

# Engaging young people in disrupting silences about school based sexuality education

Bruce Johnson, Lyn Harrison & Deb Ollis

Engaging  
Young People in  
Sexuality Education  
Research Project





# Australian Government

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# Australian Research Council



University of South Australia



Deakin University



University of Sussex



Sexual Health information,  
networking & education SA

Engaging  
Young People in  
Sexuality Education  
Research Project



# Key Personnel

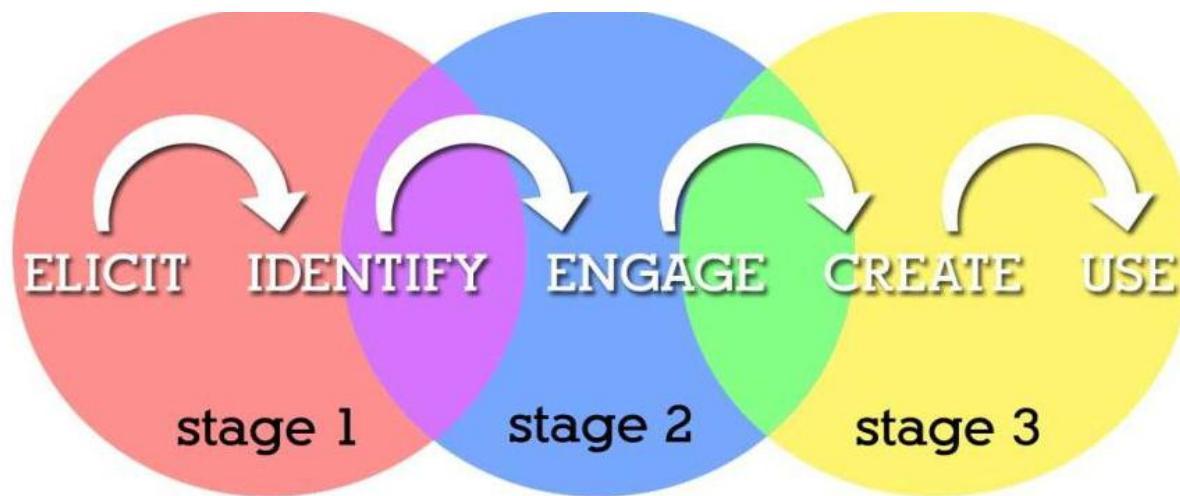
- Professor Bruce Johnson (UniSA) – Project Leader
- A/Professor Lyn Harrison (Deakin) – Researcher
- Dr Deb Ollis (Deakin) – Researcher
- Professor Colleen McLaughlin (Sussex) – Researcher
- Jane Flentje (SHine SA) – Industry Representative
- Dr Helen Calabretto (SHine SA) – Industry Representative
- Dr Peter Arnold (UniSA) – Research Associate
- Lisa Farrance (Deakin) – Research Assistant

# Aims

- What are young people's views on school-based sexuality education?
- How do young people make sense of information and values about human sexuality?
- What are young people's sexual education needs?
- What are the implications for curriculum design?

# Rationale

- The project adopts a positive approach to exploring the wants, needs and desires of young people
- It is concerned with giving young people a say about what and how they learn in school-based sexuality education programs



We aim to understand what young people think about school based sexuality education and sexual wellbeing.

To find out, we will use a combination of:

- student focussed workshops
- Focus group interviews
- Online surveys

We aim to engage young people in innovative ways to research and articulate their sexual needs, wants and desires.

To do this, we will train young people to be co-researchers and use:

- Photo elicitation methods
- Student focused workshops
- Social media

We aim to engage young people in the creation and application of new sexual education resources and teaching approaches.

To do this, we will apply the findings from stage 1 & 2 and use:

- Arts-based methods
- Co-design workshops
- Visual methods
- Usability testing

# Stage 1: Student survey

- On-line questionnaire
- Purposive sample in South Australia & Victoria
  - 15 Government Secondary Schools in each State which teach a comprehensive health, sexuality & relationships program
  - Target 13, 14 & 15 year olds
  - Boys and girls
  - $n = 800$  (at this stage; aim –  $n = 2,000$ )

# Ethics

3 main issues:

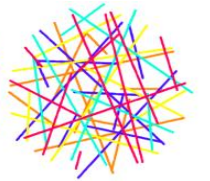
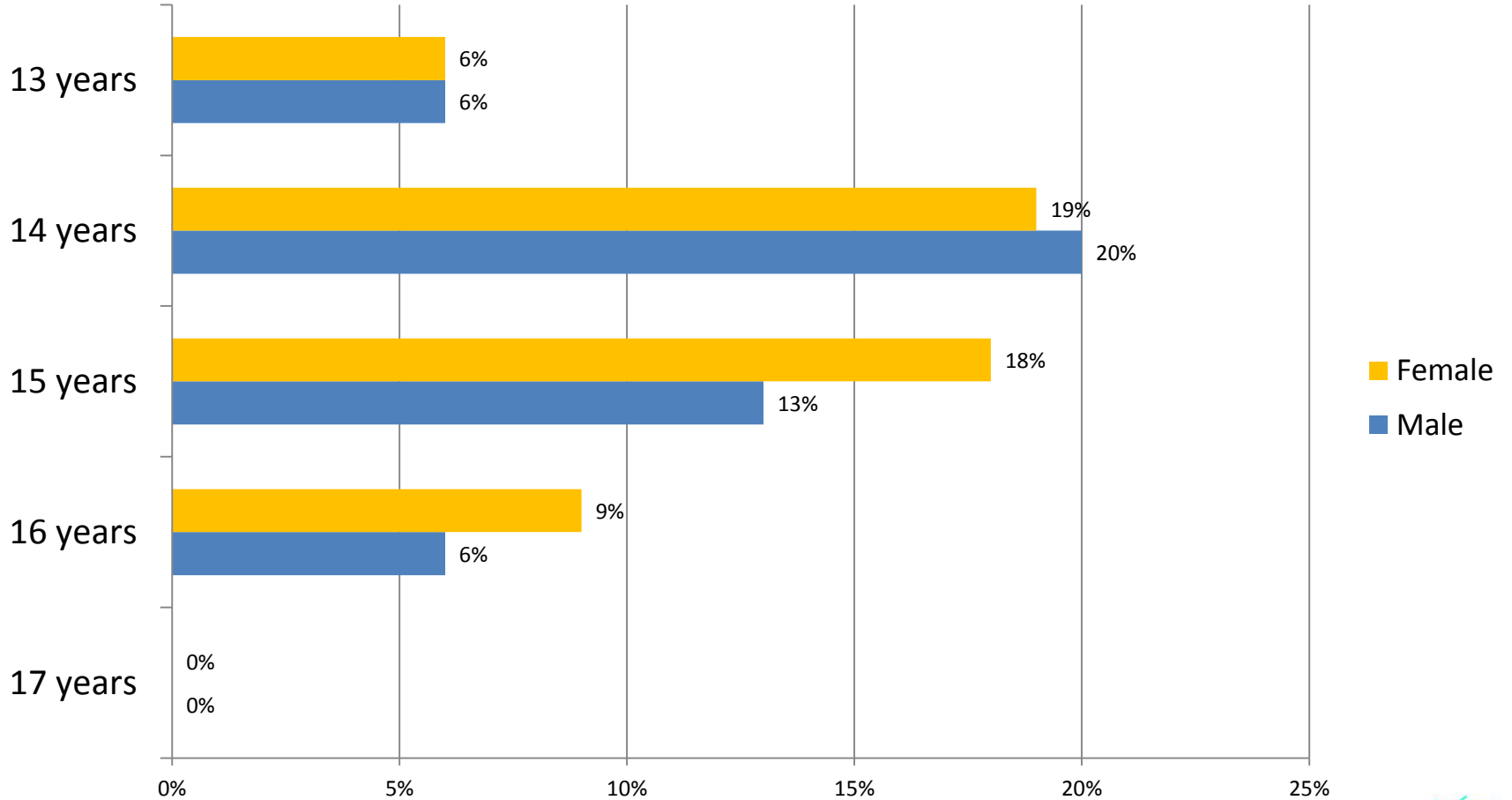
- Opt-in parental consent required, NOT opt-out
- *Informed* consent – level of detail required
- Political sensitivities
  - Gender & sexual orientation questions
  - Curriculum content questions
  - Age appropriateness

