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Media Landscapes: ‘Meet the Maker’—The Highs and Lows of Translating Gender and Sexuality Research into Practice

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Introduction

As a high-profile feminist researcher and program developer in sexuality education, I and others in the field have had to develop thick skins and keep focused on the purpose of our work. That is, improving the gendered and sexual lives of young people. Being accused of ‘having an agenda’, ‘socially engineering gender’, ‘being a man hater’, ‘corrupting the innocence of children’, ‘promoting sexual promiscuity’, ‘recruiting children to homosexual lifestyles’ and encouraging ‘aberrant sexual practices that are pornographic’ are but a few of the comments directed at me for the program/resource/intervention development, translated from gender and sexuality (G&S) research. Although I have been engaged in research, policy and practice in sexuality education for the past 35 years, it is only over in the last 5 years that I have been forced to confront the abuse and reputational damage of such public comments. In part, this is because of

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the readily available and often anonymous online platforms that enable such abuse to flourish and contribute to ‘moral panic’ around issues of G&S. It is also because the issues are more visible and explicit than they have been in the past. The *Safe School Coalition* and *Respectful Relationships Education* interventions in Australia and the state of Victoria, have clearly positioned this work in discourses of positive and inclusive social change. In the past, we have integrated the issues into broader resources in sexuality education.

For the most part I have spent the last 30 years supported in using my own and others’ research in G&S to develop teaching and professional development resources for school-based sexuality and relationships education and teacher education. Abuse and reputational damage are a recent challenge to this work. The constant need to justify the research and content, are perhaps more persistent than the media attacks. Reflecting on the work for this project, I realised that much of ‘sex and gender positive’ work in the field has been subsumed within other negative public health campaigns and government priorities, such as HIV, drug education and bullying. I decided many years ago that sexuality education was the area of health education where my passion for social change resided. I had a number of opportunities to work in leadership positions in drug education but knew I would find it challenging to work in an area where the priority for drug use was really non-use. G&S on the other hand, was an area that research, policy and practice could really make a difference to young people and promote positive identities, bodies and relationships. Although there is still a long way to go, the research in this book is evidence of hope and change.

In this chapter I use the 2004 example of the *Catching On* [1], resources developed from research and policy undertaken and examined as part of the then Victorian Directorate of Education’s (DSE) *STD/AIDs Prevention Education Project* (1994). I am hoping this project will provide an historical picture that is still relevant to work in the field today. The *Catching On* teaching and learning resources were written in 1997 but only released to schools in 2004. It took eight years and three government changes before they were made available to schools. The journey of translating the research undertaken into the practice for the STD/AIDs project has some positive and challenging lessons that are still relevant to researchers who

are passionate about making a difference to the lives of the young people they research.

The Context

In 1991, the then Victorian Ministry of Education (MoE) released the *AIDS/HIV Policy and Implementation Guidelines*, setting out schools' responsibilities around policy, procedures, discrimination and education [2]. This was in response to the HIV and AIDS epidemic which had killed millions of people worldwide. For 'good or bad' according to Dennis Altman [3] HIV and AIDS also brought sexuality education into the forefront of public contention (p. 32). The major response to the control of AIDS in Australia was education. Australia's response differed to other countries because rather than channelling resources into the traditional physical controls such as compulsory blood testing, Australia's major strategy involved 'culturally specific education' programs [4]. School based education was targeted through the *National HIV/AIDS Strategy* [5] as a means of reaching large numbers of the Australian populations and their families.

In Victoria, and other states and territories in Australia, schools were mandated 'to include HIV/AIDS within the context of a broad health education curriculum' as part of Ministerial Paper No. 6, '*Curriculum Development and Planning in Victoria, 1984*' [6], which emphasised the need for curriculum that included understanding of 'the human body and the social forces that shape personal health and wellbeing' (p. 13). The guidelines were outlined in another Executive Memo No. 140, '*Education about Sexually Transmitted Diseases, Including AIDS*', Office of School Administration 1991, which maintained that school programs should:

- build STDs (including AIDS) into the broader context of sexuality and relationships;
- focus on the total person and the promotion of his/her wellbeing;
- develop skills in decision which lead to responsible action;
- build upon and promote student self-esteem;

- encourage students to critically examine their own and other people's values and attitudes (through say, the use of case studies);
- assist students to understand other people's values;
- respect the rights of all individuals; and
- explore the total range of options for preventing STDs [7, 8].

