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# Perspectives for an Inclusive Sex Ed

An event by @SexplainUK

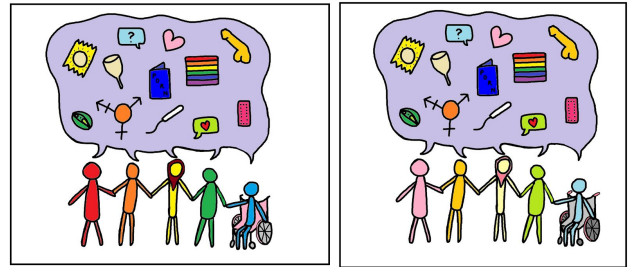
28th October 2018



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Sexplain is a not-for-profit company that provides comprehensive and inclusive sex and relationships education workshops for young people in the UK.

On 28th October 2018, we ran an event designed to provide a space to hear perspectives that have been marginalised from mainstream Sex and Relationships Education. Below is a summary of the various talks, panels & workshops.



## Yolanda Adamson: Myth-busting Polyamory

Sexplain facilitator Yolanda Adamson opened the conference with an interactive session exploring the myths and misconceptions around polyamory. Yolanda explained the diversity of love relationship concepts, including the terms ‘open relationship’, ‘idealised monoamory’ and ‘solo polyamory’. Yolanda also introduced the group to the Polyamory dragon (right)!

Yolanda explained the prevalence of so many myths surrounding polyamory, including that “people have polyamorous relationships to have lots of sex” and that “polyamorous relationships require less effort and commitment than monogamous ones”. These were explored by the group and debunked by Yolanda.



Yolanda also introduced the group to Tikva Wolf, the author of Kimchi Cuddles, a webcomic which draws from real life stories and experiences to spread awareness about poly, queer, and genderqueer issues. Check it out at [www.kimchicuddles.com](http://www.kimchicuddles.com)



## Sophie Whitehead: Sexual Pleasure and Consent

Teacher, MA student and Sexplain advisor Sophie Whitehead looked at why schools need to bring pleasure into the consent conversation.

She began by asking the group, “Why do schools not talk about enjoying sex?” The group discussed ideas such as shame around sexual pleasure and desire, and a lack of explicit language used in conversations around sex in school (“So then the man and woman go upstairs... and well... you know the rest.”)

Sophie then gave the group a series of rules to rate which would be the most important to discuss with students when educating about sexual consent, including pressure, intoxication and being in a relationship.



## Rachel Downes: The Shape of You

Rachel is a fine art model who spoke about body positivity, a movement which, as she explained, can be traced back to the 1800s. “It’s the belief that all human beings should appreciate all human body types, that we should look at our bodies in a positive light.” She explained how, because of her job, she spends a lot her time naked in front of the camera - “and honestly? I find it incredibly empowering to create the art that I do”.

Rachel explained, “I truly believe that body positivity starts from within, it starts by holding ourselves accountable for our judgement of others and how we treat them. Lady Gaga so rightly said that the best thing about kindness is it’s free, and she’s damn well right, and it applies to everything. The more we are kind to each other, that kinder we are to ourselves.”





## Milly Evans: Is Sex Ed a Human Rights Issue?

The inspirational Milly Evans is an award-winning campaigner for better sex education, a member of the Family Planning Association Youth Council, a former Stonewall Young Campaigner, and the founder of I Support Sex Ed: [www.isupportsexeducation.com](http://www.isupportsexeducation.com)

