



## writing themselves in **again**: *6 years on*

The 2nd national report on the sexual health & well-being of  
same sex attracted young people in Australia

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Anne Mitchell



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(Monograph series no. 50)

2005

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This research was supported by  
the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing

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ISBN 1920948252

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Once again, our thanks belong with the young people who not only participated in the research but who also urged us on in our work. As well, we acknowledge that much of the reason for the increase in the number of young people participating in this research from 1998 is the result of dedicated workers and organisations spreading the word about the project. We thank the many enthusiastic people who included the call for participants in their newsletters, radio shows and web sites.

We are grateful to Rachel Thorpe, Sam Croy and Hunter Mulcare for early work on the data, to Chyloe Kurdas for her dedicated effort in constructing and maintaining the website, Rebecca Stewart at Geronimo Creative Services for her website banner design and Felicity Nottingham for copy editing. Thanks also to *YGLAM Theatre and Project Group* for the production of the images for the advertising and the report.

We thank the reference group for their dedication to the project, their sound advice and their invaluable work in editing the report. Reference Group members included the authors and: Marian Pitts, Sue Dyson, Philomena Horsley and Debbie Ollis.

Thankyou to the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing for their generous support of this research.

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## Glossary

ARCSHS	The Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society
CALD	culturally and linguistically diverse background
GLBT	gay lesbian bisexual transgender
MCV	Melbourne Community Voice
SSA	same sex attracted
SSAFE	same sex attracted friendly environments in schools
SSAY	same sex attracted young people
STIs	sexually transmissible infections
SWC	student welfare counselor
YGLAM	Young Gays and Lesbians around Moreland



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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### **The young people**

*Writing Themselves In Again - 6 years on: the 2nd national report on the sexuality, health and well-being of same sex attracted young Australians* is the follow up report to a similar study conducted in 1998. This earlier report documented the experiences of 750 young people at home, at school and in the community and revealed a number of negative experiences and concerning health outcomes for these young people. The dissemination of this research was at least partially responsible for a number of positive changes in support for same sex attracted young people (SSAY) in the following years. The purpose of repeating the survey in 2004 was to explore the extent to which these changes have made a difference. In all 1749 young people aged between 14 and 21 successfully completed the survey online, or in hard copy which they received on request by mail. This time there were more young men (n = 1106) than young women (n = 643) responding and we believe this was because of internet advertising which tapped more young men than young women. Nine transgender young people completed the survey. All states and territories were represented in proportion to their youth populations and 21% came from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CALD). Eighty percent of young people came from major cities, 15% from inner regional Australia and 5% from remote areas.

### **Sexual attraction and identity**

In 2004 both young men and young women were more likely to be attracted exclusively to the same sex and to identify as gay, homosexual or lesbian than in 1998, possibly reflecting the social changes that have made this more acceptable. Young people chose their sexual identity for a range of reasons, including what was acceptable in their social groups and not necessarily because of attraction or behavior. The links between attraction, identity and behaviour were complex and changing. In 2004, as in 1998, fewer young women than young men were likely to identify as gay, homosexual or lesbian than young men. Many young people came to a very early realisation of their sexual difference, although the majority realised at puberty (11 – 13 years) and there were no gender differences in age of first realisation. Nevertheless, this early realisation did not necessarily determine the strength or nature of their later identity, attraction or behavior. There was no relationship between age at first realisation, current attraction and gender of sexual partner.

There was a shift towards more positive feelings about their sexuality with 76% feeling great or good in 2004 compared with 60% in 1998. Again this is possibly the result of more widespread acceptance of diverse sexuality and the qualitative data provided on this issue revealed that once young people reframed their experiences of homophobia as an issue of bullying and not of truths about themselves, they were more likely to feel better about being same sex attracted.

## **Sexual behaviour**

SSA young people were more likely to be sexually active earlier than their heterosexual peers and they were more likely to be having sex in line with their feelings of attraction than in the 1998 study. However, young women who are same sex attracted often have sex with young men. There was a relatively high rate of condom use with 65% reported usage at the last sexual encounter, though young women's rate of condom use was lower. Rates of diagnosed STIs were five times higher than those for heterosexual young people from our secondary schools survey with 10% having been diagnosed with a sexually transmissible infection (STI). In addition 11% of the young women had been pregnant, 10% of the 15-18 year olds. This picture points to the further complications of making assumptions about the sexual behaviours of SSAY. Despite the many social pressures to remain closeted, more than a third (38%) of these young people were in a relationship, more young women (48%) than young men (32%) but not all relationships were same sex ones. Those young people who had suffered homophobic abuse were more likely to be in a relationship.

## **Homophobia and discrimination**

Many of these young people (38%) had experienced unfair treatment on the basis of their sexuality despite the fact that such treatment is illegal throughout Australia. Work and school were common sites of this discrimination. In addition, 44% reported verbal abuse and 16% reported physical assault because of their sexuality, figures that are largely unchanged from 1998. Verbal abuse extended beyond name-calling and insults to include threats and rumour mongering. Physical abuse ranged from having clothes and possessions damaged to rape and hospitalisation for injuries. The most common site for this abuse, as in 1998, was school and this remains the most dangerous place for these young people to be with 74% of all the abuse happening there.

## **Impact of abuse and discrimination**

Perhaps the most striking finding of this research is the extent to which homophobic abuse had a profound impact on young people's health and well-being. Young people who had been abused fared worse on almost every indicator of health and well-being than those who had not. Young people who had been abused felt less safe at school, at home, on social occasions and at sporting events. Those who had been abused were more likely to self-harm, to report an STI and to use a range of legal and illegal drugs. Two main methods of self-harm were reported by 35% of the group – self-mutilation and attempted suicide. On the positive side those who had been abused were more likely to have sought support from an individual or an organization. Despite the difficult and violent situation, young people reported generally feeling safer in schools than in 1998, indicating that more supports for those abused are now available in the school setting. Research participants responded in many different ways to experiencing homophobia and, despite the fact that there were many negative health outcomes as a result of this treatment, many also reported being stronger and more determined than they were before.

## **Drug and alcohol use**

In 2004 the use of all drugs including alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, party drugs and heroin was down on reported use in 1998. This may be the result of an improved climate in which young people experience SSA. Percentages of young people injecting drugs had dropped from 11% in 1998 to 4% in 2004. Nevertheless drug use still remains substantially higher than for heterosexual young people, for example, double the number of SSAY have injected drugs. Alcohol use is similar to heterosexual young people. There is a marked gender difference in drug use. In 1998 and 2004 young women were more likely to have used marijuana and tobacco and to have injected drugs than were the young men. Drug use clearly serves a number of important

functions in the lives of these young people and its use is more likely to be a coping mechanism of some kind than a “lifestyle choice”. There was a significant relationship between the experience of homophobic abuse and drug use and this relationship is reiterated in the stories of the young people.

## **Disclosure and support**

More young people had disclosed their sexuality to someone in 2004 than in 1998 (95% vs 82%) and support for those who disclosed had increased. This was a positive finding as young people who had been able to get support reported feeling better about their sexuality. In terms of the school environment, more young people in 2004 were disclosing to teachers and school welfare counselors and more support was given, though the numbers were still small. Friends remained the most popular confidantes for young people to disclose their sexuality to, followed by mothers. In 2004, there is reason to believe that young people who are isolated and unsafe in their day-to-day world can connect to a world that is more supportive and accepting through the internet.

## **Information sources**

The internet remained the most important source of information about homophobia and discrimination, gay and lesbian relationships and gay and lesbian safe sex. Gay connected sources also filled the information gap for many young people. There is, however, strong evidence that schools are beginning to provide relevant sex education information for same sex attracted young people with the 14-17 year old group being significantly more likely to learn about homophobia and discrimination, gay and lesbian relationships and safe sex than the 18-21 year old group. Though this was still the minority of schools, there is an indication of change towards inclusive sex education. Overall 80% of respondents found sex education at school to be useless or fairly useless and only 20% found it at all useful.

## **Multiple layers of identity**

Finally the report examines some aspects of the multi-layered identities that these young people were working with. Young people from CALD backgrounds showed no differences from their anglo peers in their feelings about being SSA, in the abuse directed at them, in whom they had spoken to about their sexuality and whether they had received support. There were also no differences between the two groups on feelings of safety in most environments. However they were less likely to have disclosed to parents and, perhaps because of this, were also less likely to feel safe at home (77% vs 86%). Given that CALD young people did not score worse on any of the health outcomes, this strategy of non-disclosure may well be a good one for these young people.

Christianity remains a last bastion of resistance to what is regarded in legal and health arenas as a normal part of human sexuality. Young people who were Christians, who attended Christian schools and/or belonged to Christian families were very well aware of this problem and wrote about their anguish. In most cases they were forced to choose between their sexuality and their religion. In many cases the rejection of their sexuality and the embracing of their religion resulted in young people hating and harming themselves. Leaving their faith for many was a painful but necessary road to recovery – a sad loss for the church and a survival choice for the young person.

Coming from a rural area was not found to make a large difference to the health deficits that SSAY experienced, to their drug and alcohol use or to their sexual behaviour. However, young people from rural areas felt less safe at social occasions than their urban peers. They had, understandably, more difficulty accessing information though gay media and in the qualitative data expressed many concerns about their isolation and fear of exposure in rural areas.

## **The way forward**

There are some clear calls to action that emerge from these data and the most important of these arises from the capacity to demonstrate for the first time that those young people who have been abused and discriminated against are doing worse than their peers who, often by remaining silent, have avoided violence and abuse. It is unacceptable that preventable abuse is predisposing the young people who experience it to the health risks associated with high rates of drug and alcohol use and to increased self-mutilation, overdosing and other forms of self-harm, including suicide attempts. This is a situation for which the whole community must take some responsibility and schools in particular where most of the abuse occurs. Actively addressing homophobia wherever it occurs, recognising it, naming it and reacting with zero tolerance is the most salient challenge arising out of this report.



## 1. INTRODUCTION

### AMBER, 18 years

*Inside my skin;  
I saw that inside me was outside of them;  
And I feared that I would never be able to speak;  
What was on the tip of my tongue waiting to fall out;  
It's inside me that knows where I am and who I am;  
Yet outside I can't make sense. Because sense betrays me;  
I look at them opposites of each other, complimenting one another's contours;  
And I see us like a mirror one and the same;  
Curves and soft skin;  
Touching curves and soft skin;  
You're waiting to come in;  
But I can't let you in, Inside me.*

We, at the Australian Research Centre in Sex Health and Society (ARCSHS), are very pleased to present *Writing Themselves In Again - six years on: the second national report on the sexuality, health and well-being of same sex attracted young Australians*.

The first study was completed in 1998. It was a response to Australian research with young people in rural towns (Hillier et al, 1996) and with 3500 secondary students from rural and urban areas around Australia (Lindsay et al, 1997) that established that somewhere between 8% and 11% of young people experience sexual attraction towards people of their own sex. Focus groups with students and interviews with teachers in the rural research revealed high levels of homophobia in these towns, raising questions about the well-being of this stigmatised group. Same sex attracted young people (SSAY) were also over represented in a sample of 850 homeless young people (14%), with sexuality often being the reason that young people left home (Hillier et al, 1997; Rossiter et al, 2003).

Furthermore, the 1997 national high school survey (Lindsay et al, 1997) revealed negative health outcomes for same sex attracted young people including higher levels of drug use and higher reported rates of STIs than the heterosexual students. Though no Australian data concerning suicide and depression in this group were available at the time, research in the US suggested the rates to be many times higher than among their heterosexual peers (Gibson, 1989). At the same time, various workers with young people were grappling with how to provide for this group of disenfranchised youth who remained largely anonymous because of fears for their own safety.

In 1998, *Writing Themselves In: A National Report on the Sexuality, Health and Well-being of Same Sex Attracted Young People* (Hillier et al, 1998) described the experiences of same sex attracted young people at home, at school and in the community. Seven hundred and fifty same sex attracted young people, aged 14-21 years, from urban and rural areas in every state and territory of Australia, took part in the

research. One in five had told no one about their same sex attractions. One third reported having been discriminated against and over 50% verbally and/or physically abused because of their sexuality. Most of the abuse occurred at school (69%) at the hands of other students (59%). Eleven percent had injected drugs and this was significantly related to having experienced abuse. Few of these young people received information about gay (10%) or lesbian (5%) safe sex from school or their families and many felt unsafe at school. One in 20 stories described suicide attempts. These results revealed a breach in the duty of care that schools (and the community generally) owe to young people who are same sex attracted.

As well, the stories showed that many young people were struggling to find positive places for themselves in the world. Some were finding safe spaces where there were other young people like themselves, where they could be same sex attracted without hiding. They learned to critique discourse that described them as 'sick, twisted and perverted'. They learned that homophobia was a problem with society and not themselves. And they learned to rebuild social networks in which there was trust and support.

One challenge with writing the original *Writing Themselves In* and this current report as well, is to report the results honestly while not positioning the young people as victims. It has been argued that by reporting negative health outcomes for marginalised groups we pathologise them. There is the added problem that health funding bodies want to address health problems. We believe that stories of resistance and triumph are inspirational and should be part of any research dissemination, however, young people also need to be able to 'write in' their grief and loss. Finding the mid line between pathologising young people and denying their realities is always a challenge of research with this group.

The marketing of this research was consciously directed towards creating and supporting processes of social change. A focus on safety was thought to be a socially responsible way to disseminate the research. Safety for all young people was a basic human right, particularly in school, to which everyone could respond, irrespective of their personal moral stance. The safety paradigm endowed the cause with respectability; anyone could get behind such a banner without fear of suspicion and criticism. In short it removed seemingly insurmountable blockages to action and cleared the way for social change.

Since 1998 change has occurred on a number of fronts, including the availability of funding for social support groups for same sex attracted young people and for community development projects which aim to create safe aware communities for these young people. *Talking Sexual Health*, a new sexual health curriculum was commissioned by the Federal Government in 2001 and training to teach the curriculum has taken place in every state of Australia. Many community development and other projects in each state have also drawn on this work.

Accompanying these changes was the emergence of a number of networks of workers with same sex attracted young people and these facilitate the sharing of information and ideas. A large body of resources now exists to facilitate and legitimise the work of the increasing numbers of workers in the field who have responsibility for the well-being of these young people. These resources include teaching manuals, information booklets, school audits, information cards, parent booklets and posters, stickers and T-shirts for heterosexual young people who want to support their same sex attracted peers. The research has moved on from describing the effects of homophobia and discrimination, to a focus on young people's active resistance to hostile environments and the creative ways that they subvert and discover spaces that are safe and nurturing for them (Hillier & Harrison, 2004; Hillier, Kurdas & Horsley, 2001). Many groups are involved in activism for change. Research is underway to evaluate the effectiveness of the community development projects to ensure that there is a solid base of research evidence for the change models that are used. Research on the well-being of SSAY is also taking place at other universities throughout Australia.

In 2000 the Victorian government established a Ministerial Advisory Committee on gay and lesbian health. It drew on the health aspects of the SSAY research to require that all funding for youth projects through the government meet pre-determined requirements (Leonard, 2002) including:

- that projects are inclusive of the needs of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) young people or those young people experiencing confusion around these issues;
- that measures are in place to ensure that issues for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender young people can be addressed in a confidential, informed and sensitive manner as they arise;
- that projects do not pathologise issues of same sex attraction or gender identity but locate the problem in the society around the young people who experience difficulties with these issues;
- that projects address the issue of appropriate support and/or training in the area for all those involved, whether they be GLBT young people themselves, families, community organisations or health care providers.

We have also noted changes in social contexts, including legislation during the six years since the publication of *Writing Themselves In*. For example, relationships bills are now enacted in most states, with an aim to reduce discrimination against same sex partnerships. The popular media has increasingly provided positive role models for gay and lesbian characters which assist in normalising same sex sexuality. *Queer as Folk* and *The L Word* are examples of programs that portray gay, lesbian and bisexual characters as part of the normal range of healthy sexual life.

In the last two years there has been a request for more current research with same sex attracted young people. The 1998 report is now out of date and may not be relevant to the experiences of SSAY today. Moreover, there is a need to know whether the significant community development work that has been carried out, and the increased visibility and the social supports that have been provided, have made a difference in the lives of same sex attracted young people.

Accordingly, the aim of *Writing Themselves In Again – 6 years on*, was to find out whether the many changes in the community have improved the sexual health and well-being of SSAY. In particular the project aimed to:

1. Document the levels of homophobia and discrimination facing SSAY today;
2. Document the impact of homophobia on young people themselves;
3. Document the support available to young people and their use of it;
4. Document young people's strategies of resistance including reframing discourse, gathering information, activism and peer support;
5. Given that homophobia causes ill-health and many interventions have taken place in Australia in the last six years, look for changes in young people's experiences and health outcomes since 1998.

We have arranged this report in a similar fashion to the 1998 report and in a similar order to the sections in the survey. We have restricted research comparisons to mainly Australian research because the measures are comparable, however, the results do confirm UK and US research where it is available. The primary research comparisons are the two national high school studies (Lindsay et al, 1997 and Smith et al, 2003) and the previous 1998 report about same sex attracted young people (Hillier et al, 1998).

The first three chapters comprise the introduction, the methodology and a profile of the young people. Chapter 4 is about young people's sexual feelings and identity and Chapter 5, their sexual behaviours. Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 describe discrimination and homophobia and their impact on young people's health, including in Chapter 8, drug use. Chapter 9 is about who young people talk to and who gives them support. In Chapter 10, we look at young people's access to sexual health information. In Chapter 11 we discuss some identity



overlays that impact on young people such as CALD background, religion, gender and rurality. The final chapter, The Way Forward, concludes the report and discussed the implications of the research findings for policy and practice.

### **RALPH, 18 years**

*I never had any doubt that I was "gay". It wasn't something I figured out in my early teens, like most people seem to. Ever since I was told the concept of sexuality I was also told that being gay was wrong and disgusting and unnatural. Because I knew then that I was one of those people, I internalised all of those comments. All I've ever been taught is to hate myself for this thing that I have no control over. I have no idea why I never ever applied this reasoning to any other member of the gay community. It's just for myself. And because it's something that I was taught almost from birth, I'll never shake it. And because of these feelings, I started to injure myself on purpose. I have been a self-injurer for three years now. I have trouble forming relationships, and have never actually had an official relationship. I have formed strong bonds with gay men, mostly over the internet, and have twice fallen in love (I don't use that term loosely, I am not too young to know what love is). The first man I truly loved was 26 (I was 16 at the time). I met him online, and after about a year we met in real life. I thought I knew him well, but he used me, then one of my friends for sex and acted innocent afterwards. He was my first and will always have his mark on me. I have never spoken to that "friend" again, and I got very unstable mentally for months afterwards. I had unprotected sex as a warped kind of punishment. Don't ask me, I don't really understand it myself, but I used sex as a way to punish myself, and cried during the event. It took me a year and a half before I could even start to accept exactly what he and my friend had done (neither showed any remorse for their actions) and I still stop breathing when I think of it, or see anything to do with the 26yo. I was dealing with all of this at the same time I was completing year 12. My grades fell sharply, and for the first time I failed a subject. I am retaking two subjects this year to try and compensate, but it's not going terribly well. I never thought I'd live to finish my VCE, and I really don't know how I manage not to suicide. The only thing that really stops me is the pain I'd cause to the people around me, and the trauma I'd inflict on whoever would find my body. I could never make anyone else feel even half of what I go through every day. Though it has come very close several times, and it's getting harder and harder to hold to those values with every passing failure. I'm running out of hope for a future. I've been alone my whole life. Who could want someone as scarred and insane as me? I keep telling myself I've come this far, I've survived this much - so how could I let everything I've struggled through mean nothing? I've just got to hold onto that.*





## 2. METHODOLOGY

### **DONNA, 18 years**

*Sorry about the punctuation...i hope this has helped your research. if you ever need me for anymore lesbian or gay surveys email me please i would be glad to help. Hope your research goes ok. I had fun doing the quiz. Luv Donna. i fwd'd this survey to lots of my friends ;)*

A reference group was formed to guide the researchers through the development of methodology for the new study. Because many aspects of the original methodology were relevant to the new project and many of the problems of the research had already been solved, the new reference group was smaller than in 1998, comprising researchers and educators from the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society (ARCSHS).

