

**School of Public Health
Department of Sexology**

**A qualitative study of undergraduate students'
learning experience in sexology**

Loirel Mayberry

**This thesis is presented for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
of
Curtin University**

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Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made.

Signature:

Date:

ABSTRACT

This study responds to significant issues related to the problematic nature of perceptions of sexuality in Australian society. It also explores the extent to which the students' view of sexuality can be influenced through a sexuality education programme delivered at tertiary level.

An investigation of the literature, comprehensive interviews and feedback from students identifies the factors which form the perceptions of sexuality that students have by the time they reach young adulthood and enter the sexology class.

The qualitative study provides insights into how higher education students extend their understanding of sexuality. These insights, elicited through the study, supports the considerable body of anecdotal evidence that has been gathered over thirty years in the award winning¹ sexuality education programme at Curtin University. The study provides an understanding of the impact of sexuality education in an adult learning environment, using ethnographic methods to reveal ways in which undergraduate students perceive and interpret new knowledge acquired from formal studies.

The study also illuminates how the learning strategies and content from the sexology class influence participants' perceptions of their own sexuality and the sexuality of others. Students' responses to the class were ascertained through reflective writing, interviews and focus groups. Participants demonstrated that they had responded to the 'sex-positive' approach to teaching and learning by revealing a more open-minded, less judgemental disposition, with an enhanced body image and added confidence to discuss sexual issues.

The rich body of information emerging from this study can be used to enhance the development of sexuality education programmes in tertiary institutions and the wider community. The information includes the approach, processes, key content and the learning outcomes.

It is hoped that the participants' stories throughout this report will resonate with the reader. The aim of this report is to make a contribution to an important issue that has thus far received scant attention in the literature.

¹ In 2007 the team in the Department of Sexology in the School of Public Health at Curtin University received the Award for Innovation and Excellence in Sexuality Education from the World Association for Sexual Health (WAS).

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Dr Ernie Stringer and Professor Rosemary Coates AO These two wonderful teachers and researchers have given me hundreds of hours of their precious time. Both have guided me, not only in this study, but also over more than thirty years of learning.

Rosie is a compassionate, intelligent and courageous sexologist extraordinaire. I started my sexology studies with Rosie in 1987 and I immediately recognised a rare academic. Learning with Rosie was a joy. Ernie is also an inspirational teacher. I remember thinking, 'I want to be a teacher like him'. Warm, motivating and an exquisite story teller who challenged me to think outside the box. As a young student, he introduced me to Paolo Freire and Ivan Illich and further radicalised me! His compassionate work with Aboriginal people continues to inspire me.

Without Ernie and Rosie I would not have begun this research, and with their love and support I have now finished. Thank you for always believing I had a story worth telling and that I could complete valuable qualitative research.

Phil who joined me in the final tough months of writing this PhD. Thank you for sharing the couch with me, along with the computer and the pile of books. I look forward to joyous times beyond the PhD.

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DEDICATION

To my free-spirited mum, Gwen, who encouraged my inquisitiveness and continues to love me unconditionally from afar.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	III
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	V
DEDICATION.....	VI
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	VII
GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS.....	XV
PUBLICITY AND PUBLICATIONS ARISING FROM THIS STUDY	XVI
Media.....	xvi
Peer reviewed conference abstracts and presentations.....	xvi
CHAPTER 1: FOCUS AND FRAMING	1
INTRODUCTION.....	1
TOPIC OVERVIEW	2
RESEARCH QUESTIONS	2
SIGNIFICANCE AND UNIQUENESS OF THE STUDY.....	3
Significance of this study for the students and the researcher	4
CONTEXT OF THE STUDY	5
PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE SEXOLOGY PROGRAMME	5
APPROACHES TO TEACHING AND LEARNING IN THE SEXOLOGY PROGRAMME	6
DELIVERY OF MATERIAL – A STUDENT-CENTRED APPROACH.....	7
FEEDBACK AND ASSESSMENT	8
Reflection papers.....	8
Attendance and reflecting on the film show	8
Student presentations.....	9

Visit to sexual health agencies	9
Guest speakers	9
Curtin eVALUate	10
WEEKLY CONTENT OUTLINE	10
MY PHILOSOPHY, HISTORY AND RESEARCH JOURNEY	11
ORGANISATION OF THIS DISSERTATION.....	12
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW – THE NATURE OF SEXUALITY	13
INTRODUCTION.....	13
SEXUALITY AS A SIGNIFICANT ISSUE	13
HISTORICAL VIEWS OF THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF SEXUALITY	16
GENITALIA AND BODIES	18
SEXUALITY THROUGHOUT LIFE	21
Childhood.....	21
Young people	21
Elderly	25
INFLUENCE OF GENDER ON SEXUALITY	27
THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGION ON SEXUALITY	29
LOVE AND RELATIONSHIPS	30
SEXUAL DIVERSITY	33
CHILDHOOD SEXUAL ABUSE.....	34
FEMALE SEX WORKERS	35
RESEARCHING SEXUALITY.....	36
CONCLUSION.....	37

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW – SEXUALITY EDUCATION.....	38
INTRODUCTION.....	38
SEXUALITY EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS	38
The influence of religious groups on sexuality education programmes.....	41
WHAT DO YOUNG PEOPLE SAY ABOUT SEXUALITY EDUCATION?	42
PARENTS AND TALKING ABOUT SEXUALITY	46
TEACHERS OF SEXUALITY EDUCATION	47
SEXUALITY EDUCATION AND TERTIARY EDUCATION.....	48
KEY STRATEGIES USED IN THE SEXOLOGY PROGRAMME.....	50
SEXOLOGY STUDENTS AND REFLECTIVE WRITING.....	50
The usefulness of reflective writing in tertiary settings	53
Challenges of reflective writing in academic settings	54
Sexology students and reflective writing	56
DESENSITISATION THROUGH THE USE OF SEXUALLY EXPLICIT MATERIALS	57
Positive messages about sexuality	59
Health professionals value the use of sexually explicit materials	59
Adverse reactions to sexually explicit materials (SEM)	60
GUIDELINES WHEN USING SEXUALLY EXPLICIT MATERIALS (SEM) IN THE SEXOLOGY CLASS.....	62
CHAPTER SUMMARY	63
CHAPTER 4 - METHODOLOGY.....	65
INTRODUCTION.....	65
PHILOSOPHICAL RATIONALE.....	66
CONTEXT OF THE STUDY	72

PARTICIPANTS	72
DATA GATHERING	73
DATA ANALYSIS	78
RIGOUR OF THE STUDY	80
Rigour with participants’ responses to their stories.....	82
TEACHER AS RESEARCHER	84
ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	85
CONCLUSION	88
CHAPTER 5 – SIGNIFICANT ISSUES THAT STUDENTS BROUGHT TO THE SEXOLOGY CLASS	89
CHAPTER OVERVIEW	89
‘I WAS BAD AND WHAT I WAS DOING WAS BAD AND I WAS GOING TO GET INTO TROUBLE’: THE LEGACY OF CHILDHOOD MESSAGES ABOUT SEXUALITY	92
Family and religion	92
Schools and sexuality education.....	101
SUMMARY	103
CHAPTER 6 – EXTRAORDINARY STORIES FROM ‘EVERYDAY’ STUDENTS	105
INTRODUCTION	105
PARTICIPANTS’ STORIES: ‘NORMALITY’, SEXUAL ASSAULT AND THE CULTURAL DIVIDE	106
Sexual assault and survival.....	106
Experiencing termination	110
Wanting to ‘feel normal, to be normal’	112
Fear of being ‘found out’	114
‘Having a foot in both camps’: Sex and the cultural divide	118

SUMMARY	123
CHAPTER 7 – PARTICIPATION AND EXPERIENCES: THE CONTENT AND LEARNING PROCESSES IN THE SEXOLOGY CLASS	126
‘REFRESHING EXPERIENCE TO PARTICIPATE’: STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF THE STRATEGIES AND APPROACHES	128
‘I offered my opinions often’: A student centred approach	130
ISSUES EMERGING FROM THE SEXOLOGY CONTENT	131
Gender - being male and female: ‘Discrimination and discrepancies’	131
‘Normal’ bodies are beautiful	132
The ‘love and relationships’ class	134
Student presentations.....	136
Visit to sexual health agencies	137
Guest speakers.....	137
SEXOLOGY FILM SHOW: EVOKING SIGNIFICANT RESPONSES	138
‘It’s just not right’: Sexual taboos for the students	139
‘Interesting’, ‘honest’, ‘weird’ and ‘gross’: Sexual schemas	140
‘Getting a grip on my sexuality’: Opening up to the possibilities	143
Unwanted memories.....	144
‘Embracing the possibilities’: ‘Conscientisation’	145
Other strategies for desensitisation using sexually explicit materials.....	149
Concluding comments about the use of sexually explicit materials (SEM) in the sexology class..	149
‘I FEEL MY EFFORT IS VALUED’: PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THE APPROACHES TO FEEDBACK AND ASSESSMENT	150
REFLECTIVE WRITING	151
Sexology students and reflective writing: Background.....	151
The value of reflective writing for the sexology students.....	151
Grading of the sexology students’ reflective papers.....	153
My feedback for students on their reflective papers	154
Perspectives of sexology students regarding reflective writing	155

‘CONFIDENT TO EXPRESS MYSELF’: A SAFE SPACE	156
CHAPTER SUMMARY	157
CHAPTER 8 – OUTCOMES OF THE APPROACH TO TEACHING AND LEARNING IN THE SEXOLOGY CLASS.....	161
INTRODUCTION.....	161
‘A COURSE IN ENLIGHTENMENT’	162
More comfortable with my body.....	163
‘Most of us came (to the class) with little knowledge about sex’: The building of knowledge.....	164
The clitoris is ‘mindblowing’ and ‘tampons work’: Enhanced understanding	166
Being more vocal about desires and relationships.....	168
‘I love sex’	171
GIVING VOICE	173
‘Giving voice’: Talking about sex with family and friends.....	173
Me the ‘sex-pro’: Knowledgeable about sexuality.....	175
‘Giving voice’: Outcomes for the interviewees	178
‘STEPPING OUT INTO THE SUNSHINE’: SUMMARY.....	179
CHAPTER 9 – DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	182
INTRODUCTION.....	182
RESEARCH QUESTIONS	183
METHODOLOGY.....	189
IMPLICATIONS	190
LIMITATIONS OF THE LITERATURE.....	192
LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY	193
SUMMARY	194
LIST OF APPENDICES	196

APPENDIX 1 - AN EXAMPLE OF THE GROUP GUIDELINES THAT ARE USED IN THE SEXOLOGY 350 CLASS.....	197
APPENDIX 2 – OVERVIEW OF THE SEXOLOGY FILM SHOW.....	198
APPENDIX 3 - MY TEACHING: STUDENT FEEDBACK AND PERSONAL CRITIQUE	201
Filming the sexology class.....	201
Self reflection and personal critique of my teaching	203
Students’ comments regarding the approach to feedback and assessment.....	208
Curtin eValuate	209
APPENDIX 4 –OVERVIEW OF GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES AND LEARNING OUTCOMES FOR SEXOLOGY 350	211
APPENDIX 5 (A, B & C) – A) MY PHILOSOPHY ABOUT SEXUALITY EDUCATION, B) MY EARLY LEARNING ABOUT SEXUALITY, AND C) THE RESEARCH JOURNEY	212
Appendix 5a My philosophy about sexuality	212
Appendix 5b - My early learning about sexuality	216
Appendix 5c - The research journey.....	217
APPENDIX 6 – POSITION PAPER	223
APPENDIX 7 - INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS IN SEXOLOGY 350	228
APPENDIX 8 - CONSENT FORM FOR REFLECTION PAPERS.....	229
APPENDIX 9 – PERMISSION FORM – IN CLASS FOCUS GROUPS/ BRAINSTORMING.....	230
APPENDIX 10 – INFORMATION FOR PARTICIPANTS WILLING TO BE INTERVIEWED	231
APPENDIX 11 - CONSENT FORM - INFORMATION FOR PARTICIPANTS WILLING TO BE INTERVIEWED.....	232
APPENDIX 12 – SONG LYRICS.....	233
APPENDIX 13 - JAMIE’S FINAL REFLECTION PAPER.....	234

REFERENCES.....	236
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GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Table 1. Glossary of terms and abbreviations

Term	Description
GDHR	Growing and Developing Healthy Relationships
GLBTI	Gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex
SEM	Sexually explicit material
STI	Sexually transmissible infection
SoPH	School of Public Health
Unit	A discrete entity of study within a subject area that is a component of a course. A unit is a sequence of learning activities generally offered over a 12 teaching weeks in a semester.
Unit outline	A summary of essential information relating to the unit being studied that is available to all enrolled students.
WASS	Western Australian Sexology Society
WAS	World Association for Sexual Health
WHO	World Health Organisation

PUBLICITY AND PUBLICATIONS ARISING FROM THIS STUDY

Media

Loel Mayberry was an 'expert commentator' about young people and sexuality:

Chandler, M. (2011, June, p. 105-6). Sext offender. *Dolly*. Sydney: ACP Magazines.

McCartney, J. (2011). *The great wall of vagina*. Brighton, UK: Jamie McCartney.

Tilley, T. (Writer). (2010, Oct 11). The orgasm gap [Radio broadcast]. Sydney, Australia: HACK Programme, Triple J ABC.
<http://www.abc.net.au/triplej/hack/stories/s3035344.htm>

Wright, E. (2011, June). Vulvas and vaginas. *Cosmopolitan*. Sydney: ACP Magazines.

Peer reviewed conference abstracts and presentations

Mayberry, L. (2009, June 19-25). *A qualitative study of undergraduate students' learning experience in sexology – preliminary data*. Presented at the World Association for Sexual Health Conference (WAS), Gottenberg, Sweden.

Mayberry, L. (2010, November). *Sex, drugs and rock'n'roll. [2 hour interactive workshop]*. Presented at the National Sexual Health Educators' Conference, FPWA Sexual Health Services, Perth, WA.

Mayberry, L. (2011, June 12-16). *Peeping through the keyhole: Exploring engaging strategies from the sexology classroom [Interactive 3 hour workshop]*. Presented at the World Association of Sexual Health Conference (WAS), Glasgow, Scotland.

Mayberry, L. (2011, June 12-16). *Stripping back the veneer: A qualitative study of undergraduate students' learning experience in sexology*. Presented at the World Association of Sexual Health Conference (WAS), Glasgow, Scotland.

Mayberry, L., & Coates, R. (2012, October 11-13). *'Stepping out into the sunshine': A model of the impact of quality sexology education on undergraduate students*. Presented at the Australian Society for Sexuality Educators, Researchers and Therapists Conference (ASSERT). Melbourne, Victoria.

Mayberry, L. (2012, November 8-9). *A qualitative study of undergraduate students' learning experience in sexology*. Presentation at the Mark Liveris Health Sciences Research Student Seminar, Curtin University, Perth, WA.

Journal papers in progress

Mayberry, L., Coates, R., & Miller, P. (2013). The value of desensitisation through the use of sexually explicit materials in the Sexology Programme. *Sex Education*.

Mayberry, L., Coates, R., & Adams, N. (2013). Reflective writing and sexology undergraduate students. *American Journal of Sexuality Education*.

Mayberry, L., & Daniels, J. (2013). Birthgasm: Educating midwives about the possibility of a pleasurable birth experience. *Journal of Midwifery and Women's Health*.

CHAPTER 1: FOCUS AND FRAMING

The first part of this chapter introduces the topic and the research questions are presented. Following this, is an overview of the introductory sexology unit, Sexology 350¹, and the approach to teaching. Finally, I explore my philosophy and my perspectives related to the research journey.

INTRODUCTION

This study responds to significant issues related to the problematic nature of sexuality in Australian society. This qualitative study provides insights into how higher education students extend their understanding of sexuality. These insights, elicited through the study, confirm the considerable body of anecdotal evidence that was gathered over thirty years in the award winning² sexuality education programme at Curtin University. The study provided unique insights into sexuality education in an adult learning environment, using ethnographic methods to reveal ways in which undergraduate students perceive and interpret new knowledge acquired from formal studies in sexology. `

The study also illuminates how the learning strategies and content influence participants' perceptions of their own sexuality and the sexuality of others. The rich body of information that emerged from this study provides much needed information about the processes and learning outcomes for students at this level, making a significant contribution to an important issue that has, thus far, received scant attention in the literature on sexuality education at adult/tertiary level.

¹ Since January 2013, Sexology 350 is now known as Sexology Attitudes and Values 280. The content remains unchanged.

² In 2007 the team in the Department of Sexology at Curtin University received the Award for Innovation and Excellence in Sexuality Education from the World Association for Sexual Health (WAS)

TOPIC OVERVIEW

The focus of this ethnographic study is to investigate the place of sexuality in participants' lives – the extent to which they deal with complex issues related to learning about sexuality. The aim of the study is twofold: firstly, to investigate ways in which undergraduate students perceive and interpret issues of sexuality, and secondly, to determine students' understanding of how their sexuality was affected by the curriculum and processes used in the sexology class.

The research questions are central to the methodology and relate to the notion of a socially constructed reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Denzin, 1992). Within the constraints imposed by the mechanisms of perception and interpretation, people take the data given to them and organise it according to socially learned patterns. How they perceive the world, how they interpret what they see, for example, culturally interpreted values, roles, gender, attitudes, patterns of behaviour, largely determine the way they act in the world (Denzin, 1989b). The 'how' questions, therefore, assisted me to discover the way the sexology students consciously described and interpreted phenomena associated with issues of sexuality (Stringer, 2007). Charon (2007) asserts that the sociological perspective is an important part of the jigsaw of understanding human life and, therefore, appropriate to the task of gaining a deeper understanding of human sexuality.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions were:

- How do undergraduate sexology students perceive and interpret issues in sexuality prior to studying sexology?
- How do the students respond to the content and learning processes used in class?
- How does the approach to sexology education affect the ways sexology students perceive and interpret issues in sexuality?

SIGNIFICANCE AND UNIQUENESS OF THE STUDY

A review of the literature reveals a dearth of research on sexology education at university level. Little is known about the processes and outcomes of education in this very sensitive and contentious area. This study provides insights into the way people perceive and interpret issues of sexuality, and how the instruction and learning strategies incorporated into the undergraduate class (Sexology 350) affected the students' understandings. It illuminates the processes of learning in a highly significant area of social life that is a subject of great ignorance to the general public.

The study provides unique insights into sexuality education in an adult learning environment. Through analysis of narrative reports, this study provides rich grounded accounts of the ways adult learners perceive and interpret their sexuality after undertaking studies in sexology. It also reveals the extent to which students understood and experienced their sexuality prior to their study of this topic, giving a broad overview of how their views changed as they took in new information and reflected on their previously held views.

Extensive data exists about sexuality education for younger children, especially school children. However, a sociological study has not been undertaken in the area of sexology with university students. Nor has there been a systematic examination of the type of descriptive data obtained through reflection papers submitted by university students studying sexology. Considerable anecdotal evidence has been gathered over the thirty year history of the Sexology Programme which speaks to the need and value of this 'sex-positive'³ programme. This study validates this anecdotal evidence and extends understanding about sexuality education with adult learners.

³ Giami, Ohlrichs, Quilliam and Wellings (2006) emphasise the need for 'sex-positive' sexuality education: an approach that "avoids blaming or shaming" about sexual feelings and experiences and avoids "delivering messages that sex is not enjoyable" (p. 486). A 'sex-positive' approach "brings together divergent perspectives in an all-inclusive approach to sexuality education" (Nodelman, 2012, p. v).

Significance of this study for the students and the researcher

For sexuality educators, understanding how adult learners respond to both the unit content and the learning/teaching processes is vital if they are to provide relevant curriculum content that educates, engages and inspires students. This study enabled me to better understand the students' world. It built my skills and understanding "enriching (my) professional practice and ... enhancing the lives of those involved" (Stringer, 2007, p. 3).

As shown in the presentation and analysis of the student narratives, the content and learning strategies employed in this unit affected the students' perceptions of sexuality and understanding of themselves. Students were keen to have their comments from reflection papers and voices from interviews, heard. Thus, the outcomes of this study are highly significant to many of the students who participated.

Outcomes from this study provide:

- a resource for highlighting the importance of sexuality education for tertiary students;
- an opportunity to document the unique Curtin University Sexology Programme;
- a process map of the impact of quality sexology education for the students (Chapter 8);
- insights into the value of reflective writing; and
- illuminations leading to improvements to the pedagogy of sexuality.

Overall, this study has provided insights into the value of the teaching processes used within Sexology 350 which can be used by sexuality educators to enhance their professional practice. The teacher has also had the privilege to positively influence the participants' understanding of their own sexuality and their perceptions and understanding of the sexuality of others. The knowledge gained from this study has been adopted by the researcher and incorporated into the Sexology 350 unit to enhance the educational experience for future students.

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

The Department of Sexology, within the School of Public Health at Curtin University in Perth, Western Australia, presents the only programme of its type in Australia. The Programme provides opportunities for students to study sexology at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. Internal (face-to-face) tuition and some external e-learning tuition are offered and class sizes range from 20-25 undergraduate and 15-20 postgraduate students.

Earlier, the study of sexology concentrated on human reproduction and sexual health as topics for learning and research. The study of love, sexual emotions, human relationships, gender, human sexual response, criminal sexual behaviour, sexual function, sexual pleasure and fulfilment, have been relatively recent endeavours in sexology and have been a core part of the curriculum within the Sexology Programme for 30 years.

Students in the introductory sexology unit explore a broad range of topics including: legal and illegal sexual behaviours; sexuality through the lifecycle; enhancing relationships; love; impact of gender; anatomy and the physiology of sexual function, including reproduction; pleasure, desire and arousal; sexually transmissible infections; paraphilia; erotica and pornography; and the affirmation of diversity.

PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE SEXOLOGY PROGRAMME

Underpinning the Programme's pedagogy is the assumption that adult learners are responsible for their own learning and that introspection leads to discovery. Experiential learning is one tool to discovery. We base our approach on the educational philosophies of Socrates (Gower & Stokes, 1991), John Dewey (Archambault, 1964; Dewey, 1916, 1938), Paulo Freire (Freire, 1975, 2006) and Neil Postman (Postman, 1971).

The Socratic method is based on the notion that humans hold certain 'truths' within themselves and that, through a process of self-discovery, these may be revealed. This provides a foundation for the educational method espoused

by Dewey, Freire and Postman. The method of Socratic questioning used in our classes leads students to self-discovery. This method is compatible with that of the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire's 'critical pedagogy'. It leads students to question and challenge dominant beliefs and practices – to look beyond the surface meaning and mere opinion, tradition and myths (J. L. Elias & Merriam, 1984). Our experiential learning techniques, as promoted by Dewey and Postman, provide additional opportunities for self-discovery.

The use of reflection papers builds upon the in-class approach and aims to enhance self-discovery. The rationale for reflective writing is explored in detail in Chapter 3 and in examples of students' reflections that are reported in Chapters 5 to 8. Self-discovery is achieved through encouraging the students to reflect on what they have experienced in the classroom and to question themselves. Through this practice it is hoped that they achieve a degree of introspection that will further enhance their knowledge, attitudes and capacities. The ultimate goal is to promote the development of conceptual understandings leading to further exploration. According to Professor Rosemary Coates (Personal communication, Sept 2010) the Department of Sexology advocates evidenced-based practices to both education, and the tools used in the various professional areas of sexology. Thus, the Programme endeavours to prepare graduates who have the capacity and the commitment to develop and test new strategies, and to broaden their views and understandings about their own and others' experiences of, and knowledge about, sexuality.

APPROACHES TO TEACHING AND LEARNING IN THE SEXOLOGY PROGRAMME

The Programme uses adult learning principles to encourage students to think laterally and to bring their own experiences and learning to the class (J. L. Elias & Merriam, 1984). Adults are respected as being their own 'experts' in all matters including their own sexuality. Interactive strategies can help students articulate their ideas and experiences and to listen to the comments of their university peers. This approach to the teaching of sexuality,

champions the ability and willingness to see others' points of view (International Sexuality and HIV Curriculum Working Group, 2009). See Appendix 1 - An example of the *group guidelines* that are used in the Sexology 350 class.

Learning about sexuality includes factual information, theories and models and also requires students to explore their own attitudes and values while increasing their skill base (Dyson, Mitchell, Dalton, & Hillier, 2003; Goldfarb, 2005; Helmich, 2009). Stringer (2007) urges facilitators to consider not only the content and techniques used when working with groups but, importantly, to examine the ways they interact with people. Each person, including the facilitator, should be operating in ways that “enhance the elements of human well-being” (p.102).

To this end, an extensive range of teaching strategies are used in the sexology class including: icebreakers; role play; ‘fish bowl’ technique; dilemmas; guided visualisations; graffiti sheets; mind mapping; model making; charts and stimulus cards; and multimedia – popular music, cartoons, TV and film, short story, advertisements. These strategies maximise student involvement in the learning (International Sexuality and HIV Curriculum Working Group, 2009).

DELIVERY OF MATERIAL – A STUDENT-CENTRED APPROACH

Learning through participation is the approach adopted within the Sexology 350 unit. A Socratic method, that is, making use of higher- level open ended questions, leads the students to discover the concepts, facts, and/or answers for themselves. Working with peers in pairs, triads or larger groups provides students with the opportunity to clarify and express their own attitudes and values and become acquainted with those of their peers.

FEEDBACK AND ASSESSMENT

A variety of assessment techniques are used when teaching the sexology unit. Detailed descriptions and clear assessment criteria for each assessment piece are provided in the unit outline. Assessment techniques include the following:

Reflection papers

These 1-2 page papers, encourage students to write honestly and confidentially about their reactions and reflections during their introductory sexology unit. Amongst other things they serve to document the evolution in thinking that occurs during the process. The philosophical roots have been identified earlier in this chapter and the theoretical background for the use of reflective writing is explored in Chapter 3.

Attendance and reflecting on the film show

An important and obligatory part of the Programme for all students is attendance at a film show, which includes sexually explicit material of a diverse range of sexual behaviour (see Appendix 2 - *Overview of the sexology film show*). The film show is shown in the second session to all students, and is a prerequisite for attendance at any sexology units in the Programme. A flooding technique is used with the purpose of desensitising students and thus facilitating open discussion in the early classes. Appropriate re-sensitisation occurs over the period of the semester. The films offer a diversity of sexual expression and have been made for educational purposes. In the first session, students are fully informed about the nature of the film show and are given a week to make an informed choice about continuing in the sexology unit and any subsequent units.

In the week following the film show, students are required to write a reflection paper outlining their reactions both during the film and after the screening. Reactions to the film are often strong and contentious. These reactions and

the theoretical underpinnings of the desensitisation process are explored in depth in Chapter 3.

Student presentations

Student presentations are scheduled in the last two weeks of class. A list of suggested topics is included in the unit outline. The topics, the expectations of working in groups, and the approach to presenting are discussed with students in the first weeks of the semester. Working in small groups of three or four peers, the students choose their sexual health topic. All students receive a Unit Outline that encourages them to present accurate, up-to-date content in an engaging fashion.

Visit to sexual health agencies

When completing their sexology assessment pieces (written assignments and group presentations), students are encouraged to access relevant sexual health agencies and appropriate websites. A comprehensive list of local, national and international websites is included in the Unit Outline.

Guest speakers

Students are encouraged to attend presentations organised by the WA Sexology Society (WASS) and other sexual health agencies. These presentations are an extension of their sexology studies and many students incorporate their expanded knowledge into their assignments. Speakers at these presentations include individuals working in the field of sexology, and others with relevant experience and knowledge. Presentations have included an address by a lawyer/criminologist; workers in the sex industry relating their experiences; discussion groups such as exploration of case studies; and talks by representatives from key sexual health agencies such as Sexual Assault Resource Centre and Magenta, an organisation that provides education and support for sex workers.

Curtin eVALUate

At the end of semester, students are encouraged to evaluate their experiences of the unit using the university's online, anonymous evaluation tool, Curtin eVALUate. The website states, "Students can give feedback about their unit and their teacher: these are two separate surveys.

- The **eVALUate unit survey** asks students their perceptions of what helps and hinders their achievement of unit learning outcomes, their motivation and engagement, and their overall satisfaction with the unit.
- The **eVALUate teaching survey** asks students to give feedback to individual teachers on their teaching effectiveness."
<http://evaluate.curtin.edu.au/>

Results from an eVALUate report about Sexology 350 and feedback on my teaching can be found at the end of Appendix 3.

WEEKLY CONTENT OUTLINE

This section provides an overview of the key content of the Sexology 350 unit. This unit is conducted over a semester, three hours per class for twelve weeks; a total of thirty six hours. The final two weeks are allocated for student presentations and focus groups, providing feedback about the unit.

Sexology 350 Lecture/Tutorial Schedule

Week	Topic
1	Introduction
2	Desensitisation film
3	Discussion of the film show Language and sexosophy ⁴

⁴ **Sexosophy** - The body of knowledge that comprises the philosophy, principles, and knowledge that people have about their own personally experienced eroticism and sexuality and that of other people, singly and collectively. It includes values, personal and shared, and it encompasses culturally transmitted value systems. Its subdivisions are historical, regional, ethnic, religious, and developmental or life span (Money, 1986, p. 296).

4	Human female sexuality Human male sexuality
5	Psychosexual development Gender
6	Sexual orientation and sexual behaviours Sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
7	Sexual variance: fetishes & paraphilias Pornography, erotica & sexually explicit material
8	Aging and sexuality Sexuality and disability
9	Love, intimacy and enhancing relationships
10	Affirming sexual diversity Tackling homophobia
11/12	Student presentations Focus groups commenting on the impact of the unit

See Appendix 4 for an *Overview of the 'Graduate Attributes and Learning Outcomes' for Sexology 350*. The scope of this thesis does not allow for a detailed handbook of the weekly content. Particular topics and strategies are mentioned in later chapters as these emerge in relation to the comments and experiences of the participants in this study.

MY PHILOSOPHY, HISTORY AND RESEARCH JOURNEY

It may be argued that it is impossible to carry out any form of sociological research without the researcher having beliefs and values. "Because of the personal presence of humanness, - pure scientific objectivity is impossible to obtain" (Lawless, Sutlive, & Zamora, 1983, p. xiii). I think it would be uncommon for a researcher to undertake research in an area that he/she has no background in and/or passion for and, therefore, no preconceived beliefs and values. Qualitative researchers need to be explicit about their philosophy, hence the inclusion of this information. Appendix 5 (a, b & c)

expands on my philosophy to the teaching and learning of sexuality education, my early learning about sexuality, and my research journey.

ORGANISATION OF THIS DISSERTATION

This dissertation is divided into 9 chapters. This chapter has set the scene for the study with an overview, the research questions and background information about the Sexology Programme at Curtin University. Chapter two explores sexuality from a sociological perspective highlighting both the problematic nature and positive perspectives of sexuality. Chapter three examines the theoretical underpinnings of sexuality education and the challenges for sexuality educators. Included in this section is the rationale for two key strategies used in the Sexology Programme. The fourth chapter explores ethnographic methods and introduces the reader to the participants. Chapters five and six illuminate the first research question – the experiences and perceptions of sexuality that students bring to the sexology class. The sixth chapter introduces the reader to five ‘ordinary’ participants with ‘extraordinary’ stories. Chapter seven investigates the second research question: the effectiveness of the classroom strategies and the relevance and impact of the content of the sexology unit. The eighth chapter explores the outcomes of the introductory sexology unit, and introduces a process map of the impact for participants of the ‘sex-positive’ approach to teaching sexology. Finally, the last chapter explores the findings and limitations, and the recommendations resulting from this study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW – THE NATURE OF SEXUALITY

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents an overview of the nature of sexuality in Western society. It is outside the scope of this study to focus on the myriad of possible influences that define ‘the nature of sexuality’; so this review of the literature covers those key issues that influenced and intrigued the participants in this study. Students communicated about the key influences on their sexuality, including: religion; gender; masturbation; body image; sexual orientation and diversity; sexual abuse; first sexual intercourse; past and present relationships; and messages about sexuality absorbed during childhood and adolescence. Other topics, while not as influential intrigued the students, and hence their inclusion in this review. These topics included: a historical perspective of sexuality; pornography and cybersex; aging and the effects sexuality; and sex work.

How individuals understand and perceive sexuality is shaped by their socio-cultural context. Whilst the majority of the sexology students are Australian, Australia is a multi-cultural country with diverse and, at times, conflicting views. A minority of the students are international students and they bring their own unique experiences and perceptions shaped by the cultural mores of their country of origin. As detailed in the literature review, sexuality, while being positive and universal, is also problematic and issues of sexuality cause concern for individuals, family and society.

SEXUALITY AS A SIGNIFICANT ISSUE

Sexuality is complex. The following definitions of sexuality and sexual health from the World Association for Sexual Health (WAS) (2007) is multifaceted:

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, ethical, legal, historical, religious and spiritual factors.

The pervasiveness of sexuality, or rather a certain 'kind' of sexuality, has become so predominant in Western society that releasing a 'sex tape' (a sexually explicit recording of sexual behaviour) can lead to becoming a celebrity, a television star and amassing enormous wealth, as epitomised by Kim Kardashian (Buzzmedia, 2012).

"I have to be in a relationship in order to be intimate. I'm not the one-night-stand kind of girl. Despite the rumours." Kim Kardashian, a celebrity with six million Twitter followers.

The old advertising term of 'sex sells' has been taken to new levels in modern society, and with the advent of the internet, that has seen sexuality become an omnipotent force in pop culture, advertising and a central aspect of global capitalism.

Sex "...is everywhere you look, it permeates every aspect of contemporary popular culture. Yet, of our own experiences we are routinely silent" (A. Smith, Rissel, Richters, Grulich, & Visser, 2003, p. 103). A decade later, this statement remains true; discussing sexuality continues to be problematic for young people, parents and educators. Meanwhile, there is public outrage about the saturation of explicit pornographic images, the sexualisation of children by the media; and younger people accessing inappropriate sexual information on the internet (Flood, 2009, p. 134; Heins, 2001).

Evangelist, John Piper said, "One of the great uses of Twitter and Facebook will be to prove at the Last Day that prayerlessness was not from lack of time" (Hawkins, 2012). Hawkins went on to write, ironically, on an internet blog, of the generation of young people⁵ "made bored and vacuous" with the

⁵ Young people are youth aged between 15 and 24 years old... young people are a heterogeneous group in constant evolution and that the experience of 'being young' varies enormously across regions and within (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 2012).

use of social media, adding a warning that, with the escalating use of devices as iPhones, “we drink again from the broken cistern of this present evil age”.

Researchers offer a more balanced view than these evangelists, recognising both the dangers and the benefits of the internet and social media, such as Twitter and Facebook. The internet, mobile phones and social media are powerful tools which play a significant role for people, especially young people. These tools can: keep them connected to their world, for example by providing them with regular ‘tweets’ from their favourite celebrity, or ‘texting’ to friends; give an infinite amount of accurate and up-to-date sexual health information and options; and link them to others in many parts of the world (Flood, 2009; Goold, Ward, & Carlin, 2003; Herdt, 2009; Jacobs, 2010; Kwan, Jachimowicz, Bastian, Marshall, & Mak, 2012; Paul, Ayala, & Choi, 2010; A. Smith, Mitchell, Barrett, & Pitts, 2009; Thornburgh & Lin, 2002; Walsh, 2012).

Sexual content was initially limited to commercial pornography and educational material. However, the advent of Web 2.0 has enabled the internet to become a vehicle for sexual self-expression and sharing of content that has been adopted by millions of people globally. The advent of the mobile phone, and other internet-enabled devices, has furthered the sharing of sexual content, especially amongst young people. Sexting (sending a sexually explicit photograph or text using a mobile phone), can be illegal and may be dangerous because the final destination of explicit images is unknown (Chandler, May, 2011). The internet also allows images usually kept in private domains to be made public, and these images can then be accessed from almost anywhere. Sexual images are being shared and explicit language has become more acceptable (Shaughnessy, Byers, & Thornton, 2011). Bleakley, Hennessy and Fishbein (2011) questioned young people in the United States and half reported that they had intentionally viewed sexually explicit content in films, music clips, magazines and pornography. Flood (2009, p. 142) warns that “pornography is a poor sex educator...most shows sex in unrealistic ways and neglects intimacy and romance, and some pornography is sexist or even violent”.

Sexuality is a central feature of modern societies. It is the focus of major social and political issues that are global concerns ranging from sexual violence, sex education, prostitution, trafficking in women, abortion and contraception, single parenthood, AIDS, divorce, the rights of lesbians and gay men, through to the organisation of social life through the institutionalisation of hetero(norms). In the last thirty years it has become a central aspect of global capitalism. From the use of sexual imagery in advertising and marketing, to billion dollar sex industries selling pornography and sexual services, to weddings, to mail-order brides, to international sex tourism and so on: this is the political economy of sexuality. Sexuality is also a mechanism of social control and regulation. As a consequence, it is a focus of political struggle via the efforts of social movements concerned with sexual and reproductive issues.

At an individual level, sexuality is central to our understanding of contemporary identities and relationships. It is directly connected to how we feel about ourselves and others and, often, our motives for forming relationships and achieving intimacy. It is a mode for experience love and pleasure, as well as assessing and demonstrating personal worth.

It is for all these reasons that we need to understand the continuing transformations of sexuality and their social, personal and political implications. (Richardson, 2000, p. 14)

Sexuality is an integral part of one's life yet is often minimised and trivialised and/or shrouded in secrecy and misinformation. More than forty years ago, a working group from the World Health Organisation asserted that "religious or culturally induced sexual guilt and secrecy made it hard for partners to experience sexual enjoyment" (Giami, et al., 2006, p. 487). The internet and social media have exposed many aspects of sexuality, yet for many, experiencing pleasurable consensual sex that is guilt-free, remains elusive.

HISTORICAL VIEWS OF THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF SEXUALITY

People's sexuality has been a focus of discussion, study and academic discourse for many years. Hawkes (1996, p. 10) states that the nineteenth century was a particularly repressive period with anxiety about "unregulated sexual desire...women's sexuality...non-procreative erotic practices and same-sex desire". There have been shifts in how the pursuit of sexual pleasure is viewed (L. Allen, 2012). In pre-Christian Pagan times, the 'pleasures of the flesh' were viewed as an integral part of being human. In

Roman times, men who penetrated were viewed as masculine and virile and homosexual sex was not viewed as an offence against nature. Hawkes (1996) stated that with the rise of Christianity came the “demotion of pleasure...and the elevation of chastity and self-denial” (p. 12).

Malinowski, a pioneer in the field of ethnography and sexuality with his research, *Sex and repression in savage society* (1927) and *The sexual life of savages* (1929), argued that the Trobriand natives in the Pacific had an idyllic introduction to sexuality. He said they were playful and uninhibited by their nakedness. Adolescent sexual experimentation was encouraged, for example, with special huts made available for young heterosexual couples.

Sigmund Freud, known as the father of psychoanalysis, had views which differed considerably to the Trobriand’s carefree attitudes to adolescent sexuality. Freud was not convinced of the benefits of sexual liberation instead advocating for ‘sublimation’, that is, sacrificing sexual instincts for aims that are “socially higher and no longer sexual” (Freud, 1953, p. 23). Although he acknowledged that holding back from sexual awakening in younger years would be challenging, he saw benefits in abstinence. In the 1940’s Alfred Kinsey, gathered histories of people’s sexual behaviours and with a team of researchers, went on to interview 18,000 people (The Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex Gender and Reproduction, 2012). Kinsey (1948, p. 206) disagreed with Freud’s notion of sublimation, likening it to “age-old tenet of several religions...dogmatic and without supporting data”. Kinsey saw sexual activity as a biological imperative and saw no need to limit its practice.

According to Connell and Dowsett (1992, p. 74) the sexual revolution of the 1960’s and 1970’s lifted “social prohibitions on sexual behaviour ... and the dismantling of the power of one social group over another”. This period saw the rise of feminism, the fight for gay rights emerged and gay liberation challenged the response to the HIV epidemic that “called for homosexual celibacy” (p.75). Sexual liberation was tempered with the call for ‘safe sex’ and the moral campaigners decried the ‘moral decay’.

The media, especially the internet, has become a prevalent and powerful influence over the past two decades. The advent of the internet has given an unprecedented rise in the instant accessibility of sexuality related material. To say content is varied and diverse, is an understatement. Phenomena such as online dating, sexting and cybersex⁶ have quickly grown in popularity, with the number of people participating in cybersex increasing (Cooper, Morahan-Martin, Mathy, & Maheu, 2002). The world has become a smaller place due to the internet, and diverse sexual groups are now able to connect worldwide and rally support for their cause (Herdt, 2009).

These are just a few of the divergent views which have influenced western thinking about sexuality up to the present day. Whilst there have been profound changes in sexual mores, anxieties about sexuality remain. It can be seen from the above that our view of sexuality is changed by many factors, from popular thinking to increased exposure to sexually explicit material. Whilst entities such as organised religion have sought to control or limit sexuality, the reality is that it has never been fully suppressed. The advent of the internet (which in itself owes its growth to pornography) has served to make exploration of all things of a sexual nature, easy and anonymous (Albright, 2008). There are many benefits to such ease of availability, not the least being the ability to contact those of a like persuasion (Herdt, 2009).

GENITALIA AND BODIES

Anxieties about genitalia and bodies are shared by many males and females. Bodies, especially the genitalia, are viewed as problematic, dirty and “heavily inscribed by meaning - much of it sexual” (Lawler, 1991, p. 113). Dissatisfaction with the body fuels a desire for treatments, potions and surgery. The current passion for slimming stands in stark contrast to the rounded female figures of previous centuries (Eknoyan, 2006; Gaunlett, 2002). Curvaceous female figures, although the norm, are not commonly

⁶ Cybersex, also known as online sexual activity (OSA), involves communication with two or more people focusing on sexual relations (Shaughnessy, et al., 2011).

viewed as the ideal beauty by the media (Gaunlett, 2002). Young men also feel the pressure to conform to be muscular, trim and taut (Shomaker & Furman, 2010; Smolak, Murnen, & Thompson, 2005). Males who fear that their penis is small may seek surgery or non-invasive methods such as vacuum devices or penis/scrotal rings (Oderda & Gontero, 2011).

This striving for 'perfection' has led to the normalisation of cosmetic surgery, including altering the vulva (Leach, 2011; S. B. Levine, 2012). For some young women, the choice to not have surgery relegates them to less than 'perfect' genitalia (Braun, 2009). Lady Gaga, whose popularity can be measured by her 27 million Twitter followers, is known as an advocate for self-acceptance. It is worrying, therefore, when she "continues to engage in and contribute to the ongoing dialogue about body insecurity" (Konstantine, September, 2012). Pop culture figures, such as Lady Gaga and Kim Kardashian, frequently offer mixed messages to their followers, such as sharing their latest fad diet, strenuous exercise regime, or spending fortunes on clothing and cosmetics, adding considerable pressure to impressionable fans.

Misinformation, shame and secrecy surround the female genitalia. The Latin name for the female genitalia (pudendum) means "one who should and ought to be ashamed; the shameful part of a woman" (Herbenick & Schick, 2011, p. 78). Language used to describe genitalia, especially women's genitalia, is frequently incorrect, derogatory and misleading. For example, a woman's vulva, the external parts of a woman's genitalia, is often called a vagina (the internal passage linking the vulva with the cervix). This confusion of terms is perpetuated by the media and even health professionals (Drysdale, 2011; Ensler, 2012; Leach, 2011; Masvawure, 2008; McCartney, 2011). Herbenick and Schick (2011) suggest that the influence of incorrect language is significant. They cite the case for renaming the labia – inner and outer labia, rather than the 'medical terms' of labia majora and labia minora. As they aptly point out, women's labia are as varied as the women, and frequently the inner labia are not minor and do protrude beyond the outer labia.

“Forming one's body image is a complex process, influenced by family, peers and media messages” (Hogan & Strasburger, 2008, p. 521). Pujols, Meston and Seal (2010) surveyed 154 women ranging in age from 18-49 years who were in sexual relationships. The women who had a negative view of their body image, tended to have lower sexual esteem, low sexual efficacy and lower sexual assertiveness. Conversely, women who had a positive view of their body had greater frequency of sexual activity, were more sexually adventurous, and experienced an increased level of sexual functioning including better orgasms (Pujols, et al., 2010; Satinsky, Reece, Dennis, Sanderson, & Bardzell, 2012). Men also have concerns about their genitalia and bodies (Shomaker & Furman, 2010; Smolak, et al., 2005) and “when the media shows a strong macho figure indulging in a particular act, young boys take it as real” (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 2006).

Nowell and Ricciardelli (2008) found that negative messages about males' bodies affected their perceived desirability to partners. An internet survey of 15,246 Americans (Albright, 2008) stated that 76% of men and 41% of women had intentionally downloaded pornography. Both males and females, who downloaded pornography, reported 'lower body image' – females more so than men. As a result of viewing pornography, females believed that their partners were more critical of their bodies. Males agreed that they were more critical of both their own and their partner's body and less interested in 'actual sex' with their partner. Unrealistic bodies, such as men with larger than average penis size, give a skewed view of what is 'normal'. Pornography frequently portrays sexual performances that are carefully edited, for example, a man maintaining an erection for hours and a woman having an orgasm with little stimulation (Albright, 2008).

People of all ages, especially young people, are influenced negatively by trends, such as cosmetic surgery on genitalia, and the unrealistic images and expectations that are purported by the mass media (Shomaker & Furman, 2009).

SEXUALITY THROUGHOUT LIFE

Sexuality is a dynamic entity that evolves with the individual and is subject to the usual fluctuations of life. With natural changes that occur over time, or things that change just from existing in an environment or even by pure chance, an individual's lifetime serves to create a unique interaction of the social and psychological to produce a sexual history. This could include change agents ranging from puberty to exposure to popular press. General descriptions of anticipated milestones during the life-cycle provide a foundation for understanding human sexuality as described in the World Association for Sexual Health (WAS) (2007) definition (quoted earlier in this chapter).

Childhood

“Children are not devoid of sexuality. They have their own brand of sexuality that corresponds to their age and stage of life” (Walsh, 2012, p. 13). Talking openly and positively with children about sexuality fosters positive attitudes (Hogarth & Ingham, 2009; J. Levine, 2002). More frequently, however, children gain negative views of their body, and sexual activity such as masturbation is associated with shame (N. Elias, 1982). Levine (2002) advocates for lack of censure in regards to children and the ‘normal’ exploration of their bodies. Brennan and Graham (2012) emphasise the natural expression of sexuality through behaviour and play. They affirm the need for adults to “support the development of healthy sexuality and protect young people from harm or abuse” (p. 1).

Young people⁷

Exploration of gender, sexual identity and sexual behaviour, mark this period of development in young people (Crooks & Baur, 2011) and relationships outside the family take on greater importance (Giordano, 2003). A study

⁷ WHO defines ‘**adolescents**’ as individuals in the 10-19 years age group and ‘**youth**’ as the 15-24 year age group. These two overlapping age groups are combined in the group ‘**young people**’ covering the age range 10-24 years (World Health Organization (WHO), 2012).

involving 8438 young people showed that most people established romantic relationships towards the end of adolescence. 'Romantic events' such as hand holding and spending time together were significant events that preceded sexual activity (O'Sullivan, Cheng, Harris, & Brooks-Gunn, 2007). This gradual exploration of a relationship allows the person to progress slowly from one stage to the next, enabling careful thought, and comfort in the process.

First time sex, also known as losing one's virginity, holds significant meaning for people, especially young people (Morrissey & Higgs, 2006) and, if given the opportunity to ask questions, high school students are keen to know what to expect (Charmaraman & Sumru Erkut, 2012). First time sex can be a joyful experience, it can also be disappointing, traumatic and full of regrets (Carmody & Willis, 2006).

The first experience of intercourse lays the foundation for future sexual experiences (Koch, 1988). A negative sexual encounter can lead to anxieties and sexual dysfunction, whereas a positive experience can be influential for future pleasurable experiences, and cause for celebration (Morrissey & Higgs, 2006).

Manning (2006) said that, with the growing influence of the internet, adolescents were particularly vulnerable to exposure to sexually explicit material. She said viewing such materials could encourage earlier experimentation with penetrative sex and indulging in risky sexual practices like anal sex and sex with strangers. Manning is not alone in her concern about adolescents and cybersex (Flood, 2009; Thornburgh & Lin, 2002; Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhore, 2012). Considering the ease with which such material is available, and that adolescents are in a phase of exploration, the effect on development of a relationship could be quite marked.

An Australian study indicated that almost a half of secondary school students (n=3000) have had penetrative intercourse prior to leaving secondary school and the average age of first sexual intercourse is 16 (A. Smith, Agius,

Mitchell, Barrett, & Pitts, 2009). Accordingly, young people need the skills to develop relationships prior to having sex if they are to have a positive experience (Walsh, 2012). Those skills, reported Abel and Fitzgerald (2006), are assertiveness, communication and empowerment. Meenagh (2011) agrees that these relationships skills are essential especially to counteract the sexual violence experienced by many young people. Young women feel varying degrees of pressure to engage in certain sexual practices, such as oral sex, and too frequently are coerced to have sexual intercourse (Meenagh, 2011). Almost 3000 Australian secondary school students were surveyed: young males reported that they felt pressured into having unwanted sex (18.6%) compared to 37.8% young women (A. Smith, et al., 2009, p. 31). Similarly, Hillier, Turner and Mitchell (2006) surveyed 1749 young same-sex attracted Australians, including 6 transgendered youth. These young people disclosed that they were less likely to use protection. In addition, they said that they faced discrimination, homophobia, and were more likely than opposite-sex-attracted people to attempt suicide (Hillier, Turner, & Mitchell, 2005).

Adolescence is a turbulent time, with dramatic changes physiologically and psycho-socially (Mission Australia, 2010). Modern technology has enabled easy access to information about sexuality including sexually explicit material. Whilst the exploration of this material can provide much needed answers for questioning minds (Goold, et al., 2003), the material viewed is not necessarily accurate or indicative of real life (Bleakley, et al., 2011).