So, it was in this context that I was employed to develop a statewide strategy for STD/AIDs prevention education. The dot points above, show that Victoria's approach at the time, although focused on the prevention of disease, positioned this education in discourses of rights, wellbeing and relationships. It acknowledged the sexual activity of young people and aimed to build 'self-esteem', 'responsible decision making' and help-seeking behaviours. School programs were to build an understanding of self and others, respect and critically analyse value positions.

Tiffany Jones' extensive historical analysis of sexuality policy, programs and resources [9], would suggest that this positioning illustrates a 'liberal' orientation to the teaching of sexuality education in which teachers, and teaching and learning activities and materials act as 'facilitators in students' development of knowledge and skills; particularly relating to inquiry and decision-making, concerned with the preparing the student for life by developing knowledge and skills for personal choice needed to protect themselves against STDs (p. 144). She maintains that in this liberal orientation, sexuality is positioned:

as part of the process of self-actualisation; the aim is the weighing of values, possible outcomes and responsibilities so as to encourage the development of a consistent code of personal sexuality.

Her analysis is consistent with the prevailing discourses characteristic of the educational approaches in this policy.

The STD/AIDs Prevention Education project was a three-year project funded through Health and Community Services Victoria, as part of matched funding arrangements for the *National HIV/AIDS Strategy* [5]. Unlike earlier school-based educational approaches, this project funded the education department to develop and implement education resources and programs. It represented a change from previous approaches and

acknowledged that educational policy, programs and resources to address HIV should be done by education rather than health. Interestingly, funding by the health department for sexuality education remained for many years. Including the funding of a sexuality education resource for Universities in 2013 [10].

A Useful Case Study on G&S Research

This project is a useful case study to examine for a number of reasons. One, positive discourses of sexuality and gender were being made visible through the funding of another public health project designed to reduce STIs and BBVs. Secondly, it utilised a model that the literature would suggest incorporates key strategies and principles of health promotion and community engagement that builds commitment and capacity [11–13]. Education departments in Australia and elsewhere have a history of reactive practice to address health concerns through population-based interventions [14]. Until resources were available online, health teachers' shelves were lined with resources to address a myriad of health concerns such as smoking, drug use, sun smart, mental health, etc. Many of these resources developed from external funding with very short timelines and very short-lived relevance.

The STD/AIDs project took a strategic approach, utilising research, consultation, implementation and review of program implementation prior to the development of a teaching and learning resource for schools and professional development for teachers. In my experience, this is a rare approach to resource development. It is also an example of what health promotion scholars refer to as community-based participatory research (CBPR) [7, 8] because its aim [7] was the 'mutual and complementary goals of community health improvement and knowledge production' (p. 2), the improvement in education about STIs and BBVs. It was also premised on mutual partnerships, participation co-construction of research and in particular action, also referred to in the literature on CBPR [8]. Participation in this case study involved many stakeholders at a range of points in co-research, consultation, development and implementation.

A reference group guided and contributed to the project at all stages. It was made up of representatives from the key stakeholders including the Victorian Department of Education, Catholic Education Office, State Schools Principals Association, University of Melbourne, La Trobe University Centre for the Study of STDs, Victorian AIDS Council, Association of Independent Schools, Department of Health, Centre for Social Health, Family Planning Victoria and practicing teachers, who consulted with students [15]. This group was instrumental in spearheading potential moral panic and the sort of opposition we have seen in more recent times about G&S related issues. Moreover, members played key roles in research, participation and action over a 3-year period. This built commitment and agency which scholars in the field would argue happens when the approach matches the personal and professional values and goals of stakeholders [16, 17]. Jill Blackmore [18] argues participatory and consensus-based decision making used in the early stages of a project is important in winning over stakeholders. This was clearly the case in this project.

The *Catching On* teaching and learning resources were the final outcome of 3 years of collaborative research and development which proved to be a model that produced longevity, support and a sustainable focus on positive discourses of sexuality and gender in sexuality education in Victorian schools. Since the release in 2004, the resources have been updated and extended [19] and a resource developed for primary schools [1]. In addition, they were used as a basis for the development of the national resource *Talking Sexual Health* [20].