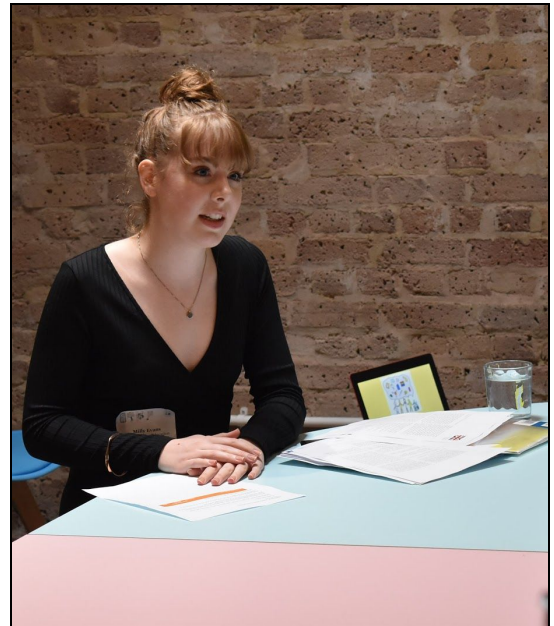
Milly's discussion session focussed on how we could look at framing representative Sex Ed as a human right; an approach not currently reflected in the draft RSE guidance. Specifically, the session outlined concerns that the proposed changes do not focus on inclusive (and specifically LGBT+) Sex Education.

The group also reflected on the potential negative impact of the proposed opt-out in the draft guidance, which could prevent people from accessing certain necessary information.

## Dr Emma Chan: Squish, Squash, Squelch!

Junior Doctor and Sexplain facilitator Emma Chan began by explaining how, when on hospital wards she was struck by patients' lack of understanding about their own bodies - even people in labour being given a catheter and asking, "but, how will the baby get out?"

Emma was joined by fellow Junior Doctor and member of LGBTIQ+ Greens, Adam Clarke. They spoke about the barriers to discussing and teaching about sexual and reproductive anatomy, and some strategies for dealing with this.



These barriers included embarrassment, and how people don't have the vocabulary to discuss their anatomy, but also that anatomy can just be conceptually difficult: it takes doctors about two and a half years to learn about anatomy, explained Emma and Adam. A way to deal with these barriers? Arts and crafts!

Complete with lovely homemade playdoh, Emma and Adam led the group on Sexplain's playdoh anatomy activity, explaining how this activity can be used to look at diversity of appearances, key points on hygiene, intersex genitals and more.

Check out Emma's write up of the playdoh genital activity, plus other anatomy, sexual and reproductive health teaching resources on her fantastic blog: <https://squishsquashsquelch.com/>



## LGBTQIA+ Panel

On the first panel of the day was: Dave Hopkinson (METRO Charity); Gayathiri Kamalakantha (IntoUniversity and Sexplain consultant); Emily Burt (Fumble); Rachel Downes (Fine Art Model); and Ibraheem and Dias, (StraightJacket and The Advocacy Academy fellows). It was chaired by Yolanda Adamson.

The panel started with an exploration of "How can we make Sex Ed more comfortable for queer students?" The panel agreed that there is a lack of, or no space for students to develop an understanding of their identity as a whole in school: their experiences of sex ed tended to be science-focussed and very heteronormative.

Even when discussing non-heterosexuality, the panel explored, the discussion can be focussed on a gay versus straight, binary approach.



The panel asked, as a straight, cis teacher, how do you get to a level where you are comfortable using different terms, reflecting on how teachers are sometimes afraid to use 'different words', perhaps concerned about what other teachers or parents may think.

They explored the idea of asking students what they want to hear about - though with the caveat of doing this carefully, treading a fine line between allowing everyone to get involved and involving dangerous (homophobic or transphobic) views.

Emily highlighted how a seemingly "democratic" approach can have dangerous and harmful consequences, reflecting on a whole-year debate in school where students were asked to discuss whether it is wrong or right to be gay. She remembered how students did not want to stand on the side that 'it's OK to be gay', how facilitators allowed and validated these positions, not weighing in on what was appropriate, treating every view as "interesting".

The role of the educator was returned to, with the group looking at what a facilitator could do if a religious student said, "this is wrong" or "this is a sin". The panel agreed that it would be the educator's responsibility to include them in a conversation where their thoughts and opinions are

respected, understand where those opinions come from and encourage discussions, rather than just saying 'you are wrong' end of conversation – this doesn't educate. This isn't easy, they said, but there are ways to shut down bigoted/hateful opinions in a constructive way. A tip was to focus on language – you're not wrong, what you're saying is wrong, or to try counterbalancing views with facts and open their eyes.

