325 students undertook the survey. All students received written parental consent to take part in the study and were then asked if they would like to participate. Demographic information includes:

- Age – 13 years (18%), 14 years (40%), 15 years (32%), 16+ years (10%)
- Location – Victoria (63%), South Australia (37%)
- Gender – Female (49%), Male (50%), 'Other' (1%)
- Sexual attraction – opposite sex (83.5%), same sex (1.4%), both sexes (5.5%), unsure (5.2%), preferred not to disclose (4.3%)
- Socio-economic status of the school – low (25.8%), middle (41.9%), high (25.8%), not ranked (6.5%)

Overall, Victorian participants were slightly younger than their South Australian counterparts due, in part, to the inclusion of Year 7 students in Victorian secondary schools (unlike in South Australia where Year 7 students are located in primary schools) (see Figure 1).

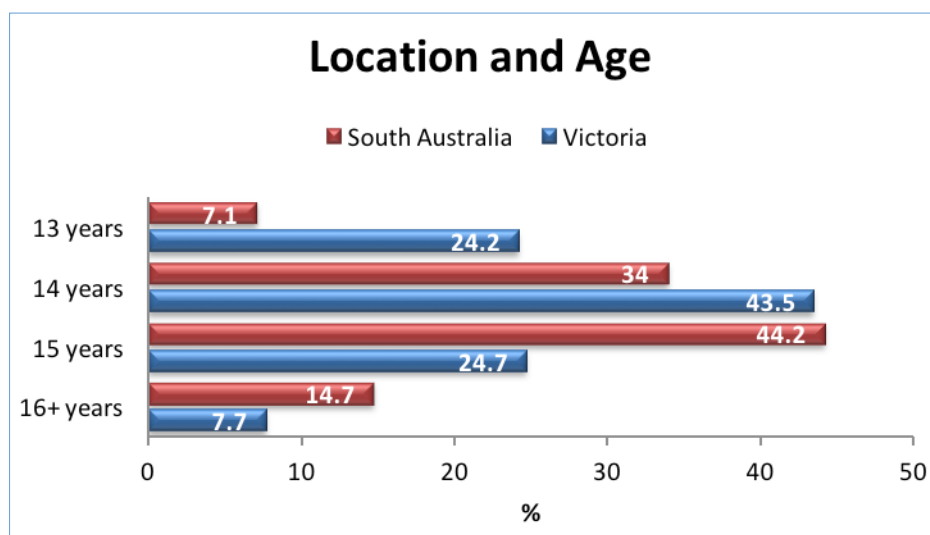


Figure 1: Age profile of students, by state

A focus on program and gender differences

As well as valuing young people's views about sexuality and relationships education, this project sought to better understand how gender, and how it is constructed and lived, affects young people's experiences of sexuality and relationships education. It also sought to better understand how teaching and learning arrangements affect students' evaluations of the quality and relevance of sexuality and relationships education.

What follows is a brief history of the evolution of sexuality and relationships education in South Australia and Victoria that provides the context for the EYPSE research project.

Sexuality and relationships education in South Australia and Victoria

South Australia

In South Australia, 'sex education' has been part of the formal curriculum of government schools since the 1970s. Historically, however, education authorities, in South Australia and in other states, have been reluctant to develop comprehensive curriculum materials and related support processes to help increase teachers' capacity to teach sexuality education (Gibson, 2007). In response to this lack of development, SHine SA successfully pursued funding from the South Australian Department of Health to develop and implement a comprehensive sexual health and relationships program for students in Years 8, 9, and 10. It researched and wrote *Teach it like it is: A relationships and sexual health curriculum resource for teachers of middle school students* (SHine SA, 2004) beginning in 2000 and culminating with the production of a draft resource in early 2003. The resource was subsequently finalised and piloted in 15 secondary schools in South Australia during 2003-2005 (Johnson, 2006).

The South Australian curriculum resource was developed for simple but significant reasons. By 2000, two large national surveys of Australian secondary students had demonstrated 'that young people are sexual beings, and that their sexuality ... inevitably find[s] expression, not only in how they act, but also in how they think and feel' (Dyson, Mitchell, Dalton and Hillier, 2003, p. 3). A third survey in 2002 confirmed that by Year 10 the majority of secondary students were sexually active in some way (Smith, Agius, Dyson, Mitchell and Pitts, 2003).

In drawing on an established body of research evidence to justify its approach, SHine SA made a commitment to evidence-based practice. There is strong international evidence from western European and Scandinavian countries that relationships and sexual health education throughout the schooling experience, commencing before young people become sexually active, has contributed to a very significant reduction in sexual health problems in their young people (Gourley, 1996; ANCAHRD, 1999). High quality relationships and sexual health education throughout schooling includes the development of assertiveness, problem solving, and decision making and negotiation skills as well as factual sexual health information and knowledge about services available to young people. Programs are best provided by trusted and respected teachers who can create a non-judgmental learning environment (SHine SA, 2000, p. 5).

In late 2000, SHine SA undertook an extensive consultation process to provide opportunities for 'students, teachers and parents to have their say on relationships and sexual health education, and ways that SHine SA could support school communities to improve the sexual health and well-being of young South Australians' (SHine SA, 2000, p. 2). The consultation provided SHine SA with public approval to proceed with the development of a new curriculum, teaching and learning resources, and teacher professional development strategies (SHine SA, 2000).

The SHine SA approach to relationships and sexual health education has four linked components:

1. A curriculum framework that outlines the scope and sequence of 15 lessons on sexual health per year for Years 8, 9, and 10.
2. Curriculum resource documents entitled *Teach it like it is* (SHine SA, 2004) and *Teach it like it is 2* (SHine SA, 2011) which are intended to be used by teachers in conjunction with other suitable and relevant sexual health education resources.
3. The requirement that schools establish a Student Health and Well-being team to plan and manage the implementation of the program on a school-wide basis. The team is responsible for co-ordinating teacher professional development, curriculum planning, resources management, and communicating with and educating parents and the wider community about the SHine SA approach to sexuality and relationships education. The team is made up of school staff, students, parents, and community health specialists.
4. The linking of young people to local sexual health information and service providers who can support students in areas beyond the responsibility and expertise of school-based staff (Johnson, 2006). The linking-up of sexual health services is an internationally recognised key component of effective sexual health promotion initiatives (Swann, Bowe, McCormick and Kosmin, 2003).

While the SHine SA approach consists of more than just curriculum materials, past research suggests that the quality and usability of curriculum guides and related teaching and learning resources affects teachers' actual implementation of curricula in classrooms (Johnson, 1996).

Teach it like it is (SHine SA, 2004) and *Teach it like it is 2* (SHine, 2011) have a number of features that, from a curriculum design and teaching and learning perspective, demonstrate their quality (Johnson, 1989). The curriculum materials:

- are research based
- are conceptually well organised
- acknowledge diversity
- rely on teachers' professional judgement
- use a variety of learning activities
- are practical
- are well structured
- include essential teaching resources

Today, SHine SA's schools program supports 93% of government secondary schools, a number of non-government schools in South Australia, and has recently expanded its support to primary schools.

Victoria

Sexuality education in Victorian government schools has been a documented part of the health education curriculum for nearly 30 years. Although there is clear evidence of sexuality education in health and human relationships education prior to 1989 (St Ledger, 2006), a sense of compulsory inclusion in formal health education first emerged in 1989 with the release of the *Personal Development Framework* (Ministry of Education, 1989). This was followed by its inclusion in the *Victorian Curriculum and Standards Frameworks* (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 1995, 2000) and most recently as an essential curriculum component of the Australian Curriculum in Victoria (AusVELS) (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2015). In Victoria, teachers assess student learning in sexuality education against the learning standards within the Health and Physical Education learning area.

The term *Sexuality Education* was adopted for use in Victorian educational policy and programs to reflect the broad socio-cultural approach Victorian schools 'take in covering the many areas of this topic, including focusing on love, abstinence, safer sex, respect for others and oneself, diversity, personal rights and responsibilities, relationships and friendships, effective communication, decision-making and risk behaviours' (Department of Education and Training, 2015, p. 1).

The Victorian Department of Education and Training, and its predecessors, have advocated for a 'whole school' or 'health promoting schools' approach to sexuality education for many years. The promotion of positive and inclusive sexuality and sexual health is seen as 'a responsibility shared between schools, the local health and welfare community, and parents'. The Department of Education and Training (2015) argues that 'school-based sexuality education programs are more effective when they are developed in consultation with parents and the local community' using a 'developmentally appropriate' approach. However, parents and carers have had the right to withdraw their children from the sexual health component of a school's health education since 1984 (Ministry of Education, 1984, Memorandum 60).

Over the past 20 years, Victorian education departments have developed a suite of resources for use in sexuality education that reflect this comprehensive, developmental, and age appropriate approach. Prior to 2004, secondary schools had access to the Commonwealth funded *Talking Sexual Health* resources developed in Victoria (ANCAHRD, 1999). The focus of these resources reflects the key research and policy issues emerging at the time, overwhelmingly from the Australian Research Centre in Sex Health and Society (ARCSHS) at La Trobe University (see Harrison and Dempsey, 1998; Ollis and Tomaszewski, 1993).

In 2004, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (as it was then called) released *Catching On*, a teaching and learning resource for students in Years 9 and 10. *Catching On* was developed utilising a very similar research base to *Talking Sexual Health*. *Catching On* was actually developed prior to *Talking Sexual Health*. However, changing governments and education ministers resulted in a 6-year lag between completion and release in 2004. In 2008, a policy framework and curriculum resource was developed called *Catching on Everywhere*. This provided schools with guidance, tools, and examples of best practice in sexuality education and set the context for additional *Catching On* resources for primary schools (*Catching On Early*, 2011) and an update and expansion of *Catching On* to include teaching and learning activities for Years 7 and 8 (*Catching*

On Later, 2014). The most recent sexuality education resource to be released in Victoria was *Building Respectful Relationships; Stepping out against Gender Based Violence* (Department of Education and Training, 2014).

Some research suggests that the most used sexuality and relationships education resource in secondary schools across Australia, including Victoria, is *Talking Sexual Health* (Smith et al., 2011). Unlike South Australia, Victoria has not had a systematic and consistent approach to resource use and professional development for teachers. Between 2001 and 2004, over 200 teachers and educators attended professional development for *Talking Sexual Health* offered by ARCSHS. Other professional development has also been made available through Family Planning Victoria and as part of the trial of *Catching On*, *Building Respectful Relationships*, and *Catching On Early*. Because of this patchy and ad hoc history of teacher professional development, especially compared with the highly structured and well-resourced approach used in South Australia, it is difficult to know what resources Victorian teachers have used in classrooms, or what activities or focus their students have covered. However, it is known that students in Victorian government secondary schools are provided with at least two terms of sexuality and relationships education between Years 7-9.

Even so, there is some consistency in the framework and approach to sexuality and relationships education taken in both states. For example, both states have utilised the *Talking Sexual Health National Framework* in the development of their resources. In addition, there has been ongoing collaboration between the writers of these resources. The early development of the South Australian resource *Teach it like it is* included a process of consultation with the writers of *Catching On* and *Talking Sexual Health*, including the use and modification of activities from these resources. Most recently, activities from *Teach it like it is 2* (SHine SA, 2011) have been used or modified in the newly released *Building Respectful Relationships* (Department of Education and Training, 2014).

In summary, the similar but different histories of the development of sexuality and relationships education in South Australia and Victoria provide the contexts to make some sense of possible differences between the views of students in both states about their experiences of sexuality and relationships education. Both states have invested in the development of high quality curriculum and teaching resources that share key components – for example, the use of interactive, discussion based teaching strategies, a focus on respectful relationships, the recognition and support of sexual diversity, and the promotion of sexual health. Where they differ most is in the nature and extent of professional support given to teachers, with South Australian teachers receiving considerably more systematic and structured support than their Victorian counterparts.

Gender issues in sexuality and relationships education

Recent research suggests that school programs often reflect broader discourses about gender that reinforce and actively produce gender stereotypes which can impact on the way that students engage with sexuality and relationships education (Airton, 2009). These relate to discourses operating both at school and in the wider society. Gender discourses in schools can determine which sex, gender, and sexuality identities are visible and intelligible and how 'girls' and 'boys' can be represented and constituted (Youdell, 2005). The majority of sexuality and relationships education in schools is entrenched in notions of sex and gender difference and ideas about sex-roles (Kehily, 2002; Harrison, 2000). Gender is overwhelmingly used to refer to three binaries: men and women, male and female, and masculinity and femininity. In terms of sexuality and relationships education, these distinctions often position men and boys in negative discourses in need of change (Haste, 2013; Keddie, 2007; Mills, 2007) and young women as victims, responsible for safe sex and in need of protection (Harrison, 2000). Moreover, school-based sexuality and relationships education uses gender when describing heterosexualised and normative notions of gender, which is quite different from the recently released resource to support gender and sexual diversity in schools (Radcliffe, Ward, Scott and Richardson, 2016).

School programs reflect the dominant discourses young people are exposed to in their broader social world (Allen, 2007; Measor, 2004). This means that access to information and sexual knowledge, and ideas about love, intimacy, and sexual pleasure are gendered (Measor, 2004). For example, Measor (2004) argues that girls are more likely to learn about sexuality and intimacy at home and from parents, whereas boys tend to learn about sexuality from sources other than parents. Australian surveys of young people consistently show that there are gender differences in sources of information accessed, used, and trusted by boys and girls (Smith et al., 2003; Mitchell et al., 2014). Kapungu et al. (2010) found that mothers talked more about sexual issues with their daughters than sons (and their messages were more protective). Stern et al. (2015) found that young women were more likely than men to learn about 'sexual and reproductive health' from family members (and there was more regulation of their sexuality) whereas young men learned about sex from pornography and peers (sexual prowess rather than safe sex).

Related to this are the documented pressures to conform to particular gender discourses available through sexuality and relationships education and how engagement with pornography creates a particular kind of masculinity (Allen, 2006). These stereotypes are drawn on by students when talking about boys and girls:

... young people's descriptions of, and explanations for, interactions in sex education lessons focus on gender differences and draw on hyperbolic, widely accepted gender stereotypes in part because of their low levels of awareness of the cultural nature of such stereotypes.

(Strange, Oakley, Forrest, & The RIPPLE Study Team, 2003, p. 212)

In the EYPSE research project we have used gender as a key lens to explore current practices in secondary schools, as reported by students. Our project is positioned within the broader context of current work, which is supportive, expansive, and inclusive in terms of gender and sexuality, reflected

in initiatives such as the Safe Schools Coalition (including the new curriculum resource by Radcliffe, et al., 2016) and the *Respectful Relationships Education in Schools* project (Department of Education and Training, 2015). While we were unable to explore students' own gender diversity due to ethics constraints, comments from students indicated support for learning about gender diversity.