 Compromises

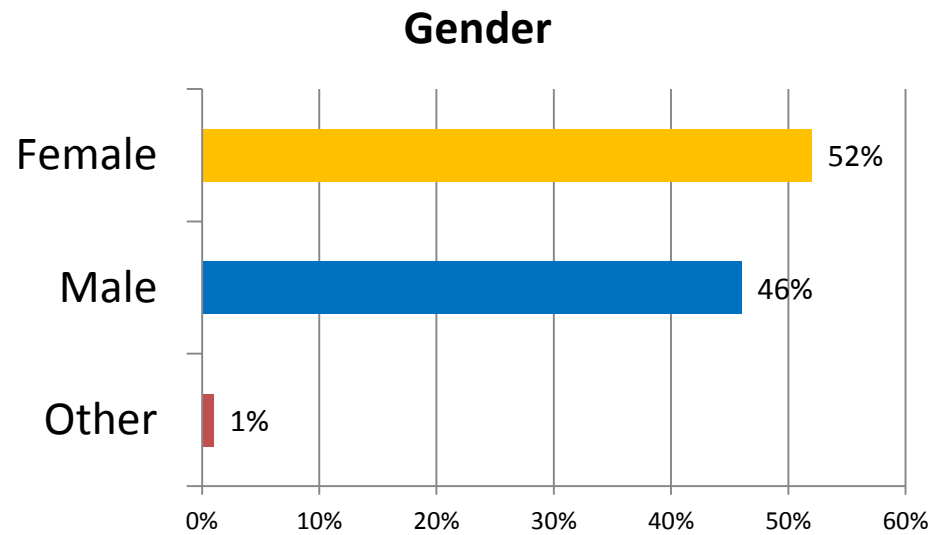


# Age

n = 794



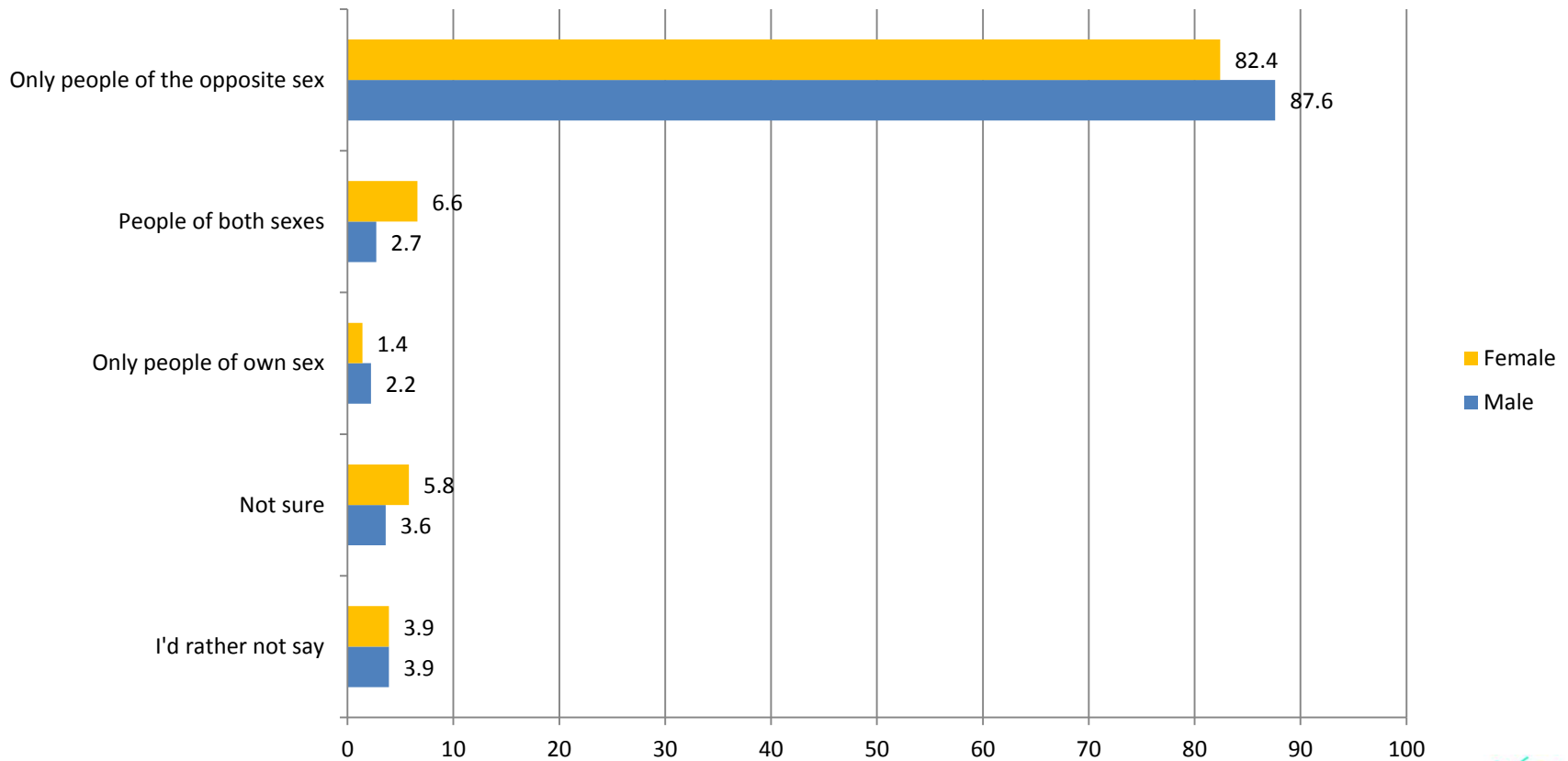
# Gender



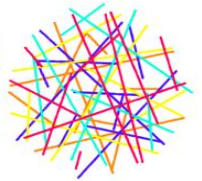
# Sexual orientation

$n = 786$

## I am attracted to...



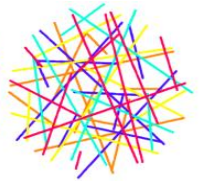
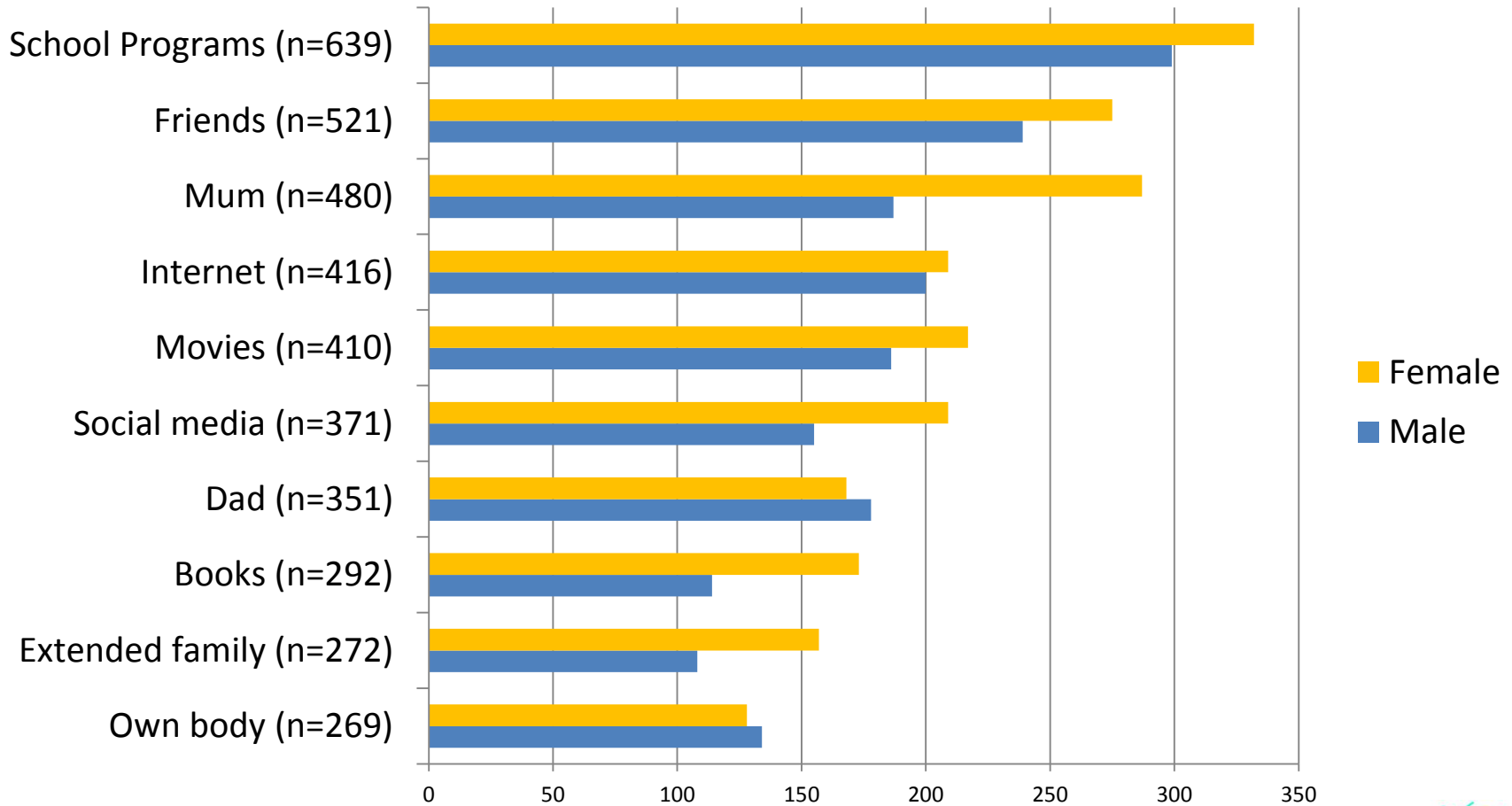
Statistically significant differences