Young people and pleasure

Young people are constantly being reminded of the negative consequences of engaging in sexual activities. Rarely are there conversations about pleasure and positive sexuality (L. Allen, 1995; deFur, 2012a; Kreinin, 2002). Hogarth and Ingham (2009), using qualitative methodology, interviewed 20 young women (16-18 years). They found that most young women discovered their sexual-being through self-exploration and masturbation, with masturbation being the safest and most significant form of sexual pleasure (Hogarth & Ingham, 2009). According to Hogarth and Ingham, males start

masturbating earlier than women and more frequently. Young men first experienced self-exploration in absence of a relationship or a sexual encounter; in contrast, young women were shown how to masturbate while in a heterosexual dating situation. Davidson and Darling (1993) surveyed 671 young women and found that they were more likely to feel guilty about masturbating, and, consequently, masturbated less, particularly if they come from a religious background. Masturbation and the amount of sexual intercourse were positively linked for these women (Davidson & Darling, 1993). Although in many cultures masturbation is seen as taboo, it has an important role to play by assisting people to know more about pleasure and their bodies (Das, 2007; Gerressu, Mercer, Graham, Wellings, & Johnson, 2008; Hogarth & Ingham, 2009).

Sexual intercourse is also an important part of a relationship because it marks a turning point in the progress of a relationship in terms of the emotional and physical state of both parties, and pleasure adds to this bonding (Biagini, 2008). Janssen (2011) confirms that young women were likely to have sexual intercourse with someone who was sensitive, respectful and trustworthy. In contradiction to this, Kuyper and Vanwesenbeeck (2011) said that heterosexual women were more likely to engage in sexual activity with an aesthetically pleasing male who is financially secure. Young men were attracted to women who they perceived to be more promiscuous and flirtatious, however, they were not as positive about these women when they were considering long term partner selection (Philpott, Knerr, & Boydell, 2006).

A positive view of one's sexuality is important because it motivates people to know their bodies and how to enhance their sexual responses (Reuben, 2000). Young people are motivated to learn about sexual pleasure and they are more likely to source this information from their peers rather than their parents or teachers (Phelps, 2007). A positive experience of sex is important for young people because it encourages communication and intimacy, leading to a better life overall (Moin, Duvdevany, & Mazor, 2009). It is reported that young people have the most positive sexual experiences with a

person they share a strong emotional connection (Kreinin, 2002) and when they understand it is “their right and choice to take their time” (Walsh, 2012, p. 37).

Whilst many sexual encounters can be pleasurable, according to Fisher, Worth, Garcia and Meredith (2011, p. 45) young people may regret their “uncommitted sexual encounters (ie. casual sex that occurs with someone once and only once or with someone known for less than 24 hours)”. The authors questioned 200 Canadian university students (132 female, 68 male) and found that young women were more likely to have significant regret than their male counterparts. Interestingly, if the sexual interaction was perceived as a quality experience then regret was rarely felt by the female or male students. Grello, Welsh and Harper (2006) stated that there was a link between college students (N=404), casual sex and depression. Both genders experienced regret to varying degrees, but male students reported fewer symptoms of depression than the female students. The authors proposed that “depressed female students may be seeking external validation”. While they feel hope that a romantic relationship may develop (Grello, et al., 2006, p. 266), they stated that expectations regarding engaging in casual sex varied depending on gender and “guilt, regret, and the violation of societal expectations may contribute to female psychological distress” (p. 265).

Elderly

Australians are living longer than ever before, with the average life expectancy for a woman being 83.3 years and for a man, 78.8 years (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012). Whilst sexual expression can occur throughout the lifespan, there is much negativity associated with sexuality in the older population in Western society. Many believe that older individuals (over 55 years) are not sexually active and/or do not want to be (Jung & Schill, 2003). The reality is that many people are sexually active into their eighties, however, the levels of sexual activity decrease with age (Bancroft, 2007). Zarbock (2009) reported that more than three quarters of American men aged 75 to 85 years and fifty percent of women that age are interested

in sex. Dunn and Cutler (2000, p. 68) surveyed older people and sexual activity (ie. they engaged in intercourse, oral sex or anal sex at least once a month). The researchers found that the percentage of adults engaging in sex were as follows: in their sixties -71% men and 51% women; seventies - 57% men and 30% women; and eighties - 25% men and 20% women (Dunn & Cutler, 2000).

Children often have difficulty accepting the sexual feelings and activities of their aging parents (A. Jung & Schill, 2003) and with many older people living in aged care, the views of staff in these facilities are also crucial. Unfortunately, Rheaume and Mitty (2008) confirm that staff working in aged care share similar views, that is, that elderly individuals are not sexual beings. Views such as these make it increasingly difficult to shift negative messages about sexuality in older people. These negative views highlight the importance of education and awareness about the possibilities of sexual activity as people age.

The presence of chronic medical conditions is associated with reduced sexual activity and an increased frequency of sexual problems in both sexes. The most common sexual health concerns for older women are vaginal dryness, loss of desire, urinary incontinence and pelvic surgery (Rheaume & Mitty, 2008). The most common sexual health issues for men are erectile dysfunction and lower levels of testosterone (Bancroft, 2007).

These issues can be overcome with medical interventions, such as sildenafil for men and lubricants to overcome vaginal dryness. Conversations with health professionals are essential, however, many older people do not discuss their sexual health concerns with their medical practitioner. In addition, some health professionals feel uncomfortable about raising sexual health matters with their clients (Helmes & Chapman, 2011). Older adults lack accurate information about sexuality. Sexuality education was not commonplace when they attended school. Sexual values were shaped by circumstances, for example economics and war, and influenced by sexual

scripts. Sexual scripts⁸ include: menopause brings the downturn of sexual desire and loss of sense of femininity; sex is for young people; sexual activity must be initiated by the male; and there is one 'correct' position for intercourse. "Such scripts need to be challenged" (Brick, Lunquist, Sandak, & Taverner, 2009, p. xi). Restricted knowledge about sex and attitudes about sexuality among older people are inextricably linked. This, combined with the hesitation to discuss sexual matters with health practitioners, may contribute to erroneous assumptions later on in life (Rheaume & Mitty, 2008). Many older individuals desire to love, to be affectionate and to enjoy sexual activity. A positive attitude to sexuality and aging is ideal if older adults are to continue to fulfil their sexual desires until their death.

INFLUENCE OF GENDER ON SEXUALITY

"We [women] would never be equals staying in the traditional sexual straitjacket" (Friday, 1973, p. xiii). Almost four decades have elapsed since Nancy Friday's liberating book about the sexuality of women and their fantasies, yet for many women the ephemeral 'straitjacket' remains. It seems the taboos imposed on women seeking pleasure, extend around the world no matter what culture, religion, education or age (Casale & Hanass-Hancock, 2011; Castro, 2001; Masvawure, 2008; Pattman, 2005; Philpott, et al., 2006).

Others argue that parents continue to play a key role in the suppression of sexuality especially for young women. Parents view their daughters differently to their sons. "Young women tended to be more heavily regulated and either viewed as needing protection from male sexual advances or castigated for encouraging them" (Hyde et al., 2012, p. 895).

According to Gaunlett (2002), magazines, with a target audience of young women, encourage women to be sexually skilful, willing to express their desires, and even predatory. Whilst this may be the feminist ideal, Bay-Cheng and Eliseo-Arras (2008) and Meenagh (2011) recognised that

⁸ "Scripts are a metaphor for conceptualising the production of behaviour within social life" (Simon & Gagnon, 1984, p. 53).

gendered norms, such as women being sexually passive and less willing to express their desires, are still very much in existence. These gendered norms lead to pressure on women to participate in unwanted sex. Representations of males and females in the media are stereotypical and heteronormative. Lady Gaga agrees, “I got criticised for being arrogant because if you’re sure of yourself as a woman they say you’re a bitch whereas if you’re a man and you’re strong-willed its normal” (Luce, 2012). Ringrose (2010) researched bullying in schools and asserts that, from a young age, girls are encouraged to be hyper-feminine, with emphasis on their bodies, beauty and youth. Boys are encouraged to be hyper-masculine, with attention drawn to strength, dominance and power, objectification of women and a lack of emotional expression (Ringrose, 2010).

According to Govender (2011, p. 176) young men are also struggling with their masculine identities. The fear of being labelled ‘gay’ requires maintaining the “restrictive grip of heteronormativity” which does not admonish violence nor does it allow freer expressions of gender. Not only are young men challenged by the restrictions of their gender, Giddens and Sutton (2006, p. 478) assert that “...wide economic and social transformations are provoking a crisis in masculinity in which men’s traditional roles are being eroded”.

The preceding information has focused on heteronormative identities. Gender variant individuals identify as genders other than male and female. They may be labelled trans*, transgender, transsexual, gender queer, bi gender, two spirit or cross dressers (Mintz, 2011). Queer and trans* individuals experience themselves as being of the opposite sex, or of a different gender, despite having the physical body of one sex (Kruijver et al., 2000)..

With societies continuing to differentiate and discriminate along gender lines, awareness about power and gender, variant genders, gender identities, stigma, and the influence of gender on relationships, is imperative for young people (International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), 2011; Kimmel & Aronson, 2010; Sanchez, Fetterolf, & Rudman, 2012). IPPF states that

young people are especially vulnerable to violation of their sexual rights. They, “like everyone else” are entitled to know their rights to ensure their “development and well-being. This is equally true for “the societies in which they live” (p. 5).

THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGION ON SEXUALITY

“When religion is used to bring repression and darkness rather than liberation and light; it is toxic to both leaders and followers” (Baines, 2006).

Through the process of socialisation young people learn about their world including their sexuality. According to Berger and Luckmann (1969, p. 66), someone living in an environment that embraces a religious ethos will find that it “exercises unremitting constraint upon his individual experiences and actions”. For example, certain groups of young Christians in the United States are encouraged to ‘take a virginity pledge’. There is no evidence that such a pledge is effective in preventing young people having sex and, in turn, getting pregnant (Kirby, 2002a). According to Kirby, there may be an increased risk associated with this ‘pledge’. Young people who had come from a Christian background and had ‘pledged’ were more likely not to use protection because of the stigma associated with protection and the fear of being seen as promiscuous.

Socialisation is an ongoing process and religious rites (partaking in ceremonies such as blessings on special days, Holy Communion, Confirmation, marriage, funerals) throughout life, reinforce and legitimise the role of religion (Berger & Luckmann, 1969). Children who attend services, whether they are in a church, mosque or temple; or are taught in a religiously-based school; or have significant others who are religious; are likely to have their views on sexuality shaped by these influences. Whilst Durkheim (2006) asserts a positive view about the role of religion in followers’ lives, other researchers believe that most religions emphasise the negative. These negative observations include the submissive role of women – “silence and obedience” (Prusak, 1974, p. 106) and narrow views of sexuality and

pleasure (Acharya, Jejeebhoy, & Santhya, 2009; Onah, Iloabachie, Obi, Ezugwu, & Eze, 2002; Shojaa, Jouybari, & Sanagoo, 2009).

For young people who are questioning their sexuality, religion can be particularly problematic. For example, the attitude of some Christian leaders toward homosexuality is the locus of much internal conflict for many gay Christians. Gay Christians may experience great deals of guilt, shame and alienation, particularly the contemporary evangelical circles in which homosexuality is widely condemned, (Airton, 2009; McQueeney, 2009; Yip, 1997).

LOVE AND RELATIONSHIPS

Love transforms sex. Deepens it,
and then deepens it some more.
Love makes sex matter more - and less.
It encourages laughter, play, utter foolishness.
It teaches tenderness. Respect. Awe.
Love makes passion last. Forever.

Dowrick (1998, p. 75)

Romantic love – “the elation and obsession of ‘being in love’” (Fisher, 2004, p. xii). According to Fisher (2004, p. 3) “romantic love is a universal human experience” with anthropologists finding evidence of romantic love in the majority of cultures. Fisher described ‘being in love’ as “the feelings of being infatuated, being passionate, or being strongly romantically attracted to someone” (p. 4) and is strengthened by sexual intercourse. However, when romantic love is withdrawn – unrequited love is “associated with emptiness, anxiety and sorrow” (p. 25). Sternberg (1988) describes a different sort of love, a consummate love, a love that combines intimacy, passion and commitment.

People often begin relationships because there is a strong attraction. As this attraction grows, an attachment to the other may develop – a consummate love as described by Sternberg. “Changing social attitudes during the late

20th century have led to an increase in de facto and same-sex relationships as well as giving people more freedom to end relationships, start new relationships or remain single” (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2009, p. 7). Of those who do marry, more are choosing nonreligious ceremonies. Although divorce rates are declining, almost a third of first time marriages end in divorce and this figure increases with consecutive marriages (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2009). Regardless of these daunting statistics, most young people are striving to be in a relationship and are keen to learn more about enhancing their relationships (G. Allen & Meier, 2008; L. Allen, 2004; Connolly & McIsaac, 2009).

Love never dies a natural death. It dies because we don't know how to replenish its source. It dies of blindness and errors and betrayals. It dies of illness and wounds; it dies of weariness, of witherings, of tarnishings. Anais Nin

For many, the ideal relationship is built on the sharing of love, trust, intimacy, respect, honesty and passion (Previti & Amato, 2004; Sternberg, 1988). A willingness to communicate with one's partner, and the ability to do so skilfully are vital attributes of a successful relationship, as is truly listening to one's partner (S. B. Levine, 2007). Communication is essential if breakdowns in relationships are to be lessened (T. Levine, Aune, & Park, 2006). A major reason for the breakdown of a relationship is infidelity with 23-25% of men and 12-15% of women engaging in a sexual relationship outside the marriage (Previti & Amato, 2004), and a significantly higher rate of infidelity is reported with cohabiting and dating couples (Conley, 2012). According to Previti and Amato (2004), sexual fidelity is intertwined with trust, intimacy and respect, and creates the ideal environment for the raising of children.

Meston and Buss (2007) surveyed 1,993 university students and volunteers from a Texas community (706 males; 1287 women) to explore the many different reasons for having sex. These reasons range from giving and receiving pleasure, stress reduction, wanting intimacy, pressured to have sex, and receiving gifts or payment. Lawrance and Byers (1998) developed a model measuring sexual satisfaction. They stated that people experience

rewards and costs from their sexual activities and may even experience a certain activity as both rewarding and costly, such as cybersex or an affair.

The opportunity for sexual interaction is an important factor in determining a person's wellbeing and general contentment within relationships and, when impaired, can cause serious implications for individuals (Baldwin, Thomas, & Birtwistle, 1997; Willoughby & Vitas, 2011). Richters and Rissel (2005), drawing on data from an telephone survey of 19,307 Australian respondents between the ages of 16 and 59 years, found that 80 per cent of the 9,134 Australian women agreed with the statement that "an active sex life is important for your sense of wellbeing" (p. 34). This statement showed the importance that Australian women place on this aspect of their lives. Richters and Rissel (2005) went on to say that the most important sexual issue facing most Australians was the lack of interest in sexual activity; this was expressed by 25 per cent of men and 55 per cent of the women. Whilst most men want more sex than their female partners, sometimes it is the woman who is unhappy with a limited amount of sexual activity.

Arndt (2009) asked 98 Australian couples to keep sex diaries about the negotiations that took place in order to have sex. She found that a disparity in sex drive and lack of desire to participate in sex, can drive couples apart (Arndt, 2009). Treatment for desire discrepancy can be challenging (Butcher, 1999; B. McCarthy & McDonald, 2009). Many couples find talking about sex embarrassing, and negotiating sexual activities within a relationship can be difficult (Casad et al., 2011). A couple needs to be open to communicating about their desires, willing to learn new skills and experiment together if they are to revitalise their sexual behaviour (E. McCarthy & McCarthy, 2003; Schnarch, 2009).

With the growth of the internet, participating in cybersex with a relationship partner is increasingly common (Albright, 2008; Manning, 2006). Some couples cite viewing pornography as sexually exciting and beneficial for them (Groves, Gillespie, Royce, & Lever, 2011; Shaughnessy, et al., 2011). Other researchers confirm there is a negative relationship between online sexual

compulsivity, sensation seeking, and distress within relationships (Albright, 2008; Cooper, Putnam, Planchon, & Boies, 1999).

In a national phone survey of more than 19,000 Australia respondents, “most people in heterosexual relationships found sex very or extremely pleasurable (90.3% men and 79.1% women) with high levels of emotional satisfaction also reported (87.5% men and 79.1% women)” (Australian Research Centre in Sex Health and Society, 2003, p. 2). Experiencing high levels of desire, communicating openly about sexual pleasure, and a willingness to engage in sexual activity impacts positively on relationships with closeness being a rewarding outcome (Australian Research Centre in Sex Health and Society, 2003; Gottman & Silver, 2012; McCabe & Goldhammer, 2012).

SEXUAL DIVERSITY

Significant parts of individual identity are bound up in our sexual identity and our gender identity. Our sexual identity is our sense of ourselves in regards to our sexuality, sexual behaviours, feelings, fantasies, beliefs and values about sexuality. Our gender identity is our gender, gender role, sense of femininity or masculinity, and our beliefs and values about what it means to be a woman or man. Being same-sex attracted or gender diverse can mean that one’s sexual and gender identities are especially significant (Freedom Centre, 2012).

When a person suffers from marginalisation and stigmatisation, mental health is affected. Young gay, bisexual, lesbian, transgender and intersex (GLBTI) people are more likely to use drugs problematically and/or have a sexually transmitted infection (Grulich, et al., 2003). In addition they are more likely to experience discrimination and “higher levels of psychosocial stress” than other young people who identify as heterosexual (Pitts, Smith, Mitchell, & Patel, 2006, p. 14).

Almost 50 years ago, Mary McIntosh (1968) explored the notion that society categorised and stigmatised homosexuals. GLBTI communities are still

seeking affirmation and equality from society. According to Pitts, et al (2006) a society that affirms diversity will be a healthier place for all. The health and wellbeing of GLBTI people can be enhanced by tackling homophobia, legitimising their relationships and acknowledging the positive contributions of this diverse community.

CHILDHOOD SEXUAL ABUSE

The sexual abuse of children is an infringement on the rights of a child (Taylor, 2010; UNICEF, 2012). According to Fergusson and Mullen (1999, p. 1) it is the cause of distress and mental illness and is “a gross example of patriarchal domination and exploitation”. Child sexual abuse (CSA) is defined as any unwanted sexual contact or non-contact (such as being forced to view pornography) that is inflicted on a child (Sexual Assault Resource Centre, 2005). The problem of CSA is widespread. According to the World Health Organisation (2010) more than twenty percent of women and 5-10% of men report being sexually abused as children (2010).

CSA impacts not only on the child but also the adult the child becomes. For many who have experienced CSA, the feelings of rejection, isolation, poor body image, self-destructive behaviour, depression, sexual inadequacy and shame follow them into adulthood (Lorenz & Meston, 2012). Sexual expression becomes problematic. Finkelhore (2009) says that the reasons for this are many: the trauma of the assault, the betrayal of a significant person (usually a male figure closest to the child, eg. a father), the stigmatisation and negative body image, and the feelings of powerlessness that stay with a victim of CSA.

Childhood sexual abuse affects individuals differently, with negative consequences that are likely to continue into adulthood. Children have the right to be free from sexual violence and to develop to their full potential (UNICEF, 2012).

FEMALE SEX WORKERS

Many young women, including university students, are attracted to the sex industry for the financial incentives, and with university fees rising, the number of students entering the industry is growing (Long, Mollen, & Smith, 2012; Telegraph Media Group, Feb 12, 2012). In the United Kingdom, it has been estimated that 3-4% of university students are working in the industry (Roberts, Sanders, Myers, & Smith, 2010). According to Roberts, et al (2010), from a student perspective, sex work offers flexible hours, on the job training and a more time for study, however, the most vulnerable – those with drug use issues and those who have been sexually abused, are open to exploitation. With a ‘mainstreaming’ of the consumption of sexual materials and services such as pole dancing, exotic dancing, burlesque, escort work and lap dancing, the above factors and a shift in “the moral climate of western societies” has changed students’ perceptions about the acceptability of sex work as a work option for them (Roberts, et al., 2010, p. 146). Scott, Hunter, Hunter and Ragusa (2006) assert that, regardless of the shift in moral climate, sex work in Australian cities and rural areas, is a highly stigmatised and a dangerous practice.

Whilst many sex workers believe they can leave the industry with ease, the reality is that they carry the stigma of their involvement long after they cease working in the sex industry (Dalla, 2000; Farley, 2004). The reasons for continuing in the industry are complex and include financial incentives, hopelessness, connection with other workers and problematic drug use (Abel, 2011; Hwang & Bedford, 2004). Jenkins (2006) examined the factors that would dissuade students from entering the sex industry, namely financial position, boyfriends, strength of family connection, and lack of information about what the industry entails. For those who do engage in sex work, dangers exist such as violence, discrimination, sexually transmitted infections, isolation and legal issues (Alexander, 1998; Meulen, 2012). With a growing number of young people being attracted to sex work, the dangers of involvement in the sex industry must continue to be discussed. The Telegraph (2012) reported a massage parlour owner as saying, “In my day,

people went to university in order to avoid this kind of life, but now they lead this kind of life in order to go to university".

RESEARCHING SEXUALITY

To extend our understanding of the complexities of sexuality, it is clear more research is needed. According to Connell and Dowsett (1992, p. 2) "the scientific gaze *could not* be neutral because sexuality is inherently a domain of power relationships". Sexuality is a significant issue and remains controversial. It is because of this that extended research to understand sexuality and its influence on individuals is vital.

Sex is not only a behaviour to be examined, rather it is a social practice that gives our lives meaning.

We human beings are wondrous when it comes to transforming the expected to the unexpected, the familiar to the surprising, the pure to the perverse. Whether it's ice cream or leather, flavoured condoms or lube, live webcam sex or pegging with strap-ons, inserting cum cubes or courgettes, plugging in e-stimulators or teledildonics, or simply adding more people, our inventiveness and cyborgian capacities can eroticise objects, coopt social processes and multiply the players to confound any narrow technical logic of biomedical prevention strategies ... and we need to remember that these so-called confounders actively constitute the substantive logic of sex as practice. They can never actually be controlled for. (Dowsett, 2012, p. 1)

Sex is pleasurable and those working and researching in the field of sexology need to be reminded of this (Dowsett, 2012). Moon (2008, p. 183) takes a step further, urging sociologists to "bring analyses of emotions and feelings into our considerations of how people develop a sense of self through social interactions".

Allen (1992, pp. 9-31) outlines the diversity of issues (and philosophies/methodologies) attracting sexuality researchers including: "norms and alternatives in sexual practice, behaviour and subculture groupings"; "cultural meanings accorded to sexuality"; and "sexual political" based research such as sexuality education, abortion, divorce and sex work.

Chapter Four explores the methodology used for this research.

CONCLUSION

This chapter presented a review of the key literature regarding the nature of sexuality. The review was informed by key themes that emerged from the participants in this study.

As the semester progressed, students gained glimpses of the historical shifts, cultural influences and changing attitudes towards sexuality. With growing awareness, new insights on the influences that may have impacted past generations, including their parents and grandparents, were evident. Students also explore how their gender had been nurtured, and how this affects them on a daily basis. Many students communicated about the importance of the internet in their lives, the impact of ‘the celebrity culture’ on body image, and their cybersex practices. Similar to the research, the students confirmed that the effects of cybersex can be both positive and negative.

The topic that generated the most comment from students was ‘love and enhancing relationships’ with many students communicating about the highs and lows of past and present relationships. A third of the participants wrote of their interactions and perception of religion and sexuality and, for most, this experience was negative. Some sexology students communicated about the sexual abuse they had endured and the traumatic impact of this abuse. A small number of students told of the discrimination and shame they felt as sex workers and the motivations for leaving and continuing in the sex industry.

This qualitative study seeks to expand on these issues as the reader is exposed to the participants’ stories and comments in Chapters 5-8.

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW – SEXUALITY EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter discussed the complex nature of sexuality and the issues this raises for individuals, family and society. A significant part of the problem is the lack of knowledge of, and the discomfort associated with talking about sexuality. In the western world, there have been dramatic shifts and transformations in the way sexuality is perceived, especially since the 1960's (Richardson, 2000). However, discussing sexual health remains difficult because of the taboos that still surround the subject. Educating about sexuality is vital if these problems are to be illuminated and addressed.

So how do people, especially young people, learn about sexuality? This chapter outlines key literature regarding sexuality education in schools and tertiary settings. This section also focuses on the current approaches to sexuality education with adult learners and how effectively these approaches address the issues raised in the previous chapter.

Two strategies, integral to the Curtin University Sexology Programme, are discussed in detail: the use of sexually explicit materials as a tool for desensitisation; and the use of reflective writing. The literature, along with the information that I gained from the participants, is crucial to the formulation of a process map about the impact of adult sexuality education (the map is described in Chapter 8).

SEXUALITY EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS

Teaching sexuality topics at all levels of schooling remains contentious and is accompanied by inhibition and shame resulting in restrictive sexuality education programmes in schools (Dyson, et al., 2003; Giami, et al., 2006; Helmich, 2009; Kreinin, 2003; Pitsis, 2003). Indeed it has been argued that many sexuality education programmes are flawed: they are frequently moralistic, negative and hetero-normative (focused on heterosexual

relationships as the norm). Many programmes ignore the realities of the sexual lives of young people and pay little attention to relationships and emotions (Abel & Fitzgerald, 2006; L. Allen, 2004; Epstein, 2003; O'Higgins & Gabhainn, 2010).

Resistance to sexuality education in schools stems from society's anxieties about adolescent sexuality and discussing sexuality in general (Bay-Cheng, 2003; Epstein, O'Flynn, & Telford, 2003; O'Higgins & Gabhainn, 2010) and emanates from numerous sources. In the United States, evangelical activists have strongly influenced political decision-making, which has resulted in funding for abstinence-based programmes to be implemented in thirty-seven of the States in preference to comprehensive sexuality education programmes (Goldman, 2008; Kreinin, 2003; K. B. Smith, 2003).

Australian schools have had access to a comprehensive sexuality education curriculum since the 1980's. Comprehensive sexuality education:

seeks to equip young people with the knowledge and skills they need to determine and enjoy their sexuality in all spheres of life ...Sexuality education must address the following **seven essential components/elements**: gender, sexual and reproductive health and rights and HIV/AIDS (including information about services and clinics), sexual citizenship, pleasure, violence, diversity and relationships. (International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), 2009, p. 3)

This approach to comprehensive sexuality education was initiated both nationally and State by State, and is now taught in all States and territories of Australia (Australian National Council for AIDS Hepatitis C and Related Diseases, 1999; Communicable Diseases Branch, 2002; Gibson, 2007; Goldman, 2010). Having access to quality materials, however, does not always equate to teachers and school administrators feeling comfortable implementing sexuality education in their classrooms (Bruess & Greenberg, 2008; Dyson, et al., 2003; Eisenberg, Madsen, Oliphant, & Resnick, 2011; Epstein, 2003; Epstein, et al., 2003; Goldman, 2010; Milton, 2003; Ollis, 2010).

Santelli, et al (2006) are emphatic about the importance of comprehensive sexuality education as a human right and point out that the “promotion of abstinence as a sole option for adolescents and young adults raises serious human rights concerns, because it involves withholding health- and life-saving information from teenagers” (p. 83). Australian schools have access to curriculum that offers a comprehensive approach to sexuality education, however, pressure continues to come from ‘abstinence only’ advocates (see the next section - The influence of religious groups on sexuality education programmes).

Sexuality education at all levels continues to be problematic and Dyson, et al (2003) point to the inadequacies of current practice to support young people in their quest to be better informed about sexuality. After an Australian-wide consultation with sexuality education experts and an extensive literature search they concluded that quality, comprehensive sexuality education in schools should:

- be positive about sexuality;
- move beyond the mere provision of information;
- address the social and cultural world in which young people make decisions;
- address the issue of gender and power;
- refrain from teaching abstinence alone;
- promote an understanding that sexuality and sexual behaviours are diverse;
- address the issue of risk; encourage the development of life skills; incorporate peer education and peer support;
- incorporate parent involvement where applicable; and
- be delivered by competent facilitators capable of creating a stimulating, active and supportive learning environment.

Indications from the little research that does exist about sexuality education at tertiary levels, plus the researcher’s extensive experience, suggest that many of the issues are similar at tertiary level.

The influence of religious groups on sexuality education programmes

Weber (1976) recognised the role of religion in social change and moral guidance. Inherent in this ‘moral guidance’ is the power of religion to control the followers by moralising about sex and shaming people about their sexual practices. The USA comes to mind when considering the influence of fundamental religious groups on sexuality (Blake & Frances, 2001; Kaplan, 2004; Santelli, et al., 2006; K. B. Smith, 2003). At the same time as the introduction of sexuality education in schools was being discussed in the USA in the 1960’s, groups opposing sexuality education, came to the fore (Bruess & Greenberg, 2004). Similar responses were occurring in Australia. Gibson (2007) wrote about the objections of the Christian Right⁹ to a new sexuality programme (*SHARE: respect, health, life*) that was introduced to schools in South Australia. Gibson recognised that this opposition came from a small but vocal Christian Right¹ group which, with “the engagement of political parties in the debate, created the opportunity for the conservative claims to have greater legitimacy and influence” (p. 241).

In Western Australia (WA), the impact of religion on sexuality education has played out somewhat differently from other Australian states. Historically, a national body, Catholic Education Office (CEO) along with other systems and sectors (Education Departments and Independent School Associations), have supported the use of a sexuality education curriculum in their respective schools (Australian National Council for AIDS Hepatitis C and Related Diseases, 1999). However, individual states of Australia have autonomy over the inclusion or exclusion of such materials. For example, in WA, the WA Catholic Education Office was notably absent from the Steering Committee of the WA sexuality education curriculum materials, *Growing and Developing Healthy Relationships (GDHR)* (Communicable Diseases Branch, 2002) and did not allow the materials to be distributed to WA Catholic schools. Some ten years later, the Western Australian Catholic Education Office still does not support the use of these comprehensive sexuality curriculum materials in

⁹Christian Right’ is defined as lobby groups “who form coalitions around a traditional Christian vision and a defence of the traditional nuclear family formation” (Buss & Herman, 2003 in Gibson, 2007, p. 248).

WA Catholic schools. This means that approximately 20% of WA school students who attend Catholic schools do not receive these evidence-based sexuality education materials (GDHR) (Lisa Bastian, Manager, Sexual Health and Blood-borne Virus Programme, WA Department of Health, personal communication, March 2011).

Approximately two thirds of the students that attended the Sexology 350 classes undertook their primary and secondary schooling in WA. Therefore, the uptake or otherwise, of the WA curriculum GDHR is relevant to this study. In Chapter 5, many participants related about their experiences of sexuality education when they attended primary or secondary school.

WHAT DO YOUNG PEOPLE SAY ABOUT SEXUALITY EDUCATION?

Discussing sexual health remains difficult and too often the sexuality education of young people is restricted to biological and ‘negative issues’: contraception, sexuality transmitted infections (STIs), pregnancy, terminations and abstinence.

Numerous researchers have asked young people about their preferred content (L. Allen, 1995; Coleman & Testa, 2007; Forrest, Strange, Oakley, & The RIPPLE Study Team, 2004; Giami, et al., 2006; O'Higgins & Gabhainn, 2010). Coleman and Testa (2007) surveyed more than 3000 ethnically diverse 15-18 year-olds in London. When asked, young people expressed their main preferences: to know more about sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and “sexual behaviour (especially how to make sex more satisfying)” Furthermore, “females were also intent on finding out more about the emotions and relationships surrounding sex and contraception” (p. 304). The young people were the least interested in the biological aspects of sex. Whilst it is important to take into account young people’s views on the content of health education, Wight (1999) warns that they may not be fully conversant with the full array of topics and may have difficulty stating their needs in this area. In other words, students don’t know what they don’t know. However, researchers (L. Allen, 2008; Blake, 2005; Coleman, 2008;

O'Higgins & Gabhainn, 2010; Poobalan et al., 2009) are clear that young people: can articulate their ideas about their preferences, have an understanding of the complex issues that need to be included and, therefore, can make a positive contribution to the formulation of relevant content for sexuality education programmes.

Dyson, et al., (2003) emphasised the need to consult young people to ensure that the sexuality education materials reflected their cultural and social lives. Prior to the development of a national resource for secondary school students, (Australian National Council for AIDS Hepatitis C and Related Diseases, 1999) more than 2,300 Australian secondary school students in Year 10 (15-year-olds) and Year 12 (17-year-olds) were questioned about their sexual health, sexual practices and sexual health knowledge and attitudes. Since 1992, every five years this body of knowledge has been refined and expanded. Research from ARCSHS continues to provide information about young people's sexual health needs, and the evaluation of sexuality education in schools (Australian Research Centre in Sex Health and Society, 2011; A. Smith, et al., 2009).

Disappointingly, many of the students who receive sexuality education in Australian schools state that the material that was covered was irrelevant, and that the calibre of the teaching was poor. For example, Hillier and Mitchell (2008) questioned a group of same-sex-attracted young people about the value of the sexuality education they had received. Very few of their sample group reported any positive mention of same-sex relationships. The limited health education they did receive presented heterosexual partnerships as the norm.

In Chapter 2, I focused on the problematic nature of sexuality and explored the impact of shame and lack of will to speak openly about issues related to sexuality. This notion is supported by Glasier and Gulmezoglu (2006) who wrote emphatically that sexual and reproductive health have been ignored by governments because of its political sensitivity. They call for courage to tackle the issues and adequate resources to provide diverse solutions. "It is

much less contentious to promote abstinence and faithfulness than sex [sic] education and services for adolescents, condoms for gay men, and access to safe legal abortion – but these are what is needed” (p.1551). Comprehensive sexuality education is a significant aspect of the ‘diverse solutions’. Sexuality is not merely driven by biological factors, as the previous chapter revealed it is also psychologically, socially and culturally organised. Therefore, for sexuality education to be relevant and effective for people of all ages, all areas need to be addressed (Aggleton, 2004; Bruess & Greenberg, 2004; Dyson, et al., 2003; Finger, 2000; Rogow & Haberland, 2005). Giami, Ohlrichs, Quilliam and Wellings (2006) emphasise the need for ‘sex-positive’ sexuality education, an approach that “avoids blaming or shaming” about sexual feelings and experiences and avoids “delivering messages that sex is not enjoyable” (p. 486). Allen (2012) agrees that it is essential to include desire and pleasure in sexuality education programmes to ensure that students understand that there is more to sexuality than infections and pregnancy. Young people, especially young women, need to understand that they have a right to feel sexual pleasure (L. Allen, 2012; deFur, 2012a, 2012b; Nodulman, 2012). Dailey (1997) urges sexuality educators to emphasise sexual pleasure and not fall into the trap of becoming “agents of social control” (p. 93).

This approach is also supported in popular media. According to Toms (2010):

One solution is to incorporate a sexual intimacy and ethics element to both formal and informal sex [sic] education as opposed to focusing only on the mechanical, Tupperware elements. And if we’re really concerned about girls and sex in particular, we must refrain from using the language of gifts and end our ridiculous fixation with hymen-centric virginity. This perpetuates the antiquated idea that carnality is something women give or do for men and privileges penetrative intercourse over other forms of sensuality. (p. 8)

In 2009, the British National Health Service produced a pamphlet for young people titled ‘Pleasure’. The ‘controversial’ pamphlet received publicity around the world. ABC News Online (Collerton, 2009) received positive responses from a key Australian sexuality researcher. In contrast, another journalist (Muehlenberg, 2009) was challenged by much of the content

contained in the pamphlet including the notion that “sexual relations can be healthy and pleasurable for young people”. Muehlenberg questioned the relevance of the pamphlet and the potential for the information to encourage promiscuity amongst teenagers. This reaction, although not based on evidence, is common (Communicable Diseases Branch, 2002; Finger, 2000; Westwood, 2006). In fact the opposite has been found. Developed countries, such as Sweden, Norway, France, the Netherlands, and Australia have comprehensive sexuality education programmes. The USA continues to have restrictive abstinence-based programmes in many of the States (although the number of States with abstinence-based programmes has recently decreased) and the corresponding rates of teenage pregnancy, births, terminations and STIs were significantly higher than in other developed countries (Darroch, Singh, & Frost, 2002; Milton, 2000; Santelli, et al., 2006).

“The fidelity of empirical research has been of little importance to organisations endorsing abstinence-only programmes” (Walters & Hayes, 2007, p. 33). Kirby (1997) is emphatic that with limited resources, programmes to be implemented must be based on sound guiding principles, be independently evaluated and shown to be effective. Abstinence-only programmes have not been found to be effective especially in reducing teenage pregnancy or STI transmission (Kim & Pang, 2006; Kirby, 2002b; Lamb, Graling, & Lustig, 2011; SIECUS, 2007; K. B. Smith, 2003).

Young people gain information about sexuality from numerous sources such as parents, media (including the internet), schools, doctors and peers. The most significant sources of information for Australian young people are parents, school health education, media and peers (L. Allen, 2009; A. Smith, et al., 2009). According to Allen (2009, p.33) young people “valued particular educator ‘qualities’ more than ‘who’ the educator was”, qualities such as being open-minded, affirming, and inclusive of diversity.

Powell (2008, p. 300) observed that young people came across information in a manner that was “haphazard and sporadic” and they accessed sexual health information in diverse ways depending on their gender, age, ethnicity

and family circumstances –“there is no ‘one size fits all’ solution. They trusted the information they received from family, but they were “more likely to be receiving opinions rather than balanced information and advice on sex and relationships”. Powell believes this process denies young people access to “the advisory and interactive qualities crucial to effective decision-making” (p. 300).

PARENTS AND TALKING ABOUT SEXUALITY

Researchers imply that the majority of parents compound the problematic nature of sexuality. Although parents are potentially the most significant sexuality educators of their children (Early Childhood Sexuality Education Taskforce, 1998), many parents feel unprepared for this task (Feldman & Rosenthal, 2000; Jordan & Chase, 2000; Kirby, 1999; Rosenthal & Feldman, 1999; Walker & Milton, 2006; Walters & Hayes, 2007; World Association for Sexual Health, 2007; Wylie, Hallam-Jones, & Daines, 2003; Zeichner, 1999; Zheng et al., 2011).

“Raising sexually healthy children isn’t about giving a single ‘Big Talk’ when they become teenagers. Your job as a sexual educator actually begins when your children are very young” (Haffner & Needlman, 2012, p. 1). Sound advice, yet, many parents feel that they lack the knowledge and skills to talk openly with their children about sexuality. Their embarrassment to engage in these vital conversations about sexuality, add to the negative messages many children carry from childhood. Most parents admit that they received little or inadequate sexuality education from their parents and felt daunted by this aspect of parenting (Berne et al., 2000; Walsh, 2012). Although many parents remain silent about sexuality, they want their children to be safe and to experience positive relationships (Walker, 2004). Regardless of whether parents talk with their children or not, children gain powerful and long lasting messages about sexuality from their primary care-givers (Walker, 2004). Informing parents about the positive role they can take as the key sexuality educators of their children, is essential (Australian National Council for AIDS

Hepatitis C and Related Diseases, 2001; Kirkman, Rosenthal, & Feldman, 2005; Rasdien, 2010; Walsh, 2012).

TEACHERS OF SEXUALITY EDUCATION

Within the school system, teachers are usually the people responsible for delivering sexuality education yet these individuals may have been conscripted into teaching into an area where they have little or no training (Gourlay, 1996). Fifteen years on from Gourlay's comments, teachers throughout Australia are equipped with a choice of comprehensive curriculum materials and various professional development options. However, many teachers are reluctant to attend professional classes or teach the materials in their entirety (Dyson, et al., 2003; Milton, 2000, 2003; Ollis, 2010; Walker & Milton, 2006). Unfortunately, some teachers believe that teaching about sexuality encourages promiscuous behaviour and the early onset of sexual activities (Dailey, 1997; Krueger, 1991) while others reported feeling unsupported by school administrators. It is essential, therefore, that teachers attend professional development classes aimed at providing the skills and knowledge necessary for teaching sexuality.

Pressure is also mounting for improved training in sexuality education for pre-service teachers. Few institutions offer comprehensive courses and more than fifty percent of universities offered no training in sexuality education for the trainee teachers (Carman, Mitchell, Schlichthorst, & Smith, 2011). Professional development and pre-service training needs to include more than teaching strategies and sexual health information. According to Ollis (2010) professional learning for teachers must also incorporate the expansion of the teachers' own insights of their sexuality and opportunities for clarification of attitudes and values. For teachers to be effective sexuality educators they must also be aware of sexual health agencies and support networks for young people. Finally, teachers need to create and maintain a safe environment that is stimulating, supportive and inclusive (L. Allen, 2009; Casale & Hanass-Hancock, 2011; Harrison & Dempsey, 1998; Patricia Barthalow Koch, 2007; Walters & Hayes, 2007).

SEXUALITY EDUCATION AND TERTIARY EDUCATION

So far, attention has been given to the status of sexuality education, and young people's preferences for both the kind of content and the types of providers of this education. This study focused on university students attending the introductory sexology course at Curtin University. The majority of the students entering the sexology unit have come via the school system (be it in Australia or overseas) and thus have been exposed to a diverse array of school based sexuality programmes. As the cited literature shows, regardless of the student's country of origin, sexuality education programmes appeared far from ideal and have frequently had a negative, biological focus. It is not surprising, therefore, that university students are often sceptical as they enter a sexuality course that prescribes a 'sex-positive' approach (Kantor, 1992). Parents have also played a part in educating their children about sex and sexuality. Once again, the literature showed that the majority of parents feel inadequate and ill-equipped when it comes to talking openly about sexuality with their children (Dyson & Smith, 2011).

Few universities offer comprehensive courses in sexuality (Professor Rosemary Coates, Department of Sexology and President, World Association for Sexual Health, personal communication, March 2011), so the question remains - where can tertiary students can find appropriate, relevant and comprehensive sexuality education?

Although there is considerable literature about the problem of intoxicated university students and the impact on sexual behaviour (Eisenberg & Wechsler, 2003; Mohler-Kuo, Dowdall, Koss, & Wechsler, 2004; Simons, Lantz, Klichine, & Ascolese, 2005), there is a shortage of literature focusing on sexuality education and university students. One study of almost a thousand college (university) students was carried out in Louisiana, USA by Synovitz, Hebbert, Kelley and Carlson (2002). They reported that the university students "do not have command of basic sexuality knowledge" and called for increased sexuality education at all levels of schooling (p. 6).

Grello, Welsh and Harper (2006) investigated the experiences of 404 college students in a southern university in the USA. They found casual sex coupled with alcohol use was a “common occurrence” and there were “divergent expectations” of the sexual encounters, which were often disappointing especially for the female students (p. 266). Welsh and Harper called for education that tackles both the physical and emotional risks associated with casual sex; education that is skills-based with an emphasis on communication skills. Goldfarb (2005) recognised the important role of university based sexuality education programmes because the scope of the courses can be far greater than school-based programmes. Goldfarb said it was essential that courses covered both the physical and biological aspects of sexual health and, more importantly, the psychosocial aspects “associated with positive, healthy sexuality were given greater emphasis” (p. 85). Dailey (1997) also made a strong case for sexuality education at tertiary level to be more than sexual health knowledge alone. For it to be meaningful for adult students, it must be relevant to their lives, have a behavioural focus and be ‘sex-positive’. Dailey acknowledges that it can be difficult to maintain a positive context for learning, especially when talking about negative topics such as STIs. He urges educator whilst talking about safe sex, to also discuss how to make safe sex more pleasurable, for example, with the use of flavoured condoms saying that “condom use during oral sex can be a bridge for those persons who are initially uncomfortable with oral/genital sexual contact” (p. 95). Masvawure (2008) talked with female university students in Zimbabwe and recognised a need for programmes to positively reflect their desire for pleasurable sex.

Wylie, et al (2003) and Dixon-Woods (2002) reported on sexuality education programmes that were broader than personal exploration of sexuality for adult students. They reviewed programmes aimed at equipping medical students to deal with issues of sexuality more sensitively in their workplaces. They reported that the programmes were effective in broadening attitudes and values; and assisting medical students to feel more comfortable to discuss sexual health with patients. Whilst the definition of sexuality encompasses a broad view of sexuality, a sociological perspective of

sexuality was offered in a number of university courses (Lenskyj, 1990; McKinney, 1987). Two units on the historical perspective of sexuality were developed to challenge university students to “consider the great variety of sexual practices and meanings prior to the nineteenth century and, in particular, to rethink notions about evolutionary liberation” (Tinsman, 2002). The Sexology Programme at Curtin University takes an interdisciplinary outlook; acts on the feedback from students when designing the curriculum; and takes a ‘sex-positive’ approach. The following section provides an overview of two vital strategies integral to the Programme.

KEY STRATEGIES USED IN THE SEXOLOGY PROGRAMME

Two key strategies are used in the Sexology Programme: reflective writing and desensitisation/re-sensitisation using sexually explicit materials. Undergraduate students studying Sexology 350 are taken beyond the theoretical course work and invited to think on a deeper and more personal level. Through the process of critical reflection, the goal is to facilitate the development of the future professional who is able to provide effective, sensitive and holistic care to their clients.

Critical reflection, coupled with the use of specifically designed sexually explicit materials, encourages students to examine their values and attitudes towards behaviours to which they may not have been exposed. Details of the sexually explicit film show and the theoretical underpinnings of these strategies are discussed in this section. Later chapters will explore the students’ reactions to sexually explicit materials and will provide examples and insights gained from the reflective writing process.

SEXOLOGY STUDENTS AND REFLECTIVE WRITING

The ability to consciously reflect is a key learning tool for adults in all areas of study and professional development (Grellier, Fisher, & McKay, 2008). Reflective writing takes this a step further by asking students to record their reflections on paper. Through the use of reflective writing, students are able

to explore their own concepts and personal beliefs about human sexuality and thus develop both personally and professionally. In the area of human sexuality, this ability is important if students are to be transformed from passive learners into active participants in the theoretical understanding and personal appreciation of sexology. Carl Jung's colleague, von Franz (1995) talks of the power of reflection for making "progress in consciousness... We know every time a human being makes real progress in consciousness, the world for him [sic] has changed; relationships change and the outlook on the outer world and his [sic] own situation changes" (p. 232).

Critical thinking and conscious reflection are resources many of us tend not to use in our day-to-day lives unless we experience a crisis or life-changing event (Mezirow, 1990). Conscious reflection takes effort and requires students to take time to process the information. Students do not have the time or the capacity to consciously reflect on all information encountered in their daily lives. Encouraging reflection, as part of the sexology unit, provides the opportunity for adult learners to practise this valuable skill. Mezirow (1990) calls this practice 'transformational learning'. Mezirow describes this as "the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our presuppositions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world; reformulating these assumptions to permit a more inclusive, discriminating, permeable, and integrative perspective; and of making decisions or otherwise acting on these new understandings" (p. 14). Given opportunities for critical reflection, adults are able to "...challenge specific beliefs, attitudes and value judgments" (Mezirow, 1979, p. 163), which results in a transformation of these perspectives and deeper learning outcomes. When information is processed and applied to one's concept of the world, one is much more likely to retain that information for life (Mezirow, 1981).

Reflective writing in academic settings can be used to strengthen the act of conscious reflection and to give students a deeper insight into their area of study (Clare, 2007). According to Stewart and Richardson (2000), formal academic assessments, such as journals, portfolios and reflective papers,

provide valuable learning experiences for students. Despite the challenges, such as the lack of clear guidelines for reflective assessments and the inability to provide uniform grading of reflective pieces, reflective writing in academic areas has benefits in all learning areas. The ability to be consciously reflective is a vital skill professionals need in an ever changing employment environment. Professionals need to be able to continually adapt and grow with these changes, and reflection is a key to developing professionals who are ready for these challenges (Grellier, et al., 2008).

Students enrolled in the Sexology Programme at Curtin University are required to write four reflection papers over the semester (specific details follow). The aim of this process is to assist participants to clarify the academic content and the impact of the process, and to apply the content to their lives. Excerpts from students' reflection papers are explored in the following chapters.

Reflective writing and tertiary education

Educators of adults have long speculated over the requirements that make for successful learning in tertiary education, with many placing emphasis on experiential learning (Kathpalia & Heah, 2008). Experiential learning "...occurs when changes in judgments, feelings, knowledge or skills result for a particular person from living through an event or events" (Chickering, 1976, p. 63). In tertiary education, students need to take control of and be engaged in their own learning journey (Kathpalia & Heah, 2008). Through conscious reflection, students are able to draw upon personal experiences and transform their perspectives for a deeper learning outcome (Mezirow, 1979).

Jack Mezirow's (1979) transformative learning theory highlights the need for adult learners to be consciously reflective in order to promote lifelong learning and perspective transformation. The act of consciously reflecting upon what one learns, brings changes within the adult learner that has a deeper and more lasting effect (Mezirow, 1990). Mezirow writes that when emotions are brought into the context of what is being learned, it will ultimately change the learner and result in the information becoming a part of

the student through personal transformation. Transformative learning is a key element in the reasoning behind reflective writing practices used in the Sexology Programme. This study explores the effects of asking students to write about their thoughts, feelings and experiences in the context of what they are learning and whether it helps students to connect emotion to content to bring about a transformation.

Reflective learning

Boyd and Fales (1983) state that the reflective learning process requires the ability to “...internally examine and explore an issue...which creates and clarifies meaning in terms of self, and which results in a changed conceptual perspective” (p. 100). As mentioned earlier, conscious reflection is the bridging of emotion and learning, which has the advantage of creating a deeper learning experience for adults. Conscious reflection usually occurs when we experience a challenging life event, where emotional and rational thought bring us closer to understanding and learning from those experiences (Mezirow, 1998). When conscious reflection is used in an educational setting, students are encouraged to look deeper than the theoretical content to find personal meaning. This produces a lifelong and deeper learning experience (Grellier, et al., 2008). To assist students in the process of reflection, educators use reflective writing assessments which, coupled with appropriate feedback, guide students through the reflective learning experience (Stewart & Richardson, 2000).

The usefulness of reflective writing in tertiary settings

A literature search about reflective writing reveals many different styles and purposes for reflection in tertiary and workplace environments. Educators, such as the lecturers in sexology, have taken reflective writing into the classroom and incorporated it into a written assessment. Such assessment tasks encourage students to be self-directive and to take control of their learning (Stewart & Richardson, 2000) and personal growth (Boyd & Fales, 1983). Reflective writing has been used in many tertiary settings including health sciences (Boud & Walker, 1998) and business management (Litvin &

Bettors-Reed, 2005). One fundamental understanding that can be gained from the literature is that reflection, in any form, can enhance and promote a deeper understanding and lifelong learning (Clare, 2007).