The role of the reference group included feedback on, and suggestions for, new questions in the survey, the design and layout of advertising and other print material, budget expenditure and improvement on recruitment strategies. As well, the reference group was involved in interpreting the initial results and in providing suggestions for translating the new research into policy and practice.

### **Questionnaire design and development**

The data were collected through a questionnaire containing both forced-choice (quantitative) and open-ended qualitative questions.

- **Format (see Appendix A)**

The format and design of the 1998 questionnaire was used as a basis for the design of the new hard copy survey, which was two A4 sheets divided into twelve panels that folded into a DL sized envelope. The front outer panel had the La Trobe University reply paid address and stamp printed on it, with 'youth survey' written in the corner – other details were omitted to maximise confidentiality for the young person.

As in 1998, young people were given the options of either completing the survey anonymously online via the [www.latrobe.edu.au/ssay](http://www.latrobe.edu.au/ssay) website, or obtaining a hard copy by filling out a coupon with their name and address, or by leaving their contact details on a toll free answering service for the survey to be sent to them. The content for the web-based version was the same as the hard copy version, with the format modified in order for participants to simply scroll down and submit at the end. To ensure anonymity was maintained, the mail-back process was configured to conceal young people's email addresses.

- **Terminology regarding sexuality**

As in 1998, we adopted the term 'same sex attracted' for a number of reasons. First, young people tend to experience sexual attractions long before they assign themselves with a sexual identity and so by using attraction as our criterion we were maximising our potential research population. Second, unlike the terms 'gay' and 'lesbian', 'same sex attracted' is less confronting and more user-friendly for organisations and young people for reasons given in the introduction. Third, by using the term 'same sex attraction' we are not foreclosing on young people's sexual futures. Young people who are same sex attracted today may or may not become the gay or lesbian adults of the future.

- **Content**

Using the 1998 survey as a basis, changes were made to include questions on self-harm, pregnancy, hepatitis C, the impact of homophobia and discrimination, and how young people were dealing with critical moments in their lives. We also wanted to know whether young people were accessing the extra supports and services that have been made available since the 1998 survey. It was important to allow young people the opportunity to describe the many ways in which they were acting on their environments, rather than being the victims of them.

Again, the questionnaire was divided into nine subject categories which contained closed and open-ended items. Headings were: About you, About your sexual feelings, How do people treat you?, About your sexual behaviours, About your drug use, About your family and friends, General well-being and Sex education information (see Appendix A). Young people were also asked to tell the story of their experiences in the following way:

*We are interested in reading more about your experiences of growing up knowing that you are sexually attracted to people of your own sex. We want to know about your own story including when you first knew about your sexual feelings, your experiences with friends and family, your good times and your bad, and your hopes for the future.*

- **Piloting**

The questionnaire was piloted with young people and youth workers in urban and rural areas and changes made.

## **Ethics**

There are a number of ethical issues associated with this research and we have written about them elsewhere (Hillier & Mitchell, 2004). In summary they include problems of unintentional disclosure, inner turmoil that could be created for young people by being involved in the research, parental approval and the risk of pathologising the young people.

The project conformed to the ethical requirements of the National Health and Medical Research Council Guidelines and Principles (NHMRC) (1999) which requires that research involving young people must only be conducted where:

- a) the question posed is important to their well-being;
- b) the participation of young people is indispensable because the information is not available otherwise;
- c) the study method is appropriate;
- d) the circumstances of the research provide for physical, emotional and psychological safety of the young person.

In order to make the process as safe and comfortable as possible for young people and reduce the risk of unintentional disclosure, participation needed to be as much as possible within young people's control. As

before, we advertised the research in magazines and radio to all young people around Australia in the hope that same sex attracted young people would come to us in their own time and place. Young people were given a number of different contact options (the internet, the post and the telephone) and could choose the one that was the most convenient and/or safest for them.

The guiding principle used for the methodology was to ‘do no harm’, where young people’s information remained (and remains) confidential. Names and any other personal details given were changed in the writing process to protect anonymity and contact details for accessible youth support services were made available to all participants.

In terms of consent the NHMRC guidelines state that consent must be gained from:

- a) the young person whenever he or she has sufficient competence to make the decision; and either
- b) the parents/guardian in all but exceptional circumstances; or
- c) any organisation or person required by law.

The ethical requirement of parental approval in all but exceptional circumstances was the next challenge. Given that same sex attracted young people tell no-one at all about their sexuality at first when they are sorting through the issues (this may take several years) and given that they almost never disclose to their parents first (Hillier, 2002), the parental consent requirement meant either that there would be no one in the research or that young people would be forced to tell their parents before they were ready. Neither of these outcomes was acceptable to the researchers and so we argued against parental consent. As before, the La Trobe Human Ethics Committee accepted that our arguments were reasonable and we were able to recruit young people 14 years and over without parental consent. Moreover, with the vulnerability of the group in mind and the risks of disclosure through sending a signed consent, we argued successfully for implied consent in our ethics application believing that by filling out the questionnaire, young people were clearly agreeing to participate.

## Sampling

The target group was the same as for the original study – same sex attracted young men and women between the ages of 14 and 21. Part of our guiding principle to ‘do no harm’ guided the decision to let young people self elect for participation in the research. As with the original survey, the sample generated is not random, and no claim is made that results can be generalised to the broader population of young people.

Efforts were made to include young people in all states and territories of Australia, sampled in proportion to the general population, with attention paid to attracting equal numbers of young men and women from rural and urban settings.

## Recruitment and promotion

Active recruitment commenced in December 2003, and continued until the end of June 2004. The survey was removed from the website in October. In order to give a broad range of young people as many choices as possible in accessing and completing the survey, we used a number of media formats.

## Producing the advertising images

In August 2003, *YGLAM Video and Theatre Project* in Melbourne were approached to produce an image suitable for advertising the research. They produced several alternatives, and the Reference group chose an image of young people at a railway station and the caption ‘Who stops you in your tracks?’. This image was used as the basis for all artwork in the study including the questionnaire, magazine and internet advertising.

## Youth Press

Advertisements were inserted in *Dolly* magazine and the Victorian schools newspaper *Spress* with the question 'Who stops u in yr tracks?':

**who stops u in yr tracks?**

If you're aged between 14-21 and are sexually attracted to people of the same sex, or both sexes, we want to hear from you.

How? Send away for our survey (or find it on the web at [www.latrobe.edu.au/ssay](http://www.latrobe.edu.au/ssay) or ring toll free 1800 678 811).

The survey has been developed by researchers at La Trobe University. It takes about 15 minutes to complete and asks about your feelings and experiences.

It's completely confidential - and a chance to help us improve education and services for other young people just like you.

If you can't get hold of a survey but would like to tell your story, please write us a letter.

**For a copy of the La Trobe University survey (in a plain envelope) send this coupon to:**  
**Youth Survey, Level 1, 215 Franklin St, Melbourne, 3000.**

Name:.....  
 Address:.....  
 State:.....Postcode:.....

*Spress* took the opportunity to include a double page feature on gay and lesbian issues for young people in the same edition as the banner advertisement.

## Gay Press

Banner advertisements were placed in gay press around the country – *MCV*, circulated in Victoria and Tasmania, *Blaze* in South Australia and the *Sydney Star Observer*. Other forms of advertising included feature articles written on the project by *Lesbians On The Loose* in Sydney and *Queer Territory* in Darwin. Each ad included a coupon as outlined above for the *Dolly* ad.

**Who stops u in yr tracks?**

• If you're aged between 14-21 and are sexually attracted to people of the same sex, or both sexes, we want to hear from you.

• How? Send away for our survey, or find it on the web at [www.latrobe.edu.au/ssay](http://www.latrobe.edu.au/ssay) or ring toll free on 1800 678 811.

• The survey has been developed by researchers at La Trobe University. It takes about 15 minutes to complete and asks about your feelings and experiences.

• It's completely confidential - and a chance to help us improve education and services for other young people just like you.

**For a copy of the La Trobe University survey (in a plain envelope) - send this form to:**  
**YOUTH SURVEY**  
 Level 1, 215 Franklin St, Melbourne 3000

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_

## Internet

### • Advertising

A five week ad placed on SSAY website Mogenic.com received a high number of hits, albeit with a male focus. A banner advertisement was placed on all pages of the website, including the chat rooms, and featured a simple animation that read '...so tell us... / who stops u in yr tracks?' and then invited the visitor to fill in the survey by clicking on the banner.

### • Online newsletters / chat forums / postings

The researchers created a one page document to email contacts, chat forums and include on postings. The areas targeted included youth / SSAY services, GLBTI contacts, rural community health networks and youth research lists. The document was designed as a call for participation, succinctly encapsulating the project while including a request for recipients to send it on to their own email lists, to include the blurb in their newsletters and to generally help spread the word. The page included a link to the survey and the response was impressive, with forward emails finding their way back to the researchers as the SSAY email lists were saturated. The surveys started arriving in the SSAY inbox within a day.

Online postings were included on gay activist Rodney Croome's weblog, YouthGAS, GAY Darwin, Yarn, Pink Sofa, Youth Coalition of the ACT, Youth Field Xpress, Queer Youth Web Community (QYWC), AIDS Action Council of the ACT, Headroom.net.au and SHFPACT, while others such as youth service Open Doors in Queensland, placed links and information on their website. This list is not exhaustive and we thank everyone for their enthusiasm and their goodwill with this project.

## Radio

Interviews were given on GLBT radio slots on community radio in every state, as well as on Triple J, the national youth network. While the response to the radio was low in comparison with other methods outlined above, the individual enthusiasm of a number of radio interviewers was inspiring, e.g. John Frame at 4ZZZ in Brisbane.

## Networks

Contact with networks built on ARCSHS' existing relationships with services around the country, as well as creating new ones in areas that were under serviced in our emerging data, such as rural areas. Emails, as outlined above, were sent to contacts, and the researchers followed up with phone calls, postcard send outs and updates. Short articles were included in sector newsletters, such as Western Youth, Family Planning Victoria's Same Sex Attracted Friendly Environments in Schools (SSAFE) website, and other online postings. The enthusiasm of a number of contacts greatly helped the project along, with a number of workers encouraging young people at their SSAY groups to fill in surveys in hard copy or online.

## Data analysis

Data were received via email and then transposed into quantitative (SPSS v10) and qualitative (Excel) computer programs. Descriptive and comparative statistical analyses were undertaken, including multiple regressions, t-tests and chi square analyses. All significant differences are reported at .05, however, to ensure the accessibility of the report specific statistical results are not presented here. Qualitative data were read and analysed in the light of the quantitative results as well as in their own right with themes produced, interrogated and understandings presented. Young people's stories have been presented throughout the report.

Comparisons have been made with two studies: the original 1998 *Writing Themselves In* (Hillier et al, 1998) and the 2002 national high school study (Smith et al, 2003). Within the study we focussed on differences according to gender, age, cultural and linguistic background and location. We also focussed on differences in health outcomes according to abuse status.

**4ZZZ link from Queer Radio show with presenter John Frame, 10<sup>th</sup> March 2004:**

Features this week: Julian Clary / Dr Lynne Hillier / NASH Theatre



Julian Clary chats with us, from Sydney earlier in the evening, about his fifth tour of Australia. Julian is celebrating 20 years in show business. His "Natural Born Mincer" show will feature a "History of Homosexuality from Caveman to Bob Downe" and there'll also be tasteful stylings of classic songs and an interactive "men only" segment called "Put It To Julian".

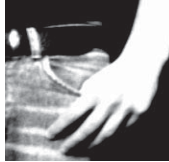


Dr Lynne Hillier of La Trobe University, Melbourne regarding: the Second National Survey Of Same Sex Attracted Young People And Sexual Health.

Dr Lynne Hillier is the Senior Research Fellow on the new project, and was behind the first national survey into the sexual health and well-being of Same Sex Attracted Youth – "Writing Themselves In". Lynne's research background includes sexuality, adolescence, sexual health and philosophy of psychology.



NASH Theatre: Theatre on the move in Brisbane, bring you Euripedes' "Medea" directed by Malcom Steele: A re-working of the classic Greek play by Euripides, Medea, complete with haunting soundtrack, blurs the lines of realism, stylised performance and traditional Greek theatre. Music by several talented openly gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender artists.



### 3. ABOUT THE YOUNG PEOPLE

#### **JEREMY, 18 years**

*1st knowing? Can't remember.*

*Always remember the negatives of everything!*

*Bad experiences? .....few...but ya get that and it could have been worse.*

*Partners?....looking...but not desperate!*

*Friend support?....Always!!...love em!!*

*Crushes...i have many...(but u dont wanna know that hey?)*

#### **Response rates and invalid responses**

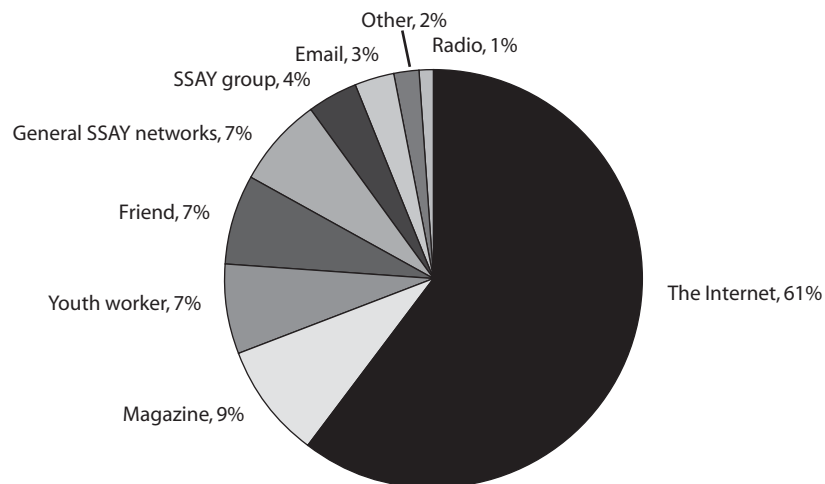
In 2004, as in 1998, it was impossible to calculate a response rate for this survey. We used a scattergun advertising approach in an attempt to reach as many young people as possible and because no one was directly approached to be involved in the research, we have no idea how many same sex attracted young people were exposed to the advertising.

We received 1749 surveys that fitted the criteria for inclusion, over double the number in the 1998 study and a reflection of the recently emerging networks of workers with, and the visibility of, same sex attracted youth. Criteria for inclusion were that young people were same sex attracted, not identifying as heterosexual, or engaging in same sex behaviours, between 14-21 years of age and Australian residents. Surveys were invalid and excluded if they were incomplete, homophobic or replicated. One hundred and thirty questionnaires (10%) were invalid, a far lower number than the 45% from the 1998 study.

#### **Where young people first heard about the study**

In order to ascertain the success of the various advertising locations we asked young people 'Where did you first hear about this survey?' Figure 1 overleaf shows that of all of the recruiting strategies used in this study, the internet was the most successful (61% up from 55% in the 1998 study) and most surveys (95%) were completed online. The internet responses were also, on the whole, more detailed in the qualitative data than those that were completed on the hard copy. Magazines were far less successful in attracting participants than in 1998 (9% in 2004, down from 21% in the 1998 survey). A new group of SSAY related contacts, which barely existed in 1998, alerted 21% of young people to the project. This included youth workers (7%), general SSAY networks (7%), SSAY groups (4%) and emails (3%) and reflects the proliferation of SSAY groups and networks in Australia over the last 6 years. A number of young people mentioned their friends as sources (7% compared with 5% in 1998). Sources were gendered with young men more likely to hear about the project via the internet and young women via magazines.



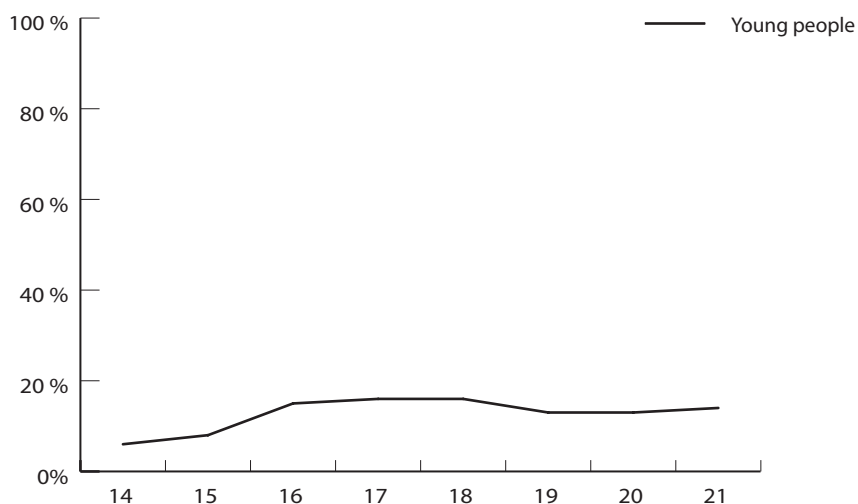
**Figure 1. How did you first hear about the survey (n = 1745).**

## Gender

The gender balance was skewed towards young men, who made up 63% (n = 1106) of the group, largely due to recruitment via the internet. Seventy percent (n = 769) of young men found out about the survey via the web compared to 45% (n = 291) of young women. Magazines went a small way to balance this, with 18% (n = 115) of young women citing this as the way they found out about the survey, compared with three percent (n = 33) of young men. There were also seven (0.4%) transgender male to female and two (0.1%) transgender female to male young people participating in the research.

## Age

The age of young people ranged from 14 to 21 (Fig. 2). The average age was 18, with young women being on average six months younger. This parallels exactly the 1998 study.

**Figure 2. Age of young people (n = 1748).**



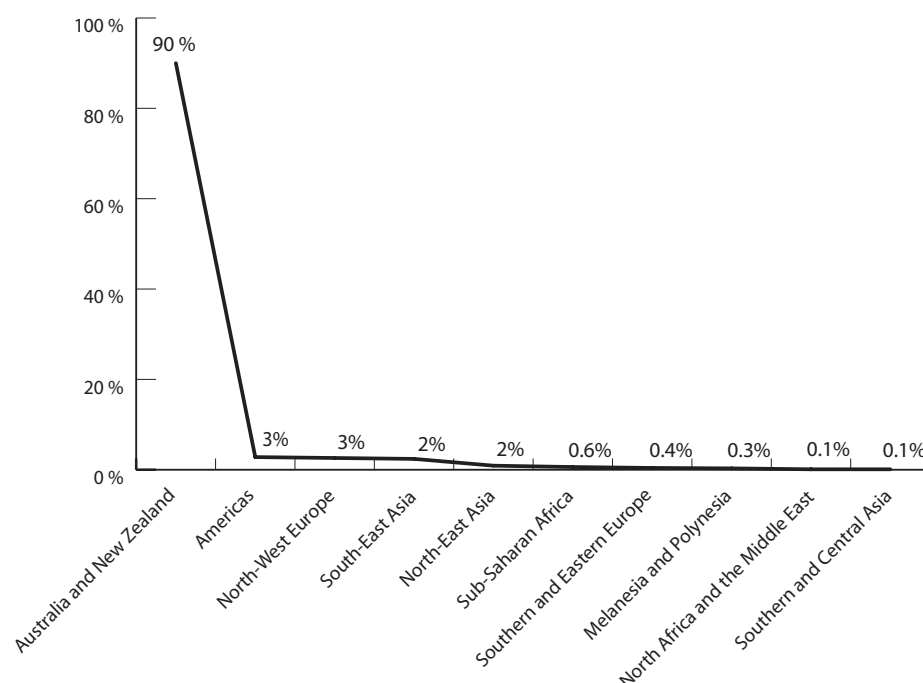
## Country of birth

Nearly ninety percent (88%) of the young people in the survey were born in Australia, two percent New Zealand.

Of the 12% born elsewhere, three percent were born in the Americas, three percent North-West Europe, two percent South-East Asia, with the remaining born in South and Eastern Europe, North Africa and the Middle East, North East Asia, Southern and Central Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa (Fig. 3).

In all, 43 countries were represented, 36 of which we classified as Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD), mainly on the basis of language difference of the birth country of the young person or either of his or her parents. On this basis 21% (n = 375) of the young people were classified as having a CALD background. As well, 2% (n = 34) of the young people were Aboriginal and/or Torres Straight Islanders (ATSI), the same percentage for the 1998 survey and a little under the national census figure of 3% (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001).