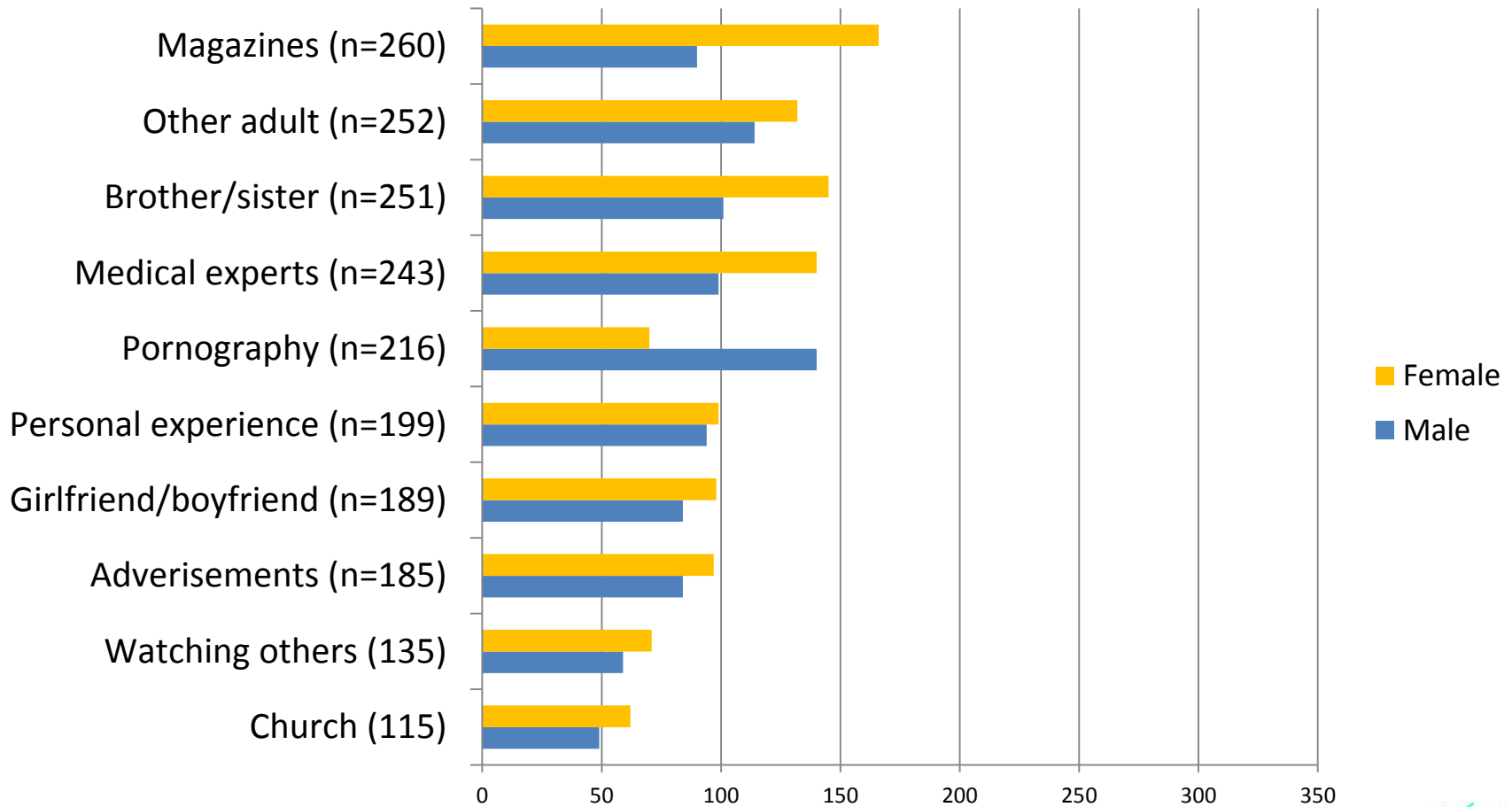
# Sources of knowledge

- Most used sources of knowledge
- Most trusted sources of knowledge

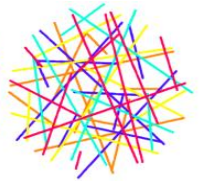
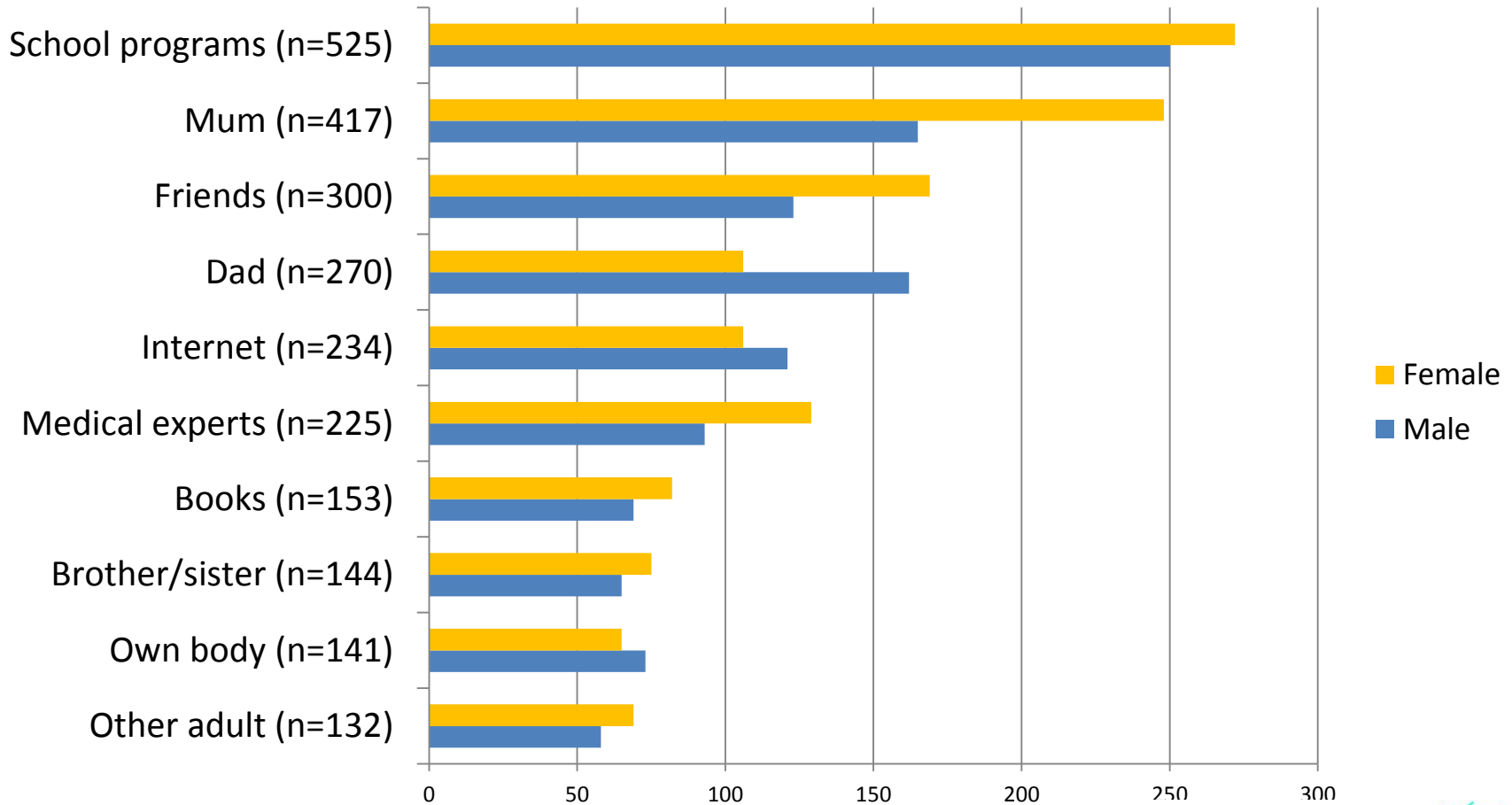
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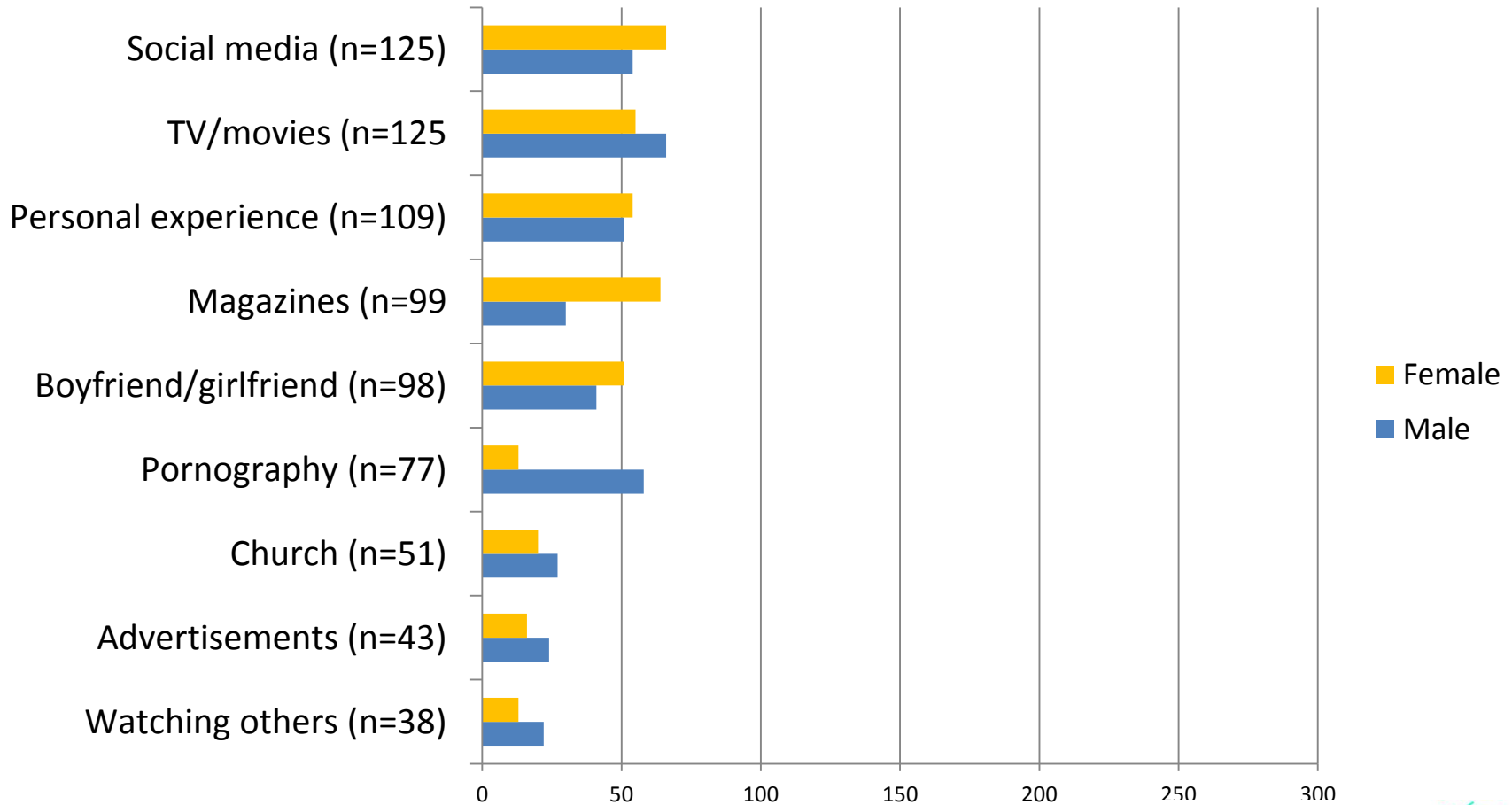
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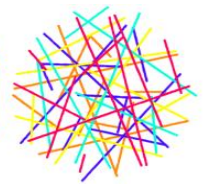




