

# ***“He’s the stud and she’s the slut”***

Young people’s attitudes to pornography, sex and relationships

Produced by Zero Tolerance

[www.zerotolerance.org.uk](http://www.zerotolerance.org.uk)





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# 1. Introduction

Zero Tolerance has been working in Scotland for over 20 years to end violence against women by challenging the attitudes and assumptions that perpetuate it. Much of this has involved working with young people, and those that support young people such as teachers and youth workers, to promote healthy, respectful relationships.

There has been intense debate in recent years about the possible effects of sexualisation and pornography on how young people see, and treat, themselves and others. A growing body of research<sup>[1]</sup> suggests they suffer serious negative impacts from our current hyper-sexualised culture. However, despite good work by youth and sexual health workers to value and promote young people's views, it is only very recently that young people have been given opportunities to contribute to the discussion on a wider scale.

This research examines how issues of sexualisation and pornography are understood by young people in Scotland. It builds on work carried out by Zero Tolerance and the Women's Support Project, particularly the 'Porcupine' project which supported a group of young people to run an online campaign challenging the normalisation of pornography and porn culture. Although there was lot of interest in this campaign, we found that many young people, including the group themselves, were very wary of questioning any aspect of pornography in a public forum. Discussion with the group suggested that pressure to conform to normalised views on pornography was so powerful that debate was almost entirely absent from young people's peer groups and dissenters were quickly shut down.

Our starting point for this research was to find out if this experience is a common one for young people in Scotland and if so, what other cultural factors may influence their views and restrict or encourage their ability to express what they really think and feel. By involving young people in the planning and implementation of the research, we hoped to find out more about the environment that young people are growing up in, the attitudes and behaviour they consider normal, the sources from which they gain information about sex and relationships, and crucially what they think needs to happen (if anything) to ensure ours is a culture in which they can grow up safe, respected and valued.

This small, time-limited piece of research does not claim to give all the answers on the topics it covers, nor to represent the views of every young person in Scotland. There are many groups of marginalised young people whose voices are yet to be heard, and work to gather their views must continue.

As adults from government, parents groups, voluntary organisations and many more begin to respond to the issues covered here, this report should act as a reminder that any action taken must address the real issues as experienced by young people; not just the perceived concerns of a different generation.

Laura Tomson,

On behalf of Zero Tolerance

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1. For example Horvath et al (2013) "Basically... porn is everywhere" A Rapid Evidence Assessment on the Effect that Access and Exposure to Pornography has on Children and Young People, Office of the Children's Commissioner; Girlguiding (2013) Girls' Attitudes Survey; Papadopoulos (2010) Sexualisation of young people review; Ringrose et al (2012) A qualitative study of children, young people and 'sexting' NSPCC

## 2. Summary of findings

- Pornography and sexualised media were part of most participants' everyday lives.
- Although pornography and sexualised media were seen as problematic by many participants, they were not understood as isolated issues but as part of a broader pattern of sexism and double standards around sex and relationships.
- Participants' responses to sexualisation, pornography, relationships and sex were heavily impacted by these gendered expectations and stereotypes. This means that young male and female participants' experiences and attitudes often differed.
- Specific issues for female participants included:
  - Pressure both to engage and not to engage in sexual and/or sexualised behaviour, with a range of negative consequences for failing to negotiate the 'appropriate' balance.
  - Pressure to conform to unrealistic beauty standards and resulting negative body image.
- Specific issues for male participants included:
  - Pressure to conform to heterosexual male 'norms' of watching and approving of pornography, sexualising women and girls, and pursuing sex. Consequences of not fulfilling these include being labelled 'gay' or not adequately masculine.
  - Pressure to appear sexually experienced, which may lead to a rejection of sex education.
- Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender participants were impacted differently than those who identified as heterosexual, including greater perceived exposure to sexualised material and feeling excluded from heteronormative sex and relationships education.
- Significant numbers of participants thought that the information available to them on sex and relationships is inadequate.

### ***3. Methods & participants***

A group of young people aged 14 – 20 were recruited from previous Zero Tolerance youth project groups, local Edinburgh youth centres and word of mouth from those already recruited. The group attended sessions with a youth worker during which they discussed the issues to be covered in the research, gained basic research skills, and contributed to the design of the survey and focus group questions. A working group of ten professionals working in violence against women prevention and youth work oversaw the research and contributed ideas and expertise.

A link to an online survey was sent to youth and women's organisations around Scotland for dissemination to young people. The survey was live between June and September 2013. Some surveys were completed on paper at young people's road-shows. 237 young people aged 14 – 19, from 25 local authorities, completed the survey. Approximately two thirds identified as female and almost 25% identified as other than heterosexual (with categories including, for example, asexual and 'questioning/curious' as well as lesbian, gay and bisexual).

Concurrently, six focus groups were held with a total of 40 young people. 31 were aged 14 – 19 and eight aged 20 – 24; 21 were female and 19 were male. The groups were comprised of pre-existing youth groups including an LGBT group, a young mothers' group, a group for homeless young people, a women's hostel group, a youth council group and a general youth group. The focus group questions were based on early findings from the survey, and aimed to explore some of the questions in greater detail. They were piloted with an Edinburgh-based youth group and refined using their comments.

The survey and focus group questions were designed to find out what the participants thought were normal or common attitudes and behaviour amongst their peers. This meant that most of them did not ask about the participants' own behaviour and experiences but about how common a particular behaviour or attitude was in their peer group, or how they thought young people their age might respond to a particular scenario.

Ethical guidelines were developed before the commencement of research to limit any potential negative impact on participants. The survey contained an introduction with information about the content, as well as links to support and resources for young people who wanted these following their participation. Participants could stop completing the survey at any point, and their responses were anonymous. Focus group participants were given information about the focus group in advance to ensure informed consent, and could opt out at any time before or during the session. A youth worker known to the participants was present during each focus group, and participants were encouraged to speak to their youth worker or an adult researcher following from the session if it raised any issues for them.

Youth workers for each focus group were given full information about the nature of the research in advance of the focus group, and were made aware that we would follow their policy on parental consent for such activities. No youth workers elected to seek consent. The survey was freely available online and therefore it was not possible to obtain parental consent for young peoples' participation. While the ethical implications of not gaining parental consent were carefully considered, we wanted to balance parental rights with the rights of young people to have a voice on the topics covered by the research.

A full list of survey and focus group questions are available to view at:  
[www.zerotolerance.org.uk/Projects/AttitudesResearch](http://www.zerotolerance.org.uk/Projects/AttitudesResearch).

## 4. Everyday pornography

Part of the remit of this research was to find out to what extent young people in Scotland consider it 'normal' for people in their age group to access and/or be exposed to pornography and sexualised media.

To do this it was important to know what the participants understood by 'pornography'. Survey participants were asked 'what do you think pornography is?' with the option to select multiple answers from a list. The results suggest that while there is some diversity of opinion about what constitutes pornography, it is generally accepted that 'film of people actually having sex', 'pictures of people actually having sex' and 'depictions of sex intended for sexual arousal' all constitute pornography (selected by 78%, 65% and 64% of respondents respectively). Other options caused more disagreement; for example 50% of participants selected 'pictures of nude or semi-nude people'. This suggests it is important that adults working with young people on this topic consider how pornography is defined and why. It may also impact on how much young people believe they are exposed to pornography; for example some adults may consider page three of The Sun newspaper to be pornography while many young people may not. It is also worth noting that only 7% said they were 'unsure' about what pornography is.

Questions about the viewing of pornography showed a large gender gap. When asked about how common a variety of activities are for boys and girls their age, 74% of survey participants said that most or all boys their age look at pornography, compared to 12% for girls. Breaking this down by age, 60% of 14 – 15 year olds said most or all boys their age look at pornography, and 79% of 16 – 19 year olds said this. When asked about frequency of access, 47% of participants said that boys their age see porn deliberately every day and 40% thought they access it once a week. Boys estimated this higher than girls, with 57% of male respondents saying that boys their age see porn deliberately every day.

Stories about pornography 'pop-ups' and sexualised 'singles' adverts coming up when searching for non-sexual content on the internet were a common theme during focus groups. This was often reported as happening at a very young age.