Our research is based on the premise that young people can reflect on and inform us about their experiences of sexuality and relationships education, and that this should be taken seriously in curriculum development and pedagogy. However, we note that there are potential tensions in terms of how we approach gender theoretically and the impact of dominant gender discourses that influence how students may understand and experience gender in their own lives. Students are situated in a society in which dominant understandings of gender centre on a binary two-gender model, and many students may derive a level of security from some of the normative expectations relating to their gender. However, students may also resist and subvert dominant gender and sexuality discourses in multiple ways. Through this research with secondary school students about their experiences of sexuality and relationships education, we explore the ways in which gender is socially and discursively constructed and performed in interaction with institutional, social, and cultural contexts where gender is 'actively created in social processes' (Connell 2002, p. 27) and what this means for improving sexuality and relationships education.

The *EYPSE* research project is being conducted in South Australia and Victoria, states that have historically led Australia in their approach to sexuality and relationships education. However, it is still the case that 'overwhelmingly, school-based sexuality and relationships education uses the notion of gender in heterosexualised and traditional terms' (Harrison and Ollis, 2015, p. 318). The key resources, policies and programs developed in both states (as discussed in the previous section), draw on the *Talking Sexual Health National Framework* (ANCAHRD, 1999). *Talking Sexual Health* (1999) discusses gender as a social construction, arguing that education should include issues about gender, including in relation to power and equity. This document supports diversity in relation to sexuality, and includes a brief critique of the presumed heterosexuality in sexuality and relationships education programs in the 1990s. Victoria's *Catching On* resource includes the following description of gender: 'while sex differences are understood as biological, gender differences refer to those behaviours and attitudes which are learned through day-to-day activities and practices. Gender behaviour and attitudes change and are changeable' (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2004, p. 25). A similar definition is used in the South Australian curriculum resource *Teach It Like It Is 2*, which emphasises gender as a social construction, defining gender as 'socially constructed expectations about what is acceptable to be masculine or feminine, including behaviour, dress, interests. It varies in history and in different cultures' (SHine SA, 2011, p. 269). In other words, the current resources used in South Australia and Victoria have consciously tried to address the limitations recognised in the research by providing a 'gender lens' on normative notions of gender. What is of interest to this project is how students have experienced their sexuality and relationships education based on these resources. As we discussed earlier, South Australia has had a far more systematic approach to resource use and teacher professional development. Although *Catching On* and *Talking Sexual Health* are the resources most used by teachers (Smith et al., 2011), it is unknown how they are translated and used by them, and what other resources are being used that reinforce or challenge dominant gender discourses. We hope the data from this survey and the qualitative workshops with students will shed some light on this and how we can improve sexuality and relationships education.

Most used and trusted sources of information about sexuality and relationships

Students gather information about sexuality and sexual health from a range of sources that may include parents, friends, siblings, schools, the internet, videos, magazines, media, and pornography (Holland, Ramazanoglu, Sharpe and Thomson, 1998; Kehily, 2000; Kehily, Mac an Ghaill, Epstein and Redman, 2002). Consistently over the last 20 years Australian students have indicated that they use a wide range of sources to learn about sexuality and sexual health, but that they particularly value school programs. The Rural Mural (Hillier, Warr and Haste, 1996) found school health programs were the most used source, and the second most trusted source (after doctors), while 'mother' was the most used and trusted person students identified. Five national surveys of secondary students and sexual health have been conducted since 1992. These surveys have asked students about the sources of sexuality and sexual health information they use and trust. Students have indicated that school programs rate highly on the list of sources used. The *5th National Survey of Australian Secondary of Students and Sexual Health 2013* (Mitchell et al., 2014) reported school programs as the second most used source of information (42.7%) after websites (43.6%).

In this study, students were asked to identify all the sources they *used* for sexuality information (see Figure 2). Overwhelmingly, 'School programs' ranked number one (74.4%) as a source of information. 'My friends' was ranked second (61.2%) with 'Mum' ranked third (57.0%). When comparing boys and girls, both ranked 'School programs' number one while 'Mum' was ranked second (66%) for girls and 'My friends' ranked third (64.2%). For boys, 'My friends' ranked second (60.2%) with 'Mum' ranked third (50.1%). Students ranked the 'Internet' fifth as a source of sexuality information. 'Dad' ranked sixth as a source of information overall but more boys (47.1%) use 'Dad' as a source of information compared with girls (36.6%).

Students were also asked to select the five sources of sexuality information they *trusted* most (see Figure 3). Girls trusted 'Mum' (66.7%) the most, followed by 'School programs' (63.5%), while boys trusted 'School programs' the most (67.8%) with 'Mum' the next most trusted source (48.7%). 'Dad' ranks quite highly as a trusted source particularly for boys (45.8%) in third position and fourth for girls (32.4%). In the case of pornography, although ranking very low, far more boys (15.9%) than girls (2.9%) identified it as a trusted source of information about sexual issues.

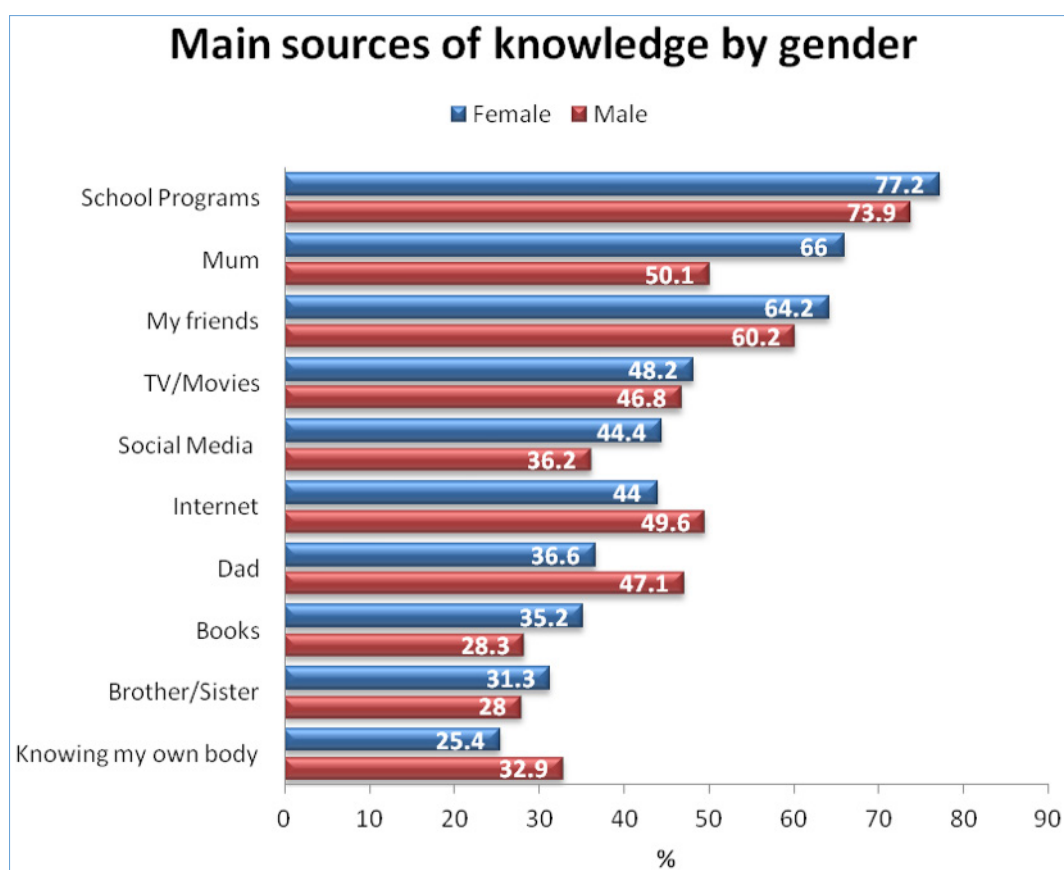


Figure 2: Main sources of sexuality knowledge, by gender

Several student comments reinforce the findings that ‘School programs’ are seen to be a trusted source of information about sexuality and relationships. The following comments were typical of those made in response to the question about ‘What parts of sexuality and relationships education did you most enjoy learning?’:

A majority of it, actually. I pay a great deal of attention to what we do learn during sexuality and relationships education because it's a very important and useful aspect of education, not only in high school, but in primary school, also. (15 year old girl)

All of it because we need to know what it means, learning everything like new things. This is very relevant to people of this age. (15 year old boy)

Nothing (liked it all) – I don't have any parts of sexual education that I do not enjoy learning about. I guess this is because the school education system about sexuality is one of the few places that I absolutely trust. (14 year old girl)

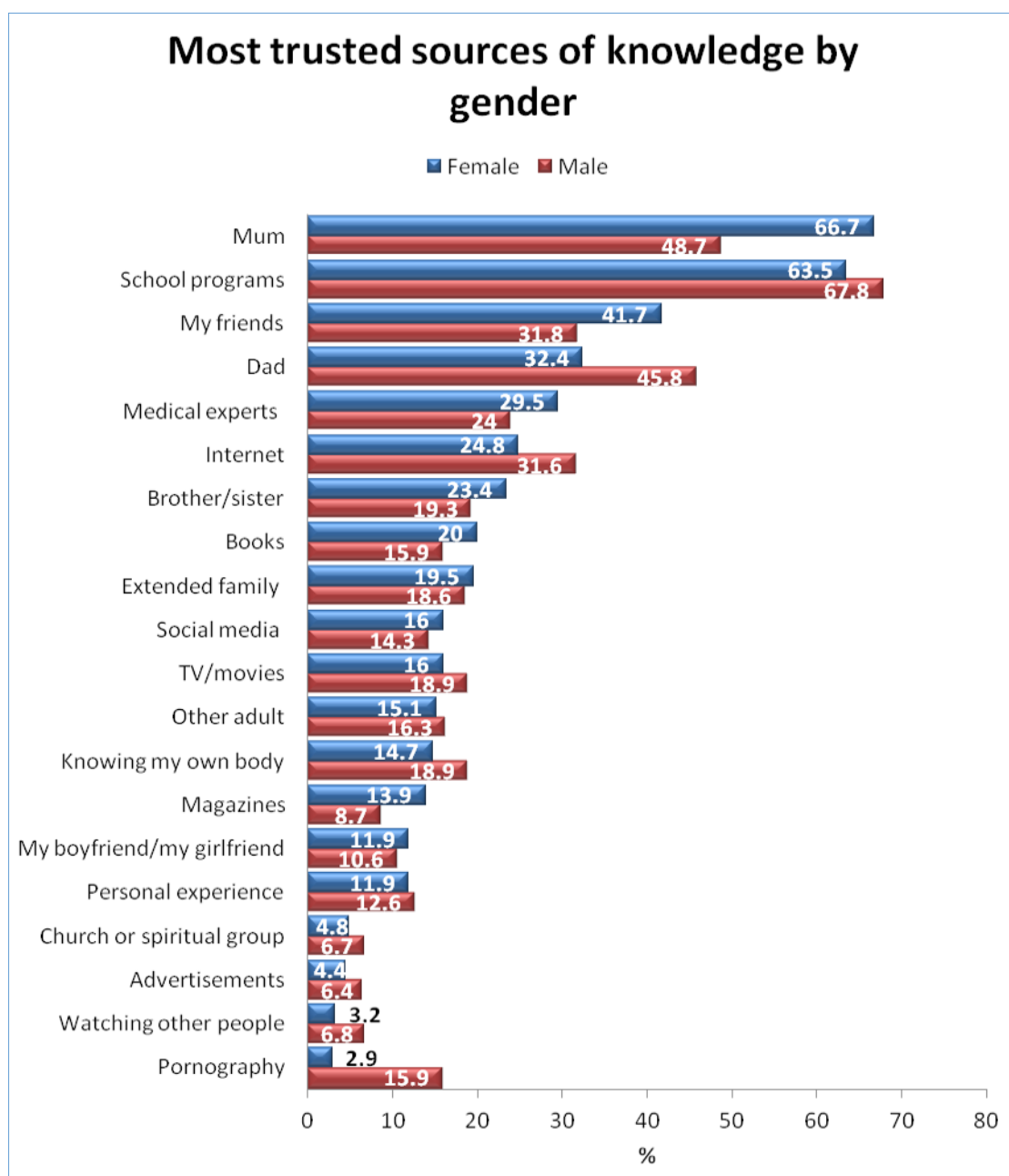


Figure 3: Most trusted sources of sexuality knowledge, by gender

Summary

- School programs were cited by 77% of girls and 74% of boys as the most used source of information about sexuality and relationships.
- The second most used source of information overall was 'friends' (girls: 64%; boys 60%).
- When asked about the sources of information they trusted most, 'school programs' was first for boys (68%) and second for girls (64%) while 'Mum' was rated as the most trustworthy source by girls (67%) and second most trustworthy by boys (49%).
- While pornography was not a highly used or trusted source of information, it was trusted by more boys (16%) than girls (3%).

'It is not all about sex':

Young people's views about sexuality and relationships education

Discussing sexuality issues

It is not surprising that students find discussing sexual matters with some people uncomfortable given the taboo much of society places on openly discussing sexuality and sexual health. There is literature on the comfort levels of teachers in teaching sexuality and relationships education (Allen, 2005; Harrison, Hillier and Walsh, 1996) but less literature on the comfort levels of students when discussing sexual matters. Lupton and Tulloch (1996) found students often felt uncomfortable asking teachers about sex, even though teachers were responsible for teaching students about sex. They found girls were more comfortable and able to talk at length with same-sex peers while boys were more reluctant to talk with peers and tended to resort to jokes. In relation to talking with parents they found 'Embarrassment also seems to be a central feature of students' interactions with their parents around sexuality, often couched in terms of feeling "uncomfortable" when discussing such issues' (Lupton and Tulloch, 1996, pp. 262-264). Allen suggests that the practice of teaching sexuality education can impact on students' comfort levels when discussing sexual matters: 'Sexuality education demands a relatively informal teaching style, where the normal hierarchy between student and teacher is relaxed so that young people can talk more openly about this private subject' (2005, p. 401).

In this study, students were asked to identify with whom they felt comfortable discussing sexual matters (see Figure 4). Girls ranked their female friends most highly (71.9%) while boys ranked their male friends most highly (58.4%). 'Mum' ranked second for both girls (63.0%) and boys (41.7%). 'Dad' ranked third for boys (41.4%) while girls ranked 'Dad' ninth (22.4%). 'Medical experts' were ranked quite highly by both girls (40.7%) and boys (38.2%). 'Teachers' were not ranked particularly highly, with girls ranking them eighth and boys ranking them seventh. When students were asked to rate with whom they felt *uncomfortable* discussing sexual matters, both boys and girls ranked teachers first. Allen (2007) suggests that students are uncomfortable talking about sexual matters with teachers because they don't want teachers to know about their personal sexual lives.