# Most taught topics

Topics	Average Value
The importance of respect in relationships	80.51
Changes during puberty	75.30
Knowledge about the female reproductive system	75.29
Choosing to have or not have sex	75.26
The idea that our bodies are our own	74.02
The correct names for sexual body parts	74.01
Contraception	73.84
Sexually transmitted infections	73.82
Laws about sexual behaviour (i.e., age of consent)	71.83
Power in relationships	70.43
Knowledge about the male reproductive system	70.37
Negotiating consent in relationships	70.29

All of these topics fall in the 'taught a great deal' section of the slider, suggesting high levels of program implementation.

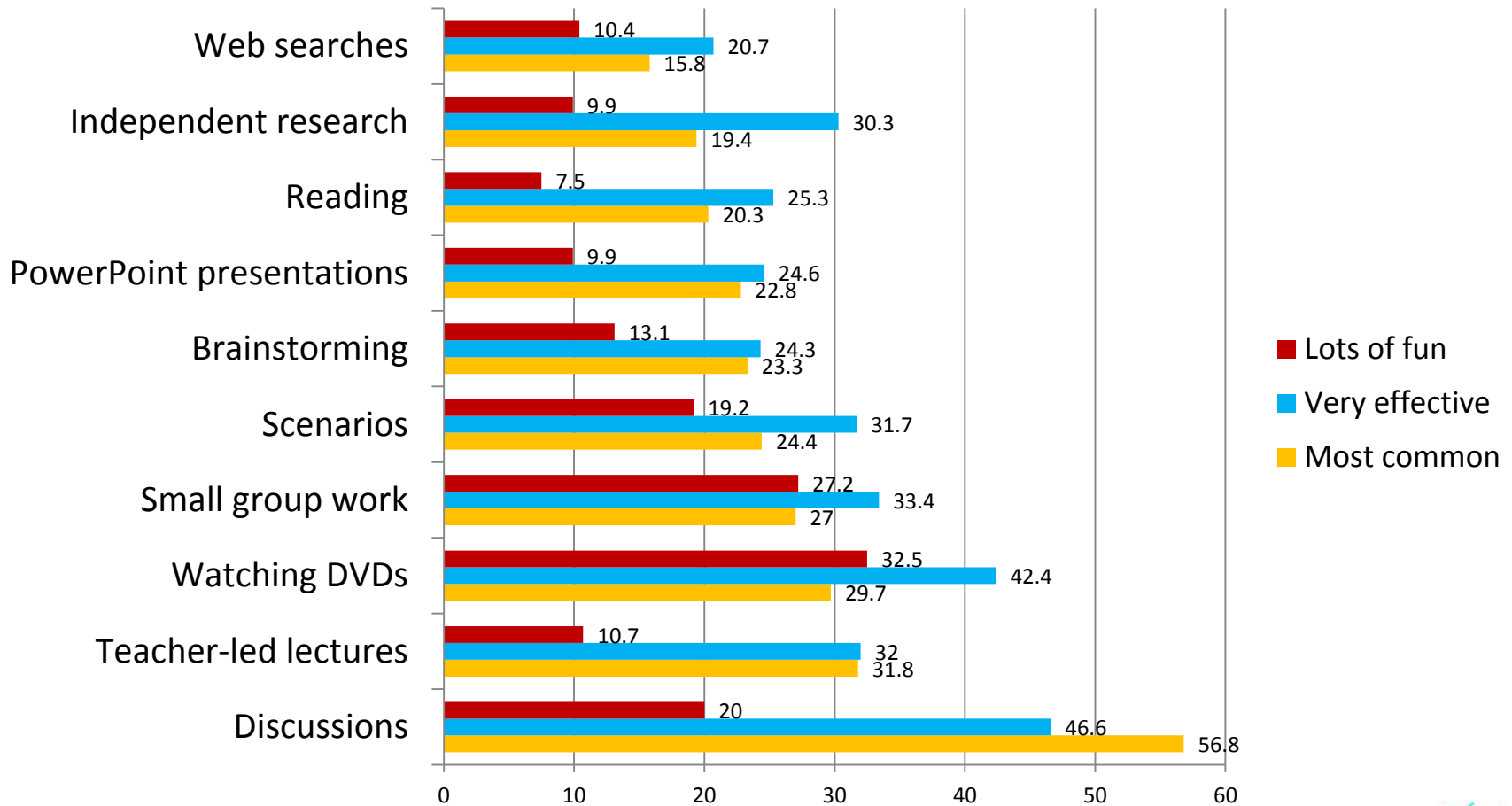


<b>Group rules</b>	<b>69.88</b>
<b>Sexual intercourse</b>	<b>68.16</b>
<b>Seeking advice &amp; info about sexual health</b>	<b>66.60</b>
<b>Respecting difference &amp; accepting difference</b>	<b>66.52</b>
<b>Cyber bullying related to sexuality</b>	<b>65.65</b>
<b>Sexism</b>	<b>64.49</b>
<b>Love and being intimate</b>	<b>64.28</b>
<b>Sexual desire and attraction</b>	<b>63.91</b>
<b>Sexting</b>	<b>61.90</b>
<b>Sexual activities - kissing, cuddling, touching</b>	<b>60.76</b>
<b>The role of popular culture, technology and media</b>	<b>60.23</b>
<b>Sexual pleasure</b>	<b>56.73</b>
<b>Homophobia</b>	<b>55.33</b>
<b>Anal, oral and digital sex</b>	<b>53.39</b>
<b>Masturbation</b>	<b>50.19</b>
<b>Pornography</b>	<b>49.29</b>