Young woman: ***"It pops up in the most kind of unexpected... I went on looking for codes for a game and end up being told that Sapphire's into me. So it's a bit strange, I think they should have, there should be more filters to stop companies advertising that way."***

Young man: *"Like people getting access to it when they don't actually want access to it."*

Young woman: *"I went on Facebook the other day and a guy had his hand down a women's trousers in the park and it was on Facebook, it was disgusting."*

Researcher: *"How common is it to see stuff like that even if you don't go looking for it?"*

Young woman: ***"Loads cause everybody shares it and likes it and it's just everywhere."***



Survey participants were also asked to look at a selection of sexualised images<sup>[1]</sup> from everyday media (image right). 66% of boys and 48% of girls said they see similar images 'every day'.

In order to explore what attitudes to pornography are viewed as 'normal' or usual, survey participants were given the following scenario. The scenario depicts a sex act that could be seen as aggressive or abusive in order to address concerns that extreme and violent pornography is becoming normalised for young people; however it was intended not to be so extreme as to provide an 'obvious' answer (or breach ethical guidelines).



**Scenario: You are with a group of friends and one of them shows some porn on their phone. In the film, two men are having sex with a woman while slapping her and calling her names. The woman isn't doing anything to stop them OR to encourage them. How do you think the group would respond?**

Many comments suggested that the viewing of aggressive or violent pornography is commonplace:

*"They wouldn't think anything of it."* Male, 16, survey

***"Not a big reaction to this as most pornography that is available on the internet now is quite brutal."*** Female, 19, survey

*"Would depend on the quality of porn."* Male, 19, survey

While words such as 'shock' and 'disgust' were common within responses, the most common word used by far was 'laugh' (or laughter/laughing).

*"They would probably laugh."* Female, 14, survey

*"I think they will laugh because I've saw that one and I laughed."* Male, 16, survey

Girls were several times more likely than boys to use words such as 'shock' and 'disgust', and many participants were clear that boys and girls would respond differently to such a scenario:

*"It depends if it's a group of boys or girls because they both react differently."* Female, 14, survey

***"Most of my girl friends would probably cringe, but the guy friends are more likely to just laugh."*** Female, 15, survey

*"If it were males in the group they would laugh but the females would find it nasty towards the girl."* Male, 18, survey

1. Clockwise from top left: Still from music video for 'Tip Drill' by Nelly, 2003; promotional shoot for British reality TV series The Valleys, featured in the online version of Heat Magazine in 2013; America Apparel advert, 2006; V magazine cover, 2013.



This suggests that pornography is normalised amongst large numbers of young people but far more so for boys. Amusement, rather than arousal, appears to be the accepted response to porn in a group setting.

Some respondents thought the group would view the scene with detachment, or direct abuse towards the woman in the film, suggesting empathy may be lacking in normalised responses. Very few respondents described the activities in the film as potential rape or abuse.

*"Laugh? I've seen and been around a similar situation to this, the people didn't react as if what was happening was real, they seen it as 'a joke.'" Female, 15, survey*

*"Laugh and think it is funny. They would call her names." Female, 15, survey*

***"A typical group... might laugh and degrade the woman - e.g. call her a 'slut' for appearing in pornography."*** Female, 18, survey

While some young people's laughter could be caused by shock or embarrassment, responses suggest it is important to be seen to find such material funny.

*"They would say it was funny so they wouldn't have to show their true feelings." Female, 16, survey*

***"Some of them would want to make a joke out of it to seem cool."***  
Female, 17, survey

A few participants said that viewing pornography would not happen in their group of friends, but that it does happen in some groups. Others said it would be unusual but only because of the group context. Although it might be expected that younger respondents would be more likely to say their peers would be shocked by the scenario, responses of shock or laughter were evenly spread between all age groups.

Taken together, these answers suggest that pornography and sexualised media are a normalised part of young people's everyday lives, but with significant gender differences. Whether or not boys are accessing pornography regularly – and there is definite suggestion that this is the case – they are growing up in an environment in which the use of pornography is considered normal for them. While this is not the case for girls, they are aware that it is seen as routine for boys and many girls are being exposed without deliberately seeking it out. It also appears that both boys and girls are regularly exposed to overtly sexualised media.

Survey participants were asked if there was anything they wanted to say about pornography. Despite the apparent normality of pornography for young people, surprisingly few commented positively about it. Some of those who did gave short, simple answers focused on personal pleasure or release:

***"Porn is a way for people to release all their stress."*** Male, 16, survey

*"It's an easy way to pleasure yourself." Male, 15, survey*

However most of those who said some positive things about pornography also wanted to acknowledge the existence of 'bad' porn or a 'bad side' to porn:

*"Porn is a personal thing; you can choose to watch it or not to, you also choose what you watch and how often. Most porn is made by straight men... sexualisation of women is seen as okay and something quite ordinary. Whereas if men were posed/dressed/photographed/etc. like a lot of women it would... make people feel uncomfortable." Non-binary gender, 18, survey*

*"It's perfectly healthy and not a disgusting thing however sexist or degrading porn is wrong."*

Female, 16, survey

*"It isn't bad but it is not respectful."* Female, 16, survey

*"Porn is something which is subjective; some people like it, others don't... there are people who deliberately set out to watch extreme or unusual or violent sexual videos and others who still watch porn but find some types wrong."* Male, 17, survey

***"I think porn is a real problem for my generation. Authority figures and the state do not know how to handle it but its prevalence is warping expectations of sex and relationships and ideals of beauty... however, pornography per se is not inherently morally wrong but the industry is exploitative and the vast majority of porn is sexist towards both genders."*** Female, 18, survey

Others were clear that they saw pornography as entirely negative:

***"Most of it is really degrading and nothing like real sex."*** Male, 14, survey

*"It's revolting and degrading. It's all just a fantasy made up for desperate creeps."* Female, 17, survey

*"I disagree with almost all of what I think other people believe about porn. I think porn is degrading especially to women and the LGBT community is depicted in a stereotype very damaging to the individuals."* Female, 18, survey

*"I think it's an industry where women are degraded. I don't think porn is empowering."* Female, 18, survey

***"Online porn is a bad influence I think it gives a contorted view of sex and women and how they should be."*** Male, 18, survey

The fact that participants considered watching pornography regularly (by boys at least) to be prevalent behaviour should not, then, lead to the assumption that young people's views on pornography are always simple or homogeneous. Despite this range of views, however, it does seem that the 'acceptable' response to pornography in a group situation, again particularly for boys, is jokey and uncritical, and does not allow for debate.

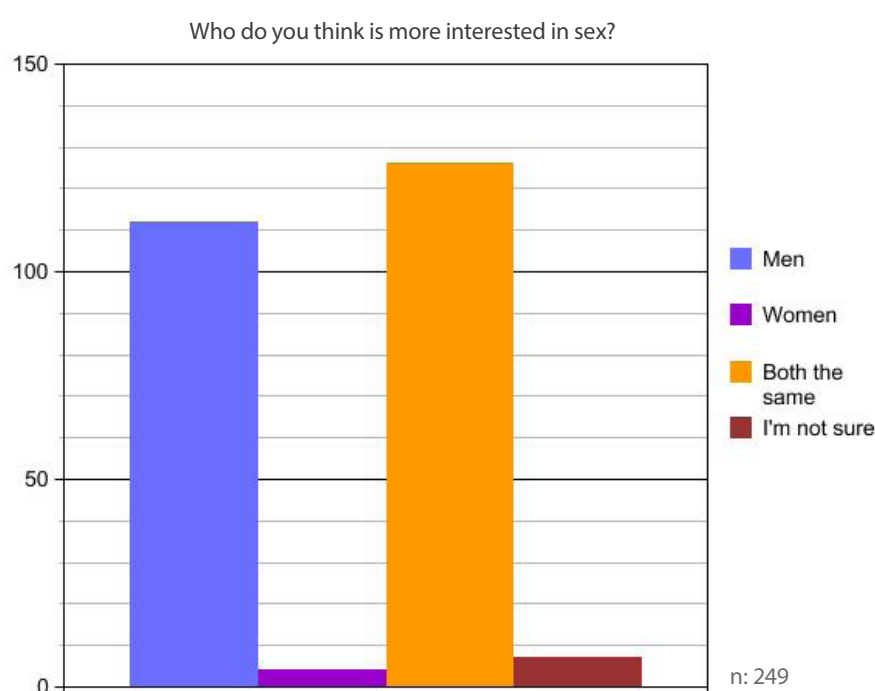
### **Key findings:**

- Participants thought they and other young people are exposed to pornography and sexualised media on a regular basis
- Many participants thought that boys and girls would react differently to viewing pornography in a group situation
- Overall, laughter was seen as the most common and accepted response to this scenario
- Participants' views about whether pornography is positive or negative varied widely

## 5. Gender, pleasure and desire

Desire and pleasure are often overlooked in both discussion about sexualisation and pornography, and within sex education<sup>[2]</sup>. Finding out what young people think about the place of desire and pleasure in relationships, and in what way, if any, this relates to gender, may shed light on how they relate to pornography and sexuality more broadly.