Forms of reflective writing

Reflective writing in tertiary settings comes in many forms. Writing about personal and academic experiences in **learning journals** is one (Coghlan, 1993). Reflective writing may also be used in work placements, where students compile work experience **diaries** which integrate workplace learning, academic learning and personal experience into reflective form (Cox, 2005). **Portfolios** encourage students to keep their work in an organised fashion. **Reflective papers** give students the opportunity to reflect on the learning process, the effectiveness of the classroom strategies, and their own particular style of learning (Kathpalia & Heah, 2008). Students are able to evaluate their thoughts, feelings and reactions to the learning process and they “become more mindful learners and thereby become more aware of what they are learning, how they are learning, and the value of their learning” (Fink, 2004, p. 97). Through the use of conscious reflection, the adult learner becomes a more successful and resourceful student. The process of recording their learning journeys will encourage and enhance skills for success both professionally and personally (Grellier, et al., 2008).

Challenges of reflective writing in academic settings

Learning to reflect

There are concerns about the use of reflective assessments in tertiary settings. These doubts include the students’ ability to reflect, and the skills of the educator to teach the technique (Stewart & Richardson, 2000). Conscious reflection is not necessarily an automatic process for many students and requires practice over time (Kathpalia & Heah, 2008).

Critical reflection is not a traditional learning strategy. It relies on being open to conscious or unconscious thoughts, feelings and beliefs through emotional analysis rather than simply relying on intellect to understand and learn (Fook & Askeland, 2007).

In order to develop conscious reflection, educators need to consistently provide opportunities for active engagement in “reflective dialogue and self-assessment” (Kathpalia & Heah, 2008, p. 302) in a safe and non-judgmental way. Kathpalia and Heah state that with practise, conscious reflection can be developed in students through guided instruction including positive and direct feedback from the educator.

Grading reflective work

There are no set rules as to how to grade reflective work. Challenges arise in regard to the ability to equitably and consistently measure students’ reflections (Sumsion & Fleet, 1996). To be consciously reflective, students are required to sometimes become aware of and analyse their personal weaknesses and this may produce a ‘fake’ reflection, that is, students will play down any weaknesses they may have (Sumsion & Fleet, 1996). However, even if a student can produce ‘fake’ reflections, this would suggest that the student is, in fact, consciously reflecting and has recognised challenges within himself/herself but is not willing to share this information with others. Students may also feel inhibited about providing personal and sensitive information to educators for fear of judgment (Hobbs, 2007). Debate surrounds the practice of grading reflective pieces with some writers suggesting that papers should not be graded at all. Hobbs (2007, p. 410) points out that the students may write “strategic journal entries” with the aim of pleasing their lecturers to maximise their scores. Some of the teaching students that Hobbs interviewed shared the information that they tended to comment on their strengths rather than discussing and analysing their weaknesses. For additional information see *Grading of sexology students’ reflection papers* in Chapter 7.

A safe and secure environment is needed for students to reflect and share their feelings and thoughts. This demonstrates the need for skilled and respectful facilitation of the process, which requires that the educator: recognises the importance of reflective learning and writing; is familiar with the process and is able to self-reflect (K. Smith, Clegg, Lawrence, & Todd,

2007). Educators need to be clear about what is expected from students in their written pieces, and allocated grades should be minimal so that students do not feel that they are being ‘forced’ to reflect.

Sexology students and reflective writing

Unit requirements for sexology students

As part of the academic requirements, students in the Sexology 350 unit undertake reflective writing assignments. Four papers are written over the semester. The first three papers require students to reflect/react to individual lectures. See below for excerpts from the Sexology 350 Unit Outline:

Papers 1, 2, & 3 (2% each)

Three reflection papers are to be written on the weeks marked with an * in the Lecture Schedule and must be handed in during the next class. The typed paper should contain an honest expression of *your reactions/reflections* of the class, including your reactions/reflections on the week’s readings, class content, class process and discussions.

(Copied with permission from the Sexology 350 Unit Outline, Curtin University, 2011, p. 8)

In the fourth paper, students reflect on the entire unit and are guided by questions about their experiences that semester:

Paper 4 (4%)

In your fourth and final reflection paper, outline how this sexology unit has impacted on you by responding to the following questions:

How has your understanding about your sexuality changed?

How has this class impacted on you and your sexuality?

How did you respond to the content and strategies used in the class?

What has been your experience of the sexology unit?

How has your understanding of sexual health changed?

(Copied with permission from the Sexology 350 Unit Outline, Curtin University, 2011, p. 8).

Excerpts from the sexology students' reflection papers are explored in later chapters.

DESENSITISATION THROUGH THE USE OF SEXUALLY EXPLICIT MATERIALS

The Department of Sexology, as part of a comprehensive approach to adult sexuality education, makes use of a hundred minute sexually explicit film show arranged by Professor Rosemary Coates, the founder of the Department of Sexology at Curtin University. The film show is specifically designed for educational purposes and has been used since the inception of the Programme over three decades ago. It is shown in the initial sexology unit at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, (UG Sexology 350 – PG Sexology 650). The film show aims to: sensitise/desensitise students to their own and others' attitudes to sexuality, increase comfort in discussing sexuality, introduce students to images of sexual behaviour that they may not have been exposed to before; and lay the foundation for other material that students will encounter as they continue with their studies in sexology. It also provides a mutual experience upon which to base discussions, thus ameliorating concerns that self-disclosure is obligatory (Coates, Mayberry, & Merriman, 2009).

The sexually explicit film show consists of short films and slides with accompanying music or dialogue, which portray a wide array of explicit physical and relational sexual expression, including: opposite sex and same-sex practices, explicit artwork, masturbation, group sex, older people, and people with disabilities. None of the activities portrayed are against the law in Western Australia. In line with the process of systematic desensitisation developed by Wolpe in 1958, the materials are presented sequentially, beginning with 'soft' scenes and gradually building up to the most explicit and unconventional scenes, until saturation. An essential element is the 'flooding' that includes the simultaneous projection of at least two films (Coates, et al., 2009). After almost two hours, the viewer usually becomes bored with the presentation and the initial anxiety elicited by the material is reduced

(Coates, et al., 2009). This is a direct consequence of the flooding technique. All videos and slides portray ‘real’ volunteers, who are usually introduced prior to commencement to “frame the video as an educational tool versus ‘pornography’, to begin to establish empathy with the people in the film as peers, and to give permission to feel” (Tepper, 1997a, p. 186).

The sexually explicit materials (SEM), although controversial (Brewster & Wylie, 2008), can be a powerful tool for provoking reactions from students that sensitise them to their own values and attitudes, and those of their classroom peers. Anecdotal feedback, from class discussions, students’ reflective writings and comments from sexology lecturers, highlights the reduction of anxiety following the viewing of SEM. It facilitates a more relaxed and open interchange in the discussion that occurs in the class held in the week following the viewing and in subsequent classes. Through this dialogue, students become even more aware of the diversity of values and attitudes held by their peers and have an opportunity to ‘work through’ their own reactions. They are also desensitised to the discussion of sexuality, an important step in the development of comfort in discussing sexuality with others outside the sexology classroom including partners, friends, and future clients and colleagues. Desensitisation and sensitisation to values and attitudes is vital for health professionals, so as to create more awareness of differing views and to reduce the chance of the professional reacting to clients with shock, embarrassment, disgust or any other emotion that is not supportive to the client. Furthermore, through the use of reflective writing and class discussion, students gain awareness to their own reactions to different forms of sexual expression, as presented by the SEM. These processes assist students to integrate the other components of a human sexuality course as the semester progresses. “There is widespread research and clinical support for the notion that cognitive material will only be accepted and used in practice when the affective components of such material are recognised and dealt with (Roberts, 1986, p. 18). This study explored the students’ reflections, reactions and perspectives regarding the use of SEM within the Sexology 350 unit.

Positive messages about sexuality

As well as sensitising students to the values and attitudes of themselves and others, the SEM used in the sexology units aim to convey positive messages about sexuality. This positive approach towards sexuality has the effect of reducing embarrassment, shame or guilt for the participants surrounding their own sexuality. Sexual personal insight and self-acceptance are imperative for health professionals if they are to talk openly about sexuality with their clients (Ojanlatva, 2008). Messages conveyed in the SEM serve to dispel myths, model healthy, satisfying sexual encounters, provide factual information surrounding the physiological and physical aspects of sex, give new information about sexual behaviours that may enhance the individual's own sex life and relationships, and relay positive, realistic messages about body image, relationships and intimacy. The sexually explicit media send a 'meta-message' that is more effective than verbal instruction alone. Due to the aroused state of the viewer, the material is learned on a deeper level and leaves a more lasting impression (Tepper, 1997a).

Health professionals value the use of sexually explicit materials

According to Brewster and Wylie (2008) the value of desensitisation through the use of SEM is supported by sexuality educators, health professionals and university students alike, not only in the facilitation of their own learning, but also for use in their professional practice. In a study of USA and Czech health and mental-health professionals, 253 of 279 participants reported positive outcomes regarding the use of SEM in their practice (Robinson, Manthei, Scheltema, Rich, & Koznar, 1999). Following exposure to SEM, a group of sexually inexperienced adult women with high sexual anxiety were found to have lower sexual anxiety and, in appropriate circumstances, were more willing to engage in a larger range of sexual behaviours than the control groups (Wishnoff, 1978). Brewster and Wylie (2002) also recognised the value of using SEM in psychosexual therapy with clients finding the visual resources (photographs and line drawings) informative, useful and appealing (p. 23). Brewster and Wylie emphasised the necessity for the therapist to assess the readiness of each client to view SEM and to inform them about

the purpose and the context in which it will be introduced. SEM are also used extensively in the sexual re-education of individuals that have suffered a spinal cord injury (SCI), and have been found to improve sexual adjustment to SCI (Tepper, 1997b).

Following a course using SEM, American health professionals including psychologists, theology graduate students and nurses, gave positive ratings “about the degree to which the course increased their level of comfort in talking to patients about sex, as well as increased their understanding of how their own values influenced patient care” (Leiblum, 2001, p. 65). Leiblum reported that the use of SEM had been reduced in the programme because the coordinators believed that the majority of the students “have been bombarded with similar material” (p. 61). Use of SEM is now restricted to select pieces that “highlight particular practices, e.g. gay or lesbian sexual relationships” or optional materials shown outside class time (p. 61). However, Leiblum acknowledges the value of “judicious use” of SEM because it “stimulates and provokes animated discussion in a way that lectures do not. And it is still the case that there are many students coming from fundamental religious backgrounds who have not been exposed to this material” (p. 61). Whilst many students may be sexually active and have been exposed to SEM “there is much that students do not know” (p. 67). Leiblum’s involvement with the human sexuality programme in the medical school and students’ evaluations indicated the value for the students of this programme: assisting them to comfortably communicate about sexual health with their clients/patients, becoming more affirming of diversity and enhancing their personal lives.

Adverse reactions to sexually explicit materials (SEM)

While much evidence points to the merit of SEM on rare occasions, some individuals may have adverse reactions to the material. This may happen when the individual is not willing to try new sexual experiences; where there is a clash between the values of the individual and the values perceived to be advocated by the SEM, (for example when the individual has strongly held

conservative or religious convictions); when the treatment of sexual problems is hampered by problems in the relationship (for example, couples that may need psychotherapy for deeper issues before working on sexual issues); and when memories of sexual abuse are triggered by the SEM (Robinson, et al., 1999). When sexual acts not previously witnessed are presented, the SEM also has “the potential...to shock, embarrass, disgust, upset, offend, and possibly block learning” (Tepper, 1997a, p. 168).

To minimise the possibility of these adverse reactions to SEM, all lecturers within the Department of Sexology at Curtin University follow clear guidelines and work towards the ideals of a supportive, non-judgemental learning environment. This study formalises these guidelines - see the developed ‘Guidelines when using SEM’ that follow. At the first class, the students are briefed about the sexually explicit materials in the film show that will be screened the following week. Attendance at the film show is a requirement for all the sexology students. Therefore, it is vital that they are informed about the process and informed that they may withdraw from the unit if they are unwilling to view SEM. In addition, students are directed to read an overview of the film show (containing a brief rationale and a description of each film segment). The overview was available to students via the Sexology 350 Manual (Coates, et al., 2009) and, since 2010, is able to be downloaded from the University’s online information system *BlackBoard* (see Appendix 1). In addition to the film show overview, a Position paper – *The use of sexually explicit materials in the Curtin University Sexology Programme* is also required reading (See Appendix 6).

Some older literature showed that, after viewing SEM, the majority of people became more comfortable with discussing sexuality. In addition, the materials conveyed positive messages that reduce the individual’s anxiety, guilt, shame or embarrassment regarding his/her sexuality (Rhoades, 2008). However, Rhoades cautions that ethical guidelines must be in place prior to the introduction of SEM.

In conclusion, as future health professionals, the sexology students have an obligation to their clients and the community to be well-informed, affirming of diversity and comfortable with discussing sexuality. For this, the professional must first be comfortable with his/her sexuality, and be aware of his/her own and others' diverse values and attitudes. Later chapters will explore how the students' perceptions towards viewing the sexually explicit media and the use of reflective writing, affects their attitudes about sexuality.

GUIDELINES WHEN USING SEXUALLY EXPLICIT MATERIALS (SEM) IN THE SEXOLOGY CLASS

To minimise the possibility of adverse reactions to the sexually explicit materials (SEM), guidelines have been developed. This study, along with the work of Robinson et al. (1999) and Tepper (1997a), has developed the guidelines:

- It is essential that sexology lecturers are highly skilled and comfortable with discussing the material.
- Lecturers need to sensitively explore student perspectives with a respectful approach to classroom discussions. Students enrolled in Sexology come from diverse backgrounds and a hallmark of the Sexology Programme is the safe, non-judgemental classroom atmosphere.
- SEM should be a part of a larger educational context; not administered alone.
- An in-depth discussion should follow the viewing of the SEM to allow the viewers an opportunity to process their reactions.
- Students must give informed consent to participate in the sexology unit. Information about the content of the units exists on the Curtin University website, in the university handbook and the unit outlines. Students self-select to undertake the optional sexology undergraduate units and, in order to undertake postgraduate studies in sexology, selection processes for potential students are rigorous. In addition, in the first week of class, students are provided with detailed information about the nature of the material they will view the following week. If

students are unwilling to view the SEM they are free to withdraw from the unit. Students who continue are required to watch the entire SEM film show (100minutes).

- Students should be invited to reflect on the responses and reactions to the film show by writing a reflection paper (1 page). The reflection papers are reviewed by the lecturer only and supportive, non-judgemental comments are written on each paper. Feedback to the student, by the lecturer, is individualised and confidential.
- If the film show does trigger deeper issues, the lecturer may be made aware of this via the students' reflection paper. The opportunity exists for the lecturer to offer supportive feedback and recommend access to a mental health professional (for example the university counselling service). In the 35 years that the Programme has been running, there has only been one adverse reaction from a student who was deeply opposed to the content of the unit. Unbeknown to the lecturer, another course at the university had made the Sexology 350 unit compulsory for their students. This highlighted the wisdom, and long held view in the Programme, that the unit should be an optional subject, and should not be a requirement of a course.

Student feedback demonstrated that with appropriate guidelines, the use of sexually explicit materials is a powerful tool for an effective sexuality education programme for adults (see Chapter 7 for comments about the SEM used in the class).

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presented a review of the literature of sexuality education. Learning about sexuality, regardless of the source, appears to be problematic for many people. Sexuality is too often hidden, shrouded in shame and secrecy, and surrounded by contradictions. Therefore, it is not surprising that educating about sexuality is controversial.

This review explored the challenges of implementing effective, comprehensive sexuality education in schools and the tertiary sector. Two key strategies used in the Sexology Programme were outlined: the use of sexually explicit materials for desensitisation; and a rationale for reflective writing. In addition, the reviewed content and student feedback informed the development of guidelines for the use of sexually explicit materials in the sexology classes and a process map (see Chapter 8) of the impact of sexuality education for adult learners.

In conducting this review, various gaps and weaknesses in the literature were identified. The main weaknesses were: a distinct lack of literature related to sexuality education and the tertiary sector; no exploration of reflective writing as a tool for sexuality educators; limited and out dated research into the use of sexually explicit materials and tertiary students; and limited qualitative research into complex issues for adult students related to sexuality. This qualitative study sought to address these issues and help fill these gaps in our knowledge.

CHAPTER 4 - METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the qualitative methodology employed for this study. It details important aspects of interpretative biography including the justification for the choice of methodology. Writing my philosophy and my personal history (Appendix 5) created the opportunity for self-reflection about my beliefs, attitudes and values. This process clarified my thinking about my choice of methodology and my passion for working in the area of sexology. For me, interpretative biography is a vibrant, humanistic methodology with sharing stories and encouraging open dialogue, at its core.

INTRODUCTION

This study investigated the place of sexuality in students' lives – the extent to which they dealt with complex issues related to learning about sexuality. The aim of the study was to investigate the ways in which the undergraduate students' perceived and interpreted issues of sexuality and the ways in which students' understanding of their sexuality was affected by the curriculum in the sexology class. The 'how' questions are central to the methodology, and relate to the notion of a socially constructed reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Within the constraints placed by the mechanisms of perception, interpretation, etc, people take the data given to them and organise it according to socially learned patterns. How they 'see' the world (their perceptions), how they interpret what they see (culturally interpreted values, roles, gender, attitudes, patterns of behaviour) largely determines the way they act in the world. The 'how' questions, therefore, assisted me to discover the way the sexology students consciously described and interpreted phenomena associated with issues of sexuality (Stringer, 2007). Charon (2007) asserts that the sociological perspective is an important part of the jigsaw in understanding human life and, therefore, an understanding of human sexuality.

PHILOSOPHICAL RATIONALE

“We learn by telling stories...But it is more than that. We discover as we tell and come closer to wisdom” (Noddings & Witherell, 1991, p. 279).

This qualitative study seeks to reveal how individuals interpret and make sense of their world. These interpretations “create the conditions for understanding” (Denzin, 1989a, p. 28). Van Maanen (2006, p. 13) describes ethnographic practices as “concerned with the study and representation of culture”— the thoughts, feelings, actions, beliefs and values that are implicit in the social life of members of any cultural group (Reynolds & Skilbeck, 1976, p. 42). Ethnographic methods, therefore, focus on group members’ descriptions and interpretations of everyday life and events. I acknowledge that this research is not ‘classical’ ethnography because I am not viewing the subjects in their own environment – rather, they are attending the sexology class. However, I am employing ethnographic techniques to explore personal experiences and perceptions. According to Atkinson and Hammersley (1998, p. 110) ethnographic methodology has a number of features, including a strong emphasis on exploring the nature of particular social phenomena and a tendency to work with unstructured data in order to reveal the meanings inherent in human action.

Phenomenological studies focus on the rich and complex experiences of human social life. Denzin (1997) suggests the researcher should seek “empathetic understandings” that reveal the highs and lows of people’s lives: their “pains, the agonies, the emotional experiences, the small and large victories, the traumas, the fears, the anxieties, the dreams, fantasies, and the hopes in their lives” (p.139). Denzin (1989a) talks about “a life being lived on two levels ... the *surface* and the *deep* (p.29). I have experienced my students initially sharing writing that is at a surface level, for example, reflections about classroom activities and generalisations about community attitudes (rather than their own thoughts and feelings). I encourage students to explore their ‘deep’ when I write on their reflection papers – for example, ‘What do YOU think or feel about this?’ The students usually move on to

share their inner world (their *deep*); their deepest fears, worries and traumatic events along with their delight about new found sexuality. The pedagogy used in the Sexology Programme encourages this shift with the use of reflection papers and the safe classroom environment. According to Denzin (1989a) the sharing of the *deep* is rare and “may only infrequently be shown to others” (p. 159).

Creating verisimilitude, clarified by Denzin (1989, p.28), is “...‘truth-like’, intersubjectively shareable emotional feelings or cognitive understandings”. It is this depth of feeling and empathic understanding of the participants’ lives, through verisimilitude, that is my goal in the course of this study. This study makes use of biography. I wrote about my sexology students’ lives and compiled stories. Denzin (1989a, p. 11) defines interpretive biography as “creating literary, narrative accounts and representations of lived experiences. Telling and inscribing stories”. The participants’ stories are incomplete: they relate select experiences and aspects of sexuality from the participants. Bruner (1984, p. 7) explored the complexities of telling stories about lives:

A life lived is what actually happens. A life experience consists of the images, feelings, sentiments, desires, thoughts, and meanings known to the person whose life it is ... A life as told, a life history, is a narrative, influenced by the cultural conventions of telling, by the audience, and by the social context. (p. 7)

Bruner warns that, frequently, there is not a perfect alignment of the three forms. It would be a rare ‘perfect’ person who is always able to align his/her outer behaviour and inner state and the stories he/she can tell about his/her experiences. Students’ stories will provide many examples of this ‘imperfect’ alignment (for example Roy¹⁰). A cautious approach is urged when writing

¹⁰ Roy’s story provides an example of this ‘imperfect’ alignment. Roy is 35 and married to Jill. In his second reflection paper he reveals his attraction to both women and men:

I am taking a risk here and yes Lorel I am recognising outwardly (that is writing it here and now) that I am bisexual – something my wife has no idea about. Maybe this is why I have undertaken this course – it will make me confront what has been firmly buried. (Roy)

and interpreting texts (Geertz, 1988). If this were a piece of fiction instead of research, I, the researcher, could be more honest (Denzin, 1989a). Because the stories are those of real people, sometimes details are altered or removed to maintain anonymity and to respect confidentiality. This was done, not to be dishonest, rather, to be respectful of participants' wishes. Pseudonyms selected by the participants do assist with anonymity, yet, there was a fear amongst a few participants about their personal information being available to the public. On reflection, two participants removed sections of 'their story'; one, because of fear of violence from a previous partner and, the other, out of concern for family members who are not cognisant with the incest that took place in her life.

The use of content of the 'extraordinary' stories from 'ordinary' students (Chapter 6) draws on the work of Denzin (1989a, pp. 17-19) who outlines conventions "that serve to define the biographical method as a distinct approach to the study of human experience...and shape how lives are told". These conventions create the opportunity for 'real' experiences of 'real' people to be shared. To provide context for this study, I presented these conventions, nine in number, as outlined by Denzin, to the sexology student participants:

- 1. The existence of others.** Students share information about others such as family, peers, partner, me/teacher.
- 2. The influence and importance of gender and class.** This study reflects the voices of a diverse group of undergraduate students. Reflection papers were gathered from the students (with the exception of 3, all students gave me permission to copy their reflection papers). The interviews that I conducted were representative of gender proportions in the class (approximately two thirds of the students were female) to ensure a fair balance of gender perspectives. Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 118) state that feminists have argued that the outcomes of social research have reflected "the masculinist assumptions of researchers". Discussions about women's issues were "often previously understood as the result of personal inadequacies and neuroses" rather than the "socially-produced conflicts and

contradictions¹¹” shared by many women (Weedon, 1987, p 33). Denzin (1989a) also urges the inclusion of women’s experiences, quoting Steedman (1987, p. 9), “Their lives were not deemed important enough to have biographies written about them”. This research ensured that both the male and female perspective was adequately covered. In addition to gender, I took into account diversity in other areas such as age, sexual orientation, cultural background, race and ethnicity.

3. Family beginnings. Many students spoke of their family’s influence on their learning about sexuality and the implicit and explicit messages they received from their parents about sex.

4. Starting points. The starting points for students’ stories were varied. Participants ‘controlled’ the beginnings – some chose to begin by talking about their family whilst others shared about their pain or joy in relationships. Some spoke of the experience and understanding gained from the sexology class and others of their sexual orientation.

5. Known and knowing authors. I am the ‘knowing author’ of the stories in partnership with the student. The stories were compiled making use of excerpts from reflection papers and transcripts of interviews. I also checked the content of the stories with the students (ie. member checked). Denzin (p. 19) says that the “work must to be done by a diligent, hard-working, attentive scholar.” Am I the best person to write about this person’s life? My ‘knowing’ is limited. Prior to the students entering the sexology class, I did not know them. I experienced the participants over one semester. In addition, I maintained a relationship (face-to-face interviews, emails and phone calls) with many of the interviewees. Despite this short period of ‘knowing’, students trusted me with their personal reflections and explorations about their sexuality.

¹¹An example of a ‘socially-produced conflict’ was provided by a research participant ... ‘women who desire sex, have sex and enjoy sex are still perceived differently to men who behave the same way’ (April).

6. Objective life markers. Life markers are significant events in a person's life – an “existence can be mapped, charted and given meaning” (p. 19). Rather than life being linear with neatly fitting pieces, it is an erratic journey. In the context of this research, as we learn more about sexuality through involvement in the sexology class, our perspective may change.

7. Real persons with real lives. ‘Real’ people attended the sexology class and their lives are so much more than the story that has been captured. The participants’ lives constantly change as does their perspectives. I gained a small sliver of perspective about their lives with a focus on sexuality.

8. Turning point experiences. “Our life is shaped by key, turning-point moments. These moments leave permanent marks” (p. 22). A key aspect of this study has been paying attention, via interview and reading reflection papers, to the events that have impacted on the students’ sexuality.

I could only write about the turning points or epiphanies relying on the information the participants provided. If participants embellished their experiences I was unable to verify this information. I member-checked, that is, I showed the drafts to the interviewees who were then encouraged to comment on and modify the narrative to represent more accurately their perceptions and responses. This process helped to eliminate my bias, for example, my portraying the participant in an inaccurate manner. Denzin (1989b) points out that, after sharing their stories or reading their stories, participants’ perspectives, may change because their lives are fluid.

9. Truthful statements distinguished from fiction. Can words truly reflect a life? Drawing on the work of significant writers, Denzin states (1989a, p. 21), “Persons as speaking subjects (Merleau-Ponty, 1964) are not just empty signs created solely by the syntactical and semiological structures of language” (Ricoeur, 1974). The challenge comes when the researcher is trying to capture a person’s story on paper.

Difficulties I experienced with this research included:

- perspectives that are trapped by words. The reality is that people change and life has a fluidity that a written story cannot show; and
- the limited scope of the interview because of limitations of time. Interviews were conducted for one to three hours. Students sometimes mentioned, on reading their interview transcripts, that they were surprised about the focus of their discussion and that they wished they had covered different aspects of ‘their story’. I may have unwittingly guided the direction of the interview (eg. Lucy on reading the transcripts of her interview – ‘I can’t believe I talked so much about my parents – yes really surprised! I know they were significant but well that’s ridiculous’).

Students’ lives are much more complex than the information they have chosen to share in their reflection papers and interviews. For the purpose of this study, I wrote about a “partial” perspective, that is, examining a selection of their experiences on their sexuality (Denzin, 1989a, p. 29). Participants’ stories were a snapshot in time. Over time, the new would emerge. Sexuality is fluid and changes. As we grasp new information, as we move in and out of relationships, as we age, and as we listen to the views of others. Previously-held views are modified and new attitudes, values and skills emerge.

Some writers (Denzin, 1989a; Elbaz, 1987; Shapiro, 1968) would argue that writing a biography is similar to creating a work of fiction. Words need to be arranged to appear as cohesive narratives similar to writing a work of fiction. At times I agreed with Denzin, “... tormented by the problem of getting this person into the text, of bringing them alive and making them believable” (p. 24). “... texts are narrative fictions, cut from the same kinds of cloth as the lives they tell about” (p. 26). I attempted to view the world as the participants did, in order to reach an understanding of the way they understood and conceptualised issues of sexuality. This approach to the research seemed particularly applicable because of the complex, social and emotive nature of sexuality.

As a lecturer in sexology, I was perfectly situated to view the students in my class in a variety of settings: interaction in the classroom, participation in focus groups, writings in their personal reflection papers, and one-on-one interviews. Reflection papers include students' reflections and reactions to material presented in class. Focus groups explore issues and identify key themes that emerge from group discussions in the sexology class. Interviews elicit a body of data, in field notes and taped responses, from each interviewee, resulting in a narrative account of students' experiences. The data was analysed according to procedures suggested by Denzin (1989a, 1989b, 1992, 1997), Spradley (1989) and Stringer (2005) for "interpreting, knowing, and comprehending the meaning that is felt, intended, and expressed by another" (Denzin 1989b, p.120).

When a writer writes a biography, he or she writes him or herself into the life of the subject written about. When the reader reads a biographical text, that text is read through the life of the reader. Hence, writers and readers conspire to create the lives they write and read about. (Roth, 1998; Lesser, 1988 in Denzin, p.26)

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

The participants were drawn from the undergraduate Sexology Programme which has been running at Curtin University for almost three decades. The three hour introductory undergraduate sexology unit (Sexology 350) is run each semester with 12 weeks contact over a 16 week period with a ceiling of 25 students per class.

The introductory sexology unit is the students' first, and perhaps only, sexology unit they will take during their time at university. See Appendix 4 for an *Overview of graduate attributes and learning outcomes for the undergraduate units - Sexology 350*.

PARTICIPANTS

The students in the sample were deliberately chosen to reflect the diversity of participants in the population of interest - in this case, undergraduate

students in sexology classes at Curtin University. The sample, selected on the basis of voluntary nomination and the researcher's knowledge of students, took into account characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and age.

The participants were students from a variety of Curtin programmes including psychology, social work, education and health sciences. Up to half the class were international students (usually from North America, Singapore and Malaysia, many of whom are visiting Perth for only one semester) and a small number of students who attended other tertiary institutions. Typically two-thirds of the students were young people (18-25 years) from a diverse range of backgrounds. Because large numbers (95%) of students allowed their reflection papers to be copied and were willing to participate in focus groups, diversity of perspectives was maximised. Interviewee selection and the number of interviewees are discussed in the *Data gathering* section below.

DATA GATHERING

"Ethnographic data collection consists of fieldwork in which multiple data sources are accessed" (Simmons-Mackie & Damico, 1999, p. 681). Data was gathered from three main sources: reflection papers, in-class focus groups and intensive one-on-one interviews. At the beginning of semester, the *Information sheet and Consent form for reflection papers* (Appendix 7 & 8) were distributed to all students. The information sheet informed them about the study and the consent form sought their permission for the researcher to make copies of their reflection papers for use in this study.

Students were required, as part of their assessment for the sexology units, to write four reflection papers. The papers were graded (2+2+2+4 =10%) but the content was not assessed. Students received 10% if they submitted the papers on time. The first three papers are approximately one page in length and talked about their reactions/impressions/thoughts about class process and content. The final reflection paper (two pages) required students to

outline how the sexology unit had impacted on them. The following questions guided their reflections for Sexology 350 (NB. The questions are a ‘student-friendly’ version of the research questions):

- How has your understanding of your sexuality changed?
- How has this class impacted on you and your sexuality?
- How did you respond to the content and strategies used in the class?
- What has been your experience of the sexology unit?
- How has your understanding of sexual health changed?

Reflection papers were read by me, the facilitator/researcher, and encouraging, non-judgemental written feedback was provided.

The technique of focus groups, as defined by Wilkinson (2004, p. 177) “involves engaging a small number of people in an informal group discussion (or discussions), ‘focussed’ around a particular topic or issue”. Focus groups are an integral part of the sexology classes and occur as part of the usual content of the units. In a manner described by Stringer (2007), focus groups explore specific issues, with participants noting the content of the discussion. Specifically, during the final week of the units, students in the undergraduate sexology 350 classes I taught were invited to participate in focus groups and comment on their experience of the unit. Working in groups of four to six, students were encouraged to share their responses from their final reflection paper, with the questions above, being used as triggers for discussion. A volunteer from each group recorded the group’s responses on large sheets of paper. This content was subjected to group analysis and they identified and organised key elements and themes that framed the groups’ perspectives on each issue, as guided by the focus questions above. Individual student responses were not identifiable. See Appendix 9 – *Permission form for students – in class focus groups/brainstorming*. See *Ethics* in Chapter 4 for additional information regarding student consent for data gathering of in class focus groups.

According to Atkinson and Hammersley (1998, p. 110) ethnographic research typically studies “a small number of cases in detail”. Rich data was required so a minimum of six participants from each class were interviewed at the end of semester at least twice for one hour. This occurred over three semesters with twenty-two volunteer students taking part in one-on-one interviews. Huberman and Miles (1998) call for careful sampling that is purposeful, selective and conceptual. Interviewee selection criteria included: diversity of age, gender, cultural background, religious affiliation, sexual experience and sexual practice. Since interviews were not carried out until all assessments had been completed, the researcher, having read detailed reflection papers from each student, was able to select a diverse sample from the volunteers. Students willing to be interviewed were given an information sheet (Appendix 10) and completed the additional consent form (Appendix 11). Interviews were recorded and fully transcribed by me from the audio recording and field notes taken.

The majority of the interviews were conducted at a university coffee shop as close to the completion of the unit as possible. The coffee shop was chosen for a number of reasons. The venue was familiar to participants and easy to access before or after university classes. The coffee shop, with its backdrop of noise and activity, also provided a safe place to speak yet there was little chance of being over-heard. A few follow-up interviews took place at a location chosen by the participants.

Participants were re-interviewed as soon as practicable after initial analysis of the first interview. Saturation was sought, that is, “no additional data is being found” in regards to the influence the sexology unit has had on their perception of their sexuality (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 61). Theoretically, saturation was the ideal, but, I realised this was difficult to achieve. The most difficult factor was scheduling of interviews with volunteers. About a third of the volunteers were international students, many of whom return to their home country shortly after semester ends. In the days following the end of class I, therefore, prioritised interview times with international students. Follow up interviews and working on draft stories was usually facilitated via

numerous emails. One international student did make use of Skype to share her emotional reactions to seeing her story in print and to expand on her story.

Capturing time to conduct interviews with WA-based students was also problematic. Often students increased their work commitments or travelled when the semester ended. I endeavoured to interview as many of the volunteers as soon as practicable. Mobile phones assisted me to contact students and schedule timeslots for discussions. I was able to conduct at least one face-to-face interview with 22 of the 81 students who signed the '*Willingness to participate in Interview*' forms.

All interviews were conducted and transcribed by me to ensure my immersion in the information. Windsor, Baranowski and Cutter (1994) state that this builds researcher and theoretical sensitivity, and reduces interviewer bias. Although this was time-consuming and challenging at times, it was an invaluable process because I became more familiar with each person's story. I continued to build on the trust and the relationship developed between me and my students in the sexology class (Dyson, et al., 2003; Zeichner, 1999).

To secure biographical narratives a researcher needs to ask open-ended questions and listen carefully. The initial interview questions were the same questions that the students responded to when writing their final reflection paper. The initial questions were broad in order to encourage a range of responses (Rubin & Rubin, 1995; Wiederman, 2001) yet it is recommended that the researcher limits the number of probing questions so as not to overwhelm the participant (Carlson & McCaslin, 2003). I made use of semi-structured questions derived from techniques suggested by Spradley (1979), Denzin (1989) and Stringer (2007). Stringer and Genat (2004, p. 73) refer to three types of prompts: "**extension** questions" such as 'Tell me more about...'; "**encouraging** comments or questions" for example 'Go on, Yes? Mmm?'; and "**example** questions" including 'Can you give me an example of a time when you felt very challenged in the sexology class?'.

I endeavoured to better understand the interactions and add to the body of information about facilitating and teaching sexuality education. Participants were encouraged to discuss the impact of my teaching style; suggest improvements for both facilitation and the content of the unit; and reflect on the effectiveness of the classroom strategies. Reoccurring answers from reflection papers, focus groups and interviews were used as confirmation of consensus especially when the answers coincided with past research.

The process of capturing and telling these stories has been both laborious and interesting. I valued the participants' feedback and through this process of 'member checking', I endeavoured to maximise authenticity. I strived for what Denzin (1997, p. 41) describes as "a meeting place where 'original' voices, their inscriptions (as transcribed texts), and the writer's interpretations come together". I remained connected with the majority of the interviewees. I tried to balance the number of communications and I wanted the participants' feedback, but, I was aware of not wanting to 'swamp' them with too many emails. I interviewed 22 students for one to three hours in the weeks after they finished the introductory sexology unit. I sent them transcripts and drafts of 'their stories' within months of their last interview. These drafts were frequently in excess of ten pages each. At this point, most respondents made few or no changes, recognising their own words (quotes from transcripts of the interviews and reflection papers). Some did, however, correct minor details. For this thesis I chose stories that incorporated differing factors: gender, age, cultural background and sexual experience. I have attempted to highlight significant issues related to their sexuality, and how they responded and felt about these issues.

Their honest sharing, both in their reflection papers and interviews, formed a solid basis for these narratives. On reflection, I realised that with some participants I had missed essential details or not expanded on points as much as I could have because of the pressure of interviewing. After reading the transcripts and resultant draft stories, additional questions were posed by me because, after reading the transcripts and resultant draft stories, I recognised many gaps, and parts of their stories that were left 'hanging'.

Most students responded promptly (via email) to the clarifying questions I posed.

I had a relatively short time to interview a large number of students (8 to 10 per semester). Some students were studying for exams whilst other students were holidaying or embarking on vacation employment. Within days, in some cases, international students would be returning to their home country. In early interviews, I attempted to both write notes and record the session. Very quickly I realised that note-taking distracted both me and the interviewee and the resultant scrawls were not particularly useful. I valued eye-contact with the participants and I found that note-taking interrupted this. A more beneficial mode was to listen to the transcript then embellish my field notes, so this was the preferred mode I used over time.

DATA ANALYSIS

“To make the invisible more visible to others is a major goal of the interpreter” (Merleau-Ponty, 1969 as cited by Denzin, 1989a, p.139).

According to Stringer (2007, p.70) the researcher ‘brackets’ – “holds in abeyance” her professional knowledge and concentrates as much as possible on the students’ perspectives of the sexology class and what was learned from the class. To assist in overcoming researcher bias, wherever possible, students’ accounts are grounded in their language and concepts. Data from reflection papers was grouped according to themes that emerged from a coding and categorising process (see Chapters 5-8). Themes emerging from analysis were also discussed with my two supervisors.

Participants, as experts in their worldview, played a role in the selection of key themes in their stories. “Collaborative exploration” is a key component of ethnographic research and Stringer (2007, p. 11) implores “those whose lives are affected by the problem under study” to engage in the research. Bloustien and Peters (2004, p. 36) endorse students’ participation in research because it gives them the “opportunity to speak and be heard and to more

successfully negotiate the traditional hierarchical and asymmetrical power relationships”. Descriptive accounts of the interviewees’ stories were compiled by me and then discussed with the interviewees (member checked). This process of story building varied for each interviewee. For example, one participant simply emailed a short, positive response whilst another participant engaged in a lengthy dialogue with me resulting in many changes to the story. Epiphanies, that is, key or illuminative events triggered by participants’ engaging in sexology studies were recorded and the key features and elements of these experiences were deconstructed and analysed. “Epiphanic moments enable us to focus on those features and elements of experience that ‘make a difference’ in the lives of participants” (Stringer & Genat, 2004, p. 97). The narrative, derived from the interviews and the participants’ reflection papers, were member-checked.

According to Denzin (1989b) the researcher may begin to know the person in a way the person does not know himself/herself. The researcher is able to tease out sections of a person’s life and shine a spotlight on these, something the participant may not be able to do for himself/herself. “The interpretations that are developed about a subject’s life, however, must be understandable to the subject” (p.65).

I endeavoured to use the participants’ words, from reflection papers and interviews, and the stories were modified in accord with the participants’ responses (Behar-Horenstein & Morgan, 1995; Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007). As I read and reread more than 600 reflection papers (157 students each writing 4 papers), I highlighted segments and then entered these into a word document under thematic headings. Pseudonyms were chosen by the 22 interviewees and these pseudonyms distinguish between interviewees and the number code used for other students’ reflection papers. I coded each entry from reflection papers to ensure I could track back to the original reflection paper (eg. 4F 109 2 – translated: student #4; female, semester one, 2009; reflection paper 2). Denzin’s (1989) ‘between methods’ triangulation was used, that is, more than one method of data collection for this study was used for the 22 key participants.

RIGOUR OF THE STUDY

There is a danger in this type of study that the power differences between the researcher and participants could skew the study towards the researcher's perceptual bias and interpretations (Newkirk, 1996). Techniques to maximise the rigour of the study, and to minimise the extent to which I was able to impose my own perspectives, were imperative. There is also the question whether this study could lead to harm, through coercion or threat to the students? Since there were no wrong or right answers, and the purpose of the interviews was to elucidate a variety of reactions and responses, there was no way that students could have been 'rated' detrimentally. Further, due to time constraints, all students could not be interviewed even if they wished to be, and there was no sense in which people could be punished if they failed to participate. This ensured that students could not be unfairly advantaged or not, by their participation in the interviews.

Rigour in qualitative research, therefore, relies on the need to establish trust. Unlike quantitative studies that focus on reliability and validity, qualitative studies, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested, need to establish credibility. Lincoln and Guba's criterion was a central aspect of this study. Because I was unable to "stuff a real-live person between the two covers of a text" (Denzin, 1989, p. 83) I looked for ways to, as accurately as possible, portray the participants in this study. I took steps to ensure the credibility of this study. Stringer (2007, p. 57), drawing on the work of Lincoln and Guba (1985), identifies the following factors for credibility:

Credibility

Without *credibility* the sexology students would not have been willing to give their honest and forthright views in classroom discussions, reflection papers, focus groups or face-to-face interviews. Credibility was achieved by:

- Prolonged engagement. I engaged in data collection with research participants (as the facilitator of the Sexology 350 unit) for three hours a week over a twelve-week semester. In addition, I had extended and repeat interviews with twenty-two interviewees.

- Persistent and conscious observation. I collected data from the multiple sources listed below for the full period of the semester, firstly, from students' reflection papers (four times a semester) and secondly, from observations in the form of a journal or recorded on my voice recorder. My journal entries included my responses to classes (eg. student responses to content or process) and interviews - extended and repeated interviews after unit completion.
- Multiple sources of information (observation, filming, reflection papers, focus groups, interviews).
- Member checking
- *Focus groups* – during the sexology classes students worked collaboratively to record brainstormed responses to a variety of questions. No individual responses were identified. A whole-of-class discussion followed providing participants with the opportunity to clarify and extend any information they provided.
- *Reflection papers.* I wrote extensively on each and every reflection paper and participants occasionally responded by continuing responses (either orally or in writing) to comments or questions I posed in their reflection papers.
- *Interviews.* Participant feedback and authority were received from all interviewees at numerous stages of story compilation. I emailed the interview transcription, draft story with suggested themes and finally, the completed story with analysis. I attempted to maintain communication with interviewees via email, phone and/or face-to-face.
- Opportunity to clarify feelings and emotions. Considering the sensitive nature of the area of sexuality; these are part of the ongoing learning processes incorporated into the sexology class.
- Diverse case analysis ensured diverse perspectives were incorporated into the study. See comments on *Sample*.
- Referential adequacy, that is, the study reflected the perspectives of the students and is grounded in their language and concepts. See comments in the *Methodology* section.

Transferability

The outcomes of this study were, firstly, the rich descriptions by the sexology students of the sexology class experience and the strategies used. Secondly, the development of a process map about the impact of sexology studies for adult learners (see Chapter 8). Others, such as teachers, other sexuality educators, health promoters, youth workers and counsellors, will be able to use elements of the study and apply them to their own unique situations.

Dependability and confirmability

I maintained an inquiry audit that outlined the procedures that were followed. This included reflection papers collected; audio recordings saved on a hard drive and securely stored and backed-up; transcripts and field notes of interviews; and outcomes of focus groups (large sheets of paper with comments were kept and the transcriptions were stored as a 'word document').

Rigour with participants' responses to their stories

Soon after interviewing the 22 participants, I wrote the drafts of their stories and emailed these to the students. The majority of the 22 interviewees quickly responded to my emails and filled in the details/gaps in their stories. All changes/requests were acknowledged by me and I recognised that the stories became richer with ongoing input.

As the research progressed a significant gap in the time since the students were interviewed occurred, yet most responded promptly when I emailed with the reworked drafts attached. I asked the students for feedback as well as how they felt about reading their reworked stories. Disappointingly, a few email addresses bounced back. Some students had only provided their university email address and had left the university since being interviewed. In hindsight, I should have stressed the importance of providing an alternative email address. I did, however, hear back from the majority (18) of the participants. The following comments are from seven interviewees:

I pinch myself. I feel like a celebrity and I am reading this in *Who* or something! Like the way you put this together – I sound interesting! You used what I wrote and said, and the story that unfolded was intriguing – corrected some small bits and answered your questions. (Ava)

Wow, I didn't realise I talked so much about my parents. Seeing it all really was quite a surprise. (Lucy)

Reading that story was pretty amazing. I see I was pretty het up about the abuse. The timing was bizarre. It was all coming out doing Sexology 350. Talking about it helped too. I am not so angry now and it helped me open up to others too, like my sister. Please keep me in the loop. When will I be able to read the other students' stories? (Dan)

Thank you for sending the draft of the story to me. I imagine you are going to edit out those 'ums' and 'you knows'. I had forgotten I told you much of what you have written. It seems like a life time ago. I have a baby now and that guy is a distant, bad memory! (Karen)

Thank you Lorel for picking me to interview. I read the story and made some changes then deleted them again. I realise what you wrote was what was happening then. I was laid bare – you and sexology helped do that. I'd taken for granted what I learnt in sexology and I am different now and more open. Life continues to get better – no new love but I am enjoying singlehood. (Roy)

Good luck with finishing the book. What you have written is awesome. I want to read everyone's comments so I will check out the website when you finish [*I informed students that I will place my study on the web and I will email them the link*]. (Deva)

Thanks for agreeing to leave those bits out. I know it's highly unlikely he would ever read it or come across it, but it's the one person that it really terrifies me if he was to do so. (Amy)

Only one of the 18 interviewees who responded made significant changes. Although Amy was keen to have her story told, she requested that certain parts be removed. She had written and spoken about the trauma of being in a violent relationship prior to enrolling in her university course and she was clearly concerned about being recognised. Even with the use of a pseudonym and many details changed, she still feared a reprisal. Three years on, however, Amy with the assistance of a 'great counsellor' gave her permission for the deleted sections to be included once again.

I have changed my mind...I felt troubled over my decision to remove it even at the time... even more so now. I'm not as scared of him now, and hell- I doubt he will ever see it anyway. Even if he were to come across it, too bad- I can deal with that now. (Amy)

It was made clear to all the sexology students that participation in the study was voluntary. Contrary to the predictions of some sceptics prior to approval for the study being given by the Human Research Ethics Committee, I was overwhelmed with volunteers. Many students commented that they were keen to expand on their stories (that they may already have shared in reflection papers and class discussions) and happy for their stories to be heard. Some expressed their feelings of importance: important to be chosen to be interviewed and 'pleasantly surprised' to see their narratives included in 'the book'. It is clear from the students' comments that they found the process of sharing their stories valuable and, that some, found it therapeutic.

TEACHER AS RESEARCHER

Extensive research exists about teachers-facilitators as researchers in their own classrooms (Bartlett & Burton, 2006; Bland & Atweh, 2007; Emerson, MacKay, MacKay, & Funnell, 2006; Johnston, 1994; Moustakim, 2007; Nyhof-Young, 2000; Ponte, 2002). Bland and Atweh (2007) attest to some of the issues that need to be addressed by researcher-facilitators when working with students because of the differences in power. Issues such as ensuring that all voices are heard (whether positive, indifferent or negative), interpreting student views in only a positive light, overbearing facilitators unwilling to seek consensus, and students not taking the research seriously. Hitchcock and Hughes (1989) state, "Teacher research must always have at its heart commitment to a reconsideration of the bases of practice in both a critical and reflective manner" (p.39).

I was both critical and reflective of my practice by making use of, for example, 'critical friends' such as my research supervisors, fellow researchers and close friends. I knew my supervisors, Dr Ernie Stringer and Professor Rosemary Coates, were a phone call or an email away. Dr Stringer

lived in the central desert of Australia but he made frequent visits to Perth. Professor Coates also spent a large amount of time away from Perth. Regardless of this, they were generous with their time and face-to-face meetings were always welcome. At these frequent and timely meetings, they questioned my research outcomes, calmed my self-doubts, and refocussed and motivated me.

I made use of a journal to record my reflections on and reactions to my process in both the class and the interviews. For example, after the first face-to-face interview I wrote, 'Could have done much better – I went into 'advice giving' mode – poor listening!' My lack of active listening was revealed when I started to transcribe the interview and recognised I spoke too much. After a particularly moving 90 minute interview with Deva (see Chapter 6), I went for a long walk with a friend to debrief. I was distressed, and the pain of Deva's termination experience stayed with me. I empathised with both her and her mother. I remember thinking that I would be greatly upset if my daughter (who was about Deva's age at the time of termination) chose not to tell me about such a traumatic situation.

One semester, after reading and commenting on 48 reflection papers I made the following journal entry: 'Wow if I ever doubted the powerful outcomes for students of doing this unit, reading this batch of reflection papers, hit the mark. Reading MS's and BG's papers bore testament to the significance of the unit on this young woman's body image and especially positive messages about genitals'.

In conclusion, I continued to build on the relationship of trust, and work *with* the students rather than *on* the students (Bloustien & Peters, 2004; Schultz, 2001).

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study adhered to Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee guidelines. After an extensive process, approval of the candidacy proposal

was passed. The proposal and the ethics Form A was then submitted to the University Human Research Ethics Committee. The Vice Chancellor also granted approval for this study because the participants were Curtin University students.

Informed consent is an essential element of ethical research. A summary of the ethical procedure that was provided to participants included:

- Confidentiality - all names and identifying labels were to be removed from the written information to protect students' identities. Reflection papers were to be coded and interviewees would select a pseudonym. Audio files of interviews that might have contained students' names were to be stored in a locked section on my computer.
- Information collected, plus my back up hard drive, would be stored in a locked filing cabinet.
- De-identified data would be stored for 5 years in a secure location and would be destroyed after this time. Results of this study would be made available to participants through placement of the report on the web.
- Students' involvement was to be purely voluntary and they would be able to withdraw from the study at any time without providing a reason and without any negative consequences¹².

In-class focus groups

As students self-select to study the optional unit, Sexology 350, it was expected that all students would be willing to allow their non-identifiable responses in class group work to be used by the researcher. However, permission was sought from all students for the researcher to make use of their responses. Initially, I was blind to the status (consenting or non-consenting) of focus group membership. A third party collected the completed informed consent form (Appendix 9 – *Permission form for students – in class focus groups/ brainstorming*) and checked that all students had signed their consent. As expected, all students (n= 157) over the five semesters gave their consent.

¹² Should any student have chosen to withdraw from the study, any notes obtained in the above ways would have been returned to the participant and no records or copies kept. NB. All students participated willingly – there were no withdrawals.

For my study to progress, I was required to consider the improbable outcome of a student or students not giving their consent to collection of the brainstorming sheets. The following section was included in my study proposal: 'A third party would sort the consenting participants into one set of groups and the non-consenting students into another set of groups. Any recorded comments from group work would be submitted to the third person who would then sort and provide the researcher with only those responses from the consenting participants.' I believe this sorting process would have proved unworkable and discriminatory for the non-consenting students. I would simply have not gathered the sheets from that group of students.