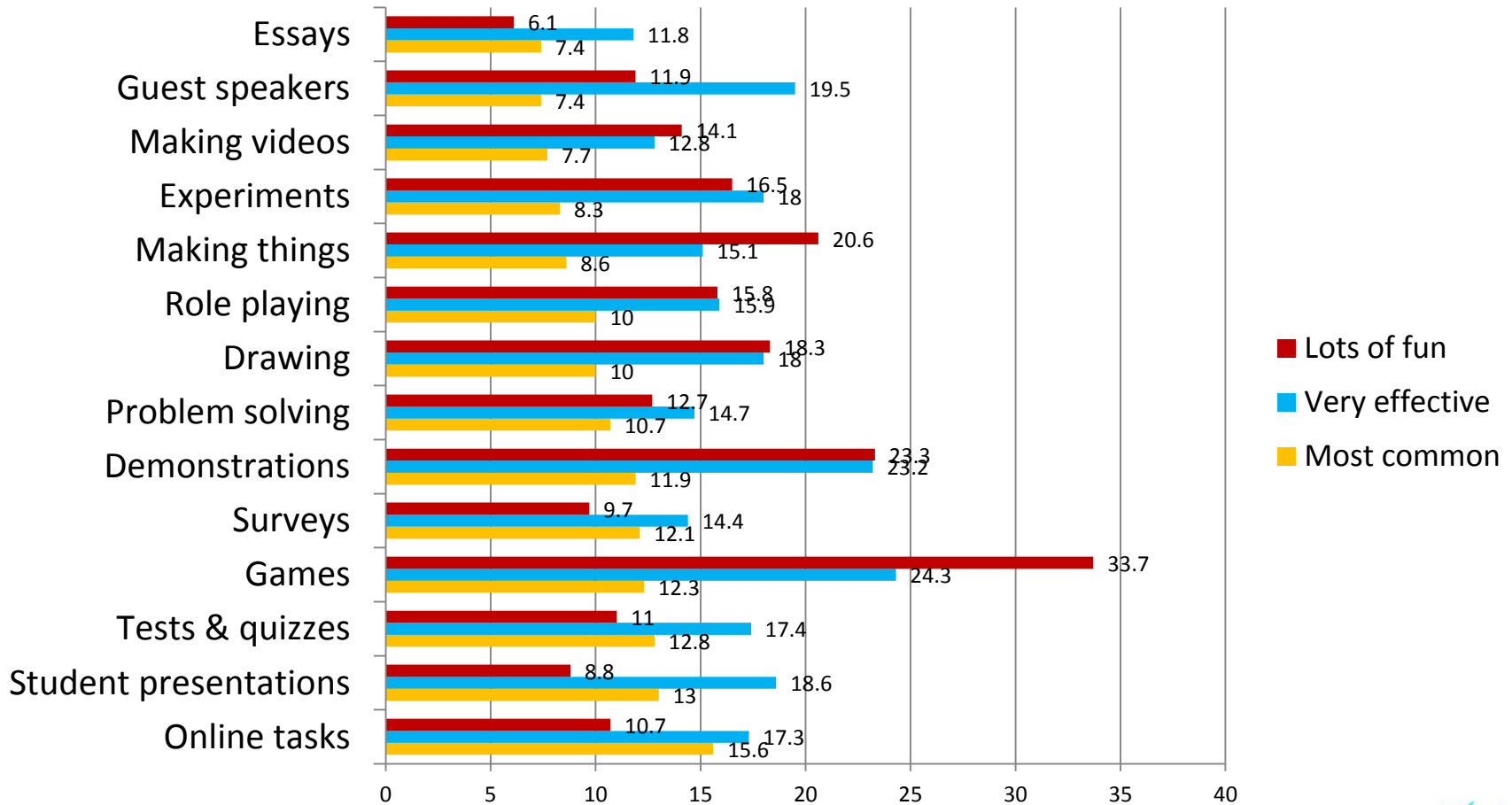
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Some teachers are reluctant to teach 'sensitive' topics. They become the 'silences' in the curriculum – teachers and students know about them but don't talk about them.

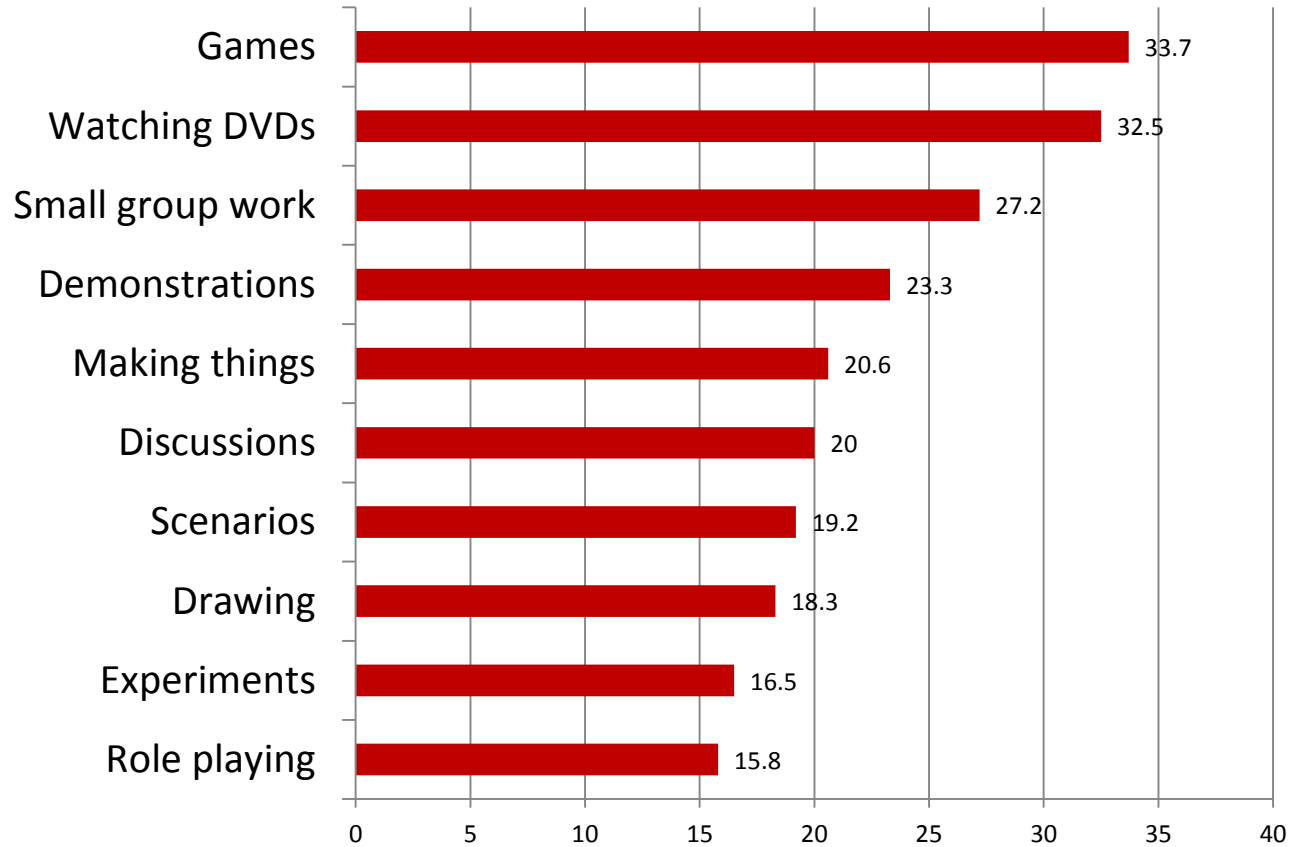
# Learning activities – most common, very effective & lots of fun



# Learning activities – most common, very effective & lots of fun



# Lots of fun – top 10



# Topics enjoyed learning

- *‘Learning about why young people desire to have an intimate relationship’*
- *‘Laws about sexual behaviour as I like to know when it is too young to do it’*
- *‘Having sex because it sounds fun’*
- *‘I don’t know. I didn’t really enjoy learning it. It was just important’*
- *‘Discrimination against LGBTs because I learnt what my peers think about the subject’*



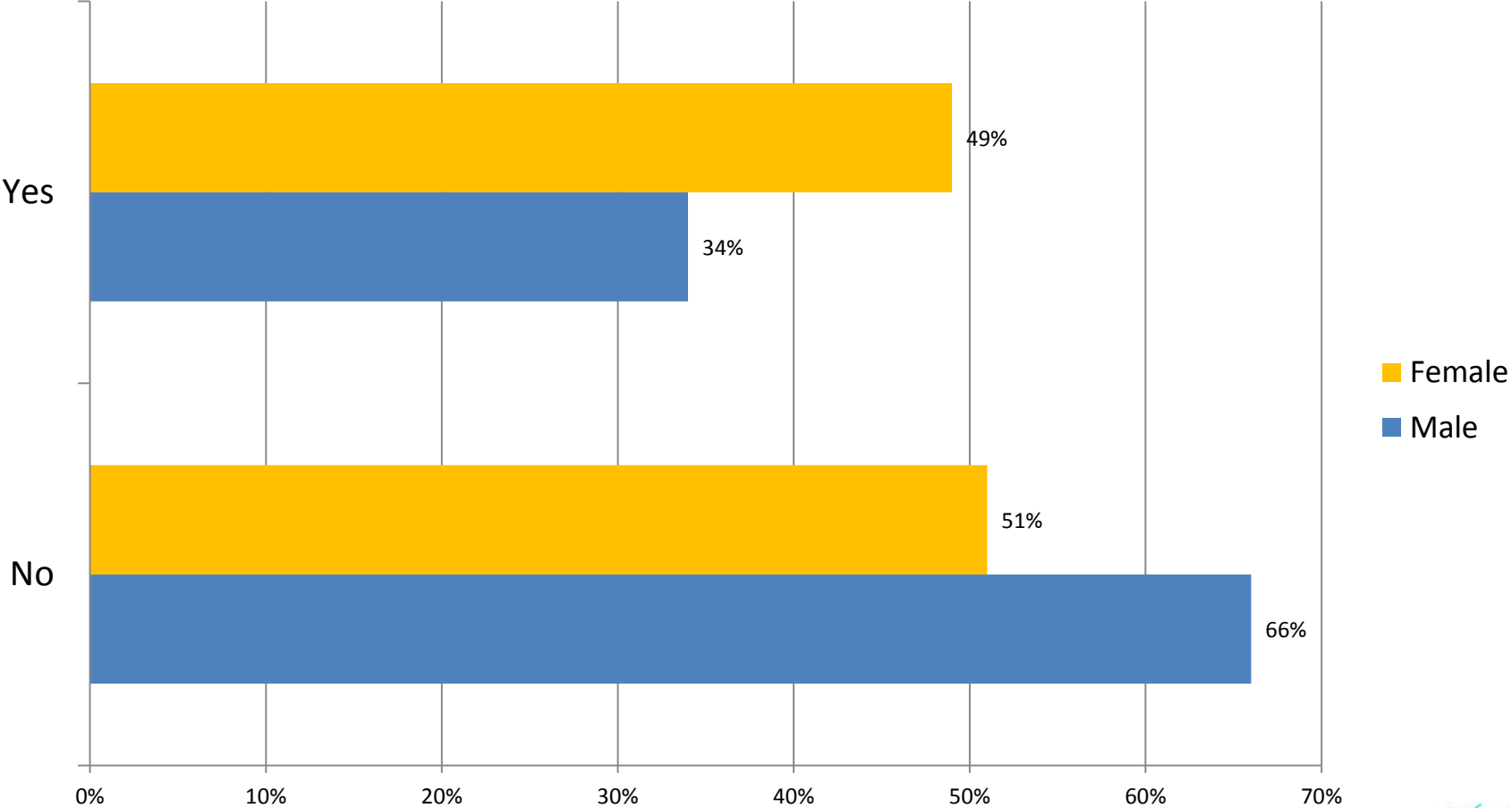
# Topics enjoyed learning

- *'None because I already knew all about it'*
- *'Sex and rooting'*
- *'The importance of respect in relationships because in every relationship you should be able to respect each others' decision'*
- *'Respecting difference and accepting the diversity of sexual attraction because I am a big supporter of it'*