The longevity also relates to the evidenced-based focus on G&S in the *Catching On* resources. The 2004 *Catching On* resources were and still are positioned as sexuality education resources, although they were funded as an intervention to address HIV/AIDS and STIs. They include a gender and power analysis of relationships and sexual practices in a social context, at the same time as addressing the invisibility of sexual diversity on the one hand, and homophobia on the other. The name *Catching On* was a play on words to indicate that the resources were funded to address 'catching STIs and BBVs' and also to reflect the need to 'catch onto' a new framework for thinking about sexuality education, one that examined and included gender and sexual diversity, and took a more sex-positive approach.¹

Making G&S Under the Radar

The Discussion Paper

The discussion paper, the first component of the research that guided the *Catching On* resources [1, 19], included a literature review, a review of current school programs, a survey of schools conducted by La Trobe University [21], consultation with schools, and a survey and follow up consultation process with community agencies who supported schools in sexuality education.

The review positioned young people's sexual activity as a normal aspect of their sexual cultures, arguing that school programs needed to acknowledge that young people were sexually active and that 'adolescent sexual activity is not by definition dangerous, harmful, sinful or painful [22]. Drawing on the work of Australian researchers [23, 24] and international research [25, 26], the review maintained that the level of sexual activity amongst young people had increased with approximately one in four young people being sexually active by age 15; one in four students having penetrative sex by year 10, and one in nine by the end of year eight [23]. Moreover, it also acknowledged same-sex relationships, and reported that same-sex sexual activity was also a feature of young people's sexual cultures. Citing the work of Haffner [27] who suggested that 5% of 13–18-year old had engaged in same-sex sexual activity, provided data to start to make visible issues of sexual diversity and the normalisation of sexual activity.

Much of the literature review was devoted to examining young people's sexual practices from a gender and sexual diversity perspective, which was conspicuously absent from mainstream sexuality education in the late 1990s. Specifically, the review drew on the work of Moore and Rosenthal [24]; Boldera [28] and Shaw [29] to examine 'recognising diversity' (p. 14), 'explaining condom use' (pp. 15–17), 'gender and power' (pp. 15–19), catering of NESB and students with disabilities' (pp. 19–21) and 'sexual orientation' (pp. 12–23). It also included a review of current programs and strategies focusing on difficulties in evaluating program effectiveness, shortcomings of teacher training, criticisms of program structure and content, failure to challenge dominant attitudes and successful programs and strategies [22] that included an examination of the need to be inclusive,

particularly of gender and sexual (pp. 24–28). Disappointingly, issues are still overwhelmingly, inadequately addressed or silenced in much sexuality and relationships education [30].

The Strategy

The discussion paper also drew on a number of other research components to develop the STD/AIDS strategy that collected data on schools, school programs and agencies who supported school programs. A survey of schools [21] a survey of community agencies and follow up consultation meetings with both. The STD/AIDS strategy was developed from the recommendations in the discussion paper (pp. 49–50) and included six elements.

1. Providing a background—publication of the discussion paper.
2. Providing a policy framework—updating existing policy be more consistent with the curriculum framework.
3. Providing flexible models of a variety of curriculum contexts—four pilots of different models evaluated by La Trobe University [31].
 - a. One driven by local community agency.
 - b. Integrated in line with the curriculum framework.
 - c. A whole school approaches.
 - d. A school wanting to renew their approach.
4. Skilling teachers—professional development package for schools and those providing PD to schools.
5. Skilling community agencies—professional development for community agencies to support the work they currently do and develop understandings of the best way to work with schools.
6. Resource development [15]—a resource that will ‘address risk behaviours, sexual identity, gender and power, discrimination and the use of peer education strategies’ (pp. 3–5).

Over the next year, the project piloted the 4 models of curriculum implementation. Evaluated by Lyn Harrison and Marg Hay at La Trobe Uni-

versity [31]. They collected data using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies that included pre/post program questionnaires [31], reproductive system questionnaire, classroom observation, teacher interviews, teacher journal analysis, focus group discussion and curriculum documentation examination (p. 4). This pilot also involved professional development for teachers and community agencies. The detailed report examines many of the issues identified in the discussion paper and made very strong recommendations that programs in addition to, incorporating teaching about risks to sexual health, should:

...also, be explicit about varieties of sexual behaviours (including masturbation), safer sex practices, sexual orientation and other topics considered controversial...sexuality education be considered a core unit within an overall framework of comprehensive health education delivered from Year 7-10, preferably using an integrated curriculum model. That as matter of priority curricula should incorporate **teaching for difference** and the following areas: disability, discrimination, **gender**, NESB and prior learning. [32]