Interviews

Interviews were conducted after the semester had finished and after all assessments had been completed and marks lodged. In addition, participants were invited to give their informed consent for interviews, by making use of a third person (independent of the Sexology Programme) to collect consent forms. In most cases, this independent person was a volunteer student who placed the forms (sight unseen) into a signed, sealed envelope. This envelope was not opened by me until I had submitted all grades.

The relationship between students and the teacher-researcher developed over a semester. I acknowledge that there was an unequal power relationship, that is, a teacher-student relationship. This teacher-student inequity was minimised by building trust, establishing credibility and using the collaborative processes of ethnographic research (see *Rigour of study* section).

For detailed information see:

Appendix 7 - *Information for students in Sexology 350*

Appendix 8 - *Consent form for reflection papers*

Appendix 9 - *Permission form – in class focus groups/brainstorming*

Appendix 10- *Information for participants willing to be interviewed*

Appendix 11- *Consent form for participants willing to be interviewed*

CONCLUSION

This chapter provides details of the qualitative methods used in this study and the reasons why they were selected. It was essential for me and the Human Research Ethics Committee that students were informed participants. I outlined the strenuous efforts I made to ensure rigour of this research and the maintenance of ethical processes. The participants who were interviewed were closely involved with this study. Furthermore, through the process of member checking, they remained involved over several years as their stories emerged on paper. Their feedback was crucial to the integrity of this work.

The following chapters present the findings from students' reflection papers, focus groups and interviews. Chapter 6 contains a sample of the rich descriptive stories that emerged from the face-to-face interviews.

CHAPTER 5 – SIGNIFICANT ISSUES THAT STUDENTS BROUGHT TO THE SEXOLOGY CLASS

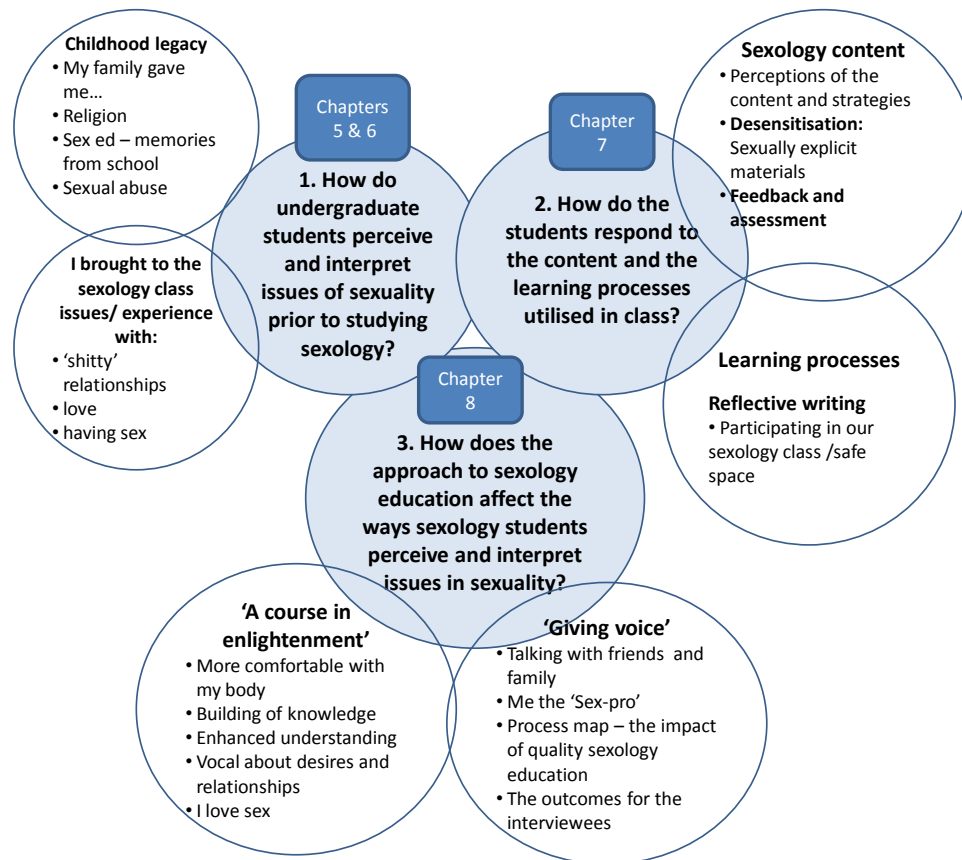
CHAPTER OVERVIEW

In Chapter 3, the literature expanded upon the key issues and concerns raised by the participants in this study. In Australian society, sexuality is seen as problematic in a number of ways. The literature review revealed that young people gain many overt and covert messages about sexuality from multiple sources. The most significant sources are: parents and other family members; religion; school-based sexuality education; the media; and relationships, both rewarding and dysfunctional. Participants in this study revealed how sexuality sits in their lives. When ‘ordinary’ people are asked to talk of their experience of learning about sexuality, they generally speak of the problematic experiences, and negative messages about themselves as sexual beings. This chapter explores the learning students brought to the sexology class. These issues are also reinforced with five case studies in the following chapter.

I investigated the way my students perceive and interpret issues of sexuality. In addition, I collected data about how the instructional and learning strategies incorporated into the sexology class affected the way the students perceive and interpret these issues. The following four chapters are dedicated to exploring the themes that emerged from more than 600 reflection papers (157 students each writing four papers), class discussions/ focus groups and 22 interviews. Detailed descriptive information is presented and analysed in the chapters -Chapter 5 and 6 – Research question 1; Chapter 7 – Research question 2; and Chapter 8 – Research question 3.

After analysing the diverse points of view from participants, I made use of Spradley’s system of categorising themes and subthemes. These points of commonality between participants are linked to the three research questions as shown in Map 1.

Map 1. Links between the three research questions and the themes and subthemes.



The next two chapters examine the first research question - **How do undergraduate students perceive and interpret issues in sexuality prior to studying sexology?** This question relates to the early messages participants received in their childhood and their experiences and understanding of sexuality prior to entering the sexology class. The themes and subthemes that emerged included:

'My childhood legacy'

- My family gave me ...
- Religion
- Sex ed – memories from school
- Sexual abuse (see Chapter 6 for two stories (Natasha and Amy) that relate to this subtheme)

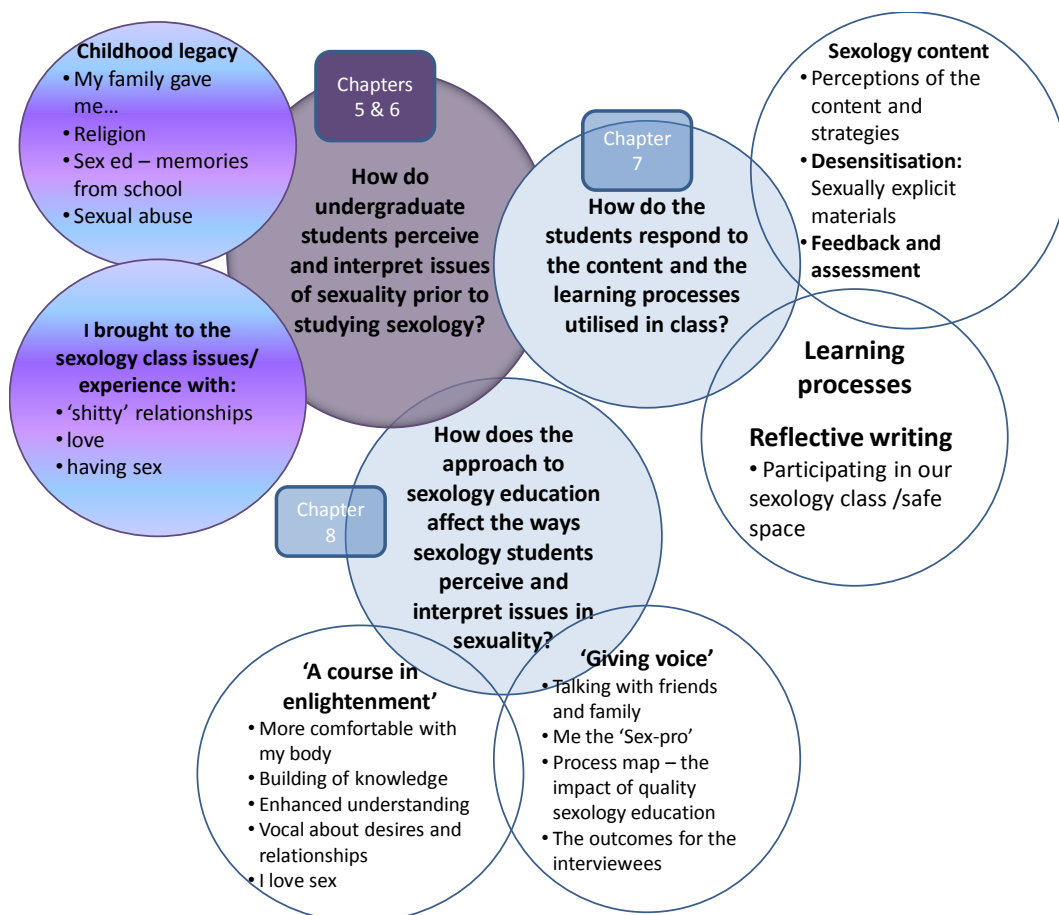
'Before the class'

- 'Shitty' relationships
- Love
- Having sex

- Sex work (see Chapter 6 for Amy's story that specifically relates to this subtheme)

The majority of these subthemes are explored in this chapter. The next chapter builds on specific subthemes (such as sexual abuse, 'shitty' relationships and sex work) and introduces the reader to five unique stories with the additional subthemes of experiencing termination, learning about being male, and sexuality and the cultural gap. These rich, descriptive stories add another dimension to the first research question.

Map 2. Themes and subthemes of Chapters 5 and 6.



‘I WAS BAD AND WHAT I WAS DOING WAS BAD AND I WAS GOING TO GET INTO TROUBLE’: THE LEGACY OF CHILDHOOD MESSAGES ABOUT SEXUALITY

The issues that are revealed in the following section have had a major impact on students’ sexuality prior to engaging in the sexology class. The primary messages students absorbed were from their family of origin and exposure to their family’s religion. In addition, sexuality education in schools; and sexual abuse impacted on students’ experiences and ideas about their sexuality.

As participants entered relationships and became sexually active these new experiences continued to inform their perceptions about sexuality. It is these perceptions that students brought to the sexology class. Other experiences such as experiencing their first love; involvement in ‘shitty’ relationships; exposure to pornography; losing their virginity and ‘having sex’; and involvement in sex work, also shaped their awareness and perception of their own and other’s sexuality.

The overall effect of these messages was strongly felt by many participants. The following accounts reveal, for a significant number of people, that certain issues were a key feature of their developing sexuality. These experiences are also explored in the following chapter – Extraordinary stories from ‘everyday’ students.

Family and religion

About a third of the participants were deeply affected by the part that religion played in their lives as children and young adults. Many spoke of the strong influence of their family’s religious views. Lucy, a 20-year-old said her Afrikaans background was ‘very, very strict’ and Afrikaaners have ‘a lot more orthodox views and opinions than Australians’. She gave the example of her parents’ conservative views of same-sex relationships - they are ‘a lot less understanding of homosexual people’. Despite their conservative views, both parents were open and interested in hearing about the sexology class. Her father was especially curious about what she learned in sexology.

He is very curious about gay culture for some reason – it is very strange. He is so averse to it but he asks me all these questions like ‘What are they doing and how does it work?’ I have no idea why he is so interested and don’t want to know. (Laughing) I don’t know if he is fostering some gay tendencies...Just weird people and we always think we are surprised my brother and I turned out so normal with parents like them... (Lucy)

Lucy’s parents, despite their religious views speak openly about sex with Lucy.

The Afrikaans [sic] are conservative... Despite this upbringing, I think I am a really sexually open person and with all my acquaintances nothing bothers me. I can talk about anything. Which is weird because my parents are strong Christians yet both my parents are very open with their sex life...They were very open especially about **their** sex life. I know they have a very healthy sex life...Willing to share that and more! ...When you say you have strong Christian parents, people assume they are really frigid or something but they are not at all. (Lucy)

Lucy’s parents, on the one hand, hold conservative views about certain topics, such as same-sex relationships and believe these relationships are ‘against God’s wishes’. On the other hand they take delight in conversations about sexuality and speak openly about their own sex lives with their daughter. Lucy is open-minded about sex and unlike her parents, celebrates sexual diversity. Both she and her parents found the unit ‘fascinating’.

Religion is particularly significant for Lucy’s family and there were frequent interactions about the topic in their household. For Lucy, her religious beliefs seem to sit comfortably with her attitudes towards sexuality.

Like Lucy, Steve’s parents are South African and attend an Afrikaans church in Australia. Steve’s parents divorced when he was young and he moved, with his mother to New Zealand and finally to Western Australia. Steve is currently studying psychology, and intends to work as a sports psychologist on completion of his studies. He chose sexology to ‘help him grow up’. As a 19-year-old, he realised he had ‘so much to learn about sex and relationships’ and ‘get over all the stuff the church and my mum filled me with’.

I grew up with nothing at all about sex but abstinence. The first time Mum found out about me making out with a girl she was pretty

angry...The next morning she went off and said, 'I was against religion and the word of God'. That was when I was about 15. I was over going to church. Told me, 'I was bad and what I was doing was bad and I was going to get into trouble'. Mum would get really angry and complain that, 'I was setting a really bad example for my sister' and 'You can't bring girls home. You can't do this until you're married.' ...She knew what was going on and she didn't want my sister to find out. (Steve)

Steve's mother has strong views about how Steve should behave toward women and she is concerned that Steve's sexual liaisons will 'land him in trouble'. Her negative views about sexuality haunted Steve. 'Sex is bad, bad bad!' appears to be her main message to her son. Her main concern is that he will become a father at a young age. She is unhappy that he shows no regard for her views by blatantly flaunting his sexual endeavours and entertaining young women in his bedroom. After the age of 15, Steve ignored his mother's requests for abstinence and rejected the notion of attending church.

Jacob, born in Australia, was an older student in his mid 30's. A psychology student, Jacob enrolled in sexology to help him feel more comfortable about sexuality. He wrote: 'My point is that I worried too much about sex, about being a man, fitting in, and will this person like me, accept me and so on'. The information in the unit helped me relax about sex generally'. Up to the age of 15, Jacob, along with his family, attended a Catholic church. He spoke and wrote of the effect on him of his parents' experiences with the church.

My folks were pretty good. At 15/16 (years old), they said, 'Come along if you want'. They left it up to me...Thankfully I didn't stay on with that so I didn't really have all the Catholic bullshit ground into me. So the religion thing, for me is not a problem, like if you meet some people they have the Catholic guilt complex, 'I am going to hell', 'I am no good'. I don't have that. For me, religion is more a problem from the point of view for what they stand for. (Jacob)

In his 3rd reflection paper Jacob wrote: Sex would have to be **the** most normal behaviour of all but has been twisted into something bad by the church. Sex is then kept under the table, people do not get taught about it and when they then experiment with it they are bound to run into trouble, confirming the idea that sex is a bad thing. I guess sex is a powerful force that all people are subject to; if you can control that you can control everyone. I do not consider myself Catholic, never did but I have been affected by proxy through my parents who were abused by this insidious system. (Jacob)

He recognised that the negative messages passed on by his parents about their experiences within the Catholic church, contributed to his anxieties about sexuality. He yearned to feel more relaxed in regards to his sexuality.

Ava is 20-years old; her father is Episcopalian and her mother is Catholic. 'I didn't like any of it – too restrictive.' She went to a Catholic school for 9 years and then finished her schooling at a public school. She is not certain, but thinks her mother still takes her little sisters to church once a month. 'We all have to go on Christmas and Easter and I do it to humour my mother'. Although she is not interested in the Catholic religion, she hasn't communicated this to her mother. 'She would be a little hurt and she has spent all this time taking us to church'. She reflected about religion and the USA.

Where I come from it is a status thing too and it is evil, yes evil. They are crazy. Absolutely insane and I have never seen a group of people behave in such a way in the name of God...A lot of time they take it to extremes and make it absurd because no one can follow every religious law cos it is just not human. Like every time I look at porn, you make me think I will go to hell and die in a firey pit! Oh really! Do I have to have that hanging over my head every time? Come on! (Ava)

Although Ava had little positive to say about her experiences at Catholic schools, interestingly, she plans to reassociate with another Christian church and introduce her children to a non-Catholic religion. She thinks, 'it is good to have a higher purpose and spirituality and morals and values and that is what I would want to teach my kids. Religion is a good way of doing that'.

Ella, a mature-age student and mother of two, travelled from Zimbabwe to study social work. Her family has an Adventist background and her husband 'came from a Catholic family but now we are more Adventist'. Ella phoned her husband daily and he expressed his anxiety about Ella watching the desensitisation film show. 'No! No! No! God said sex is wrong'. I said 'No! No! No its not!' (laughing).

In her first reflection paper Ella wrote: There are some activities that are characterised as taboos in some cultures and especially in my culture.

Sexual education is taken as a private issue and cannot be discussed openly, therefore, watching films like the desensitisation is something that is perceived as UNGODLY. I found myself in a controversial sense watching the film, another part of me was enjoying it and on the other hand, my instincts were telling me, some practices are morally unacceptable 'according to my religion and culture.' Practices like gay/lesbian relationships are not so common in Africa and it is illegal in Zimbabwe in particular...I was socialised that anything to do with gay/lesbian relationships is an abomination against God. (Ella)

During her stay in Western Australia, Ella was attending a 'local Adventist church'. She realised that Western Australians who attended her church 'tolerate more things and at my Adventist church here I have never heard them criticising things here, sex and things'. Through the course of the semester, she questioned her previous perceptions about sexuality and was challenged by the content, including the celebration of sexual diversity.

But back there (in Zimbabwe) I have heard them preaching, 'That is wrong, this is wrong - about gay and lesbians. Sex is only intercourse and anything else is wrong'. And in the bible you won't find anything that says you have to do it this way. We were brought up to think, 'Everything is wrong!' So shame and more shame. Even a thing like oral sex, 'Ooooh that is wrong'. Even the way of dressing was all wrong and things like, 'Females don't wear trousers, that is not good, not right'. I am appreciating different things now. Some things I still believe but at least I have that tolerance now. My eyes have been opened and that is a good thing. (Ella)

Experiencing the content of the sexology unit, Ella questioned previously held worldviews and especially the views of her parents, husband and the Adventist church in Zimbabwe. Her church said that anything, other than intercourse between married couples, was wrong. These negative messages about sex had left Ella feeling ashamed and inhibited.

Twenty-year-old Sarah was born in the Philippines and also had 'strict parents who are Catholic'.

My cousins would go and talk to my parents and tell them, you know you are in Australia now and it's different. As I get older they are less strict and in ways, like they let me go out and stuff but they are still not accepting with ... the (quietly) sexuality. They didn't talk about anything. Noooooooooo nothing except my mother, she told me that I could get pregnant now. I didn't actually know the concept of how or what it actually is or anything about sex cos she never talked to me about that.

So it was hard...in high school, we had sex education so that's how I know about that...I was already at that point where I didn't agree with what I grew up in, my family but it (the sexology class) reinforced it and I realised there are two sides ... their beliefs are different and it's really not wrong... I always had that guilt about sex but that guilt is not as much there but, it's weird, there's still a bit of it. (Sarah)

Sarah acquired very little overt information about sex from her parents. Subtly, she did pick up that her parents have very different views from other Australian/Pilipino relatives and Australians in general. Her parents found it difficult to talk about sexuality and this embarrassment and guilt were passed on to Sarah.

Rachel, who grew up in Pakistan then moved to England and America, also has parents and an extended family who are 'still very, very, very traditional even with the Western influences...Don't get me wrong I am still very traditional still. Those values I learned from my Muslim faith are more important than anything really'. Her upbringing has been about 'no kind of sexual anything until you get married'. Rachel believed that, 'It's not as bad as some, I have never been circumcised or any of that stuff that we talked about in our class. But it is like 'don't talk about it, don't do ANYthing until you are married'. Both her parents are doctors and Rachel acknowledges that they are 'a little bit more open than most Pakistani parents but I grew up in quite a conservative Muslim home'.

I have experienced both eastern and western influence. The importance of both my religion and my family is a difficult concept for people in western societies. I am always going to have my family with me and even though they would not make me marry someone I don't want but they would have some say in who I end up with. And others like grandparents and aunts and uncles all that mess...They can tell me 'No I can't marry this person' and then what would I do? Run off with that person. Well that's not something I can think about... I would like my children to be Muslims because it has been good for me and I love my religion despite the media bashing it constantly gets. The things that the media tell you are wrong. I have read the Koran three times over and nowhere does it say to take a life is correct. You know, religious values are primarily the same in every religion and something that is unique to Islam is about alcohol and drugs and abstinence. Muslim women are always respected in the Koran and that is why you see Muslim women with the scarfs that's because they are supposed to have a higher standing and that is something that is important to me. The Koran is

also against indecent exposure and you can't wear a bikini. Well it is not like I can't wear a bikini - it is that I don't want to expose myself and these things are important. (Rachel)

Rachel's parents have financed her trip from the USA to WA to increase her chance of following in their footsteps and becoming a doctor. Unexpectedly, early in her international study exchange, 21-year-old Rachel met her first boyfriend, her 'soul mate', Tom, a young English man, who was also staying in student accommodation and studying at Curtin University. This new relationship provided Rachel with much joy but many dilemmas.

He is atheist...We would spend hours and hours talking about philosophy and religion about soul and spirit. I know his perspective and he knows I am very religious and he has been really good about it...To make things even more complicated than they are anyway, I am Muslim and I can't drink and despise alcohol and the smell of alcohol. He is a viticulturalist, studying winemaking and me being a Muslim!!! (Rachel)

Rachel and her family expected that, in the future, Rachel would marry 'a good Muslim boy'. Tom, an atheist and a lover of wine, was very different from their 'ideal choice'. Four months prior to the interview and corresponding to the time Rachel was attending the sexology class, Rachel and Tom conversed at length about life, love and religion.

For Tama, born in northern Sri Lanka and a Hindu, and Rachel, a Muslim, their valued cultural/religious beliefs underpin their lives, for example, in their choice of prospective partners.

Sex hasn't come into my relationships yet. I went out with one Indian boy who was a friend but we didn't kiss. I got shivers sitting next to him. My brother comes out with me, my family insist on that. My Aussie friends think that's funny but they like my brother and we feel safer. We talked today about family values and I know that sex before marriage is not something my family would approve of. They and I think I will marry a Hindu man. I want to be the best person going into a marriage and being Hindu I try to be my best and respect myself. Safer too. I shudder when I remember those STI horrible pictures. (Tama)

Tama and Rachel cannot imagine marrying a person who isn't a 'believer'. Both want children and see children as an integral part of a marriage.

Regardless of their type of religion, the early messages some students received about sexuality stay with them and continue to guide their thinking.

For some, maintaining a monogamous relationship is crucial. Some go further than monogamy and state the importance of sex within marriage. Three students valued the respectful way sexuality is dealt with in their religion, such as talking privately about sexual matters with their partners.

I grew up in a Christian homeI understand that I may sound a bit old-fashion in my beliefs but I respect those who vary in their beliefs and if they would like to pleasure themselves or have interactions with the same-sex or multiple people then that is their preferences... I am all for having sex when I am married and I am sure it will be wonderful but as I said before it will be something private for my husband and I to enjoy, not for others' viewing pleasure. (#22F, 208, 1)

My sexuality has always been something I kept under wraps. I was raised to believe sex was between a married man and woman. (#14M, 108, 4)

It is still taboo to talk about sex and any sexual-related issues in Muslim world. I am well aware that no-one can change that...it is a good way to keep ourselves grounded but that does not stop me from being myself. (#24M, 209, 1)

For many students, exposure to the content in the sexology unit conflicted strongly with their religious views. Fewer students stated that religion was not as much an issue for them growing up even though their parents were religious.

I wasn't used to saying lots of stuff and my parents never were that open to it. They did give me information like sex and condoms and that sort of thing, but nothing in depth about all types of sexuality so that was new. The message my parents gave was, 'If you do it be careful!' My mum is a minister but she's not that strict about it – she's kind of laid back about that sort of stuff. She just laughed when I said I was doing sexology - it wasn't a big deal and it was understood that I would do some different things here in Australia. (Kevin)

Although Kevin's mother has a religious background, Kevin felt unconstrained by this, especially whilst on an international exchange from Chicago. He sought his mother's reaction to his sexology studies and appeared pleased that his mother was supportive. Growing up, there were infrequent conversations about sex, but, the topic of sex was not taboo. Kevin believed his parents gave realistic messages, albeit limited, that encouraged safer sex. Later in the conversation, Kevin acknowledged that he was the one that did not want to talk about sex with his parents.

Winston, like Kevin, has experienced that the links between families and religion being non-issues or 'grey areas'.

My family are not very religious. Culturally we are Christians least on my mom's side. My dad is Muslim, well he is not Muslim because he rejected that with the whole Iranian revolution but that's another story. Culturally Iranian, but he is very progressive- very liberal but some traditional hangovers! Like I once said to my parents, 'Hey would you guys still love me if I was gay?' and they were like, 'Yekes! Oh no! Don't even say it. We'll have to cross that bridge when we come to it!' They were not amused at all. It would be upsetting to him but they would get over it I think. We do Christmas and stuff like that. My mum is spiritual and my step dad – well his dad was a minister and I think he believes in God but he doesn't mention it. We aren't really religious. Once in a while on Christmas we were forced to go but that's about it. Personally, I identify as an atheist. I don't think my dad thinks of himself as Muslim because of the Islamic Republic. My stepmum I don't know, maybe she doesn't do it because my dad isn't religious. I think my brother believes in God but I am not really sure. It is all sort of a grey area. (Winston)

Winston, like many students, has grown up in a blended family. Added to this complexity are the various cultural and religious views held by different members of his family. Regardless of the variety of views, Winston feels his parents (all 4) would continue to embrace him irrespective of his sexual preferences or practices. In addition, he spoke in glowing terms about them as 'good and encouraging' and doesn't appear to be constrained by his family's religious background.

Twenty-year-old Jamie is 'openly gay'. Although Jamie experienced his parents as 'great' and supportive, others, he felt, were not so fortunate.

I don't have any religion and my parents aren't really into anything strong. They decided we could decide what we want to do. I don't really believe in any religion although I believe in a higher power. My little sister goes to church with her best friend and she has organised bands and stuff and is quite involved. My sister doesn't have any problem with me being gay at all. Her best friend, who I actually think likes my sister and her have had a lesbian experience together, cos she is a bit like that. Well my sister's best friend's older brother has recently told his family, 'I think I am gay.' And they went, 'Oh, no you're not!' They are

quite Christian so they went out and bought him a book on how to fix yourself and they wouldn't accept the way he was. So to calm his parents he lied and said, 'Oh I am not gay anymore. The book has helped me. I've got a girlfriend now. I was confused. I am into guy's bodies but not into guys' personalities'. I think it is so sad. I feel so sorry for him. I can't imagine what it would be like to not have your family accept who you are. (Jamie)

Jamie recognised that religious views, especially those of parents, can significantly affect the way a person is perceived and acts. Jamie's friend felt the need to deny his sexuality to his parents and lied to alleviate their concerns.

Schools and sexuality education

Students complained about school campaigns of fear, full of negative misinformation along with discriminatory comments, especially about same-sex relationships.

I went to a Catholic girls' school, 'It was so bad!' Jade wrote, A very interesting topic raised was within the 'Genesis' section of the desensitisation film, God created man and women, with different body parts, however these characters were not allowed to make use of them. This highlights the strange message taught repetitiously as we grow, through church and school, even though parents. I went to a Catholic primary and high school and the topic of sex and sexuality was not mentioned. The only sex education received in high school was from an anatomical perspective. The messages of abstinence until marriage was taught in religion class, and no further guidance about sexuality was offered, let alone the theme of homosexuality displayed in Nik and Jon (a section of the desensitisation film showing 2 men in relationship). I remember in year 11, one student made a comment that she was attracted to females, the following day she was called into the principal's office and threatened with expulsion. This idea of not appreciating body parts, even looking down on others who have a different sexuality is wrong. While these people continue to honour all creations from God, while rejecting sexuality amongst individuals - they are in clear contradiction, as they reject God's gift of individuality. (Jade)

Emma attended various Catholic schools in Perth. She recounted a story of her year 5 primary school teacher being 'beetroot red and so embarrassed' about talking about puberty. She admired the teacher for continuing even though it was obvious to her, as a 10-year-old, that the teacher was really struggling. Sexuality education at her high school was limited and ...

What we did was hopeless, really hopeless. A joke really! They showed us awful films and had pictures of babies (after abortions)...The message was clear – have sex and go to hell, or get pregnant and go to hell. I didn't take it seriously – I don't think others did either – it was a joke. I can't believe they're so out of touch with what's really happening. But then some of that Catholic guilt maybe has stuck. I felt embarrassed to think about buying a vibrator or other sex toys but I loved that (sexology) class when they were all passed around. (Emma)

Another student, in her first reflection paper, wrote:

It was like acid. Going to a Catholic school ate away at any positive thoughts I had about having sex and being sexual. (#15, 209, 1)

Li Ting and April also spoke of their time at religious schools. According to Li Ting, sexuality education at her Singapore school was confined to a very narrow piece of biologically-based information and she craved knowledge about sexuality, especially safe sex.

I went to a Catholic school in Singapore and they told us nothing. I didn't plan to be sexually active and they told us nothing about condoms. They only told us how to put a pad on underwear and that is all. ...I got caught with my skirt hitched up above my knee and a nun gave me and my friend a real telling off calling us 'sluts'. She told us that looking like that we would be going to hell and getting pregnant. She was right! So many girls got pregnant at our all girls' school – not because we were sluts but because the school gave us no sex ed. It's a disgrace that Catholic schools are still operating in the same way 20 years on. (Li Ting)

April, a 21-year-old was studying psychology. Since her early teens she visioned being a sex therapist. The following incident was the catalyst for her career choice:

Going to the girls' school (private Anglican) definitely opened my eyes. There was a lesbian couple and they kissed and touched on the school ground. The school actually banned those year 11 girls going to the ball together that year. I really hated the fact that they did that - a lot of us did. A lot of different people influenced me, like an uncle that is gay, and I believe people should be free to be who they want to be. (April)

Ava, as mentioned earlier, was a 20-year-old student on exchange from the USA. When she was six years old her 'teacher looked her dead in the eye' and said 'You are going to go to hell and going to die in fire because you're not Catholic'. She spoke about the many negative messages she received.

Sexuality is wrong, premarital sex is wrong, tampons are wrong - come on really! I love tampons. (laughing) Crazy stuff and very restrictive like not being allowed to make up or wear nail polish or more than one set of

ear rings. Obnoxious things when you are 13 you want to experiment with – just be quiet and pray! (Ava)

As a result of her experiences in this school system, Ava held strong views about the importance of sexuality education and the effect of this ‘warped’ education on her own development as a sexual being. She wrote:

It is very important to view and speak about sex in positive terms. Growing up in a Catholic school in the US gave me a very warped perception of sexuality. We were taught about sexuality in terms of marriage and reproduction only, and even then it was also expressed as dirty and undesirable. It took me a while to view sex as positive and it only happened when I rebuffed my religion. (Ava)

A small proportion of students communicated positively about sexuality education at their school. These students had all attended secondary school in the past few years. Two wrote:

I went to D.. Senior High School and I had some great health teachers who let us talk honestly about sex and ask any questions. Without that I would have known nothing. (#23, 209, 3)

Our school [government senior high school in eastern suburbs] had students from around the world and all ages. Sexuality was discussed quite openly in many classes like drama and health...Two gay couples went to the school ball and we knew quite a few teachers were gay. (#23, 209, 3)

Whilst a limited number of students had positive experiences of sexuality education, this subject, especially at religious schools, appeared to have little benefit for those participants. It was something to be endured, ridiculed, ignored or rebuffed. Students were crying out for relevant content that affirms diversity and discusses ‘real relationship stuff’. Instead many schools chose to ‘stay in the safe zone’ and ignore the psychosocial aspects of relationships such as emotions and enhancing intimacy.

SUMMARY

Many participants spoke about the shame and guilt they felt about sexual experimentation. Positive information from sexuality education in schools was rarely reported. Instead, the messages received appear to be fear-inducing

such as 'going to hell', 'getting pregnant' and bringing shame on the family. The limited sexuality education they did receive from their schooling was biologically focused with 'don't do it' messages. Many perceived these 'abstinence only' messages as irrelevant.

The majority of the participants were given extremely negative messages about sexuality from many sources. In their families, the silence about sexuality was palpable and the implied negative messages left an indelible mark. Some parents shared their fears and anxieties, especially with their daughters, about things such as pregnancy and 'out-of-control boys'. Only a small number of students spoke of their parents talking openly to them about sexuality. Those that did implied that their parents remain valuable allies in the quest to learn more about their sexuality.

As the young people in the study experienced their first relationships they learnt a lot. 'Broken hearts and broken promises' was a common theme. For most, 'fumblings' and embarrassment in their first sexual encounters with another person, was the norm. 'Fumblings' because of lack of awareness about their bodies and emotions, and limited skills to communicate effectively about their needs and desires. Sadly for some, their first sexual experiences were marred by trauma and abuse. Incidences of incest and rape were disclosed by 28 students (out of a total of 157 students). Clearly this is a highly problematic experience and may, in part, be a consequence of the lack of comprehensive sexuality education. That a significant number of students disclosed their very personal experiences of sexual abuse and trauma signifies the level of trust and the degree of safety felt by the sexology students. The stories in the following chapter will continue to build on these themes.

CHAPTER 6 – EXTRAORDINARY STORIES FROM 'EVERYDAY' STUDENTS

INTRODUCTION

The people in this study are, in many respects, typical of people you might meet in any sphere of modern, mainstream Australian society. On the surface there is little or no indication that many of them have suffered deep trauma or have suffered adverse experiences related to their sexuality that have profoundly affected their lives. Issues raised in these case studies which have been distilled from 157 students over 5 semesters are serious and profound. This section builds on the previous chapter and adds depth to the first research question - ***How do undergraduate students perceive and interpret issues of sexuality prior to studying sexology?*** What issues and understanding did they bring to the sexology classroom?

The previous chapter explored themes and subthemes in students' experiences of sexuality prior to entering the class. This chapter is dedicated to adding depth to this research question by exploring stories from five students. The narratives are rich in content and meaning and examine how these experiences left an imprint on the core being of each person.

As the five narratives indicate, beneath the surface of their apparently 'ordinary', everyday lives lay unique stories, in relation to their sexuality, that continued to affect them. Some are still seeking resolution. For others it has directed their career choices and the ways they respond to issues of sexuality.

PARTICIPANTS' STORIES: 'NORMALITY', SEXUAL ASSAULT AND THE CULTURAL DIVIDE

Sexual assault and survival

Natasha, a 21-year-old teaching student, came to the sexology class 'because I want to be a teacher that kids can approach and talk about their problems with'. Weeks into the class she found herself remembering a frightening attack she had endured as a young teenager. Natasha wrote:

The violent incident happened when I was 13. For more than 7 years the memory was buried deep. Over the past few weeks it has bubbled up – first I had nightmares and then I remembered the rape. It was like a short film that was spliced – I was getting bits – the end, the middle and then it all came together. The sexology class has triggered this and the nightmares. It has been an excruciatingly painful time for me ... and also a time of growth and cleansing'.

Natasha's 'first experience of sex wasn't good'. It was a warm March day in Wagga, NSW in 2003. She was '13 and a ¼' and enjoying the pool outing. Her school, Wagga East Technical School, sometimes allowed 'school swimming afternoons' where a 'whole mob of us went to the large pool about 1 km from the school'. On this hot day, all the form 2 and 3 students were crowded in the pool – 'hundreds of them – a complete free-for-all'. Natasha was happy to be out of school because she loved swimming, playing with her friends, and diving around like a dolphin. But this outing ended badly.

Tears and anger as I am reminded. Wanting to kick and scream at those bastards that took MY innocence away. I am a survivor but it has taken its toll. Did they not see a young girl in pain? A young girl close to drowning. A young beautiful innocent girl having fun and harming no one – why me? Did they not see my eyes reacting to their degrading touch? Maybe I hid that and all they saw were fierce eyes and a girl fighting for her life. They wanted to win/to degrade and beat me into submission. They were laughing at me as I gasped for breath. It was so close to being too much and I was ready to give up.'

I asked Natasha if she was OK to continue talking about the assault. She nodded, the words tumbled out and tears rolled down her face.

They didn't break my hips but they ripped me apart in other ways. The punches, the penetration and piercing pain. I moved the pain. Wow I

just realised how/ when I learnt to do that. I did that to survive – to not feel them penetrating me, fucking violating me. Humiliating me. My breast throbbed – I could feel where the shithead in front of me – pinning me against the wall- punched my breast repeatedly – especially when I kicked or hit or bit. I was feeling two of them thrusting my face under the water into his dick. ‘Suck him, suck him!’, his two mates yelled. And over the noise of the pool no one heard. I just fought and kicked even more and they helped themselves to every part of my body. One of them was in front of me and the others either side of me pushing me into the pool wall holding my arms and legs and, when I broke a leg or arm free I kicked or hit or scratched them but that got them going more – they punched me harder and squeezed my arms so tight – I was terrified and getting weaker and weaker. My new halter neck bikini my mum had made, had been violated – they ripped off my top but the neck strap held. Exposing me – I couldn’t cover myself cos they had my arms spread wide. God I hated that – being on display – so embarrassing... and I just couldn’t fight them off – thank god in another way for being in the water – couldn’t get their dicks deep inside me so used their fingers and fists instead but at least the water covered me.

Natasha was talking through clenched teeth and she was shaking. Her hands were a tight ball in her lap. I sat with her, tears streaming down my face too.

Natasha continued after drinking half a bottle of water.

I wasn’t a soul to them – just treated me like a punching bag, a toy with no feelings. I hope they feel shame. I hope they wake up at night and struggle with what they did to me. I hope they see their daughters the same age as me and cry as they are reminded about what they did. They could track me down and say sorry but I don’t ever want to see them again. They disgust me and are poor examples of maleness. I sometimes give myself a hard time for not pursuing them – charging them.

I asked Natasha who else may have seen the assault.

Teachers – where were they? Four or five of them sitting in a mob talking/ laughing at the pool – oblivious to the violence happening around them. And even if they did know – doubt if anything would have happened. Violence and verbal shit all around us at that school. Fights were a daily occurrence and you took your life in your hands to go into the girls’ toilets. There was always someone waiting to hurt you.

Natasha’s face softened as she told of her ‘rescuer’.

Mark, my rescuer - and still my friend - saved my life. He risked being beaten by standing up to them. I saw a flash over my head – I had almost given up – lost track of whether I was under water and when I could take a breath. I had no more fight in me. Then Mark bombed the

guy in front of me – the one doing the most degrading things to me while his gutless mates pinned me into the pool wall down the deepest end of the pool. The shithead in front of me got pushed back and he let go of me – he was under water after Mark landed on him. I saw Mark's eyes – his face – fuck he looked mean – and the other two shitheads pinning me, let go – not at first but then they saw him swimming towards them – they let me go and they took off. I didn't look at Mark or say anything. I staggered up the metal pool stairs and into the toilet/shower block. Pulled up my bikini bottom and covered my small breasts – one of my bikini top straps had been torn off.

They ripped me apart and I was bleeding – anus and vagina. Red swelling – bruises not showing yet. I cried quietly curled up in foetal position rocking gently on the toilet with no seat in that concrete shower block. Stayed there hiding until the female teacher blew the whistle and we all had to be ready to walk back to school. Struggled to walk and pretend nothing had happened. Not wanting them to see that they had won. How did I do that? Cut off from that pain, feeling such shame and humiliation – one foot in front of the other, I can still remember that long hot walk back to school. Moving with the mob but not hearing or talking to anyone. I couldn't speak and then had to survive the rest of the afternoon at school - numb and broken and still bleeding - just weeping by that stage. I couldn't feel my body from my waist down, my breast throbbed and I hurt to breathe. I couldn't cry at school. I wouldn't cry at school – had to keep it a secret. The bell rang – one foot in front of the other for the big walk home.

Natasha paused and I asked if she had shared her awful experience with anyone else at the time.

Mark rode his bike alongside me up the hill. He asked if I wanted him to walk all the way home with me. I shook my head - no. I wanted to be on my own and just get home to hide. Did he know why I wasn't talking? How much did he know? Couldn't look at him cos he would see into my eyes. He knew pain and beatings in his life.

I went into the bedroom I shared with my sister and under the covers. Stayed there till dark and Mum brought me tomato soup. I heard my sister saying – worrying about me, caring about me, 'What's wrong?' I didn't answer. She didn't guess and I wouldn't talk. I stayed under the covers till dark.

I asked Natasha how she coped with the sexual assault in the days and weeks after.

After - only remember I blocked it out, didn't talk to anyone about it and avoided that pool. Hate in my eyes when I looked at them. It was sport to them. How could three boys do that? Why would they behave like that? Why me? Why anyone?'

Natasha feels fortunate her family, oblivious of her traumatic experience, moved to Western Australia a few years after the attack. Her next school had a very different culture - 'a more respectful place'.

I couldn't believe it when a boy actually used my name - instead of 'sluthead' or 'mole' or some other abusive term. The first few times I went down stairs at the new school I was looking over my shoulder waiting for someone to push me down – simply because I was a girl. It didn't happen and I was amazed.

Natasha spoke of her reluctance at the time to 'burden others' – especially her family, with the violent assault she had experienced. So strong was this reluctance that she 'kept this secret deep inside', for many years. Recently, however, she shared her story with close friends and her sister. Natasha was also grateful to her 'supportive partner', one of the few people she has 'trusted with the worst of this stuff'.

A few months ago, I went back to Wagga with my partner. We cried together when I talked about what had happened at that pool. He holds me and listens and tells me he loves me because of what I have been through... I felt relieved that the pool was gone and houses covered the site... I wonder if those boys remember what they did. I'll never forget it.

Natasha's story indicates the deep, long-lasting pain experienced by a person who has been sexually assaulted. These breaches of trust have left their scars and she continues to relive those traumatic experiences. These 'nightmares and doubts' have been softened by those people close to her, who listened and affirmed her.

This story highlights the need for comprehensive sexuality education in schools, because of the empowerment, awareness and learning respect for bodily integrity such a programme can bring to students and teachers. This awareness relates both to the crime act of rape and sexual violence and the ability of the victim/survivor to speak to a compassionate person, to consider getting support, and whether to press criminal charges. In a school climate that allowed violence and intimidation, the perpetrators may have been unaware of the impact of their actions and may have seen it as a 'game'. Perhaps these young men might not have been so callous and cruel if they had experienced such a programme and Natasha may have had some

resources (such as a Helpline phone number) to ameliorate the attack. Natasha said she 'valued the opportunity to have a voice and start to heal the festering sore'. What remains is for the perpetrators to be held accountable.

Experiencing termination

Deva was a vibrant woman in her late twenties who was studying social work. Deva left her South West home town and travelled widely. Deva was working in London, in a rut but not ready to come home. As she was holding a globe of the world, she closed her eyes and pointed her finger, it landed on China. She thought, 'Fuck it! I am off, why not!' There was a 'chance meeting with a Chinese girl from an online agency' that specialised in working holidays to China. She had an interview at the Chinese Embassy. Weeks later she had her visa and found herself teaching English in a sprawling, ugly, industrialised city in the north of China.

Life in China was challenging with daily reminders that she was the 'white outsider'

Every day for a year I was stared at, sniggered at and strangers would come up to me and say I am fat. I used public transport and I was the only white person on the bus and it was packed. Like one day, a little bent over grandma came up to me on public transport and obviously wanted to speak to me. The whole bus knew what was going on and what she wanted to say cos she wanted to speak English. She managed to get someone from the back of the bus to get her to me. Now the bus is packed and you can hardly move but she got down to me. She said, 'You're beautiful but you're fat and the only way you are going to get a husband, is to eat less.' So every day I was reminded how big I was. Yes it was a real challenge.

Another experience brought home to Deva that life in China was very different to that in Australia.

When I was living in China and I didn't know the language and I needed help. I couldn't even go and get the contraceptive pill. We had to use condoms. I had a Chinese person to help me but what they prescribe to the women over there is you get one tablet a month that is a mini abortion pill. Can you imagine that you are giving yourself an abortion once a month? And what happens if you are not even pregnant so THAT is your contraceptive? And what happens one day

if you want to have children and you can't? There are little things like that. Dangerous!

After a short relationship with an Irish guy, she discovered she was pregnant.

I couldn't believe I was in this fucking situation. In China, pregnant. Alone. I knew I had to have a termination...I was terrified that the gossips I worked with would find out, but I had to get help. I trusted Rola, my very practical Korean friend. She took me to the local hospital.

Unbelievable! Really fucking unbelievable! Do you have any idea what it's like? What they do in China is line you up like cattle, all in one room. There is a sliding door and the theatre is the other side. Just like cattle waiting for your turn.

I was the only white girl and blonde as well. Bigger than everyone else – size 14! They made me take my pants and undies off. I'm standing there so exposed, trying to cover myself with my hands. Pale, white and transparent. I look different down there. At least they left my woolly jumper on. I was shaking so much from fear and cold. I remember it was almost Christmas and fucking freezing. Minus 40 degrees.

Then an ear piercing scream cut through me. A woman in the theatre next door shrieking through paper thin walls. She couldn't afford to get knocked out. You know to get sedated costs triple as much? And she was screaming so fucking loud. She staggered into the waiting room with blood on her legs and collapsed in front of me. We all had to watch that before we went in.

It was my turn now. The nurse gave me an internal. She was so bloody rough! I yelled! Then I started crying as she put my legs up in the stirrups. Humiliated and degraded! The surgeon was nice - strange really. He knew a little bit of English. 'You have to stop crying because it is dangerous to put you under like that'. The last thing I remember before going under was hearing the nurses laughing among themselves. I woke up sobbing, curled on my side back in the waiting room. More women lined up like cattle. Rola was there. 'It's ok. I am taking you home to my house'.

Deva's harrowing experience of having a termination was further compounded by her isolation in a non-western country as she grappled with the added issues of cultural sensitivities and difference. Deva was confronted by many 'taken-for-granted' factors and attitudes she came across. The circumstances she faced in the Chinese hospital were to her, 'horrific and unbelievable'. She was struck by the lack of basic facilities such as heating and seating, and the memories of her nakedness reminded her of her intense

vulnerability. There was nowhere to hide and no private spaces. Anaesthesia was an 'optional extra' which most Chinese women could not afford. The physical needs were barely attended to, let alone any emotional support or counselling. The experience literally and figuratively stripped her bare and the memories, two years later, remain vivid.

The impact of this experience for Deva has been profound. Her enrolment in social work and sexology was fuelled by a passion to work with women (especially migrant women) to better their lives. The sexology unit has given voice to Deva's experience and a chance to explore how this particular experience has shaped her choices.

I have always wanted to look into the mental health side of things. I want to look into working with refugees and political asylum seekers. I know what it is like to live somewhere and not speak the language. You don't have any rights and you don't know where to ask for help or where to go.

This narrative reminds us of the necessity to respond compassionately and without judgement to all women faced with this traumatic decision to terminate a pregnancy. Termination is a charged issue that requires access to counselling and support. The decision to terminate or not, can be life-changing for the person having to make the choice.

Deva's story shows that even with the best of intentions of 'safer sex', an unwanted pregnancy can happen. Deva experienced the angst of being in a different country with a vastly different medical system, and the additional stress of a different set of cultural values and attitudes about an unwanted pregnancy. Even in Australia where terminations are legal and safe, the experience can be harrowing. Deva felt 'helpless' and 'voiceless' and the termination was 'something that had to be survived'.

Wanting to 'feel normal, to be normal'

Like Deva, Amy wants to make a difference in the lives of women and she believes that her enrolment in psychology has set her on the path to achieve this. Amy, mother of Ben, is in her late twenties. Her life thus far has been

painful and she yearns to 'feel normal, to be normal'. Her mother was a victim of paternal incest. In speaking incessantly about her awful experiences to her young child, she subjected her to a form of parental abuse. Amy was also sexually abused by the same man, her maternal grandfather. Family life was traumatic and unsafe.

I was brought up with a father who had little respect for women and a mother who has been badly abused by men her entire life. My mother made it clear to me from a young age that sex is disgusting. Life is associated with pain and sex is something you just have to silently grit your teeth and put yourself through for men. My mum also made me aware that sex was associated with dirty, disgusting men.

By the age of 8 I began acting 'weird'. I started saying, 'Me and poppy have a secret'. It was a dirty secret.

Unfortunately, many children, such as Amy, are sexually abused and carry their 'dirty secrets' into their adult lives. Although Amy made attempts to tell teachers and family about the abuse, no-one listened or took action. Amy fled the family situation and was on the streets at 14 and soon became involved in the sex industry.

I had nowhere to live, no money and didn't really know how to look after myself. I was attracting men that abused me and treated me like a blow up doll - an object to poke and prod any way they liked with little consideration for my enjoyment. I ended up in the sex industry and stayed for 7 long years. At a young age, I began using drugs/alcohol around 11/12 yrs. I drank and did other drugs frequently. I lived in a miserable fog, a really awful time.

I take full responsibility for making the choice to do sex work and I don't want to be a 'victim'. I am disgusted though that the men who were having sex with me must have realised how young I was and yet there was no-one to help.

Again, Amy found herself in a depressing situation so much so that required 'serious' drug taking to 'numb' her.

When you're plagued by anxiety, depression, work in the sex industry and have to scull straight tequila and have a line of speed the minute you get out of bed to feel 'normal'- you know you're NOT normal!

Amy's story highlights the long term impact of negative childhood experiences. These early experiences shape our understanding and perception of the world, and our sense of self is formed through these life

experiences. If these early experiences are negative, a child will form an adverse understanding of life. Amy's 'warped perceptions' of men and her reduced sense of self made her vulnerable to ongoing hardship both in her work and her adult relationships. She was involved in a series of abusive relationships with men, and only after significant counselling, was able to see that her life could be different. Amy's story highlights the need to show compassion for the young people who enter the sex industry, understand why they choose that industry and why they continue to stay.