**Figure 3. Young people's country of birth (n = 1744).**



## Remoteness of young people's residence

We applied the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA), developed by the National Key Centre for Social Applications of GIS (GISCA), using MapInfo/CDATA software, to the postcodes provided by the young people in the surveys. Where a postcode had more than one remoteness index code, a decision was made to code it according to the remoteness indicator that featured most within that particular postcode.

Eighty percent of young people came from major Australian cities (n = 1327), 15% (256) from inner regional Australia and the remaining 5 percent came from outer regional, remote and very remote Australia.

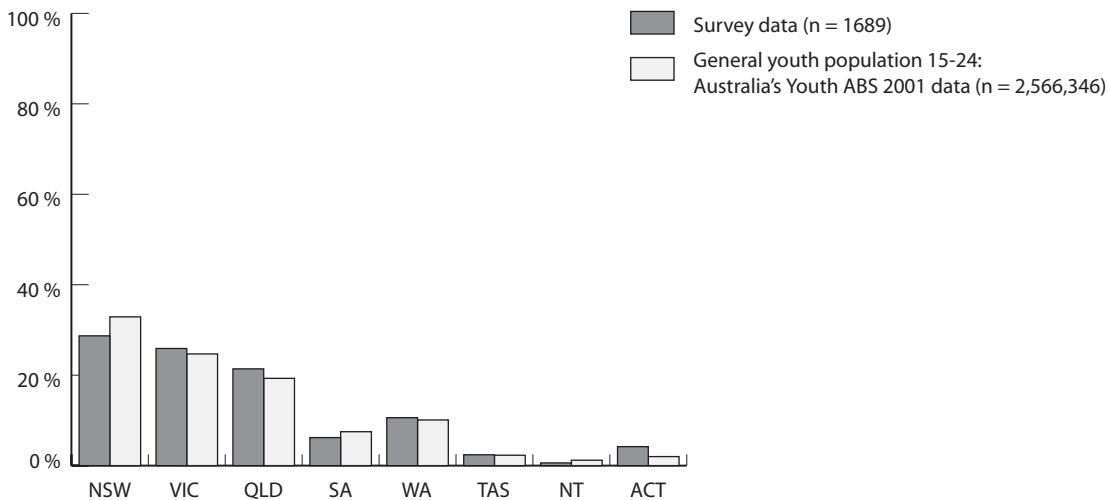
*At the age of 16 I began my studies to become a youth worker and at the age of 20 and 2 months I received a Diploma of Community Services (Youth Work) and started up a youth service in [names remote town] and studied sexuality counselling and offer that service in the town to which at present I have 42 clients that speak about this issue. (Dorian, 20 years)*

## State or territory of residence

Every effort was made to recruit young people from each state and territory in proportion with numbers of young people in the general population of Australia and we were quite successful in this aim (Fig. 4).

In accordance with the distribution of the youth population, most young people came from New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland, with the lowest numbers coming from the Northern Territory and Tasmania.

**Figure 4. State or territory of residence - youth population distribution comparison with the survey sample.**

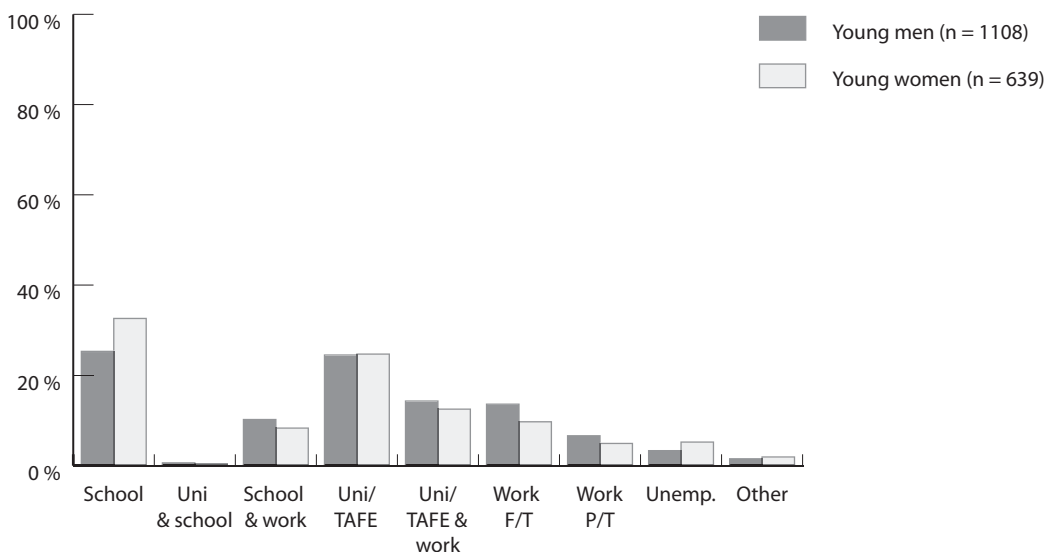


## Accommodation

As in the 1998 survey, most of the young people (68% vs 65% in 1998) were living in the family home. The remainder were living in a shared flat or house (15% compared with 17% in 1998), on their own (5%), at their boy/girlfriend's house (4%), with relatives (3%) or in a boarding house (3%). A small number (1%) were living on campus, in a refuge and on the street/in a squat. This may mean that young people who live away from the family home are under represented in this study.

## Education and work status

**Figure 5. What are you doing at the moment.**



We asked young people what they were doing now and gave them the opportunity to tick as many boxes as applied from: school, Uni/TAFE, working full or part time and unemployed. Over one third (38%) of young people attended school (this includes young people who combined work and school and uni and school in special programs) and another third (34%) were enrolled at university or TAFE. Significant numbers of young people worked full time (12%) or part time (29%), although many of these (23% of the full sample) studied as well. Four percent of young people were unemployed. There were small gender differences in what young people were doing, with more young women at school (Fig. 5). However, these can be accounted for by the slightly younger average age of the young women. A comparison with the 1998 study shows similar results, with slightly more young people (3%) at school or Uni/TAFE in 2004.

### **EVA, 20 years**

*i was born in [name of country town] and raised here. my family is very catholic and right-wing political. my family is big in the church and the [political] Party, members of [names conservative family associations], and my father works for [conservative organisation]. growing up i was sure what being gay meant but i was told it was a bad thing. in high school i felt different and confused and didnt know what to feel. i saw the school counsellor regularly which helped but by the end of high-school still didnt know what to do. entering university opened my eyes to the world. because i had been sheltered growing up, university was a big difference to me. during first year (2001) was confiding in a friend and was feeling better about it, but still was ready for anything. that friend then left town and i felt alone again and went back into my shell. this continued for a while. in early may 2002 i was in a shopping centre and i met a woman passing through town. i was not out and had no idea what i was thinking but somehow ended up sleeping with this woman a few times. there was no emotion or anything. she left a couple of weeks later. it was my first sexual experience with anyone. i didnt really like it and i kind of regret it and the situation. not sure if it helped or not. over these years i have always been a big fan of Buffy the Vampire Slayer. and in season 5 and 6, the lesbian relationship in the show was focused on. i watched these episodes and they made me realise that they were accepted and that you are who you are. in early july 2002 after a specific episode, it all clicked in my head and i realised i wasnt a bad person. once i worked it out in my head, i was able to tell others. i initially told all my friends from high school. some said they were expecting it, others were surprised but all were supportive. i started being out to everyone then and wanted to tell my parents before they found out from someone else. i remember telling them and they being stunned. it was probably the worst thing they could have heard. emotions were simmering under the surface and it got really tense. not long after it got really bad and i left home. my dad didnt really want me around as he was handling it the worst. once i told my parents i didnt mind if anyone else knew. once the people i wanted to tell personally were out of the way, i became out to everyone. since then, i have never lied about my sexuality and am as out as i can be. in 2003 i was a youth speaker at the [names country town] SSAY conference held here. and i am also trying to be involved in queer affairs on [university] campus. relationship wise, hasnt always been too good. i've only ever been with one woman but had 3 relationships. the last one i thought was special and was going somewhere. but i was wrong and got hurt. before that ended though, was some of the best times i ever had. it was great. i know one day i will be in a relationship and be exceedingly happy and loved. i dont plan on rushing in on anything either. i'm quite happy with who i am.*

### **ERICK, 18 years**

*I always knew I was gay. Ever since I was attracted to the boy next door when I was 5. But when I saw Brendan Fraser in 'George of the Jungle' I really knew I was gay. I came out in high school when I was 16. Everyone was surprised, and even happy for me. I only ever experienced homophobia once, and I retaliated violently which was wrong, but it did stop the harrassment. I didn't have any gay friends till I was 17, and out of high school. We moved from [names country town] to [names city] and suddenly there were lots of gay people around. I started university, joined a youth group and found a boyfriend. My parents are very supportive of me, and overall I am extremely satisfied with life. I read about this website in the student paper for [university].*

**NADIA, 15 years**

*first let me say i love you ppl for doing this survey, i think this research will make a big difference. i had no idea there were things this phenomenal here in melbourne. thanks heaps! :) ok well in yr 4 i noticed that i liked a friend of mine who was a girl and i told all my friends about it, including her. that was the first time i can remember ever liking a girl..... my friends when i was in yr 4 said it was weird and gay for me to like her, but i didn't care, they ALWAYS called me weird. i moved away from there when i was 9 and lived in a place for 3 years, longer then ever before, so that in itself felt weird, and it was a completely new country on the other side of the world. there i learnt that by drawing chicks in the nude (i was and still am a very good drawer, especially of that) i could make myself feel good, but i didn't understand y as i was only 10 - 11. i got in trouble with my parents for doing that on a school test, naughty girl! so, as far as i can remember, i still had this lust for drawing and couldnt stop so i decided to clothe them and i didnt get in so much trouble. anyway i started masturbating when i was about 11-12, and i absolutely loved it. the only way i could get a big O was to think about girls, but for the most part i didnt let that bother me. eventually tho i started getting angry at the girls who made me feel this way, i guess it didnt feel natural (but it felt good!). i started calling them gay all the time behind their backs, along with celebrities who had beautiful wives like jess simpson, i was sooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo jealous of them! so i called her hubby gay one day and my friends thought i was serious and i was just like 'huh?' when i moved from there i decided to tone down and be nicer, but it didnt work, i still managed to call the sexiest girl in school a slut because word got around that she'd given a boy an oral and that made me feel like vomiting. then she along with the rest of the yr level hated me but it wore off. that was 2 yrs ago. man, i was so horny then, i didnt admit it but i had a crush on that girl and thats y i hated her, coz she was str8. i also hated myself for yrs after that and because of that, nothing seemed normal. well i went to see the counsellor about it at the beginning of this yr (it now seems like ages ago) and she took a bit of getting used to but she really helped. i still talk to the new counsellor and she's a great help too, i can speak frankly about it and she realises thats important to me rather than keeping it bottled up. i also have a best friend (who i'll admit i kinda like, but don't tell her;) who i can talk about it to, and she doesn't judge me AT ALL. she's really, really great, coz i didn't realise she'd be so accepting, i thought she'd make a big deal out of it like i was, but she didn't. :) as for my family, none of them know yet, i'm afraid to tell them coz i know they'll judge me for it. how ridiculous is that, trusting your friends with that info and not telling the ppl u'll be with the rest of ur life. the counsellor sez it would be better if i did it sooner but i just cant bring myself to, im waiting for them to notice, altho the whole naked-chicks incident in yr 5 might have got them thinking. my hopes for the future? i want homosexuality to become a recognised topic and not a taboo, a joke, or something to shy away from. i want gays 2 b able to express themselves more easily without fear of judgment, and i want gay marriage 2 b legal, as well as ok in the church (i'm catholic). as for myself, i want to become a psychologist to help others like me and meet others not like me, who i can also help. :) i also wish for my family 2b accepting of me and for the courage to tell them, it's so difficult coz it has no one answer to it that will just work 'like that'. anyway, thank u so much for reading all this, i hope it helped u in some way! :)*



## 4. ABOUT YOUR SEXUAL FEELINGS

### FRANCES, 19 years

*I like having so many more options than most people. I like being more open minded than most. I like the fact that everyone I know reasonably well no longer assumes I'm straight, and that I rarely have to deal with lesbian stereotypes, unlike some of my friends who are lesbians, because I'm not a lesbian. I don't mind getting more attention from guys because I'm bi, altho' I don't like it when they assume I must be interested in them, coz I'm interested in everyone else, aren't I? I like that I have surrounded myself with queer or queer-friendly friends, and that my parents haven't made a fuss, even if they haven't quite reached accepting yet. I'm at my 2nd year of uni, & it is a very accepting environment, and so I feel I'm in a really good place at the moment.*

### Key findings

- In 2004, young men and young women were more likely to be attracted to the same sex only and to identify as gay/homosexual/lesbian than in 1998;
- Young people chose their sexual identity for a range of reasons, not necessarily because of attraction or behaviour;
- Young women were more likely to identify as bisexual or no label than young men;
- 76% felt great or good about their sexuality in 2004 compared with 60% in 1998;
- More than a third of young people realized their sexual difference very early in their lives and there were no gender differences in age of first realization;
- There was no relationship between age at first realization of sexual feelings, current attraction and gender of sexual partner;
- Once young people reframed their experiences of homophobia as an issue of bullying and not of truths about themselves, they were more likely to feel better about being same sex attracted.

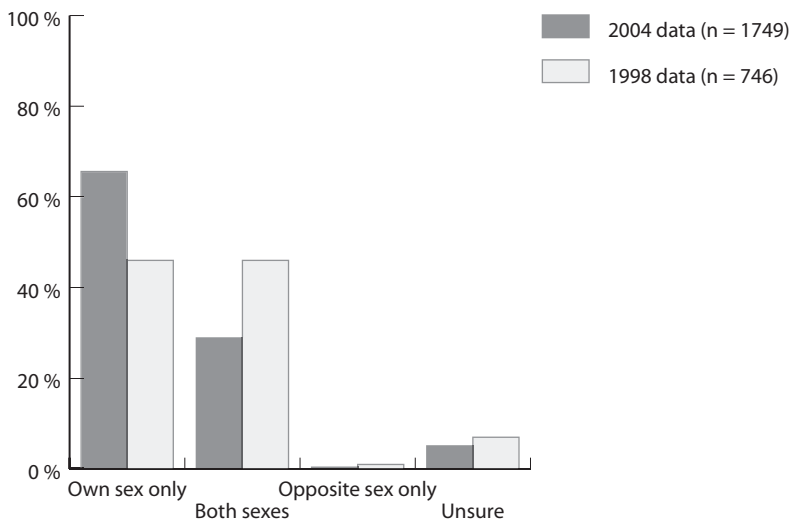
### Sexual attraction

Since the 1998 study there have been many changes in the social landscape in Australia with regard to visibility, acceptance and support of sexual difference. Relationships bills have been introduced in most states, there has been an increase in positive media visibility of alternate sexual lifestyles (eg the *L Word* and *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*), community development projects have raised awareness to SSAY issues and have built community capacity to support SSA young people. Moreover, a plethora of social support groups have given young people a safe space to meet others like them as well as providing information and referral. One of the aims of this study was to look for changes in the profiles of young people's attraction, identity and sexual behaviour over the last six years. In this chapter we report on young people's attractions

and how they feel about them, their chosen identity and the links between identity and attraction, their first realizations of a different sexuality and their explanations of their attraction and identity.

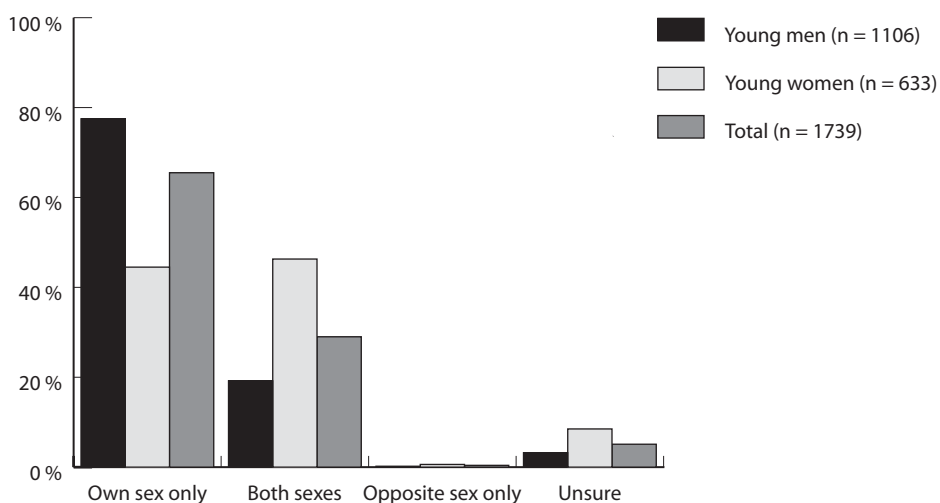
In measuring attraction, we asked young people whether they were attracted to people of the same sex only, both sexes, the opposite sex only or if they were unsure. In Figure 6 it can be seen that there were more young people in 2004 who were attracted to their own sex only (46% in the 1998 survey and 66% in 2004). Fewer young people said that they were attracted to both sexes (29% in 2004 compared with 46% in 1998) and fewer young people were unsure (5% in 2004 compared with 7% in 1998). Attraction to the opposite sex remained minimal in this group (less than 1%) and these were excluded if they did not fit other criteria.

**Figure 6. Comparison of young people's sexual attractions in 2004 and 1998.**



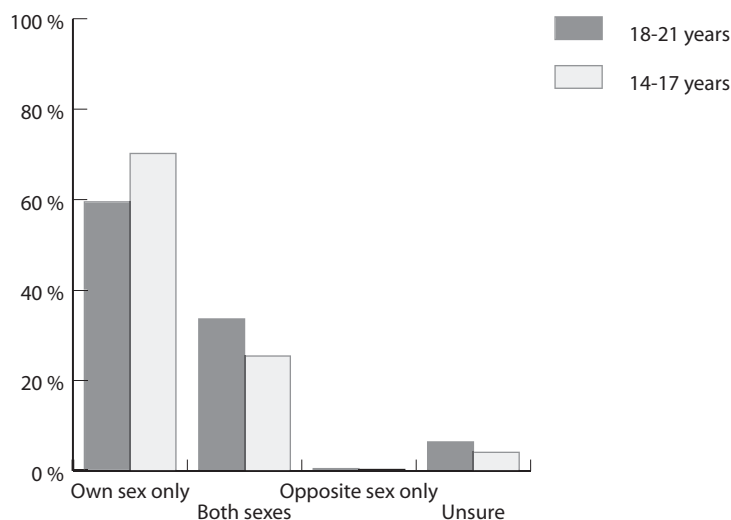
As in 1998, young people's sexual attractions were gendered but the direction of change in both genders from the 1998 study was the same. More young people were exclusively same sex attracted in 2004 than in 1998 (see Fig. 7). Notwithstanding the change, in 2004 young women were still more likely than the young men to be both sex attracted (46% compared with 19%) and less likely to be exclusively same sex attracted (45% compared with 78%).

**Figure 7. Comparison of young men and women's sexual attraction.**



Psychological theories about sexual identity often describe a movement in stages from first realization to disclosure and eventually pride in identity (Cass, 1993/4; Troiden, 1984). They also describe a movement from unsure through attraction to both sexes to attraction to one sex as a person moves through the stages of sexual identity over time. If these theories are valid there should be a strong and significant difference between the attractions of the young people based on their age, with more of the older group being attracted to the same sex only. The stage theories of linear progression were only partially supported by these data. In this study (as in the 1998 study) the older group were slightly more likely to be attracted to the same sex only, slightly less likely to be attracted to both sexes or to be unsure (see Fig. 8). This correlation was significant but weak.

**Figure 8. Young people's attraction by age (18-21 years, n = 984; 14-17 years, n = 765).**



The shifts in reported attraction towards a gay or lesbian identity could be interpreted as reflecting a society in which sexual diversity is more acceptable, where there are many supports for sexually different young people and where positive visibility creates ways of thinking about young people who are same sex attracted that are acceptable in the eyes of the community, thus making it more palatable to the young people themselves.