When comparing how comfortable students felt discussing sexual matters with particular people, there are some interesting and significant differences between the responses of students in South Australia and Victoria (see Figure 5). More South Australian students reported being 'comfortable' discussing sexual matters with a variety of people: 'Medical experts' (SA: 46.6%, Victoria: 34.9%), 'My female friends' (SA: 62.3%, Victoria: 51.2%), 'School counsellor' (SA: 22.8%, Victoria: 14.9%), and 'Teachers' (SA: 27.9%, Victoria: 20.8%).

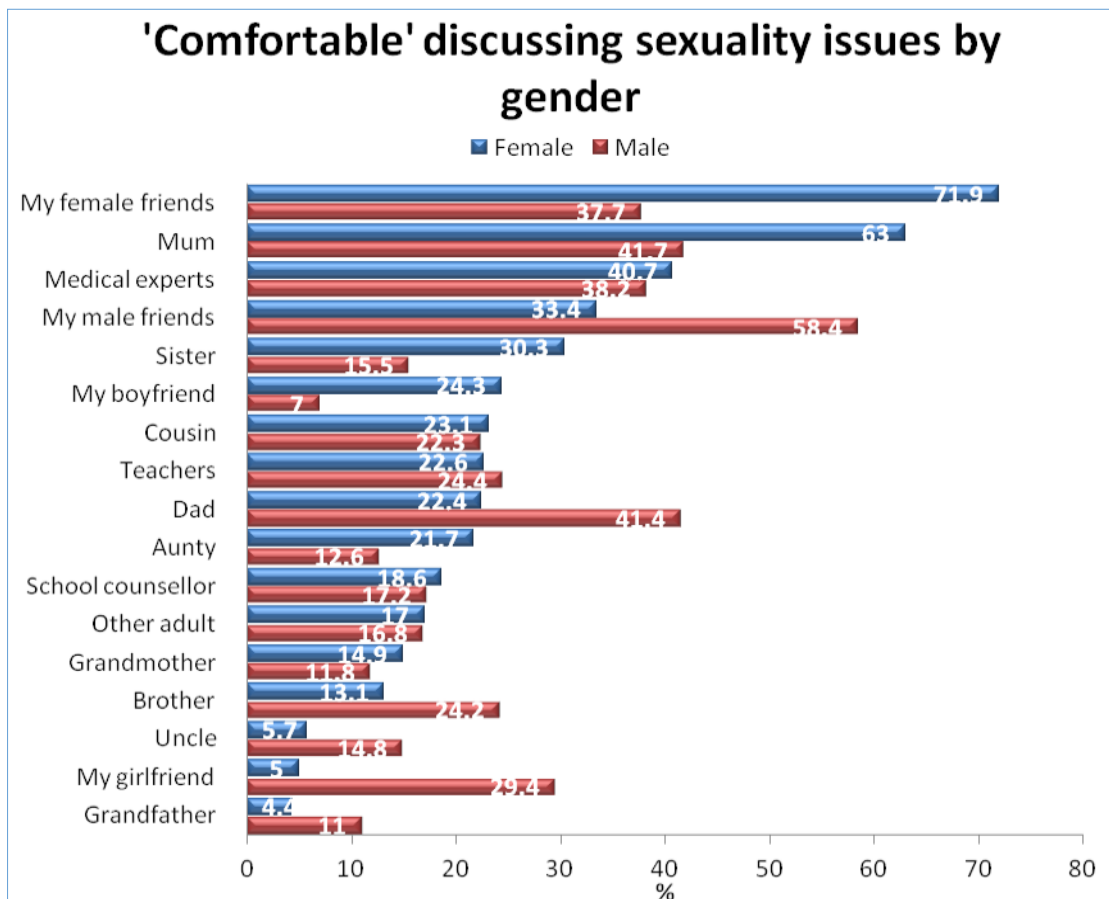


Figure 4: Who students felt comfortable with talking about sexuality issues, by gender

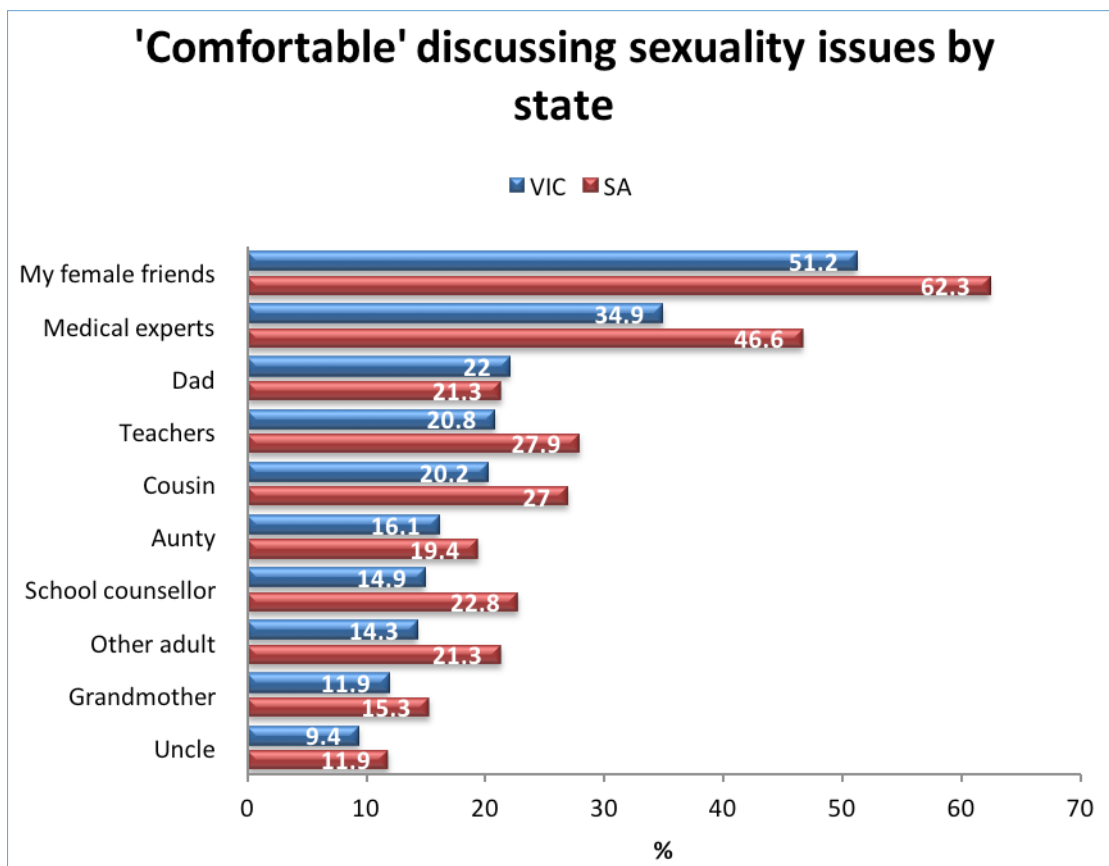


Figure 5: Who students felt comfortable with talking about sexuality issues, by state

Student comments reflect a variety of positions about comfort in sexuality and relationships education classes and talking to others about sexual matters:

I 'dunno, the class was pretty good all things considered so it was a comfortable environment, meaning that most things were conducted in an extremely...chill...manner, yet we learnt a lot. (16 year old boy)

more knowledge makes you feel more comfortable later in situations (16 year old girl)

The best teachers make you feel comfortable and normal. (13 year old girl)

I think teachers are often as uncomfortable as students when it comes to teaching about sexual things so I think we need something that makes neither party feel ostracised. (14 year old girl)

What parts of sexuality education did you not enjoy learning about?...All of it because I'm very uncomfortable talking about sex. (14 year old boy)

because we are told how to be safe when having sex, but not so much about the emotional impact of it, or how to do it and feel comfortable discussing it with people. (16 year old girl)

What parts of sexuality education did you not enjoy learning about? ...contraception as I am not in a comfortable position to be talking about that yet. (14 year old girl)

I'm really comfortable with learning about this sort of stuff and comfortable about talking about to most people. (15 year old girl)

I enjoyed the discussion sessions with the class... because i'm a little more comfortable than most people talking about these things. (13 year old girl)

I enjoyed the discussion sessions with the class.... because it reminds me that there are some other people who don't entirely feel comfortable like me so I don't feel alone. (14 year old girl)

Students also commented about their lack of comfort when talking to others:

It is terribly uncomfortable talking to parents about this! (14 year old girl)

I'm just uncomfortable talking to teachers about sex ... it's weird. (14 year old girl)

Because everybody at a young age feels uncomfortable about sex. It's natural. (15 year old boy)

Summary

- Both girls (72%) and boys (58%) reported feeling 'comfortable' talking about sexuality issues with friends of the same gender.
- Girls (63%) were more likely to report feeling 'comfortable' talking to their mothers about sexuality issues than were boys (42%).
- Boys (41%) were equally comfortable talking to their mothers and fathers about sexuality issues while fewer girls (22%) were comfortable talking to their fathers.
- Victorian students were far more uncomfortable discussing sexuality issues with a range of people compared with South Australian students.

What is taught in sexuality and relationships education

What has been included in 'sex education' has evolved over time. Changes in health priorities and social mores broadened the focus of 'sex education' from the bio-medical and physiological aspects of sexuality (the 'plumbing' or functional approach – Farrelly, O'Brien and Prain, 2007) to include the personal and social aspects of intimate relationships (Ollis, 2014). This process of change can be seen in the 1999 publication of a national framework for education about sexually transmitted infections and blood-borne diseases (ANCAHRD, 1999). That framework, entitled *Talking Sexual Health*, positioned sexuality in the broader social context of relationships and social life. Inclusive practices were a key platform of the framework as emerging research identified the impact of alienation, violence and invisibility of same sex attracted young people in sexuality education programs. Resources developed using this framework were some of the first to include issues of gender and sexual diversity in an inclusive way. This approach continued to develop during the 2000s as research and social changes expanded the content of sexuality and relationships education to further refine the approach to gender diversity, sexual and gender subjectivities, power in relationships, and the emerging role of the media and online environments. Most recently, explicit issues to do with gender based violence in relationships, pornography and sexual consent are being included in sexuality and relationships education (Department of Education and Training, 2014) as is the call to include a focus on sexual pleasure (Ollis, 2016).

While policy and curriculum developments reflect these changes, teachers remain the final arbiters of what is taught in sexuality and relationships education. In his study of South Australian teachers' use of SHine SA's program, Johnson reported that:

Some features of the curriculum were taught more fully than others. More than two thirds of teachers reported teaching five features of the curriculum extensively. Interestingly, these focused mostly on the attitudes and values that promote respectful relationships. The least intensively taught features were the newer and perhaps more contentious issues dealing with the impact of popular culture, technology and media on gender stereotyping, the influence of pornography and cyber bullying on sexual safety, and the implications of social constructions of gender. There also seemed a reluctance to deal explicitly, and in detail, with the often not talked about issue of human sexual desire and attraction. (2012, p. 18)

Given this variability in topic implementation and enactment, we were interested in finding out what is taught in sexuality and relationships education in South Australia and Victoria. In the study reported here, students identified which topics they recalled being taught in sexuality and relationships education from a list of 28 options (see Figure 6 for the most selected options). Overall, the most taught topics were the importance of 'respect in relationships', the physical, emotional and social 'changes during puberty', and the idea that 'our bodies are our own'. 'Respect in relationships' was identified by both boys (76.8%) and girls (76.7%) as the most taught topic. Girls were more likely to say

they had been taught knowledge about the 'female reproductive system' than boys (75.2% to 68.1%) whereas boys were more likely to say they had been taught knowledge about the 'male reproductive system' than girls (73.7% to 62.7%).

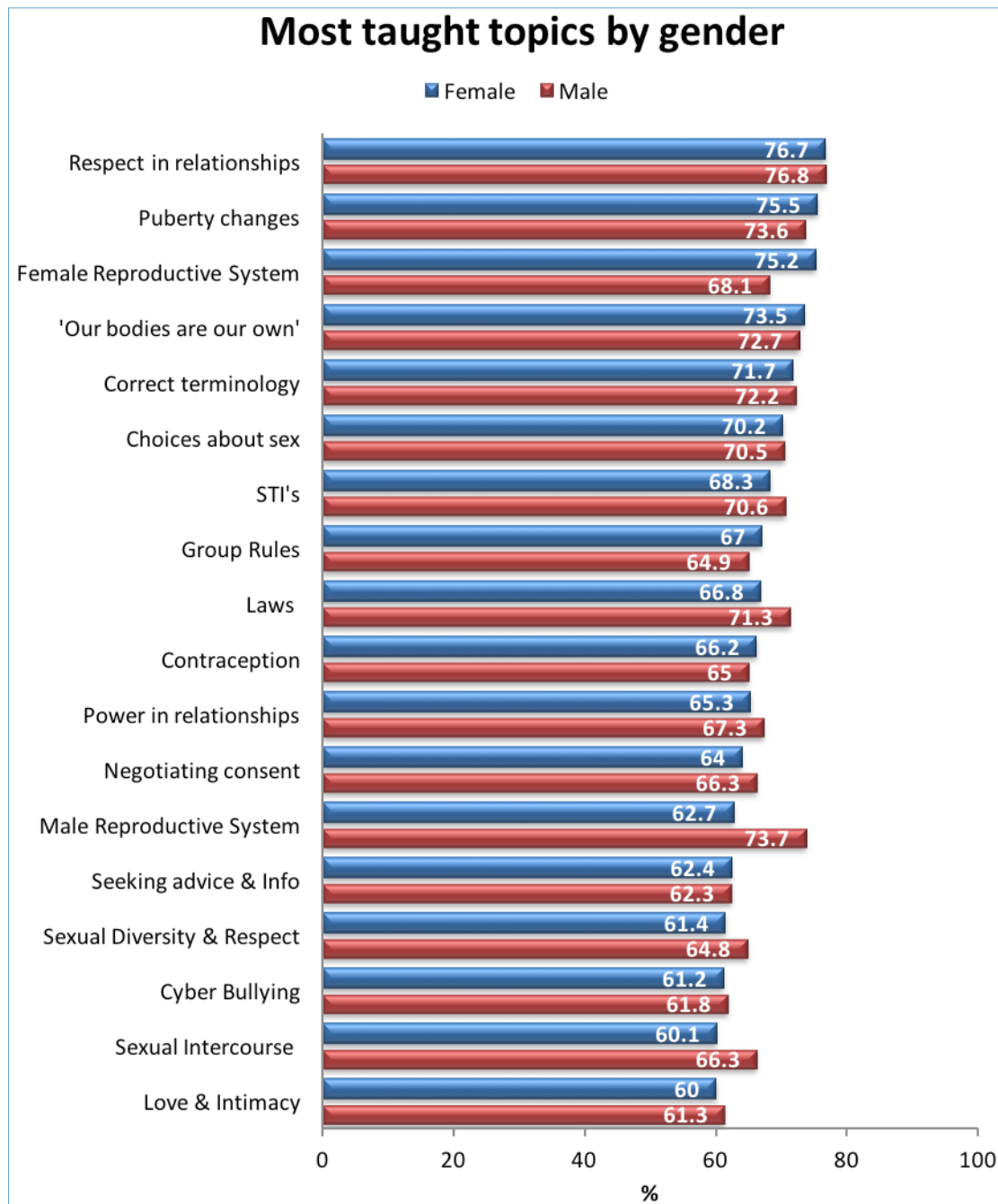


Figure 6: Most taught topics in sexuality and relationships education, by gender

There were also some significant differences between what students from South Australia and Victoria recalled being taught. Overall, students from South Australia were much more likely to recall having been taught a greater number of topics than those from Victoria (see Figure 7).