# Topics NOT enjoyed learning

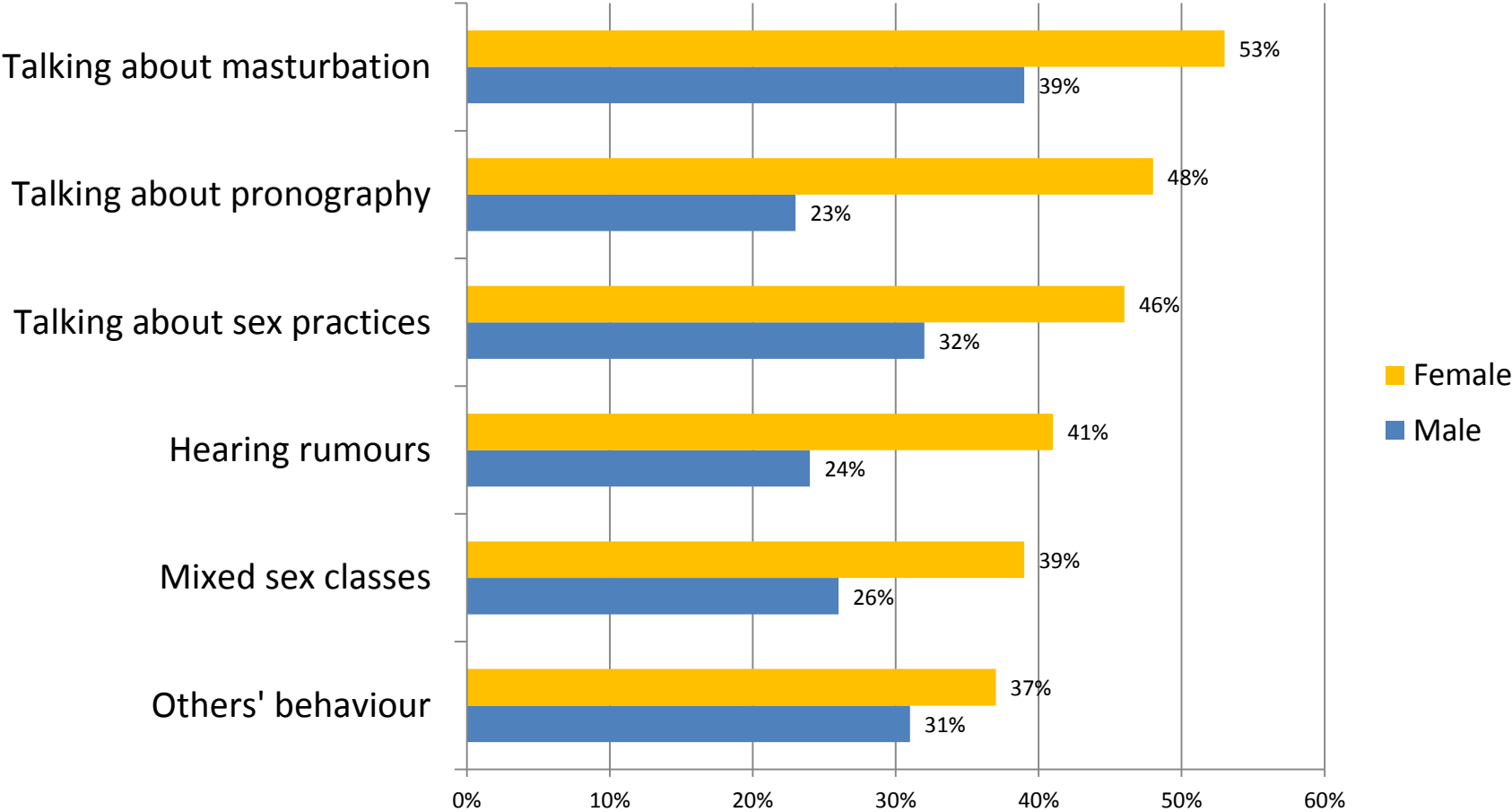
- *'The plastic dick because it was weird and disturbing'*
- *'I didn't enjoy learning about the more embarrassing factors'*
- *'Masturbation because I felt uncomfortable'*
- *'Power in relationships because it was boring'*
- *'I felt awkward learning about sexual parts'*
- *'The penis'*
- *'Periods because it's gross'*

# Uncomfortable, embarrassed, or annoyed?



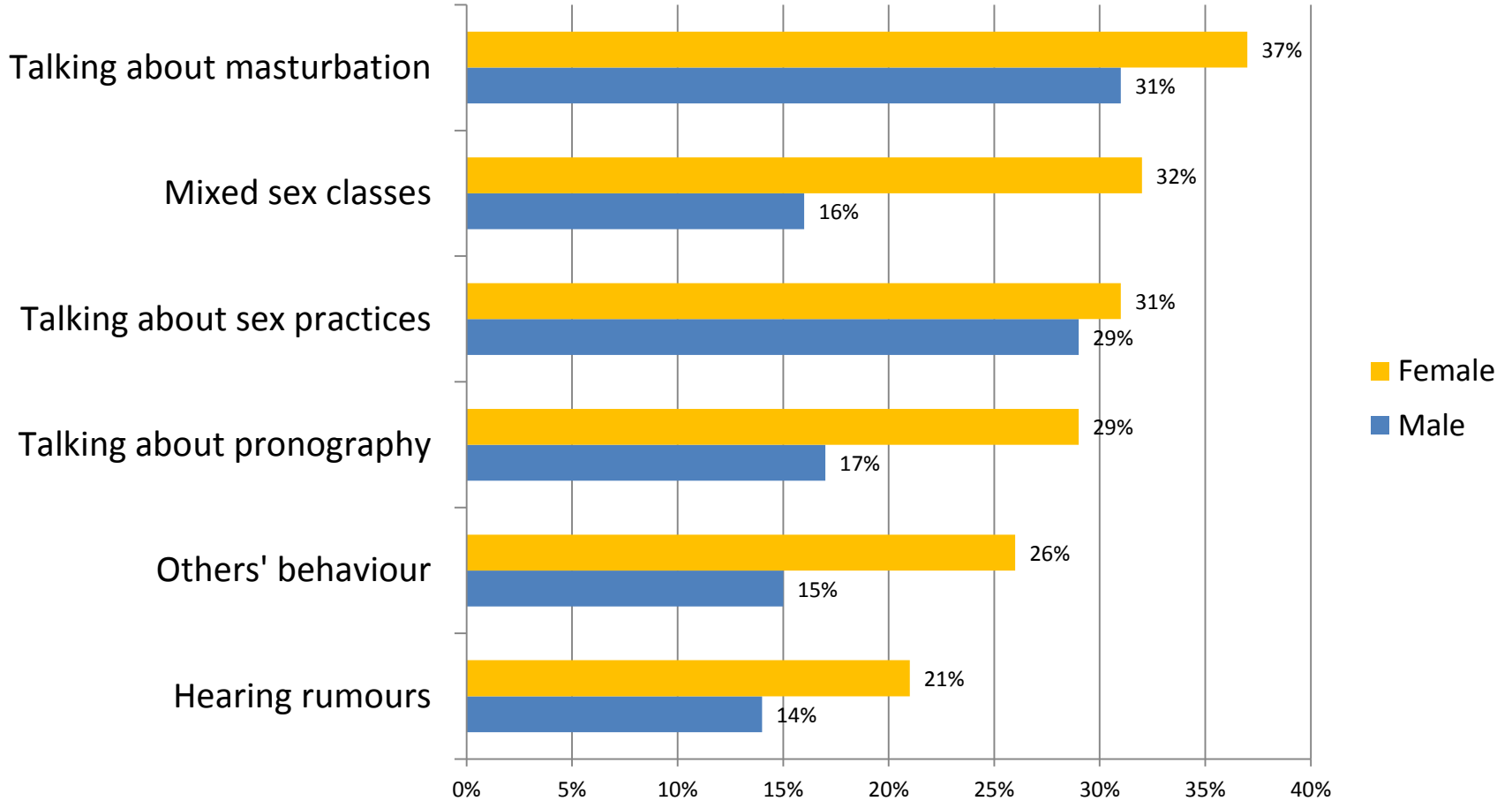
# Uncomfortable

(n= 270)