### How do you feel about your sexuality?

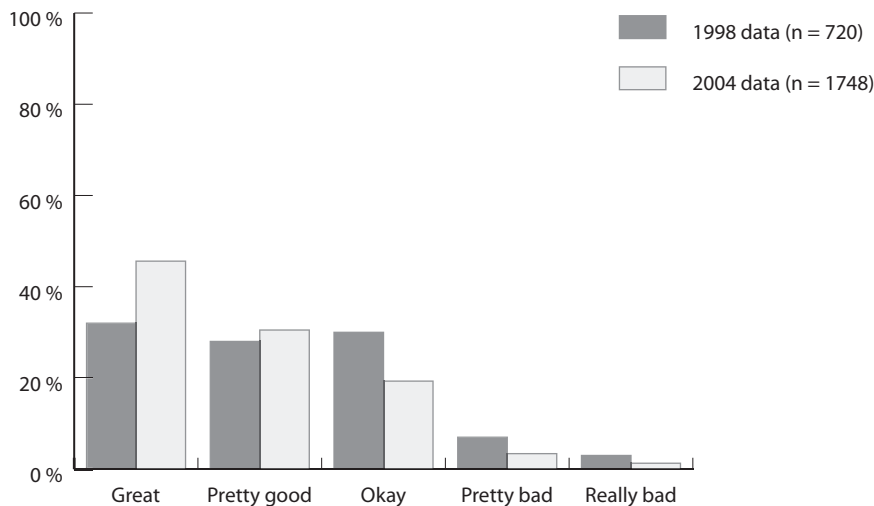
In 2004, as in 1998, we asked young people how they felt about being attracted to people of their own sex. We gave them the options on a five point scale of 'great', 'pretty good', 'OK', 'pretty bad' and 'really bad'.

Their answers revealed that young people in 2004 were more likely to be feeling 'great' or 'pretty good' (76%) about their sexual feelings than in 1998 (60%). As well, fewer young people in 2004 reported feeling just 'okay' (19% vs 30%) or 'pretty bad' and 'really bad' (5% vs 10%). This is a very encouraging finding. Reasons for this can be found in the responses to the accompanying item on the survey, which invited young people to elaborate on their answer to 'how do you feel about being SSAY?'. An analysis of their responses revealed many reasons for the improvement in their feelings, but mostly, the ways young people understand same sex attraction will impact on how they feel. As mentioned above, more understandings that are positive have been available to young people in the last six years. There has been a substantial increase in the last six years in the positive visibility of homosexuality in Australia: in the media, in legislation and in the community, including on the ground support for SSA young people.

When we looked closely at the descriptions of how young people felt about their sexuality, we commonly found a journey through a range of feelings that ultimately resulted in a positive framing of their experiences.

Many young people spoke about times that they had felt bad in the past. Those who felt 'okay' sometimes expressed ambivalence. The 76% who wrote about feeling 'pretty good' or 'great' included anecdotes of reframing negative feelings into stories of self discovery, becoming more clear about their sexuality, feeling more confident and comfortable in themselves and having a more positive imagining of the future.

**Figure 9. Comparison of 1998 and 2004 data on feelings about sexuality.**



Taking the two extremes in feelings, 'great' and 'really bad', if a young person in this research felt 'great', it was usually because s/he had been able to reframe ways of thinking about their sexuality. This was also the case in the 1998 research (Hillier & Harrison, 2004) though visibility was far more restricted than in 2004. Pierre and Morgan reported feeling 'great' about their sexual feelings:

*I'm pretty comfortable with being gay. the way I see it now is the only difference between me and a str8 guy is that at the end of the day I like the comfort of a male, and I don't see that as a big deal at all. 12 months ago I didn't think this at all. I thought being gay meant I had to be secretive and that I couldn't tell ppl cause everyone is against it, and I think that's still the problem today in most schools. (Pierre, 20 years)*

*When I first came out, it was hard for me to accept it, but everyone around me was very supportive, my mum is already an open lesbian, so that made it very easy, plus my friends are mostly gay anyway so.....I mean of course there were times that I hated the fact that I am a homosexual, but now, as the years have gone by, I have come to terms with it, and I'm very happy and proud of who I am....as JERRY SPRINGER'S audience would say: "WE LOVE LESBIANS!, WE LOVE LESBIANS!" (Morgan, 17 years)*

At the other end of the 'how do you feel' spectrum, Nadia and Steve felt 'really bad' about their sexuality, in part because they had been unable to access ways of thinking which described them in positive ways:

*The people ... I hang out with, and my family too, consider gay people, homosexual people to be bad. I have grown up knowing, taught that people who are not straight, or homosexual are not really abiding by society, and the way in which it has been formed. If there were no gay people in our community, I feel that my family and friends may be relieved of that. This is hard for me, but I do not want to change my sexual preferences. (Nadia, 14 years)*

*It's Bad, I wish I did not feel this way. All my mates would freak if they knew, My family would not like me at all...and I am ashamed of myself. (Steve, 21 years)*

In both these cases, young people thought about themselves in negative ways, as bad and shameful. It makes sense that they felt 'really bad' about their feelings of same sex attraction.



## How do you feel about being attracted to the same sex?

### Great

*Since I realised that I was attracted to women it's been a journey of self discovery. Initially I was scared because I come from a catholic background and was a straight A student who had boyfriends etc. I needed to be me though but was afraid of letting people down. Slowly as I've revealed who I am to people I find that they are very accepting and are supportive even if they don't understand. (Staci, 21 years)*

*I only came out to myself about a year ago. It was a relief and very exciting when I did. I finally felt like myself. But over the past year I have learnt more about what it means for me to be gay and how to navigate that. Before a year ago, I never thought I would think being gay was ok. (Solomon, 21 years)*

### Pretty good

*Before I went to university I had only told a couple of people, they were fine, but kind of ignored it. I got to university, and as always, fell madly in love, and didn't care who knew it. So I no longer hid things all the time, now everyone but my family knows and it's all because of university and growing up...since I've turned 18 it has changed a LOT. (Sophia, 18 years)*

*I'm accepting the reality and enjoying it! "everyone should be gay, its so much fun" that said, it has its downsides, but generally I'm an optimist so if I were a ...umm... blue monkey I'd be pretty glad about it. (Spencer, 20 years)*

### Okay

*Well, my parents had such a negative reaction to me telling them that I'm a lesbian. It makes me feel that what I am is wrong and unnatural. I mean, I don't think that it is very fair. My sister doesn't have to tell our parents that she is straight. She doesn't have to get girlfriends that she doesn't like to pretend that she isn't straight. We are both just as normal as each other. (Tara, 15 years)*

*Being attracted to members of the same sex is satisfying because I know in my heart that a same-sex relationship would satisfy me emotionally. This is a decision I have only come to accept from the beginning of this year. However, I only feel "OK" about this because my sexuality has caused many varying problems in my life and I feel that it will be difficult to interface with people in the future for fear of rejection, etc. (Trent, 17 years)*

### Pretty bad

*cos there's no future in it. (Toby, 17 years)*

*I feel like I have disgraced the family. I cant tell my mum and my dad doesn't listen. My family really don't like gays/ lesbians so its hard to tell them how I feel. they think that you don't really know if your gay/lesbian when you are 16, but I dunno if I agree with them... (Tabitha, 16 years)*

### Really bad

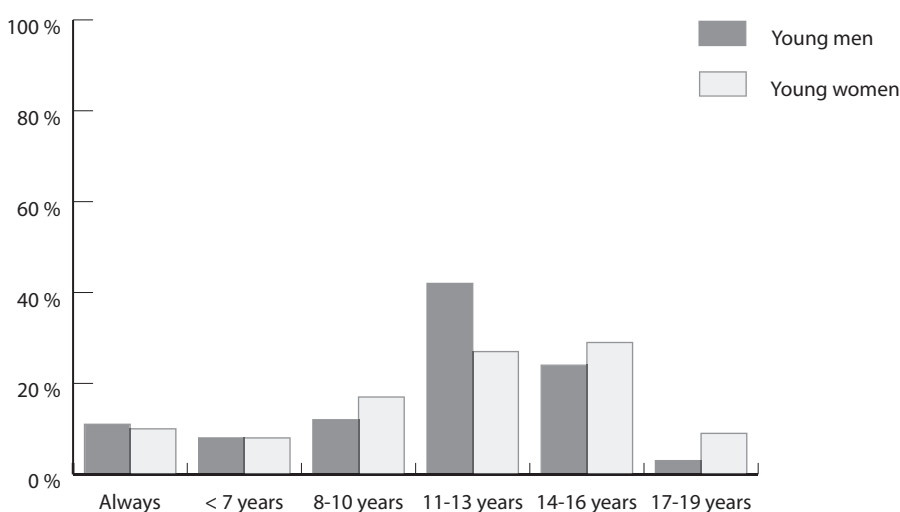
*I don't know if feel like I'm letting my family down coz I like girls and I hate disappointing my mom. She tells me its not right to be that way and it just makes me feel worse coz I cant help it. (Tyra, 17 years)*

*It couldn't be any worse - I want a family and a normal life but that can't happen. Life sux this way and I know why so many guys suicide. I can never be truly happy. It's a lose lose situation. (Virgil, 21 years)*

## First Realisations

There has been a tendency in popular culture to regard those who realise their sexual difference earlier as being more ‘gay’ or ‘lesbian’ than those who realise later. These early realisers are thought to be more likely to follow a gay lifestyle, identify as gay or lesbian and have only same sex partners. Accordingly, at the end of the survey, we asked young people to tell us more about their lives including when they first knew about their sexual attractions. This was an open-ended request and we received 476 responses (60% young men and 40% young women). These responses included when they first knew and in what context this happened. We coded these answers into six age categories including: always knew, before the age of seven; from 8-10 years; 11-13 years; 14-16 years and 17-19 years. The results are depicted in the graph below.

**Figure 10. Age at first realisation (n = 476).**



Given the research that suggests that boys generally realise their sexual attraction at an earlier age (Savin-Williams, 2004), we were surprised to find few gender differences in the ages at which the young men and women first realised that they were same sex attracted. For more than one third, realisation came long before puberty and a further 55% realised around the age of puberty. Equal numbers of young men and young women (around 10%) felt that they ‘always knew’ that their sexuality was different. Contrary to popular conceptions and in line with Diamond’s (2003) research, there was no relationship between age of first knowing and current identity or attraction. Those young people who ‘always knew’ were no more likely to be currently attracted to the same sex only or to identify as gay or lesbian. Furthermore, those who realised later were just as likely to currently identify as gay or lesbian and be attracted to the same sex only.

The context of first realisations varied and there appeared to be few gender differences. Indeed, one of the startling findings was a lack of difference in young men and women’s explanations of when and how they first knew. We divided the context of realisation into the 10 different categories of ‘always knew’, ‘sudden dawnings’, ‘dreams’, ‘sexual attraction’, ‘falling in love’, ‘having sex’, ‘disclosure from others’, ‘pornography’, ‘lesbian and gay visibility’ and ‘reflection’. We include below how young people described this range of experiences.

Some young people reported always knowing about their sexual feelings or at least knowing that they were different. Samantha and Tom were typical of this:

*I’ve always known that I was homosexual. I’ve never questioned it, denied it or ever been confused about myself.*  
(Sam, 17 years)

*OK... well i guess i’ve kinda always know that i’m gay... just a gut feeling.* (Tom, 14 years)

Other young people, such as Jack and Bree described a pivotal moment in their lives when realisation dawned on them:

*When i was 13 - i distinctly remember becoming obsessed with strong female figures in the media. I knew i was sexually attracted to women, i was walking and it dawned on me that i was a girl who liked girls. it made me stop and seriously remind myself of what gender i was - it was a head trip, i had to look around to see if anyone had noticed i'd suddenly become a lesbian :). (Bree, 20 years)*

*Well, it kind of just hit me one day...i didn't expect it, but i knew i was fine. i live in a household with two lesbians (my parents) and a gay male housemate whose almost my sister anyway...al my friends are really supportive and i love everyone in my life, i just wish everyone was as lucky as me. (Jack, 15 years)*

Dreams were a catalyst to realisation for other young people:

*Well i first started feeling attracted to girls in school but not quite knowing why and then i started having dreams about other girls. (Hannah, 20 years)*

*I first thought I was gay when I was about 14, I started having dreams about men. (Nick, 18 years)*

Sexual attraction was a turning point for Ailis and Alex:

*The first time was when i was in the street and a really pretty girl walked past and i got a strange feeling and from then on i considered myself to be attracted to both sexes. (Ailis, 14 years)*

*I first knew what I felt for other males was sexual when I'd get a raging boner in P.E. in school, the change rooms were a bit intimidating, so I changed in the shower. (Alex, 18 years)*

For others, for example, Emily and Angus, falling in love was the catalyst:

*Briefly? I first knew about my sexual feelings when i hit puberty when i was say 12, in year 8. Id find my self spending all my lessons just soaking in this girl who sat a few rows in front of me. I was head over heels for her, to the point where, even today, smelling her perfume sets my heart racing. (Emily, 18 years)*

*My sexual feelings for other males first appeared around age six, and grew stronger throughout primary school (particularly when I wanted to marry my friend Andrew). (Angus, 18 years)*

Sally and Will realised their sexual difference through sexual exploration. In their cases it was at a very young age:

*When i was 8 i was in the bath with a female friends and we decided to explore each others private parts with our fingers. I started feeling very "wet and tingley" when i was playing with this girl. (Sally 14 years)*

*I knew probably when I was in grade 1... I was entangled with a friend doing a 69 ... and I liked it... it wasn't until I was just going on 17 that I actually realised and understood what that all meant. (Will, 20 years)*

Someone else disclosing in a small number of cases, jolted a young person into a realisation:

*I basically had to wait till a woman to fell in love with me before I had the courage to return any signs of affection. This occurred when I was 18. It took me that long to be able to tell MYSELF i was gay. (Kelley, 20 years, transgender m-f)*

*I first realised i was gay when a friend of mine shared his sexual feelings towards me. (Mungo, 20 years)*

Looking at pornography prompted a realisation from Olivia and Ben:

*I had always liked looking at naked woman and watched a few lesbian pornos and found myself being attracted. I havent had a same sex experience but would like to in the future to explore not only my sexual but also emotional and relationship options. (Olivia, 16 years)*

*I first knew I was attracted to other guys when I was 13. This only came about from looking at my brothers heterosexual pornographic magazines. It started off with 'Gee that girl is cute' to "hhmmm, I would rather be her because he's cute'.*

*I had my first sexual encounter the same year. (Ben, 20 years)*

Finally, Sue and Drew realised from their own or others reflections on their behaviour:

*I grew up without posters of Hanson and Backstreet boys on my walls, i had Vespas, and punk bands. I never had any crushes on boys either and all my friends thought i was a lesbian because of it. (Sue, 18 years)*

*I just remember, ever since the start of highschool that whenever i went out with a girl i wouldn't be able to hug her or kiss her without feeling kind of abnormal. I'd look at other couples and emulate what i thought was right. Then the next logical thought was that i was gay, i "tried it out" and it worked. Been happy ever since. (Drew, 17 years)*

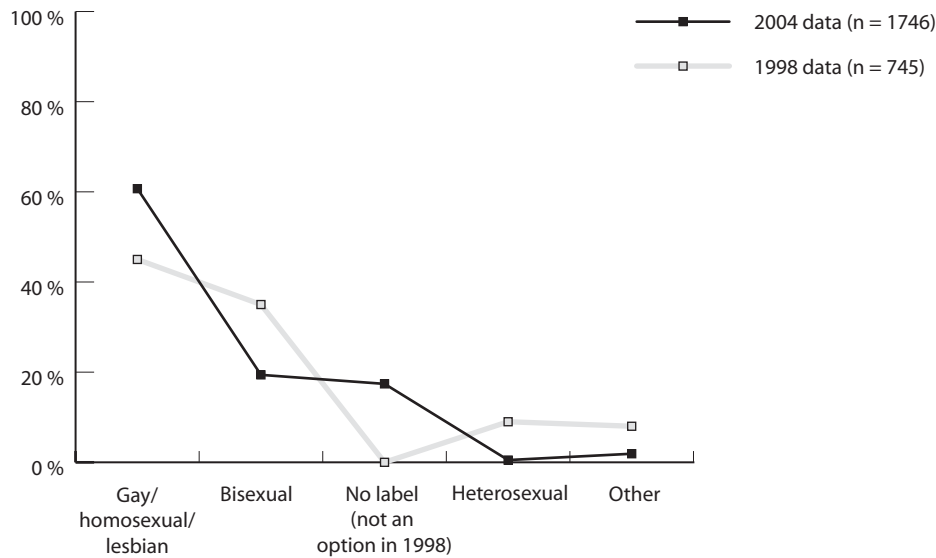
Theories about sexual orientation traditionally provide two differing explanations for same sex attraction: one from psychology describes a primarily stable trait (Cass, 1983/4; Troiden, 1984), the other from sociology (Fuss, 1991) describes a sexuality that is socially constructed. While there is the sense in some of these young people's descriptions of first realisation that their sexuality is one that emerges from within them as an essential trait, there are also indications that the social environment does impact on young people's realisations by giving them a space (or not) in which to contemplate these things. It may be that the answer lies somewhere between (Ussher, 1997).

## **Sexual identity**

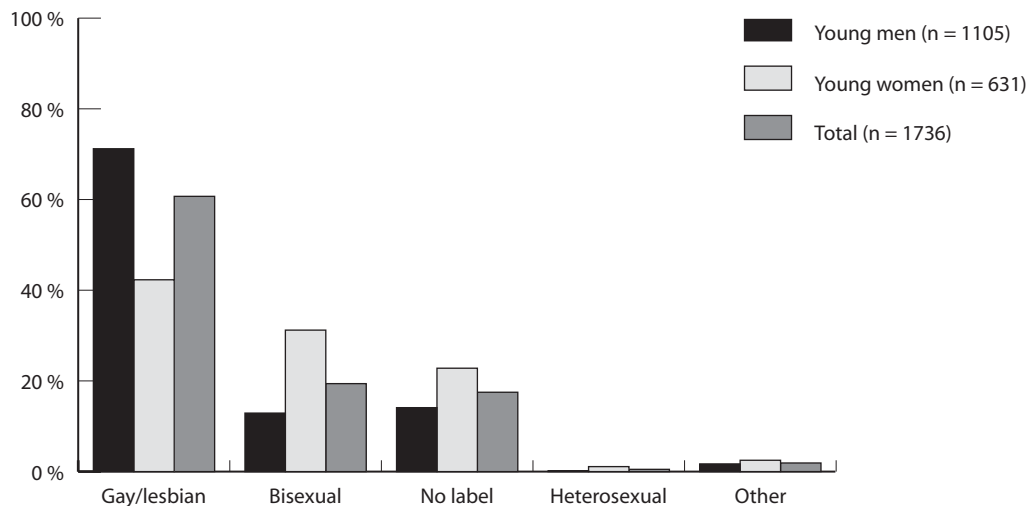
In line with the three components of sexuality - attraction, identity and behaviour (Laumann, 1994), we asked young people about what identity label, if any, that they attributed to themselves. We used the same categories as in 1998. However, we added one, 'no label', to cater for young people who, for whatever reason, did not choose to label themselves at all. The choices given were 'gay/lesbian/homosexual', 'bisexual', 'heterosexual', 'I don't label myself' and 'other'. As with attraction, we were interested in differences in labelling from 1998. We also asked young people to explain the reasons for the label they chose.

Most young people chose to label themselves gay/homosexual/lesbian (61%), 19% identified as bisexual, 18% chose no label, one percent chose heterosexual and two percent other.

Similar to the change in young people's sexual attraction from 1998 to 2004 we find that more young people in 2004 identified as gay/lesbian/homosexual (61% vs 45%), fewer identified as bisexual (19% vs 35%), fewer identified as heterosexual (1% vs 9%) and fewer chose other (2% vs 9%). Though the addition of the no label category muddies the waters in this comparison, and may have included those who would otherwise have chosen heterosexual, other and bisexual categories, the increase in those identifying as gay/lesbian/homosexual is an important one and likely to reflect increased visibility and opportunities for exploring sexuality that are available today.