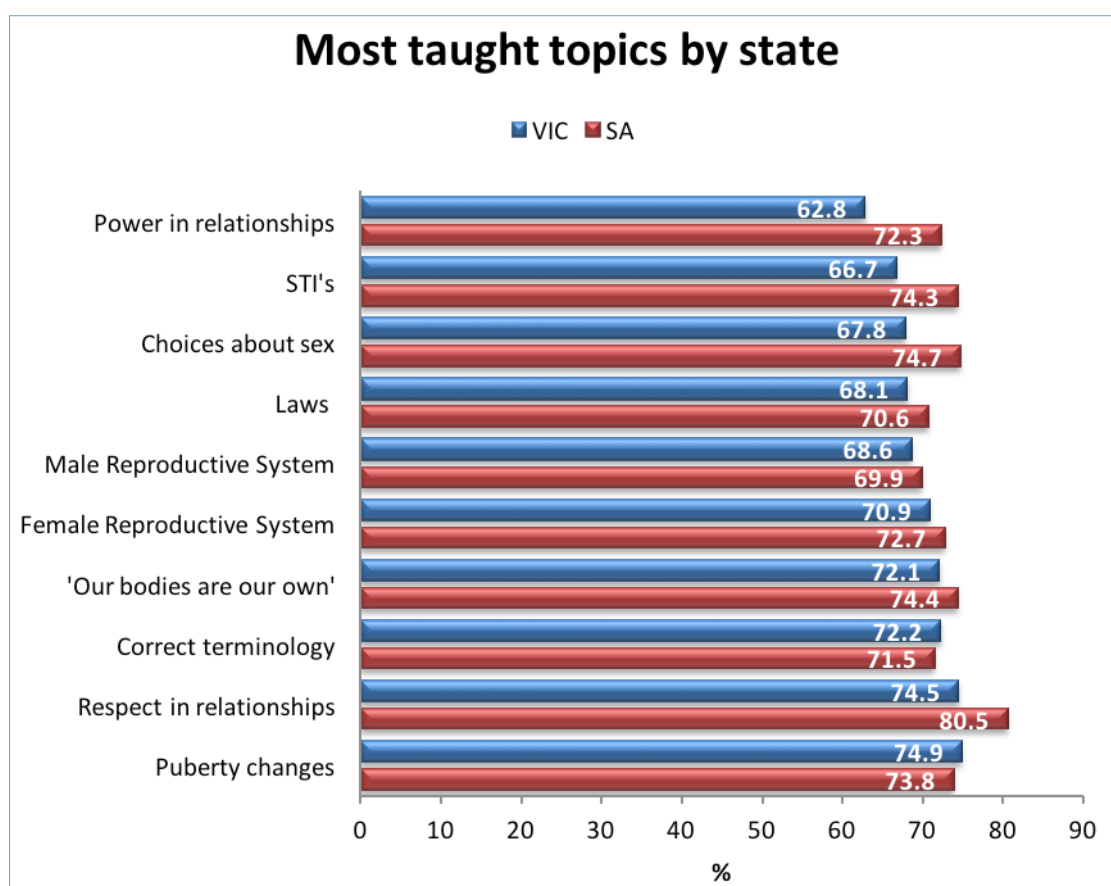


Figure 7: Most taught topics in sexuality and relationships education, by state

Students wrote about numerous topics they enjoyed learning in sexuality and relationships education, including in relation to bodies, sex, relationships, and contraception:

I enjoyed learning about the female body because it made me feel more comfortable about myself. (14 year old girl)

I enjoy learning about rights and responsibilities in relationships most because it is not all about sex; it's about love and equality. (14 year old boy)

I most enjoyed learning about mutual respect and power in relationships, as it is something I had never been taught about before. (16 year old boy)

Contraception. I feel like that this section is one of the most important sections in all of the sexual health section of health. I feel that I can trust the information that is given to us by teachers - more than the stuff on the web. (14 year old girl)

In addition, some students wrote that they either enjoyed all of what they learnt, or none of it:

I enjoyed learning about all areas because I thought all of the information was very useful and interesting to learn about. (13 year old girl)

To be honest, I have enjoyed all the things that we have been learning in class. (14 year old boy)

All, because I do want to know about it and be aware of everything. (16 year old girl)

None of it because: it's boring and weird; uncomfortable to talk about; embarrassing; disturbing; awkward. (14 year old girl)

Students were also invited to share what they least enjoyed learning in sexuality and relationships education. Some students disliked learning about aspects which other students enjoyed, such as in relation to bodies, sex, relationships, and contraception:

Parts of the body, merely because some of my classmates are too immature and can't seem to learn without giggling about it. (13 year old girl)

I did not enjoy learning about the male parts. Don't get me wrong, it's good to know, it's just gross. (14 year old girl)

Sex, mainly because everyone in my class was immature about learning it. (13 year old boy)

I didn't enjoy learning about sexual pleasure in school as it made me feel uncomfortable in that environment. (14 year old girl)

Teaching stuff like 'healthy relationships' in sex ed without actually teaching about... well... sex. (16 year old boy)

The contraception! They teach us how to prevent having a kid but not how to look after one when we actually want one in the future? Thanks for the preparation – NOT!
(15 year old girl)

Summary

- The most taught topics were 'respect in relationships', 'the physical, emotional and social changes during puberty', and the idea that 'our bodies are our own'.
- Three quarters of boys (77%) and girls (77%) named 'respect in relationships' as the most taught topic.
- Girls (75%) reported learning more about the female reproductive system than boys (68%), whereas boys (74%) reported learning more about the male reproductive system than girls (63%).
- More boys (66%) than girls (60%) reported being taught about 'sexual intercourse'.
- Few other gender differences were reported in the top ten 'most taught' topics.
- More students in South Australia (81%) reported being taught about 'respect in relationships' than students in Victoria (75%).
- Other state-based differences included topics about 'power in relationships' (SA: 72%; Victoria: 63%), 'choices about sex' (SA: 75%; Victoria: 68%), and 'sexually transmitted infections' (SA: 74%; Victoria: 67%).

Teaching and learning activities

The literature on sexuality and relationships education contains an abundance of research into the kinds of topics that should (and shouldn't) be included in 'age appropriate', 'developmentally sound', and 'comprehensive' programs (e.g., Allen, 2005; Boone, 2015). Paradoxically, there has been less interest and concern with *how* students learn than with *what* they learn in sexuality and relationships education. Yet from the perspectives of young people themselves, the nature of learning activities impacts on their levels of engagement, how uncomfortable and embarrassed they feel, and their overall satisfaction with school-based programs (Allen, 2005; Buck and Parrotta, 2014; Lupton and Tulloch, 1996; Walker, 2001).

Most studies that focus on teaching and learning activities cite students' preference for 'active' approaches that involve group discussion, social interaction, and practical sessions, rather than individual activities like writing and completing worksheets (Strange, Oakley and Forrest, 2003; Walker, 2001). Allen found that 'young people's concept of "interactive" encompassed a notion of student inclusivity and physical engagement in activities [like]... games, role play, drama and demonstrations' (2005, p. 394). She reports that the young people in her study wanted more practical, tangible, and interactive activities which enabled them to actually touch and manipulate condoms, lubricants, and birth control pills. She maintains that 'introducing this kind of practicality brings issues of sex and sexuality to a level of everyday relevance and reality for young people' (Allen, 2005, p. 394).

In this study, the most commonly reported approaches to teaching and learning about relationships and sexual health involved more sociable and interactive activities than traditional activities like writing essays and listening to guest speakers. Discussions (44.2% of students indicated that they recalled participating in discussions 'lots of times'), small group work (21.5%), and watching DVDs (22.4%) featured in the top four activities cited by students (see Figure 8). When students' responses were broken down by gender, some differences emerged, most notably the extent to which girls recalled participating in discussions (48.7%) compared with boys (39.6%) (see Figure 8). This is consistent with findings from recent research into the task-related verbal interactions of boys and girls in small learning groups (Onnela, Waber, Pentland, Schnorf and Lazer, 2014). In those contexts, girls talked more than boys. Interestingly, there were few gender-based differences in other commonly reported learning activities.

There were many significant differences between the responses of students who were taught the South Australian curriculum and those who were taught Victorian curricula (see Figure 9). In particular, students recalled the use of discussions significantly more in South Australia (62.4%) than in Victoria (33.9%)

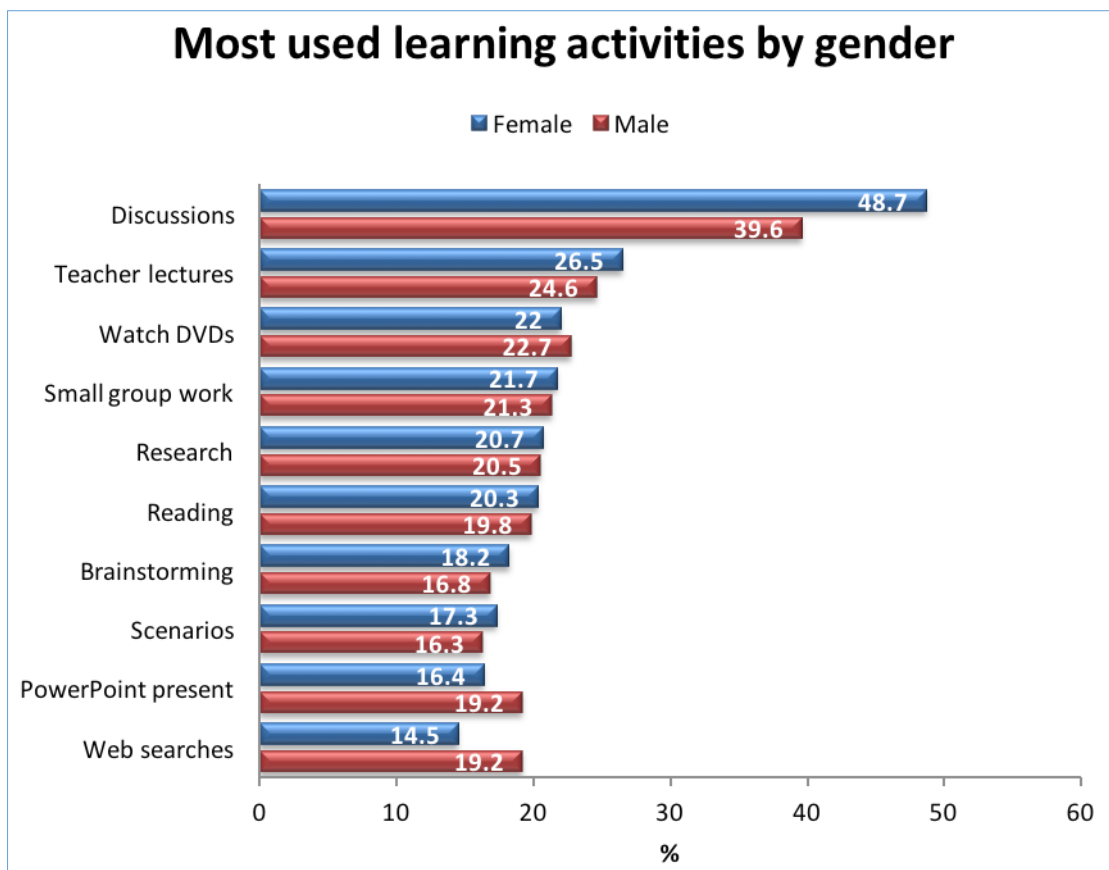


Figure 8: Most common learning activities used in sexuality and relationships education, by state

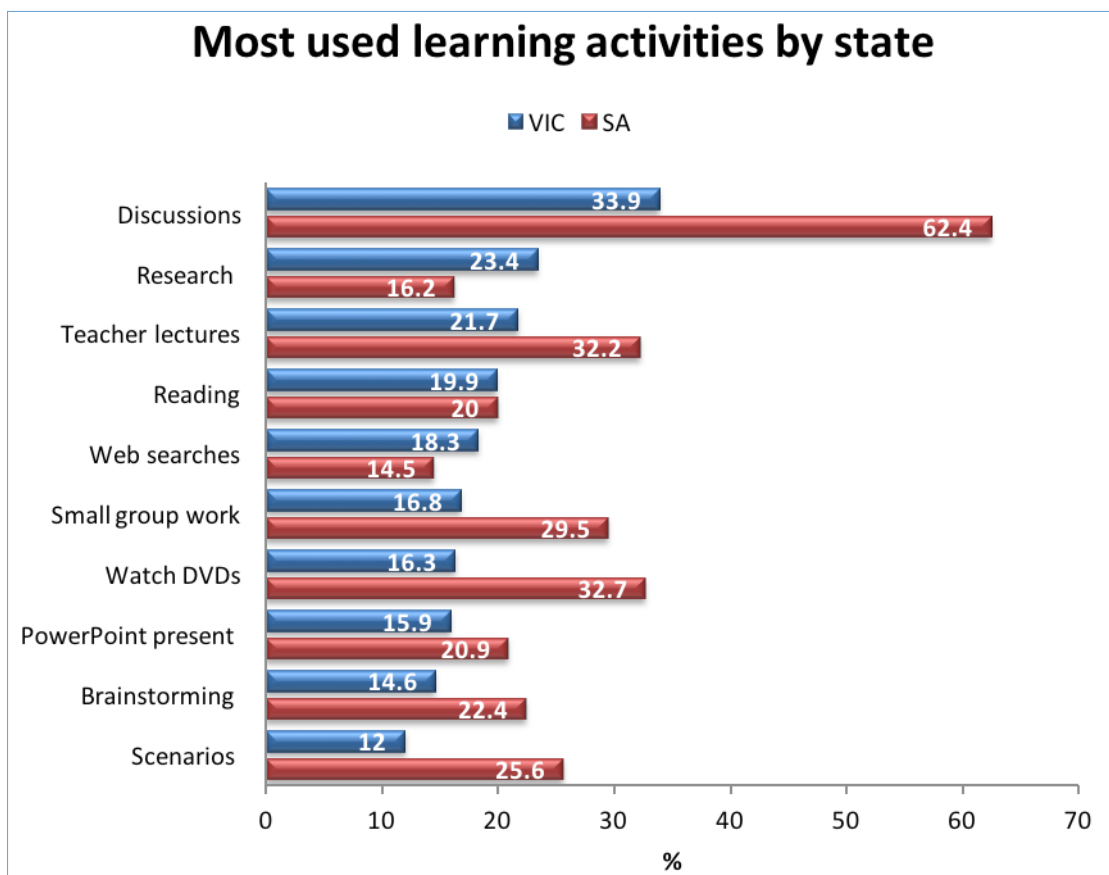


Figure 9: Most common learning activities used in sexuality and relationships education, by state

Several of the students' written comments supported the use of sociable, discussion-based learning activities. There was also support for the use of visual learning resources:

I really like more interactive things... It makes everyone get involved and just makes things a whole lot more fun! (14 year old girl)

The group discussions as they yielded plenty of opinions. (14 year old boy)

Working in small groups because you were able to talk about it with fellow students and not feel awkward. (15 year old girl)

I liked it when the teacher read out scenarios and we had to discuss how we would feel if we were in that situation. (13 year old girl)

Brainstorming because you got to think for yourself and then share with other people and see what they thought. (14 year old girl)

Watching videos because I think I've learnt a lot as it involves lots of deep thinking. (15 year old girl)

Summary

- Discussion-based learning activities were used most frequently in sexuality and relationships lessons.
- More girls (49%) recalled participating in 'discussions' than boys (40%).
- Few other gender differences were reported for the top ten learning activities.
- Significant differences in the frequency of use of learning activities existed between South Australian and Victorian students for 'discussions' (SA: 62%; Victoria: 34%), 'watching DVDs' (SA: 33%; Victoria: 16%), 'responding to scenarios' (SA: 26%; Victoria: 12%), 'small group work' (SA: 30%; Victoria: 17%), and 'brainstorming' (SA: 22%; Victoria: 15%).