When asked about men's and women's levels of interest in sex, 50% of survey participants said that men and women have the same level of interest in sex, compared to 46% who said that men are more interested.



Those who thought that men are more interested explained this in a variety of ways. Some referred to men's greater exposure to sexual media:

*"Because it's more normal for guys to watch pornography, so they're more exposed to it, and therefore more interested."* Female, 17, survey

*"Men are assaulted by sexual themes from a younger age and are encouraged by pornography."* Male, 18, survey

Others thought boys are under more pressure to appear sexually experienced:

***"Guys want more experience so then they can show off to their mates and brag how much they had done it and it makes them more awesome or cool or whatever."*** Female, 15, survey

2. Wight et al (2010) 'The Quality of Young People's Sexual Relationships' Briefing 50, Centre for Research on Families and Relationships

*"During teens I think it's male because of peer pressure." Female, 16, survey*

Several participants referred to their experiences of boys talking about and pursuing sex:

*"They are always trying to hit on women." Female, 17, survey*

*"Because more boys ask for sex than girls." Male, 18, survey*

Others used crude physiological or 'common sense' explanations:

*"Because men are just men." Female, 14, survey*

*"Hormones." Male, 17, survey*

*"We masturbate more." Male, 18, survey*

Those who answered that both men and women are equally interested often explained their answer by arguing that men appear more interested due to cultural pressures. These young people distinguished between the way that sexuality is presented by the media or wider society, and their own experience.

*"We are fed the image that boys want it more than girls, however, this is clearly not the case."*

*Female, 16, survey*

*"In the media, it is portrayed that men are more interested in sex than women... in practice it seems like both men and women are equally interested." Male, 17, survey*

***"I just think it's shown in different ways. Women want the feeling of pleasure just as much as men do, but it seems nowadays that if a woman wants to be as openly sexually active as a man (who would be idolised for it), she is criticised."*** Female, 19, survey

Participants were also asked how important it is for men to give sexual partners sexual pleasure, and then asked the same question about women. Responses were similar for each question with about 60% saying it was either important or very important for both women and men to give their partners sexual pleasure. Many young people explained their answers with reference to equality and the importance of mutual pleasure to a relationship:

*"Because it shows that he cares about the experience of his significant other." Female, 16, survey*

*"They get enjoyment out of their partner's sexual pleasure." Female, 16, survey*

*"Brings you closer sometimes." Male, 16, survey*

*"If you're in a serious, long term, loving and committed relationship it can make you feel closer to your partner." Female, 18, survey*

***"Sex is about pleasure for both parties involved so they should both receive pleasure."*** Male, 18, survey

However, some of the explanations for the importance of a woman providing her partner with pleasure spoke more about expectations, pressure and fear of consequences:

*"That's what she's there for. Boys will say that a girl is a crap shag and embarrass her. Girls don't do that."* Female, 15, survey

*"Guys think a woman is meant to make her partner come every time."* Female, 15, survey

***"Practically all of the guys that are my age want sex and if they don't get sex they break up with their girlfriends. I think that guys act like that because they want more experience in sex. If a girl has more experience she is automatically called a slut or [seen as] being easy."*** Female, 16, survey

*"Because if he's not satisfied he'll go with someone else."* Female, 16, survey

***"Because if I don't get it I go elsewhere."*** Male, 17, survey

*"I think she would feel a sense of embarrassment if she didn't and would feel inadequate."* Female, 18, survey

***Young people are aware of – and often influenced by - a stereotyped sexual 'script' in which men are desiring subjects and women are objects of desire to be pursued and persuaded into sex.***

Taken together these comments indicate that young people are aware of – and often influenced by - a stereotyped sexual 'script' in which men are desiring subjects and women are objects of desire to be pursued and persuaded into sex<sup>[3]</sup>. Some young people connect this script in part to pornography and the media. There is a division between young people who take these messages at face value, and those who distinguish between wider societal portrayals of male and female sexuality and their own experience. The latter group often connect equality to greater intimacy and are more likely to use language that connects sex to enjoyment, rather than pressure and negative consequences.

### Key findings

- Participants showed awareness of a stereotyped 'sexual script' in which men express desire while women are objects of desire who are expected to please men
- Some participants critiqued this script using ideas about equality and respect
- Many participants thought perceived differences in male and female sexual behaviour are caused by stereotypes within pornography, the media and wider culture

3. Byers (1996) 'How well does the traditional sexual script explain sexual coercion?' Journal of Psychology & Human Sexuality Vol. 8, Issue 1-2

## 6. Issues for young women

Given the findings outlined above, it is unsurprising that the research flagged up distinct issues for boys and girls in relation to pornography, sex and relationships.

As discussed, girls' exposure to sexualised media appears to be more incidental than deliberate. Only 12% of participants said that most or all girls their age look at pornography, compared to 48% who said they are exposed to overtly sexualised imagery every day. As noted, girls were several times more likely than boys to use words such as 'shock' and 'disgust' in their responses to the scenario on viewing pornography, and many young people felt that girls and boys would respond very differently.

In both survey and focus groups, young women saw pornography as something that is aimed at men, and gives a negative representation of women.

***"Pornography is usually geared towards male viewers."*** Female, 18, survey

*"[In porn] all women are made out to be sluts."* Female, focus group

The words 'slut' or 'slutty' were used frequently by survey and focus group participants to describe both female behaviour that was seen as negative, and the general impression that was given of women by their portrayal in pornography and sexualised media. In the survey we asked participants to select, from a list of 15 words, which three best described a set of images from popular culture (page 7). 'Slutty' was the most popular word, selected by 65% of respondents; twice as many as the second most popular word<sup>4</sup>. In focus groups it was used often in describing pornography:

*"[The women are] quite slutty."* Female, focus group

*"Like slutty bitches one and two."* Male, focus group

***"He's the stud and she's the slut."*** Female, focus group

Participants differed somewhat as to the meaning of 'slut' but overall it seemed that the word is invariably applied to women, often to describe perceived sexually attention-seeking behaviour rather than actual promiscuity.

*"Someone who shows their tits on Facebook."* Male, focus group

*"Someone who dresses provocatively and just wants all the guys... wants sexual attention."* Female, focus group

Although ideas about 'slut-shaming' and double standards were not the focus of the research nor addressed directly, discussions on these issues arose frequently and were often stimulated, as illustrated by the quotes above, by questions about porn and sexualised media. Both boys and girls suggested, implicitly and explicitly, that women's 'inappropriate' sexual behaviour could have negative consequences for the woman.

One survey scenario asked participants whether 'Ashley' should ask 'Bri' for a nude picture (N.B. many misread the scenario as Ashley deciding whether or not to send Bri a nude picture.)

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4. 'Disgusting' at 34%; 'eye-catching' was the third most popular choice at 32%.

*"...it would just make her seem like desperate and like she isn't respecting her body." Female, 16, survey*

*"Don't ask him for it makes you sound like a slut." Female, 18, survey*

*"No in case they show everyone." Female, 18, survey*

Although the names Ashley and Bri were intended to be gender-neutral, most negative commentary was focused on a 'she' – whether this meant Ashley or Bri. This idea of negative consequences for girls – from name-calling to sexual assault – recurred within focus groups.

(discussion starts about sharing naked pictures)

Researcher: *"So it's ok to show pics if you're in a relationship?"*

Young man: *"No, after the relationship, hahaha, after it breaks down... like go back out with me or I'll put it on Facebook."*

Young man 2: *"To show everyone, look you're a fool..."*

***"If [girls] are going to leave the house [in short skirts] then they need to think about the consequences."*** Female, focus group

The latter comment, made about what girls wear to parties, was followed by a discussion about who would be responsible if a young woman at a party was sexually assaulted. The participants debated whether it would be the girl herself or the host of the party, and made no mention of the perpetrator.