**Figure 11. Identity comparison between 1998 and 2004.**

Similar to 1998, when we looked at gender differences in identity, we found that the young women were less likely to identify as gay/homosexual/lesbian than the young men (42% vs 71%), and more likely to identify as bisexual (31% vs 13%) or choose 'no label' (23% vs 14%) than the young men. Young people's reasons for choosing no label were generally because they didn't want to be defined by their sexuality or have their future options curtailed. Some young people chose not to have a label because they were still exploring their feelings.

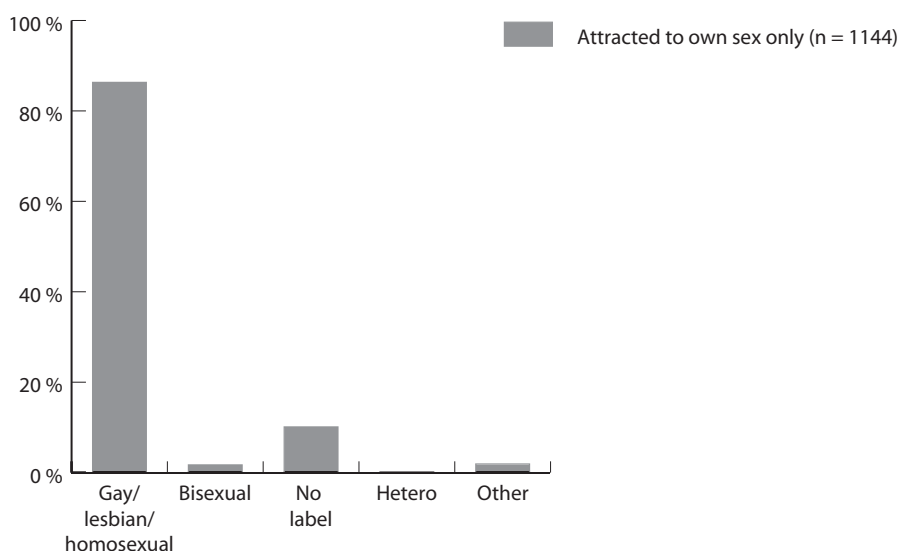
**Figure 12. A comparison of young men and women's identity choices.**

In terms of age, there were differences in the ways the younger and older groups identified their sexuality. The older group was more likely to identify as gay/homosexual/lesbian (65%) than the younger group (55%), while the younger group was more likely to identify as bisexual (27% vs 14%). Equal numbers of the older and younger groups (17%) chose the no label category. All of the young people who identified as 'queer' in the 'other' category were in the 18-21 age bracket, giving support to the idea that queer is a theoretical concept that young people learn in their later years at university or in the community.

When we look at the identity choice of young people in relation to their sexual attraction, we find a fairly close match between 'same sex attraction only' and identity. Figure 13 below shows that the large majority (86%) of young people who were attracted only to the same sex identified as gay/lesbian/homosexual. Of the

remaining 14%, two percent chose bisexual, 10% chose no label, and two percent other. All is not what it seems however. Young people's explanations of their attraction and identity show that this close match between identity and attraction is often not reflected in young people's sexual behaviours. We discuss this later under the heading 'Further understanding identity and attraction' and in the chapter on sexual behaviour.

**Figure 13. Identity choice of young people who were attracted to the same sex only.**



**Figure 14. Identity choice of young people who were attracted to both sexes.**

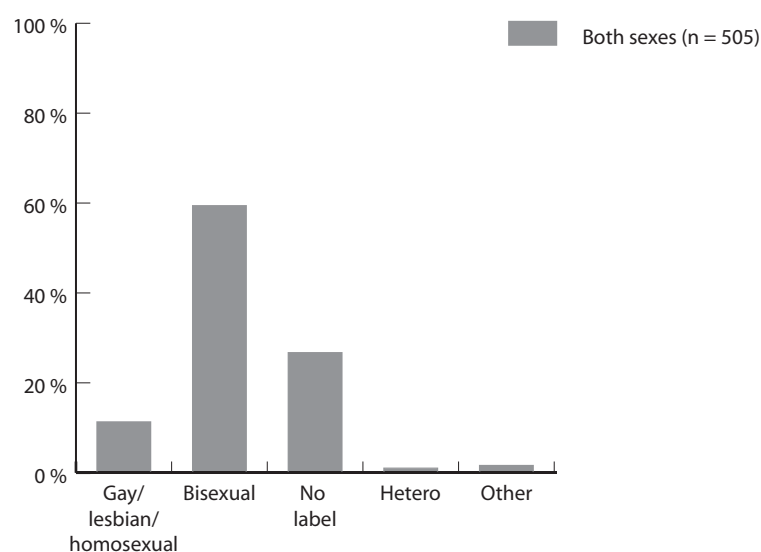
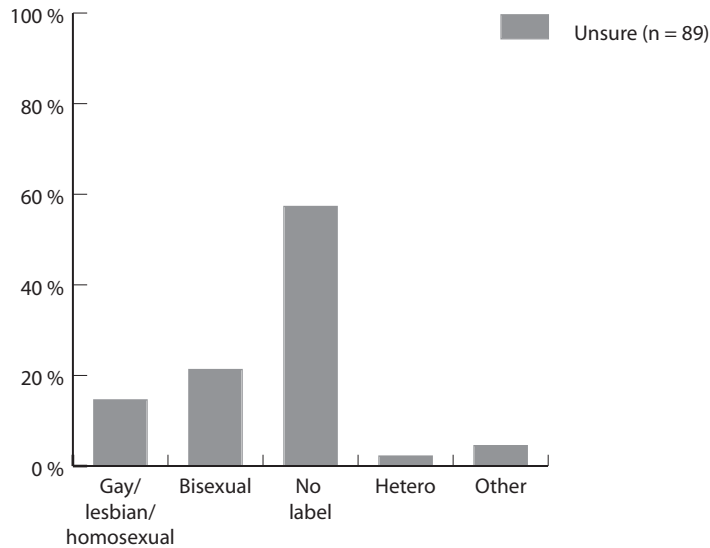


Figure 14 above shows that the match between identity and attraction in young people who report attraction to both sexes is less clear. Most (59%) of these young people identified as bisexual, however, 27% chose no label, 11% gay/lesbian/homosexual, 1% heterosexual and 2% other. Where the identity choice was bisexual there was a match with attraction. However, 41% chose to identify as other than bisexual despite being attracted to both sexes. Data which encapsulate young people's explanation for their identity choice is relevant here and can be found under the heading 'Further understanding identity and attraction' below.

The five percent ( $n = 89$ ) of young people (see Fig. 15) who were unsure about their attractions were spread across the whole range of identities, with the majority (58%) choosing no label. Over 30%, however, chose gay/lesbian/homosexual and bisexual suggesting that for those working with young people it may be unwise to assume attractions (and behaviours) from young people's stated sexual identity.

**Figure 15. Identity choice of young people who were unsure about their attractions.**

### Further understanding identity and attraction

An added item in the 2004 survey asked young people for explanations for their choice of identity. We included this because we wanted to clarify what young people meant by these terms. This is particularly important for health and other professionals who work with SSAY. Many make decisions and provide options on the basis of young people's stated sexuality, for example, information about contraception and STI protection. We do know that there is sometimes a lack of congruence between young people's attraction, identity and behaviour and we thought that explanations of identity might help clarify this observation. Over 600 young women and over 1000 young men explained their choice of identity in this survey. They talked about attraction and relationships and sex. The answers fell into five fairly clear categories: 'certain', 'ambivalent', 'movement over time', 'don't like labels' and 'confused'. They throw light on how little could be assumed about attraction and behaviour from a young person's stated sexual identity. This analysis does not include the category 'heterosexual' because the number (n = 9) was too small to allow comment.

Around one third of young people in all identity categories were absolutely certain about their attraction and this was borne out in the boxes they ticked and their accompanying comments. Bridget and Erica spoke of this certainty:

*i loooooovvvveeeee girls!!!!!!!!!!!!!!* (Bridget, 20 years, same sex attracted, lesbian/gay/homosexual)

*I'm 100% into girls. Known since I was 10. Often the words used to label me are used in a negative way. I'm a person not a classification.* (Erica, 19 years, same sex attracted, no label)

A further third who seemed unequivocal in their identity labels and attractions were far less equivocal in their comments:

*I would label myself gay, but don't think that necessarily excludes me from ever having a relationship with a woman.* (Mike, 20 years, same sex attracted, lesbian/gay/homosexual)

*I am attracted to boys but sometimes on the rare occasion i am attracted to girls but yet i dont think i could sleep with them. so its very confusing.* (Ralph, 20 years, same sex attracted, lesbian/gay/homosexual)

*For simplicity's sake i would just call myself a fag. but i've worked out all my attractions to be around this 50% male adolescents, 20% male pre-adolescents, 15% male around my own age, 10% female around my own age, 5% female adolescents. however i'd never attempt anything at all with a male pre-adolescent because i can still control my actions.* (Nathan, 18 years, same sex attracted, lesbian/gay/homosexual)

Many young people, such as Fiona and Morris, gave evidence of shifts in their attractions and behaviours over time, in the past, or potentially in the future.

*I realised I was attracted to girls at about 13 and thought I was bi. It took me a few years to realise I wasn't attracted to guys at all. Having a girlfriend reinforced that.* (Fiona, 20 years, same sex attracted, gay/lesbian/homosexual)

*Sexually attracted to men, but haven't ruled out sex with a woman.* (Morris, 21 years, same sex attracted, gay/lesbian/homosexual)

Around one in five wrote about the problems of having a label because of people's reactions (eg Mary), because they couldn't find a label that matched their attractions (eg Jo) or that they felt comfortable with (eg Sandi).

*I've gotten sick of going backwards and forwards, if I say I'm bisexual it just confuses people and I get harassed by guys who don't understand what it means. It's safer and EASIER just to call myself a lesbian cos I get less crap and people can deal with it.* (Mary, 15 years, both sex attracted, gay/lesbian/homosexual)

*I consider myself bisexual, I am attracted to both sexes, but for different reasons. And of course, it is not 50/50 attraction, That is why I find the labelling of 'bisexuality' problematic.* (Jo, 19 years, both sex attracted, bisexual)

*Although I am attracted to males and females, I think to use a blanket term like bisexuality conjures up stereotypes and preconceptions which I am not personally comfortable with.* (Sandy, 15 years, both sex attracted, no label)

There were also those who disliked labels because of the belief that they fell for a person, not a gender. However, this did not stop Sarah from choosing a label.

*I fall in love with personalities not genders.* (Sarah, 20 years, both sex attracted, gay/lesbian/homosexual)

*I find any person attractive for their own personal qualities, not entirely on looks or gender.* (Terry, 16 years, both sex attracted, no label)

Finally, in all identity categories, including gay/lesbian/homosexual, there were young people who expressed confusion about their identity, their feelings and the future, including those who reported being same sex attracted only and gay/lesbian/homosexual.

*I know in my heart I am gay but it doesn't stop me from wondering whether I might end up changing and being bi or straight and making a fool of myself after identifying as gay.* (Wendy, 20 years, same sex attracted, gay/lesbian/homosexual)

*I guess you could say im still confused a bit. But now ive given up on trying to work it out, i just go with the flow so to speak. All i know is, without trying to sound crude, both guys and girls can turn me on.* (Harley, 18 years, both sex attracted, gay/lesbian/homosexual)

It is clear from these young people's explanations for, and comments about, their sexual identity that there were many reasons for choosing to identify or not identify with a sexual category. Some of the reasons are political, others are social and on occasions they are related to sexual attraction and behaviour. The important thing for health professionals and others to keep in mind, is that a sexuality label does not necessarily predict sexual attraction or behaviour. It is important that those working with young people don't jump to conclusions from given identities or foreclose on their options. In the case of a health professional, only the taking of sexual history will give the information needed to be able to give appropriate information and referral about sexuality and reproductive issues.





## 5. ABOUT YOUR SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR

### GARY, 16 years

*i first started to realise i was same-sex attracted when i was 11. i just went thru until i was about 14 ignoring these feelings. when i was just past 14 i had my first gay sexual experience. i enjoyed it but afterwards my feelings took a turn and i convinced myself that being gay wasnt the way, it was wrong and that no one would ever accept me for it. so i went straight. for about 3 months anyway. around the start of 2002 i turned into a slut. i was having new bois weekly, but never serious relationships. then i met my first serious bf liam. we went for about 2 months and i broke it off for another guy. by the end of the year i had hurt so many people and only been hurt a couple of times. at the start of 2003 i turned back to liam. he turned me down and i went into depression. i had bois through this but they didnt help. until i met zac (my current bf). i met him through [name of support organisation] and we became good friends. from around august to september we were good friends. and on september 9 we decided to take a step further and date. he is probably the first bf i haven't got bored of. my plans for the future are to continue my education until year 12 and move to sydney to follow a career as a dancer. go to uni and hopefully become a full time dancer or a dance teacher. As for my love life, all i can say is that i hope i stay safe and that i find a nice guy to keep me happy through these years.*

### Key findings

- SSA young people were more likely to be sexually active earlier than their Year 10 and 12 peers in secondary school;
- SSA young people were more likely to be having sex that matched their sexual attraction than in 1998;
- 38% of young people were in a relationship at the time of the survey, with more young women (48%) than young men (32%);
- 65% used a condom at their last penetrative sexual encounter;
- 10% of young people reported being diagnosed with a sexually transmissible infection;
- 11% of young women had been pregnant, 10% of the 15-18 year old sub-sample;
- 6% reported having being diagnosed with some form of hepatitis.

### Sexual experience

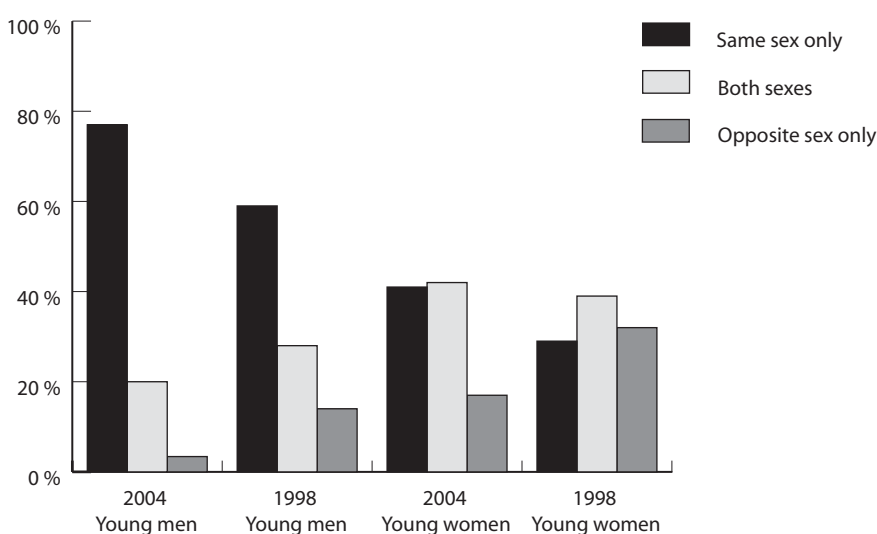
After sexual attraction and identity, sexual behaviour was the third aspect of sexual orientation that we were interested in exploring. We wanted to know when young people had first engaged in a range of sexual practices and the gender of their sexual partners. We were also interested in the overlap between their

attraction, identity and behaviour. We chose the term 'sex' for sexual encounters in general (to be inclusive of lesbian sex) and more specifically 'penetrative sex' for vaginal or anal intercourse with a penis. The questionnaire also included questions about safe sex, relationship status, sexually transmissible diseases (STIs) and pregnancy.

Seventy seven percent of young people reported that they had had sex (79% young men, 72% young women). Sixty one percent of the young men had had sex with males only, 16% had had sex with both sexes and three percent with females only. Thirty percent of the young women had had sex with females only, 30% had had sex with both sexes and 12% with males only.

Since 1998 there have been shifts in the gender of sexual partners away from opposite sex and towards same sex partners. Fewer young people had had sex with the opposite sex only, more had had sex with the same sex only, and fewer young men had had sex with both sexes than in 1998 (see Figure 16 below).

**Figure 16. Gender of sexual partners in 1998 (n = 542) and 2004 (n = 1320).**



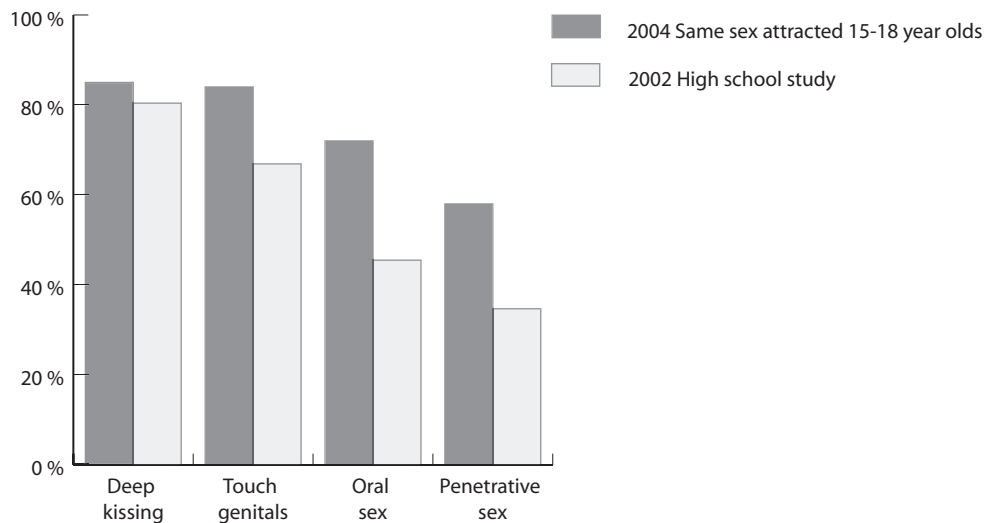
Unlike the 1998 survey, and in line with the 2002 national high school study (Smith et al, 2003), we asked young people questions about the age at which they were first involved in specific sexual practices including deep kissing, genital fondling, oral and penetrative sex.

Ninety percent of young people had experienced deep kissing, 89% had touched a partner's genitals, 89% had had their genitals touched, 81% had given oral sex, 81% had received oral sex, and 70% had experienced penetrative sex.

When we compare the 15–18 year old sub-sample in the study with the students in the 2002 national study of secondary students (Smith et al, 2003), we find that the young people in this study were more likely to have experienced all types of sexual activity (see Fig. 17 below). This difference affirms results from previous research that SSA young men and women are, on average, sexually active earlier than their heterosexual peers and has implications for the provision of relevant sex education in schools. Simon's description of his sexual pathway is a simplified one, but typical of a sexual trajectory of many of the young men.