Feelings during sexuality and relationships education

Feeling uncomfortable or embarrassed about participation in school-based sexuality and relationships education has been an issue for some time and is still evident in contemporary discourses whether referring to teachers (Harrison et al, 1996; Lupton and Tulloch, 1996) or students (Lupton and Tulloch, 1996). In the case of students, Allen has argued that, 'Fear that engagement with this subject may reveal their sexual selves, is likely to make discussion and learning about sexual pleasure less productive' (2007, p. 262). Such discussions interrupt the notion of students as non-sexual beings and influence the way 'young people', 'schooling', and 'pleasure' are understood (Allen, 2007, p. 249). Schools are sites that are rife with regulations and assumptions around the expression of sexuality (Allen, Rasmussen and Quinlivan, 2014; Lupton and Tulloch, 1996) and it is therefore little wonder that more explicit areas in the sexuality and relationships education curriculum cause students discomfort. Students' feelings of discomfort or embarrassment are discussed in the following section with results broken down by gender and location.

A comparison across the two states indicates that more students felt uncomfortable, embarrassed, or annoyed in Victoria (50.5%) than in South Australia (40.4%) (see Figure 10). As we pointed out earlier, there have been important historical differences between the two states in terms of the development and delivery of sexuality and relationships education. While schools in South Australia receive an in-depth program, including teacher professional development, this is not the case in Victoria. In Victoria, the Department of Education and Training and other organisations provide teaching resources, but they are not mandated and are accessed and used differently in different schools. Furthermore, teacher professional development is poorly resourced and infrequently available. These differences may well impact on Victorian teachers' ability to address students' comfort levels. However, more research into teachers' training and development and its impact on students' comfort levels is needed (Ollis, 2010; Johnson, 2012).

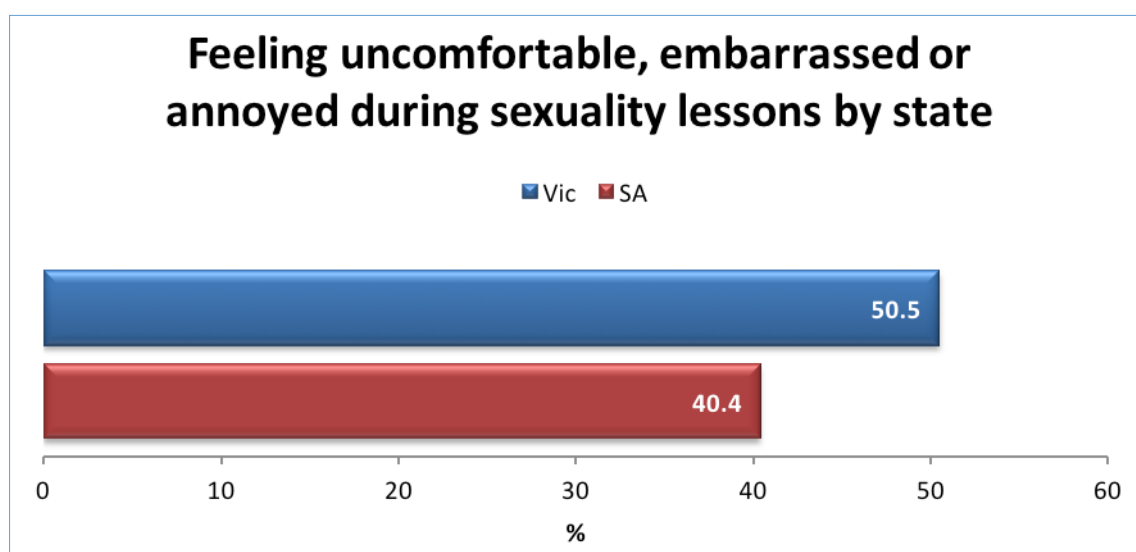


Figure 10: Students feeling uncomfortable, embarrassed or annoyed during sexuality and relationships education lessons, by state

Over half of girls reported feeling uncomfortable, embarrassed, or annoyed during sexuality education compared with just over a third of boys (see Figure 11).

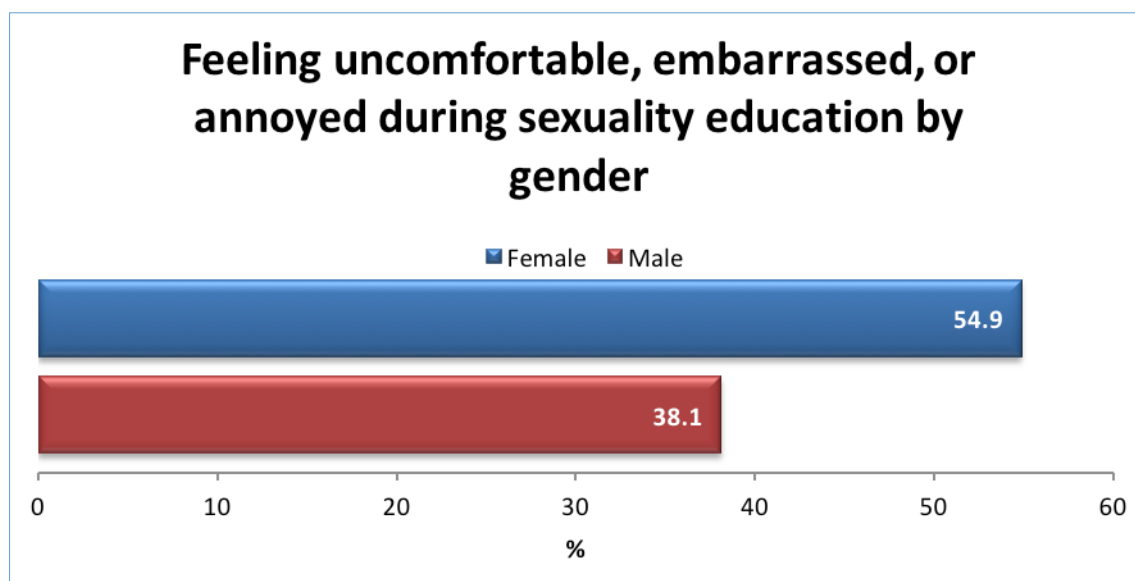


Figure 11: Students feeling uncomfortable, embarrassed or annoyed during sexuality and relationships education lesson, by gender

A selection of girls' comments helps to shed some light on the reasons for their discomfort:

Because sex isn't something I've ever really talked freely about and it's mildly confronting for me. I think it's because in our society we are taught from a young age that sex and sexuality is not something to discuss in the open or not at all. (14 year old girl)

Yes because I hate talking about it in front of people it feels wrong and so much more it makes me feel uncomfortable because it's weird talking about this kind of stuff with the teachers and class. (13 year old girl)

I found that during a lot of the activities that involved the opposite gender's participation, things were made embarrassing, annoying and discomforting by rude/inappropriate/immature comments made by the opposite gender, especially when these comments were directed towards me, the teacher, or other people in the class/school/area. (15 year old girl)

Although fewer boys expressed their discomfort, their reasons for feeling this way were very similar to the girls:

Because they were awkward situations to be talking to my friends about it. (14 year old boy)

Because of the stupid kids in the class that have no maturity. (14 year old boy)

Because of two reasons; my classmates' hypocritical-ness or tool-ness because they are always loud and say stuff before thinking. (14 year old boy)

An analysis of the top ten topics that made students feel uncomfortable reveals that overall students in Victoria felt less comfortable than their counterparts in South Australia, although the differences for most topics were around 5% (see Figure 12). The topics that differed most by state in terms of making students feel most uncomfortable were: 'Rumours about others' sexual behaviour', 'Other students' attitudes', with the largest difference being 'Learning in mixed sex classes' (43.1% in Victoria compared with 30.5% in South Australia).

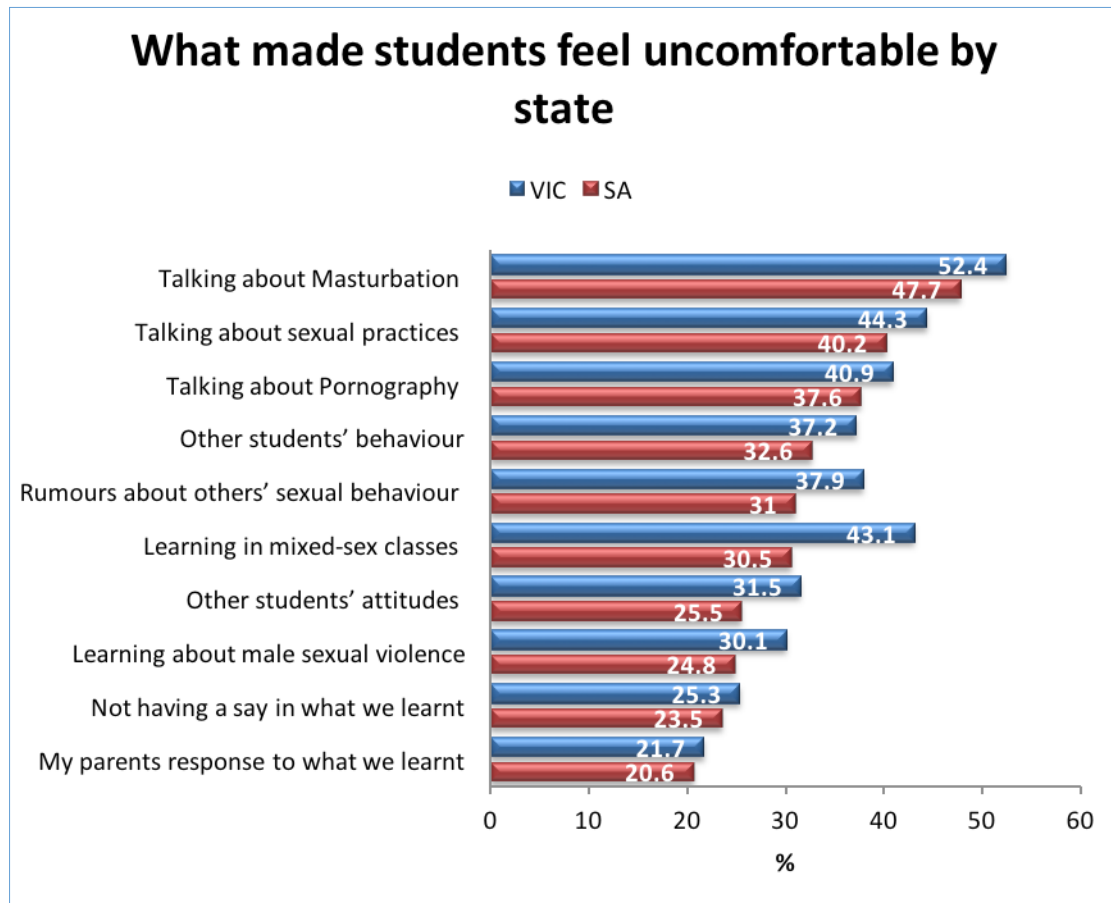


Figure 12: What made students feel uncomfortable in sexuality and relationships education lessons, by state

There were fewer differences between states in terms of what made students feel *embarrassed* compared with what made them feel *uncomfortable*, but again students in Victoria felt more embarrassed than their South Australian counterparts except for the topic 'Learning about male sexual violence' (16.3% in SA and 13.2% in Victoria). Although this is only a small difference, it is interesting given the spotlight on gender-based violence in Victoria.