The panel spoke about the danger of being too London-centric; how London has a lot of charities and organisations which can help with Sex Ed, which aren't available elsewhere. Conversely, they agreed, some areas of the country have no trans-inclusive organisations and youth groups, and also that whilst growing up in London provides





more exposure to diversity, other areas of country, where there is less diversity, may struggle more to push students out of their comfort zones.

The panel also explored LGBT teachers' unions, and how LGBT teachers do not and should not be the token members of staff - rather, the conversations have to be on the straight, cisgender teachers as much as queer members of the faculty, otherwise it "creates an US and THEM' atmosphere around queer sex ed. Nevertheless, said the panel, LGBT teachers can play a very important role as role-models.

The panel opened up to questions, exploring with the audience in more depth the 'UsVThem' issue, and how power dynamics in relationships and discussions about non heterosexual power relations can be confined to 'the gay lesson'.

The group looked at how dialogues need to be had in an intersectional way - consent discussions in particular can be very heteronormative, and can be very reductive to discuss it without intersectionality.



## Bryony Walker

Bryony is Campaigns Director of Level Up ([www.welevelup.org](http://www.welevelup.org)). Bry explained about Level Up's campaign to get more LGBTQ young people to contribute to the consultation on the RSE Draft guidance.



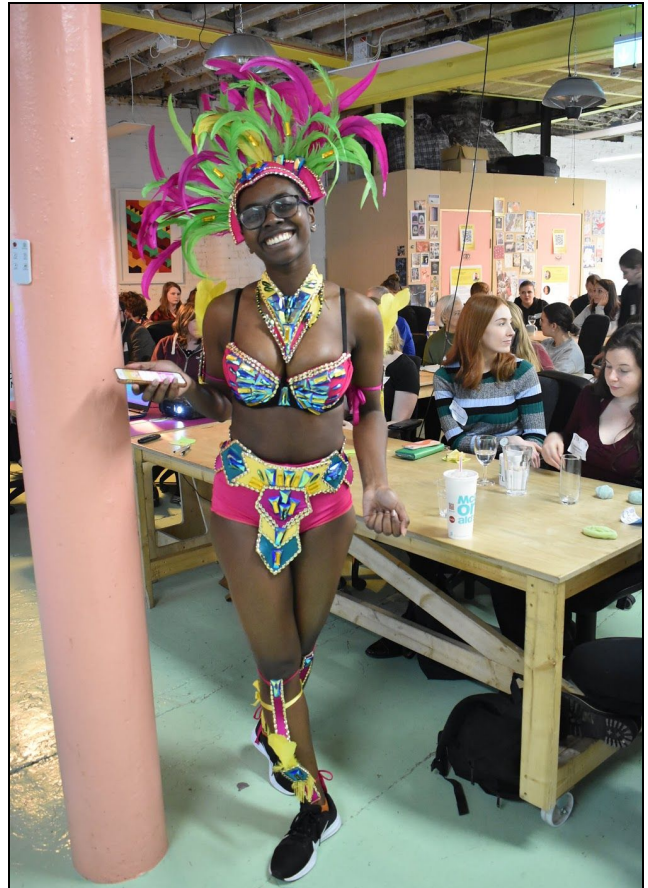
## Saskia Hoskins

Saskia is a PhD research student at the Department for International Development at King's College, London. She spoke about her research around adolescent pregnancy in Peru, which is ethnographic research regarding knowledge and attitudes towards contraception and conceptualisations of teenage pregnancy.

## Jemmar Samuels: Sexuality, Culture and Liberation

Jemmar is a 22-year-old Afro-Jamaican intersectional feminist and activist. She is a student at Brunel University London where she studies Politics and Sociology. Wearing her beautiful Caribbean attire, Jemmar spoke about the complex interaction between Jamaica's "in many ways sexually liberating and expressive" culture and attitudes, but how, owing to the legacy of colonialism, it is at the same time Christian and religiously conservative.

Around the world, explained Jemmar, only one of these sides is being told or is known; and in sex education classes, teachers need to understand this conflict.



## Elena Veris Reynolds: Queer Identity in Education

University Student and Sexplain Youth Panellist Elena looked at Queer Identity in Education. Elena explained how queer is liked by some for its ambiguity; but disliked by others, and how there is a pressure when questioning your sexuality to put yourself in a box. There's a belief, said Elena, that you will find an end point where you can identify yourself. This is not always the case.