*I first knew I 'liked boys' when I was in year 4 (9 years), first touched a boy's penis at age 11, first blew, and got a blow in year 8 aged 13, first had anal sex at 17. (Simon, 19 years)*

**Figure 17. Comparison of sexual activity between 15-18 year old SSA students (n = 557) and their peers in the 2002 high school study (n = 2388).**

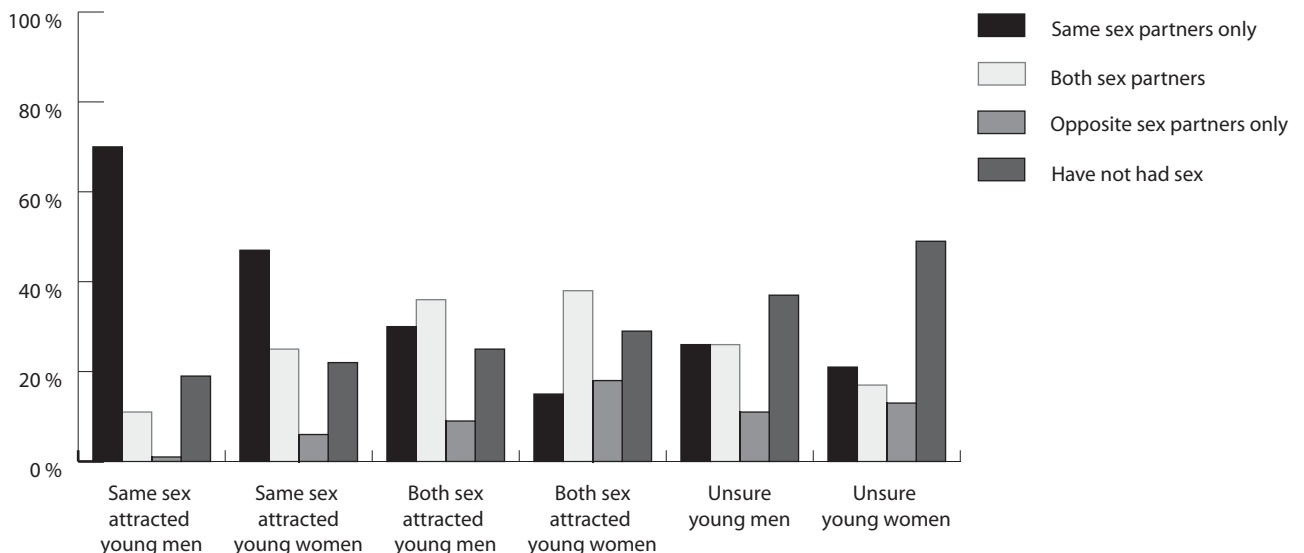


### Relationship between sexual behaviour and attraction

As in 1998, we were interested in whether young people's sexual behaviour matched their sexual attraction. For example, had exclusively same sex attracted young people had sex with the same sex only and had those who were attracted to both sexes had sex with both. In 1998 there was a mismatch between attraction and behaviour, especially for the young women, 32% of whom had only had opposite sex partners. We have provided some explanations for this elsewhere (Dempsey et al, 2001; Hillier, 2002) including the way young women are taught to be passive in sexual encounters and the taboo on casual sex for young women both of which make it more difficult for them to act on their same sex attractions.

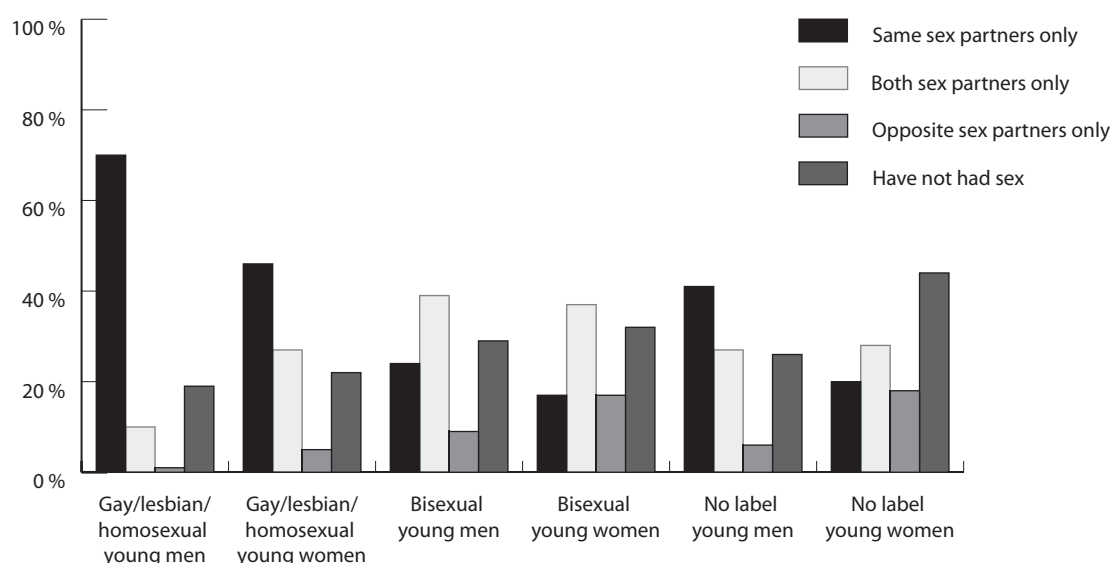
Though there was a significant relationship between young people's sexual attractions and the gender of their sexual partners, this was by no means a complete match (see Figure 18 below). Seventy percent of exclusively same sex attracted young men and 47% of exclusively same sex attracted young women had sex only with people of their own sex in the last two years. On the other hand, 30% of both sex attracted young men and 15% of both sex attracted young women had only had sex with the same sex in the last two years. Predictably, those young people who had not had sex were more likely to be unsure about their sexual attraction.

**Figure 18. Sexual attraction by gender of sexual partner (n = 1726).**



The relationship between identity and gender of sexual partners (see Figure 19 below) was also not an exact match. The young people most likely to have sex with a same sex partner were those who identified as gay or lesbian (70% of young men and 40% of young women). Over 20% of this group had not had sex (19% of young men and 22% of young women), a number had sex with partners of both sexes (10% of young men and 27% of young women) and a small number had only had opposite sex partners (1% of young men and 5% of young women). Young people who identified as bisexual were most likely to have sex with both sexes (39% young men & 37% young women), but over 20% of them (24% of young men and 17% of young women) had sex only with people of their own sex and some (9% of young men and 17% of young women) had only had sex with opposite sex partners. Of those who identified as bisexual, 29% of young men and 32% of young women had never had sex. Of those who identified as bisexual, 29% of young men and 32% of young women had never had sex.

**Figure 19. Relationship between young people's identity and gender of sexual partners (n = 1723).**



These findings of a lack of congruence between young people's sexual identity, attraction and behaviour are not as marked as the findings in 1998. However, those who work with young people should still keep in mind that it is not wise to make assumptions about sexual behaviour from young people's stated attractions or identity. In particular, health professionals should remain aware that these young men and women need information about contraception and reproduction as much as heterosexual youth.

## Relationships

We asked young people whether or not they were in a relationship at the time of the survey, and if so to tell us more about it. Thirty eight percent of young people reported that they were in a relationship, many more young women (47% young women and 32% young men). Young people mentioned their partners throughout the survey in the context of abuse, safety, attraction and identity. Given the hostility of many of their environments, having someone who cared was especially important and break ups were particularly devastating. Vincent's experiences are an example:

*[name of boyfriend] and I split up and I dive bombed into a graveyard of depression, many many months afterwards I was still shattered, single and beginning to feel the full load of being gay. (Vincent, 15 years)*

Partners were often the focus of conflict between parents and their children because young people in relationships are more visible than those who are not. Relationships tended also to be the catalyst for disclosure.

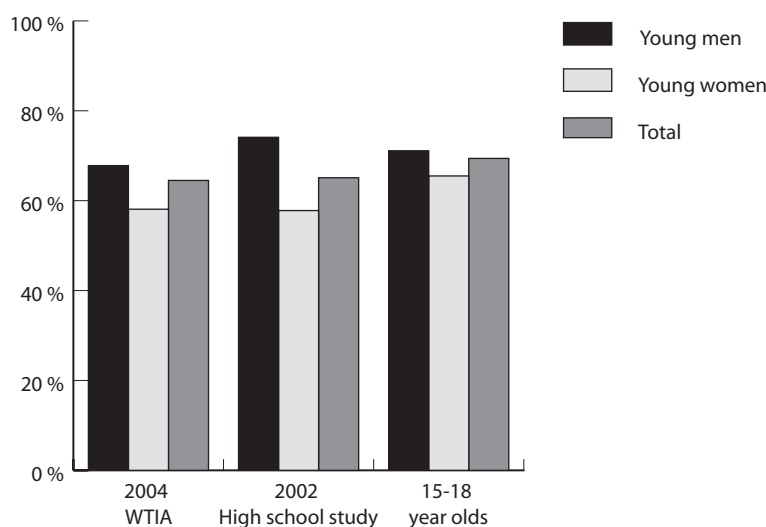
## Use of protection during sex

Given that these young people were sexually active earlier than their heterosexual peers, it was important to learn about their safe sex practices. We asked: ‘The last time you had penetrative sex. If it was penis in vagina or penis in anus sex, was a condom used?’ Sixty-five percent of young people (58% young women and 68% young men) used a condom during their last penetrative sex encounter.

Seventy percent of the 15-18 year old sub-sample used a condom during their last penetrative sex encounter compared with 65% of students in the national high school study (Smith et al, 2003).

In both studies, fewer young women than men reported having used condoms the last time they had sex (see Figure 20 below).

**Figure 20. Comparison of condom use at last penetrative sex between the young people in this study (n = 906), the 2002 high school study (n = 818) and the 15-18 year old student sub sample (n = 365).**



## Pregnancy

Given that many SSA young women have sexual intercourse with young men, we included a new question asking them if they had ever been pregnant. Of those young women who had had penetrative sex, 11% (n = 46) reported having been pregnant at some time. One third of these young women were attracted exclusively to their own sex and 26% identified as gay or lesbian.

In order to compare our results with the national secondary school study (Smith et al, 2003), we separated out the 15–18 year old female students in the study. Eight percent of the Year 10 and 12 young women in the national secondary school study reported having had sex that had resulted in pregnancy, while 10% of the 15-18 year old young women in our study who had had sexual intercourse, had been pregnant. Given that same sex attracted young women are sexually active earlier than their heterosexual peers, this finding is not unexpected and adds to the special issues facing these young women.

## Sexually transmissible infections (STIs) and hepatitis

We also added a new question asking young people if they had ever been diagnosed with a sexually transmissible infection (STI). Fourteen percent (n = 230) reported in the affirmative. However, when we removed lice and thrush from the list we had a final figure of 10% (12%) of young men and 9% of young women). For those who had an STI, the most common infections were warts (21%), gonorrhoea (19%),

chlamydia (16%) and herpes (14%).

In comparison with the national secondary school study (Smith et al, 2003), the 15-18 year old students in this study were five times more likely to have been diagnosed with an STI (10% vs 2%).

We also added a question about hepatitis infection. Six percent of the young people (n = 101) reported having been diagnosed with hepatitis at some time in their lives (the 15–18 year old sub-sample was slightly higher at 7%). In comparison with the national secondary school study (Smith et al, 2003) the SSA group was over three times more likely to be diagnosed with some form of hepatitis. We asked young people about the exact type of hepatitis, however, as with the secondary school study, their responses were mostly non-specific. This finding may need to be further studied.

## **In Summary**

The same sex attracted young people in this study were sexually active at an earlier age than their heterosexual peers, many of them with people of the opposite sex. Though they were just as likely as their heterosexual peers to use a condom at their last sexual encounter, they were five times more likely to report having been diagnosed with an STI. The young women, many of them exclusively same sex attracted, were at least as likely to have been pregnant as young women in the national secondary school study. The higher rates of STIs may be because sexual partners are in a higher risk group for STIs or because SSA young people have sex at a younger age. There are many ramifications of these findings for sexual health educators and health professionals, not the least of which is that these young people require more and better sexual health information and support in having safe and protected sex.

### **CRYSTAL, 17 years**

*i never really had any awakening like you hear most people talk about, i just always knew - when i heard that song "i kissed a girl" all my friends (we were about 10) were grossed out but i just thought it was completely normal. i had a couple of minor crushes on guys in early high school which i tried to play up so i would feel normal but when i first liked a girl (year ten) it was completely different, much much bigger. my first kiss was with a girl who was a close friend at the time, in year ten. i loved her a lot but not in that way and i guess she realised that and we grew apart. early in 2002 i started going to these "girls nights" at the [name of support organisation], where we met other girls, learnt about safe sex, etc. i met this one girl there who i really liked and the feeling was mutual. we flirted for a few weeks then one week i decided to work up the courage to ask her out but someone told me she had come out to her mum and was grounded until she was 18 (3 months). i was extremely depressed about this and at a party one night for some reason i seduced this guy - which ended up being this six month relationship. my first kiss with a guy. and more. i was on holiday in january 2003 and was date-raped by this guy, and that kind of put me off guys so since then i've only really liked one guy and since he is one of my closest friends and gay, that only really gets fulfilled at extremely drunk moments. i'm back in touch with the girl from the [name of support organisation] but she has a girlfriend. so currently im completely single and without any prospects. my two best friends (a girl and a guy) have been real life savers. i've felt a lot less depressed lately than i have in the past, because i dont feel as alienated. and we all have similar stories - right down to all having self-harmed in the near past. its strange that there's that similarity, maybe its something to look into in the future? i'm looking forward to meeting new people at uni and turning eighteen - because its impossible to meet people when you cant go to clubs and pubs. hope this is of some use.*



## 6. HOW DO PEOPLE TREAT YOU?

### JOEY, 18 years

*It happens every day, it's the way people look at you when they find out; it's the way people ignore you, shun you; make you feel little, different and inferior. It's the way work administers the roster and the way the school fails to curb bullying.*

#### Key findings

- 38% of participants reported unfair treatment on the basis of their sexuality;
- 44% reported verbal abuse and 16% reported physical abuse because of their sexuality, figures that are largely unchanged since the 1998 report;
- School was the most dangerous place for young people to be with 74% of young people who were abused experiencing this abuse at school (80% young men, 48% young women).

There have been significant changes in Australian culture over the last six years. The expectations of researchers were that discrimination and abuse levels reported by young people would have dropped considerably since the 1998 study. We were particularly interested in how young people were faring in schools because this was where most of the homophobic abuse was reported occurring in the 1998 survey and also where many of the awareness-raising initiatives have been directed.

In this chapter we report on young people's experiences of discrimination and abuse and where this occurred. We have included a separate section on schools.

### Discrimination

*GOD!!! I could write a whole report on how gay youth in country areas are being unfairly treated! For example, being served last at a supermarket, harassed and bullied into fighting in the local schools. Lack of information about homosexual safe sex compared to straight safe sex in our schools. I see the unfair way that the GLBT youth is treated on a daily basis as I am told by the members of [name of support group]. (Katy, 20 years)*

The percentage of young people reporting that they had been treated unfairly because of their sexuality was higher in 2004 (39%) than in 1998 (29%). This may be, however, because the percentage of young people who were 'out' in this study was also higher (95% had spoken to someone about their sexual feelings compared with 82% in the 1998 study). An increase in young people who are visibly out may result in increased discrimination because being out leaves young people exposed to discriminatory practices that exist in the community.

Notwithstanding the above, it is clear that virtually all same sex attracted young Australians experience discrimination. It may be because they cannot take their partners to the school dance, because they are given no relevant safe sex information, or as one young woman commented in 1998, 'because they are



brought up straight'. In 2004 same sex attracted young people are more likely to be part of networks and to be involved in discussion about homophobia and this may mean their awareness of discrimination is higher. We would suggest therefore that the increased reporting is a combination of discrimination against the higher percentage of young people who are visible and their sharper recognition of unfair treatment. Unlike the 1998 sample, more young men (41%) reported unfair treatment than young women (34%).

In their descriptions of the unfair treatment they received, young people showed more sophistication in their understanding of discrimination than in 1998, picking up on subtle differences in behaviour in those around them. Kira wrote:

*Not to any great degree, however I often feel as though people are unable to see past my sexuality to my true person. It may not have been unfair as such but I do believe that I have often been held to different standards than my heterosexual peers. (Kira, 17 years)*

Despite the fact that all states and territories of Australia have legislation that is designed to prevent discrimination in areas of public life, many young people continue to experience it. Lacey described institutional discrimination with her same sex relationship:

*I can't get a partner payment at Centrelink because of homophobia. (Lacey, 21 years)*

It was not uncommon for young people to describe work-based discrimination in which they were sacked, denied promotion or treated differently because of their sexuality. Lizette, Meghan and Morris gave typical examples:

*My girlfriend and I were both sacked from work when our boss found out we were gay. (Lizette, 21 years)*

*I used to work in an independent supermarket. My boss would blame me for gay people using the store even though it never hurt his business and I never knew the gay people who came in. (Meghan, 20 years)*

*I have been mistreated in the workplace due to being open about my sexuality. I have been passed over for special training although another reason is always used. (Morris, 20 years)*

It is not surprising that some of this treatment had an impact on the relationships of young people:

*For our one year anniversary, my g/f and I decided to go to a nice hotel for the night. When we went there to book the room there was an older couple behind the desk. When they realized we were staying together they automatically booked two single beds. When we said we'd prefer the double they both stopped and stared at us and laughed saying we'd be much more comfortable with two single beds. I then had to say again that we wanted a double room... It wasn't fair and [it was] humiliating. (Melody, 20 years)*

*Being misunderstood, unable to be public with my partner, the usual shit that goes with being gay. I think it's harder to maintain a relationship with someone of the same sex due to environmental pressure forced on us by people around us. (Milton, 20 years)*

Discriminatory practices also occurred at school and were particularly perpetrated by fellow students. Frequently it seems they went unchecked by school authorities:

*Guys at my school refuse to share dormitories with me on camps. (Kendall, 15 years)*

*I wasn't allowed to play rugby because all of the guys on the rugby team said they wouldn't play if I played so if I didn't budge ... then there wouldn't have been a school rugby team. (Kory, 16 years)*

Social connectedness and inclusion are vital pre-requisites for good mental health and a sense of well-being. It is therefore disappointing that these young people are being given such strong messages that they are unacceptable and that they do not belong in the broader community. These messages create feelings of alienation from the community that are continuously reinforced. We know that resilience in young people is dependant on connectedness and trust in other people, two things that are destroyed when young people are



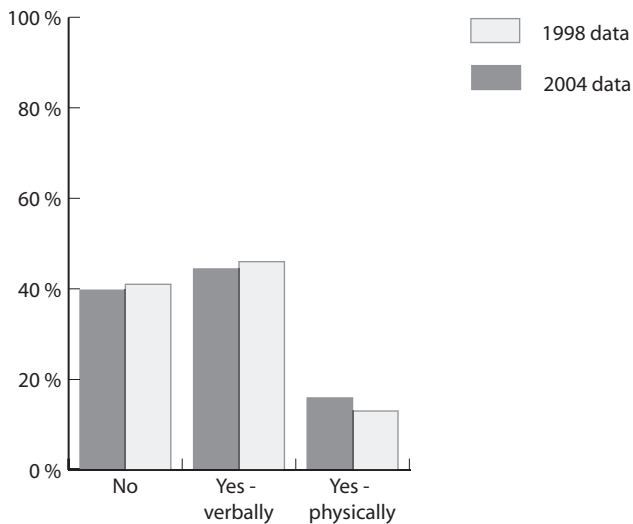
treated as outsiders. Even more powerful in conveying messages of societal rejection may be the verbal and physical abuse directed at this group.

### Verbal and physical abuse related to sexuality

*Can't remember what was specifically said but a girl and a boy chased us around on bikes and had metal palings in the botanical gardens, just 'cos I was holding hands with another girl...they eventually left us alone. Again, people were watching but no one helped...this seems to be typical! (Nancy, 21 years)*

As in 1998, we asked young people: 'Has anyone ever been abusive to you because of your sexuality?' Surprisingly, little change was observed in levels of reported abuse compared with 1998. In 2004, almost half (44%) reported having been verbally abused (compared with 46% in 1998), and 15% reported physical abuse (compared with 13% in 1998). More young men than young women reported verbal (46% males vs 43% females) and physical abuse (19% males vs 9% females).

**Figure 21. Percentages of young people experiencing abuse in 1998 (n = 749) and 2004 (n = 1720).**



### Verbal abuse

As well as gathering quantitative measures of verbal and physical abuse, we asked young people to tell us more about what was said or done, who did it and where it happened. We wanted to know more details about the verbal abuse that young people were experiencing.

As in 1998, the abuse ranged from simple name calling to insults, threats and rumour mongering. With the contexts of abuse in mind the qualitative descriptions were coded into categories.

Name calling and insults were the most common forms of verbal abuse. The names that young people reported hearing were explicit and designed to hurt. Insults had their roots in religious morality and stereotypes about HIV infection, pedophilia and illness. Many were delivered in anger and initially at least were upsetting to their targets, especially as the perpetrators could be family members and fellow students.

*"You fucking faggot" – from my brother. (Keith, 20 years)*

*Name calling such as carpet licker but I'm happy with who I am. (Mikala, 19 years)*

*I've been told it's a phase, that it's a sin, that I'll go to hell unless I stop this 'behaviour', that I'm doing it for attention, that I'm a man-hating dyke. (Maya, 19 years)*

*Just things like "Fag" and "Fudge Packer" accompanied with lewd gestures and offensive offers. (Oliver, 18 years)*

Other young people were abused with even more threatening language that was often gendered – AIDS and death for boys and rape for girls.