Young woman 1: *I've had a couple of parties in the last month... and I take full responsibility for them, I had to drag [a girl] out a car because she decided it was a good idea to go home with somebody who she just met...*

Young woman 2: *And it wouldn't be very fair to you, if anything did happen you've got that guilt...*

Young woman 1: *Exactly, which is why I couldn't let that girl leave with that guy. Because I thought no, that's not what she would want if she was sober, she's not doing it.*

Young woman 2: *If anything had happened to her you would know...*

Young woman 1: *Exactly, that would be my fault.*

Young woman 3: *It wouldn't be your fault, it would be her fault, she chose to go.*

Researcher: *In that scenario who would you all see as being responsible if something did happen?*

Young woman 3: *The person.*

Young man: *The party organiser.*

Young woman 3: *No, the person should be.*

Researcher: *But if it was a girl say, getting into the car, if something had happened like she ended up having sex or if there was a sexual assault?*

Young woman 3: ***I think that should be her responsibility because she's the one that got herself into that position...***

Young woman 1: *But if she's completely out of it, if she has no idea what she's doing, and I see that she's about to do that and she would not want to do that normally I feel like I've got a responsibility to stop that happening.*

It is interesting to see here how the perpetrator is made 'invisible' and not even considered as potentially



responsible. It is also surprising given that one of the young women taking part in the exchange above (Young woman 1) had strongly asserted earlier in the discussion that a victim is never to blame for a sexual assault.

Participants' perceptions of adult attitudes showed that many feel they agree with double standards about sex:

<i>'Most adults think women shouldn't have sex with a lot of different people'.</i>		
<b>Agree – 83.9%</b>	<b>Disagree – 9%</b>	<b>Not Sure – 7.1%</b>
<i>'Most adults think men shouldn't have sex with a lot of different people'.</i>		
<b>Agree – 34.9%</b>	<b>Disagree – 51.4%</b>	<b>Not Sure – 13.7%</b>

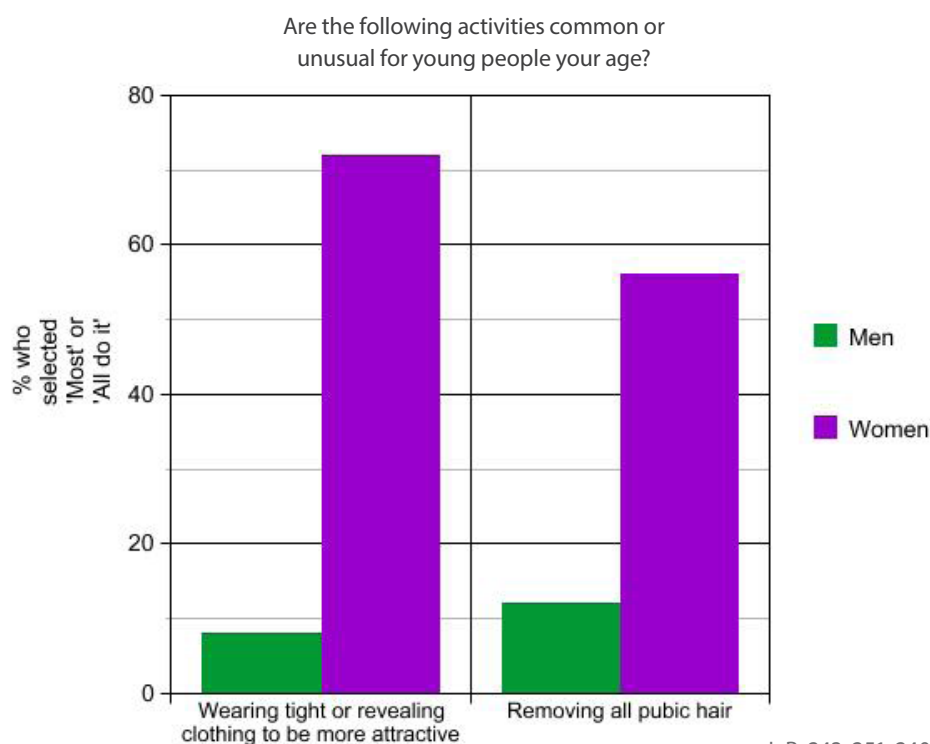
This suggests that, at least from many young people's point of view, double standards are not only perpetuated by the media but by the adults around them.

While too much sexually-attention seeking behaviour in girls was seen as negative and 'slutty', survey answers suggested that dressing and grooming their bodies in sexualised ways are nevertheless considered normal behaviour for young women. 72% of participants said that most or all girls their age wear tight or revealing clothing to be more attractive and 56% said that most or all girls their age remove all pubic hair. This compares to only 8% and 12% for boys respectively.

Discussion in focus groups suggested that this focus on physical appearance is more about conforming to pressure to fit a certain stereotype of beauty than making 'empowered' or sexually liberating choices. Young women compared themselves negatively to the images they see in pornography and the media:

*"The [picture] of Rihanna, looking at that, even though you know she probably doesn't look like that it makes you feel quite bad about yourself."* Female, focus group

*"[in porn] all the girls are beautiful and immaculate."* Female, focus group



n: L-R, 243, 251, 240, 253

***“If that’s what attractive, I must not be attractive because I don’t look like that.”*** Female, focus group

Although the word ‘inspiring’ was offered as one of the choices to describe the images shown in the survey (page 7), it was the only word that no female participants selected. Looking only at female participants’ responses to that question, the top two choices after ‘slutty’ were ‘disgusting’ and ‘sexist’.

Interestingly the young women seemed to place greater importance on their physical appearance than the young men placed on it. 75% of male survey respondents selected ‘a good personality’ as one of the three things considered most attractive in a girl, while only 59% of young women did so. Women were also more likely than men to select ‘a slim, toned body’, and ‘wearing revealing clothing’ as qualities seen as attractive in a girl.

Given the findings laid out in the previous section, it is unsurprising that young people’s views about gender and sexuality are mediated through popular culture as well as stereotypes that are still prevalent in wider society. These responses suggest that gender stereotypes about sex and sexuality, perpetuated partly but not exclusively through pornography, are having a real impact on the ways that some young men and women experience their sexuality, including their right to express sexual desire and feel pleasure within sexual relationships.

As noted above, frequent discussion of ‘sluts’ along with both criticism and defence of girls’ sexual behaviour and dress was something that flowed naturally from discussions about porn and sexualised media. Girls, in fact, were more likely than boys to select ‘slutty’ to describe the sexualised images in the survey. Young people, particularly girls, seem to see a clear connection between pornography and gendered ideas about sex and sexuality – even if they do not always acknowledge this as such.

Many of the girls’ discussions about pornography and ‘sluts’ were expressed in angry or bitter tones. Although this was often directed against women they saw as slutty, there was definite sense of discomfort with the way that women are represented in pornography and the media. It is important that work with girls on this issue acknowledges this, but is careful to examine the reasons and targets for this anger. When girls criticise, for example, a celebrity who they see as inappropriately sexual it may not be that they are simply expressing a view on how women should behave, but also their uneasiness with the way that women are represented. ‘Slutty’ women, so often criticised by society at large, are a convenient target for young women who wish to distance themselves from representations of women that they see as degrading, while defending themselves from similar attacks. The fact that girls were more likely than boys to express discomfort with pornography but also more likely to use the word ‘slutty’ to describe sexualised images reflects the fine line they must attempt to tread between being too sexual, and not sexual enough.