Elena spoke about how biphobia comes from both inside and outside of the LGBT community, and that exposure to microaggressions can have a large impact on one's sense of self and sense of identity. Ambiguity about sexuality can be difficult to talk about and explain; growing up is a confusing process for everyone, and even more so for LGBT teenagers, said Elena.



Meanwhile, Elena explains, LGBT support at school is broadly poor and often just for show, and SRE is based on the assumption that LGBT people fit into boxes, and that support can be tailored around definite categories.

Elena gave several ways of addressing this, including:

- Having inclusive SRE that actively engages with a variety of queer issues on the physical and emotional sides
- Education that includes information about the variety of different LGBT+ experiences, that isn't limited to only the most visible/palatable identities
- That SRE should include the message that it's OK to be unsure, that many people feel this way and you should not feel pressure to label yourself
- Teachers require better training about how to talk about LGBT issues; and, that everyone has a responsibility to educate themselves on these issues.



## Turbo Talks

These short talks were delivered by incredible students from Blackheath High School and Bacon's College, and were widely agreed to be a highlight of the conference.

### **Jessi Borg: Is Education Homophobic?**

Yes it is, explained Jessi: at age 16, Jessi had no information on lesbian sex ed and was left to use the internet and porn, "a less than adequate sex ed tool, more harmful than helpful". Jessi now has a blog - [www.awarewolfblog.wixsite.com/website](http://www.awarewolfblog.wixsite.com/website) - on, amongst other things, the importance of teaching LGBT issues in sex ed from a safety perspective.

Jessi says, "some believe it should be separated into queer sex ed for gay people and straight for straights, but it is important to provide diverse sex ed for all. Even if the recipients aren't LGBT+, it provides the tools to help others who are." LGBT students are, overall, under informed about how to stay safe when having sex.

## **Ingrid Berdal: The Cycle of Female Sexual Pleasure and Shame**

Ingrid began by articulating the difference in information provided about male v female masturbation and sexual pleasure in schools. SRE is broadly split into 3 areas, says Ingrid: Reproductive, safety, STIs. There is an avoidance, says Ingrid, of issues that primarily affect females, and not educating students on this areas can give a damaging impression that female sexuality is shameful, while male sexuality is not shameful and more valued. Women have the right to understand sexual pleasure, said Ingrid, and we need an intersectional approach, factoring in disability, class, race and sexuality.



## **Rosie Futers: Lesbians & Reproduction**

Rosie spoke about how children should be taught about reproduction outside heterosexual couples. This is relevant, explains Rosie, for the ~10% of the population who are LGBT and also people who have issues with fertility. Currently, access to information currently can come from less than reliable sources. Insemination, sperm donors and surrogacy are all equally as important as the science of heterosexual reproduction, and should be taught to all secondary age children.

## **Zoe Hadsell: Sex, Gender and Identity**

We view identities as a revelation that we have one day – but we should see it as a process, Zoe told the audience. What Zoe wishes we had been taught? That sex assigned at birth, gender constructed; that a gender identity is trying to categorise something

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that isn't inherently categorical. That we may discover new things about our gender or sexual identity throughout our lives. That gender expression is external, identity is internal. That gender expression moving, and doesn't have to fit in boxes.

These fundamentals are more than what is taught in most schools, said Zoe. A majority of people don't remember receiving education on gender identity at school, and without understanding how they interlink, it becomes harder to understand identity.

### **Eden Chambers: How do you get the moment of consent?**

Eden explained, Sex Education should contain teaching about consent and how it is reached. Without an understanding of how consent can be reached, it can be dangerous. It helps students to understand the signals that partners are giving - and avoids added stress. Currently, says Eden, movies and parents not providing adequate education on this topic - and porn even less so.

### **Maria Turek: Sexual Harassment, Assault and Rape**

Maria began by explaining why we should be taught about sexual assault, abuse and violence, and the differences between them. Lots of people have experienced unacceptable sexual behaviour but don't know that or whether it is recognised as harassment etc., and what they can do about it. People also must understand how to report, where to report and what to report it, said Maria. This is also critically important because when cases are incorrectly reported as sexual/assault/abuse, owing to a lack of knowledge about terminology, they may not be taken as seriously.





