A submission by Professor Marilyn Campbell to the Queensland Parliament, Education, Tourism, Innovation and Small Business Committee

Inquiry into improving the delivery of respectful relationships and sex education relevant to the use of technology in Queensland state schools

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About Marilyn Campbell

Dr Marilyn Campbell is a professor in the school of Early Childhood and Inclusive Education, Faculty of Education at Queensland University of Technology. She currently lectures in the Masters of Education program preparing teachers for school counselling and in the Masters of Educational and Developmental Psychology preparing psychologists to work in a range of educational and developmental positions. Marilyn has worked as a teacher and psychologist in early childhood, primary and secondary schools. She has also been a teacher-librarian, school counsellor and supervisor of school counsellors. Her research interests are in behavioural and emotional problems in children and adolescents. Her recent work has included research into anxiety prevention and intervention as well as the effects of bullying and especially cyberbullying in schools.

Prevalence of pornography, sexting and cyberbullying

Pornography

There are three main ways that students use the internet for sexual relationships. The first is viewing pornography online.

Definition of pornography

Pornography is sexually explicit material, usually images, which are designed to sexually arouse the audience (Malamuth, 2001). While pornography has been accessible to young people before the internet by way of magazines such as Playboy and Penthouse and X-rated movies, the internet has made pornography more easily accessible at any time, affordable or free, anonymous and not as easily controlled as other media. The internet not only enables youngsters to deliberately find pornographic material at a time when they are becoming sexually curious but also allows them to come across this material accidentally.

Prevalence of pornography

The prevalence of this behaviour varies according to whether the student searches for the material or accidentally comes across it. There seems to be scant research on the prevalence of online consumption of pornography by Australian children either deliberately or unintentionally. Only one study was found which reported on an individual telephone survey in September, 2002 of 100 males and 100 females in Sydney and Melbourne (Flood, 2007). The Australian Institute commissioned this study from market research company Newspoll. Only 16 or 17-year-olds were interviewed. It was found that 38% of boys had searched the internet for sex sites and 2% of girls. In contrast 84% of boys and 60% of girls said they had been accidentally exposed to sex sites on the internet.[1]

Internationally, studies have found differences in online pornographic seeking by boys and girls. In the Netherlands in an online survey in 2005 it was found that 71% of males between 13 and 18-years-old sought pornography on the internet with 40% of girls doing so (Peter & Valkenburg, 2006). This higher percentage could be because the study was conducted three years later than the Australian survey. Exposure to unwanted sexual material on the internet rose from 25% of children in 2001 to 34% in 2006 in the US (Wolak, 2006). In the UK the accidental exposure was 50% in 2006 (Livingstone & Haddon, 2009). Methodologically, differences in definition, time frame, prevalence or frequency also muddy these results. In addition, there are variations in access by country (Horvath et al., 2013).

In summary there is a dearth of recent Australian or international studies which give us accurate figures on the trend of online consumption of pornography by Australian children, let alone Queensland.

[1] Although a study by the Australian Broadcasting Authority (Aisbett) published in 2001 found 47% of young people aged 11-17-years-old had unintentionally accessed “offensive or disgusting” material this included “rude stuff and jokes” as well as pornography.

Negative outcomes of watching online pornography

The negative effects of watching online pornography for young people (aged 18 and under) have been well documented. Watching has been associated with permissive sexual attitudes, stronger gender-stereotypical sexual beliefs, more sexual intercourse, casual sex and sexual aggression (Peter & Valkenburg, 2016). These findings are however not causal, that is we don't know if watching pornography comes first or that sexually active young people then watch pornography.

Sexting

The second way that students use the internet for sexual relationships is sending sexual images of themselves usually to their current partner. This has been labelled 'sexting' which is "the taking or sending of sexually explicit images" (Spears et al., 2017). The word 'sexting' was included in the Oxford Dictionary in 2011 and is a neologism that merges the word 'sex' and 'texting' (Morelli, Bianchi, Baicocco, Pezzuti, & Chirumbolo, 2017). This term originated in the media (Lee & Crofts, 2015) and is not one young people use. However, what a sext is and is not is not always agreed upon. Are the sexts suggestive only with pictures of bikini clad girls or are they of fully exposed genitalia or copulation? Sexts have several gradations, it is not a black and white distinction.