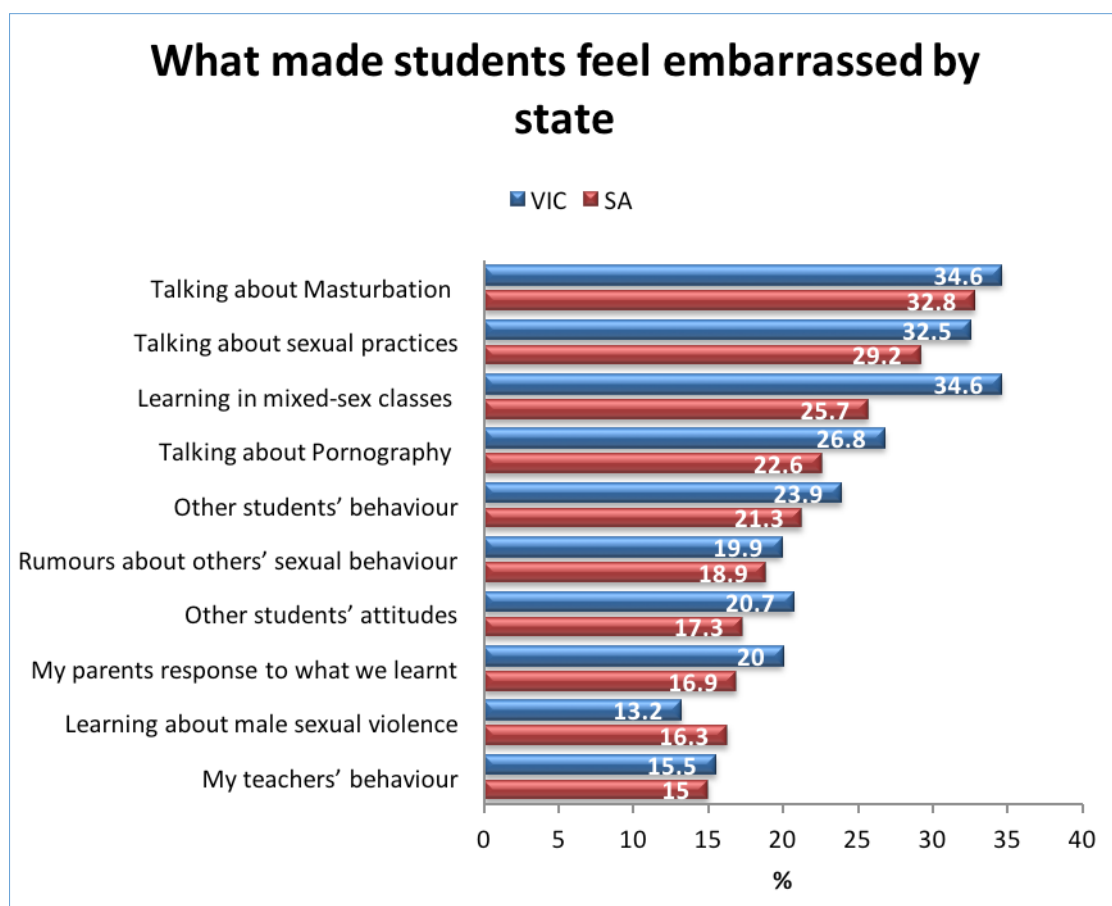


Figure 13: What made students feel embarrassed in sexuality and relationships education, by state

Overall girls were much more uncomfortable and felt much more embarrassed discussing the issues presented in Figures 14 and 15. Despite differences in the order, the topics themselves are consistent. 'Talking about masturbation', 'Talking about sexual practices', and 'Talking about pornography' were the top three topics that made students feel both uncomfortable and embarrassed. Overall, girls were much more uncomfortable about these three and all topics listed than boys except for 'Learning in single sex classes', 'Learning about male sexual violence', 'Not having a say in what we learnt', and 'Talking about homosexuality'. Lupton and Tulloch's research found that boys were much more likely to resort to humour and boasting when talking about such issues in 'an attempt to protect their masculinity' (1996, p. 269). This may account for the higher percentage of girls reporting that they felt uncomfortable or embarrassed 'Learning in mixed-sex classes' and by 'Other students' behaviour'. Previous research has supported the inclusion of some same-sex classes (e.g. Milton, 2003), which may foster a more comfortable environment, although our results show a significant percentage of boys who felt embarrassed or uncomfortable about learning in single sex classes.

It is worth noting that boys were more uncomfortable and embarrassed 'Talking about homosexuality' than girls, which is consistent with the proposition made by Lupton and Tulloch (1996) that boys seek ways to protect their masculinity in discussions where they may feel that their masculinity is under threat.

What made students feel uncomfortable by gender

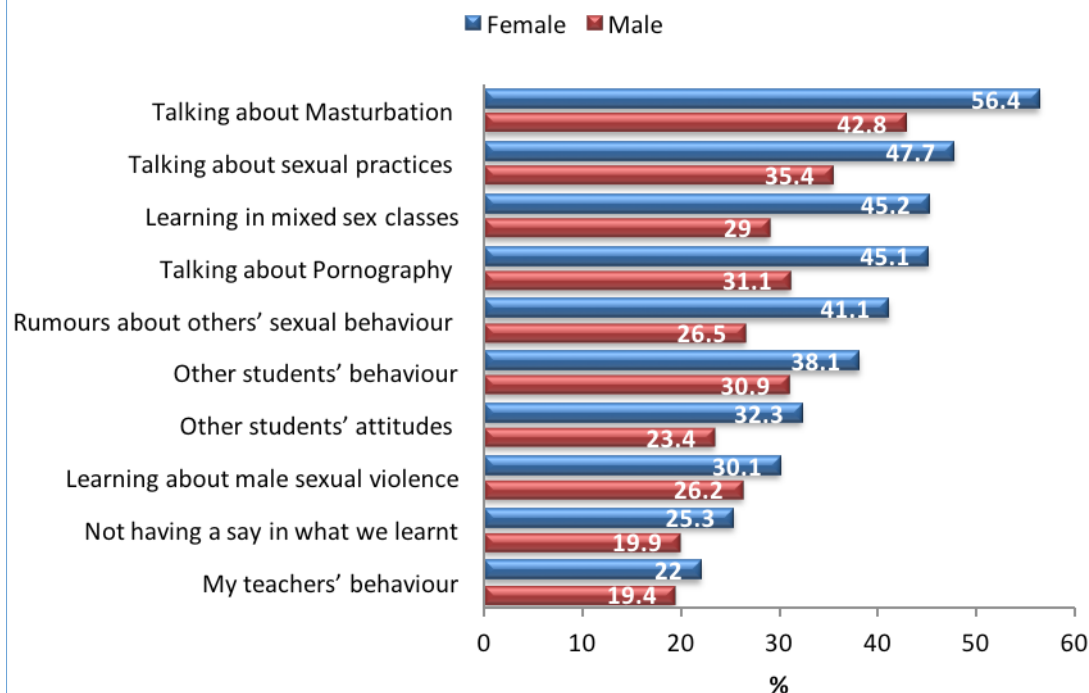


Figure 14: What made students feel uncomfortable in sexuality and relationships education, by gender

What made students feel embarrassed by gender

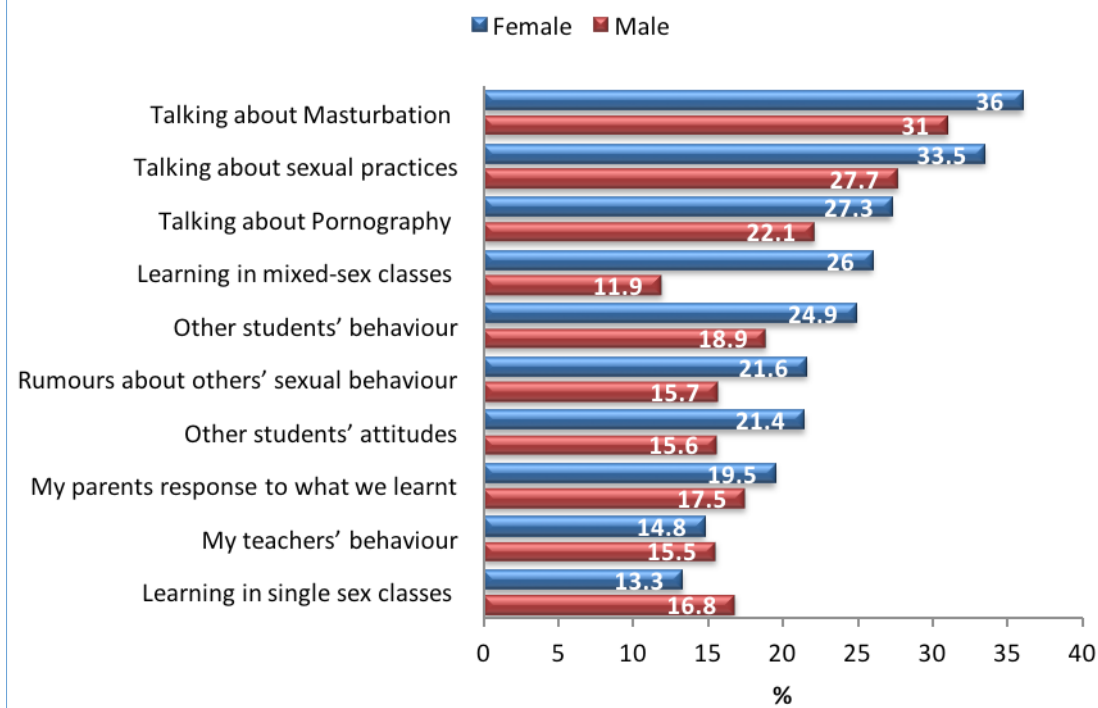


Figure 15: What made students feel embarrassed in sexuality and relationships education, by gender

Summary

- More Victorian students (51%) than South Australian students (40%) felt 'uncomfortable, embarrassed, or annoyed' during sexuality and relationship education lessons.
- More girls (55%) than boys (38%) felt 'uncomfortable, embarrassed, or annoyed' during sexuality and relationship education lessons.
- Generally, girls felt more uncomfortable than boys when 'talking about masturbation' (girls: 56%; boys: 43%), 'talking about sexual practices' (girls: 48%; boys: 35%), and 'talking about pornography' (girls: 45%; boys: 31%).
- A higher percentage of girls (26%) than boys (12%) reported that they felt embarrassed when 'learning in mixed-sex classes'. Girls were also more embarrassed by 'other students' behaviour' than boys (girls: 25%; boys: 19%).

The 'best teachers' of sexuality and relationships education

Many studies have confirmed what teachers of sexuality and relationships education already know; it is a difficult and complex area of the curriculum to teach (Johnson, 2012). As Allen notes, 'the socially constituted nature of sexuality as "private", "sensitive" and "dangerous" demands a teacher who is comfortable with a highly controversial subject as well as their own sexual identity' (2009, p. 33). Because teaching in this area is often challenging, considerable research has been undertaken to identify the kinds of knowledge, skills, and dispositions that teachers need to be confident and competent sexuality educators. Much of this work has been critical of teachers who are ill-prepared to teach in this area (Harrison, 1997), who are too embarrassed to teach certain topics (like sexual pleasure and eroticism) (Johnson, 2012), and who lack the skills and will to confront sexist and homophobic attitudes (Milton, 2003). Yet other research reveals that many teachers are 'almost without exception, extremely committed and enthusiastic about SRE' (Strange, et al., 2006, p. 44). What is it about these teachers that enables them to provide quality sexuality and relationships education?

In his study of South Australian sexuality and relationships teachers, Johnson found that:

Most teachers didn't think factors like teaching experience, subject background, gender, or sexual orientation were particularly important issues when considering who should teach sex education. Rather, they focussed strongly on the quality of the relationship between teachers and students, teachers' knowledge and training in the area, their ability to 'manage' student behaviour, and their openness to different ideas about human sexuality (being 'broad minded').

(2012, p. 16)

Referring back to Allen's (2005) New Zealand study of young people's views on school-based sex education, it is interesting to note what attributes they prefer in teachers. They want teachers who:

- Are explicit, go into detail and 'say everything' without being shocked
- Are 'comfortable' dealing with sexual matters
- Don't repeat what students already know
- Are open and honest
- Are unbiased and don't moralise
- Are well trained and prepared
- Use informal and interactive teaching strategies
- Challenge inappropriate remarks and disruptive behaviour ('shut down bigoted students')
- De-emphasise the usual hierarchy between student and teacher

In both studies, it appears that teachers and students were not so much concerned with ‘who’ the best teachers were (i.e., gender, sexuality, or age) but with ‘what’ knowledge, skills, and dispositions they used to teach in the area.

In this study, students were given a range of teacher characteristics and were asked to select which of these make the ‘best teacher’ of sexuality. Overall, students selected ‘respectful’, ‘sense of humour’, and ‘relate well to students’ as the most important characteristics of the ‘best teachers’ of sexuality and relationships. Each of these was ranked as more important by girls than boys. When divided by gender, girls rated ‘respectful’ (55.1%), ‘approachable’ (53.0%), and having a ‘sense of humour’ (52.1%) as the most important characteristics of the ‘best teachers’, whereas boys rated ‘having a sense of humour’ (52%), ‘experienced’ (47%), ‘respectful’ (45%), and ‘relate well to students’ (44%) as most important. (see Figure 16).

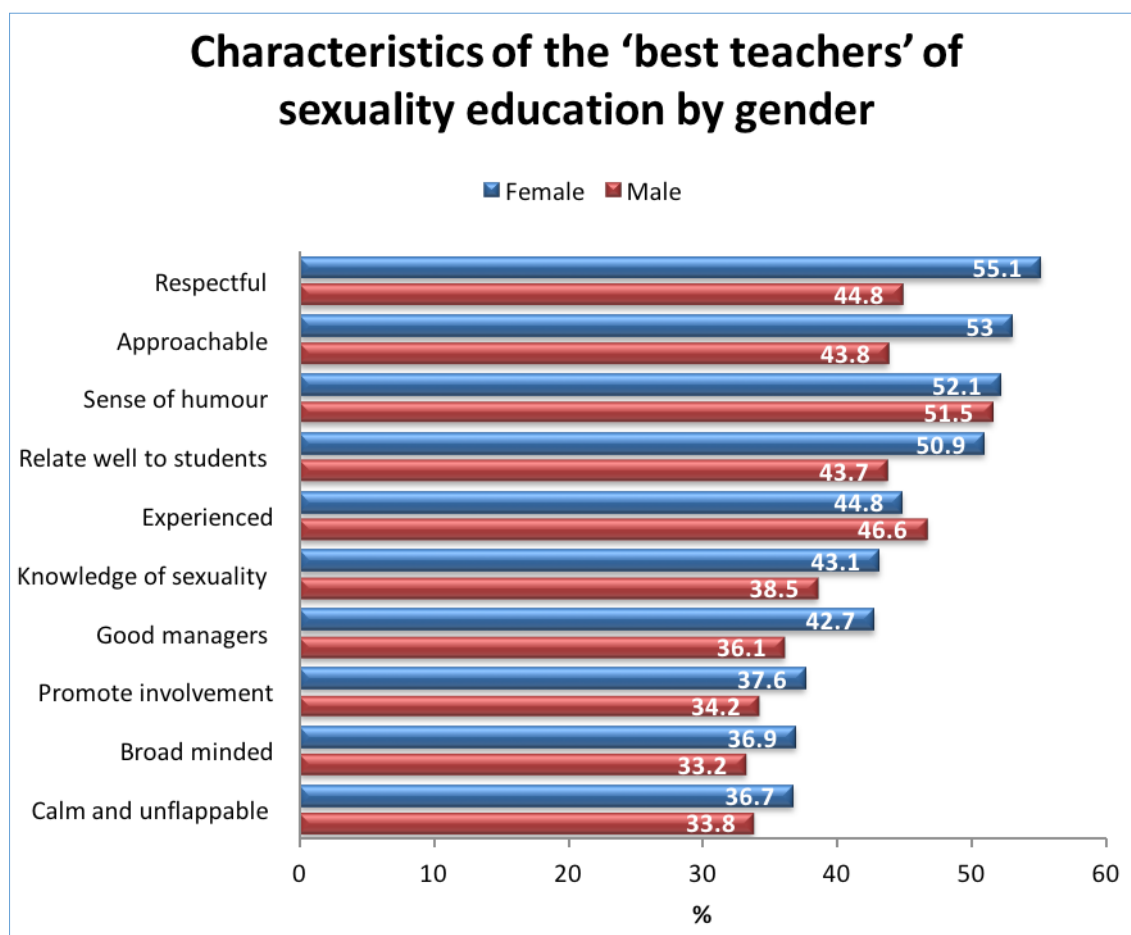


Figure 16: Characteristics of the ‘best teachers’ of sexuality and relationships education, by gender