### **Key findings**

Female participants:

- Less likely to deliberately view pornography
- Saw pornography and sexualised media as portraying women negatively and unrealistically
- Described experiencing pressure to be sexually attractive and please boys/men while also avoiding being labelled ‘slutty’
- Often used the language of ‘sluttiness’ to negotiate this balance by distancing themselves from ‘slutty’ women

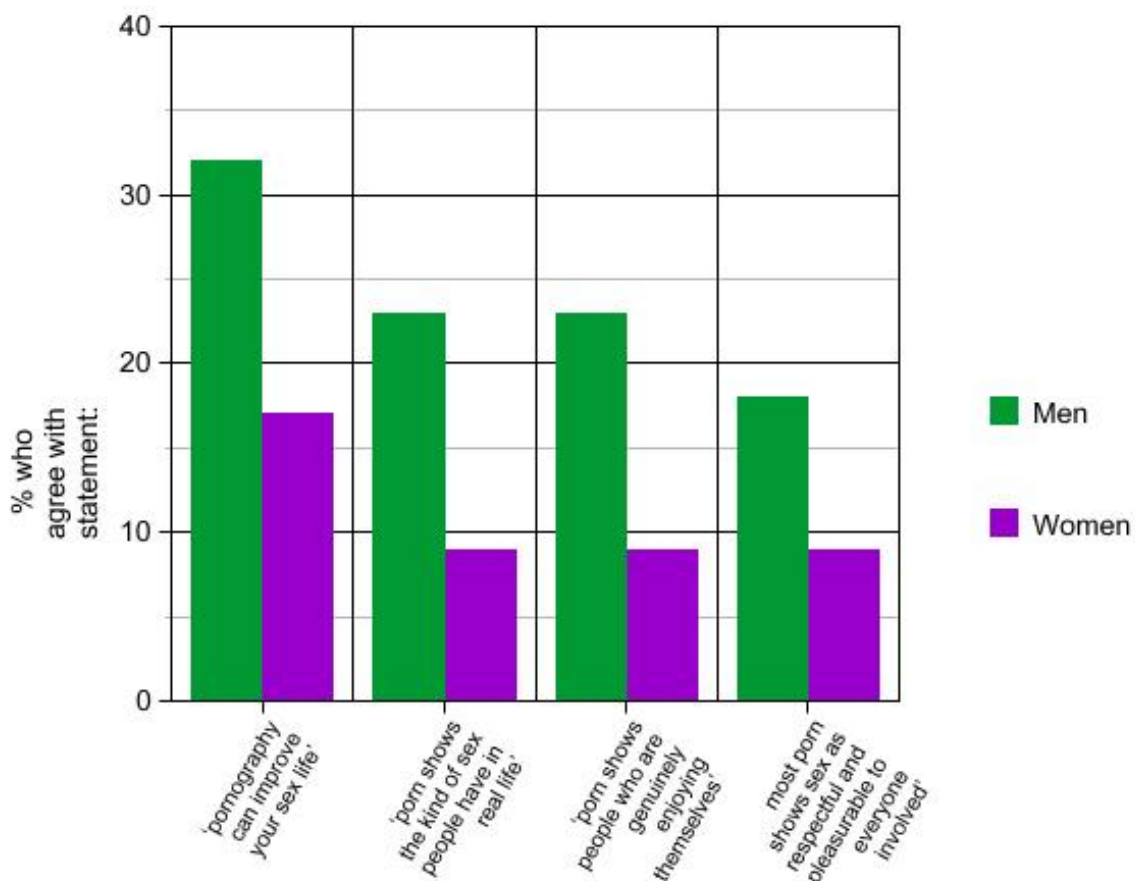
## 7. Issues for young men

As noted, young men were far more likely than young women to say that looking at pornography on a regular basis is normal for boys in their age group. Several boys referred to specific porn sites, types of porn, and examples of porn films in focus groups and survey responses, while no female participants did so. Some young people felt that there is a connection between boys' greater consumption of sexual media, such as pornography (and the way this is targeted at them) and their attitudes and behaviour.

Girls and boys had different views on the production of pornography, with only 47% of girls saying that pornography is made by companies for money, compared to 69% of boys. However, boys were also more likely to say that pornography is 'something that is free' at 50% compared to 31% of girls. This may reflect boys' greater experience of pornography and the availability of both paid-for and free material.

Survey participants were given a series of statements about pornography and asked to decide whether most other young people their age would agree or disagree, whether it would be about 50/50 between these options, or if they were unsure.

Although the overall trend for both boys and girls was to think other people their age saw pornography as unrealistic and potentially damaging, significantly more boys than girls thought their peers would view pornography positively.



n: L-R, 215, 217, 214, 214

- 32% of boys felt that their peers would say that 'pornography can improve your sex life' compared to 17% of girls;
- 23% said their peers would say that 'porn shows the kind of sex people have in real life' compared to 9% of girls;
- 23% said they would say that 'porn shows people who are genuinely enjoying themselves' compared to 9% of girls;
- 18% said they would agree that 'most porn shows sex as respectful and pleasurable to everyone involved', compared to 9% of girls.

Given the range of views expressed in the survey there was surprisingly little debate within focus groups about the nature of pornography. Although male voices were dominant throughout the mixed focus groups, it was often only one or two boys who led the conversation, with other boys either agreeing with them or being quickly silenced if offering a different opinion. While it was considered normal for young women to show little interest in pornography, there was a suggestion that young men who showed no interest would face ridicule. Focus groups discussed what it meant if a boy wasn't interested in pornography, and what the response from peers might be.

Young man: ***"Then you're not really a boy."***

Researcher: *"What does it mean to be a boy?"*

Young man: *"I dunno, every boy's the same, they all want their hole."*

*"Not easy, peer pressure..."* Young man, focus group

***"[They would say] are you gay?"*** Young man, focus group

As noted in the previous section, many participants felt that while girls would react with disgust to pornography in a group situation, boys would be more likely to joke about it. The evidence here suggests that this may be in part an attempt to impress peers with a casual attitude to pornography:

***"They would enjoy it and have a laugh. I would pretend to but would be perturbed at the content."*** Male, 18, survey

This kind of response could also suggest a disengagement from the reality of what is happening on screen. Of course the two are not mutually exclusive and it is worrying if young men are developing non-empathetic responses to violent pornography in order to fit in with peers or learning that this kind of distancing is the 'correct' way to respond to potential victims of abuse.

***While it was considered normal for young women to show little interest in pornography, there was a suggestion that young men who showed no interest would face ridicule.***

Another potential consequence of boys feeling pressure to appear sexually knowledgeable is a lack of interest in learning more about sex. In contrast to young women who criticised sex education in schools but wanted it to be better, many young men were dismissive of the general idea of sex education:

***"I think it's common sense. If you're going to have sex, it's basically common sense."*** Male, focus group

*"It came natural to me like, you're no stupid."* Male, focus group

Young man: *"Well if you're pleasing the women you're obviously doing it right, that's the way I see it anyway."*

Researcher: *"How would you know?"*

Young man: *"She'll either jizz or she'll scream... or say she'll want more."*

These comments indicate that some young men's idea of learning about sex is limited to 'knowing what to do', and also that it's important to young men to appear confident and experienced sexually. It is interesting to compare this to boys' answers to the question 'what three things are considered most attractive in a boy?' for which only 8% of boys selected 'sexual experience'. Along with the comments above this suggests that appearing sexually experienced and blasé about pornography is more about being accepted by other boys than attracting sexual partners. The consequences of this peer pressure could be to limit young men's learning about important aspects of relationships and sex, and such attitudes should be taken into account when delivering work on these issues.

***Appearing sexually experienced and blasé about pornography is more about being accepted by other boys than attracting sexual partners.***

Another consequence of course is that it is difficult to find out what young men really think and feel about the issues covered in this research, and what kinds of information and support would benefit them. Although boys dominated in the focus groups, only about a third of survey respondents were male. This could indicate that they are less interested in engaging critically with this topic than girls. Different methods should be tried to gather young men's views in ways that avoid, as far as possible, the effects of peer pressure and probe more deeply to discover whether different attitudes and beliefs lie beneath normalised views on sex and relationships.