Fear of being 'found out'

Will, twenty years old, was from the north west of USA. He came to WA for a semester of 'change – I wanted new experiences and a break from my uni...doing sexology has been liberating'. Will wrote openly in his reflection papers about his sexual experiences and the angst and learning involved:

Learning about sex has been pretty traumatic for me. I know from experience that fear can affect sexual performance because I had trouble getting strong erections. From the summer before fifth grade until the summer before my first year of high school, I experimented sexually with my next door neighbour and best friend, who happened to be a guy.

At the time, I was not privy to the knowledge that it is not unusual for kids around that age to experiment with their own sex. I know two other guys in my class who had experimented with each other through 6th grade. One of them let it slip what they had done and pretty soon the entire grade knew. Almost all of the kids made fun of them, it was a huge running joke, and I also joined in and made fun of them. I know now that I did this to distance myself from the fact that I too had participated, and still was, in a similar act. I did this to shield myself and I definitely didn't want to experience that embarrassment and teasing. That's what would have happened if anyone found out about what I was doing.

As Will entered ninth grade he noticed that his 'erections were becoming less strong...I was scared this was my lot – this was my punishment for playing with my friend.' He talked with his male friend and they agreed 'to abstain from any further sexual engagements. I needed to grow up and start fooling around with girls'. Both he and his mate were 'adamant about the fact that we

'liked girls' and we were not 'homosexuals' we just enjoyed having somebody else provide sexual pleasure'. Will's erection issues continued and the following year he 'gathered the courage' to discuss his concerns with his father. Will wrote:

My dad was supportive and organised for me to get the problem checked out. I went to see two different urologists and underwent testing. I wore a ring around my penis for three nights and this machine recorded the strength of my erections. On another instance something was injected into my penis that was supposed to make it erect but it didn't. The first guy said, 'Nothing physically wrong with you - it is psychological.' I spun out. I went around driving for a few hours. I was very upset. Was no-one going to be able to help me? I definitely cried and was so frustrated. I didn't know what to do.

I talked more to my dad and this was when I prepared myself to speak to a psychologist about the situation. I met with one psychologist during the summer between my sophomore and junior year but got fed up because I felt like I was getting nowhere. At this time I was not confident in my ability to get a firm erection at all. I stayed away any situation in which I may have ended up in an intimate situation with a girl. Or if I allowed myself to get to that point, I would perform sexual acts on girls and would not accept any myself. Once in my freshman year I 'hooked up' with a girl and she performed oral sex on me, I couldn't have a full erection and was embarrassed. This was the experience that led me to keep my pants on for the next couple of years.

Will's sexual concerns continued to build, adding to his sense of hopelessness and shame.

As winter came in my junior year I felt hopeless and even more ashamed about my experiences with my male friend. To top it all off, my mother found out, and then I had to speak with her about seeing a sex therapist. That was an awkward moment in my life. Talking to dad was one thing but it was much harder talking to mom about this. She did reassure me (she is in social work counselling) that it was quite common for boys in their teens to experience a loss of erection. It still felt weird talking to her about erections and things.

At his parents' insistence, Will continued to seek answers. One doctor referred him to a sex therapist, and it was here he finally received the answers and the mentoring he needed.

I went to a second guy (urologist) and he did similar tests and, thankfully, the machine showed that I was having normal erections

while I was sleeping. He recommended I see a sex therapist and he referred me to Dr V. The new therapist, Dr V, didn't beat around the bush and was open to sharing about some of his experiences and learning. He was different and almost at the start he pulled out a personal experience like, 'This woman was trying to touch my penis ...' I thought, 'Wow most therapists don't say that!' He really got to the point.

One of the main things he spoke to me about was being comfortable with a girl to the point where I can be more excited than anxious to engage with her in sexual acts. I saw Dr V for about a year. During that time, I began dating someone and worked through it with her. To this day, I still have some doubts now and again but I know that if I care about someone everything will be just fine.

So it definitely was a humbling experience and gives me a more introspective approach. I know that it has kept me from making some decisions I would regret, like random sexual encounters that I didn't feel confident of, and I appreciate those decisions now. I remember Dr V saying the penis was connected to the heart.

I waited until I met a girl I could slowly feel more comfortable with. I dated a girl in my twelfth year high school and she helped me feel more comfortable. She was 2 years younger so she was more comfortable with me doing things rather than the other way around like... but the second girlfriend was the opposite (laughing). At first I wasn't too comfortable doing things and I was embarrassed about being in that sexual situation with somebody because it had been a while.

Initially, we had awkward interaction because I had to build up my confidence and was trying to tell her why I was acting as I was. I couldn't tell her everything such as what I did with my neighbour. I didn't actually tell her about that because I didn't necessarily trust her reaction. I did talk to her about my anxiousness about getting erections. That was hard enough to do. She said, 'It didn't matter [to her] and we will take it slow'. Taking it slow helped build my confidence. She was very supportive of doing whatever to make sure that I wasn't anxious. She was in tenth grade and I was in twelfth grade. So maybe the fact that I was older made her less anxious and she thought I was more experienced and she had never had a long term serious boyfriend. So she was happy to go slower so it did take the pressure off about getting in relationship and part of it was getting comfortable in a sexual environment.

Will continued to meet and share openly with Dr V and obviously valued his honesty and advice. Over the next few years, as Will's confidence grew, his relationships with a few girlfriends blossomed. He became more relaxed

about his sexual performance and, as trust built, he communicated more openly about erections.

Dr V gave suggestions to try, like if we are lying naked to do that for a while and that would relieve some of the tension and just light touching and not jumping into anything faster. Also to not have the ultimate goal as orgasm just pleasure. Yes that definitely helped and trying new things and becoming comfortable with the person and trust. Yes definitely trust helped and knowing what I shared with her that was between us because I guess with worrying about what happened with my neighbour and that not getting out. In the same way I didn't feel like it was for other people and she felt the same way so we kept sexual things private and kept sexual things between us. I felt comfortable that she wasn't talking with her friends about my lack of confidence.

When we broke up I didn't hook up with lots of girls - maybe one girl in the two year span. I needed to wait to feel comfortable with a girl. I wanted somebody I could trust, not somebody sexually promiscuous or who had lots of sexual experiences before. Maybe I didn't want to be compared but I wanted somebody who I could trust and somebody with a more innocent personality and who is more interested in all of me.

In the new relationship, just before I came here to WA, I needed to work things slowly and the girl had never had a serious boyfriend before. I made sure that we didn't jump in to oral sex or something like that. We enjoyed kissing and touching and she said she was comfortable with that too. Really, I was the one that needed the time to get comfortable too, but she didn't think that because she thought I was a lot more sexually experienced.

After a few months I told her, 'Do you know I am still a virgin?' She was, 'Oh I didn't think that!' I think we were just working through it together. I definitely found that communication helped. We talked about what we did sexually, and what we thought about what we did. Instead of worrying about the fact that I knew that I wouldn't have an enormous erection the first time, I just accepted that was how it was and trust just grew and grew. I knew that it would get better and it did!

Will reflected on the loss of his virginity and how his experience was very different from that of many young men.

I was very happy that that's the experience I had. Dr V talked about how he felt sad for people who got drunk and just had a random one night stand and don't even know the person who they lost their virginity to. So it was great with that girl because, not only did we know each other and were comfortable with each other, it made it so much

better it wasn't a random person over in like 2 secs and you're done. It was nice, very nice. I liked the process and the night together.

Will still regrets that he cannot be 'completely confident with random girls'. There are times when Will thinks 'random hooking up' is something he wants. He wishes he could 'follow through' on this because, at the moment, he doesn't have a girlfriend or partner and he is aware that opportunities to 'hook up abound'. Will said, 'At times I think bugger! I just want to go out and be promiscuous. But I just hold back cos it wouldn't be that enjoyable. For me there would be more stress to it. That's how I am wired'.

Will's ability to speak honestly with his father about his sexual concerns, was not only admirable but vital for him. His parents supported and directed him to appropriate health services. Although it took some investigating, Will finally found a sex therapist he trusted. Dr V was 'approachable and real' and Will spoke at length with me about the value of the mentoring he received.

Will was forthcoming about the struggles he had experienced relating to his sexual performance. Sharing information about his encounters with his young male neighbour continued to be difficult. The fear of humiliation remained – early on, from his school mates and, later, from his girlfriends. He felt validated that my views 'were along the same lines as Dr V's'. Will recognised that he was not the stereotypical young male ready to 'hook up' with a partner at a moment's notice. At times, he yearned for this ability and regretted the lost opportunities. He was circumspect in his choices of girlfriends, being willing to wait for 'the right type of girl' – an undemanding young woman with little or no sexual experience. His apprehension about his sexual performance dissipated as he accepted how 'he was wired'. He saw the wisdom and the positive benefits of not 'aggressively pursuing sex'.

'Having a foot in both camps': Sex and the cultural divide

Vesper was born in India and came to Australia 15 years ago when he was 10. His family are Brahman and 'come from temple families,' meaning his family are responsible for maintaining the Hindu temples, which are run by the priests in his family. He returns to India every few years and, each time,

he travels the four-hour drive from his grandparents' house to the temples. I asked Vesper how being Hindu impacted on sexuality. He spoke with passion, his sense of humour shining through.

Hinduism is more about a value system and choices. It is not ten commandment sort of stuff – lots of grey areas. If you do this, then this (laughing and shaking his head). There are always choices. I am choosing to be way more hard line than my parent. They are more, 'You know we are here now (in Australia)'. They may not find me a wife probably and that is a big difference to how it used to be and probably because I am so naughty as well (laughing). If you drink you are much less likely to find a wife, especially through traditional means because that is not what traditional people are looking for. And others would ask, 'Have you ever had a girlfriend?' Meaning have you had sex! 'Yes!' (laughing) - That is not such a good thing to a traditionalist.

Vesper lives with his parents and a younger sister. Staying with the family until marriage is 'the Indian way'

I like that I live at home. I know the food is great and no rent to pay. All these things are good and there is still that co-dependence with family. It is just part of being family. You can't get away from that. Mum will leave things for me to do that she can reasonably do that herself but she leaves it for me because she knows I am supposed to (laughing). It's the man's job!

As an Indian, new to Australia, he felt like 'a complete freak for a while'. He went from having 'a million friends in India to having no friends' in Australia. This was very painful and difficult for 10 year-old Vesper. In India, Vesper had attended a Hindi school (local language public school) where he did not learn English. One family member left India and then 'like dominoes others followed'. He only began to learn English just prior to coming to Australia.

Everything I did was the wrong way especially in primary school. I was pretty nerdy as well. I was a social outcast because I spent too much time in the library and too much time doing what the teacher might want because that is what you do. (Talking very slowly and looking down) Changing over and making friends was a bit hard to start off with. Luckily, there were a lot of nerds at my school. I spent a lot of time in the library and on computers instead of outside playing games with the jocks. I was naturally put in the nerd slot but I guess everybody is, like when you are popular or not and not that cool.

Throughout primary school and up to the middle of high school, he spent time on his own or with his growing band of male 'geek' friends. Things changed

for him with girls when he realised that his writing skills could woo the girls. 'When you can write well, girls like it. I think in year 10, I started making female friends but I didn't have a girlfriend until nearly the end of year 12.' His first relationship was 'perfect in the beginning' and went on 'forever – 7 years'. She was South African-Indian and in Australia on an overseas visa to study. They met and there were 'fireworks'. Vesper's eyes glazed over as he shared his experience of his first love.

We spoke about being grandparents and could see grandchildren together, you know, that sort of dreaming. It was so obvious that we could never be with anyone else because it was so great. The first time we met we were really crazy and it was at a function for Devali - New Years for Indians. We started talking and walked away from the rest of the group. We talked for two or three hours. It was almost time for the function to finish and there were fireworks and before we knew it we were both undressed, on the grass, watching the fireworks and making out on the grass. It was amazing! That perfect story beginning. She was worried I am never going to call her after that. I got her number and gave her mine. The next day I called her and she said, 'I am surprised you called'. She would take a 40 minute tram ride to come and meet me for 15 minutes. It was pretty crazy.

Vesper's relationship flourished because they lived close by. Even when his girlfriend moved two hours away, the relationship remained strong. For the first year, the relationship was 'passionate' but not sexual. 'Making out' according to Vesper referred to kissing and sexual exploration but not penetrative sex. 'Sex' happened later in their relationship.

I never really thought about it, having sex, until we did it. Up to then we just chose not to and it wasn't really talked about. She said, 'Ok let's do it!' And I was like, 'Ok' and that was just after a year. On long breaks, I used to go and visit. She moved 2 hours away from the city to a university in the country. Her accommodation was the girls' hostel and I wasn't allowed to be there but I got quite good at sneaking in, it wasn't that easy. (Laughing).

With a year of studies still to complete, sadly, Vesper's girlfriend had to return to Africa. Her family could no longer support her studies because her father had lost his job. Vesper was devastated.

I started sending money because I had started working. We stayed in touch with lots of emails and phone calls. Lots of phone calls about \$6000 a year – long phone calls and anxiety stuff if you don't have the

money to call. She would never be able to call because she didn't have the money so she would give me a missed call and I would call back. I remember leaving home one night at midnight and nothing was open so I couldn't get a phone card so I called with the normal phone. I was often getting \$300 phone bills.

Vesper felt a change. A year after his girlfriend returned to South Africa he felt 'there were problems'. It was difficult to keep the relationship going but he struggled on for 3 years. In 'desperation and yearning and with three years of savings', he decided to travel to South Africa.

I had booked the flight and bought the engagement ring and gifts. Two weeks before I was supposed to leave, she told me she has run off from home and she is about to get married. I never figured out when she met the other guy. She was really emotional on the phone and it was hard to speak to her about it. I had been calling her once or twice a week so pretty expensive but she never had the courage to tell me until then. And I was like, 'Oh great! Now I have to cancel my flight'. Yes it was pretty bad at the time. I didn't really believe it at the time because there was complete trust. She never had the courage to tell me it was finished. It was a long time after she met him, so for her it was well and truly over. But for me it was like, 'Help. What the hell!'

Vesper continued to call because he wanted answers. Her husband politely asked him not to call her any more. Vesper was crushed. Rebuilding and trusting has been a difficult and painful process. After the class on relationships, Vesper wrote, 'I don't pin my hope on relationships anymore'.

Although Vesper's first love continued to haunt him, he has had other relationships and he has adopted a 'modern western approach' to his choice of girlfriends.

Most of my girlfriends have had previous boyfriends. I think that is a bit hoi tie toittoi to expect perfection. You should have stayed celibate if you wanted someone who stayed celibate. It is normal and if you are attracted to a person it doesn't matter.

His Indian Hindu background and his parents, however, still strongly influence his decisions about a marriage partner selection.

My parents might try to find me a partner - the traditional way - but I don't see it as a guarantee. The traditional way is through a family discussion. My parents and her parents would have to talk. They (would have to) like each other then they meet the girl and then

discuss (marriage). That's the process and it would be the same for my sister.

I have chosen my previous partners and my parents didn't like it. They didn't approve of some of them. My mum doesn't think it is a good thing to have relationships before marriage so any girl that is willing to have them is not good. My ex - the first one - was a bit nuts and that is why I loved her. The first one would stay for dinner and my mum would grumble about it later. My ex felt a bit uncomfortable that she was being naughty. If it is a fairly short relationship, and I don't think it is going to the marriage stage, then I am not going to introduce them to my family. Very few have met my family.

I asked Vesper if he would consider being with someone who is not Indian. He acknowledged that there had been a 'few girlfriends of different nationalities and colours'. However for Vesper having an Indian girlfriend would be the ideal – 'there is something there for me that clicks'. His mother's views on the subject 'worried him'. His father is 'so laid back he wouldn't care and as long as there is food' (laughing).

Oh yes, my mum would care about my choice of girlfriend. She is like that with other Indian girls too. She is disapproving (long pause). I don't know how to express it. If we are living together (with my family) or visiting (my family) it would be pretty awkward if they couldn't talk. Most of the girls I have dated have similar values so they want that as well- you know, to get along. Family is important and tradition, believing in God whether it be Jesus through Islam or whatever. If you are convinced there is no God then there's no way we can have relationship because it is hard to reconcile my ways of being. And children - that is why you get married. Anyone who chooses not to have kids after they get married, I think, 'Ok to each their own,' but I don't get it. For me I just assume cos it is more like, 'How many kids do you want?' Yes yes, 'Not do you want kids?' They are often asking the same way. Something must be there that matches us up before I even ask about children. It is surprising how common it is though - well not really surprising that people do want to have kids. And for me, no matter where you are from, you must believe in God.

Vesper has experienced a 'broken heart' and carries pain and regrets in relation to the ending of his first long term relationship. He 'carries these scars' and is somewhat despondent about his chances of finding a suitable partner to marry. Vesper seems caught between two cultures – 'a foot in both camps'. On the one hand, he embraces cultural norms attributed to the 'Australian way', for example, he drinks and he has had premarital sex with a number of girlfriends. Conversely, he sees his behaviour as 'being naughty'

and acting like a non-traditional Hindu. Vesper spoke with clarity about his choice of partner. Whilst some factors are essential, such as a willingness to have children and a belief in God, his preference is mainly for a woman with a similar cultural background.

Vesper's parents remind him that 'we live here now', yet, there are many examples that their Indian heritage is powerfully alive. His mother, in particular, plays a strong role in their family. Her likes and dislikes in relation to Vesper's choice of partner were clearly felt, if not always voiced. Vesper's connection with his family is crucial for him so his mother's approval is significant. Without such approval, occasions such as living with the family or frequent family gatherings, would be awkward.

SUMMARY

The stories in this chapter reflect the diversity of the human condition and richness of everyday life, especially regarding human relationships and sexuality. The five interviewees, whose extraordinary stories appear in this chapter, said that they were able to speak more openly about their perceptions and experiences having undertaken studies in sexology. Furthermore, they clarified and expanded their knowledge, attitudes and skills then carried this awareness into their chosen professions of social work, sexology and psychology.

Central to two of the stories is the theme of sexual assault. Because most sexual assaults (especially incest) go unreported, numerous victims remain isolated and, therefore, unsupported. In many cultures, including Australia, sexual assault in all its guises is a taboo topic; surrounded by silence, secrecy and shame. The interviewees in this study who spoke of their experiences of being sexually assaulted were eventually able to share their stories with partners, friends, family, educators or counsellors. The ability and willingness to take this risk and share their experiences brought about some healing and release from the powerful inhibitors that had held them from disclosing their stories previously. Tragically their stories of abuse and

assault are all too common. The literature review in Chapter 2 outlined the alarming rates of sexual assault in Australian society.

We read of the severe trauma Deva experienced before, during and after her pregnancy termination. She, and the Chinese women present, had no voice and were powerless in this 'alien' hospital in China. Faced with an unwanted pregnancy in a foreign country, the choice she made to terminate was not an easy one. Compounding this dilemma was the cold, clinical environment, the lack of emotional support as well as the factor of being an 'outsider' in a foreign country. Her experience reminds us to extend compassion to every woman who finds herself in a similar situation, especially women who come from non-English speaking countries.

The innocence of childhood sexual exploration with his male friend was brought to light in Will's story. Same-sex exploration can be just that – exploration. These pleasure-seeking experiences with his friend later became charged with guilt and fear of being 'found out', leading to sexual dysfunction and embarrassment. Will spoke out for those men who do not behave in stereotypical ways in the various sexual situations they find themselves in. His story reminds us to question the ways that young men and their sexuality are portrayed. Not all young men want sex without intimacy nor are they solely motivated by having sex with any available person.

Australia attracts people from around the world to its shores, and each person brings diverse experiences and perceptions to his/her relationships with others. Vesper's story as an Indian migrant highlighted the complexity when the intertwining of two cultures happens. On one hand his behaviour is that of any young Australian man, for example, the freedom to have relationships, including sex with his choice of partners and experiencing the heart break of a love that is not returned. On the other hand, he is keeping with tradition and waiting for his parents to 'find him an Indian bride'.

The previous chapter reveals some of the major issues experienced by the participants in this study including the early messages participants gained

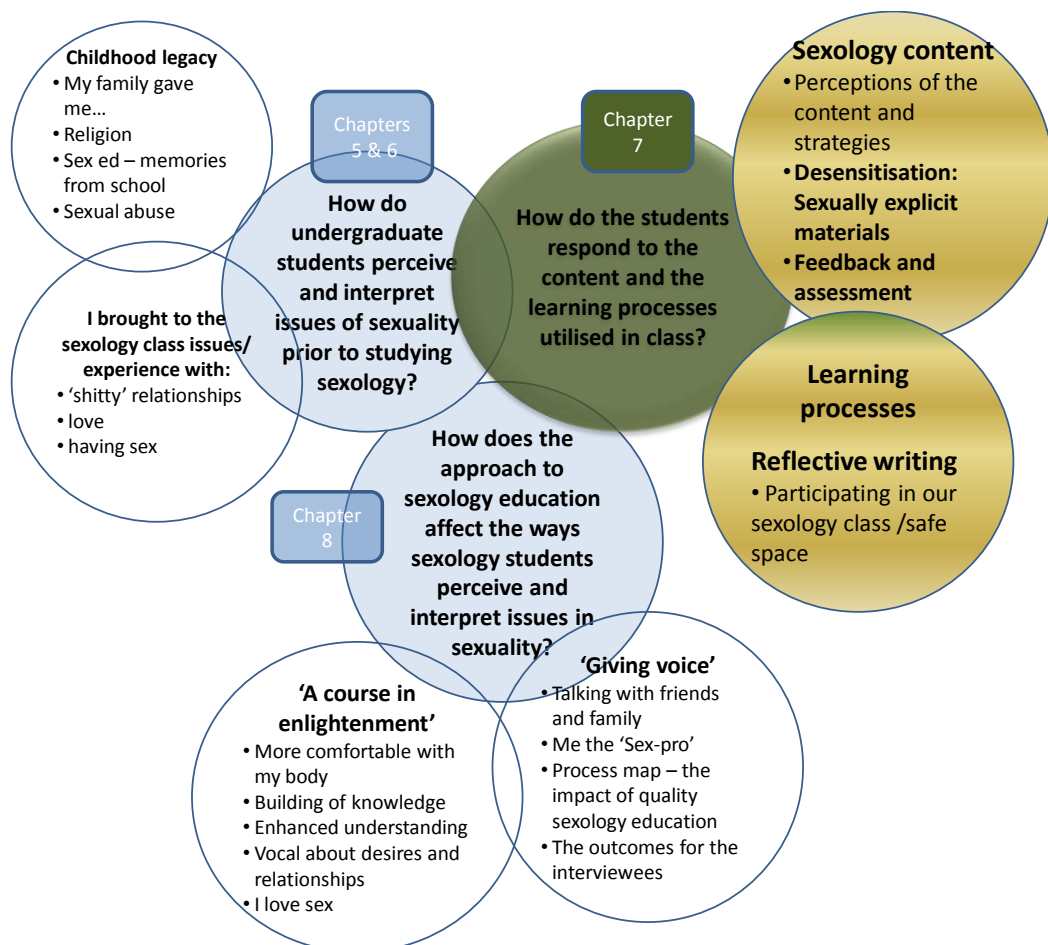
about sexuality and relationships. For most young people, this early learning, especially from religious parents, was quite negative. Sexuality was shrouded in secrecy or shame. School based sexuality education generally built on the negative aspects of sexuality – for example, ‘don’t do it, avoid STIs, don’t get pregnant’.

The case studies in this chapter reinforce the effects of the problematic early messages about sexuality that most people encounter. As the stories reveal, under the ‘ordinary’ exterior of each participant lie complex messages and experiences about each student’s sexuality, messages such as the emotional pain of abuse that so often leads to self-loathing, ‘degrading’ experiences’, and ‘cutting off’ from pleasure. For some it was a sense of not belonging or finding their place, and a fear their secrets being ‘found out’ that the students brought to the classroom. These authentic and touching revelations of secrets long hidden, shames exposed, guilt explored and values pondered show us how, despite overwhelming adversity, the seemingly frail human spirit can not only survive but thrive in challenging situations through interpersonal relationships and sexuality.

CHAPTER 7 – PARTICIPATION AND EXPERIENCES: THE CONTENT AND LEARNING PROCESSES IN THE SEXOLOGY CLASS

This chapter explores the second research question - *How do the students respond to the content and the learning processes used in class?* The participants' experiences of the classroom environment are explored. Two key learning processes for the sexology class were examined: How effective was the desensitisation process using sexually explicit materials; and what was the value of reflective writing? Student feedback about my teaching plus my learning about improving my facilitation of the teaching process are included in Appendix 3.

Map 3. The link between Research Question 2 and the themes and subthemes.



Common sense is the collection of prejudices acquired by age eighteen.
Albert Einstein.

Participants entered the sexology class with an established worldview. Hiebert (2000, p. 15) defined worldview as “fundamental cognitive, affective, and evaluative presuppositions a group of people make about the nature of things, and which they use to order their lives”. In other words, one’s worldview can also be known as one’s perspective, truth, framework, mindset or philosophy of life. According to Mead (1959), the elements of one’s worldview are:

- **epistemology:** beliefs about the nature and sources of knowledge;
- **metaphysics:** beliefs about the ultimate nature of Reality;
- **cosmology:** beliefs about the origins and nature of the universe, life, and especially Man;
- **teleology:** beliefs about the meaning and purpose of the universe, its inanimate elements, and its inhabitants;
- **theology:** beliefs about the existence and nature of God;
- **anthropology:** beliefs about the nature and purpose of Man in general and, oneself in particular;
- **axiology:** beliefs about the nature of value, what is good and bad, what is right and wrong.

Our worldview affects our perception of the world yet few people take the time to thoroughly think out, much less articulate, their worldview. When particular views are expressed, the language we use is telling (Funk, 2001; Mead, 1959). Sexology students are encouraged to consider and express their views and the quotes from reflection papers and interviews form the basis for this research. Expanding on Meads’ elements of one’s worldview, students come to the class with particular beliefs about sexuality such as:

- **epistemology:** beliefs about the sexual knowledge and messages gained from family during childhood;
- **metaphysics:** beliefs about the ultimate nature of sexuality, for example the nature and impact of one’s gender;

- **cosmology:** beliefs about the origins and nature of sexuality;
- **teleology:** beliefs about the meaning and purpose of sexuality and its place in the universe, for example, the meaning of love;
- **theology:** beliefs about the existence and nature of God and the role that religion plays in regards to sexuality;
- **anthropology:** beliefs about the purpose of sex, for example, sexual intercourse is for procreation rather than pleasure; and
- **axiology:** beliefs that sex is good or bad, right or wrong, and strong opinions about certain behaviours (such as homosexuality).

The processes employed in the sexology unit are designed to provide students with the opportunity to consider and give voice to their perceptions of sexuality and reveal their worldview, and to hear the views of others. There are a range of elements emanating from these worldviews and sexuality is manifest in a number of different ways. The students spoke of their taboos, beliefs about religion, memories that were triggered, and views of their bodies. The worldviews of students will be explored in greater detail in the discussion of the sexology film show (see Chapter 7).

‘REFRESHING EXPERIENCE TO PARTICIPATE’: STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF THE STRATEGIES AND APPROACHES

Adult learning principles were applied in every class. These strategies encouraged students to think laterally and to bring their own experiences and learning to the class. The students were respected as being their own ‘experts’ in matters pertaining to their own sexuality. I used interactive strategies to help students articulate their understanding and to hear the comments of their university peers. This approach to the teaching of sexuality, champions the ability and willingness to express one’s perspective and to see others’ points of view. Student feedback indicated the value of these teaching styles and methods:

I was very impressed with the level of student involvement ...some of the exercises we did in class, such as putting ourselves in another’s shoes, were eye opening. It was not until I imagined myself in a

different situation that I began to fully understand what other people may go through in regards to their chosen sexuality. (#5M, 209, 4)

I hate missing even one class – very different to my other classes where I don't say a word or think one bit. (#3M, 209, 3)

I was not at first comfortable because it was completely different to my cultures and beliefs as a Moslem but now I am so happy - I strongly agree to teach like this unit in Moslem countries and through education and understanding a more positive approach can lead to better outcomes. (#23M, 208, 4)

Learning about sexuality included gaining factual information, becoming acquainted with theories and models, and also required students to explore their own attitudes and values while increasing their skills.

As I am now more open to talk about issues surrounding sexuality, I believe that my clients may be more comfortable talking about their issues with me. (#20F, 210, 4)

Students were exposed to an extensive range of strategies that included: roleplay; 'fish bowl' technique; dilemmas; guided visualisations; graffiti sheets; mind mapping; model making; charts and stimulus cards; and multimedia – popular music, cartoons, TV and film, short story, advertisements. I also varied the setup of the room and, to maximise student participation, paired sharing, triads and group work were used in every class.

I left the class feeling good – I warmed to you Lorel straight away, particularly in the sensitive way that you respected people's boundaries. (#10F, 208, 1)

I love that each class is different – music today, pictures and jigsaws last week, ping pong balls and string the week before that – I love that the time flies and I leave with my head buzzing with new information, and possibilities for me and my partner. (#19M, 210, 3)

It was a refreshing experience to participate in the activities today and learn that men of my age (19) have a communal set of fantasies that are basically already socially established, making me feel much more comfortable about fantasies. This forced me to question myself about why I have been so guarded about them. (#2M, 209, 3)

Whilst initially, some participants found it 'embarrassing' and were fearful of their reactions – 'blushing' and 'tongue tied', all students recognised the benefits of feeling more comfortable about sharing about sexuality. Feeling comfortable about talking about sexuality is difficult for many people. Given

the opportunity to participate in activity-based strategies, students attending the sexology class have demonstrated enhanced communication skills and an ease with talking about crucial issues related to their sexuality.

‘I offered my opinions often’: A student centred approach

Learning through participation is the approach adopted within the Sexology 350 unit. See Chapter 1 for examples of teaching strategies that aimed to actively involve students in the learning. A Socratic method, that is, making use of higher-level open-ended questions, led the students to discover the concepts, facts, and answers for themselves. Working with peers in pairs, triads or larger groups provided students with the opportunity to clarify their own attitudes and values and hear about those of their peers. Students commented that the paired work and the use of smaller groups were beneficial.

I am usually very reluctant to share in any of my other classes but because I had the chance to test out my ideas with another classmate or two, I offered my opinions often. (#9F, 108, 4)

Learning through role play was used later in the semester after the students were feeling more comfortable with the sexology classroom environment. One example that many students commented on was the opportunity to role-play negotiating with a partner about sexual concerns, such as erectile dysfunction or desire discrepancy. I played a song ‘Fingers’ by Pink – a ‘gutsy’ and assertive role model for many young women (Gaunlett, 2002) (see Appendix 12 for the lyrics to this song) that tackled many issues (masturbation, frustrating sexual experiences, lack of communication with partners). Students were given the opportunity to role-play a person from the opposite gender. I invited them to communicate with their class partner with the aim of improving the situation for the couple in the song. Feedback demonstrated that the music provided a scenario that many students could relate to and the use of music was a novel strategy.

I feel more confident to express myself and talk about my needs, as a direct result of those role-plays and communication exercises with my class partner. (#23F, 209, 4)

I tracked down the Pink song and played it for my partner – that got us talking about masturbation – that’s a first for us! (#6M, 210, 3)

Activities such as the role-play provided participants with a safe learning environment in which to practise their communication skills on difficult, yet common, scenarios. For many their increased skills, including clear, assertive communication and better negotiation of sexual wants, were able to be transferred outside the classroom to their ‘real’ relationships.

ISSUES EMERGING FROM THE SEXOLOGY CONTENT

As the semester progressed, participants responded, often with passion, about the subject matter in each class. The following discussion looks at the content that is most commented on, that is, gender, bodies and genitalia, and love and relationships.

Gender - being male and female: ‘Discrimination and discrepancies’

In groups of 5-6, students discussed the messages they received (as children) about gender differences. One group wrote ‘Discrimination and discrepancies faced by male and female students were very much alive even in 2010’. Another group wrote in ‘dot point’ form about the different messages both females and males receive: ‘Females – sex objects and groomed from a young age. Homemaking type roles. Boys are dangerous. Don’t get pregnant. Nothing about sex for pleasure. Marry and be cared for. Be a virgin when you marry. Males – ‘Emphasis on being physical (sport, mowing the lawn, gardening) and keen to have sex – always ready for sex. Allowed to do more and take more risks than our sisters. As a teenager: expected to want sex with anyone. Have fun then settle down.’

As one group stated, stereotypical gender roles are ‘alive’ and many families appear to reinforce them. Less often, groups wrote that their parents ‘allowed them to be’ and ‘my brothers and sisters had the same jobs – a roster type system’. Another group of students commented that, ‘Equality as children but differences showed as teenagers eg. Dating – boys freer than girls’. Students also wrote about gender differences they had experienced:

The past few weeks of sexology have been fascinating. I've found myself thinking of things I had never considered before but also being desensitised to things that may have previously evoked a different reaction. Beginning with the 'Story of X', I found this story to be really eye opening and intriguing. It was definitely something that has had an effect on me and has changed my perception. The values and perception people in society place on gender is huge and the story made me think so what if I'm a girl, so what if he is a boy? What does that really even mean? And why should someone be treated a particular way because of what they do or done have in their pants? It seems petty and old fashioned and yes our society does it – where does it come from? (#6F, 210, 2)

Discussions and reflections after reading 'Story of X' (Gould, 1978) were heated. I asked students to consider their earliest memories of being a girl or boy. What was happening? How were you treated? How were your siblings treated? Most were able to recognise their own gender conditioning within their family:

I realise I was raised very differently to my sisters. Stereotypical stuff like not doing dishes and not learning to cook. Maybe it is my Italian background or maybe it is because my parents weren't aware. I want to be more aware and treat my children more evenly. My girlfriend is also Italian and she had tried to talk to me about this – now I want to listen more. (#18M, 211, 3)

I was definitely treated differently to my brothers. Every adult in my family seemed more interested in what I was wearing (jeans, etc) and wanted me to wear pretty dresses. Even at a young age I realised this was bullshit! I kept asking, 'Why couldn't I wear the same as my brothers?' (#4F, 211, 18)

Many students recognised that they continued to carry the restrictive messages from their gendered socialisation and with this awareness, change became possible, for example, treating their own children more fairly.

'Normal' bodies are beautiful

Increasingly, as the classes progressed, a number of the students spoke positively about their bodies.

I had a real aha experience by seeing women having sex notably seeing women with 'normal' bodies having sex. I thought they were really beautiful and their appeal so erotic. I do enjoy sex a lot, but I was never comfortable with seeing myself in a mirror while having sex not to mention on pictures etc. my attention would instantly shift from having

fun to seeing unfavourable parts of my body. Therefore I never understood why my boyfriend wouldn't see that. He always gives me the feeling that I am the most beautiful woman for him. Seeing these films just gave me the insight to understand him and not to doubt his words. It's the little difference between knowing and really feeling something. (#8F, 210, 2)

I am going to make a bold statement: I love sex. I am not just talking about the act either, while that may be great. I am referring more to the completely natural way your body reacts to another body. (#17F, 209, 4)

Many students wrote about the positive changes regarding their sexuality and the impact of the content covered in the sexology classes on their relationships. Students wrote about a new-found confidence to celebrate their sexual expression, and the release and joy of talking more comfortably about sexuality.

My point is that I worried too much about sex, about being a man, fitting in, and will this person like me, accept me and so on. The rules drilled into us about gender and sex is too limited and too rigid. There is, within reason, no right or wrong to sex, no real boundaries to how we should behave in terms of gender, apart from the ones we are taught. I do not have to fuck like a robot to be a man. What does being a man mean anyway? What does it mean to be a woman? I had fairly rigid and restrictive views about men women and sex but would like to think that has now changed. I just feel a lot more relaxed in general, like I said I do not know how else to put it. I am not putting so much pressure on myself anymore. In fact, dare I say it, sex is not even that important. Wait, maybe it is but I am just not so worried anymore. (Patrick)

The emotional aspect of sexuality is one that is widely overlooked outside of this unit. Sexual education in school and sex in the media focuses on the physical side of sexuality. It is no wonder I was obsessed with the physical performance side of things and did not nurture the emotional side of my sexuality. I feel as though I have brought the spark back and reunited mind and body. (#3M, 109, 4)

In the wise words of the Divinyls, "It's a fine line between pleasure and pain," and I have found that I seem to enjoy a bit of sadomasochism. I have been strangled, and spanked (both consensual), and found that these acts really enhanced my sexual experience – by adding excitement and an element of danger. I obviously had to be very trusting in my partners to engage in these activities, but I felt like I was in safe hands...I find it really interesting learning about what turns different people on. I don't think there is anything wrong with being aroused by unusual things, as long as no one is being harmed (without their consent). Sexual variance, such as fetishes and paraphilias can

enhance sexual experience and I think more people should embrace variety and diversity. (#16F, 112, 2)

I would say that besides just being more open to talk about sex related things with people I'm also more open to trying new things. I enjoyed when we talked about sex as not just being intercourse, it was all of it: the intimate kissing, foreplay, penetration and other things that happen...I love to cuddle and be close to someone, be intimate, and have no secrets- however I believe there is more to it now. I feel as though I've opened a new door to the way I look at and understand sex, sexuality love and relationships ... and what I will be looking for in a partner: humour, trust and reliability. (#8F, 108, 4)

The final reflection papers frequently demonstrated considerable shifts in awareness and understanding.

I have been challenged by the material almost EVERY week and come out the other end. This unit has made me re-evaluate my beliefs and ideas. (#8M, 209, 4)

The 'love and relationships' class

Students were particularly motivated to participate in this class. The relevance to their personal lives resonated with them. Many students spoke of the challenges and pain they had experienced such as 'lost love' or 'love that soured'. Some students recognised the value in entering a relationship with more knowledge about love. Four different students said,

I realise now I was naive – I am 24 and I am admitting that – I thought love would 'just happen' and then it would be perfect. The elusive love has happened a few times- and then finished as quickly as it started – oh the pain! Now I have some skills about keeping that love happening. That class most of all, gave me hope. (#23F, 112, 4)

I really enjoyed the weeks when we talked about love and relationships. It helped me put my past relationships into perspective and realise what I did and did not want to avoid... discussions helped me realise just how strong I have become because of my past experiences and how it will hopefully benefit me in the future. (#2F, 112, 4)

Relationships aren't that easy...The day that we talked about what we look for in a relationship really got me thinking as well. It seems such an easy question but in all actuality it's not! What are the important qualities in a partner that I wouldn't stand for and what are the qualities that my partner must have? Here I have been dating for 6

years and I never even knew or even thought about what it is that I'm looking for! It was a sudden reminder that dating is not only fun and exciting but for me, it is also intended to one day (hopefully) find a spouse. (#15M, 211, 4)

I have a prejudice about the sexuality of straight men. I haven't had good experiences with them, and consequently pigeonhole many straight men into being sex-hungry, selfish lovers. Crooks and Baur (2011) say this "assumption is demeaning and reduces men to insensitive machines" (p. 141). Sexology has forced me to examine why I feel this way... Now I am in a relationship with a woman and *it is* like the one I dreamed about. I am emotionally, intellectually and sexually fulfilled. I feel loved and adored every day. Studying sexology has helped me to understand why it is I feel resentment toward straight men, and look at what I can do to change this. I've let go of some shame on my part, and anger towards others. (Alice)

Over the decade I have lectured in Sexology 350, the student responses to this class have been overwhelmingly positive. The following comments exemplify this:

Well there were so many great classes but the most interesting class was the love one and that seems really lame when you think it was a sex course, but it was good. There were so many different things that I had discovered for myself and then we learnt more about it. That about being autonomous and not being the better half of a whole. I really enjoyed that – that was great hearing that. I hate it when friends of mine lose their individuality. I hate seeing that – it is disgusting... I am clearer about what I want and I have a huge list of qualities that I am looking for (laughing and talking fast) – oh I have tons and about half a dozen deal breakers which I need to have and a bunch of other ones. They have to be attractive of course but they have to be smart – well as smart as I am. Like be able to hold a conversation and I am not intellectually dominating. I get really bored. I have to be challenged. A good sense of humour like they find me hilarious or else they could think I am inappropriate all the time. Be willing to do things – exciting and just be able to hang out and be lazy. She has to bring something to the table. And someone who can call me on my shit and has her own views and can express them. I need someone who can throw a few punches and like verbally spar. I enjoy getting the piss taken out of me. (Winston)

The exercise that stuck with me the most from the whole semester was picking the card that represented our best quality that we bring into a relationship. After I had explained why it was such a great quality, you told us to then explain why it could be harmful to a relationship. I learned that a main reason my relationship in the past hadn't worked out was because I was too helpful. Being helpful is an amazing attribute; at the same time it can make you into a doormat

and outline the rest of your relationship. Since that class I have started to take a lot of the things into consideration and hopefully future relationships will prosper. (#13F, 108, 4)

The use of interactive strategies combined with down-to-earth discussions, helped to demystify love especially the ‘mystery’ of ‘falling in love’. Other topics are also explored such as intimacy, infidelity, improving relationships and other ways of relating (such as swinging and polyamory). It was clear that improving prospects for a healthy relationship was high on almost all students’ agenda. Many students shared their experiences of the ‘ups and downs’ of relationships such as ‘a broken heart and broken promises’ and ‘rollercoaster ride of crazy hormones and lust’. The topic of defining and negotiating fidelity stirred much debate, with Karen saying that ‘she took the debate home to the bedroom...I assumed my partner would think the same as me – watching porn on the net is being unfaithful. I was shocked that he thought this was OK...big discussions over a whole weekend’.

Almost all students affirmed the importance to them of applying theoretical knowledge about love and relationships, to their personal lives.

The Sexology Programme makes use of other strategies to immerse students in sexology content. These include:

Student presentations

Students were encouraged to present their chosen sexual health topic in an innovative fashion and were required to provide a visually appealing overview for their peers.

My group presentation on swinging forced me to think about a topic which I had previously judged unknowingly. I judged people who were involved in swinging, but in reality, I had no idea what swinging really was. And again, I had to ask myself who am I to judge? (#11F, 211, 4)

When I thought it could get no better, the student presentations began. Our group worked so hard for the marks we got. We got out of our comfort zone to do a great presentation that got the class jumping. It was a buzz – and we learnt about our topic – transgender. (#6M, 112, 4)

This process extended students to present accurate information on a controversial topic in an engaging manner. In addition to feeling more comfortable discussing controversial information, students are practised their facilitation skills and/or managing groups and also fielded questions.

Visit to sexual health agencies

When completing their sexology assessment pieces (written assignments and group presentations), students were encouraged to visit relevant sexual health agencies.

My annotated bibliography was about sexuality and intellectual disability and I am glad you talked about the appropriate agencies that could assist. I went to secca (Sexuality, Counselling and Consulting Agency) and Amanda was so helpful and generous about me borrowing their resources. Prior to visiting and talking with the secca staff I didn't know they existed. This visit has made me aware of the valuable resources that agencies are so willing to share and this will be useful also in my future career. (#11F, 109, 4)

The visit to an appropriate agency assisted this student to gain relevant information for her written assignments and group presentation. As a student studying psychology, she was able to recognise the value to her future career of extending her networks.

Guest speakers

Students are encouraged to attend presentations organised by the WA Sexology Society (WASS) as an extension of their sexology studies. Speakers at these presentations are individuals working in the field of sexology, in addition to others with relevant experience and knowledge. These include: a lawyer/criminologist; sexology researchers; workers in the sex industry; and representatives of key agencies such as transsexuals.

The presentation at WASS last week was fascinating. I amazed myself by being brave enough to go to a talk about sex. Meeting so many people who work in the field of sexology was another positive outcome. I joined the group and will attend regularly. (#16F, 109, 3)

Many students incorporate their expanded knowledge into their assignments and valued the networking.

SEXOLOGY FILM SHOW: EVOKING SIGNIFICANT RESPONSES

The viewing of the sexology film show appears to have a marked effect on students' perceptions of sexuality. This section focuses on the sexology students' reflections and reactions immediately after viewing the sexually explicit materials (SEM) in the film show.

The sexology desensitising film show takes place in the second week of semester. An overview of the segments of the 100 minute film show can be found in Appendix 2 and the rationale for the use of SEM was explored in depth in Chapter 3. During and after watching the film show, students' core beliefs were often challenged and their worldview then came to the fore in their first reflection paper. The writing of the first reflection paper, after viewing the film show, enabled students to explore and reveal their personal views. Importantly, it also provided them and me with insights into their attitudes, beliefs and worldviews.

In the class following the film show, an extended discussion provided opportunities to debrief and express views. Some students were hesitant to speak openly to the group of peers about their views and feelings about the film show so early in the semester. One student admitted in his reflection paper he was, 'Testing the waters and waiting to see what others said'. Another said, 'Writing about it is hard enough but I felt weird for me to speak about things like masturbation and old people having sex. After all, I was in a room full of strangers but hopefully my anxiety about this will lessen'. Another said, 'I was worried I would be like a beetroot in front of the whole class'. Some students stated that it was easier or more comfortable to express their views in the **written** reflection paper rather than talking. The majority of students remarked that viewing the SEM was 'hard' and 'confronting' and some students were able to articulate the limitations of their worldview:

As I have never watched porn before other than sex scenes in movies this is the most confronting film about sex and sexuality I have seen. (#16F, 208,1)

Seeing sex in movies and on TV is totally different – nicer – the bodies are better. Largely it wasn't a pleasant experience. (#3M, 208, 1)

Sitting there watching that film was hard for me. I am a Christian and a virgin and I will be until I am married. I have not been exposed to the things in that film. (#3F, 208, 1)

These three students, especially the female students, felt unprepared for the SEM in the film show. In the briefing prior to viewing the film show, students were told that the films were made explicitly for educational purposes and that they bear no resemblance to pornographic films. The first student had no previous exposure to such explicit materials other than 'staged' scenes in the movies. The second student was displeased by the 'normal' bodies, preferring to see 'nicer' bodies that are prevalent in the media. Finally, due to her strong religious beliefs, the third student had refrained from viewing 'any porn or R rated movies'. The sexology film show was her first experience of seeing such explicit SEM and it 'was hard' to watch.

'It's just not right': Sexual taboos for the students

One of the outcomes of watching the SEM was to highlight the sexual taboos held by some students. Written in the reflections papers were words such as 'inappropriate' 'confronting' and 'strong'. In some cases, the requirement to clarify their position caused the participants' to 'own' what they wrote (in reflection papers) and/or said in the class. Students had the opportunity to deliberately express their views on issues of controversy for them; issues such as masturbation, same-sex relationships, and older people having sex:

Wow. No more hiding. At times I closed my eyes and could feel myself blushing. Seeing and hearing another person masturbate and cum was a bit much for me. (#2F, 209, 1)

It is a common stereotype that older people having sex is just not right, however, I think it is a good for them to be sexually active as long as I don't know. (#15M, 208 1)

This was one of the many perceptions that changed over time.

‘Interesting’, ‘honest’, ‘weird’ and ‘gross’: Sexual schemas

A useful way of thinking about what we are hearing from the students is provided by Andersen and Cyranowski (1994). The authors outlined the sexual self-views (sexual self-schema) of women, and men (Andersen, Cyranowski, & Espindle, 1999) and recognised the strong relationship between sexual schema (the cognitive sexual views of self) and sexual functioning:

The view is derived from past experience, manifest in current experience, influential in the processing of sexually relevant social information, and give guidance for sexual behaviour. (1994, p. 1092)

The researchers (Andersen & Cyranowski, 1994; Andersen, et al., 1999) building upon polarised schemas (positive and negative views) developed a scale with two positive dimensions (passionate/romantic and open/direct) and one negative dimension (embarrassment/conservatism). Meston, Rellini and Heiman adopted the scale (2006) and elaborated:

ten adjectives contributed to the romantic/passionate dimension: romantic, passionate, warm, loving, feeling, sympathetic, arousable, stimulating, and revealing. The **open/direct** dimension comprised the following nine adjectives: direct, straightforward, frank, outspoken, broad-minded, experienced, casual, open-minded, and uninhibited. Finally, the **embarrassment/conservatism** aspect comprised seven adjectives: cautious, timid, self-conscious, prudent, embarrassed, conservative, and inexperienced. (p.233)

Making use of Meston, Rellini and Heiman’s (2006) sexual scale, only a quarter of the students came to the sexology class polarised towards the open/direct dimensions. Two-thirds of the students’ comments, especially in their first reflection papers, were polarised towards the dimension of embarrassment/ conservatism:

The part relating to masturbation was by far the worst part of me. I do not think masturbation is acceptable and I do not think it should ever be practised. (#22M, 208, 1)

I realised that female masturbation, as the movie mentioned, is not something that is normal in our society. I was never encouraged to explore my own body sexually by my parents, friends or teachers. Female masturbation has never been shown to me in a positive light

but rather something that was weird, gross and unnecessary. (#8F, 208, 1)

Students' initial response, having observed the film show, revealed open or closed thinking. Examples of short phrases that highlighted closed thinking were: 'that was wrong'; 'those bodies were fat and gross'; and 'disgusting, really disgusting'. In contrast, some examples of open thinking included: 'refreshing to see REAL people having sex'; 'I hope I'm like that when I'm older'; and 'sexy, real bodies'. About a third of the students expressed their openness to accepting the content of the film show:

The film shown was an open and honest portrayal of many differing views, opinions, expressions and situations involving sex. I was a little taken aback at first but later found the content very interesting and eye opening. (#24M, 208, 1)

When I found out that we were going to be watching 2 hours of sheer sex the next week I KNEW that this wasn't going to be like any other class I had ever taken before! Watching that film wasn't as easy as I had anticipated but it did a great job putting it all out on the table. After watching that film I felt that I could say or write anything and everything without hesitation. (#8M, 108, 4)

No matter what we all look like, we are all sexual creatures, and for me that creates a comforting sense of harmony. (#17F, 208, 1)

For some, hearing the views of their peers was illuminating and surprising:

I couldn't believe some of the homophobic attitudes of some class members. This might be a long semester! (#14F, 208, 1)

Having a few older people (over 40) in the class will be interesting. I guess they still have sex?? (#12M, 209, 1)

Interesting for me – being Muslim I had a very limited education about sex and I was surprised that others in the class are also coming from limited backgrounds in this matter. (#16M, 210, 2)

The worldview of some participants required that sex remained in the private domain and sexual behaviours were viewed 'behind closed doors':

I was extremely grossed out. Why would anyone want to masturbate while others were watching? I believe this mindset stems from the fact that I myself have always been private about that sort of thing. (#18M, 210, 1)

I felt most uncomfortable with was the masturbation scenes and the open discussion of people's most intimate moments. While I understand that basically everyone masturbates, I think of it as a very private act and I felt like I was intruding on their private time. (#1, 208, 1)

Gays and oldies having sex – I know it happens but I didn't want to see it! (#3, 210, 1)

The segments of the film show where same-sex couples appeared received strong negative reactions by some with words such as 'disgusting', 'creepy', 'revolting'. One writer shared her rigid views about same-sex relationships and she was clearly disgusted with the content. Others agreed stating that the content was 'disturbing', 'gross' and made them 'uncomfortable'.