Prevalence of sexting

Lee, Crofts, McGovern, & Milivojevic in 2015 found in a study with over 2000 students in NSW that two-thirds had received a sext and half reported sending a sext with most texts exchanged consensually with individuals in relationships. In an Italian study of 610 adolescents aged 13 - 20 years, Morelli et al. (2017) found 77.2% had received a sext and 54.8% had sent one. Mitchell et al. (2014) found among sexually active students 50% had sent a sext. In a 2016 survey by the organisation Our Watch 51% of 600 females aged 15-19 believed that there was pressure on them to sext. Australian studies have mostly examined what students believe or think how common sexting is (Spears et al., 2017). This is because asking about sexting behaviour is similar to pornography research; because of the sensitive nature of the questions, surveys are usually the only method to collect generalisable data and are subject to social desirability bias as well as very difficult ethical procedures. Another confounding factor is when sexting is measured, the two types of sexting, consensual and non-consensual are often not separated (Lee et al., 2015).

Negative outcomes of sexting

Watching pornography online has been strongly associated with sexting behaviours in some studies (Owens, Behun, Manning, & Reid, 2012) however, other studies have not found this to be the case (Crimmins, & Seigried-Spellar, 2014). Kosenko, Luurs, & Binder (2017) found while sexting behaviour was positively associated with sexual activity, unprotected sex and a large number of sexual partners, the relationship was weak to moderate and we do not know which comes first, risky sexual behaviour or sexting. However, sexting is also seen as culturally acceptable and normative in many peer groups of young people (Ringrose & Harvey, 2015; Walrave et al., 2015) even to the extent that some young people see it as a safer option than disrobing in person and acceptable as flirting. Girls however, are judged more harshly than boys with boys describing girls who did send sexts as sluts and those who

didn't as prudes (Lippman & Campbell, 2014). Reputational damage in later years is also a risk as is non-consensual sharing of sexts.

Cyberbullying

The third way that students use the internet for sexual relationships is by cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is bullying through technology (Campbell, 2005). Although originally there was some dispute whether it was bullying or another phenomenon (Dooley, Pyżalski, & Cross, 2009) most researchers now agree it is a form of bullying where there is an intention to hurt, repeatedly over time to victims who cannot defend themselves.

Cyberbullying can be by the non-consensual sharing of sexts. Sometimes this is called revenge porn which implies that the relationship has broken down and the person with the sext is trying to hurt the other person. Sometimes that is the case but not always. Non-consensual sext sharing can also be for fun, status amongst peers and curiosity.

Prevalence of cyberbullying

The prevalence of cyberbullying by sharing non-consensual sexual images has not been well researched as most cyberbullying studies do not differentiate the kind of hurtful, aggressive behaviour that is being perpetrated. The Our Watch survey (2016) found that 11% of boys engaged in non-consensual sexting as perpetrators with 16% of girls were victims.

Negative outcome of cyberbullying

The negative consequences of non-consensual sharing of sexts has not been studied. However, we know that negative impact of all kinds of cyberbullying are increased depression, anxiety and social difficulties for those who have been cyberbullied (Campbell, Spears, Slee , Butler, & Kift, 2012), decreased self-esteem (Chang et al., 2013) substance abuse (Mitchell, Ybarra, & Finklehor, 2007) conduct and peer problems (Dooley et al., 2012). There are also negative associations for cyberbullying perpetrators with increased social difficulties, depression and anxiety (Campbell, Slee, Spears, Butler, & Kift, 2013). Those students who were both cyberbullied and cyber perpetrators had the worst scores on measures of physical and psychological health and academic performance (Kowalski & Limber, 2013)

Although the prevalence of the use of technology and sexual relationships by students in Queensland can only be estimated from studies of all Australian young people there is no reason to believe that Queensland students would be different from students in other states. Therefore, online pornography use is widespread, especially among young men; consensual sexting is practised by a sizeable minority of students and the prevalence of non-consensual sharing of sexts prevalence is unknown but happens.