## **Key findings**

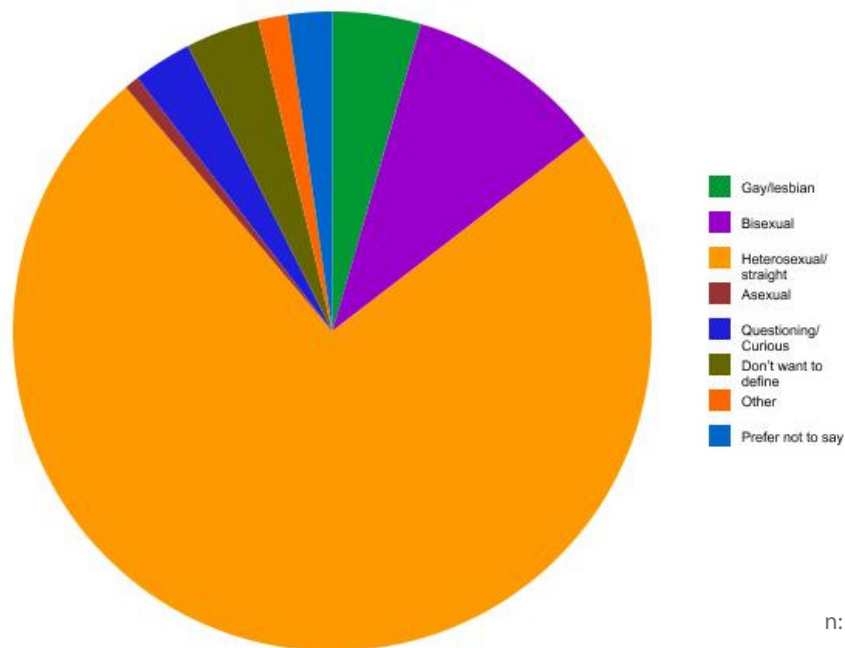
Male participants:

- Saw frequent viewing of pornography by peers as the norm
- More likely than female participants to think their peers view pornography positively
- Pressured to conform to a hyper-sexual, heterosexual and sexist norm
- Consequently less open to formal learning about sex and relationships

## 8. Issues for young LGBT people

Almost 25% of survey respondents did not identify as heterosexual. As the chart below shows, not all of this group identified as gay or bisexual but rather encompassed a wide range of sexual orientations.

How would you best describe your sexual orientation?



The assistance of an LGBT organisation in distributing the survey may account for this number of non-heterosexual participants, but it may also be that there are simply large numbers of young people in Scotland whose sexual orientations do not fit the heterosexual 'norm', while also not necessarily identifying as lesbian or gay. The acronym 'LGBT' as used here will refer to the full range of orientations detailed above as well as transgender identities<sup>[5]</sup>.

A common argument in support of pornography is that it provides education and an outlet for sexualities that are not catered to within mainstream culture. As one (heterosexual) male survey participant argued:

*"...pornography is a vital way of helping people with minority sexual preferences discover that identity, particularly in parts of the world (or even families) where it might be frowned upon. The classic example of this is a gay teenager... who accesses gay pornography as a way of discovering what homosexual sexual relations might involve, and crucially whether it is sexually arousing for him."* Male, 18, survey

5. Three survey participants identified as transgender.

LGBT survey participants were more likely to say they are exposed to sexualised imagery 'every day', at 63% compared to 50% for those identifying as heterosexual. While it is possible that LGBT young people are more likely to deliberately access sexualised media and pornography as a way to explore their sexuality, the LGBT young people who participated in this research did not display a more positive attitude to porn than those identifying as heterosexual, and many were highly critical of it. One focus group was held with an LGBT youth group. Rather than seeing pornography as portraying a wide range of sexual identities, these young people argued that it always comes from a heterosexual male perspective:

*"The thing with porn though is that it is more aimed at males."* Young woman, focus group

Young man 1, focus group: ***"Weirdly enough even gay porn is targeted towards a straight male way of thinking of it, like fantasies it just happens..."***

Young man 2: *"Like oh we've walked in to a room together and now we're having sex."*

Young woman 1: *"That's often the same with lesbian porn as well; it is aimed at the straight males, and how they would fantasise, like two women with long nails rubbing oil into each other."*

They also felt that pornography can give false expectations about sex:

***"...a young person, when they're force-fed all this adult, hairless, beautiful completely composed makeup and then they're faced with a pubescent person in front of them there's no correlation between porn and sex so that just fuels the porn industry even more cause you're turning away from your actual sex life to what you think your sex life should be."*** Male, focus group

*"If you stand on a street corner for long enough, whether or not you are male or female, they will come and ask you if you will accept money for sex and I think a culture where you can sell sex like that, that says something about porn, people think if you pay enough money you can just get it."* Female, focus group

*"I think people want the accessibility that's on the internet in real life."* Male, focus group

***LGBT participants were far more likely to describe the images as 'sexist', at 56% compared to 23% of those identifying as heterosexual. They were also less likely to describe them as 'slutty' at 46% compared to 70%.***

Many, although not all, survey responses from LGBT young people reflected this more critical stance towards pornography. When responding to the scenario about pornography in a group setting (page 7), several were keen to point out that this would be unlikely in their group of friends and would be treated with disgust:



*"My group of friends would be really disgusted. They are all aware of feminism, gender issues and problems with porn. It would not be something that would happen in my friend group but if it did it would be uncomfortable, awkward and upsetting."* Female, 18, survey

***"Me and my friends in particular would find it disgusting and most definitely stop watching it."*** Female, 19, survey

*"Firstly, why are you showing us this? But I think the responses would be directed more towards the person and it'd be like, what the hell? This is wrong; how can you be into that kind of stuff?"* Male, 17, survey

In terms of other sexualised media, LGBT participants were far more likely to describe the images (page 7) as 'sexist', at 56% compared to 23% of those identifying as heterosexual. They were also less likely to describe them as 'slutty' at 46% compared to 70%. It is possible that these participants may have accessed the survey through LGBT youth groups with which they had already done work on gender stereotyping, sexualisation and so on; they may also have a heightened awareness of sexualised media due to not fitting the heterosexual 'norm' such media often portrays.

***Many LGBT young people think that current sources of information on sex and relationships are not adequate.***

If LGBT young people are exposed more to pornography and sexualised media than other young people then it is particularly important that they have the opportunity for discussion and support on any issues they think it raises for them. As the next chapter demonstrates, however, many think that current sources of information on sex and relationships are not adequate.

## Key findings

LGBT participants:

- Made up a high percentage of the sample, including participants who identified as 'curious/questioning', and 'do not want to define'
- More likely than heterosexual participants to say they were frequently exposed to pornography and sexualised media
- Highly critical of school-based sex education

## 9. Learning about sex and relationships

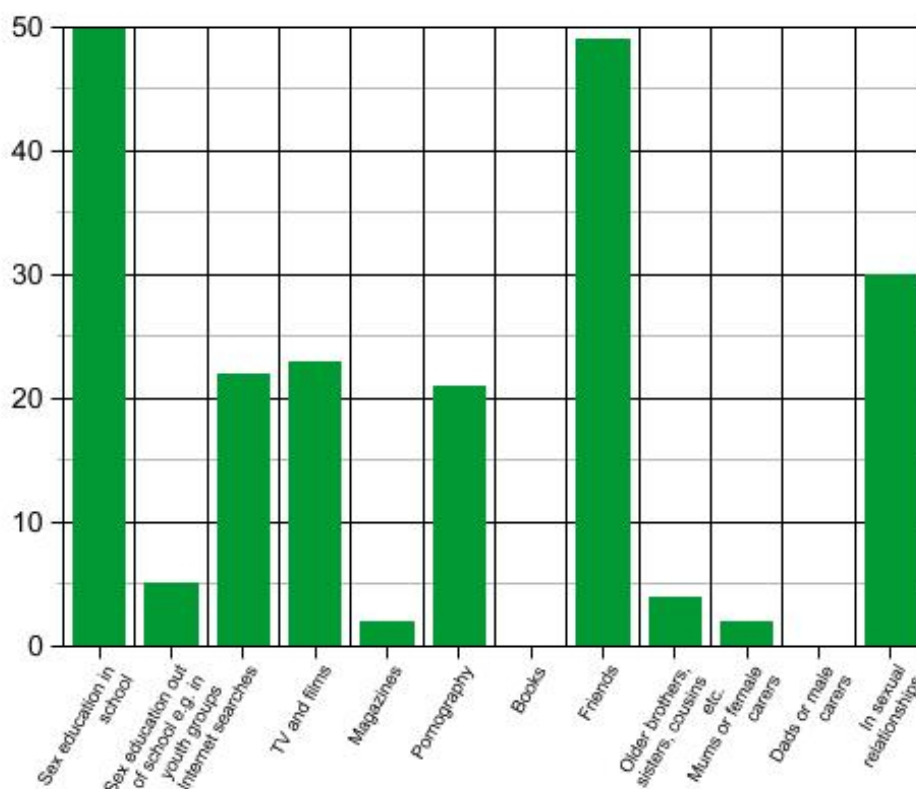
It is clear from the findings outlined above that young people express diverse views on relationships, sex and pornography. Many participants believed that their peers and wider society espouse sexist, heteronormative and damaging values; others reflected these values in the ways they spoke about sex and about men and women.