Many of the students’ open-ended comments focused on professional skills and dispositions, some of which reflected the key characteristics identified. These comments include the need for humour (also see Allen, 2014), for teachers to be comfortable with the topic, and for teachers to be able to ‘control’ the class (as also found by Allen, 2005):

I think that a teacher should be very open about sexual stuff and they should be able to take a joke and laugh because if we make jokes it is just showing that sometimes it is uncomfortable and it's a lot more fun if they aren't so serious about everything. (13 year old girl)

A good teacher who knows what they are talking about. (13 year old boy)

Not awkward; very open minded; approachable; easy going, relatable and calm; not sexist, homophobic or racist. (14 year old girl)

They also deal with inappropriate, rude or immature behaviour. (14 year old girl)

Some students also commented on the age, gender, and sexuality of the 'best teachers', although they did not rate highly when students selected their preferred characteristics:

Younger teachers are better. (15 year old boy)

It would be easier if each gender of child was taught by the same sex teacher. (14 year old boy)

It doesn't matter if they're male or female or other as long as they are calm and don't get embarrassed about what they teach. (14 year old girl)

Teachers' sexuality is none of our business. (14 year old boy)

I don't think that sexuality (of the teacher) is relevant when learning about this, as we are going to learn the same thing either way. (14 year old girl)

Summary

- Overall, students reported that the 'best teachers' of sexuality and relationships education were 'respectful', 'have a sense of humour', and 'relate well to students'.
- However, when divided by gender, two of the top three responses were different. Girls rated 'respectful' (55%), 'approachable' (53%), and 'having a sense of humour' (52%) as the most important characteristics of the 'best teachers'. Boys rated 'having a sense of humour' (52%), 'experienced' (47%), 'respectful' (45%), and 'relate well to students' (44%) as most important.

What should be taught in greater depth

Students' need for additional information, or more depth on topics already covered, mirror a number of current social, political, and media issues that were prominent in both South Australia and Victoria at the time of the survey: most notably violence in relationships, and gender and sexual diversity. They also reflect a desire to have greater depth about issues related to the social context and norms of relationships rather than traditional sexual health information such as Sexually Transmitted Infections or contraception. Comments such as, 'More about relationships in general, less about the female reproductive system because there's no point knowing about female anatomy if you don't know how to have a healthy relationship with a woman' (16 year old boy), were characteristic of student responses in this area.

'Gender diversity', 'violence in relationships', 'staying safe online', 'starting relationships', 'ending relationships', and 'love' were the issues that rated the highest amongst students, although as Figure 17 shows, issues related to greater explicitness about 'sexual practices' and 'sexual pleasure' were also in the ten most highly rated issues that students wanted to explore in more depth.

In relation to gender and sexual diversity there was a sense that students were frustrated with a failure to address these issues in sexuality and relationships education, illustrated in the sentiments expressed by the following student: 'Teach them about different genders and sexualities, for God's sake' (13 year old girl). The focus of several student comments was clearly around a more inclusive approach and understanding more about gender and diverse sexualities:

I think our sexuality and relationships education needs to deal with teaching students to be more accepting to homosexuals and to break out of gender stereotypes.

(14 year old boy)

I think we should focus more on homosexuality and how people are different but we should accept them. Instead of just talking about sex for opposite sex couples, talk about it for same sex couples.

(14 year old girl)

How to deal when you're confused about what gender you like or what gender you really are.

(14 year old girl)

Lots more about sexuality differences. I'm gender fluid and no one knows what that it is.

(15 year old girl)

Consistent with other Australian research (Ollis, Harrison and Richardson, 2012), love featured as a topic that students wanted to know more about (42.2 % of girls; 39.4% of boys). As one 14 year old girl wrote, 'It would be awesome to learn more about love and relationships rather than just the names of sexual organs, and masturbating'. Students felt that they needed more insights into the emotions associated with 'falling in love' because it is at this age 'where relationships and love happen but a lot of people are clueless and don't know what to do' (15 year old girl). Although the resources available in South Australia and Victoria have some focus on love, these may not be meeting the needs of some students. Perhaps this is also because love, in particular intimate love, is often ignored in the functional approach to sexuality and relationships education common in schools (Farrelly, O'Brien and Prain, 2007).

Although there was a significant difference in the percentage of girls and boys who identified 'gender diversity' as needing to be taught in greater depth (girls: 51.8%; boys: 41.0%), it was rated as the second highest issue by both girls and boys. Figure 17 shows clear gender differences in topics related to 'how to have sex', 'sex acts', 'sexual pleasure', 'masturbation', and 'pornography', which were rated far more highly by boys. The exception to this was 'starting a relationship', which was identified by both boys (41%) and girls (40.8%) as an issue that should be explored in greater depth.

There was a significant difference in the expressed need for greater information about pornography by boys (31.6%) compared with girls (14.2%). Similarly, 37.3% of boys wanted more information about masturbation compared with 17.3% of girls. However, written comments made by some girls indicated that they wanted to know about 'Sexual positions' (13 year old girl), and 'something about the use of sex toys' (13 year old girl), with one girl writing 'For me personally, information about masturbation would have helped a lot' (14 year old girl).

Gender differences such as these are probably not surprising as research on normative expectations about sex amongst young people centre on girls' desire for love and romance and boys' desire for sex and sexual experience (Hillier, 2010). This also reflects the common argument by scholars in the field that these issues are rarely covered in sexuality and relationships education classes despite them being important to students (Allen, Rasmussen and Quinlivan, 2013; Bay-Cheng, 2010; Cameron-Lewis and Allen, 2013). As one of the students in this study points out 'I've never been educated about masturbation... I've never been told what is too much' (15 year old boy).

Other research would suggest that the data reflects boys' desires to explore the 'sexual script' that pornography provides (Haste, 2013, p. 521). This was confirmed by a number of comments made by boys, including 'everyone watches it and they don't teach us enough about porn and information' (13 year old boy). Haste (2013, p. 520) goes as far as saying that 'One of the key challenges facing sex education is how to deal with male pupils' use of, and reference to, pornography'.

When student comments are analysed, a number of themes emerge. Power and control from having knowledge and being informed about sex and relationships was identified as a key reason why students wanted or needed to explore issues in more depth:

Because knowledge is power. If you know nothing or very little about sex and relationships, then you have very little power in any situation regarding them. You place yourself, or, if you're the one teaching or deciding on a curriculum, those you are educating, in danger if you don't give them that knowledge. (15 year old girl)

The importance of this knowledge for their current and future lives and relationships was also identified as a key reason for wanting more depth:

It will be handy in the future. (13 year old boy)

They are all occurring matters in real life and will probably have to deal with them when we grow up. (13 year old girl)

So it can help us with our future relationships because they aren't covered enough and no one talks about them normally. (15 year old girl)

Because this generation doesn't see anything about relationships or 'making love'. It's all about rooting or having sex with a girl. Way too many females are being cheap and doing this [as though it's] ordinary. Not making it special. Not thinking it is a huge deal. It's quite disturbing.
(16 year old girl)

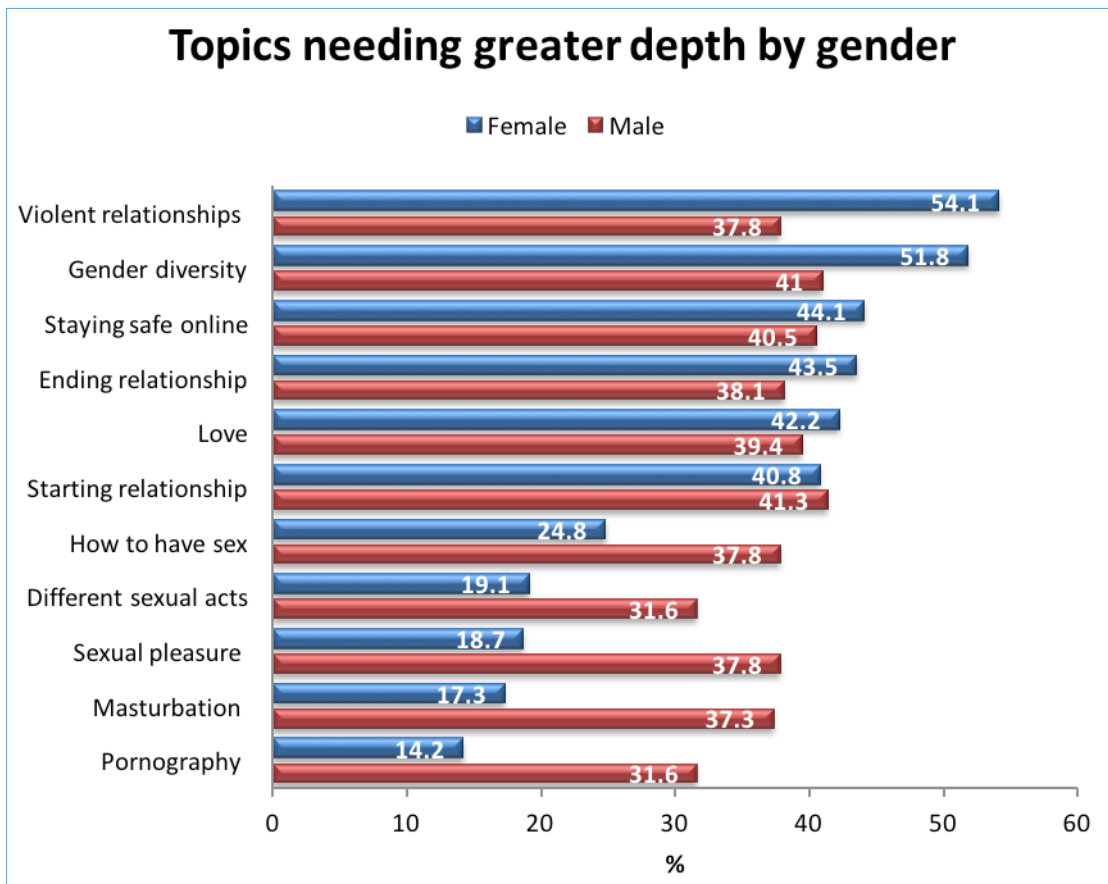


Figure 17: Topics which should be taught in greater depth in sexuality and relationships education, by gender

The issue that surfaced most, and is consistent with other research (Ashcraft, 2012; Allen, 2005), is a lack of focus on topics that are relevant to students:

I feel like we didn't talk about these topics much. (13 year old girl)

Some are hardly ever talked about: gender, pornography and unhealthy relationships.
(14 year old boy)

Summary

- Overall, the two topics that students most wanted to explore in greater depth were 'Gender diversity' and 'Violent relationships'.
- 'Love' and 'starting a relationship' were also identified by both boys and girls as topics that should be taught in greater depth.
- More girls than boys wanted further information about 'gender diversity' (girls: 52%; boys: 41%), 'violent relationships' (girls: 54%; boys: 38%), 'staying safe online' (girls: 44%; boys: 41%), and 'ending a relationship' (girls: 44%; boys: 38%).
- More boys than girls wanted further information about 'how to have sex' (boys: 38%; girls: 25%), 'sexual pleasure' (boys: 38%; girls: 19%), 'masturbation' (boys: 37%; girls: 17%), 'different sexual acts' (boys: 32%; girls 19%), and 'pornography' (boys: 32%; girls: 14%).
- Students' reasons for wanting more information frequently centred on their need to be knowledgeable about sexuality issues when they become involved in relationships.

Ideas to improve sexuality and relationships education

Allen has pointed to the mismatch between what young people's needs and interests in sexuality and relationships education are, and what adults think these are, which in turn influences the content and pedagogy of many sexuality and relationships education programs (2008, p. 573. See also Aggleton and Campbell, 2000; Johnson, 2012; Thomas and Aggleton, 2016). In her research, Allen found that 'Young people's calls for content about emotions in relationships, teenage parenthood, abortion and how to make sexual activity pleasurable' are at odds with the current emphases in many programs (2008, p. 573). She argues that the responses made by students position them 'as having the right to make their own decisions about sexual activity and to access knowledge that will enable their engagement in relationships that are physically and emotionally pleasurable' (p. 573). Some of her findings are echoed in our participants' responses.

In this study (see Figure 18), significant numbers of both girls (28.3%) and boys (25.6%) strongly agreed with statements about being consulted more on the content and teaching approaches used in sexuality and relationships education. They also wanted 'fewer "secrets" about sexuality' suggesting that a quarter of boys and girls knew that some topics and issues were still subject to tacit censorship by program developers and teachers. When viewed alongside the findings presented in the previous section of this report about what students wanted dealt with in more detail, it is clear that students want more say about what is taught about the complexities of forming intimate, positive, and respectful relationships (identified by more girls than boys), and how to address topics and issues (e.g., sexual pleasure, masturbation) that remain largely taboo (identified by more boys than girls).

Overall, boys tended to be more critical of sexuality and relationships education than girls. For example, around 5% more boys than girls recommended changes to improve sexuality and relationships education in seven of the ten suggested areas. These focused on the need for 'more visual materials', 'better teachers', and more information about the 'impact of alcohol' on sexual decision making.