Education about sexual relationships and technology in Queensland

Context

Although the committee is not investigating the law or media in relation to sexual relationships and technology, we need to put young people's sexting in its social context of a highly sexualised media, the easy accessibility of online pornography and the illegal nature of sexting in Queensland at present. Sexting is currently illegal in Australia as it relates to offences related to using a carriage service to produce, possess or distribute child pornography, child exploitation or child abuse material.

Current education

Education is about knowledge, skills and attitudes to prepare young people for life, not just for employment. This life is where widespread and continual access to digital media is changing the process of negotiating relationships (Reed, Tolman, & Ward, 2016). Early intervention when attitudes and behaviours are being formed is essential for prevention of harmful behaviours. The extent of domestic violence and the recent Australian Human Rights Commission survey (2017) into sexual assault and harassment of university students has shown that schools are not educating enough on respectful relationship in the physical and the virtual world.

The current Australian curriculum is not sufficient for teaching students about the use of technology and sexual relationships. It is outdated, mainly focussed on the biology of sex and not on power and respect in relationships in a sexually ethical framework. There is a lack of mention of technology, it lacks clear direction about objectives for achieving respectful relationships through technology and lacks resources. While there are many resources on internet safety per se, they are not in the context of respectful relationships.

Parents and students in Australia when surveyed reported that young people do not know enough about sexting (Spears et al., 2017). Schools also seem to react to non-consensual sharing of sexts and use scare tactics with police and the law and punitive tactics for the behaviour rather than educating young people.

Not only is the current curriculum not sufficient it is not compulsory for government schools to teach what is there.

Proposed changes to education

- The curriculum needs to more explicit about sexual relationships and technology. This may happen when the Australian curriculum is revised next year.
- The curriculum needs to a spiral with developmentally appropriate content, considering the many young people are reaching puberty much earlier than previously, often in primary school.
- Young people need to be included in determining the curriculum and especially the way that it is delivered.
- Respectful relationships needs to be taught in the first instance in single sex groups with the same gender teacher. Then if possible mixed gender groups should be retaught the same lesson.

- Parents need to be fully engaged in the partnership to educate their children. This is very difficult to achieve but information, discussion and inclusion are necessary.
- Only some parents surveyed said they talked openly about pornography and sexting with their children and all felt it was a difficult issue to discuss (Spears et al., 2017). Both parents and students identified schools as the place to teach about respectful relationships. However this is an issue which needs to be shared between home and school with schools perhaps educating and empowering parents more.
- Who teaches these lessons is difficult. Educators from outside the school might have the expertise and the freshness for students to engage but do not have the relationships with students nor the ability to reinforce the attitudes and behaviours afterwards.
- Most schools do not use evidenced-based programs in their entirety for teaching social and emotional learning because of time and money constraints. This is why respectful relationships in the context of technology need to be in the curriculum.
- This education needs to be mandatory in government schools. Parents can be provided with the right to withdraw their children similar to provisions in state schools for religious education.
- If this education is not mandatory then with an overcrowded, academic curriculum, without good training and resources many schools will decide against it. Vulnerable students, especially those who live in households where there is domestic violence/abusive relationships, need to learn about how to conduct respectful relationships and the only place they can do this is in school.
- Mandating this education would lead to better preparation of teachers which would improve the quality of the sexuality and relationship education. There needs to be both mandated and quality education provided - it is not a choice of either or as Mitchell (2013) contends.
- Programs such as Deakin University's **Sexuality Education Matters** is an excellent program for preparing teachers and as an in-service for practising teachers.

Educationally we know from studies that it is better to teach young people about sexual relationships, that there is not more promiscuity and teenage pregnancies and STDs but that this education actually minimises harm to young people (e.g., Lindbert, & Maddow-Zimet, 2012). However, there are risks

- *Politically* it could be risky if a proportion of the electorate is misinformed about the consequences of such education. However, they could be informed.
- *Economically* it will be costly with teacher training and in-service and resources. However, that can be offset by the reduction in cost of dealing with domestic violence and bullying in our society

In summary

We know that many students in Queensland engage in watching pornography, sexting and cyberbullying. It is inconceivable as a state that we would not want our children better informed about the risks in using technology in a sexual relationship.

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