It is natural for young people to be curious about sex and sexuality, and messages about what is normal and healthy within sexual relationships are present in a wide variety of sources. In order to find out which sources of learning young people think have the most impact on them, we asked them to tell us what sources young people learn from; which are most common; and which they think are the most reliable.

Participants were asked to select all that applied from a list of 12 options for the question 'where do young people learn about sex and relationships?' 77% selected sex education in school, the most popular response. This was closely followed by 'friends' at 71% and 'in sexual relationships' at 70%. 62% of survey participants identified pornography as one of the ways that young people learn about sex. Although the option of selecting 'other' was offered, no participants identified sources that were not on the list.

We then presented the same selection and asked participants to select the one most common way they think young people learn about sex and relationships. Again, sex education in school was the most popular answer, at 25%. 'Friends' and 'sexual relationships' followed at 24% and 15% respectively. 9% selected pornography, with boys being twice as likely to do so, at 16% compared to 7%. Only 1% of survey participants selected 'mums or female carers' as the most common source of information, and no participants selected 'dads or male carers'.

What is the most common way young people learn about sex and relationships?



n: 208

LGBT participants were less likely to say the main source of learning about sex is school at 15% compared to 28% for heterosexual participants. More than twice as many LGBT young people said friends are the main source of information at 35%.

It appears that young people are learning about sex from a variety of sources, with only a quarter selecting school sex education as their main source of learning. The results are somewhat different when asked about what they think is the most useful source of information about sex and relationships, however; sex education in school is considered the most reliable source by 37% of young people. While this is positive, it also shows that there is room for improvement. Many survey and focus group participants were very critical of the sex education they received in school:

***“School only tells you what sex is and how to avoid getting pregnant instead of the things that are equally as important.”***

Female, 15, survey

*“In sex ed they don’t really tell you a lot, like they show you how to put on a condom and stuff like that, they don’t help you understand more about it.”* Female, focus group

*“The day you get sex education everyone’s like ‘Oh my god it’s sex ed day’ and everyone’s sat down giggling in the classroom... it’s just like a moment... outside of normal learning...”*

Male, focus group

***“Sex education is rubbish.”*** Female, 19, survey

***Young people need a grounding in healthy and unhealthy relationships which comes from reliable sources and preferably prior to forming their first intimate relationships.***

Many focus group participants felt that while some teachers are very good at delivering sex and relationships education, many others are awkward and unapproachable. Participants suggested that teachers should see sex and relationships education as an important part of their role, rather than an add-on, and receive better training; some felt that inviting specialist educators in to give classes could be helpful.

LGBT participants were less likely to say that school was the most reliable and useful source of information about sex and relationships, at 27% compared to 42% of heterosexual young people. In focus groups and survey comments, LGBT young people were particularly critical of school-based sex education, feeling strongly that LGBT sex and relationships were ignored or marginalised and that this made sex education of little use to them.

*“LGBT relationships are not mentioned in school sex ed. This really needs to change.”* Female, 19, survey

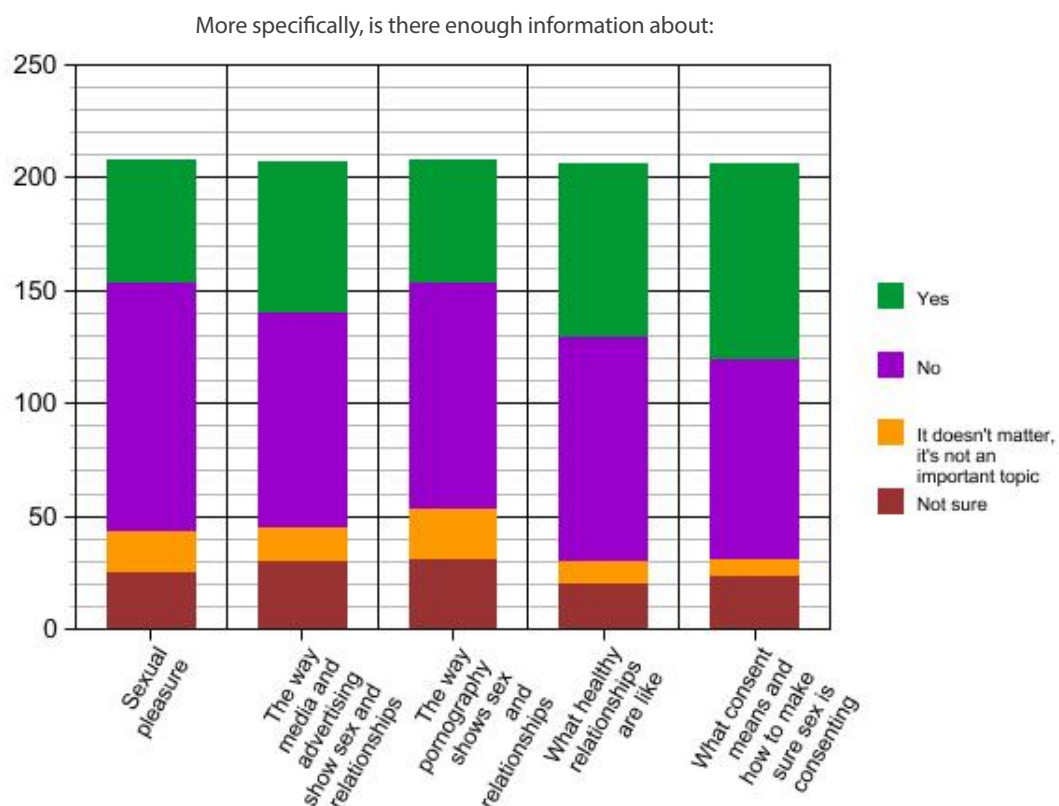
***“There was one poster, ‘gay is ok’ and that was it, that was the only LGBT information in my school”.*** Male, focus group

*“If [LGBT young people] are not taught anything about sex ed. and they throw themselves into a sexual relationship without any other knowledge except porn they are putting themselves at risk... because they have been neglected in the classroom.”* Male, focus group

One (not LGBT-specific) focus group debated the right age to tell children about LGBT identities, with most agreeing that discussing this at a young age is healthy and helps to prevent homophobia. This suggests that young people in general are open to the idea of LGBT relationships being included in sex and relationship education.

16% of survey participants selected 'sexual relationships' as their main source of information. There is substantial evidence emerging that many young people's relationships involve coercion and abuse<sup>[6]</sup> so it would be useful to have more information on what young people think they learn directly from sexual relationships. Certainly, young people need a grounding in healthy and unhealthy relationships which comes from reliable sources and preferably prior to forming their first intimate relationships. Also important to note is that while a large percentage of young people think that learning from friends is the most common form of sex education, only 4% think it is the most reliable. Focus group participants indicated that they turn to friends as a less awkward and sometimes more trusted (in terms of confidentiality) source of information than adults such as parents and teachers, but this suggests that the information they receive from friends is not what they feel they need.