*"You should get AIDS, you people make me sick" etc. (Reid, 21 years)*

*Usual names such as Dyke, Butch bitch etc. and sometimes comments/ogling from guys in terms of needing a good root, need to be raped straight, some dick etc. (Rena, 21 years)*

Verbal abuse could also take the form of gossiping and rumour mongering which was especially damaging because it was designed to disrupt young people's social networks and left them isolated and unsupported, especially at school:

*Just people calling me names and saying I was gross and a freak and calling me gay or dyke. And people have drawn or wrote things on pieces of paper and left them in my locker. And there's things written on toilet walls and rumors about me. (Paula, 14 years)*

*Just stuff behind my back, both while I was there and in my absence. I heard second hand I bet he's only gay because he couldn't pull a chick. (Rick, 21 years)*

Verbal abuse alone could be very damaging. However, in some cases, verbal abuse escalated to physical abuse.

## Physical Abuse

Overall, 15% of young people reported being physically abused because of their sexuality with more young men (19%) than young women (10%) experiencing it. The abuse ranged from having clothes and possessions ruined, to severe bashings, rape and hospitalization. The type of abusers ranged from family members to fellow students and strangers.

Though it was relatively rare, Miriam and Owen were assaulted by their parents:

*My father and stepmother ... believed that I wouldn't be gay if they knocked it out of me, quite literally used to slam my head against the wall, gave me a headache, but I'm still gay. (Miriam, 19 years)*

*Got smashed by my Dad. (Owen, 15 years)*

The most common context for abuse was the school and in many cases the abuse was part of ongoing campaigns of harassment by other students. The toilets were a particularly dangerous place for these young people:

*School - Daily bashing, taste testing of the urinals or making sure people's shit was the right color. (Kevin, 17 years)*

*I was cornered in the school toilets and three guys took turns punching the shit out of me. (Tristan, 18 years)*

Abuse occurred in most places at school, including the corridors, stairways the playground and even in the classroom:

*Pushed down the stairs and into a wall at high school. (Tori, 20 years)*

*One guy threatened to kill me and i found that i had to stop going out in case the person was there! they were very abusive, and i know that the person would bash people up for no reason at all! this guy and his brother both sorta pushed me around and ruined yr 9 and beginning of yr 10 for me! (Tyron, 16 years)*

*In PE class the guys would try to give me the ball so they could tackle me. (Troy, 20 years)*

*Bullied all the way through school, mostly for being different but my sexuality was the biggest factor in why I was different. Being spat on, legs being constantly kicked from behind as you attempt to walk away ... thrown against walls and threatened. (Yolanda, 19 years)*

*My bed at boarding school was pissed on. I was subjected to other guys pretending to have sex with me. Broomsticks*

*inserted in my anus. (Hugh, 21 years)*

Of the young people who were abused, 46% experienced abuse in public places in the community:

*I kissed my girlfriend goodbye at the train station and a man walking past started screaming abuse at us. I left the train station and the man was outside. He grabbed me and shook me and screamed in my face about how sick I am. He almost knocked me down some stairs but I pushed him off and another man nearby helped me and I walked away. Nothing serious. (Trina, 21 years)*

*I was walking home ... a group of six 12 year olds were teasing me when they asked if I was gay. I stupidly said yes. They tripped me to the ground and then kicked me until a car stopped and they ran away. (Victor, 20 years)*

*My boyfriend and I were punched at [a local] beach. A group of about seven guys in their early 20s were around and two of them laid into me and my boy.... I was hospitalized and lucky not to have a broken jaw, only fractures. My boy has had back pains ever since. (Vance, 17 years)*

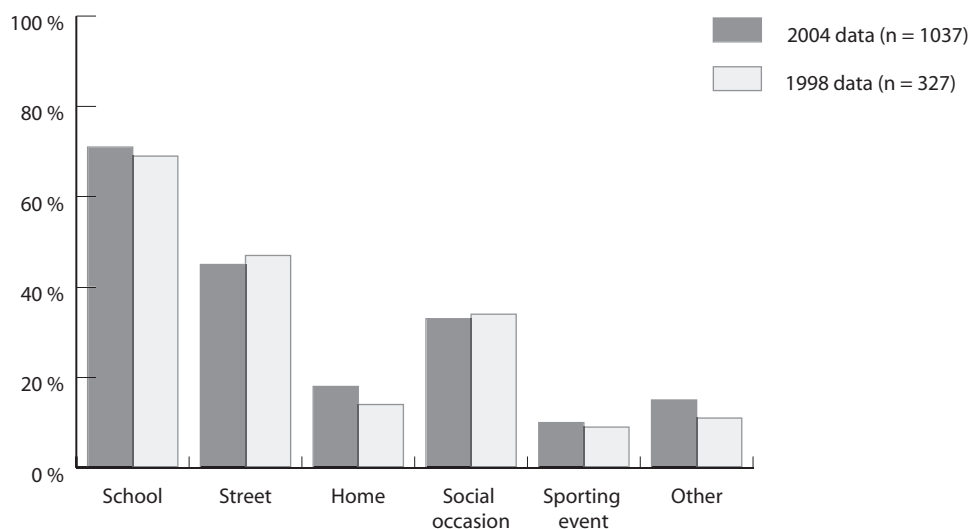
The descriptions of assaults perpetrated against young people are chilling and, as the next chapter on the impacts of homophobia shows, have long term serious impacts on their health and well-being. In addition they reinforce messages to SSA young people that they are unnatural, unhealthy, evil or freakish until they find it hard not to believe it themselves.

### Where did the abuse take place?

In 1998, we found that the most common place of abuse of young people was at school.

Figure 22 below tells us that in 2004 little has changed with 74% of young people who had suffered abuse, compared with 69% in 1998, reporting at least one incident at school. Young people in the 14-17 year age group were more likely to report abuse at school (89%). We suspect the immediacy of the abuse in their daily lives at school may be responsible for this. The street (47%), social occasions (34%) and the family home (18%) were also common contexts for abuse.

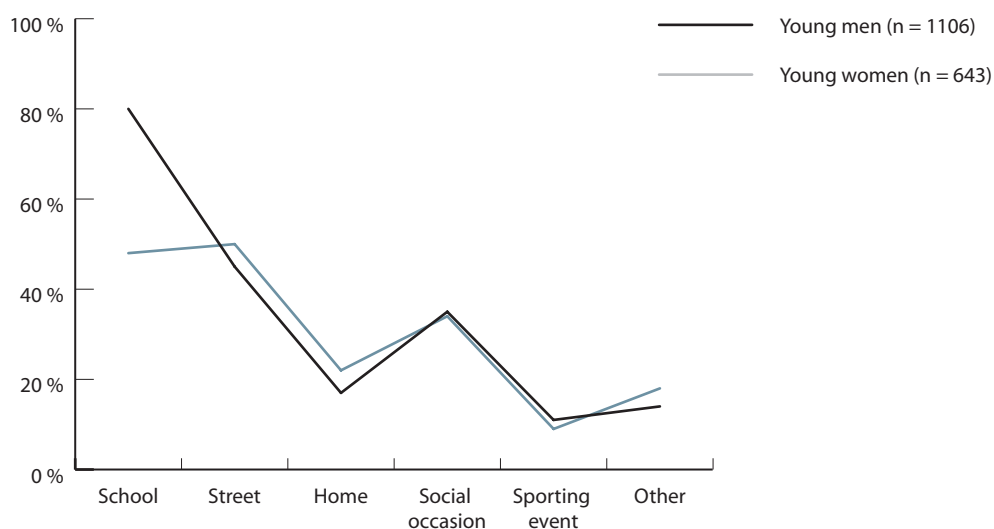
**Figure 22. Comparison of where the abuse occurred in 1998 and 2004.**



From Figure 23 overleaf we can see that young men were significantly more likely to experience abuse at school (80% males vs 40% females) while young women were more likely to experience abuse at home (22% females vs 17% males) and in the street (50% females vs 45% males). The explanation for the large gender difference at school is likely to be, in part, because homophobia is gendered and homophobia against boys is more likely to be expressed in overtly aggressive ways and more easily recognizable as abuse. Homophobia against girls and by girls is often expressed more subtly in whispers and exclusions which may not be

regarded as abuse. Notwithstanding these differences, the verbal and physical abuse that was directed at girls was qualitatively little different from that against boys.

**Figure 23. Comparison of where the abuse occurred by gender.**



## Schools

It is disappointing indeed to find that abusive incidents have not decreased at school. This is one place, in particular, where we traditionally believe young people have the right to feel safe and supported. It is especially concerning that the most dangerous place for these young people to be, in terms of verbal abuse and physical assault, is their school. In the last six years many resources have been invested in schools. They have been targeted with professional development and community development programs with the aim to promote acceptance of diverse gender and sexuality expression and reduce homophobia in the school culture. Many positive changes have been observed in these data and are described elsewhere in this report. They include young people's feelings of safety at school, perceived support from school staff and the information they receive at school. Notwithstanding the aforementioned change there is no evidence from these data that these interventions have made an impact on reducing homophobic abuse in the school environment. This surely must be the next step in tackling homophobia in the school system.

Wayne's and Zac's experiences are typical of some young people who sought redress at school for the injustices they believed they suffered. In both cases nothing was done:

*I was hit in the face and thrown down a flight of stairs and called a poofta and a queer weirdo. This was at high school in year 8. I didn't even associate myself as gay at the time. In both incidents I went to teachers in [name of state] for help and none was given. It was all given a blind eye. I felt hurt and upset that nothing was done. (Zac, 19 years)*

*In year 12 I was beaten by four guys in my maths class in front of my teacher who said nothing and did nothing to prevent it. I complained and I was taken out of the class and put into another which screwed up my timetable meaning I had to drop classes. Basically my school hid the problem rather than deal with it. (Wayne, 19 years)*

Lack of responsiveness to the problem led Dean to write:

*Although I've had many experiences, I'll just say this. "The fact that homophobia is 'illegal' in schools means SQUAT! The second the teacher's back is turned all hell breaks loose. Until awareness and education is spread, and attitudes change, youth suicide statistics will soar and homophobia will continue to linger. (Dean, 18 years)*

Despite the many examples of discriminatory and violent behaviour in school young people felt safer at school in 2004 and analysis of the data shows that feeling safe is linked with accessing supports and having

access to safe spaces. It is likely that changes in schools have occurred at a staffing level rather than a student level, reflected in a more supportive attitude and a willingness to help that was not evident in 1998. Unlike the 1998 study, in 2004 a number of young people gave examples of ways in which teachers helped them feel safe and supported and there were many instances of teachers working to address homophobia in their schools.

*I was brought up in western [state] in a regional town ... where i spent about 9 to 10 years of my life. Growing up there was hard and the local high school of 300+ students was a complete nightmare. In 2001 i moved to the south coast where i finally got confidence through studying SOCIETY AND CULTURE at High School with the most excellent Ms[teacher's name] (kudos). She opened my eyes and studying queer theory gave me a lot of confidence, to the point where i can now brush homophobic comments off, and even retort with confidence. (Kevin, 18 years)*

There were also a small number of occasions where whole school communities including students were supportive:

*I always knew in the back of my mind that i was gay, but it wasn't until I was eleven that i actually KNEW i was gay. For almost 5 years i tried to force myself into heterosexuality. Eventually i had become fed up, i was tired of trying to be someone i wasn't, so i came out...EVERYONE ... has been terrific, everybody knows now, even my entire school. one day i walked into class, and two guys i barely knew, started asking me questions, like "whats it like to be gay?", "how do you know?" or "How do you meet other people?" and to my shock, it was just the beginning, suddenly heaps of people were talking to me, being nice to me, and telling me they respected my courage to come out while still in school... although if i knew i would have had this reaction, i would have come out a lot sooner... (John, 16 years)*

These examples of support, however, were sporadic, often based on an individual teacher's sense of social justice or a pocket of supportive students rather than whole school policy and practice. Some schools are dealing with homophobia as a whole school and anecdotally we have heard stories of same sex attracted young people moving to them because they have heard they are safe. What appears to be missing in many cases is a whole school approach to stamping out homophobic violence in the school environment. Part of the reason for school reluctance may be a fear of parental backlash and understandably many schools are likely to err on the side of caution in addressing the problem.

It is likely that the only way to bring about sustained change in enough schools to make a real difference is through planned systemic change. While individual schools have more autonomy than ever before, there are some clearly-understood areas, such as the prohibiting of racial vilification, where all schools are legally required to take action. A clear and strongly-worded directive to schools from the Departments of Education and Training in each state/territory advising them that homophobic discrimination and abuse in schools is illegal and that they must honor their responsibility to the students by putting policies in place to address it, is likely to clarify the issue. It would also give staff in schools the backup that they need to challenge homophobia without fear of recrimination. Until strong leadership is provided to schools on this issue, it will remain a matter of choice at the individual school level. In this way laws will continue to be broken and young people will continue to experience the alarming long term health costs of homophobia.

However, it is not simply schools which must take action or which can be held entirely responsible for these unacceptable levels of abuse. Homophobia is permitted to persist and flourish within many institutions, including families. It surrounds young people in public spaces and limits their capacity to lead fulfilling lives. The reduction in homophobic abuse is a societal responsibility.

#### **HELEN, 19 years**

*I grew up in a country town and didn't know any gay people. I realised I was gay at 14, when I was in year 8. I kept it a complete secret for the remaining four years of high school. For most of this time I was clinically depressed. I tried to commit suicide once. In 2003 I moved to the city to start uni, and pretty much straight away I came out to everyone in*

*my life. All of my new friends were fine with it. Most of my high school friends had trouble dealing with it, probably because I'd spent four years lying to them. My parents are still having trouble dealing - I'm not allowed to tell my siblings, in case they get 'confused' about their own sexuality. I had my first girlfriend in October of this year. That was fantastic; so much better than relationships with boys! We broke up after a month and I was devastated, but that's life. Mostly I'm happy about being a dyke. I have experienced a fair bit of homophobia, but basically I'd a million times prefer the occasional nasty comment to going back into the closet. I'm still on medication for my depression and may always be, but that's okay. Maybe I'll come off it eventually, once I've had more time to sort my life out. The future - who knows? All I know is that it's going to be fantastic, and I can't wait to get there!*



## 7. IMPACT OF DISCRIMINATION AND ABUSE

### KATE, 17 years

*my parents are conformists and their comments (I'm not out to them) have hurt me emotionally and convinced me not to come out to them. In early adolescence I felt that my sexuality was wrong because they and other adults were so against homosexuality. There's times when I have hated myself so much that cutting or claiming that I would attempt suicide seemed like my only solutions, when I was about 14-15 years old. I think adolescents at this age need to be more widely supported. I think by the time they reach 16-17 they come to realise that there are other people out there who feel the same.*

### DAVID, 20 years

*when guys at school were abusing me and my friends about my sexuality, i considered harming myself. because it just got so draining sometimes, and i thought my friends would have an easier time at school if i wasnt there. also, when me and a mate were drunk...we got with each other. he is straight. the next day when he realised what happened he freaked out and made some homophobic comments. i got very hurt and cut myself and just wanted to die. after a while we made up and we are still very good friends.*

### Key findings

- Homophobic abuse has a profound impact on young people's well-being:
  - those who had suffered abuse felt less safe at school, home, on social occasions and at sport
  - those who had suffered abuse were more likely to self-harm, report a sexually transmissible infection (STI) and use a range of legal and illegal drugs
  - those who suffered abuse were more likely to have talked to someone and to have accessed a support organization;
- Young people felt safer at school than they did in 1998;
- Young people felt the most safe at home and the least safe at sporting events;
- Young people responded in many ways to homophobia, there were many negative health outcomes but many reported being stronger and more determined because of it.

Homophobia was defined in the Victorian Ministerial Advisory Committee publication on gay and lesbian health as 'a fear of alternate sexualities' (Leonard, 2002, p 4.). Homophobia is manifested in negative thoughts, attitudes and behaviours against people of alternate sexualities. Homophobia has been so clearly documented as a public health issue that we could argue that sexual orientation and gender identity are themselves social determinants of health (Hillier et al, 1998; Garafalo et al, 1998; Waldo et al, 1998; Warner et al, 2004). Being same sex attracted is a healthy and natural part of the development of many adolescents and yet young people who experience such feelings are regularly told that they are sick, unnatural, freakish,

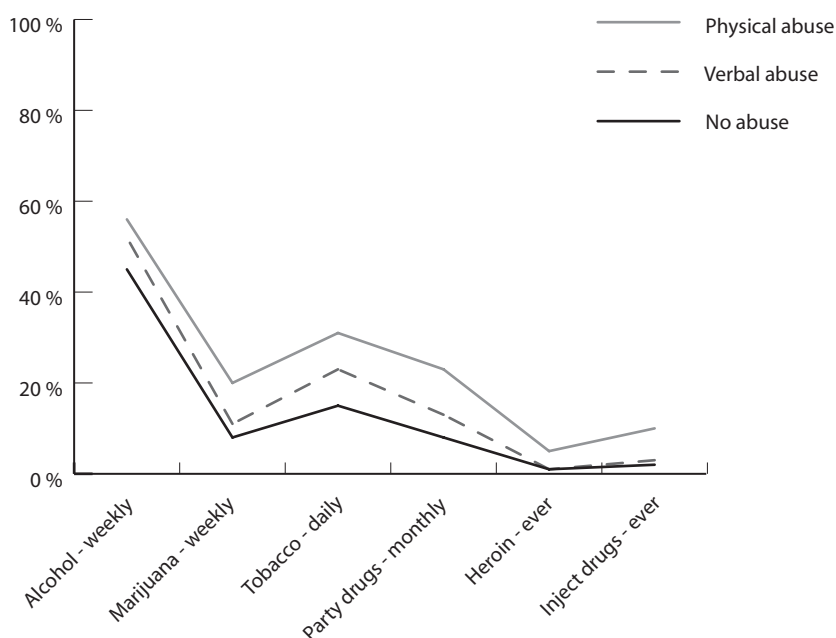
unacceptable and evil. It is unlikely our society would tolerate such a response to any other naturally occurring phenomena. It is also unsurprising that experiencing homophobia has many negative impacts on the physical and mental health of these young people. There is ample evidence to date that same sex attracted young people engage in more behaviour that is risky to health and experience more dramatic health deficits than their heterosexual peers.

In the section of the questionnaire (see Appendix) titled *How do people treat you?* young people were asked whether they had been treated unfairly because of their sexuality, whether anyone had been verbally or physically abusive because of their sexuality, if yes, what was said, what happened and where did it happen. Questions were added in 2004 about the effect of these experiences including self-harm, what young people did to feel safe and where they felt safe. A final item in this section asked about young people's feelings of safety in a range of places including school, on the street, at home, at social occasions and at a sporting event.

The findings of this study demonstrate that those same sex attracted young people who experience verbal and physical abuse fare worse than same sex attracted young people who do not. For example, in the chapter on drug use we reported that same sex attracted young people use a range of legal and illegal drugs at a higher rate than heterosexual youth. Within this group however, analysis shows that the risk of drug use is accentuated by experiences of verbal and/or physical abuse.

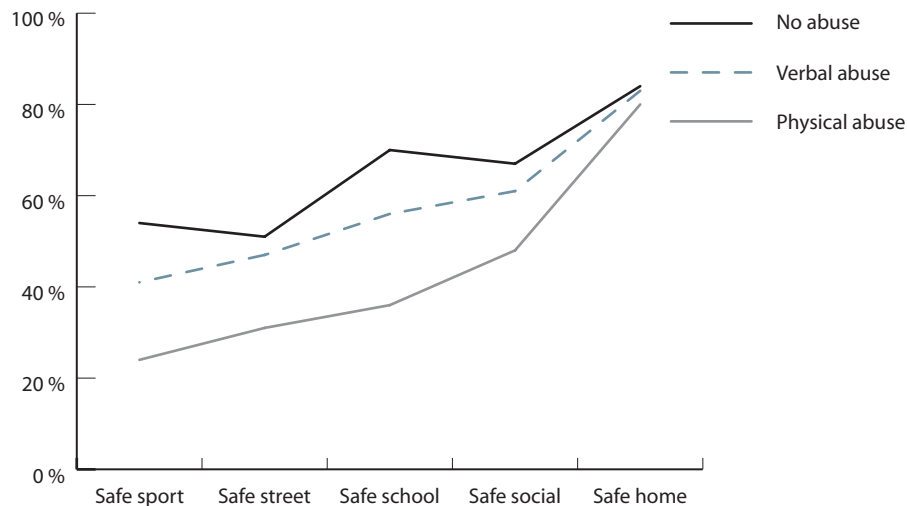
Young people who had suffered abuse were significantly more likely to drink alcohol at least weekly, to smoke tobacco daily, to use marijuana weekly, party drugs monthly and to have ever used heroin. They were also more likely to have ever injected drugs (see Fig. 24 below). All of these associations were highly significant, that is, beyond the  $P = .000$  level. As well, young people who had been physically abused were significantly more likely than those who had been verbally abused to use these drugs.