I have only seen one film where there was a gay kiss, and my mother told me I couldn't watch it after that. These ideas are so ingrained that I really just think it's absolutely disgusting for a guy to suck another guy's penis. (#19F, 209, 1)

The hardest section to watch was the man-on-man. I've never seen anything of the sort and I really found myself not watching that part. It was so disturbing to me because I think I was also raised to not tolerate anything except the norm ... growing up in my high school I was taught that homosexuality was a mental disorder. (#15M, 210, 1)

I do not consider myself to be a homophobe but something about the gay couples having sex made me really grossed out and uncomfortable. (#4M, 209, 1)

About a third of the students, mostly female, affirmed their comfort with viewing same-sex couples having sex:

It was really nice seeing the two men in the film, Nik & Jon, being intimate after having sex. (#8F, 208, 1)

Men with men, women with women, men and women and whatever does it for you! As long as all are willing, what is the problem? (#5F, 210, 1)

About a quarter of the students highlighted their willingness to viewing the sexually explicit content.

The film is real and raw in comparison to pornography as the groaning and moaning is so real and the people are real. It is refreshing that it is not fake. (#15M, 208, 1)

I was turned on by the sex film and it reminded me of quickies and my girlfriend. My partner and I have quickies all the time maybe before

class, in between classes or after class and before work. It is not because we want to hurry up the process but because we want to have an orgasm before we have to attend to other things and will have long intimate sex later that evening. (#23M, 208, 1)

Roy: Although I am a married man and seen as straight, there is another side to me – and one I hope to explore in this class. The 2 normal clips with the hetero couples having sex out in the open were ho hum and too long. Although I did like seeing the black guy's dick – enough to make me jealous.

These students were open to viewing the diverse range of people expressing their sexuality, in the film show. This 'openness' has many advantages such as being "associated with greater levels of sexual information, sexual activity, and better body image" (Andersen, et al., 1999, p. 656).

'Getting a grip on my sexuality': Opening up to the possibilities

One student articulated that, after watching the film show, although he was 'OK with everything', he had specific sexual preferences:

The young man that masturbates does it in such an unusual way to me anyway. From many of the, usually drunk, conversations I have had with friends, none of them do what this male does (sticks his finger in his anus). It seems out of the ordinary. I can understand the anal penetration but I just would never do that. (#15M, 208, 1)

A number of students reflected about the 'why' of their reactions to aspects of the sexually explicit film show:

I was raised a Catholic which gives me a very different view on what is or isn't acceptable in the Church's eyes. Although I am not a practising Catholic, I remember being a young child filled with fear because my visiting religion teacher told me we would go to hell if we masturbate. Perhaps this is why I felt the most uncomfortable during the 'Feeling Good' scene. (#11M, 108, 1)

I got caught touching myself with my hands down my pants and a lost look on my face. Then wack'! and my face burning when mum hit me. My brothers fiddled with themselves all the time and mum and dad just laughed and said things like, 'boys and their toys'. Being a girl was very different in my family. (#20F, 208, 2)

I enjoyed the Nik and Jon portion. This time however my enjoyment wasn't as much in the form of arousal but in a general feeling of gratification. My older brother is gay and came out around the beginning of high school. My whole family has always been extremely

loving, encouraging and supportive...My brother knows exactly who he is and I admire him greatly for that. (#17, 208, 1)

Students often wrote about their experiences of their family, their gender or their diverse religious backgrounds. Personal experience, for example, having a family member who is gay provided a different context for understanding and empathy. Reflections on the impact of their gender also surfaced and one student said that these realisations 'put everything in perspective...'being a girl' in her family 'limited her options' especially about sexuality 'but I am getting a grip on this and growing as a person'. The last quote above highlights that the student's worldview was inclusive of diversity because of her relationship and experience with her brother. Early in the semester, some participants were already able to recognise how their perceptions of sexuality had been formed. Freire (1998) contended that education is vital for the "act of cognition not only of the content, but of the why of economic, social, political, ideological, and historical facts...under which we find ourselves placed" (p. 101).

For some young people, aging and sexuality had not been a topic they had considered or been exposed to:

When the video showed couples of all ages having sex, including older couples, it was a little weird to me, only because it is rare to see that, but I was happy to see that people have the capacity to find joy and intimacy all though life! (#3F, 208, 1)

Thinking of my Gran having sex is just too much but then when I get old, I hope I still have a partner that wants to have sex. (#21, 208, 1)

These students showed openness to the thought of older people being sexual. In addition, although the majority of the students are under 30 years of age, some were able to connect with the realisation that they too will age. In old age, they might also want to have intimate relationships.

Unwanted memories

Negative sexual experiences from the past can adversely affect our views of our sexuality in the present (Andersen & Cyranowski, 1994). A small number

of students communicated that aspects of the film show triggered memories of 'awful sex' and 'abuse':

I experienced unwanted memories of the abuse I suffered at the hands of my grandfather. Watching '*Ripple in time*' had brought back some bad memories. On reflection I realise that I probably wasn't paying proper attention to '*Sunbrushed*'; and the disconcerting memories triggered by seeing the older man having sex had obviously coloured what I did see. (Amy)

Slowly and gently I feel I am letting go of the shame that keeps me from celebrating the woman within. (Maggie)

I was a bit turned off by the thought of the smell of 'shit' when watching Nik& Jon and I wondered whether they always have to have an enema before they have sex to avoid it. My ex-partner was completely fixated on anal sex. I just found it painful most of the time and hated have to 'go and have an enema' beforehand as well; (it was just uncomfortable and sitting on the toilet preparing to be 'fucked in the ass' isn't my idea of foreplay). (Amy)

The 'Sunblessed' part made me smile – free and happy. Australia is safer than my country. Females in my country [an African country] are political footballs: rape and violence everywhere. My friend was raped and murdered. Women are nothing. (Esther)

Students often disclosed abuse and other negative experiences in their past. The SEM and the discussions in class seemed to 'shine a light' on past trauma. How to deal with disclosure and trauma can be found within the Guidelines when using sexually explicit materials in the sexology class (Chapter 3). By illuminating these experiences, participants had the opportunity to move beyond and heal.

'Embracing the possibilities': 'Conscientisation'

Freire's (1998) approach to 'conscientisation'¹³ has the power to transform and liberate thinking. Although students had attended only two classes (3 hours each), a small number wrote of such transformations at this early stage, so consciousness for them is having a better understanding of the worldview in regards to sexuality:

¹³'Conscientisation' refers to the process for people of "achieving deepening awareness both of the socio-cultural reality that shapes their lives and of their capacity to transform that reality (Freire, 2000, p. 65).

It's like magic. Entering the doors and possibilities emerge. I embraced the possibilities and realise MY sex life can be so much more. (#12, 210, 1)

Glad I took the risk to come to this class. My friends thought it was a joke. One person recommended the class and said it opened her eyes. (#2, 210, 1)

I was actually jealous of that old couple having sex in the first movie we watched because I was thinking to myself; I hope I'm like that when I'm older. (#25, 208, 1)

I can't believe I am writing this explicit stuff. I don't even write in my diary about me masturbating!! (#18F, 210, 2)

The second week of class was a breakthrough for me. Before viewing the film I was insecure about my body image. The film had many women of different ages and sizes. I know I will never be perfect but I now know I can love my body the way it is. I loved seeing the slides of all the vulvas too – now I know I am not unusual. Learning about the body parts made me appreciate the beauty and complexity of our bodies. Each person is made differently. I was always worried my vaginal lips were outside of my body too much. I thought this was odd but now I know not every woman has the same formed vulva as the women in pornography. Now I am no longer embarrassed about how I was formed. (#11, 108, 4)

For a small number of students the shifts were just beginning. They wrote about their walls (barriers) such as the fear of certain reactions or inexperience with viewing SEM, yet, they appeared willing to have their apprehensions challenged and possibly changed:

I was initially uncomfortable watching the desensitisation video and so inexperienced with so much of what we saw. While some parts were a bit difficult for me to watch, I realised that so many of my personal insecurities when it came to sex and sexuality were not only things other people experience but not at all something to be uncomfortable talking about. I realised the importance of finding an outlet of communication where I feel safe and accepted for what I feel and thing and furthermore I realised that I have an amazing group of friends who provide me with this outlet, if only I let myself go a little bit and express my true thoughts, concerns and feelings. (#2, 108, 3)

I think the film show helped make me and others more comfortable and once we got through that - though it wasn't as exciting as I thought it would be and I got it – yer I know, people having sex. We moved on and that helped a lot and talking about it every day and doing reflections and research you get more comfortable. (Winston)

I was a little apprehensive on how I would possibly react to watching the movies within the class environment. I have watched a bit of pornography in the past and had always been turned on by them, so I was hoping that I would not melt on the floor for everyone to see, or feel uncomfortable or embarrassed. I was surprised as this was not the case. As it turned out I felt quite comfortable watching the movies. I did find myself getting quite aroused, and accepted these feelings and reminded myself that these feelings that I was experiencing was in fact quite normal. I related to the movies, and felt that I could actually tell my own story and sexual journey through many of the movies on the screen. (Maggie)

Although I was not fully at ease with watching a couple have sex just yet, this film make me feel a little better about the act of sex. I think this was due to the fact that *Free* portrayed the lighter and 'happier' side of sex and the film had an air of intimacy and joy which I found to be a really positive thing. (Rachel)

I loved the desensitisation film – I guess that is on everyone's list. After viewing the film I wrote: The man in the wheelchair was really empowering at first. But then I thought, 'Oh my God, that is a complete stereotype'. I felt angry at myself for being so closed minded to think a man in a wheelchair could not have sex. They didn't have actual intercourse because the man couldn't get erect, but it's not like he cannot do other things. That girl screamed just as loud as any other girl did. Stereotypes and closed mindedness are to blame for stupid thinking like my own. But hopefully this has taught me that old saying we learn as children, but never seem to grow to understand: you can't judge a book by its cover. (April)

Although these students were uncomfortable with certain aspects of the SEM, they seemed to accept others' preferences. Their views were not as extreme as those of the person who was clearly polarised (for example with comments such as 'this is ok', 'this is not ok'). An open person can assimilate the information and 'reconscientise' him/herself. The above narratives acknowledge the students' discomfort whilst viewing the SEM, but never the less expressing their willingness to engage with the learning opportunities.

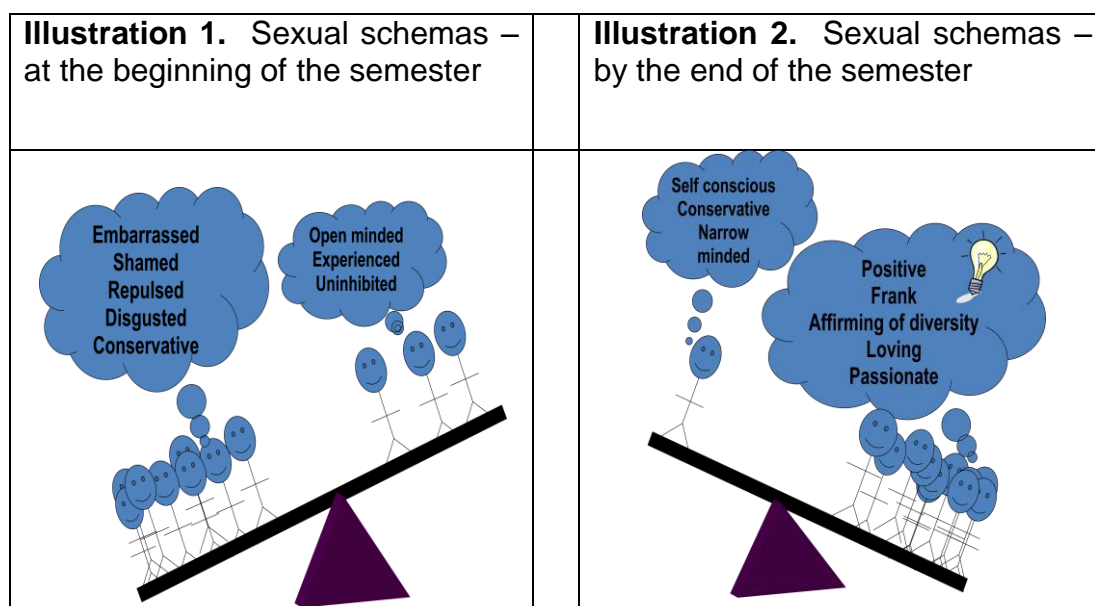


Illustration 1 reflects the beginning of semester where approximately 30% of students enter the class with an attitude that is open-minded. By the end of semester more than 90 % of students had made the transition from Illustration 1 to 2. For the few students who did not markedly shift their negative sexual schemas, religion, especially Fundamental Christianity appeared to be the reason. The journey from Illustration 1 to 2 varied for all the students – for one person it might be after the films and, for another, the shift is more gradual over the semester.

The process of watching the SEM and then expressing their views (in class discussions or reflection papers), raised the consciousness for the participants about their worldviews, core beliefs, and barriers/walls (see Chapter 7 - Illustration 1 & 2). The SEM was confronting for many students and they could not hide their views. The students were invited to express their thoughts and feelings and this process of ‘conscientisation’ required students to ‘own their walls’. In other words, students were revealing themselves to themselves and me. As one student said, ‘I could articulate (without judgement from you) where I was at’ and ‘that’s how it is for me’. This process illuminates aspects of the students’ worldview bringing with it the possibilities of evolution and change (Freire & Faundez, 1989).

Other strategies for desensitisation using sexually explicit materials

An important and compulsory part of the Programme for all students is attendance at a film show. In later classes, more explicit SEM is shown such as: close-up photography of genitalia; and 'hard core' SEM and erotica.

One strategy called 'Describe-a-slide', invites students to work in pairs and describe a sexually explicit act (that is being shown on the screen at the front of the class) to a partner. The person 'receiving' the description has his/her back to the image.

I can't believe I was describing those sexual acts to a person I didn't know 4 weeks before this class. At first it was hard to talk and I felt my face like a beetroot but I pushed through and it was easy by the tenth explicit slide. He said my descriptions were great as he got a strong mental picture of the image before he saw it on the screen. (#19F, 211, 3)

Students frequently express surprise at their growing confidence in talking about sex. Their reactions are often strongest to the first film show (which has less explicit SEM) and the reactions grow weaker as the semester progresses. For one woman, the ability to be able to 'talk more openly about sex and positions and what I like' has been 'a real breakthrough'.

Concluding comments about the use of sexually explicit materials (SEM) in the sexology class

The reduction in anxiety following the viewing of the film show led to a more uninhibited class discussion. Students became more comfortable with discussing sexuality, and the materials conveyed positive messages that reduced the individual's anxiety, guilt, shame or embarrassment about his/her sexuality. Furthermore, the medium (SEM) left a lasting impression on most participants. Students were required to write a reflection paper about the film show following hours of processing in the preceding classes. Reactions to the materials were strong. Students had many opportunities to express their reactions and resolve these. Students were far more likely to integrate the learning of other material in the sexuality course, and there were many examples of students utilising their learning in their lives.

As future health professionals, they have an obligation to their clients and the community to be well informed, affirming of diversity and comfortable with discussing sexuality. For this, the professional must first be comfortable with his/her sexuality, and be aware of his/her own and others' diverse values and attitudes. To this end, sexually explicit media are a valuable tool. These materials sensitised the students to their own values and attitudes, and desensitised them to the values and attitudes of others.

However, it is not the materials alone that made the difference. The learning content and processes in the Sexology Programme, of which SEM is a part, is of vital importance and SEM is part of a comprehensive approach to adult sexuality education facilitated by an experienced sexuality educator.

'I FEEL MY EFFORT IS VALUED': PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THE APPROACHES TO FEEDBACK AND ASSESSMENT

Of all the comments students provided about the feedback for the variety of assessment pieces, the most common response was that they appreciated the extensive comments I wrote and that they felt their efforts were valued. One mature-age student commented on extensive feedback she received in her reflection papers:

Thank you for the great teaching job you've done over my last two semesters. You have put effort and enormous amounts of energy into your teaching and it has kept me on toes (and at times out of my comfort zone) and interested in getting to class.

You have surely achieved at least one outcome for me personally...even negative initial reactions are possibly the building block to great learning. My reaction paper to your first lesson is evidence we don't always know what's good for us. Your interactive approach to teaching was not one I had used a great deal and it may not totally fit my personal style of teaching however so many aspects of that teaching style have proved to be valuable and I will incorporate much of what you have imparted.

I've also appreciated your detailed response to my reaction papers, workshops and other assessments. I never expected them to be so thoroughly examined and your written comments have been helpful and made me feel my effort is valued. It's obvious you invest a lot into your work Lorel and I want to say how much it has been appreciated. I'm

sure I am speaking for many students, as these same sentiments have been voiced by others from the classes. Thanks again. (Sara)

Detailed descriptions and clear assessment criteria for each assessment piece are provided in the unit outline. This student also appreciated the personalised and detailed feedback that I provided with each reflection paper and other assessment pieces.

REFLECTIVE WRITING

In the third chapter, I outlined the usefulness of reflective writing for adult learners and some of the challenges, raised in the literature, to the academic requirements for reflective pieces. I will discuss how I overcame these challenges. Examples of reflective writing are included to demonstrate the usefulness of reflection for the undergraduate students studying the introductory sexology unit.

Sexology students and reflective writing: Background

Almost all (97%) of the 157 students in Sexology 350 (over the research period) gave their informed consent for their reflection papers to be used for the purpose of the study (and papers or presentations arising from this study). (See also Appendix 7 - *Information for students in Sexology 350* and Appendix 8- *Consent form for reflection papers*).

Students in the Sexology 350 unit, as part of the academic requirements, undertook reflective writing assignments. Four papers were written over the semester. The first three papers required students to reflect on/or react to individual lectures. For the duration of the study, I collected four reflection papers from more than 150 students.

The value of reflective writing for the sexology students

These reflective papers were an important learning tool in the development of future professionals in the sexual health field. Students wrote about their thoughts and feelings about what had transpired in the period of the unit.

Through the reflection papers, you provide people the freedom to talk about experiences and feelings which like you say, in itself is a very healing process. I think people, essentially, just want to feel like they've been heard, and that is what you give people by inviting them to share their reflections with you. So, thank you. (Alice)

Participants were able to reflect on beliefs, attitudes and values that they held and, if necessary, challenge those perspectives leading to awareness and transformation on a personal level. Students, armed with understanding of themselves and their reactions/reflections to the content of sexology, will take this confidence into their chosen career. This will enable them to become reflective therapists or educators who provide carefully considered services for their clients. See Appendix 13 for an example of one student's complete fourth reflection paper. The 19 year-old student, Jamie, displayed his ability to write about his learning, including the impact of the sexology unit on his relationships with his partner and his parents. His new-found pride in his sexual orientation is evident. In addition, after completing the sexology unit, Jamie wanted to integrate his new found confidence with his sexuality and his ability to openly discuss sexual topics. As a result of this, he modified his career goals to include a business focusing on nutrition, sexuality and body image.

Numerous students were able to recognise the relevance of the content covered in the sexology unit to their future profession.

As a social worker I feel strongly about supporting those who have been hurt through their own experiences and need an advocate to support them. I feel that because of what I have learned on a personal level I can be of greater benefit to those who I see in my profession. (Deva)

A skill that I have taken away from this class is to approach situations with an open mind and I don't just mean sexual related situations but in all aspects of life. (#12M, 113, 2)

My sexual language has changed, I am very good at making reference to body parts without making them sleazy and now with this new found openness I can talk more accurately and clinically, with less embarrassment and self-consciousness. This will help me be a more effective psychologist. (#14M, 109, 4)

Reflective thinking and writing appear to be important conduits for students attaining the learning outcomes (see Appendix 4) in the Sexology Programme. Students need to be comfortable with their own sexuality, and that of others to effectively provide support to clients in their professional lives (Roberts, 1986). If students are not given the opportunity to actively engage in deep thought about diversity, their effectiveness as sexual health professionals may be compromised. Students' comments reflected shifts in their perception about celebrating diversity:

My understanding about my sexuality has changed in that I understand sexuality in general to be more of a wide range spectrum. There is no right or wrong, left or right; it's more grey than just black and white. I am a heterosexual female but don't fall completely at the heterosexual side of the spectrum. (#18F, 208, 4)

While I have always thought of myself as open-minded I really feel as though I have learned the difference between tolerance and acceptance or, even better, celebration. I truly feel that as long as people are happy and content with themselves then those around them should feel the same and be supportive and accepting. I feel like our discussions of diversity as well as the desensitisation video have opened my eyes to how difficult it really can be and I strive to celebrate and speak up when something is wrong or unjust. (#2, 210, 4)

This class has shown me that everyone is different so who am I to judge another's behaviour? It has definitely changed my perception of what is normal and has caused me to believe that if another's behaviour is not hurting themselves or someone else and is consensual than you may as well go for it. Whatever you're into it's not my business. (#12M, 113, 2)

This class has definitely helped me embrace and appreciate my own sexuality while accepting everyone else's sexuality whether or not it is the same as mine. (#4M, 208, 4)

By taking time to look inside ourselves, we are better able to acknowledge, challenge and come to understand this diversity so that we are able to celebrate rather than just tolerate it (Pendleton, 2009).

Grading of the sexology students' reflective papers

As documented, the literature review raised concerns about using reflective writing as assessment pieces. The Department of Sexology acknowledges these concerns and the marks allocated to reflective papers are a small fraction of the overall mark. There was a total of 10% for writing four papers,

with students receiving a half of these marks for simply submitting their paper on the due date. The length of the writing, and the depth of the personal information students included, was left to their discretion. Other marks were awarded for their comments related to the theory in set readings and lecture content. Students were not graded on their personal perspective in their papers. Instead, they gained full marks for their attempts to reflect on the meaning, principles, values and implications of the learning experience. Theoretically, a student could simply write about the readings he/she had studied. Students are not forced to share personal information about themselves. However, students invariably wrote at length about their experiences and understanding of their own sexuality.

Fook and Askeland (2007) encouraged their social work students to share a significant 'critical incident' from their field practice in a peer circle. The sexology students, in pairs or a small group, also discussed the workshop content and its impact on them. Because of the nature of the topics covered in sexology, sensitive issues are discussed. I observed that, although students did share deeply personal information in this setting, reflective writing papers appeared to provide a preferred avenue for such information. It was emphasised that these writings were confidential between the student and the lecturer and that no-one was obliged to self-disclose.

My feedback for students on their reflective papers

Many participants reported that an important part of the reflective writing process was the feedback that I provided. I made use of personal questions and comments to every student on each reflection paper. Examples of feedback were, 'I look forward to hearing more'. 'I am sorry to read that this has happened.' 'Please tell me more about ...' 'I encourage you to read/call (eg. counsellor, sexual health agency)' 'I admire your courage.' 'Thank you for sharing.'

I responded to generalised comments, for example, 'All people know ...' 'All guys are ...' by challenging the student to consider his/her own attitudes.

'What do YOU think about this'; 'How is this for YOU?' or 'Can you write a personal example of this?'

At times, students' comments were in opposition to the attitudes and values of my own. Examples of such statements included: 'Seeing the oldies having sex turned my stomach.' 'Seeing those people (swingers) having sex with many partners is simply wrong'. In response to reflections such as these, I wrote, 'look forward to reading your reflections as the semester progresses'. 'Yes it can be a shock to see bodies that are different to yours'. 'Glad you felt comfortable to share your thoughts.' 'How do you think you came to feel this way?' I provided non-reactive, non-judgemental responses.

For the first three reflection papers, I encouraged depth of thought on any topic raised in the sexology classes that interested the writer. I was not prescriptive about the content. Some students wrote at length about a small aspect of the class and others wrote generally about the whole class.

The week 8 lecture was on the subject of sexual orientations and analysing the range of human sexual behaviours. For this reflection paper I'm going to refer specifically to the fantasy section of the discussion because I found this to be the most interesting. (#8, 209, 3)

The final reflection paper posed questions (see Chapter 3) about the sexology unit and I modified these questions to ensure they aligned with my research questions. The majority of participants responded to the questions.

The feedback provided: guided the reflective learning process; encouraged participants to take risks with their writing; and built on and reaffirmed the safe space which had already been created in the class.

Perspectives of sexology students regarding reflective writing

Although students practise reflective writing throughout the semester, only a few participants commented about their *experience* of writing about the sexology class.

Thank you for the care you took and the time you gave me – I appreciated the comments and support and then felt safe sharing more. (#12F, 208, 4)

I have submitted many reflective pieces. I can say that it does help with the learning process and not just in a theoretical way. I currently study psychology and that is theory driven but it is refreshing to be able to look into myself and take the information I have learned and apply this to my life/situation. It has given me insight that I would not have achieved had I only surface learned the material. (#1F, 209, 4)

I never once felt pressured in the class so I am able to take my time and make my own opinions for myself. I feel like so much of the time this is rare in my path of education because it is based on theories, histories and current trends, while ideas behind sexology are factual, it is easy and I am encouraged to think and write about them for myself, and I feel that this is so refreshing and creates such an impact on my life. (#16F, 208, 4)

Throughout the class I have found the topics we discuss to be incredibly relevant to my personal life....aspects of my personal life are changing and honestly a bit out of whack right now and this unit has helped me grasp my true feelings. I have explored options in class and in the papers I did not previously think possible. I honestly look forward to the class and feel that I have retained more. (#7M, 109, 4)

It took me a while to get it. It was hard for me to know what to write in the first few papers. I have never kept a diary or written personal things before. I did get better at it by the final paper and can now think and write more about how things really affect me. With an added benefit! I am sharing more/disclosing with my girlfriend about how I feel. (#15M, 209, 4)

The reflection papers provided students with the opportunity to share information about their learning, questions, concerns, fears and intimate details of their sexual lives. Participants valued the non-judgemental feedback and their confidence in sharing private thoughts and feelings appeared to increase as the semester progressed. For some, this process provided the trigger for disclosure to those closest to them.

‘CONFIDENT TO EXPRESS MYSELF’: A SAFE SPACE

Learning through participation is the approach adopted within the Sexology 350 unit. Students commented that the paired work and the use of smaller groups were beneficial.

I am usually very reluctant to share in any of my other classes but because I had the chance to test out my ideas with another classmate or two, I offered my opinions often. (#20, 112, 4)

Learning through role play is used later in the semester when the students are feeling more comfortable with the sexology classroom environment. One example, that many students comment on, is the opportunity to role-play negotiating with a partner about sexual concerns, such as erectile dysfunction or desire discrepancy. Students are given the opportunity to role-play a person from the opposite gender. After this class, one student wrote:

I feel more confident to express myself and talk about my needs, as a direct result of those role-plays and communication exercises with my class partner. (#5, 111, 4)

These activities provided the participants with a safe learning environment in which to practise their communication skills on difficult, yet common, scenarios. They improve their skills including clear, assertive communication and negotiating sexual wants, and many were able to apply these skills and knowledge in their personal lives.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

In Chapter One, I outlined the approach to teaching and learning adopted by the Sexology Programme including the embracing of Paulo Freire's work on conscientisation (Freire, 1972, 2000, 2006; Freire & Faundez, 1989; Freire & World Council of Churches. Commission on the Churches' Participation in Development, 1975). I entered this research process with an open mind - how effective was this approach? Analysis of the data within this study reveals certain key elements about the sexology classes. These include liberation and empowerment. Similar to Freire's pedagogy, the film show, combined with the classes that follow over the semester, has the potential to raise awareness and empower both the individual and the group. Freire's (Freire, 2000, 2006) conscientisation process provides the framework for movement from oppression to liberation.

This chapter explored the ‘liberation’ or otherwise of the sexology students after being immersed in the content and processes teaching and learning inherent in the Sexology Programme with the use of sexually explicit material (SEM) being a key process in the unit.

The ‘sex-positive’ approach to teaching sexology, combined with a safe classroom environment, are both critical elements for the success of the sexology unit. Whilst the majority of the feedback from the participants is positive, both the content and the methodology are controversial. Teaching in this area is not always straight-forward and ‘sunshine and roses’. The interactive sexology classroom is not the norm in a university setting. Our approach is the opposite to that which many students have previously been exposed to, that is, ‘lecturing’ to a quiet group of students who are expected to listen and say little, have no communication with peers and write lots of notes. In this traditional university setting, disruptive behaviour is rare because students are the passive learners and the lecturer dominates the space. Although the sexology class may take some adjusting to, most students thrive as they interact with the creative mix of strategies. This dynamic setting suits the majority of students but not all. Just as I have requested that the students reflect honestly about their attitudes, feelings and thoughts, I have endeavoured to look critically at my practice. For additional details see Appendix 3 – *My teaching: Student feedback and my personal critique*.

Each semester I am inspired and challenged by a new group of individuals who bring their unique outlook on the world to the classroom. Is it the case, as a colleague pointed out, ‘that the extremes of personality may be attracted to the sexology’, or do the students in sexology simply represent a random selection? The class is composed of students with a range of personalities, from a variety of cultures, with different ages, genders and perspectives. Mix this diversity with the sexology content and the processes I use, and it is not surprising that reactions are triggered. Some students speak confidently and share openly, whilst others are more reluctant. Facilitating this unit sometimes brings me into conflict with the more vocal students – especially

those few students who do not have the awareness and/or desire to self-regulate their contributions. I have outlined some of the strategies I employ to encourage respectful interactions in the classroom, but, as some of the comments highlighted, I am not always successful. If these students, who ignore the rights of others, go out into the world believing that, and behaving as if, they have more rights to expression than others, they have missed a significant point of the class. I use it to inform my future practice.

I have learnt to emphasise the group guidelines at every opportunity and to respond promptly to group tensions. I believe these challenging dynamics are not necessarily a function of the subject area of sexology. Because I am dealing with controversial topics using interactive processes, these dynamics are more likely to surface. By virtue of the content and processes, I and the participants are exposed to the 'extremes' of personalities. In the classroom I attempt to model that all students' responses are valid, but, not all students are respectful of each person's right to speak. Their dominance or disruptions of discussions can be viewed poorly, creating factions and tensions in the class, necessitating me to employ 'control' strategies to affirm appropriate boundaries.

I endeavour to model the creation of safe spaces. I am motivated by the fact that those undertaking this sexology unit gain far more than an increase of knowledge about sexual health. Many students will take their university qualifications into the workplace. They may work, for example, as psychologists facilitating mental health discussion groups, or social workers coordinating small group work in a community, or teachers nurturing young people in a school setting. They have the potential to be the sexuality educators of the future. I want them to facilitate respectfully and to allow any participants a safe forum for expression. It is my hope that they will actively apply their experience of the importance of creating and maintaining a safe environment.

The next chapter will explore the outcomes for the students. As one student said, 'I left different to how I came in'. They have been challenged regarding

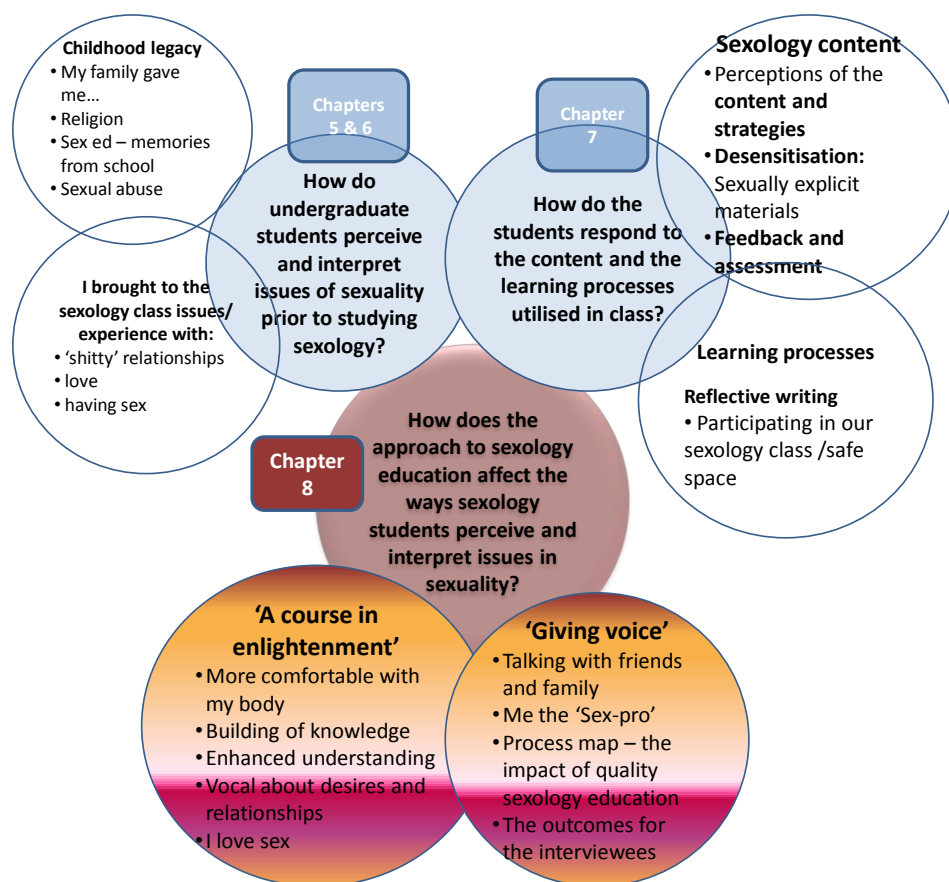
their worldview – their core attitudes and values, prejudices, preconceived judgements, apprehensions, fears and assumptions. At the core of a sex-positive approach is respect for the rights of individuals. By encouraging respect and affirming diversity of other people, students hopefully will apply these attitudes to those closest to them and those whom they will engage with in a professional setting.

CHAPTER 8 – OUTCOMES OF THE APPROACH TO TEACHING AND LEARNING IN THE SEXOLOGY CLASS

INTRODUCTION

The third research question - *How does the approach to sexology education affect the ways sexology students perceive and interpret issues in sexuality?* - is explored in this section. Students often moved from rigid beliefs at the beginning of the class to less inhibited, non-judgemental, open views by the end of the semester. Illustrations 1 and 2 – Sexual schemas at the beginning and the end of the semester, in the previous chapter, reflected these shifts in perspective. This chapter has two elements. The first element, 'A course in enlightenment', discusses the changes in perceptions and interpretations about their own and others' sexuality as they are exposed to the content and sex-positive approach intrinsic to the sexology class (as outlined in the previous chapter). The second element, 'Giving voice', acknowledges the transformations for the majority of the participants, including the interviewees, in regard to their willingness and skills to talk openly about sexuality. Process map 1 will be introduced in this chapter showing the impact of quality sexology education for adult learners (Stages 1-6). The following map highlights the themes and subthemes for this chapter.

Map 4. The link between Research Question 3 and the themes and subthemes.



‘A COURSE IN ENLIGHTENMENT’

Students often enter the class with limited expectations about what they will gain from the sexology class, but as the semester progresses, almost all students speak or write of significant outcomes for them. Outcomes such as an improved body image; an increased confidence to discuss sexuality with partners, family, friends and future clients; and a more positive view of pleasure and expressing their desires. One student wrote that the unit ‘taught me far more than sexual knowledge - it was a course in enlightenment’. The following section will sample this ‘enlightenment’.

More comfortable with my body

The literature reviewed for this study revealed that as a culture we are daily bombarded with unrealistic images of youthful appearances, and saturated with information about building 'perfect bodies'. An improved body image (especially the genitalia) was a common reflection from students. In addition, a new confidence, that embraced being a sexual person, was a positive outcome for many. After viewing both the film show and the slide show of the male and female genitalia, increasingly, as the classes progressed the female students in particular, spoke positively about their bodies and, especially, their genitalia.

I had a real aha experience by seeing women having sex notably seeing women with 'normal' bodies having sex. I thought they were really beautiful and their appeal so erotic. I do enjoy sex a lot, but I was never comfortable with seeing myself in a mirror while having sex not to mention on pictures etc. My attention would instantly shift from having fun to seeing unfavourable parts of my body. Therefore I never understood why my boyfriend wouldn't see that. He always gives me the feeling that I am the most beautiful woman for him. Seeing these films just gave me the insight to understand him and not to doubt his words. It's the little difference between knowing and really feeling something. (#14F, 208, 1)

This participant is rethinking her view of her body and considering how this view has been shaped. 'Young, skinny, unrealistic, photoshopped' bodies are the norm in the media. This young woman has recognised that her boyfriend enjoys her body and is not focussed on her 'unfavourable parts'. As she drops these 'doubts' she can embrace her partner's view of herself as a 'beautiful woman'.

The following paragraph is by female student who is also quelling the internal doubts about her vulva and challenging the perception of the 'perfect' body.

The second week of class was a breakthrough for me. Before viewing the film I was insecure about my body image. The film had many women of different ages and sizes. I know I will never be perfect but I now know I can love my body the way it is. I loved seeing the slides of all the vulvas too – now I know I am not unusual. Learning about the body parts made me appreciate the beauty and complexity of our bodies. Each person is made differently. I was always worried my lips

were outside of my body too much. I thought this was odd but now I know not every woman has the same formed vulva as the women in pornography. Now I am no longer embarrassed about how I was formed. (#16F, 108, 4)

Previously held perceptions about 'normal' or 'perfect' genitalia, struck a chord with many women (and a few males) in the class. Prior to sexology many female students perceived their genitalia to be unattractive and used derogatory words such as 'freak show', 'disaster zone', 'weird' and 'repulsive'. In addition, this writing at the end of the class shows a willingness to use the correct term for the external female genitalia ie. her vulva. Vulvas are a hidden, and often perceived as shameful, part of the female body and this 'shame and dislike' can affect a woman's willingness to be sexual. Karen said that recognising the 'diversity of form of vulvas was a freeing and liberating thing that flowed over into having sex ...no longer needing to be hidden under the sheets or oral sex only in the dark... I was willing to be seen and enjoyed'.

'Most of us came (to the class) with little knowledge about sex': The building of knowledge

Many students assume that, because of their religious background (eg. Hindu, Catholic, Muslim, Fundamental Christian) or place of origin (eg. India, Africa, Singapore, country WA), they are 'disadvantaged' in regards to prior knowledge about sexuality.

As for myself (a Muslim woman) I learn to become much more independent and empower myself. Women are no longer seen behind their man's back. Everything I have learned is very useful when I get married and to prepare myself when I finally find my life partner. I loved the section when the class brainstormed on other ways to say 'I love you'. Everyone learns the art of give and take and maintaining happiness. Furthermore it helps in lessening polygamy. (#14F, 108, 4)

In Malaysia sex is not something that is discussed openly in schools or families. I was surprised that some Australian students said this was the case for them too. (#21M, 210, 4)

In addition to understanding that most people come to the class with limited exposure to positive information about sexuality, these two students (above)

are also challenging the assumption that people from different ethnic or religious backgrounds would attend the sexology class. About 80% of Australian-born students also shared that they had received little or no positive sexuality information:

I grew up in the wheatbelt of WA. I never thought gay people lived in our town and no one ever said anything nice about gays. I know now that prejudice can shift and education is the key. (#2M, 210, 4)

This male student from a small country-town, had no exposure to the diverse range of sexual orientations and expressions. No doubt this diversity exists in his town, but because of fear and ignorance it remained invisible.

The same student related that 'his high school mate came out to me...I was honoured'. He said that his 'mind had been opened up' and 'I guess that's why he could tell me now'. His mate's revelation was an epiphany for him. All along he believed that 'only hetero's lived in our town' and now his mate's disclosure refuted this. As a direct result of his participation in sexology, his 'support and respect for my mate has grown as now I get the effects of the bullying and discrimination and invisibility of gay people'. From this example, it is clear that these studies celebrate diversity in human sexual expression and therefore promote a more inclusive community. It can also be assumed that the practice of inclusion creates safe spaces for individuals to share their deepest and most profound 'secrets' with another.

Not only do students understand the importance of extending their own understanding about sexuality, a number of students spoke of the importance of educating children.

It was reassuring but disappointing to realise that I was in the majority when it came to having no sex ed from my parents... If I have children, I want to talk honestly about the bad and good stuff. (#1M, 209, 2)

Like the male student above, 27-year-old Anne, recognised that her new found confidence to discuss sexuality will also assist her to communicate honestly with her children.

One day I hope to be a mother and will I really freak out at my daughter for having sex? I suddenly realised that the answer to that

question is no. I want my kids to feel comfortable talking to me about sex and relationships. (#13, 108, 4)

It is not surprising that the students were appreciative of their new found confidence to speak about this 'taboo' subject. Almost all interviewees said that their parents had usually been raised by parents who were reluctant to talk positively about sexuality. In addition, most parents had not had access to any school-based sexuality education. Roy said that he wanted to 'break the spiral of ignorance' and like many students, he believed that he was now better equipped to talk openly with his children, should he have any. Other students, who were parents, shared information on how they felt when they opened up the subject with their children. They communicated about the 'joys', 'pride and 'relief'. One father wrote that he was 'over the moon' when his 15 year-old daughter asked him to 'buy milk, tampons and toothpaste'. He felt 'rewarded for his new openness' and pleased that his daughter had realised that he was 'just as able to talk about this stuff as her mum'. Fathers, more so than mothers, feel poorly equipped to talk about sexuality, especially with their daughters. Having the 'courage to make the first comments' opened up conversations where all the family members could take part.

The clitoris is 'mindblowing' and 'tampons work': Enhanced understanding

For many students it was clear they had very little knowledge of female genitalia, especially the clitoris. This left many participants with feelings of inadequacy and embarrassment. As the classes progressed they began to realise that the information was readily available and there were advantages in being more confident about 'holding some key info'. Male students, in particular, were keen to know more about female genitalia and the clitoris in particular:

I am blown away by all I have learned, for example about the clitoris. I believe that the clitoris is a great motivator that encourages sexual activity, if for no other reason that the physical pleasure it provides. (#19M, 208, 3)

This student came to a new understanding about how the clitoris works. He was looking forward to 'showing his skills on a willing partner'. Another student said this new knowledge was 'mindblowing' and a 'privilege':

The clitoris, what an amazing and wonderful organ. I understood its importance in giving pleasure and have spent my sexually active years trying to work it out, the best ways of stimulations and to give pleasure. I know of stimulating areas round the clitoris but I never knew it was all interconnected; it all makes so much more sense now and I feel almost privileged to have that understanding. (#9M, 108, 4)

A nursing student expressed her incredulity about not learning about the female genitalia in her university course:

This course taught me so much about body...I have been taking biology courses for three years and was still uncertain where the clitoris was. I find it weird that I had to take a sexology course to learn about body organs because I should be learning about them in my anatomy courses. (#4F, 211, 4)

Li Ting had received no sexuality education prior to attending the sexology class. The next two quotes demonstrate that a lack of understanding about the female body has practical consequences:

I knew nothing about tampons and I couldn't use them until Lorel talked to me and gave me some tips. Using tampons has been a breakthrough for me. Sex is a lot more prevalent here than Singapore but maybe it is just talked about. I think it is great to talk about it. (Li Ting)

I got my period at 13 but I was 18 before I realised I had a vagina and that is where my period blood was coming from. Today I learnt about all types of tampons and I am pleased to report that I am now a tampon user and they work!... I had never put my fingers in my vagina before or masturbated. (#20, 210, 2)

Menarche, the beginning of menstruation, is an unforgettable milestone for most young women. Many students said that they had been given negative messages about periods and poorly prepared for this event. This event provides an opportunity to celebrate a significant sexual milestone. Quite the opposite happened for one young woman. Parents, especially mothers, 'were not up to this task' wrote the student, 'When my period started, my mother groaned. No positive messages coming from her'. The quotes above from Li

Ting and the other female student showed that using tampons instead of pads had 'been huge'. Describing their menstrual period now - it is 'like going from a D minus to an A plus – easier by far' and no longer the 'monthly embarrassing drama'. I asked Li Ting why she hadn't previously sought out information about periods. Li Ting said that in the past she had felt 'shameful about wanting to know anything about sex' and, therefore, it was 'too risky to google for that sort of stuff'. Taking the sexology class had been 'totally liberating for me AND my boyfriend' because now discussions 'are brilliant and honest'.

With few exceptions, students spoke of knowledge gained. Only once a comment was made about learning little. After working in a small group compiling male genitalia with 'bits and bobs', Roy wrote:

The class on anatomy was a bit basic for me. Sitting around labelling sexy bits felt like being in primary school – but I realised I didn't know all the female bits. (Roy)

Roy, however, acknowledged that he 'had lived longer and experienced more than the younger students' and had an 'intimate knowledge of male bits including having a vasectomy'.

As students participated in the interactive learning activities, their knowledge of genitalia (especially female genitalia) grew considerably. This left them feeling 'liberated' and 'more confident', for example to use tampons for the first time. Another female student said that she was feeling more skilled to talk about her body and this 'was freeing and opened a door'. She spoke of a willingness to broach 'embarrassing body issues' with her doctor and her partner, issues that had plagued her for years. The ability to discuss 'embarrassing' and 'sensitive' sexual health topics is a positive step for physical and emotional health.

Being more vocal about desires and relationships

Sexuality is not a topic that is openly discussed in public or education circles without a degree of embarrassment. Many students spoke of their expanded

confidence to 'be vocal' about their desires and this flowed through to their sexual practices, such as feeling more 'adventurous' and 'experimental'.

...let myself go a little bit has increased dramatically. I am happy and more comfortable with who I am...I have a voice now...speaking about things I never could have done before ... things from the course I will carry with me for the rest of my life. (#6F, 108, 4)

Steve spoke about negotiating his current 'friendship' with a young woman, something he would have 'avoided doing before'.

Currently I am pretty on and off with a good friend as we don't know where we want to go with what we have. Now having the confidence to discuss the situation more openly has helped us a lot. (Steve)

A willingness to talk about boundaries in relationships has been significant for Steve and his female friend. Rather than 'breaking off' or 'not trying to talk' he was willing to engage in a 'tricky conversation'. Another young male said that talking about sex, especially with women, was now easier because his 'sexual language has changed'.

I am very good at making reference to body parts without making them sleazy and now with this new found openness I can talk more accurately and clinically, with less embarrassment and self-consciousness. (#11M, 108, 4)

Many student papers demonstrated that language is a crucial tool that has the power to connect; embarrass; reflect class, culture and gender. The ability to use 'correct', 'clinical', 'proper' language eased some of the stress when it came to talking about sexuality.

One of the main ways this unit has impacted my personal life has been in my relationship. I am much more confident talking to my boyfriend about sexual matters. Recently he told me that he loves how he can talk to me about anything - even the guy stuff he wouldn't be comfortable talking to his friends about. We've even discussed effective masturbation techniques, contraception and our own sexual fantasies. Also the class on love and relationships has been useful in bringing both of us together. (#7F, 109, 4)

For Rachel the topic of sexuality was 'extremely taboo'. The messages she received 'coming from a conservative Muslim background', 'inhibited' any expression of sexuality and according to her culture and her parents, sex was 'to be stayed away from'. However, a huge shift happened for her when she

'studied sexology and met her first boyfriend'. As sex became less of a 'mysterious black box', Rachel saw that the ability to talk about sex with her boyfriend was empowering. It was a way of understanding how he 'ticked' and for them both to 'get close' without being physical. It was 'a joyful, happy and intimate way of showing our love for each other'. There was a 'freedom' that came with 'expressing honestly about a whole world that was always so foreign to me'. For Rachel, talking about sex was 'allowed' but having sex, she said, was 'not going to happen until I marry'.

Another female student, also from a conservative Christian background felt a shift in attitude 'not to feel bad about what I do sexually'.

Now I am more open to the ideas of same-sex relationship and non married couples. I have had sex before marriage but now I am not ashamed of it. I have experienced something that has allowed me to understand me as a woman with desires... Sexology has shown me that I am not to feel bad for what I do sexually. Sex is part of life. My parents and pastors may not view it in the same light but I am comfortable with what I have and will experience. (#12F, 108, 4)

This is a significant shift for this female student because at the beginning of the semester she 'felt ashamed about even looking at sexual pictures' and believed that sex should only 'happen within marriage'. She recognised the importance of her religion, yet realised that her views did not have to align completely with the views of her parents and pastors. She was allowing herself to have desires and to experience sexual pleasure and not judging herself and others so harshly.

The following quote from Maggie stands out because of her 'troubled past'. Maggie, a mature-age student, had a 'past filled with sexual abuse' and she had worked in the sex industry for almost a decade:

On a personal level I have probably learnt the most and am surprised at exactly how much my attitudes towards sex have shifted. I think that what has mainly shifted for me is that a lot of what I thought was maybe unacceptable in society has been normalised for me now. Through this semester I have expanded my own sexual experiences which have allowed me to move from feeling shame around wanting to experience certain sexual acts to feeling liberated at having the experience...My personal past has been filled with sexual abuse as a child to being in relationships with abusive partners and then moving

onto prostitution in my thirties. None of these experiences led me to feelings of acceptance of myself as a woman. But sexology has given me a different view; it has enabled me to see sex as an experience of expression, to not feel ashamed to want to have new experiences, but to embrace them. (Maggie)

Maggie's learning involved the shedding of the shame from her past. As a sex worker, she felt cut off from her femininity and alienated from society. Some may be surprised that someone who has worked in the sex industry would not be an 'expert in sex'. Although Maggie may have brought to the class extensive knowledge about certain aspects of sexual behaviour, she revelled in the positive attitudes towards sexual expression and diversity. She had moved from one abusive situation to another and had used a 'cocktail of drugs' as a means of coping. In the middle of her life, she 'was getting her life on track' and away from abusive relationships, she was reinventing her sexual self and looking forward to her professional role as a social worker, working positively with other women in troubled relationships.

Through engagement with the learning processes, most participants were better able to communicate more knowledgeably and confidently about their sexuality.

'I love sex'

For many participants, enjoying being sexual is a new found feeling. Discussions about pleasure, desire and the benefits of sex stimulated many comments in reflection papers during the middle and latter part of the semester.