As the chart below demonstrates, there are several topics many young people would like more information about. Across all categories, girls were significantly more likely than boys to say that there is not enough information available. For example, only 39% of girls said that there is enough information available on sexual consent, compared to 53% of boys. There is no evidence here to suggest that boys actually have more access to reliable information than girls, but based on findings from elsewhere in the survey this could reflect the assumption of some young men that they do not need educating on relationships and sex. These young men may benefit from targeted interventions.<sup>[7]</sup>



n: (L-R) 208, 207, 208, 206, 206

6. Girlguiding (2013) Care Versus Control: Healthy Relationships

7. Other research supports the idea that many boys resist formal sex education, see e.g. Measor (2004), 'Young People's Views of Sex Education: Gender, Information and Knowledge', Sex Education: Sexuality, Society and Learning, Vol. 4, No. 2

Although there was support for more information on all the areas suggested above, the most popular area was 'sexual pleasure'. More work needs to be done to find out exactly what information would be useful to young people on this topic, but the results of this survey suggest that acknowledging the role of desire and pleasure for both women and men would be a welcome starting point. When asked what other information they would like, some female participants returned to this point:

***"There needs to be more about how sex is something that should be enjoyable for both parties."*** Female, 18, survey

*"Consent, sexism and feminism, female sexuality."* Female, 17, survey

*"Can we just stop with the double standards and slut shaming on women?"* Female, 17, survey

Much sex and relationships education focuses on preventing risky behaviour in order to reduce negative outcomes for young people. However, the responses of young people here suggest that including discussion of pleasure and desire could make the topic more relevant to young people's actual experiences, allowing for comparisons between healthy and unhealthy behaviour while breaking down harmful gender stereotypes about sex. Indeed, other research on this topic has found that ignoring the role of pleasure and desire can lead to negative outcomes for young people, particularly girls.<sup>[8]</sup>

***Ignoring the role of pleasure and desire can lead to harmful outcomes for young people, particularly girls.***

Focus group and survey participants had a lot of suggestions for how access to useful information on sex and relationships could be improved for young people. Suggestions included more and better internet resources, smaller teaching groups in schools, leaflets, youth groups, and more input from parents. Focus groups also repeated the theme of being 'ready' for different types of information. This suggests that young people want access to a wide range of complementary sources of information which they can access at a time that feels appropriate for them.

***"There's a lot of different young people and a lot of different personalities and a lot of different levels of maturity... there's got to be a lot of different information available to them."*** Male, focus group

*"The more sources you take it from the better."* Female, focus group

While there is no one source that young people would prefer to learn from, one idea that was repeated across all focus groups was that peers are a less awkward, more approachable source of information on sex and relationships with several participants suggesting that this could be harnessed in a way that would make it more useful.

*"Just normal people talking to other people in the same age group."* Female, focus group

8. Fine (2008) 'Sexuality, Schooling, and Adolescent Females: The Missing Discourse of Desire', Harvard educational review, vol. 58 No.1; Tolman et al (2003) 'Sowing the Seeds of Violence in Heterosexual Relationships: Early Adolescents Narrate Compulsory Heterosexuality', Journal of Social Issues, Vol. 59, Issue 1

*"We should get schools in; clubs like this should have young parents like us in to tell them how hard it is."* Female, focus group (member of young parents group)

***"I think when you're a first year you're going to listen more to a sixth year than a teacher."*** Female, focus group

The young people who took part in this research were both thoughtful and passionate in their suggestions for improved sex education, suggesting that efforts to include young people's voices in designing information and resources would be well-received as well as being essential to ensure they meet young people's needs<sup>[9]</sup>. Most participants appeared to very much value good sex and relationships education; however there are also barriers to delivering this, including the resistance of some young men to learning and the prevalence of gendered 'norms' which may stifle honest discussion. Work must be done to create an environment for relationships and sex education in which all young people feel comfortable asking for the information they need. A prerequisite for this will be acknowledging the various, often gender-based, pressures which might prevent both young men and young women from doing so.

### **Key Findings:**

- Sex education in school, friends, and sexual relationships seen as the most common ways of learning about sex
- Sex education in school, sexual relationships, and internet searches seen as giving the most reliable, useful information
- Many participants critical of school-based sex education, particularly LGBT participants
- Significant numbers of participants would like more sex and relationships information to be made available to them, on a wider variety of topics
- Participants had many ideas about how sex and relationships education could be improved

9. As has been urged by sexual health professionals in Scotland for some time. See e.g. Health and Sport Committee Report on Inquiry into Teenage Pregnancy, 2013, page 46

## 10. Conclusion

The voices of the young people who took part in this research tell a powerful story about the way that gender and sexual orientation impact on their views about sex, relationships and pornography. Many participants explicitly acknowledged the effects they believe gender stereotyping and double standards have on them; even when not actively critiquing these double standards they were a constant presence in participants' language, attitudes and accounts of their experiences.

Participants who thought that pornography and sexualised media can have negative consequences almost invariably discussed these as part of a bigger problem, present throughout society including the media and attitudes of adults and peers. The harms associated with pornography and sexualised media were rarely identified as ones of exposure to sex or bodies in themselves, but were rather about a particular version of these that presents women and men in narrow, unrealistic and heteronormative ways. Within this sexual 'script', women are only objects of desire, 'real' men are always sexually active and knowledgeable, and 'gay' is a term of abuse used to exclude LGBT young people and pressure young men into conforming.

Participants were often critical of sex education in schools and the information about sex and relationships available to them in general. Most were very much open to, as well as in need of, reliable, comprehensive information and support on these issues. Harmful stereotypes and attitudes could be countered by a more positive approach to sex and relationships education, focusing on benefits as well as risks and emphasising that sexual desire and pleasure are natural and healthy for both women and men.

*Many participants explicitly acknowledged the effects that they believe gender stereotyping and double standards have on them; even when not actively critiquing these double standards they were a constant presence in participants' language, attitudes and accounts of their experiences.*

This research suggests that some young people have spaces in which they can think and talk honestly about pornography and sexualisation. More work needs to be done to find out what factors support this, and to counter the pressures that prevent other young people from engaging critically on these issues.

Comprehensive sex and relationships education that tackles sexualisation and gendered attitudes is vital not only for young people's sexual health but their self-esteem, ability to form respectful relationships and to reduce their risk of experiencing or perpetrating violence. These in turn impact on every aspect of their lives, from academic achievement to mental and physical health. All adults working with and for young people – including policy makers, teachers, youth workers and parents – have a responsibility to engage with these issues and the challenges they present.



## 11. Recommendations

### What policy makers can do:

- Make good-quality comprehensive RSHPE (Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenting Education), based on values of equality and respect and with a strong gender component, compulsory in all schools
- Ensure all RSHPE includes information on:
  - LGBT relationships
  - consent
  - sexualised media and pornography, including the different ways these target and portray men and women
  - emotional literacy within intimate relationships, including the importance of empathy and dealing with rejection in a healthy way
  - the positive aspects of sex and sexuality for both women and men
- Make training on delivering RSHPE in a way that promotes LGBT and gender equality a core component of teacher training and continuing professional development
- Provide guidance to teachers on methods of delivering RSHPE that acknowledge the gender-based pressures young people are under, including pressure on boys to reject education on sex and relationships
- Ensure RSHPE is monitored and evaluated
- Make more resources and training available to parents to help them talk to their children about sex and relationships
- Involve young people in developing sex and relationships education, including non-school based forms such as youth work and internet resources, to ensure that all young people have access to the information they need in a format that is accessible to them

### What schools can do:

- Make RSHPE a valued part of the curriculum, treated as a normal subject rather than an addition or a one-off
- Ensure teachers have access to continuing professional development on delivering RSHPE, including reflecting on their own values
- Develop and maintain a school ethos which promotes equality and respect, and actively challenges sexism, homophobia and discrimination
- Make links with appropriate youth, sexual health and voluntary sector organisations who deliver lessons to supplement RSHPE
- Deliver RSHPE in a way which acknowledges that young people's sexual orientations are diverse and do not all fit into easily-defined categories

## **What researchers and voluntary organisations can do:**

- Carry out research focussing on young people whose experience is not currently reflected in the literature on pornography and learning about sex – for example young people from ethnic minority backgrounds and young people with disabilities
- Carry out research with younger age groups on these topics, particularly how their attitudes to relationships develop
- Challenge industries that promote unhealthy messages about sex and relationships, including aspects of the media and the pornography industry
- Ensure all young people's sexual health workers are trained on LGBT issues and gender equality
- Deliver work on issues not currently covered in all schools, such as sexual consent, LGBT sexual health and pornography
- Provide specialist lessons in schools

## **What parents and carers can do:**

- Talk to your children about gender and LGBT equality, and demonstrate respectful behaviour in your own relationships
- Acknowledge and challenge victim-blaming, sexist, and homophobic attitudes when they come up in conversation, in the media or at school
- Tell your children it's ok to have different views to their friends and that there isn't a 'right way' to be any gender
- Make use of the resources available to develop your skills in talking to your children about sex and relationships
- Don't leave the conversation to female carers: it's important for young people to know that men care about healthy relationships, respect and equality, and demonstrate the ability to communicate on these topics

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