The *Catching On* Resources

The Development Challenges

The final aspect of the strategy was writing and trialling the *Catching On* resources. This was the direct translation of research into practice so that young people had access to resources and teaching and learning strategies that included a focus on gender and power, that could teach for difference in the way envisaged by Harrison and Hay [31], and provide young people with information and skill development that could help them make informed decisions about their sexuality and relationships. In addition to the research that had been undertaken as part of the STD/AIDS project, the 1996 National school survey undertaken by Lindsay et al. [33] was also instrumental in setting the direction of *Catching On*. The research provided data on Australian young people's, knowledge, attitudes and sexual behaviours. Moreover, the project was able to access the Victorian specific data that could also provide authenticity to the direction of the *Catch-*

ing On resource. At about the same time, the first *Writing Themselves In* research report was released [34] which painted a very grim picture of the experience of same sex attracted young people in Australian schools.

As Altman [3] pointed out, HIV/AIDS had firmly put sexuality and sexual practices on the agenda. This was an enabling factor in developing resources that were explicit about sex, acknowledged young people's sexual lives, including sexually diverse young people, and enabled dialogue and discussion about the discourses that were being used to position young people and their sexual cultures. Scholars at the time were arguing that there was a 'knowledge-action gap' between what young people were learning in sexuality education and their sexual behaviours [35, 36]. Others argued that current practices of the time assumed that sexuality education was 'value-free' preventing an examination of gender and power [37]. Valerie Walkerdine (1990) maintained that shifts were needed to enable girls (and boys) to examine issues of gender from multiple and dynamic perspectives to see that they were not:

unitary subjects uniquely positioned, but are produced as a nexus of subjectivities, in relations of power which are constantly rendering them one moment powerful and at another powerless. [3]

A key theme in the literature was the need to be inclusive, to ensure that SSAY in particular, were not positioned as 'other and different' but rather ensure they were visible in sexuality education in ways that were meaningful and positive. Hillier and Harrison et al. [38] found that sexuality education was extremely heteronormative, covering safe sex and relationship issues as if all students were heterosexual. Others found that teachers were uncomfortable and reluctant to include sexual diversity and had little professional development to improve inclusive practices [32, 39–43]. Hillier et al. [44] also found that school programs were a key resource that young people used and trusted for information about sex and sexuality. This meant that SSAY people were not provided with information sources that they used and trusted. Rather, they had to access sources, such as the gay press and friends, which they did not necessarily trust. Moreover, they found, as did other scholars [9, 40, 43], if homosexuality was positioned

at all in sexuality education, it was in relation to negative discourses of disease and difference.

Recognition of the violence and abuse experienced by SSAY was perhaps the most significant factor in supporting the focus on gender and sexual diversity in the *Catching On* resources. Australia was not the only place calling for a more inclusive approach and recognition of the experience of SSAY in schools. Ian Warwick [43] in the United Kingdom demonstrates this:

For too long, many teachers and governors have been 'playing it safe' when addressing issues of sexuality. This is, perhaps, understandable given government rhetoric and policy. An unfortunate consequence of this however has left lesbian and gay pupils victimised and unsupported, and the information needs of all pupils unhelpfully circumscribed. It is now timely to build on new initiatives to encourage the acceptance of the social and sexual diversity that makes humanity what it is. (p. 139)

At a practical level, this resulted in a conscious strategy to include issues of sexual diversity in an inclusive way by ensuring that diversity was woven into the activities. The table of contents gives a sense of the approach. Remembering that a key aim of the resource was a focus on STIs and BBVs. This was challenging because the key framework in *Catching On* was overwhelmingly the need to address the social context of young people's sexual cultures, which the research and literature had clearly identified as gender and sexual diversity. This is where the reference group, made up of key stakeholders championed this approach and a decision was made to include a set of support materials that fulfilled the factual information on STIs and BBV's, and enabled the teaching and learning materials to focus heavily on broader issues of G&S (Table 3.1).

Being Explicit and Acknowledging Young Peoples' Sexual Activity

Being explicit and acknowledging the sexual activity of young people was also a challenge. Again, the research was crucial to the direction and development of the activities listed in the table of contents. There was an

Table 3.1 Contents section of the *Catching On* resource [1]

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(continued)

Table 3.1 (continued)

Activity 6: Things Are Not Always What They Seem	105
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explicit focus in the first unit on sex, sexuality and gender, in line with the Australian and international research, that maintained these areas were missing, in particular what Michelle Fine called 'the missing discourse of desire' [45]. Intimacy, love and sexuality were clearly foregrounded in the resource, with particular attention to including inclusivity of diverse sexualities. The need for a gender analysis identified by scholars such as Szirom [37], Wyn [46, 47], Moore and Rosenthal [24] focused unit two on gender, sexuality and power, including gender and violence, violence towards SSAY and in same-sex relationships.