It is great to get the message that sex is good. As a female this is the very opposite of the message I got growing up. (Ava)

I am going to make a bold statement: I love sex. I am not just talking about the act either, while that may be great. I am referring more to the completely natural way your body reacts to another body. (#18F, 208, 3)

I also loved the part of the class where we learned that sex is good for you! I agree - sex is one of the few things in life that is pleasurable and also good for you! (#2M, 208, 2)

Deva had an epiphany about aging, and remaining sexy and desirable:

I have now realised through maturity that sexuality should not be denied to use just because one ages. I hope as I advance into my older years, I will still have the same sexual urges and still be able to lead a fulfilling sex life without being labelled as 'non human' as I grow older. I think sex gets better and better as I get older. Sexology also made me think about me and what I like now, and that I want to be old and sexy. It reaffirmed a few things for me and it is human to have sex. There is nothing wrong as long as you are not hurting anyone else and go for what you want and desire. Everyone is just so different. Some people have a real problem with that. I wish everyone could do sexology and get to a different understanding. (Deva)

Deva challenged the stereotype that as people age, their desire to be sexual lessens. She felt affirmed as a sexual being and rejected 'the idea that only beautiful young skinny people have sex'.

Numerous students communicated their willingness to 'step out of the comfort zone' and to give themselves permission to experiment sexually. Participants shared about: 'acting out fantasies', 'surprising' my partner and buying a 'rabbit ears' (vibrator), 'watching porn together', sharing same-sex fantasies; 'visiting a swingers' club' and 'dressing up and being playful'. Combined with this was the issue of consensual sex, that is, sexual activity that is respectful of all parties.

I have only started this since I started sexology so that shows me how much I have changed my whole/giving myself permission stuff. I love it and just acting out a few of those fantasies. Like what was said in class 'You don't have to act them all out'. Like some of those that aren't safe like the rape sort of thing. (#17, 210, 4)

Sex to me is penetration. Whether it be with a toy or penis – that's what I like – well I like it all. And the group orgy scene [on the film show] made me laugh. I liked that. Definitely I am thinking and laughing and remembering my own scene [sex with 'two spunky guys at the same time']. It was the experience of a life. I don't know if I would ever repeat it but because it was spontaneous. I would pike out I think. But if my partner wanted it I would consider it yes but I don't know if I could make out with a girl – kissing a girl is one thing but making out – not sure. (April)

As far as I'm concerned, sexual variance is a wonderful thing, as long as all participants are consenting. I love variety in the bedroom, and

feel that atypical sexual behaviour has the ability to really enhance my sex life. One of my most bizarre, and fascinating sexual experiences involved a partner that was aroused by urine (urolagnia). I was standing naked in the shower one night, my partner watching from the doorway, and he told me to piss. I was a little shocked, but he gave me a reassuring smile and I did as he wished. His response was immediate – his eyes lit up with passion and excitement, and he quickly joined me in the shower to have some amazing, hot and steamy sex. (#16F, 113, 2)

On the weekend I went to the local sex toy shop and bought my partner a vibrator. Before I was threatened and thought I wasn't good enough to give her an orgasm. Now I love that she is going off and loving sex more. (#14M, 208, 3)

Permission to be sexual, to experience pleasure, and an openness to experiment sexually are central to the sex-positive approach taken in sexology. The ability to articulate desires and fantasies, and to take into account others' desires, is vital for a vibrant, healthy relationship.

GIVING VOICE

'Giving voice': Talking about sex with family and friends

For most students, as their confidence to discuss sexuality in class grew, they found themselves talking about sex with both friends and family more often:

I now realise that people love sex and love to talk about it including myself!...The moment someone hears that I am taking sexology, it instantly sparks many questions and an interesting conversation! (#4, 108, 4)

This new-found confidence to participate in conversations with friends about sexuality may spill over and change the way sexuality is talked about within the family. A 35-year-old student perceived her mother's views about sex as being 'very Victorian' yet she 'took a risk' and asked her mother to edit her sexology essay. 'This led to a lively conversation in which both of us were comfortable and relatively open.' The same student was proud of her ability to be able to speak more honestly to her prepubescent sons.

I had the man-to-man talk and I could focus far better on information rather than skimming around the edges of subjects. (#3, 210, 4)

For most parents, speaking to their children about sexuality is extremely difficult and, as the literature showed, these discussions are often forgone altogether. Embarrassment and perceived lack of knowledge hinder open discussions. 'I know I don't know everything but the books and tips you gave helped'. Armed with a little more knowledge and a willingness to overcome her anxiety about talking about sexuality with her sons, this participant 'stepped up and used every chance' to engage in conversation with her children. Talking about 'sex and relationships' became 'normal for us'.

Prior to studying sexology, 20-year-old Steve had a difficult relationship with his 'religious' mother and felt he had to 'sneak around behind her back and felt guilty as if I was doing something wrong'. He longed for a more honest relationship with his mother and wrote of 'a major breakthrough' with her.

I told her, 'Look I'm 20 years old so get off my case and stop treating me like a little kid'. It worked real well and we are having some great conversations rather than just being told what to do...Sexology helped me feel more comfortable about talking to her about my relationships and me having sex. I have even had a few girlfriends sleep over.
(Steve)

For Steve and his mother, there was a profound shift in their interactions.

Jamie's relationship with his parents 'went to a new level thanks to sexology' and he recognised that 'doing sexology has been a great conversation starter'.

Last week I asked my Mum if she and Dad still had sex, at which she laughed and said 'Of course, we're only 50.' I then explained to her that being 50 doesn't necessarily mean that you are still sexually active and then spilled into more conversation about menopause (which my mum hit at 43) and the Madonna-whore syndrome. Before this unit I probably would not have been comfortable having this conversation or with knowing about my parents' sex lives. But now I feel that I can be there if my Mum has any questions or to encourage my parents, should they ever feel they are 'too old' for sex. (Jamie)

Jamie's willingness to engage with his parents in open, and often explicit, conversations about sex brought him satisfaction and elevated feelings of 'closeness and honesty', and challenged the traditional model of the parent

as the educator and authority on the subject of sex Jamie's final reflection paper in its entirety is attached in Appendix 13.

For the participants, the ability to engage in discussions about a large range of topics brought a freedom and a new connection with those closest to them.

Me the 'sex-pro': Knowledgeable about sexuality

Almost all students spoke of their increased confidence to answer questions and engage in conversations about sexuality. Because of this new-found confidence, many spoke of becoming people who influenced and educated those around them about sexuality:

Ever since I started studying sexology, my girlfriends are always eager and waiting excitedly for me to bring them good news and information when I come home from class. I felt funny sometime and smiling to myself as I thought 'when did I become the sex-pro?' At the same time, this is an opportunity for stronger bonding between me and my loved ones and to simply brighten up the day. (#19F, 210, 4)

One young woman wrote of her delight at her new found 'Sexologist' status.

I know there is so much I still have to learn but it is fun and entertaining when people assume that I am a professional (and obviously I don't correct their assumption). I spent a weekend down in Margaret River with four other girls from the sexology class and we were known as 'the Sexologists' by the end of the trip. (#13F, 109, 4)

Friends and family sought out the participants. 'A door had opened' said another young father, after his teenage daughter shared her experience of her period and the 'hassles of growing up.' Because of their willingness to listen, 'not judge and be open' to a variety of perspectives ensured that others valued the sexology students as 'trustworthy and capable' holders of information about sexuality.

Another student wrote of 'overcoming her embarrassment, fear and judgements' to 'add a touch of reality' to her group presentation. She, along with two peers from the sexology class, visited a local brothel:

I didn't know what to expect but I am glad I went. I talked with two sex workers and we were shown a few of the rooms – 'the jungle room

and the 'girly' room'. One worker spoke about a good paying job that supported her children. The other sex worker hated her work but said it paid well. I am guessing that every woman in that brothel had an amazing story. It blew away any stereotypical ideas my group had, and our presentation was much improved. (#3F, 111, 4)

After visiting the brothel, she felt more 'relaxed' and 'competent' to deliver an 'exciting presentation and a detailed paper'. In addition to the benefits for her assignment and presentation, 'it opened my mind and I saw how little I knew about another's life...the women looked like any other women – I was expecting angry, illiterate druggies'. Although brief, the personal contact with a 'real sex-worker' and a glimpse into the sex-workers' world, this female student rearranged her preconceived ideas about them and their work. 'There was a cross section of women there and, although the money was the focus, their banter and support for each other was evident'. The visit had an impact on this student and she recognised the experience as 'real education'.

Rachel spoke about her growing confidence to talk with her boyfriend about the 'scariest stuff like masturbation, erections and orgasms'

He talks to me about masturbation. Honestly I don't know everything but before I took this class I would have been like 'What! What! What! I don't want to know that or don't tell me!' but now it like 'Ok this is what I have learned in sexology'... and then 'Ok that's good, tell me more.' ...He was being sorry that he wakes up with erections and I was telling what I learnt in sexology. 'Cool' he said 'Like I am not like crazy?' (Rachel)

Not only did Rachel receive an education about sexology, she also spoke freely to her boyfriend about subjects that would have previously been taboo. She was able to normalise this ordinary behaviour, eg. early morning erections, and to reassure her boyfriend that he 'wasn't crazy'.

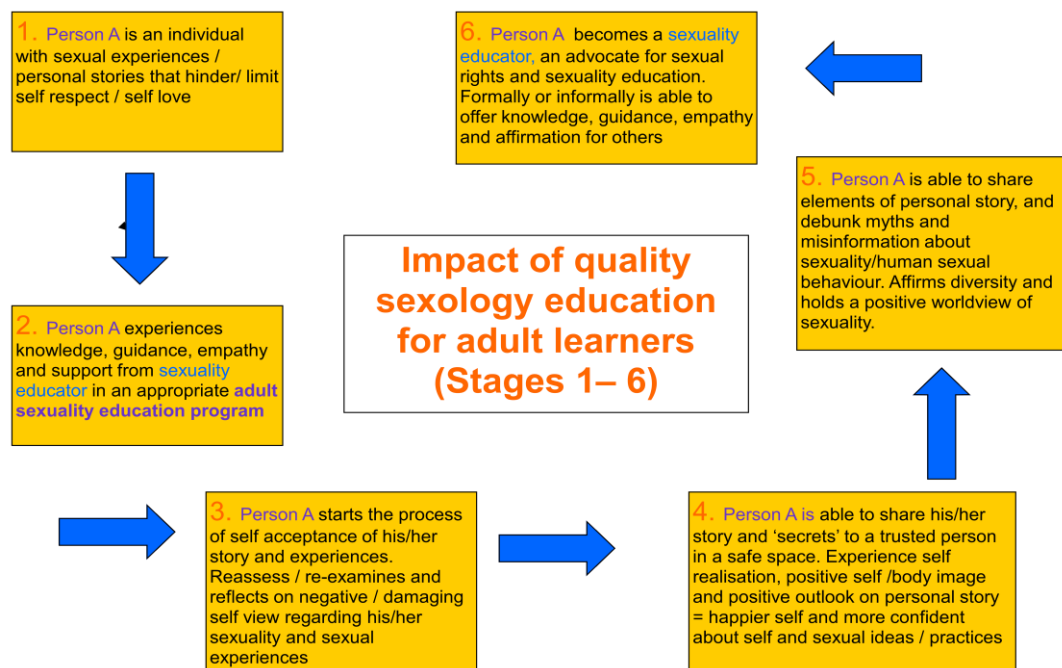
Rob, a usually quiet listener, spoke about his willingness to contribute to conversations with his partner and their friends.

Sex comes up as a conversation almost every time my mates get together and even with our partners there too. This is not unusual – what is unusual is that I am the one contributing most to these conversations – so my cred has gone up! (Rob)

Unanimously, students spoke of their greater confidence to speak knowledgeably about sexuality and relationships. This 'sex-pro' role was well received by family and friends and they became the 'star attraction' and keepers of the 'truth' about sexuality and relationships. Their friends and family waited eagerly for them to return from class. They made a significant shift from student to sexuality educator. For some, it was a surprising new role to find themselves in, overcoming awkwardness and or/ shyness.

A useful process map that exhibits this growing confidence is shown below. The map shows the development of the students as they are immersed in the content of, and 'sex-positive' approach to, sexuality education. The majority of students are able to discuss issues relating to their sexuality and emerge from the class as advocates for the sexual rights of others (Stage 6). This map incorporates a number of steps but not all students move from Stages 1 to Stage 6. Whilst the goal is to move students through the stages, for some participants moving just one or two levels is significant. Change will continue to happen long after the sexology class has ended. Even the students who came with open-minded attitudes, and seemingly no problems, related to their sexuality, stated that they benefited enormously from the unit. Their confidence to speak about sexuality grew and others (family and friends) sought them out to discuss issues.

Process map 1. The impact of quality sexology education for adult learners (Stages 1 to 6). (Mayberry, L., & Coates, R. 2012).



'Giving voice': Outcomes for the interviewees

The students who were interviewed reflected on the outcomes of this process. Some of the participants' stories are detailed in Chapter 6. Others appear as quotes throughout Chapters 5, 7 and 8. Their stories are a snapshot in time; participants have moved on, their reflections and feelings about their experiences may have also changed. According to Atkinson (1995) the process of capturing our life story can help us to be "more authentic and alive" (p. 51). Participants shared experiences about lost love, grief, anger, remorse, shameful secrets, abuse, lust, longing, loneliness, violence, fear, love, contentedness, cultural dilemmas, health issues, termination, pregnancy, and a myriad of other poignant issues. With the researcher providing a listening ear and an open ended approach to questioning, these stories were able to come to the surface. This process gave the interviewees the opportunity to re-examine and reframe these experiences. It can be seen from many of the students' comments that the reflection and storytelling process was invaluable to them. One interviewee said, 'My story has been given a voice. I kept it down for so long. I have a whole new freedom around it'. Many, in turn, said that they had become the listeners to others' stories. 'My openness to tell about what had happened has had some surprising endpoints – my best friend told me something big –

I am sure that only happened because I risked and told her about my secret'. Telling their stories and sharing their secrets enabled participants to consider how past events and behaviours had impacted on their lives in general, and their sexuality in particular.

A common theme in much of the storytelling is secrecy. About a third of the students said that they were sharing secrets that they had carried for decades. Carrying these secrets can profoundly shape individuals' lives because in the holding of the secrets, damage is being done. Carl Jung (1966, p. 55) wrote, "The possession of secrets acts like a psychic poison that alienates their possessor from the community". The reason for holding a secret (as opposed to keeping something private) is often shame and fear about what others may think. Repeated throughout this study, many felt a cultural pressure to hold their secrets. Generally, sexuality is not discussed openly in families, churches, amongst friends and/or with partners. Unspoken stories are more potent, more powerful and can be the inhibitors that stop us from discovering our potential (C. G. Jung, 1966) – it has a spell over us.

Reading these stories can help each of us explore and affirm our own story – especially those who have suffered harm in the realms of sexuality and relationships. We learnt how the participants forged a path through adversities and challenges in relationships and sexual experiences. Because of their willingness to share, we too can be more open, more affirming, more understanding of others' stories and our own story.

'STEPPING OUT INTO THE SUNSHINE': SUMMARY

This chapter explores the impact on participants of the 'sex-positive' approach to teaching that is so fundamental to the Sexology Programme.

Besides a new-found appreciation for the uniqueness of their bodies (especially the variety of shapes and sizes of genitalia), students consistently affirmed the enormous diversity of consensual sexual practices, regardless of age, gender or sexual preferences. Participant feedback demonstrated how

powerful the experiential learning approach was, as opposed to the traditional 'sit and listen' method of classroom teaching.

For many people in mainstream Australian society, silence, shame and secrets are the norm when considering the topic of sexuality. Acknowledging this makes it all the more remarkable that, very soon after starting the course, participants willingly spoke and wrote about their personal sexual experiences. As the above perceptions indicate, reflection about what has taken place in the classroom offered the learner a powerful tool for personal growth. Realisation of one's personal journey encouraged and enabled a dialogue for participants, challenging 'taken for granted' attitudes and prejudices.

In addition to the experiential learning strategies and self-reflection, the ongoing creation of a 'safe space' in the classroom enabled participants to feel supported in expressing their thoughts and feelings. Talking freely and openly about relationships, sexual experiences, body parts, fantasies, pornography, fears, prejudices, hopes, desires and longings, freed students from their past – as one female said, 'freedom from the bondage of suppressed thoughts and ideas'.

Sharing thoughts and feelings, stimulated greater self-awareness for the participants. Self-expression in the company of a non-judgemental, supportive audience with an experienced empathic educator/facilitator allowed students an opportunity to reconsider 'their story'.

A remarkable change in students' confidence to express their thoughts and feelings about sexuality occurred in a relatively brief time. This can be attributed in part to the keeping of the 'safe space' and confidentiality agreed upon by participants, their willingness to be honest and open, along with the skills of an experienced teacher/facilitator. Students' comments reflected their increased levels of confidence and expanded knowledge about sexology and this encouraged them to be bolder and more forthright in their discussions with others especially partners, parents and friends.

This new found willingness to provoke and engage in discussion about sexuality brings increased depth to relationships and ‘treads new paths’ for many. Some students spoke of improved sex lives: more adventurous and satisfying. Others communicated how they applied their new understanding to existing relationships or to the search for more fulfilling relationships. Participants now had tangible knowledge of how they could proceed in this task and a clearer idea of what a more suitable partner or relationship might be like. Students’ resourcefulness and willingness to research and discuss the topic of sexuality made them become a ‘magnet’ to others. Family members, peers and friends sought them out and asked questions of them. What makes this all the more remarkable is that in Western culture sexuality is a ‘hot’ topic, yet it is often shrouded in secrecy and rarely discussed honestly in a public forum. For most students, this was another positive, if somewhat surprising and pleasant, outcome of their sexology classes.

It is heart-warming to read of the ‘sex-positive’ outcomes described by students undertaking sexology studies. As one student succinctly put it, taking sexology was like ‘stepping out into the sunshine’. This indicates that the writer has been somewhat ‘in the dark’ about sexuality prior to undertaking her sexology studies. This apt metaphor describes the aim of the Sexology Programme: participants clarify their own understanding of sexuality and gain the skills and confidence to apply what they had learned.

These students are then able to use these tools to encourage a sex-positive attitude and approach with others, thus creating a ‘ripple effect’ that promotes ‘sex-positive’, happier individuals, relationships and communities. As one male student wrote, ‘I now know that prejudice can shift and education is the key’.

CHAPTER 9 – DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

This study has investigated the place of sexuality in people's lives and the extent to which people deal with complex issues related to learning about sexuality. The topic of sexuality often raises anxieties in Western society. Discussing sexuality and feeling encouraged about expressing one's sexuality are problematic. Individuals carry the early messages they received about sexuality into their adult life resulting in shame, guilt, inhibition and judgemental attitudes.

Sexuality is a contentious part of life (Glasier, Gülmezoglu, Schmid, Moreno, & Van Look, 2006; Richardson, 2000). A person's sexuality is at the very core of his/her being, yet, as this study uncovered and the literature supported, only a small proportion of parents feel comfortable to discuss sexuality with their children (Berne, et al., 2000; Dyson & Smith, 2011). The first question parents ask about their newborn is: 'Is it a girl or a boy?' Our gender and sexuality are interrelated. We are influenced by our family as we experience the world around us. Our peers, the media, religion and the internet are key factors in the development of our sexuality. People share a need to express themselves through their sexuality. Attractions bring us alive and have the potential to teach us more about ourselves and others. Growing and developing intimate relationships with others and selecting sexual partners become a key focus for individuals. Our identity is formed by our sexuality. Globally, sexuality is a problematic feature of modern societies with concerns about sex trafficking, the use of sexual images and the rise of pornography on the internet, HIV/AIDS, gender-based discrimination, rape as a mode of torture in war, and the rights of sexually diverse groups (Richardson, 2000).

Teaching about sexuality is challenging and controversial and, because of this, many teachers feel unprepared to tackle this subject. Sexuality is

complex and the literature emphasises the need for a comprehensive approach to sexuality education (Dyson, et al., 2003). This study reveals the complex issues regarding teaching sexology and demonstrates that engagement in the sexology class was a catalyst for challenging the participants' view about sexuality and provided an opportunity to hear the views of others. This study clearly shows that comprehensive sexuality education for adults is positively received by students and worthwhile. This final chapter advocates the provision of comprehensive sexuality education for adults both at tertiary institutions and within the wider community.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions that were investigated were:

- How do undergraduate sexology students perceive and interpret issues in sexuality prior to studying sexology?
- How do the students respond to the content and learning processes used in class?
- How does the approach to sexology education affect the ways sexology students perceive and interpret issues in sexuality?

In reference to the first research question, this study revealed the early messages participants received in their childhood, and their experiences and understanding about sexuality prior to entering the sexology class. Undergraduate students bring a myriad of perceptions about their own and other's sexuality to the sexology 350 class. Chapters 5 and 6 demonstrated the diversity of experiences and influences that students in the study encountered in their formative years. It is clear that the strongest influence on participants was their parents' views, and this was even more pronounced if their parents were themselves influenced by a religious culture. Overall, it appears that those students whose parents were strict in their observance of religion influenced their children more than those whose parents did not follow any particular religion. The study supported the findings reported in the literature review that sexuality is problematic in society. Many parents feel

that they lack the knowledge and skills to talk openly with their children about sexuality. Their embarrassment to conduct these vital conversations about sexuality, added to the negative messages many people carry from childhood.

With few exceptions, the responses indicate that the influence of religion on the participants' views of sexuality is a negative one. Be it learning from one's family, attendance at church or a religion-based school, the experiences paint a bleak picture. Guilt about sexual activity and pleasure, and judgement about others' sexual practices, appeared to permeate students' attitudes and values prior to undertaking their sexology studies. Another example of the literature reflecting students' comments is: prior to attending the class, female participants viewed in a derogatory manner their bodies and their genitalia, in particular. There is no standard for the appearance of the genitals. No-one expects two faces to look exactly the same, so why do we expect the genitals to look alike? (Herbenick & Schick, 2011) Both male and female students clearly had been influenced by the messages that are prolific in the media and pornography about the 'perfect vulva'.

A review of the literature found limited sexuality education in schools and the participants in this study supported this view. They reported limited or irrelevant sexuality education in schools with a narrow focus on the biological aspects of sex (L. Allen, 2012; Blake, 2005; Dyson, et al., 2003). The education did not address the issues that were significant for them and in particular there was no positive acknowledgement of desire and pleasure (L. Allen, 1995; L. Allen, 2007; Bay-Cheng, 2003; A. Smith et al., 2011). Unfortunately the state of sexuality education in schools is unlikely to change in the near future. For example, in Western Australia, although there is access to a quality sexuality curriculum and online support, www.gdhr.wa.gov.au (Department of Health (WA) and Department of Education (WA), 2012), the subject of health education (of which sexuality education is a part) is not mandated. In addition, scant resources are allocated to teacher training (both pre-service and in-service) resulting in teachers' feeling unprepared and unsupported to discuss this controversial

area in its entirety (L. Allen, 2009; Ollis, 2010; A. Smith, et al., 2011). At all levels, there appears to be discomfort about talking about sexuality so there is no catalyst for paradigm change. Although the literature clearly states that ‘one off’ lessons about topics (such as STIs) rarely change behaviour, much of what is delivered in schools is of just such a limited and narrow focus (A. Smith, et al., 2011).

The second research question was: **How do the students respond to the content and learning processes used in class?** To answer this question the study focussed on the sexually explicit film and the sexuality content that ‘grabbed’ students’ attention. The learning environment created in the sexology class was also explored.

It was abundantly clear that the students were motivated to participate in the sexology classes. The relevance of the content to their personal lives resonated with them. For example, many said that the ‘love and relationships’ class gave them an opportunity to examine their previous relationships and encouraged them look forward to ‘healthier, sexier’ relationships. Many students spoke of the challenges and pain they had experienced such as ‘lost love’ or ‘love that soured’. Some students recognised the value in entering a relationship with more knowledge about love and intimacy and, importantly, they appreciated the practical strategies that helped them express their feelings and thoughts.

The Sexology Programme makes use of two key tools – sexuality explicit materials and reflective writing. I discovered that the use of sexually explicit materials was a powerful tool for challenging people’s perceptions of ‘usual sex – real people having real sex’ rather than the often manufactured sex portrayed by the media, including the internet. Students reported that the SEM dispelled myths, modelled healthy, satisfying sexual encounters, provided factual information surrounding the physiological and physical aspects of sex, gave new information about sexual behaviours that will enhance their sex life and relationships, and relayed positive, realistic messages about body image, relationships and intimacy.

While much evidence points to the merit of SEM (Brewster & Wylie, 2008; Tepper, 1997; Wishnoff, 1978), on rare occasions, some individuals may have adverse reactions to the material. This may happen when the individual is not receptive to try new sexual experiences; where there is a clash between the values of the individual and the values perceived to be advocated by the SEM (for example, when the individual has strongly held conservative or religious convictions); when the treatment of sexual problems is hampered by problems in the relationship (eg. couples that may need counselling for deeper issues before working on sexual issues); and when memories of sexual abuse are triggered by the SEM (Robinson, et al., 1999). When sexual acts not previously witnessed are presented, the SEM also has “the potential...to shock, embarrass, disgust, upset, offend, and possibly block learning” (Tepper, 1997a, p. 168). A major outcome of this study was the development of guidelines (See Chapter 3) regarding the use of SEM. Whilst students’ reactions to the sexology film show could be strong initially, as the semester progressed the responses to all the SEM became less reactionary and more considered. In my experience students did not have the ‘adverse reactions’ mentioned by Tepper. Students’ comments throughout this study highlight the powerful and positive effects of the SEM. As the material became more explicit as the semester progressed, the participants were desensitised and more comfortable to discuss their thoughts and feelings about these images. Additionally, students said that they felt more comfortable discussing the images and the controversial topics in the class and with their partners, friends or family.

Another strong outcome of the study was the efficacy of the reflective writing practice. The participants reported that this was an effective tool for them to express their thoughts and feelings about what they were learning in the sexology classes and about their own sexuality. Participants were able to reflect on beliefs, attitudes and values that they held and, if necessary, challenge those perspectives leading to awareness and transformation on a personal level. Students said that they gained personal understanding and growth that may not have been achieved through more traditional means.

Authors have stated that conscious reflection can help create new ways of perceiving and a deeper understanding for adult learners becoming professionals that are better prepared for the ever-changing demands on the workforce (Cox, 2005; Grellier, et al., 2008; Mezirow, 2000). Students reported that intend to take this confidence into their chosen career. They reported that they hope to become reflective counsellors, therapists or educators who provide carefully considered services for their clients. With guidance and effective feedback, students were able to develop the skills of reflection and felt more comfortable with the assessment of reflective writing pieces. For students who expected to work in caring professions, the ability to reflect upon personal attitudes and values and academic content was an important attribute. Sexology at Curtin University is a sexuality education programme that is dedicated to developing sexual-health professionals who are able to interact more skilfully and empathically with their clients. With reflective practice, in combination with the unique sexology content and innovative teaching, this programme expanded on students' respect for their own and others' sexuality. Students are more prepared for the challenges they may face in their chosen professions and in their personal lives. According to Meyer and Land (2003, p.412) reflective thinking may open up "a new and previously inaccessible way of thinking ... a transformed internal view of the subject matter, subject landscape, or even worldview".

The interactive student-centred focus of the strategies was well received by the majority of the students. Students appreciated being engaged and stimulated by both the content and the strategies. The use of popular music, role play, group work and paired work was mentioned repeatedly by students as engaging and effective. The most significant aspects of this study reveal that a safe, supportive learning environment is crucial if students are to feel enabled to openly and honestly share their thoughts and feelings about their sexuality. Clear guidelines (Appendix 1) about participating in the group were provided. I also modelled speaking without judgment. Students were encouraged to work with a variety of class members and by the end of semester students had conversed intimately with almost all of their 25 peers.

Feedback said that this strategy was effective in breaking down barriers and increasing students' confidence to discuss even the most controversial of topics. They reported that this confidence was translated into their personal relationships, with improved communication with partners, children, family and friends. Furthermore, participants said that their newfound openness to discuss sexuality would be a vital skill in their future professions.

The third research question: **How does the approach to sexology education affect the ways sexology students perceive and interpret issues in sexuality?** explored the 'sex-positive' approach to teaching and learning in the sexology class and the resultant transformations in understanding about their own and others' sexuality.

The findings of this study support that pre-existing views (and usually negative views about sexuality) can be modified. People change at different rates, however, all the participants reported change. Process map 1 - the *Impact of quality sexology education for adult learners* (Chapter 8) shows clear pathways for this attitudinal change. Whilst not all participants went from stage one to stage six, there is evidence that all moved along the continuum. Changes were reported such as a greater confidence to discuss this controversial subject with those closest to them, and the skills and knowledge to talk with others. Another significant change was feeling more positive about their body image. The unit also provided a basis for students to seek further information about sexuality. They reported that they gained a greater awareness of the resources available, which they recognised as a vital skill enabling them to pursue this initial change.

Research findings support that a 'sex-positive' approach works for behaviour and attitudinal change regarding a person's own sexuality and a less judgemental attitude towards others' sexuality. Whilst this unit is just one component of the broader picture, the content and approach taken in this unit are independent from the cultural and family influences and provide the opportunity for significant debate in a non-judgemental environment.

This class was the starting point that opened the participants' minds to the possibility of a new, less restrictive and joyous attitude to sexuality. They appeared to grasp this with both hands. Students gained skills and the confidence to seek answers and a window to another view of the world. This study offers a process map (Chapter 8) showing what is possible and provides insight into the type of sexuality education that is, not only well-received by students, but also clearly demonstrates the capacity to facilitate changes in knowledge, attitudes and skills which can enhance the lives of individuals and communities.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study contributes invaluable 'lived experience' data to illustrate the impact of effective sexology education for adults. Moon (2008) states that an ethnographic focus on the interactions of our subjects can help bridge the gap between schemas (such as the sexual schemas discussed in Chapter 7) and deepen our understandings of our subjects. The study attempted to capture the perceptions and experiences of the sexology students. According to Denzin (1989a) sharing of the 'deepest' secrets is rare. It can be seen from the quotes and stories throughout this study that participants felt safe and willing to divulge very personal life experiences. This study gained insights and understanding into the participants' sexual world – their pain, heartbreak, joy and pleasures.

It should be noted that whilst there is only a small number of students involved in this study, their experience is not unique. It has been my observation over the last 10 years that these attitudes and beliefs of the students are indicative of most who participate. Prior to my experience with teaching this unit, preceding staff have also reported profound changes for the students involved (Prof. Rosemary Coates, Founder of the Sexology Programme, personal communication, November 2012).

Professionals working in the area of sexuality "must not regard the social as confounder, as an annoyance to be mopped up later" (Dowsett, 2012, p. 2).

If we don't factor in all this sweat, bump and grind from the start, and understand the meaning in the making, the purest of biomedical interventions will be far less effective as practice and in practice. The way forward lies not in relegating the social to the margins, or as prelude or postscript to the business of biomedical prevention, but rather in embracing the social as constitutive. After 31 years of [HIV/AIDS] pandemic, we still don't hear much about sex as pleasure, and pleasure as culture. And we hear too little of sexual cultures, their construction, production and evolution, an analysis of which could greatly enhance understandings of risk calculus, of motivation and meaning, of the ascendancy of pleasure, of the triumph of touch over technology. (Dowsett, 2012, p. 2)

Dowsett, when delivering a keynote address to an AIDS conference, stated that, even given a long history of interventions and research into sexual behaviour, too often the view taken is negative and bio-medical. This study addresses this imbalance by giving a broader perspective that includes socio-cultural perspectives on topics such as gender, sexual diversity, enhancing relationships, and pleasure.

IMPLICATIONS

This study demonstrates the efficacy of the 'sex-positive' approach taken by the Department of Sexology at Curtin University. The strongest recommendation is to engage more universities and other tertiary institutions in offering sexology as an option for their adult learners. Tertiary institutions, including the TAFE (Technical and Further Education) system, provide an ideal opportunity to give their students exposure to this vital and life-enhancing subject. It is clear from the research that these units need to be imbedded in the course structures and given adequate funding. Whilst some universities do offer units with sexuality content, a review of the literature revealed that the emphasis was on a narrow part of sexuality (biology or risky behaviours or socio-cultural or psychological) rather than the all-encompassing, multi-disciplinary approach of sexology. The institutions have a part to play in supporting the teaching of this valuable area, especially in those institutions where it is already being taught (eg. Curtin University, Western Australia). The pressure to increase class sizes is ever present. Students in this study emphasised the value of interaction with their peers,

therefore, a maximum of 25 students per class is imperative for engaging students in the process. Online learning, as opposed to face-to-face teaching, is also promoted as a cost-cutting tool yet the overwhelming response from the students was to maintain the interactive and intimate classroom environment. Increasing class sizes or streamlining this unit into an 'online' format, ignores the value of the interactive process as demonstrated through the positive feedback from the students. Enforced changes for economic purposes would negatively impact on the outcomes. Departments that teach sexology need to be appropriately resourced; staffed by lecturers who are knowledgeable, experienced and motivated about the topics. Adequate time should be allocated to ensure staff are able to provide the depth of feedback and marking required, and encourage innovative research. In the Curtin University context, to ensure this Programme continues to inspire and liberate students, Curtin University needs to facilitate access and expand the Sexology 350 unit.

This study highlighted the strong influence of parents on their children's sexuality. The bigger picture requires schools, parents and the wider community to be informed about the importance of sexuality education and given access to comprehensive education in this area. The literature revealed the challenges of delivering school-based sexuality education. If school-based sexuality is to be more effective and relevant for young people, teachers require comprehensive education at both pre-service and in-service levels (A. Smith, et al., 2011). It is clear from the literature that teachers need to be supported in their efforts to teach this controversial area. Mandated sexuality education is essential with a positive emphasis on the needs of young people. Researchers advocate an approach that is less biologically focused and more 'real'. Young people have requested an approach that acknowledges their right to be informed about sexuality and their desire to learn more about pleasure, responsibility and relationships (L. Allen, 2012; Nodulman, 2012).

The review of the literature showed how essential it is to engage young people in sexuality education. So too, is providing comprehensive sexuality

education to adults. Whilst community education was not considered in this study, providing effective sexuality education was. With limited opportunities for universities to offer sexology, an important recommendation arising from this study is the need to encourage other community-based facilities to offer courses about sexology. Taking sexuality education into the community allows balanced, credible information to be available to people of all ages and backgrounds. It is possible to offer modified sexology courses for the whole community; information for targeted groups such as older people, people with disability, parents of teenagers, parents of young children, people working with elderly clients, men, young women, singles, couples, etc. Naming the workshops with a 'funky' name, would grab attention and attendance would, hopefully, follow. Titles could include: young and sexy; (targeting young people 16+); love and enhancing relationships; surviving infidelity; aging positively; sexuality and living with a disability; talking with your children about sex; etc.

A large proportion of the Australian adult population does not attend university, yet everyone is entitled to access sexuality education to ensure they can make informed choices – this is a fundamental human right. The literature review emphasises the need to talk positively and honestly about sex across a multitude of settings.

LIMITATIONS OF THE LITERATURE

What the literature **does not** provide is knowledge about the capacity and tools for change in regards to attitudes and values about sexuality for adult students. This study adds to the current body of knowledge by outlining the philosophical approach that guides this work and provides the effective strategies for implementing this teaching. It also provides practical wisdom for tackling contentious issues in the classroom and guidelines in the use of sexually explicit materials. This capacity for change seems to have no limitations because regardless of the problematic areas identified in the literature such as age, gender, culture, ethnicity, religion, abuse, the sexology

studies were effective for participants regardless of their previous experience or environment.

LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

A limitation of this study may be that it examines perceptions of sexuality, and their amenability to change as a result of sexology education, in a very specific context. Observations were based on five classes of students (approximately 157 students) exposed to the delivery of the Sexology 350 unit by me - a facilitator with extensive experience, training and knowledge who is committed to sexuality education. The student feedback reflected, by and large, a warm and respectful relationship with the researcher and this relationship underpinned the willingness of students to disclose personal information. The significant changes in students' worldviews, demonstrated in the reflection papers and interviews, attest to the skill involved in connecting with students and supporting their personal development during the duration of the course. As the teacher/researcher, I was aware of this limitation and reflected throughout the study on my approach. I was sensitive to student feedback and both the approach and content were modified to optimise outcomes.

Another possible limitation that needs to be taken into consideration when applying the map of the *Impact of quality sexology education for adult learners* (Chapter 8) to other settings, would be that adjustments may need to be made to the content area depending on the target group. The questions may well arise: 'Were the students atypical because they self-select this optional sexology unit' and 'Were these students more broad minded than others?'

A final limitation would be the short period of contact with the majority of the participants, that is, one semester which is approximately four months. Whilst significant impact has been reported by the participants, this study has not investigated the long-term outcomes and behaviour changes with these students. Additional research could investigate the longevity of the attitudinal changes and the impact these have had on participants' lives.

The findings of this study may be used to inform future directions in sexuality education in tertiary institutions and community settings, and provide a map and framework to support course development. It offers insight and direction to any tertiary institution considering the implementation of such a unit as part of a course of study. A key factor in the success of such a unit is that educators themselves must have undertaken a similar course in sexology to achieve the requisite skills and attitudes. However, additional research is required to determine and document the extent to which the personal qualities and experience of the presenter determine successful outcomes.

SUMMARY

This study demonstrated the current situation in regard to sexuality education where there is a lack of effective sexuality education and little support from community decision-makers to support a change in the status quo. University courses offer a wonderful opportunity to provide a platform for promoting change regarding perceptions of sexuality through educating the next generation of parents, teachers and health professionals.

As indicated in the literature, positive perceptions of sexuality can enhance relationships, celebrate desire and pleasure, promote sexual health, affirm sexual diversity, and promote gender equity. The findings in the literature were supported by the study where students reported significant improvements in relationships, communication skills and self-image as a result of their studies.

However, the literature, supported by the feedback from individual students, paints a disturbing picture of the potential consequences of less positive perceptions of sexuality and establishes a clear rationale for effective sexuality education programmes in tertiary institutions. The study presents examples of how negative perceptions of sexuality have the capacity to cause significant harm at the individual and community level. Levin (2007) discusses the cost to the individual, “A saying that is often quoted is that

'nobody has ever died from not having sex'; that may be true but it does not take into account that its lack can generate frustrated, resentful, unfulfilled and embittered individuals" (Levin, 2007, p. 137). The cost of these mistaken perceptions of sexuality result in poor relationships or divorce, discrimination against various groups, gender-based violence, rape, STI's, sexual abuse, sex trafficking, teen pregnancies, and terminations. Mental-health issues include guilt, shame, isolation, persecution, and risk of suicide. Not only is there a human cost - there is also the economic cost.

Sexuality education is linked to human rights (World Association for Sexual Health, 2008). This study has demonstrated that the value of a 'sex-positive' approach to education about human sexuality. The reasons why this critical area of humanity is neglected in university curricula must be addressed.

A statement from a student at the end of the unit epitomises what is perhaps most valuable about this study:

'This unit has made me re-evaluate my beliefs and ideas.' (#8M 209, 4)

This type of thinking fostered in this unit is the foundation on which change can be established.

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – An example of the Group Guidelines that are used in the Sexology 350 class

Appendix 2 - Overview of the Sexology Film Show

Appendix 3 – My teaching: Student feedback and personal critique

Appendix 4 - Overview of graduate attributes and learning outcomes for the undergraduate unit - Sexology 350

Appendix 5 – A. My philosophy about sexuality education
B. My early learning about sexuality
C. The research journey

Appendix 6 – Position paper – The use of sexually explicit materials (SEM) in the Curtin University Sexology Programme.

Appendix 7 - Information for students in Sexology 350

Appendix 8 – Consent form for reflection papers

Appendix 9 – Permission form – In class focus groups/brainstorming

Appendix 10 - Information for participants willing to be interviewed

Appendix 11 - Consent form - Information for participants willing to be interviewed

Appendix 12 – Song lyrics

Appendix 13 – Jamie’s final reflection paper

APPENDIX 1 - AN EXAMPLE OF THE GROUP GUIDELINES THAT ARE USED IN THE SEXOLOGY 350 CLASS

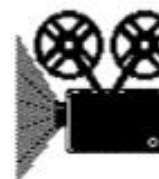
Group guidelines: The pillars of the course



- Respect for others
- Confidentiality
- Non-judgmental
- Non-abusive
- 'Interruption free' zone
- Right to pass
- You stand to gain the most from the unit if you actively participate
- No dobbing! Speak for yourself
- 'No therapy' zone
- No phones please

APPENDIX 2 – OVERVIEW OF THE SEXOLOGY FILM SHOW

The Film Show



Desensitisation

The technique is called 'flooding' and is designed to desensitise the viewer to unrequired responses to selected stimuli. This is achieved through saturating the viewer with similar images in a concentrated period of time.

The ultimate result of viewing sexually explicit films in such a way is boredom, which leads to a temporary level of insensitivity.

Desensitisation conducted in this manner has been found to provide the participant with greater ease in listening to discussions about sexual activity, greater ease in participating in discussions about sexuality and provides a baseline of 'seen and heard sexual activity' for all the class members allowing greater depth of discussion on a variety of sexual behaviours.

The sexual behaviours displayed in the movies are all legal behaviours within Australia.

The erotic slides were selected by Prof Rosemary Coates, with copyright permission from published prints.

The entire show and music selection has been choreographed by Rosemary Coates.

The DVD was made by Duncan Hardman.

Introductory music - The music is a song from the 1960s musical **HAIR** which was a celebration of the 'freedom' culture.

Erotic art slides - Collection of recognised artworks cross-cultural and cross-temporal representations. They include works by:

- Matisse
- Magrit
- Picasso
- Beardsley
- Reubin
- Dali
- Zichy

Periods, cultures and material represented are:

- Neolithic
- Indian woodcuts
- Persian
- Chinese
- Japanese Marriage Manual - artist unknown
- Italian Renaissance
- French Revolution & Napoleonic wars
- British Victorian period

Some of the art movements represented are:

Classicism
 Naturalism
 Impressionism
 Surrealism
 Art Noveau
 Pop Art
 Late 20th Century realism.

Slide presentation of GENESIS - The intent is not to ridicule religion *per se* but to highlight how religion has been used to give the double messages we get about sex 'Here is a gift from God - but you can't use it' and '...you can't enjoy it'.

A QUICKIE -An amusing film with a serious message: we treat sex with anonymity, we pretend it doesn't happen. Also, as Alex Comfort says, "What should be a banquet we turn into a snack" - an important consideration in counselling, most people hurry the most intimate part of their interaction. Could be linked back to the message in **GENESIS** - that we can't(shouldn't) enjoy it.

ORANGE - Was this non-explicit film sexual in any way? How was sensuality portrayed. Does expectations influence perception? Are images of sexuality/sensuality culturally specific?

FIRST DATE - This film would not be funny, nor would the message get across if the roles were not reversed. Essential points - the 'game-playing', the pretence that nothing is happening, the half-hearted attempt at non-involvement, 'when he says no he means yes'. The final send-up of the stereotypical male behaviour - she climaxes & goes to sleep & he's left wondering.

FREE - An Afro-American couple in the bush just having a fun time. It demonstrates that sexual intimacy, free of guilt, can be a mutually enjoyable thing.

FEELING GOOD - Discussion and demonstration of male masturbation. The men talk about their experiences and feelings about masturbation. Some people still feel guilty about autoeroticism, these discussions demonstrate how one can learn about one's own sexuality in a safe environment.

MARGO - Presents female masturbation. The step-by-step instructions aren't necessarily surprising, some women have never learnt to test their own sexual response cycle. This film is useful in therapy - also reassuring to see that someone with a less than 'ideal' figure can be sexual.

NIK & JON - An expression of male to male sexuality. It shows feeling, sensitivity and pleasure and it also provides some insight into their thoughts, desires and feelings about same sex relationships.

WE ARE OURSELVES - Female to female sexual interaction. In the dialogue they discuss their individual histories. The hirsute appearance was conventional at that time for MOST

American women - unfortunate that this particular film tends to reinforce a stereotyped image of 'lesbians'.

Commonly with these two films men get turned-off by **NIK & JON** & enjoy **WE ARE OURSELVES** & women the reverse. It is worth considering why this might be so.

BOTH/AND - This film is intended to represent bisexuality, and indeed it is discussed, however the group activities leaves the viewer with the impression that it is about group sex *per se*.

RIPPLE IN TIME - This film demonstrates that one is never too old. The man, Ed Brecher (Co-author of **The Sex Researchers**) was 63 year old and 'Pam' was 58 at the time the film was made. They demonstrate a variety of positions and techniques, show that one does not always have to climax and generally have a great time!

TOUCHING - The man in this film has a spinal lesion, at the C5/C6 level, leaving him with quadriplegia. Although he has little movement and has lost all genital reflexes and sensation it shows that one can still enjoy sex and intimacy.

SUNBRUSHED - Young, white, heterosexual couple. This film is used as a wind down at the end of the two or more hours. The credits show that the films are produced by the Ecumenical Church.

The film maker for all but **WE ARE OURSELVES** & the first three short films is Laird Sutton - he works alone with a hand-held camera. A couple of the films show how far away from the action he is - at the end of **SUNBRUSHED** & at one stage in **RIPPLE IN TIME**.

The closing music is **I AM WHAT I AM** chosen to demonstrate that we should be proud of what we are and life is for celebrating.

APPENDIX 3 - MY TEACHING: STUDENT FEEDBACK AND PERSONAL CRITIQUE

I engaged in an extensive reflective process and assessed my practice. Information was gathered through a number of means: firstly, by filming two sexology classes; secondly, extensive commentary from students; thirdly, my own reflective writing; and finally, the university's online evaluation (eValue) for the students. These strategies and processes provided me with the opportunity for self-examination and objective personal critique.

Filming the sexology class

Initially I had not planned to film the sexology students in the classroom, but it was extremely difficult to document and journal six hours of teaching and learning each week (2x3 hour sexology classes). Although I work from a plan of the weekly content, this does not provide information on the dynamics of the classroom interaction nor can it anticipate the various directions discussions might take. I sought to be 'a fly on the wall' regarding my practice.

I wanted to capture events in their totality and I recognised that my memory and note-taking were fallible. As the teacher, it was extremely difficult at times to juggle the demands of teaching with the demands of researcher. I aimed for my sexology classroom to be as dynamic as possible so filming certain strategies or group processes provided me with a 'second set of eyes'. The advantages of filming became apparent to me. I was able to capture moments of which, as an involved participant, I was not consciously aware at the moment of it happening. Students appeared relaxed and continued talking in group situations because I was not standing nearby. I witnessed my teaching and became more aware of my habits and practices.

I gained informed consent from one group of students to film two classes only. I was specific about my choice of two classes. The first class required me to use a lengthy PowerPoint presentation about sexually transmissible

infections with a small amount of interactive activities to follow. The second filming was during the 'love and relationships' class. I informed students that the material would be viewed by me only and the file would then be deleted from my computer. I placed the camera on a stand at the front corner of the classroom. As the class progressed and students appeared oblivious of the camera, I occasionally moved the camera to film groups in action. I envisaged that a few students would deliberately locate themselves with their backs to the video camera, however, this did not appear to happen.

I found the habitual nature of some of my practice somewhat disconcerting. I viewed the first three hours of footage soon after the class and before the filming of the next class the following week. I was surprised to hear how many times I said, 'Ok' and 'Excellent!' I also realised that the amount of 'teacher talk' was high. Almost half the time had been taken with my talk.

This changed considerably in the second filming and I see two reasons for this: firstly, the 'love and relationships' class had been structured by me to be activities-based and, therefore, was more interactive. The use of group and partner work was almost double the interactive content of the class on STI's. Secondly, I made a significant effort to allow greater 'student talk time' because of what I learned after viewing the first piece of footage. The participants appeared to value extended time for discussion in dyads or a group. The level of student participation increased substantially after I created the space for longer discussions.

It was difficult to achieve a balance between the time spent on activities versus teacher-directed content. After all, there was a considerable amount of content required to be covered. Students were keen to continue discussions and frequently I had to stop the process. An experienced facilitator waits for a lull in conversations or a change in pitch. A lower, duller pitch often signifies that conversations are exhausted or students are distracted. In the 'love and relationships' class, these breaks, or lulls, simply did not happen. Students were actively engaged and motivated to share their responses and to listen to those of their peers.

Filming the classes was a useful tool for me. By viewing the footage after the first class and before the class the following week, I was able to learn from my 'bumbling and fumbling' and make immediate changes. These changes, such as allowing more time for students to be actively involved, and allowing the students to have more control over the length of time spent on activities, appear so fundamental, yet I needed the footage in front of me to be reminded of my lapses.

Self reflection and personal critique of my teaching

The students are invited to be honest about their perceptions and experiences. I, therefore, consider it vital that I also reflect on my facilitation and my part in the process. My discussions with my co-supervisor, Professor Rosemary Coates, encouraged me to reflect on my teaching. To be mentored by Rosie is a privilege because so few people have had the breadth of experience in teaching sexology with adult learners. These conversations assisted me to view my classroom teaching differently. Rosie was able to be a 'critical friend' and provide valuable feedback. Dr Ernie Stringer, also an experienced, inspiring educator, guided me with the methodology and the most effective and eloquent ways to record my teaching.

Whilst my two supervisors provided valuable insights, it was the students who truly inspired me to continually reflect on and improve my practice. In the first week of class, I expressed my willingness for them to approach me personally, to 'phone my mobile phone, and/or to write their feedback in their reflection papers. I urged them to not wait until the end of semester but to talk with me as ideas and issues arose. For some students, it took time to develop trust and to realise it was safe to 'document' their reflections and suggestions. Rarely in the first few reflection papers, did students offer suggestions about improving the learning experience. In the final reflection paper many students gave feedback about the unit:

I have been challenged by the material almost EVERY week and come out the other end. This unit has made me re-evaluate my beliefs and ideas. (#8F, 210,4)

Some also offered suggestions for improvement. My response to this was always receptive. My comments on the students' papers include:

Thanks for this feedback – always looking at ways of improving my teaching/the class.

Thank you - so many valid points. I am glad you enjoy working with others and I will make a special point of mixing you and your peers.

I reflected on student feedback and continually adapted the pedagogy to meet the evolution in the students' development. I expanded the content as the need arose. For example, after a number of students wrote and spoke about their own experiences of infidelity, I developed additional materials to meet this topic. I believe this demonstrated my flexible and creative approach to teaching.

Another student (comment above) expressed her appreciation for the group work. She valued working with different people each week because in other university classes, as she said: 'I am always stuck with the same small group of students'. I was aware of moving students and structuring groups so they had the opportunity to discuss with their peers. For example, at the beginning of each class I ask students to 'sit in a different seat next to a person you don't know'. I also used a variety of energisers and grouping strategies so that students were exposed randomly to others. I realised how important it was to not only listen and respond to students' comments and feedback but to ACT on this feedback too. Karen wrote,

In my last paper I said how tired I felt and, even though the class was interesting, I found myself nodding off. The energy levels in the class today were brilliant because you mixed up the activities. I liked getting out of my chair and I met new people. I can't believe I am talking without blushing! (Karen)

I aimed for everyone in the class to feel supported and not judged. Two students wrote:

I felt the group has been very open and I have felt comfortable in being able to share and learn from others.