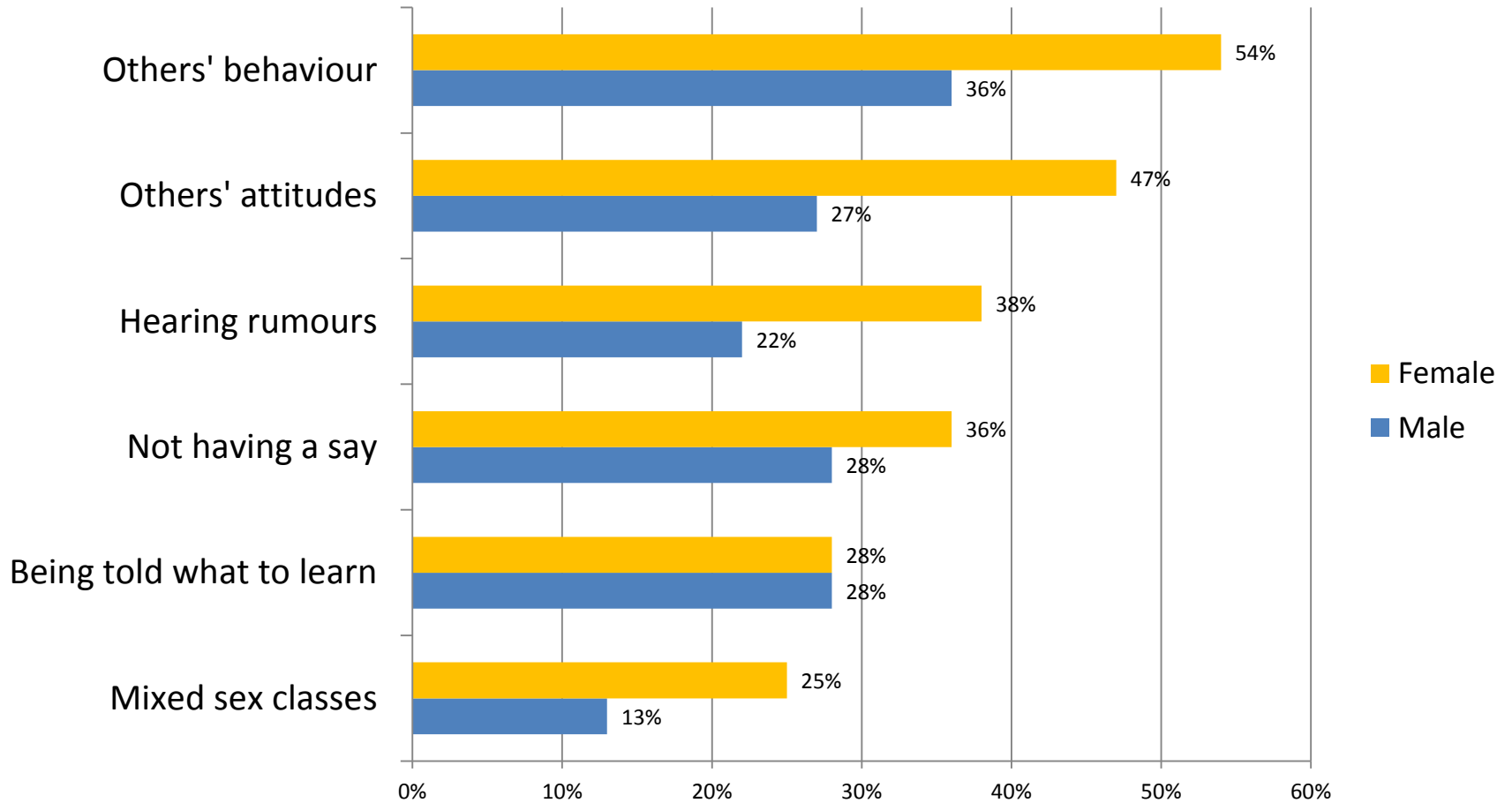
# Embarrassed

(n=264)



# Annoyed

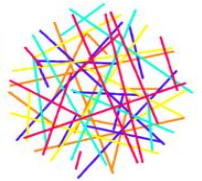
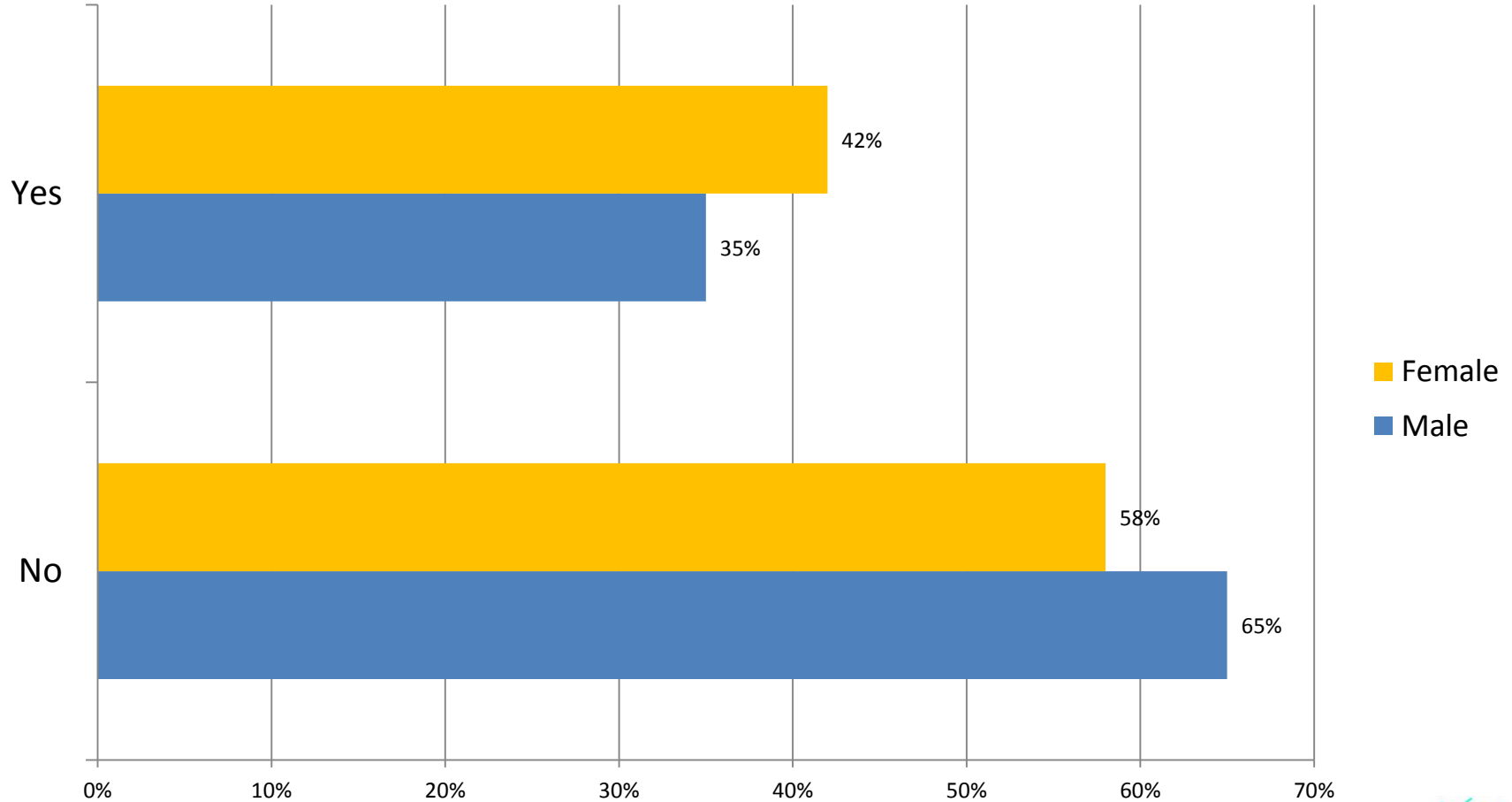
(n=260)



# Why?

- *‘Because people were not mature in any way’*
- *‘Because of two reasons: either hypocritical-ness or tool-ness because the boys are always loud and say stuff before thinking’*
- *‘Because we didn’t have a say in what we did’*
- *‘Because I don’t like to be told what to do’*
- *‘Because it is hard to talk about sexual education’*