## Adam Fouracre: Gender & Violence

Adam is the CEO of Stand Against Violence ([www.standagainstviolence.co.uk](http://www.standagainstviolence.co.uk)), which aims to prevent violence, its long term consequences and the grief of losing loved ones. SAV was set up following the murder of 17 year old Lloyd Fouracre, and during this session Adam told the story of Jay, who murdered Lloyd in 2005.

Jay's story was told by Adam and through a new SAV video. We saw how Jay did not experience an environment where he could discuss his feelings about his abusive father until in prison for murder. Jay's story tells the consequences of negative masculinity, which took the form of exposure to domestic violence against his mother as a teenager, and certain toxic social aspects of groups of men. Is there anything that would have made a difference to Jay? No, probably only being sent to prison earlier and being given that crucial space to talk. According to Jay, the only thing he thinks would help him open up is having a trusted person in his life.

Adam tells the audience, there's lot of work to be done in changing perceptions of what it is to be a man. Otherwise, more people will lose their lives at the hands of men who are victims of the culture of masculinity.

## Dave Hopkinson: Working with Boys & Young Men in RSE

Dave began by explaining his work at Metro and the Boys and Young Men project, which he says sits between SRE and Youth Work. The project provides holistic support and advice for boys and young men, around relationships, identity and sex.

They are a referral based service. Reasons for referrals, explained Dave, are many, and include inappropriate language, age inappropriate use of tech or harmful gender attitudes. Though, says Dave - cases are flagged up on issues that present which may be the tip of the iceberg; below this can be much more serious issues. The core approach of the project is holistic (a multi-week

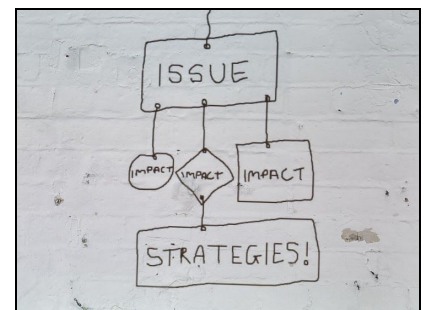


workshop series), supportive, non-judgemental, confidential and to model positive masculinity.

Recurring themes that come up in Dave’s work include emotional regulation, essential for healthy relationships, retribution and self-esteem. Dave shared a quote from [Jackson Katz](#): “Boys will be boys’ also has a self-fulfilling quality, because boys possess not only the potential to rise to people’s expectations, but also the potential to sink to them”.

Our assumptions about young men interact with the way in which they present themselves, explained Dave. He spoke about unconscious bias, and the relationship between this and support for boys who are victims of CSE. According to Barnardo’s research (2014), up to a third of victims of CSE are male, but, “The stereotypical belief that boys are less vulnerable to child sexual exploitation means they are receiving insufficient protection from front-line services” (Barnardo’s, 2014).

Audience discussion included getting boys (particularly white boys) involved in conversations about feminism. Dave explained how many boys get their first experience of feminism through MRAs/gamer forums, and therefore a lot of debunking must be done. Men must be engaged to see the benefits of living in a feminist society.



## Alex Greenwood: Challenging Gender Biases in the Classroom

Alex is from TIGER ([www.tigerbristol.co.uk](http://www.tigerbristol.co.uk)), which runs workshops for young people addressing gender based barriers.

Alex started by exploring the notion of stereotypes, and key terminology when it comes to talking about gender. Alex then invited the group to take part in an activity exploring gender bias or gender inequality in schools or educational environments, and possible tools or tactics to tackle these issues. These ideas took the forms of mini mobiles (pictured right)!



## Matilda Brindle: Masturbation: A Natural History

Matilda is a PhD researcher based at UCL and the Institute of Zoology. She spoke about her current research, which explores the form, evolution and function of masturbation across the primate order.