As the resource was to address STI education, the third unit focused on safer sex issues. However a broad view of this was taken and included social and emotional safety as well as safety from STIs. This required an explicit approach to sexual practices that itself created a set of challenges. It was one thing to acknowledge the sexual activity of young people from key reports [23, 33, 34] yet another to take an explicit and open approach to sexual practices in school-based resources.

The research emerging from the then Centre for the Study of Sexually Transmissible Diseases (later to become the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society) was instrumental in the focus of the activities. The data was used, for example, to develop activities on 'Who can I trust?' [34], the national school survey data was used in an activity to test students' knowledge against the Victorian and Australian data—'How much do you know?' [33]. Case studies from Mitchell et al. [48] on sexual coercion and young people focused the activity 'Assumptions', examining gendered assumptions in power and coercion in intimate relationships.

The Politics of G&S Education

In addition to empirical research, other community resources were used to translate the research into practice. HIV had put sex on the agenda and the media was also engaged in raising awareness of sex and safer sex practices. In December 1994, Cleo magazine in collaboration with the Department of Human Services and Health released *The only Safe Sex Guide You'll Ever Need* [49]. I refer to this because it was instrumental in the development of a number of the activities in *Catching On*, but also illustrates the way those translating research into practice must navigate not only the political process but the sensibilities of those who make decisions to approve resources for schools.

Remembering that this project was funded by the health department as an intervention for education about STIs and BBVs to address the HIV epidemic, the Cleo guide was used in particular to develop the activity, 'How Safe is That?' [49]. The Cleo guide (pp. 18–19) provided an inclusive and extensive coverage of sexual practices, practices that in the main were excluded from any school-based sexuality education resource. This activity was one of the few that created tension and opposition during the Education Department's final sign off process and perhaps was another reason why the resource took 8 years to be released to schools. In the original version, all the sexual practices in the Cleo guide were included in the activity, although the slang was removed and they were summarised. For example, in the guide it lists 'cunnilingus, going done on, eating, licking out, muff diving, sucking off' (p. 18) in *Catching On* it is referred to purely as oral sex. However, a decision was made as part of the approval process that only the following behaviours could be included, love bites, kissing, holding hands, love letters, body and genital rubbing, cuddling, sex toys, anal intercourse, vaginal intercourse, oral sex, talking dirty, fantasy, oral sex, fetishism, fingering, eyeing someone off, massage and masturbation. Fisting and rimming were defiantly out!

Yankah and Aggleton [50] might argue that this is an example of the 'politics of silence', that they maintain was invoked during the HIV epidemic. They argue that HIV and STIs were constructed at this time, as a problem of 'other', 'of people far beyond domestic boundaries, and of groups (sex workers, gay men, people who inject drugs) whose existence

within a domestic frame of reference has been contested or denied' (p. 57). This was invoked in the opposition to the Cleo guide. Conservative Australian politicians grilled the Department of Health who had funded the guide in a parliamentary committee about its appropriateness and accuracy. Senator John Herron in particular disputed the figures on women and anal sex.

Minister, you will recall at the last supplementary estimates committee hearings I asked about a Cleo safe sex guide and its advocacy of anal intercourse. I wrote to the editor of Cleo about the accuracy of the figures and questioned her about studies indicating that 13 per cent of couples engage in anal sex. Also, on another page she said that between 40 and 60 per cent of women have tried it and on another it was 13.9. [51]

There was also questioning about how and why teachers had been able to order multiple copies through the then Commonwealth Health Department, when according to a petition presented to the House of Representatives by Noel Hicks, Member for Riverina in NSW, National party of Australia, '*We believe that the sex guide encourages dangerous sexual practices which could have serious medical and moral effects*' [52]. When the controversy hit the media, we were asked by the Minister's office for not one copy to be sent up but six!

Political interference is not new to research and practice in sexuality education, there is a long history in Australia [14, 53] and elsewhere [54]. Yet *Catching On* was published and used in schools for 20 years with little opposition until the conservative backlash to the Safe Schools Coalition. As the table of contents illustrates, similar activities have been used in Victorian Secondary schools for at least 20 years.