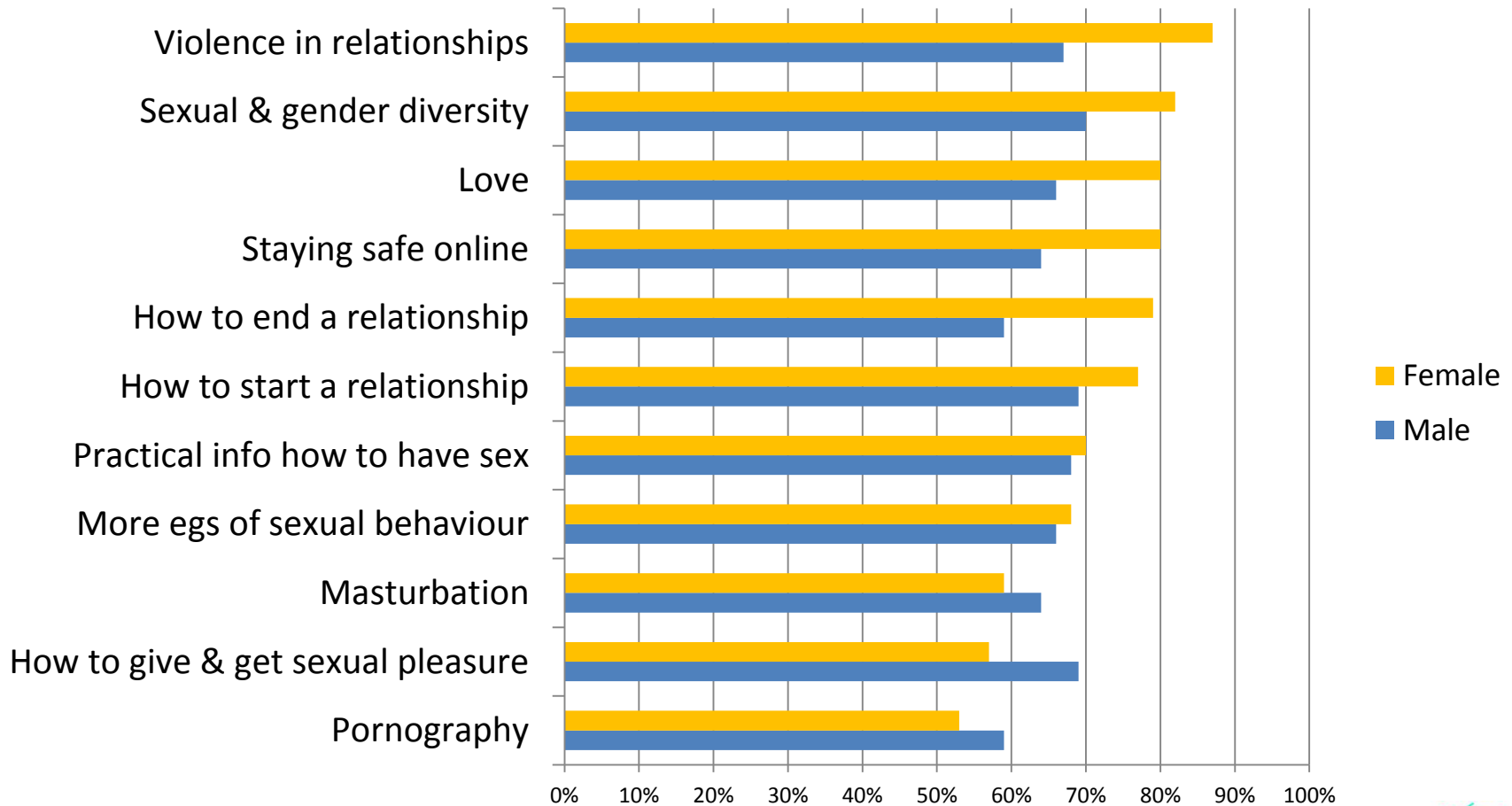
# Greater depth, more detail





# Issues/topics: greater depth

(n=278)



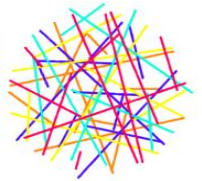
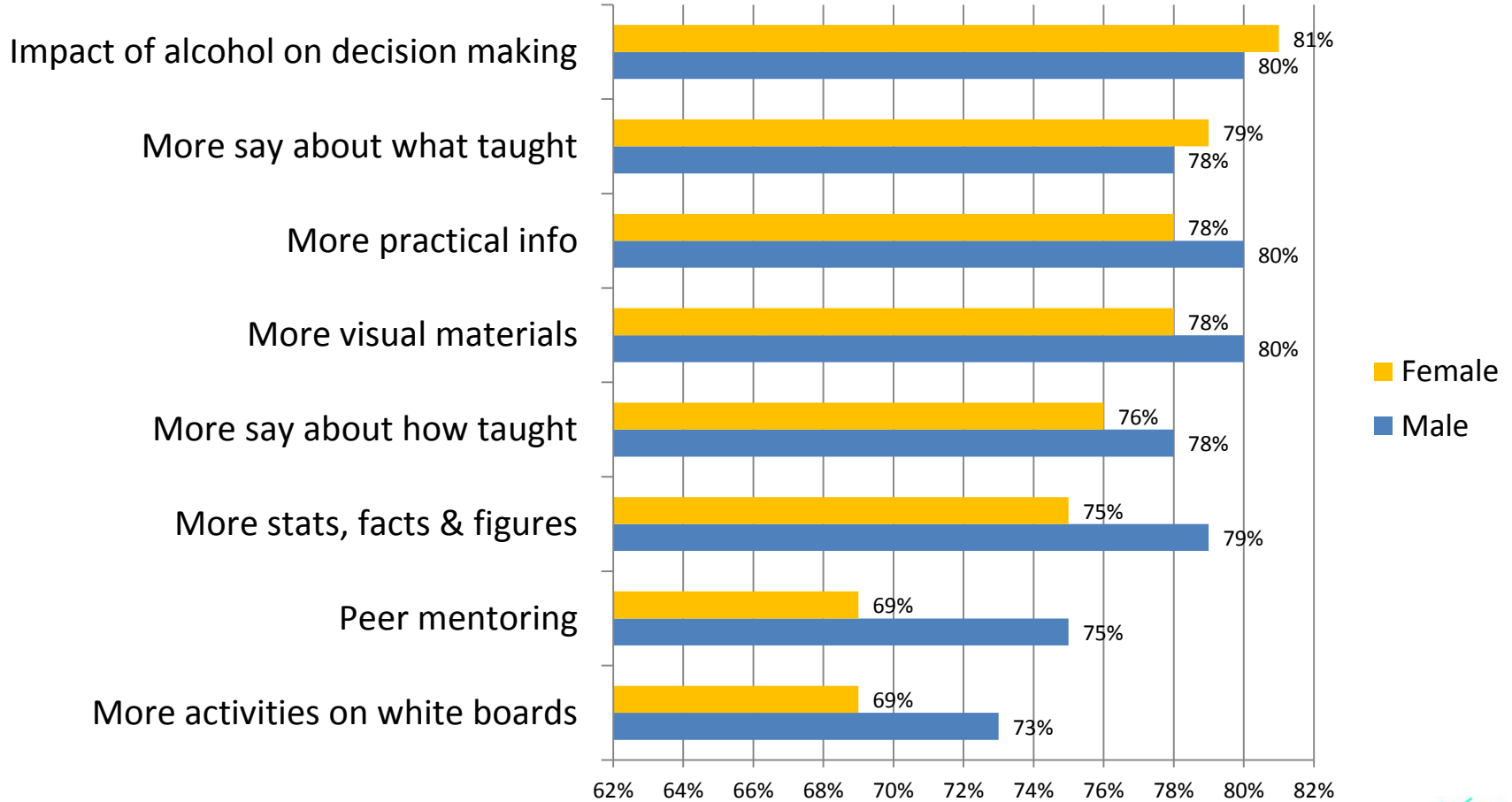
# Reasons for more detail

- *‘Because I am sick of explaining it to dudes’*
- *‘I find it hard to be myself because of how people look at LGBTs and I think if they were better educated about how people are born that way then it will be easier not only for me but others like me’*
- *‘Students may not have the resources to find out more information about these issues so when they are in class they will be able to talk and learn about it’*

# Reasons for more detail

- *‘Because people struggle with this and I have failed in this aspect because of a lack of knowledge’*
- *‘They don’t get spoken of enough or in enough detail’*
- *‘More knowledge makes you feel more comfortable about what might happen later’*
- *‘I want to be informed so I know these things before they come around’*

# Improvements



# 'The best' teachers

- *'They should be approachable by everyone'*
- *'The 'best' teachers of sexuality education have the ability to let students speak, to respect them, and to have an open mind about all issues regarding students and their personal lives'*
- *'The best people are the ones that actually know what they are fucking talking about'*
- *'Listen to all questions whether they are stupid or not and answer truthfully'*

# 'The best' teachers

- *'They are really open minded and they make the whole class feel welcome and make sure no-one feels uncomfortable. It's also good to have a teacher that has a bit of experience with sexual activity and health'*
- *'Fun, happy, no favouritisms, no writing'*
- *'I think a teacher should be very open about sexual stuff and should be able to take a joke and laugh because if we make jokes it just shows we are a bit uncomfortable. It's a lot more fun if they aren't so serious about everything'*

# Any other comments?

Very few:

- *'It can be very weird'*
- *'It's boring because it's not hands on'*
- *'No, I know everything'*
- *'People should be able to be who they are and always be happy'*
- *'Talk about EVERYTHING'*
- *'No – this is a dumb survey'*

# Conclusions

- Early results, but trends are emerging
- School sexuality education programs are a very important source of information (so too are Mums & friends)
- Most frequently taught topics relate to relationships issues – respect & reciprocity – and reproductive physiology
- Least frequently taught topics relate to more sensitive & taboo issues – pornography, masturbation, sexual desire, & sexual pleasure (the ‘silences’ in sexuality education)



# Conclusions

- Most frequently used learning activities are interactive, discussion-based activities (rather than reading and writing tasks)
- Around 40% of students (more girls than boys) feel uncomfortable or embarrassed dealing with sexuality issues in class (reflects wider social anxieties about human sexuality)

# Conclusions

- Around a third of students want to deal with some issues in more detail (more girls than boys) – focus on relationships (violence, start, end, mysteries of love)
- 4 out of 5 students want more of a say about what is taught in sexuality education
- 4 out of 5 students want to know more about the effects of alcohol on sexual decision making

# Where to from here

## Stage 1: Students' views about sexuality education

- Student focus group discussion & interrogation of survey results

## Stage 2: Researching students' sexuality education needs

- Co-designing and co-researching approaches

## Stage 3: Curriculum design implications

# Contacts

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