Matilda began by explaining our changing attitudes towards masturbation over time - that it didn't become a taboo subject until the 1700s. Masturbation, she says, is 'self directed sexual behaviour', and loads of animals do it, and not just mammals! Her list included camels, dolphins, and her primary focus: primates! How do they do it? Stroke, slap, hold, rub, chew, pull, thrust, lick – using mouths, hand, foot, finger - but also props: wire netting, food baskets, mother's toe (!), even a tortoiseshell.

So why do animals do it? Well, there's no reason to believe animals don't view sexual pleasure in the same way as humans, explains Matilda. It feels good, alleviates boredom and sexual tension. And there can be various useful purposes: preparation for copulation; it can improve sperm quality in some species; it helps maintain vaginal muscles; and more!

Matilda's key message was that masturbation occurs across the animal kingdom, is varied in the methods by which it happens, and is good for you! It has been retained throughout evolution because of the advantages it provides species.



## Panel discussion: Sexual Pleasure

Our second panel was chaired by Sexplain's Director Dolly Padalia. On the panel was Emily Burt (Fumble Mag), Milly Evans (Campaigner), Becky Lund Harket (Sexplain), Elena Veris Reynolds (Student and Sexplain Youth Advisor), Dave Hopkinson (Metro Charity) and Sophie Whitehead (teacher, MA Student and Sexplain consultant).

The panel started by answering the question: 'why is sexual pleasure important to talk about?' They discussed stigma around discussions of sexual pleasure and masturbation, and lots of issues around slut shaming for women. They agreed that it was important to also talk about topics such as sex toys and lubricant in conversations with young people.



The panel looked at the importance of going into sexual encounters because we want them, not because we feel we *should* be having them. Having the language to discuss our own genitals and bodies, they said, shapes our sexual encounters and allows us to go into them and know what we want.

The panel also looked at how women/XX people report less sexual pleasure than men/XY people, particularly in heterosexual relationships. In fact, heterosexual long term relationships have an orgasm deficit of around 35%. The panel agreed that conversations around the clitoris and sexual pleasure, whilst they can cause awkwardness among pupils, need to be had at secondary school, because otherwise students get their education from porn.



## Emily Burt: The birds, the bees, and the anal fisting: Rethinking 'the talk' for the age of hardcore pornography

Emily is a journalist and co-founder at Fumble ([www.fumble.org.uk](http://www.fumble.org.uk)). She ended the day by looking at how we need to reimagine the 'sex talk' in the age of easily accessible porn.

It's unlikely these days that a young adult will have an understanding of sex (and have done it and know their preferences) before they see porn, said Emily. They are far more likely to be exposed to it at a young age. This includes sexual terminology, says Emily (citing Wildo the Dildo), but if families aren't able to have discussions about it, children will look it up, at which point it becomes easy to find porn.

'Young people accessing porn have no frame of reference for what is the norm'. Porn has a very narrow aesthetic, there's rare use of condoms, 41% of sex scenes in free online porn involve violence towards women or girls, and over 50% involve one person dominating the other. Research shows that watching pornography leads young people to value their own sexual pleasure over that of their partners, and also makes it harder to form meaningful relationships.

“It’s like using *Fast and Furious* to learn how to drive”, explains Emily.

There’s presently no understanding of how to deal with issues around young people and porn, she says. It’s almost impossible to protect young people from seeing porn. In an ideal world, these conversations would begin at home, and we would enable a child’s curiosity in a safe way, be open to child’s curiosities and concerns, so if they come across something they are anxious about they feel able to talk about it – rather than feeling embarrassed or like they will get into trouble.

Here are some of Emily’s ideas on how we can talk to young people about porn:

- Be reassuring, let them know that their curiosity and interest in their bodies is natural.
- Explain that online pornography is not real life
- Not everybody likes some of the things that you see in porn – people like lots of different things
- Talk about healthy relationships and what they look like – what is it to love and respect a person. This conversation must involve discussions of consent – pornography can glamourise non-consent
- Say that not everybody watches it; there is peer pressure to watch porn and people can feel different/invalid if they see something they don’t like that other people seem to like.
- Don’t call it The Talk. Instead, make it clear that it is an ongoing dialogue, open to coming back to have further discussions. After all, it’s not as simple as having one conversation.