Students' written comments capture some of the reasons behind their responses to the survey questions, particularly over the issue of withholding or selectively omitting information deemed to be important by students:

More lessons on sexual activity. (14 year old girl)

No sugar coating – tell us how it is. (14 year old girl)

There should be no stone left unturned! Sex is a part of life that needs to be discussed as loudly and openly as possible. (14 year old girl)

Don't hide these things from us. For around 95% of us, these things aren't inappropriate compared to what we've already seen, and for that remaining 5%, their innocence will not stay for much longer anyway. We all have a right to know. (15 year old girl)

Don't hold anything back; tell them it all so we know it even though I already know. (16 year old boy)

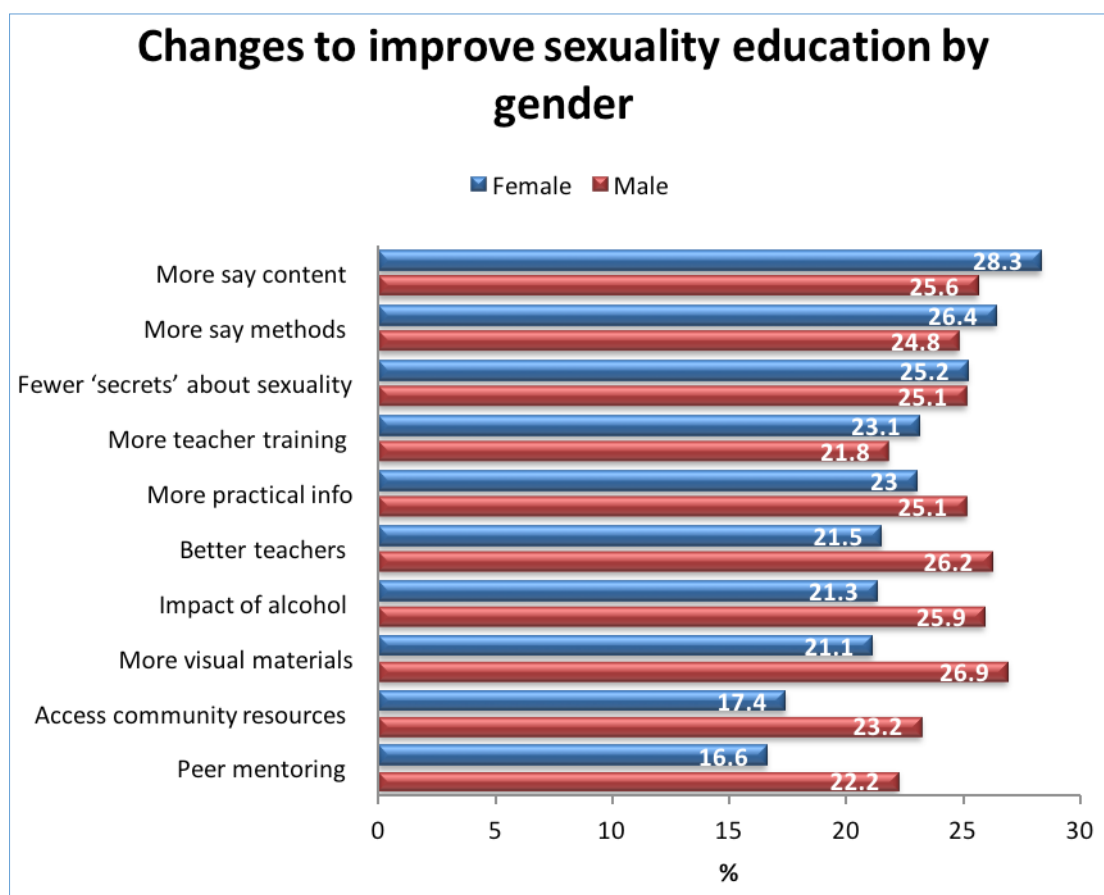


Figure 18: Changes to improve sexuality and relationships education, by gender

The following comments reflect some students' reasons for suggesting that sexuality and relationships education could be improved by having 'better teachers':

My teachers made me feel annoyed when they talked down to us, I didn't like how they told us that we shouldn't be doing any of these sexual activities yet. It should be a person's choice when or when they do not take part. Having someone's judgment over your head is horrible to have. (14 year old girl)

The teachers wouldn't allow us to learn different things and when we asked they would put it off and say that we didn't have any time. (14 year old girl)

They should make it more fun. (13 year old boy)

They should send out kids who are 'homophobic' when we are talking about sexuality (because it's very embarrassing and their opinions upset me). (14 year old girl)

When asked about how sexuality and relationships education could be improved, more students in Victoria expressed a need for improvement in eight of the ten suggested areas (see Figure 19). The biggest differences relate to the quality of teachers: 'More teacher training' (Victoria: 24.2%; SA: 19.6%) and 'Better teachers' (Victoria: 26.3%; SA: 19.1%). This could be a further indicator of the importance of providing ongoing professional development for teachers in this area. However, for the most part, differences between the two states were small (<2%).

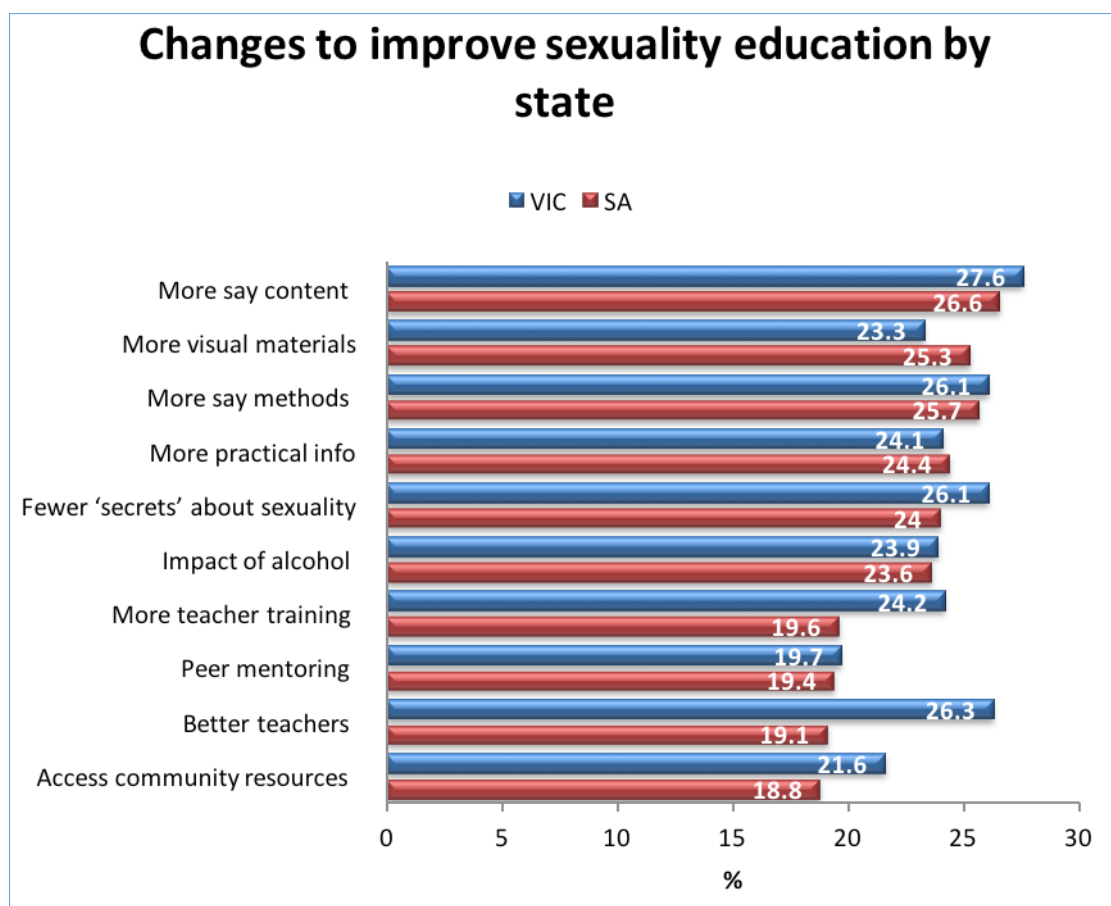


Figure 19: Changes to improve sexuality and relationships education, by state

Summary

- Around a quarter of students strongly agreed that 'having more say about content', 'having more say about teaching methods', and 'having fewer secrets about sexuality' would improve sexuality and relationships education.
- More boys than girls strongly agreed that 'more visual materials' (boys: 27%; girls: 21%), more information about 'the impact of alcohol' on sexual decision making (boys: 26%; girls: 21%), 'better teachers' (boys: 26%; girls: 22%), and the greater use of 'peer mentoring' (boys: 22%; girls: 17%) would improve sexuality and relationships education.
- While the responses of students from South Australia and Victoria were very similar, more Victorian students than South Australian students identified the need for 'better teachers' (Victoria: 26% strongly agreed; SA: 19%) and 'more teacher training' (Victoria: 24% strongly agreed; SA: 20%).

Conclusions

This report has detailed the findings of the first stage of our research exploring young people's views of sexuality and relationships education in schools. 2,325 students aged 13-16 years, drawn from 14 state government schools in South Australia and 17 in Victoria, participated in our online survey. In this Stage 1 report we have focused on gender and state comparisons and have reported on students' views on the following:

- Most used and trusted sources of information on sexuality and relationships
- Discussing sexuality and relationships issues
- What is taught in sexuality and relationships education
- Teaching and learning activities
- Feelings during sexuality and relationships education
- The 'best teachers' of sexuality and relationships education
- What should be taught in greater depth, and
- Ideas to improve sexuality and relationships education

Although students' views about school-based sexuality and relationships education were diverse and complex, overall they did see it as playing an important role for learning about sexuality and relationships. School programs were the most used source of information about sexuality and relationships and featured as the most trusted source for boys and the second most trusted source for girls, after their mums.

As such, it is imperative that curriculum content reflects students' expressed need for a greater focus on all aspects of developing and maintaining respectful relationships and that teachers are well equipped to deliver relevant and up-to-date content using engaging pedagogical approaches.

The importance of involving students

Previous research has identified a gap between what is taught in sexuality and relationships education and what students would like to learn about. This gap is also evident in our research and points to the importance of asking students what they want and need in order to develop responsive and relevant curriculum and pedagogical approaches.

Issues which have gained attention recently such as gender diversity, staying safe online, and building safer relationships were identified as issues of concern to the students in our study. Topics such as puberty, reproductive systems, sexually transmitted infections, and contraception did not appear in the top ten topics that students wanted to learn in more depth. The latter appeared in the top ten most taught topics reported in our survey. This is consistent with previous research that indicates that teachers are comfortable with teaching more 'factual' information and less comfortable teaching issues deemed to be sensitive or controversial.

The move to a strengths-based approach in Health and Physical Education in the new Australian curriculum presents a unique opportunity to explore positive aspects of sexuality such as love and sexual pleasure, and gender diversity which were identified by students as topics that need to be taught in greater depth. There are challenges in adopting this approach, as well as opportunities. The need for students to acquire the knowledge and skills to keep themselves healthy requires some focus on health risks. However, for too long risk discourses have formed the bedrock in sexuality and relationships education resulting in students often feeling disempowered, victimised, and alienated. Getting the balance right is difficult but necessary.

Significant numbers of participants expressed their desire to be consulted about the content and teaching approaches used in sexuality and relationships education. Girls' and boys' responses were similar although their prioritising of these was different. It is clear, however, that they do want their opinions heard and, as discussed above, are very clear about what they want to learn about, and how. Love and all facets of safe and pleasurable relationships, gender diversity, and staying safe online were prioritised by students. Learning more about sexual pleasure and how to have sex were also of importance.

Ethics

As noted earlier, the ethics processes at both the University and Education Department levels in each state were long and arduous and caused long delays in commencing this Australian Research Council funded Linkage project. As well as the delays, we were also required to modify our survey so that we were unable to explore sexual and gender diversity, ethnicity, and religion in the depth that we envisaged when developing this research project. The four ethics committees we dealt with were all concerned about protecting students. We do not argue with the need for due diligence. However, it is very clear that the discourses of childhood innocence being invoked are out-dated in a hyper-sexualised world. The young people who participated in our research want to talk about the issues confronting them with well informed and trusted adults. As one young woman we quoted earlier stated, 'For around 95% of us, these things aren't inappropriate compared to what we've already seen...we all have a right to know'.

Gender Differences

More girls than boys felt uncomfortable, embarrassed, or annoyed during sexuality and relationships education. Despite some significant gender differences, the topics they nominated that caused them discomfort were similar: 'talking about masturbation', 'talking about sexual practices', 'talking about pornography', 'learning in mixed sex classes' and 'other students' attitudes' were the top five nominated.

Both girls and boys often cited boys' joking or disruptive behaviour as a cause of discomfort and girls were much more uncomfortable than boys about learning in a mixed-sex environment. Students expressed discomfort when topics such as masturbation and other socially taboo issues were covered in class. Again, girls were more uncomfortable than boys on every topic that was named in the top ten. However, these feelings did not necessarily mean that students thought the topics should not be taught, as many viewed them to be relevant and important.

There were marked differences of opinion between girls and boys about what should be taught in greater depth in sexuality and relationships education. More girls than boys wanted 'violent relationships', 'gender diversity', 'staying safe online', 'ending a relationship', and 'love' taught in greater depth. Boys wanted more depth on 'how to have sex', 'different sexual acts', 'sexual pleasure', 'masturbation' and 'pornography'. This is despite the fact that talking about sexual practices was second in the top ten topics that made students feel embarrassed. The contradictions here are important to explore further.

Although gender differences were evident, there were still significant numbers of boys who also wanted to be taught more about gender diversity and staying safe online.

It is clear that despite some similarities the students in this study mirror the wider society in terms of what is appropriate/not appropriate to talk about in public spaces and its gendered nature. Boys are still expected to talk about sex and indiscriminately; girls are not. Girls are not expected to masturbate, talk about sexual practices, or talk about pornography. Historically this has been the case and it appears that not much has changed despite the efforts of sexuality and relationships educators.

State Differences

When it comes to discussing sexuality and relationships, students in Victoria were far less comfortable talking to a range of people than their counterparts in South Australia. They also felt more 'uncomfortable', 'embarrassed', or 'annoyed' during sexuality and relationships education lessons than students from South Australia when discussing masturbation, sexual practices, and pornography. Despite these differences, the top five topics nominated as the most 'uncomfortable' across both states were similar: 'talking about masturbation', 'sexual practices', 'pornography', 'other students' behaviour', and 'rumours about others' sexual behaviour'. Victorian students were much more uncomfortable learning in single-sex classes than their South Australian counterparts.

There were also differences between what is taught and how it is taught between the two states, with more students in South Australia recalling being taught about 'respect in relationships' than those in Victoria. More Victorian students also perceived the need for 'better teachers' and 'more teacher training'. Although the reasons for these differences require further research, it is reasonable to surmise that the absence of ongoing teacher professional development in Victoria has a deleterious effect in all of the areas discussed above (Ollis, 2010) and may go some way towards explaining the differences in students' comfort levels and perceptions of teachers.

Implications

These findings have clear implications for curriculum developments in sexuality and relationships education. Our research comes at a time when there is increased emphasis on the role that education can play in promoting respectful relationships. A recent report (*Our Watch*, 2015, p. 11) noted that:

State and Commonwealth Education Ministers, on 18 September 2015, strengthened the position of Respectful Relationships in the Australian Curriculum with specific content in the Health and Physical Education learning area and through the personal and social capability across the learning areas.

The Commonwealth Government has also announced substantial funding for resource development and the Victorian Government recently announced that 'Respectful Relationships Education will be included in the curriculum from 2016 in Prep through to Year 10'.

We are currently conducting the second phase of our Stage 1 research, which involves smaller groups of students from two schools in each state interrogating and responding to some of the significant survey findings and working with us to discuss and explain some of the contradictions we have discovered in our data. Stages 2 and 3 will further involve students in the research process, to develop ideas for use in secondary school sexuality and relationships education.

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