Working with Community Agencies

The final aspect I would like to discuss is the constant call to undertake this work in collaboration with education, health, NGOs and other important stakeholders. Perhaps this is the most challenging and rewarding aspect of translating research into practice, particularly in school-based sexuality

and relationships education. I have work on enough projects to know the frustration that sectors feel when they perceive that their expertise is not being used to its full potential, particularly at the implementation phase such as classroom practice or teacher professional development. At the heart is a desire by all to make a difference to lives of young people and all sectors have a great deal to offer. Yet in practice there is a lack of recognition and understanding about what each sector or agency can bring to the table and more importantly, how such partnerships can work in practice in the context of the structural constraints of schools and a lack of understanding of teachers' work and NGO philosophies and priorities. The project ran a series of consultations with community agencies who worked with schools. It was clear that they were passionate about working in schools to improve the health outcomes of young people. However, they did not know how to work with schools, contact and support teachers, and had very little understanding or recognition of teachers' pedagogical expertise [22].

To address this the project developed a professional development resource and workshop that was used to enable teachers, health agencies and NGOs to come together to develop strategies for working together in sexuality education. A basic outline of this can be found in *Talking Sexual Health* [55], yet 20 years later these relationships and issues still exist and still clearly get in the way of productive partnerships. Teachers have the pedagogical knowledge, they know the curriculum, how to assess, how to address learning outcomes, they know the students, their families and how to promote student wellbeing, yet I have seen on many occasions community organisations belittle teachers' skills and knowledge. Partnerships with other agencies and NGOs are crucial and important to connect students to services and provide important professional knowledge, they can support the work of teachers but not replace the work of teachers. If schools need support from agencies they will generally seek it out [13, 56–58].

Final Reflections: Working to 'Current Political Climate'

As the previous sections have illustrated, there was momentum for change at the time we developed the *Catching On* resources [1, 19]. The structure and organisation of the democratic and participatory reference group had ensured that the key stakeholders were firmly behind a resource that was inclusive of gender and sexual diversity. The Hillier et al. [34] research had been instrumental in raising awareness of the exclusion, discrimination, violence and abuse SSAY were experiencing in schools. The legacy of the gender and violence work of the early 1990s and the focus on gender equity had women's health agencies demanding change and were excited to work with health and education to improve practice. Public discourse was overall positive and a more inclusive and explicit approach was emerging. Schools were crying out for resources to assist them to teach a more positive approach to sexuality education [57].

Catching On [1] received a public health awarded in 1999 and has been used to develop other resources in sexuality and relationships education such as *Talking Sexual Health* [20, 55, 59], *Catching on Later* [19] and elements in other resources. These have all translated research about sexuality and gender into classroom and teacher practice, more often than not under the guise of other health issues and from funding outside education. However, for G&S researchers and those translating the research into practice, the game has changed and the work has become personally risky. The internet has enabled critics such as the woman who calls herself 'Political Mumma', to attempt to discredit the work that we do. She made a video called 'Meet the Maker' in which she constructs a narrative of me and misconstrues the teaching and learning activities in an attempt to build a picture of inappropriate 'adult knowledge' being used in schools. A discourse Kerry Robinson [60] has found common to those who oppose young people and children having access to sexuality education. Yet, we know from recent research with young people that learning about G&S in sexuality education at school is a priority for them [30, 61, 62].

Conclusion

Sexuality education can be risky emotional work at the best of times. The current political climate can make it feel extremely personal for those of us who have been attacked by the neoliberal, conservative forces for trying to make a difference to the lives of young people. Although the personal impact of such attacks vary in how we individually make sense of them and deal on a day to day basis. I think it is worth remembering, as Sarah Ahmed [63] reminds us that these attacks are part of the ‘cultural politics of emotions’ which are aligned with ‘particular bodies’ which elicit emotional responses from those that position gender and sexual diversity as negative. To deal with this, I surround myself with researchers, policy makers and practitioners who work to bring about social change to enable young people to be safe, supported and celebrated regardless of their sexuality or gender and I pick my public battles. At times like the present, I try to remember the importance of this work and use whatever context I can to continue to translate our research into practice.

Note

1. I was the senior project officer for the STD/AIDs project and the *Talking Sexual Health* project, hence I have this insider knowledge.

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