The discussions have led me to the decision that in future sexual relationships I'm going to propose a more open sexual lifestyle in which we can feel free to explore judgement free, even if some of these things may seem a bit scary at first. (#2, 209, 2)

For the second student, the discussions provoked thoughts about how his future relationships could be more 'open' to a variety of sexual practices in relationships that are not-judgemental. Almost all the students said they felt comfortable to discuss even the 'scariest' of issues and the 'cringe factor' and 'blushing' lessened. The elements that create a safe space appear to be essential to enable discussion, sharing and disclosure of controversial material. Whilst the majority of the students wrote positively about the class, occasionally participants share their angst - usually about the classroom dynamics. For example, in response to two particularly vocal mature-age students, two younger students wrote:

A few older students try to dominate the class. I try and avoid being in a group with them. (#20, 209, 2)

The clash of personalities took over today and I found myself shutting out. Just because I haven't lived as long as them, I have something to add to the discussions. (#22, 209, 2)

Both students expressed their frustration with the domination of the discussion by a few students. This is a particularly challenging situation for both the students and for me, the facilitator. For the students unable to 'get a word in', it can be frustrating, they may withdraw or become disruptive. Fortunately, they can chose to write about the situation in a reflection paper, speak with me after the class or send me an email. Two of the older students (#7 and #18) creating much of the frustration, were particularly vocal about almost everything, wrote:

I felt shut down today by you. So much for a safe space... I didn't appreciate it when you asked someone else to write for the group. (#7, 209, 2)

I have a right to speak my mind. I have had years of not speaking up in my marriage...my friend, N... is also feeling like she is not welcome to speak. (#18, 209, 2)

These situations tested my facilitation skills. Many things were happening in this classroom interaction (in week four of the semester) that culminated in the comments in the reflection papers. I observed that both of the students (whose comments appear above) tried to not only dominate whole group discussions, #7 consistently nominated herself to be the 'scribe' and 'group reporter' (in small group work involving brainstorming). Two other students felt so strongly about this 'domination' that they wrote about this in their second reflection paper. On the one hand, I wanted to allow all the students in a class the opportunity to share their thoughts and feelings: on the other hand with up to 25 in a class, this is unrealistic.

Some students, if left unchecked, will dominate any large group discussions and group work. I try to be sensitive to the classroom dynamics, including reading the body language of the students. For example, frustration may be demonstrated in behaviours such as: rolling of the eyes, crossed arms, whispers to other students, and raised voices. The body language in this class was overtly negative and was being demonstrated by more than half the students, even though most did not write about it in their reflection papers.

After reading about the perspectives from a number of students in this class, I decided that, at the beginning of the next class (week 5), I would invite students to comment on 'how they were feeling about the dynamics in the class'. Eleven people spoke including the two mature-age students (#7 and #18) who felt particularly 'stifled'. I also shared my perspective of the unfolding dynamics in the classroom and I was open about the difficulties, ending optimistically about the 'opportunities to look at the part we are all playing'. After a particularly frustrating class in week six, I wrote in my journal, 'No amount of experience appears to make a difference. Maybe I am too old for this! I have never had a class so full of angst' The semester ended a little more relaxed. However, the discord in the class could still be felt and the class of 2009 will stay with me! Student #18 listened a little more attentively and appeared more willing to converse with the younger students. The other student's (#7) behaviour was moderated a little. Whilst, she didn't dominate

the whole class discussions, she ignored the request to 'listen more and say less' in small group work. She seemed oblivious to the social nuances of group work. One student wrote about my efforts to 'control' the classroom and another commented about the 'clearing the air strategy':

The same two students take over our psychology tutes. The tutor lets them get away with it. I see you are trying to give a space for the younger students to talk but the atmosphere is still tense. (#1, 209, 3)

Will they pull their heads in? – don't think so. Glad I spoke up but many more didn't. Hopefully it will clear the air and the few older students won't put us down. (#7, 209, 3)

I pondered how I would handle a similar situation in the future. I am aware that I need to remind participants about the 'Group guidelines' (see Appendix 1) as the class progresses, not just at the beginning of semester. Asking students to clarify 'respectful communication' would also focus the participants on solutions. I would speak privately to the 'dominant' students at the earliest opportunity and seek their views about the classroom environment. Seeking the perspectives of the whole class ('clearing the air' strategy) is worthwhile because this situates the difficulties among many participants, not just me. I have employed this strategy on numerous occasions and I am always relieved that students are courageous and speak their mind. Varying seating arrangements and changing the composition of the small groups, can also have a positive effect on the dynamics of the class. Staying positive and enthusiastic towards each student's attempts at discussion is vital. All students need to feel that their contributions are valid. Affirming and encouraging comments create a safe environment for taking the risk to share in front of me and their peers. I also provide extensive written feedback on the students' reflection papers. My written comments encourage the students to feel that their statements are valid for them.

Sexology is a sensitive subject that 'pushes buttons' and challenges diverse perspectives. Whilst I endeavour to create a classroom environment that is conducive to discussions, occasionally the personality clashes (including with me) are so strong that the safe environment is compromised. My preference is to create an atmosphere where even the shiest student can feel safe to

speak and a few people do not dominate the discussions. I am not always successful in this endeavour.

Students' comments regarding the approach to feedback and assessment

A variety of assessment methodologies are used when teaching sexology. I recognise that the assessment and the feedback are a critical part of the pedagogy because, it not only tests understanding of content, it also provides me with feedback about the impact and relevance of the content area and the approach. This is a far broader purpose than simply testing students' knowledge.

Detailed descriptions and clear assessment criteria are provided for each assessment piece. In addition, I spend considerable time carefully explaining each assessment piece. Many students said that they appreciated the detailed commentary I provided on each piece of writing. One student commented on feedback she received:

Thank you for the great teaching job you've done over my last two semesters. You have put effort and enormous amounts of energy into your teaching and it has kept me on toes (and at times out of my comfort zone) and interested in getting to class.

You have surely achieved at least one outcome for me personally...even negative initial reactions are possibly the building block to great learning. My reaction paper to your first lesson is evidence we don't always know what's good for us. Your interactive approach to teaching was not one I had used a great deal and it may not totally fit my personal style of teaching however so many aspects of that teaching style have proved to be valuable and I will incorporate much of what you have imparted.

I've also appreciated your detailed response to my reaction papers, workshops and other assessments. I never expected them to be so thoroughly examined and your written comments have been helpful and made me feel my effort is valued. It's obvious you invest a lot into your work Lorel and I want to say how much it has been appreciated. I'm sure I am speaking for many students, as these same sentiments have been voiced by others from the classes. Thanks again.

Not all students appreciate the detailed commentary and the 'harsh' marking. Whilst the style of writing for the reflection papers is quite casual, the other

assignments (annotated bibliography and a 'professional paper') have clear criteria and high academic standards as per the university guidelines.

I am used to getting high marks so I was shocked when I got my paper back and got such a low mark...too much emphasis on referencing and a particular style of writing. (#4, 210, 4)

The academic standards set for the written assessments were the topics that harnessed the most negative feedback on eValuate (see below). Although clear guidelines are provided, some students (especially those from the USA) are 'shocked' by the 'low marks' they receive. As best practice, the Sexology Programme provides clear expectations and marking criteria in the unit outline, samples of work are located on the university website (Blackboard), the criteria are also discussed by me with the class on numerous occasions, I, and the unit coordinator, respond to any queries from individual students. Additional time (extensions) to complete assessments can also be requested by the students. Regardless of all these factors, students can be disappointed with the marks they achieve. University standards vary from one faculty to another and from one university to another. The pressure on students, and by students' themselves, to gain the highest mark is very real. I empathise with these stressors and do my utmost to minimise this stress.

Curtin eValuate

Students were encouraged to evaluate my teaching using the university's online, anonymous evaluation tool, eValuate (<http://evaluate.curtin.edu.au/>). Since its introduction in 1999, many students have used it and about half the students in Sexology 350 made use of this opportunity (for example, 55% of the 42 sexology 350 students participated in Curtin eValuate in Semester Two, 2010). In addition, student satisfaction levels regarding their teaching and learning experience in sexology is consistently 80% or more. Feedback from the Sexology 350 students (including from reflection papers and Curtin eValuate) is valued and acted upon, often resulting in specific changes to delivery, content or administrative improvements. The Unit Coordinator is required by the University to respond to the student feedback via the

eValuate site and a growing number of students are logging on to see the responses to their feedback (Tucker & Pegden, 2010).

In 2007, I was the winner of a citation from the national Carrick Awards for Excellence and Innovation in Teaching after receiving an Excellence and Innovation in Teaching Award from Curtin University and I continue to strive for innovative practice. According to Bland and Atweh (2007, p. 345) if there is openness to listening to students' voices then the researchers have access to "insider knowledge" that can assist with "improved student retention and provision of a "more relevant and engaging curriculum"(p. 345).

Student feedback speaks resoundingly of the success of this unit – success built on not only the stimulating content but also my relationship with the participants and the passion I bring to the classroom. This qualitative study has demonstrated the effectiveness of the content and the approach.

APPENDIX 4 –OVERVIEW OF GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES AND LEARNING OUTCOMES FOR SEXOLOGY 350

Graduate Attributes	Sexology 350 Learning Outcomes <i>Successful students in this unit will:</i>
1. Apply knowledge	Undertake an inquiry of a topic of choice related to sexology
2. Critical thinking	Interpret current knowledge and understanding of the chosen sexology topic
3. Access, evaluate and synthesise information	Access and synthesise current literature related to the topic of choice
4. Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss aspects of human sexuality in a comfortable & non-judgmental manner • Write a professional paper • Present about their topic to peers in stimulating manner
5. Technology	Use electronic media such as library catalogues and databases and the internet to source information and create reference list
6. Recognise and apply international perspectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider sexual health issues from a multicultural perspective • Be aware of international ideals related to sexual health and human rights
7. Demonstrate cultural awareness and understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognise individual human rights • Appreciate the importance of cultural diversity in relation to sexuality • Challenge homophobia and celebrate sexual diversity
8. Professional skills	Be sensitised to the needs and problems of the people encountered in a professional capacity

APPENDIX 5 (A, B & C) – A) MY PHILOSOPHY ABOUT SEXUALITY EDUCATION, B) MY EARLY LEARNING ABOUT SEXUALITY, AND C) THE RESEARCH JOURNEY

Appendix 5a My philosophy about sexuality

My choice to be a teacher/researcher using qualitative methods required me to be an active participant in the research process. It is relevant, therefore, to reflect on my philosophy and set of guiding principles as a sexuality educator. I recognise that I am the main research instrument and acknowledge that I have a ‘filtering system’ influenced by my own socio-cultural experiences when it comes to making sense of what is happening in the sexology unit that I taught. Therefore, it would be helpful to tell something of my philosophy and how I arrived at my particular approach.

There are several ways of looking at sexuality education such as an ‘abstinence only’ approach or a mainly biological approach, however, I embrace a ‘sex-positive’ approach’ that: increases knowledge of sex in the broadest sense; enhances skills, especially communication skills; and explores and affirms diversity (see Chapter 3 for a summary of published studies related to sexuality education). I have been an educator in primary, secondary and tertiary settings for almost three decades, twenty of those years spent in university classrooms. I began my teaching career as a primary school teacher where I observed, firsthand, the negative impact of a limited sexuality education (both from parents and in schools). This lack of information was causing serious problems in the life of young people and this resonated with my own lack of sexuality education (see Appendix 5b *My early learning about sexuality*). I heard stories from my 11 or 12 year-old students about ‘sucking off the high school boys for 50c’ (oral sex). I was also aware that a small number of the girls visited the local pub with an older sister and ‘got blind’ (drunk). At least a quarter of my young students were sexually active, none of whom used any form of protection. For me, teaching about Florence Nightingale or the life cycle of the fly, flew in the face of

common sense. Such a narrow, dry curriculum ignored the obvious need of the child for sexuality education.

For my students and me, it became apparent that the primary issue was more about how these young people were relating to one and other. Therefore, sexuality education had to cover more than the biological issues such as menstruation and physical changes at puberty. I chose to concentrate on building their ability to develop their social relationships. For example, the ability to say no to unwanted sexual advances depends largely on the sense of self of the young person and having effective communication strategies. It was from this place that I began to develop my own sexuality education programmes with my students. This motivated me to increase my knowledge, including additional tertiary studies specialising in sexology.

The aforementioned group of sexually active primary school students is rare. However, the reality is that almost half of young Australians have had penetrative sex by the end of their high school years. In addition, secondary school students' knowledge of STIs remain poor and the prevalence of unprotected oral sex has grown (Australian Research Centre in Sex Health and Society, 2011; A. Smith, et al., 2009). Regardless of these statistics, resistance exists towards comprehensive sexuality education in our schools (A. Smith, et al., 2003). A quality curriculum that has a harm-reduction approach is freely available to all Western Australian government and independent schools. Many teachers, however, feel uncomfortable and inadequately trained to teach this curriculum.

I have also assisted in the preparation of pre-service teachers and worked extensively as a train-the-trainer with experienced teachers. I have been involved with curriculum writing, 'expert' reading of curriculum materials, production of materials for young people and community development with young people. I believe that consultation with stakeholders and especially young people has been the crucial element resulting in the success of those projects. I have been involved with the introduction of the sexuality curriculum materials used in Western Australian schools (*Growing and Developing*

Healthy Relationships [GDHR]) and remain a strong advocate for its use in schools. (See the end of this section for an overview of the GDHR curriculum materials). Sexuality education, be it for primary aged students or adult learners, should not be a 'chalk and talk' subject. Rather it should be an exchange of ideas, expression and clarification of attitudes and beliefs, and the opportunity to practise vital life skills.

It is unrealistic to expect that the teacher's own values do not have a powerful influence on students. I strongly believe a sexuality educator should model those important aspects he/she wishes to impart to students. These aspects include: respect, inclusivity and safety. I believe teachers/facilitators directly affect the students' self-esteem and their confidence to participate in the class, regardless of the age of the students. Creating a safe space for exploration and sharing of ideas is central to this notion and I endeavour to be respectful in my interactions and to be non-judgemental.

I believe that the sexology unit is relevant to the students' lives and impacts positively on their key relationships now and in the future. Ideally, this ripple effect will also impact on their professional lives (the majority of the students are enrolled in courses in the humanities area such social work, psychology and education). I hope that their experiences with the sexology unit positively influence how they view their sexuality and their propensity to affirm diversity in others.

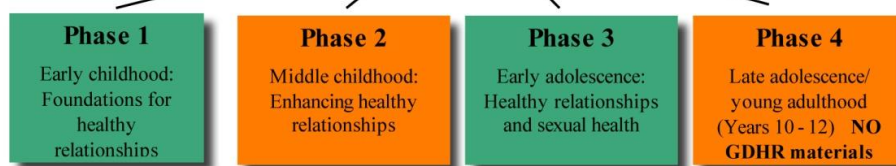
Scope and sequence of WA schools' curriculum materials – *Growing and developing healthy relationships.*

***Growing and Developing Healthy Relationships
Curriculum Support Materials***
Content outline

Sexuality (relationships) education is guided by:

The WA Curriculum Framework which

describes schooling in four phases



The GDHR materials have been organised reflect developmentally appropriate content within three phases of schooling.

↓

Sexuality education content for Phase 1 is addressed through the following topics:

- Families
- Friendships
- Body parts and human growth
- Changes in life situations
- Emergencies – what to do eg. syringes, first aid - blood
- Protective behaviours
- Expressing feelings and affection

↓

Sexuality education content for Phase 2 is addressed through the following topics:

- Conception, pregnancy and birth
- Contraception
- Puberty
- Emergencies – making decisions
- Sexuality and advertising
- Communicable diseases
- Friendships
- Peer influence
- Conflict and cooperation
- Agencies

↓

Sexuality education content for Phase 3 is addressed through the following topics:

- Healthy relationships
- Sexual activity and pregnancy
- Contraception
- Sexuality and the law
- Rights and responsibilities
- Gender issues
- BBVs & STIs
- Community resources
- Personal safety
- Sex and drugs
- Puberty

Appendix 5b - My early learning about sexuality

My passion for knowledge about sex was apparent from an early age. This is strange considering my family's discomfort around any discussion of sex. Talking about sex was taboo – even the word 'pregnant' wasn't used in my home.

Once at high school, I caught snippets of information from my peers, for example, anyone who kissed a boy in public was assumed to be having 'sex'. I was unsure what 'sex' meant and my naivety caused me great embarrassment. Consequently I laughed at any jokes with sexual innuendo and joined in the discussions in an effort to cover my embarrassment and ignorance. Girls, who were less knowledgeable or indifferent to this chatter, were left out and frequently bullied. The high school environment was frequently hostile and violent. I also remember rumours of sexual assaults in vacant classrooms, on excursions and on school buses. Sadly, I was not immune to this violence. This fact has also driven my desire to be an effective sexuality educator capable of creating safe learning environments for young people.

Embarrassment drove my passion to know more and I quenched this thirst by scanning encyclopaedias in the school library for any information about sex. I remember embarrassment again was a theme regarding school sexuality education. The only formal education came in the form of a 'mothers and daughters night'. While there, questions about sex churned around in my brain: 'how many times do you have to have sex to have 2 babies?'; 'what do you do if your period starts in a public place?'; 'how do you know if you're having a baby?'; 'where/how is a baby born (I didn't know the word 'vagina')?' ...and so many more questions. However, they all stayed as thoughts because my fear of standing out and looking 'stupid' stopped me from asking anything. The evening seemed endless and finally we were heading for home. My mother, sister and I drove home in silence.

Two copies of the 'Little Red School Book' (LRSB) were circulating through the high school and they were in huge demand. I only glanced at it over a lunch time break. I remember some explicit pictures of genitalia, descriptions of oral sex, gay practices and explanations of slang. There are three possible reasons why I didn't get hold of my own LRSB: firstly, my shame at getting caught at home with such reading material; secondly, no access to the LRSB because it wasn't stocked in our country Victorian town; and finally, why buy it when I could borrow it? I do remember thinking, 'I would like to write a book like that – one that could help kids like me learn'.

Lack of access to information, combined with my parents' reluctance to openly discuss anything related to sexuality, was stressful and potentially dangerous. I was not alone in my ignorance, hence, another reason behind my passion for creating safe spaces to talk and learn about sexuality.

Appendix 5c - The research journey

This section tracks my four year research journey – what and who motivated me, and what were the highs and lows? Prior to my application for PhD candidacy, the Department of Sexology and its staff had received accolades – professional awards and overwhelmingly positive anecdotal comments from students. My study was both an opportunity to document the undergraduate Sexology 350 unit (and to a lesser extent, the Sexology Programme) and because of my keenness for an ethnographic approach, a unique way of recording the students' voices. In short, this qualitative study was my way of giving something back to the field of sexology.

After 12 months of futile attempts at juggling study, work and major life changes, I successfully applied for a postgraduate scholarship. At the beginning of 2008, I embarked on an impoverished but inspired path to my PhD as a full time student. The first 4 months of my 'application for candidacy' period was a focused effort to prepare my candidacy proposal and work with my supervisor to articulate my qualitative research.

Over previous years, I had been to numerous candidacy presentations in the School of Public Health (SoPH) and the experience was rarely a positive one; more an experience to endure. The candidates (usually 1 or 2 a month) present about their proposed research for 15 - 20 minutes then face 5 minutes of 'challenging' by the audience. No opportunity exists for the supervisor/s to support the candidate. In fact the supervisors are instructed that they cannot comment or clarify because the candidate is the only person allowed to respond to questions. The audience (academics and postgraduate students) hails from the diverse mix of disciplines in SoPH such as nutrition, occupational health and safety, health promotion and sexology with the majority of the academics being involved in quantitative research.

In April 2008 with shaking knees, quivering voice and sweating brow, I stood in front of a crowded large room full of academics and a small number of fellow postgraduate students. Never before had I put so much time into the preparation of a presentation including scripting sections of the presentation. I am an experienced and confident speaker yet my confidence deserted me in this forum. I had both seen and heard stories from previous candidates who were humiliated and even reduced to tears in the face of a barrage of questions (often irrelevant to their chosen topic and/or methodology). My experience was all I expected and worse. Fortunately the presentation went as planned and finished within the time allocated. The 'question time' was extended and it seemed like an eternity. Many of the questions were inappropriate and out of context for my study and reflected the scant awareness and education in human sexuality of lecturers from epidemiological and biological backgrounds. It highlighted the desperate need for sexuality education as part of mainstream education however, this unsettled me and I performed poorly and at times my mind went blank. I felt humiliated, drained and shattered that I had let down my two valued supervisors.

A cynical perspective may be that this forum provides certain academics with an opportunity to be heard and the chance to impress the audience with their

knowledge by asking the candidate tough questions he/she may not be able to answer. Rather than a challenging, antagonist environment, for me - the novice researcher, ideally the meeting could be supportive and relaxed with ample opportunity for discussion and questions. In addition, supervisor/s would be encouraged to provide input. After speaking with other candidates from other schools/faculties within the university I am pleased to report that alternative supportive candidacy processes are operating.

I was aware that my study would require approval by a number of university committees including the ethics committee. Because my study involved university students additional approval was also required from the Vice Chancellor. What I did not expect were the barriers I would face from fellow academics within the School of Public Health (apart from the Sexology Programme) to the approval of my candidacy. Negative comments spring to mind – ‘This isn’t a topic worthy of investigation at PhD level’. ‘This research will never receive ethics approval.’ ‘The methodology is lightweight.’ ‘Why is the sample size so small?’ ‘Why don’t you change the focus of your research and the research methodology?’ (everything from grounded theory to quantitative methodology) and the key concern ‘How can you address the many ethical concerns because you are both teacher and researcher?’

Almost 9 months passed from the time of my candidacy presentation to the School of Public Health to approval of my PhD candidacy (December 9th 2008). Rejections at the monthly Graduate Studies Committee numbered five and in between the monthly committee meetings I, with tremendous support from my supervisor and co-supervisor, attempted to respond to the ever changing and inconsistent requests from the committee. My anxiety levels were calmed by a supportive partner and friends and without their love and support, I might not have continued. There were passing moments when I wished I had never started this frustrating process. However, my passion for teaching the sexology units and my desire to record the students’ experiences kept me on track (and also my stubbornness, tenacity and/or resilience).

As a sexuality educator for almost 3 decades, resistance around this sensitive and controversial subject area came as no surprise for me: my surprise derived from the point of contention, that is, my qualitative methodology. My supervisor and I adopted the 'drip drip principle' and, although we modified the proposal, both the participants in the study and the ethnographic methodology remained much the same. It was disconcerting that we needed to put considerable energy into convincing the committee of the validity of the ethnographic methodology and the viability of my being both the researcher and teacher, but we did!

In November 2008, the School of Public Health committee passed my proposal to the next level for approval – Division of Health Sciences. Once again, approval was not given, yet this was quickly overcome with a face-to-face meeting with a representative of the Divisional committee that included my supervisor, co-supervisor and me. Minor clarification of the methodology was complete. Within days the proposal was in front of the Human Research Ethics Committee. A meeting was requested to discuss two issues: firstly, the 'power issues' between students and teacher/researcher and, secondly, clarification of consent forms in relation to collecting the written feedback from the in class brainstorming/focus groups. A positive meeting transpired with my supervisors, me and the Ethics Committee representative, an anthropologist who had worked with my supervisor (and was, therefore, familiar with ethnographic methodology). At the conclusion of the 20 minute meeting the committee representative said, 'This is a well-written proposal and an exciting piece of research'. Again, the background and education of the representative were a major contribution to his capacity to grasp this research proposal. Approval was granted and I felt both relief and exhilaration. I had barely begun the PhD process yet I felt like I had survived an eight month boxing match!

Because of the barriers I faced I engaged in much soul searching – why am I doing this research? My view of academic life had been seriously damaged after the extended candidacy process. This was compounded by a jaded perspective after more than two decades of teaching in a university

environment. I neither wanted or needed to return to permanent university employment, therefore, my motivation to complete my PhD was not driven by the prospect of university employment. The difficulties I experienced gaining ethics approval for this study were, in part, due to my inexperience as a researcher. The other reasons are far broader: the discussion of sexuality and the perceptions of the subject area of sexology are shrouded in secrecy, controversy and misinformation, even in a university environment.

Gladly, the delights of this journey have far outnumbered the frustrating and confidence-sapping candidacy process. My supervision team, Dr Ernie Stringer and Dr Rosemary Coates AO provided prompt, insightful feedback. They are people I hold in the highest esteem, having known both of them for decades. As a new undergraduate teacher-education student in 1976, I met Ernie, who was the first lecturer to make every class a joy to attend. He challenged us through his engaging strategies, and modelled compassion and genuine regard for his students. In 1988, I enrolled in sexology as part of my postgraduate studies. Rosemary was the lecturer who most inspired me to follow my passion and focus on becoming the most effective sexuality educator I could be. I valued talking with them; both are extremely busy people who visited Perth irregularly, so the opportunity to meet face-to-face, injected me with energy, direction and inspiration. I worked in bursts, allowing myself some breaks (eg. a camping holiday and with no research books to weigh me down; time out to care for my father and a dying friend; my son's wedding; and initiating the sexuality education of hill tribe children in Thailand) - then at other times I read and wrote with focus. I was extremely grateful for their humanness and flexible approaches. Their generous spirits and belief in me have sustained and motivated me on this research journey.

My work with tertiary students always inspires me. I continue teaching and researching in sexology because I gain so much and I continue to learn. I hear that my passion for this area is palpable and I hope my passion enthused my students to discover more about, and to follow, their passion. Each group of students brings diverse experiences and life stories. I have been privileged to be trusted with information and secrets as they learn more

about sexology and their sexuality in particular. Reflection papers and group work was used to explore the themes that emerged from these sources. In addition, twenty three students were also interviewed at length and their unique stories can be heard throughout this thesis. This required an additional commitment by the interviewees; both in time spent talking with me (at least 2 hours) and then their willingness to continue corresponding with me as the stories unfolded. I thank them for their courage to be so open. The overwhelming highlight of this journey for me has been working with the interviewees in that process.

APPENDIX 6 – POSITION PAPER

The value of desensitisation through the use of sexually explicit materials in the Department of Sexology, Curtin University

Introduction

Sexual health is an integral component of physical and emotional wellbeing. With growing publicity and more enlightened attitudes toward the importance of sexual health, people are increasingly turning to health professionals for advice and assistance with sexual problems. If not handled in a well-informed, non-judgmental and relaxed manner; health professionals have the potential to compound the problems of their patients/clients. Furthermore, ignorant health professionals have the potential to negatively influence public perceptions of sexual minorities and unorthodox sexual practices. Given their position of authority, health professionals have a responsibility to be well informed, open-minded, affirming of diversity, and comfortable with discussing sexuality. Sexology students are the professionals of the future who may work in fields such as psychology, social work, education and health promotion.

The sexually explicit film show as part of the Sexology Programme

The Department of Sexology, as part of a comprehensive approach to adult sexuality education, makes use of a hundred minute sexually explicit film show arranged by Professor Rosemary Coates, the founder of the Department of Sexology at Curtin University. The film show is specifically designed for educational purposes and has been used since the inception of the Programme over three decades ago. It is shown in the initial sexology unit at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, (UG Sexology 350 – PG Sexology 650). The film show aims to: sensitise/desensitise students to their own and others' attitudes to sexuality, increase comfort in discussing sexuality, introduce students to images of sexual behaviour that they may not have been exposed to before; and lay the foundation for other material that students will encounter as they continue with their studies in sexology. It also provides a mutual experience upon which to base discussions, thus ameliorating concerns that self-disclosure is obligatory (Coates, et al., 2009).

The sexually explicit film show consists of short films and slides with accompanying music or dialogue, which portray a wide array of explicit physical and relational sexual expression, including: opposite sex and same-sex practices, explicit artwork, masturbation, group sex, older people, and people with disabilities. None of the activities portrayed are against the law in Western Australia. In line with the process of systematic desensitisation developed by Wolpe in 1958, the materials are presented sequentially, beginning with 'soft' scenes and gradually building up to the most explicit and unconventional scenes, until saturation. An essential element is the 'flooding' that includes the simultaneous projection of at least two films (Coates, et al., 2009). After almost two hours, the viewer usually becomes bored with the presentation and the initial anxiety elicited by the material is reduced (Coates, et al., 2009). This is a direct consequence of the flooding technique. All videos and slides portray 'real' volunteers, who are usually introduced prior to commencement to "frame the video as an educational tool versus 'pornography', to begin to establish empathy with the people in the film as peers, and to give permission to feel" (Tepper, 1997a, p. 186).

The sexually explicit materials (SEM), although controversial (Brewster & Wylie, 2008), can be a powerful tool for provoking reactions from students that sensitise them to their own values and attitudes, and those of their classroom peers. The reduction of anxiety following the viewing of SEM facilitates a more relaxed and open interchange in the discussion that occurs in the class (in the week following the viewing of the SEM). Through this dialogue, students become even more aware of the diversity of values and

attitudes held by their peers and have an opportunity to 'work through' their own reactions. They are also desensitised to the discussion of sexuality, an important step in the development of comfort in discussing sexuality with others outside the sexology classroom including partners, friends, and future clients and colleagues. Desensitisation/sensitisation to values and attitudes is vital for health professionals, so as to create more awareness of differing views and to reduce the chance of the professional reacting to clients with shock, embarrassment, disgust or any other emotion that is not supportive to the client. Furthermore, through the use of reflective writing and class discussion, students gain awareness to their own reactions to different forms of sexual expression, as presented by the SEM. These processes assist students to integrate the other components of a human sexuality course as the semester progresses. "There is widespread research and clinical support for the notion that cognitive material will only be accepted and used in practice when the affective components of such material are recognised and dealt with (Roberts, 1986, p. 18).

Positive messages about sexuality

As well as desensitising/sensitising students to the values and attitudes of themselves and others, the SEM used in the sexology units aim to convey positive messages about sexuality. This positive approach towards sexuality has the effect of reducing embarrassment, shame or guilt for the participants surrounding their own sexuality. Sexual personal insight and self-acceptance are imperative for health professionals if they are to talk openly about sexuality with their clients (Ojanlatva, 2008). Messages conveyed in the SEM serve to dispel myths, model healthy, satisfying sexual encounters, provide factual information surrounding the physiological and physical aspects of sex, give new information about sexual behaviours that may enhance the individual's own sex life and relationships, and relay positive, realistic messages about body image, relationships and intimacy. The sexually explicit media send a 'meta-message' that is more effective than verbal instruction alone. Due to the aroused state of the viewer, the material is learned on a deeper level and leaves a more lasting impression (Tepper, 1997a).

Health professionals value the use of sexually explicit materials

According to Brewster and Wylie (2008) the value of desensitisation through the use of SEM is supported by sexuality educators, health professionals and university students alike, not only in the facilitation of their own learning, but also for use in practice for the treatment of sexual dysfunction. In a study of USA and Czech health and mental health professionals, 253 of 279 participants reported the outcomes regarding the use of SEM in their practice (Robinson, et al., 1999). Following exposure to SEM, a group of sexually inexperienced adult women with high sexual anxiety were found to have lower sexual anxiety and, in appropriate circumstances, were more willing to engage in a larger range of sexual behaviours than the control groups (Wishnoff, 1978). SEM are used extensively in the sexual re-education of individuals that have suffered a spinal cord injury (SCI), and have been found to improve sexual adjustment to SCI (Tepper, 1997b).

Following a course using SEM, American health professionals including psychologists, theology graduate students and nurses, gave positive ratings "about the degree to which the course increased their level of comfort in talking to patients about sex, as well as increased their understanding of how their own values influenced patient care" (Leiblum, 2001, p. 65). Leiblum reported that the use of SEM had been reduced in the programme because the coordinators believed that the majority of the students "have been bombarded with similar material" (p. 61). Use of SEM is now restricted to select pieces that "highlight particular practices, e.g. gay or lesbian sexual relationships" or optional materials shown outside class time (p. 61). However, Leiblum acknowledges the value of "judicious use" of SEM because it "stimulates and provokes animated discussion in a way that lectures do not. And it is still the case that there are many students coming

from fundamental religious backgrounds who have not been exposed to this material” (p. 61). Whilst many students may be sexually active and have been exposed to SEM “there is much that students do not know” (p. 67). Leiblum’s involvement with the human sexuality programme in the medical school and students’ evaluations indicated the value for the students of this programme: assisting them to comfortably communicate about sexual health with their clients/patients, becoming more affirming of diversity and enhancing their personal lives.

Adverse reactions to SEM

While much evidence points to the merit of SEM on rare occasions, some individuals may have adverse reactions to the material. This may happen when the individual is not willing to try new sexual experiences; where there is a clash between the values of the individual and the values perceived to be advocated by the SEM (eg. when the individual has strongly held conservative or religious convictions); when the treatment of sexual problems are hampered by problems in the relationship (eg. couples that may need psychotherapy for deeper issues before working on sexual issues); and when memories of sexual abuse are triggered by the SEM (Robinson, et al., 1999). When sexual acts not previously witnessed are presented, the SEM also has “the potential...to shock, embarrass, disgust, upset, offend, and possibly block learning” (Tepper, 1997a, p. 168).

Guidelines when using SEM in the sexology class

To minimise the possibility of adverse reactions to the sexually explicit materials (SEM), guidelines have been developed. This study, along with the work of Robinson et al. (1999) and Tepper (1997a), has developed the guidelines:

- It is essential that sexology lecturers are highly skilled and comfortable with discussing the material.
- Lecturers need to sensitively explore student perspectives with a respectful approach to classroom discussions. Students enrolled in Sexology come from diverse backgrounds and a hallmark of the Sexology Programme is the safe, non-judgemental classroom atmosphere.
- SEM should be a part of a larger educational context; not administered alone.
- An in-depth discussion should follow the viewing of the SEM to allow the viewers an opportunity to process their reactions.
- Students must give informed consent to participate in the sexology unit. Information about the content of the units exists on the Curtin University website, in the university handbook and the unit outlines. Students self-select to undertake the optional sexology undergraduate units and, in order to undertake postgraduate studies in sexology, selection processes for potential students are rigorous. In addition, in the first week of class, students are provided with detailed information about the nature of the material they will view the following week. If students are unwilling to view the SEM they are free to withdraw from the unit. Students who continue are required to watch the entire SEM film show (100minutes).
- Students should be invited to reflect on the responses and reactions to the film show by writing a reflection paper (1 page). The reflection papers are reviewed by the lecturer only and supportive, non-judgemental comments are written on each paper. Feedback to the student, by the lecturer, is individualised and confidential.
- If the film show does trigger deeper issues, the lecturer may be made aware of this via the students’ reflection paper. The opportunity exists for the lecturer to offer supportive feedback and recommend access to a mental health professional (for example the university counselling service). In the 35 years that the Programme has been running, there has only been one adverse reaction from a student who was deeply opposed to the content of the unit. Unbeknown

to the lecturer, another course at the university had made the Sexology 350 unit compulsory for their students. This highlighted the wisdom, and long held view in the Programme, that the unit should be an optional subject, and should not be a requirement of a course.

Conclusion

A reduction in anxiety following the viewing of the film show leads to a more uninhibited class discussion. Students become more comfortable with discussing sexuality, and the materials convey positive messages that reduce the individual's anxiety, guilt, shame and/or embarrassment regarding his/her sexuality. Furthermore, the medium (SEM) leaves a lasting impression that is far more memorable and deeply processed than a traditional lecture. It is almost impossible for the viewer not to experience a reaction to the SEM. Once this has been acknowledged and resolved, the students are far more likely to integrate the learning of other material in the sexuality course, and utilise their learning in their lives/relationships.

In addition, as future health professionals, they have an obligation to their clients and the community to be well informed, affirming of diversity and comfortable with discussing sexuality. For this, the professional must first be comfortable with his/her sexuality, and be aware of his/her own and others' diverse values and attitudes. To this end, sexually explicit media are a valuable tool. These materials sensitise the viewers to their own values and attitudes, and desensitise them to the values and attitudes of others.

However, it is not the materials alone that make the difference. The learning content and processes in the Sexology Programme, of which SEM are a part, is of vital importance and SEM is part of a comprehensive approach to adult sexuality education facilitated by experienced, skilled sexuality educators/lecturers.

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APPENDIX 7 - INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS IN SEXOLOGY 350

My name is Lorel Mayberry and I am a PhD student in sexology at Curtin University of Technology. I am gathering information from students about their experience of learning about sexuality in the sexology units that I facilitate. The study seeks to gain insights into the way the unit affects students' understanding about sexuality.

If you agree to take part in this study, I will use information from your four reflection papers which will provide valuable insights about your views of sexuality and what you learn as the class progresses. I will also use information derived from focus groups that explore the experience of the unit including writing the final reflection papers. In addition, I seek volunteers willing to be interviewed at the end of the sexology unit. This will enable me to learn more about the ways the class influenced their views on sexuality.

For confidentiality purposes, all names and identifying labels will be removed from the information collected and a code and/or pseudonym will be used to protect your privacy. Information collected shall be stored in a locked filing cabinet and accessible only to me and my Curtin University supervisors, Dr Ernie Stringer and Prof Rosemary Coates.

Following completion of the study, this data will be stored for 5 years in a secure location within Curtin University of Technology and will be destroyed after this time. Results of this study will be made available to participants. You can contact me to arrange this.

Your involvement is purely voluntary so you can withdraw from this study at any time without providing a reason and without any negative consequences to you. Should you choose to withdraw from the study, any notes obtained in the above ways will be returned to you and no records or copies kept. This study has been approved by the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval Number HR 163/2008). The Committee is comprised of members of the public, academics, lawyers, doctors and pastoral carers. Its main role is to protect participants. If needed, verification of approval can be obtained either by writing to the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee, C/-Office of Research and Development, Curtin University of Technology, GPO Box U1987, Perth, 6845 or by telephoning 9266 2784 or by emailing hrac@curtin.edu.au.

Please contact me if you require additional information about this study before, during or after the study is completed. Alternatively, you may also contact my supervisor Dr Ernie Stringer – his details are below.

Your participation in this study is greatly appreciated.

Researcher:

Lorel Mayberry

Work phone: (08) 9266 4579

Mobile: 0403 012 474

L.Mayberry@curtin.edu.au

Supervisor:

Dr Ernie Stringer

Phone: (08) 895 67314

E.Stringer@exchange.curtin.edu.au

APPENDIX 8 - CONSENT FORM FOR REFLECTION PAPERS

A qualitative study of undergraduate students' learning experience in sexology.

I have been given a copy of the information sheet and I have read and understood this sheet. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study. I understand that:

- The study aims to understand more about the undergraduate students' experience of learning about sexuality in the Sexology 350 unit and the way the unit affects students' understanding about sexuality.
- My privacy will be respected. For confidentiality purposes all names will be removed from data collected and codes and/or pseudonyms will be used in any reports derived from this project.
- Information collected within this research project shall be accessible only to the researcher and the research supervisors, Dr Ernie Stringer and Prof Rosemary Coates.
- For the duration of this study, all data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in a secure location. Following completion of the study, this data will be stored for 5 years and will be destroyed after this time.
- Results of this study will be available on the web. Interviewees will be notified by email when this is available.
- My involvement is purely voluntary so I can withdraw from this study at any time without providing a reason and without any negative consequences to me. Should I choose to withdraw from the study, any notes obtained in the above ways will be returned to me and no records or copies kept.
- The researcher will be publishing her study and information from reflection papers, focus groups and the interviews may be included in future publications.

I agree that a copy of my reflection papers will be kept for research purposes.

Signature of participant:

Name of participant:(please print)

Date:

Third person witness:

If you are interested in finding out more about the interview process, please provide the following details:

Mobile phone number:

Preferred email address:

**APPENDIX 9 – PERMISSION FORM – IN CLASS FOCUS GROUPS/
BRAINSTORMING**

I give my permission for any comments made in class group work/brainstorming to be used for Lorel Mayberry's PhD sexology study. I understand that:

- all comments will not be identifiable to individual students; and
- my involvement is purely voluntary and there will be no negative consequences to me if I chose not to participate.

NAME: Please print	Signature:

APPENDIX 10 – INFORMATION FOR PARTICIPANTS WILLING TO BE INTERVIEWED

A qualitative study of undergraduate students' learning experience in sexology.

My name is Lorel Mayberry and I am a PhD student in Sexology at Curtin University. I am interviewing students about their experience of the Sexology 350 unit, and how the unit has affected their understanding of sexuality issues.

If you agree to take part in this study, I will interview you for one hour, at least twice, at a time and place of your choosing. The interviews will focus on issues that emerged from your reflection papers and the ways the class activities affected your understanding of sexuality.

I will take notes and/or record the interviews. After writing up my notes, I will show them to you to ensure I have accurately captured your perspective. You will be able to clarify, modify and/or delete any of the content from your interview.

For confidentiality purposes, all names and identifying labels will be removed from the information collected and a code and/or pseudonym will be used to protect your privacy. Information collected shall be stored in a locked filing cabinet and accessible only to me and my Curtin University supervisors, Dr Ernie Stringer and Prof Rosemary Coates.

Following completion of the study this data will be stored for 5 years in a secure location and will be destroyed after this time. Results of this study will be emailed to you. Please inform me if you change your email address.

Your involvement is purely voluntary so you can withdraw from this study at any time without providing a reason and without any negative consequences to you. Should you choose to withdraw from the study, any notes obtained in the above ways will be returned to you and no records or copies kept. This study has been approved by the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval Number HR 163/2008). The Committee is comprised of members of the public, academics, lawyers, doctors and pastoral carers. Its main role is to protect participants. If needed, verification of approval can be obtained either by writing to the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee, C/-Office of Research and Development, Curtin University of Technology, GPO Box U1987, Perth, 6845 or by telephoning 9266 2784 or by emailing hrac@curtin.edu.au.

Please contact me if you require additional information about this study before, during or after the study is completed. Alternatively you may also contact my Curtin supervisor, Dr Ernie Stringer – his details are below.

Your participation in this study is greatly appreciated.

Researcher: Lorel Mayberry
0403 012 474
L.Mayberry@curtin.edu.au

Supervisor: Dr Ernie Stringer
(08) 895 67314
E.Stringer@exchange.curtin.edu.au

APPENDIX 11 - CONSENT FORM - INFORMATION FOR PARTICIPANTS WILLING TO BE INTERVIEWED

A qualitative study of undergraduate students' learning experience in sexology.

I have been given a copy of the information sheet and I have read and understood this sheet. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study. I understand that:

- The study aims to understand more about the undergraduate students' experience of the Sexology 350 unit and their views about sexuality.
- I will be interviewed for one hour, at least twice, at a time and place of my choosing. The interviews will explore my experience of the sexology unit and the ways the class activities affected my understanding of sexuality.
- The researcher will take notes during the interview and/or use a voice recorder. Notes and any transcriptions will be available for me to see and my feedback will be encouraged. I will be able to clarify, modify and/or delete any of the content from my interview.
- My privacy will be respected. For confidentiality purposes all names will be removed from data collected and pseudonyms will be used.
- Information collected within this research project shall be accessible only to the researcher and the research supervisors, Dr Ernie Stringer and Prof Rosemary Coates.
- For the duration of this study all data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in a secure location. Following completion of the research, this data will be stored for 5 years and will be destroyed after this time.
- The final report will be placed on the web. The researcher will let me know when the report is available. It is my responsibility to inform the researcher if I change my email address.
- My involvement is purely voluntary so I can withdraw from this study at any time without providing a reason and without any negative consequences to me. Should I choose to withdraw from the study, any notes obtained in the above ways will be returned to me and no records or copies kept.
- I understand that the researcher will be publishing her study and that information derived from interviews may be included anonymously in future publications.

By signing this form, I am agreeing to participate in the study.

Signature of participant: Name of participant:

Date:

Home phone: Mobile phone number:

Preferred email address:

Third person witness:

APPENDIX 12 – SONG LYRICS

Pink - *Fingers*

I'm alone now
Staring at the ceiling
I'm kinda bored now
I can't sleep
And you and me can't make my life complete
And when you come you slip into a dream

Chorus:
When its late at night and you're fast asleep
I let my fingers do the walking
I press record
I become a fiend
And no one else is watching
I let my fingers do the walking

I'm starving
For some attention
I'm begging, pleading, bleeding
For a suggestion
I bite my tongue because I wanna scream
I'm almost there and you turn and look at me

Chorus
Rewind and you will see (you will see)
Why in the morning
I'm happy (I'm happy)
Right there on the tv screen
Me vengo, me vengo

I'm restless
You need some caffeine
But I'm wasted
If you could only see (only see)
Cause I need more than you are gonna give

Chorus 2X

APPENDIX 13 - JAMIE'S FINAL REFLECTION PAPER

I've always been in touch with my sexuality. Knowing what I liked, what I didn't, what I thought was allowed in a relationship and what was not. This class has really reaffirmed who I am and has reawakened parts of me that I was proud of but had forgotten. Before I was confident in my homosexuality, life was hard. Bullying in high school for 3 years on a daily basis caused me to dislike who I was. One weekend I was walking my dog and I found, engraved in now set cement, the words "Jamie likes cock", which I do, but their taunts and laughing made me feel that it must be wrong. I believed that my attraction to the same gender was wrong and disgusting and therefore I was wrong and disgusting. There were many time when I considered suicide but not to the degree that I made any attempts. I think this is because I knew that there were aspects of my life that were still good, and there were things that I really wanted for my future, like having my own successful business and building a family. I have studied nutrition and I want to be the better version of Jenny Craig! I want to open a lifestyle programme and I now plan to incorporate what I have learned about sexuality. So many people aren't happy with who they are and what they look like especially if they are overweight (and I have been there because I was overweight until Year 8). I want to have a focus on well being. It is important to be happy with who you are especially if you want to share yourself with someone sexually.

I think most homosexual guys contemplate suicide during the phase of their lives when they are figuring out their orientation. It's a really lonely time, where you feel that you aren't right, wishing you could change, that there is no one you can talk to and that you can never just be yourself. Coming out of that phase, and learning to be proud of exactly who I am, is a big part of what makes me 'me'. Just knowing that I belong to this minority of people who (for the most part) are open-minded, caring and joyful people makes me really proud. I'd forgotten that I was a part of this and through the course of this unit, I again understand what it means to be gay, and how great it is that I am. I've been sexually active since before I can remember, at least 10, playing 'Dares' with the other boys in year at sleepovers, which I somehow always managed to turn into dares involving nudity and touching each other. My first intimate sexual experience was when I was 13, and with a boy who I met on holiday and was 15. This was only once, and I liked it at the time, but still didn't think that it meant anything about my sexuality; just that I was desirable. My second intimate sexual experience was with the same guy, about 2 years later, and afterwards we dated for a month or so. After this point, I was never single; always in a relationship with a guy, or in the process of seducing one until I met my current partner when I was 16.

Since about the age of 13 I was aware of the concept of an open marriage and believed that you can have sex without emotional attachment, I still believe that couples should be able to adhere to whatever guidelines they set so long as both people are happy with the arrangement. Looking back now, I would say this is quite young for a person to be thinking about casual sex and the guidelines that apply to it. This class has challenged me to think about the reasons why I think the way I do, and to think about the reasons other people think the way they do, enhancing my understanding of how relationships work.

Other than re-enlightening me on who I am, this unit has had an excellent impact on my relationship with my partner. The class on enhancing relationships really made me consider what it is exactly that I want in a relationship, how to get it, and how to find out what my boyfriend needs. My boyfriend is not very open about sex, about

what turns him on, or about what he want in a relationship so after learning about the 5 ways of giving love and about sandwiching a negative between to positives (I have now applied sandwiching anything that may be come across as invasive), I have been able to piece together some idea of what he likes and doesn't. So far, the biggest turn on discovered is he likes muscles but I'm optimistic about learning more. As a result, my partner feels more comfortable to share his thoughts.

I really enjoyed the range of strategies used to educate the class. I liked being put into a variety of different groups, changing the dynamic of the class and of people individually. Through being given the opportunity to discuss quite personal opinions and thoughts in an educational way with people one-on-one, in groups or with the entire class has opened me up to the way other people think and feel about themselves and others and provided me with many new people that I could call my friends. Brainstorming, like what we did for Erotica v. Pornography and Ways of Showing Love, is my preferred way of expressing all the thoughts in my head, as otherwise everything would come out in the wrong order, so being able to do this regularly, and throwing around ideas with other people increased the amount of information I was able to absorb. I also really enjoyed writing about my own experiences because in other units you write about information rather than my own reflections. I am now thinking more about why I like certain things and why I feel strongly about things.

Sexology 350 has been my favourite uni unit to date. I always leave the class feeling full of life and confident in who I am and where my life is headed. It has been a great conversation starter and I feel much more secure in talking to my brother, sister and parents about theirs, mine and other people's sexuality. Last week I asked my Mum if she and Dad still had sex, at which she laughed and said 'Of course, we're only 50.' I then explained to her that being 50 doesn't necessarily mean that you are still sexually active and then spilled into more conversation about menopause (which my mum hit at 43) and the Madonna-whore syndrome. Before this unit I probably would not have been comfortable having this conversation or with knowing about my parents' sex lives. But now I feel that I can be there if my Mum has any questions or to encourage my parents, should they ever feel they are 'too old' for sex. I am now also more accepting of 'obscure' sexual behaviours, such as shoe fetishes. I enjoy rimming and though I don't think that this sexual activity is a fetish in itself, before this unit I was too ashamed to admit this to anyone. Now my close friends, my brother and some strangers all know and it feels much nicer to not think of myself as abnormal in any sense. I feel someone could approach me with any fetish or paraphilia (even paedophilia, though I would have to ensure that they weren't acting on any of their desires) and I wouldn't turn my nose up at him or her.

Before this unit my understanding of sexual health was that it included STIs, intersex, genital issues and sexual orientation. Aspects such as gender identity, fantasies, orgasms and pleasure, pornography and a general wellbeing that comes from happiness in all sexual health areas had never occurred to me. A big thing that I have taken from this unit is that sex isn't all about penis-vagina sex, or penis-anus sex. Originally I thought that sexual encounters should start with kissing (or sometimes not, if it's not an intimate relationship), followed by undressing, then by foreplay (usually with hands before oral activity), then with penetrative intercourse and finished with some cuddling. My mind is now open to the concept that one can have sex, and do any sexual activities in any order and perhaps not involve any penetration, and still have a 'mind blowing' time. I will take this lesson with me and encourage everyone dear to me to adopt it, as it has really made a difference in my life.

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