**Figure 24. Abuse status and its relationship to drug use (n = 1749).**



Homophobic abuse also impacted on young people's feelings of safety in a number of contexts. Young people who had been verbally abused were less likely than those who had not suffered abuse, to feel safe at school, on the street, at home, at social occasions and at sport (see Figure 25 below). Young people who had been physically abused were the least likely of all to feel safe in those places.

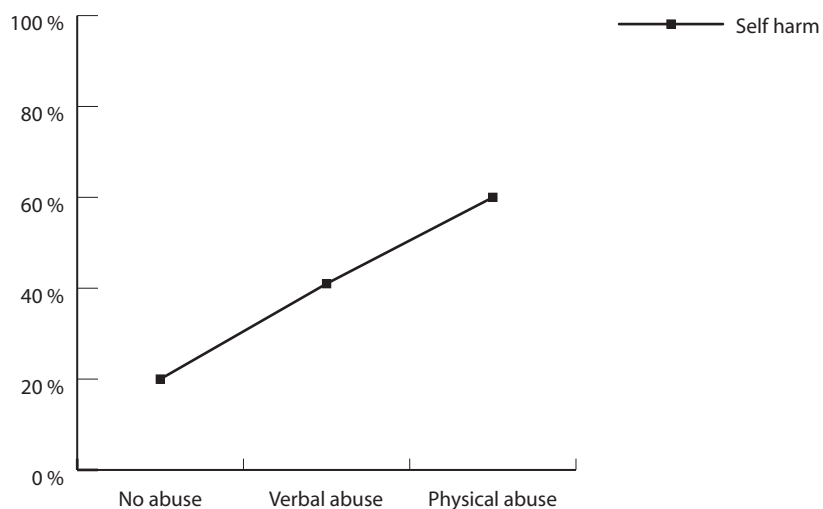


**Figure 25. Abuse status and its relationship to safety (n = 1749).**

In terms of age and feeling safe, the 14-17 year old group was less likely to feel safe than the 18-21 year old group on the street (42% vs 48%), at home (81% vs 86%), at social occasions (57% vs 65%).

Perhaps the most concerning impact of abuse on young people's health and well-being, beyond using drugs and feeling unsafe, was the higher rate of self-harm, especially suicide attempts and cutting (self-mutilation) of those who had been abused. Thirty five percent of young people reported hurting themselves because of their sexuality with the 14-17 year old group more likely to self-harm than the 18-21 year old group (41% vs 31%).

Figure 26 shows that young people who had been physically abused because of their sexuality were three times more likely to report self-harm than those who had not been abused, and were half again more likely to self-harm than those who had been verbally abused. We have included an analysis of young people's self-harm later in this chapter.

**Figure 26. Abuse status and its relationship to self harm (n = 1750).**

Finally, on a more positive note, homophobic abuse seemed to be a catalyst for young people seeking support. Those who had been abused were more likely to be in an intimate relationship ( $\chi^2 = 14.798$  (2)  $p < .001$ ), to have talked someone ( $\chi^2 = 33.311$  (2)  $p < .000$ ) and to have accessed a support group or organization ( $\chi^2 = 8.34$  (2)  $p < .015$ ). The higher use of supports by those young people who have been abused makes the availability of these services vital for the well-being of many same sex attracted young people.

## Young people's experiences of the impacts of abuse

In order to gain an in-depth understanding of the impacts of abuse on SSA young people, we asked them to explain the ways homophobic abuse had affected them (in positive and negative ways) and if they had thought about (or succeeded in) hurting themselves because of homophobia. We were interested in the ways young people manage abuse and discrimination, how it becomes part of their bodies, the creative ways that they resist its negative impacts and how they sometimes choose risky health behaviours to help them cope in the short term. We could see from young people's responses that there were indeed many ways of handling homophobia, within the group and over time for each individual. The categories we have chosen are ordered from negative to positive. In many cases there is overlap between them as young people are both damaged and strengthened by the same experiences. They do begin, however, to tease out the many ways that homophobia impacts on them and show that in most cases, young people embark on a journey when they begin to deal with abuse. It begins with shock and pain and negative health outcomes and then with reflection young people often gain important insight and skills that help them deal with the problem in more satisfactory ways. A summary of these responses follows.

### *Deliberate self harm and depression*

The most concerning impact of abuse came from those young people who told us that they had thought about committing suicide or harming themselves in other ways, such as cutting, because of homophobia. Previous research tells us that same sex attracted young people are more likely to commit or attempt suicide than their heterosexual peers and that this is more likely to happen before they tell anyone about their sexuality (Nicholas & Howard, 2001; Remafedi, 1994). Additionally, our research demonstrates, that suicide and self-harm occur more commonly in those SSA young people who are experiencing abuse.

We asked young people if there had been occasions when they had thought about (or succeeded in) harming themselves as a result of other people's homophobia and included the request to tell us more about their response. Of the 97% of young people who responded to this question, 35% had thought about or succeeded in harming themselves and this was related to having been abused (see Figure 26). In their descriptions, the most common forms of self-harm were cutting and suicide attempts. Forty-two percent of young women mentioned cutting (21% of young men). This involved slicing or jabbing the skin on their arms or legs until they bled. They used knives, razor blades and compasses and gave various reasons for their behaviour, including using it as a coping mechanism and dealing with pain. This range of behaviours was frequently part of a constellation of responses to being different and being abused for it.

*i used to cut my wrists ... physical pain is easier to deal with than emotional pain. (Cameron, 21 years)*

*When I was about 14 I used to cut myself on the arms and hands. At the time I didn't really know why. I knew I was attracted to girls and I knew I had to keep that a secret. I have since found out that the cutting was probably a coping mechanism for me, because I didn't know how to deal with discovering I was a lesbian, which at that time I thought was a negative thing and something I didn't want to be. I never cut myself seriously or attempted suicide or anything but I used to slash my arms up pretty bad. My scars remind me. I think they make me stronger too. I want the world to change so in 2010 there won't be some 14 year old girl sitting alone in her bedroom cutting up her arms with a compass because the world tells her that how she is wrong. (Dana, 19 years)*

*when so many people tell you how disgusting you are, you start to feel disgusting and at many times in my life, I know I have wanted to turn my back on the person looking back at me in the mirror. when it got particularly bad I used to scratch patterns in my face until it bled out of disgust for myself. (Aiden, 19 years)*

Sixty-four percent of young men who had harmed themselves mentioned thinking about or attempting suicide (23% of young women). Claudia, Craig, Brenda and Darcy are examples:

*I tried to kill myself because i was so badly teased at school for being a lesbian.. it never ended and i got severe depression and i saw no other way to be happy, i was in hospital for 2 months trying to control my depression and because doctors thought i would hurt myself again if they let me out and it also forced me to drop out of school. (Claudia, 16 years)*

*i thought about it so much, i came close just as many times. but for some reason i never bought myself to try. i did have a complete plan though, i took a week to plan the whole thing out. (Craig, 16 years)*

*YES i occasionally got tired physically and mentally and thought about ending this whole thing up and 'go somewhere else' who-knows-where. Thought of overdosing on sleeping pills so many times (cuz i dont want any pain like jumping off building or cutting myself would be painful). but somehow on those few seconds before i really took those.. there seemed to always be something that glimpsed my mind and I saw all the wonderful times i shared with my girlfriends.. saw them on those days where they were there for me and i was calmed for the second, so i just cried and cried and decided to walk on and walk on.. until i meet with my destined love and soul mate.. waiting and struggling for her.. (Brenda, 17 years)*

*When I was 13 I suffered from depression, cut myself, and attempted suicide by overdosing on hay fever pills. Over the last year I've resorted to getting pissed to 'forget it all' and had a brief stint on dope. Everything has made me very self-conscious and paranoid about what people think of me, and now the depressions come back and I have developed a pathetic eating disorder. I left home a while ago to get away from my family and try and sort myself out but now I'm back. However, I am also a much stronger person, have just started counselling at [name of youth service] and am on anti-depressants so things are feeling good at the moment. I no longer take shit from anyone and am a very outspoken person at school as a sort of shield against all the crap people try to deal me. (Darcy, 15 years)*

These stories indicate the very serious health ramifications of the lack of acceptance and support for young people. They illustrate the ways that community hatred can translate into self-hate which in turn can lead to self-harming behaviours for this group of young people.

The impact of homophobia was also implicated in a number of other both negative and positive outcomes as young people sought to manage and make meaning out of their experiences.

### *Leaving home*

A number of young people wrote about the emotional impact of not being accepted by their parents and in some cases needing to leave home. Elisa suffered long-lasting rejection by her mother, whereas the rejection for Ebony was temporary:

*I left home and moved in with my dad and i hardly talk to [Mum] since she moved away and i have no idea where she is, she wont tell me. i went to the house after our fight about a month later and it was empty, i always ask her where she is when she calls but she won't tell me. It is a hard thing to live without my mum and she has so much hatred towards me but it has made me stronger and made me value what family i do have that love me. (Elisa, 18 years)*

*My mum freaked out and threw me out during HSC because she is a Catholic. But do you know what? It only made me stronger and I got excellent marks to prove her wrong! She is now apologetic and has since become a much more liberal free thinking person. I'm proud of her. (Ebony, 21 years)*

It must be acknowledged, however, that for other, usually older, young people the experience of moving out of home was a positive one:

*Leaving home has been AMAZING! My parents, whilst very loving and supportive, were a bit smothering, and I needed to really get out n do things for myself, which I am, and have, and love has also helped me feel more comfortable expressing my sexuality. I was never shy about "coming out" but worried because I didn't really know who I was, and I have only really found out who I was in more depth since I've moved out – all in all, a positive experience. (Jana, 20 years)*

### *Disruption to school progress*

Given the problem of homophobic abuse in schools it was not surprising to find that many young people had a disrupted school career and that some young people like Carl dropped out of school or, in the case of Heath, were forced out:

*Left school because of verbal abuse, then had to leave home. (Carl, 20 years)*

*I left school after grade eleven when my principal told me fags weren't accepted at a Catholic institute, and finished grade twelve at TAFE. (Heath, 18 years)*

### *I get angry*

Anger was often part of the process of dealing with homophobia. How the anger was dealt with made quite a difference to the outcome. Sometimes young people turned it against themselves with further negative consequences. Some others, however, could direct it outwards to complain, to protect others or to make changes in the community:

*it has made me angry! - not being able to tell everyone about the "real" you, because of fear in one way or another... (Ira, 16 years)*

*The school boys ... made me feel cheap, dirty and sick. I was angry for a long time, and still am thinking about it. The thought of them makes me glad I'm a lesbian, because it makes one less girl they'll every touch. It makes me determined to protect other people from these kind of jerks. (Jill, 17 years)*

### *Feel stronger / more resilient*

In spite of the demonstrably negative impacts of homophobia documented by this study, it was heartening to find that, despite what they had been through, the largest group of young people said that they were feeling stronger as a result of homophobia. They were often regularly negotiating a number of impacts both negative and positive. Many of these stories are inspiring because they show the incredible ability of these young people to survive difficult times:

*Leaving home; -Heavy alcohol consumption habit; -Serious depression; -After having waded through all this shite, I do feel stronger as a person. (Kell, 21 years)*

*At school it was difficult and really affected my self esteem. Once I had the confidence to come out, I found any taunts to be quite liberating. They didn't hurt as much and made me more determined to show homophobes that I wouldn't let them hurt me. ...Once in a shopping centre, being called a fag by some kids whilst with my boyfriend. I remember my boyfriend just turning around, smiling and we pranced away. That was liberating. (Jordan, 19 years)*

### *Politically aware / want to help people*

A small number of young people, around 5%, wrote about their determination to help other people as a result of discrimination, whether through political action or more generally wanting to make a positive change:

*It made me stronger, taught me to deal with it and fight for what I believe in, no matter what. (Kayli, 17 years)*

*They have made me realise the ignorance there is of the subject amongst the current teen population and so this has lead me to begin forming the first queer society at [name] University. (Jon, 20 years)*

In relation to the above, we find that there was rarely one impact of discrimination and abuse on these young people. There was often a range of both negative and positive impacts, reflecting a dynamic negotiation through their experiences over time, where many young people talked about working from initially negative impacts to a more positive, strong position.

## How safe do you feel?

Feeling safe is an important ingredient in young people's well-being. We asked a range of questions in order to find out about young people's subjective perceptions of safety at school, on the street, at home, at social occasions and at sport. Young people were asked to rate how safe they felt at each venue, ranging from 'very safe' to 'very unsafe'.

**Figure 27. Feelings of safety at school, the street, home, social occasions and sport (n = 1749).**

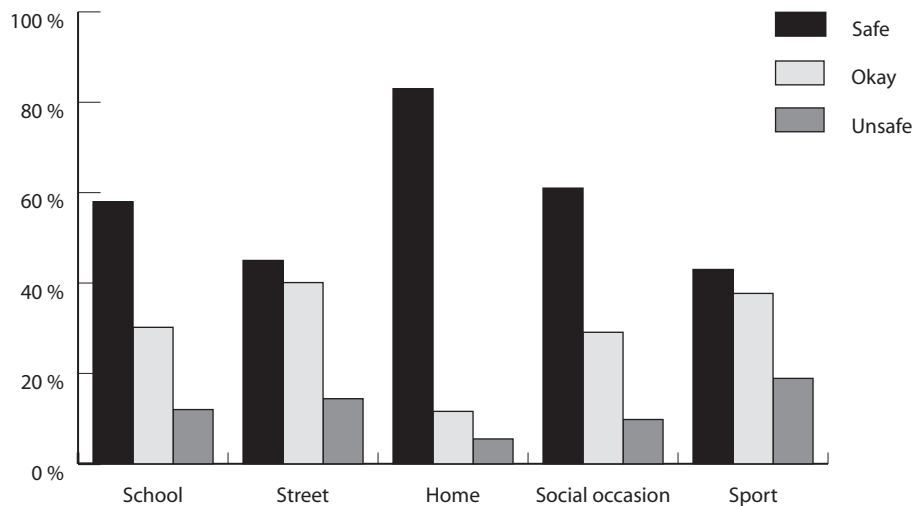
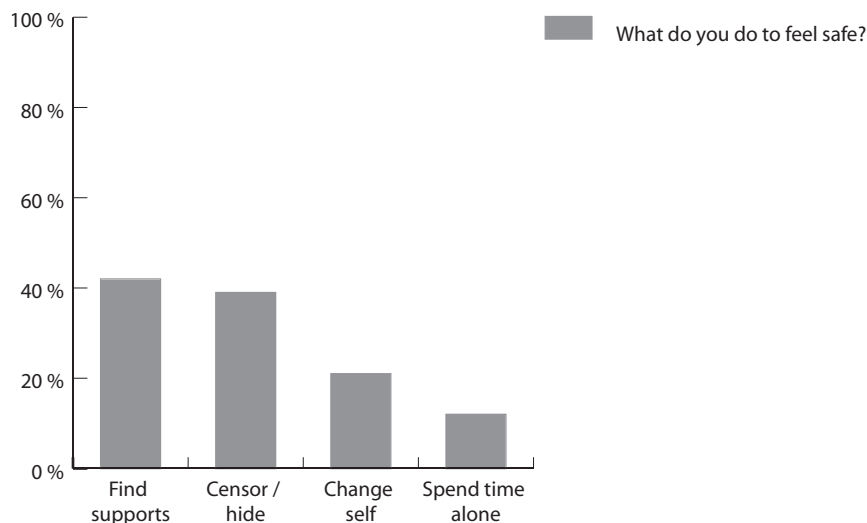


Figure 27 shows that young people felt least safe at sport (19%) and on the street (15%) and most safe at home (82%). Fifty eight percent felt safe at school. Given that school is one place where young people are expected by society to be safeguarded because they are in the care of adults, the finding that over 40% did not feel safe at school is of great concern.

## What do you do to feel safe?

We expanded this section in 2004 to help us understand the strategies that young people use to help themselves feel safe. This question was answered in detail by many young people – most of them had experienced feeling unsafe and many had developed strategies that they called upon in order to negotiate what they perceived as unsafe environments.

**Figure 28. Strategies young people use to feel safe (n = 469).**



We have grouped these strategies into several categories.

### *Surround myself with supports*

The largest group of young people (42%), talked about the importance of surrounding themselves with supportive people in order to feel safe. This fits in well with the statistical relationship mentioned earlier, between having been abused and finding support. Similarly, those young people who had been abused were more likely to speak to someone and to find groups or organizations to support them. Isiah and Krista are typical examples of this strategy:

*At one point last year, things got pretty bad. I mean, i was just teased so much. I couldn't take it, so i left home. it didn't last that long, but i had to go to one of my friends that could understand me, and accept me for me. Ever since then, i haven't exactly taken abuse from anyone. but that might of been cause i changed schools and into an environment that is a lot nicer towards homosexuals. (Isiah, 16 years)*

*Other than making me angry and frustrated with the idiocy of some people, they haven't really affected me all that much. I have a great, supportive network of friends who are there to remind me that not all people suck. I also realise that I am quite lucky in that respect. (Krista, 21 years)*

### *Vigilance, self-censorship and hiding*

Forty percent of young people wrote about being constantly aware of what was going on around them and adjusting their behaviours to match. Karl watched out for certain types of people:

*If there are butch beer drinking males up ahead, don't act like a big queen. Tone it down for a second until you pass them. It's a shame this is necessary because we have the right to be who we are as much as they do but it's a fact of society. You just have to watch out for yourself when you're in public places because not everyone is as accepting of you as your friends. (Karl, 21 years)*

And Kade and Jesse wrote about self-censoring their own affectionate behaviour in public spaces:

*If it's a place where I know that affection towards my boyfriend isn't appreciated then we don't do anything that might offend someone. Of course, it is ridiculous that we have to do that but that's the way it is in certain areas. (Kade, 19 years)*

*We're not as affectionate in public anymore, in fear of being abused. We used to hold hands a lot while we were out, but now refrain from doing so. (Jesse, 21 years)*

### *Changing myself*

Young people made changes in their mindset or even their bodies, to help them deal better with day to day danger. Sometimes even finding a distraction was helpful in counterbalancing constant feelings of danger. For Justin this process included being sure of himself and projecting this to others:

*... I am who i am and like i tell clients dont be afraid of who you are and people in this town know about me and who i am, and because of the way that I present myself to the community they dont try anything because they know that I will get back up and keep going. (Justin, 20 years)*

For Kai it meant training up his body to be stronger so he could feel in control of a situation:

*i've built myself up so i can calmly assess situations and i'm more than ready to protect myself if the time arose, though i'm not a violent person. (Kai, 18 years)*

Kalvin used strategies such as retreating into creativity to take his mind off his worries:

*i draw, i sing, i act and i dance and i design clothes. it helps me to escape into my own little world and after i'm out of it i'm calmer happier have a lot less worries and feel safe. (Kalvin, 15 years)*

Other young people re-oriented their ways of thinking towards regarding homophobia as a problem within the people who were discriminating against them. By establishing that the abuse did not point to a truth about themselves, they managed to lessen its impact and feel safer:

*I just blow things like that off now – People are always going to be like that. There will always be at least one person who is closed minded and ignorant to the fact people are different – and will do their best not to accept it. (Jena, 18 years)*

*I understand that these people are uneducated about queer people >> [possibly] generally because they have not come into contact with positive homosexual figures through their life... (Ivan, 20 years)*

### *Being alone and sorting myself out*

Around 12% of young people reported spending time alone thinking and working through their issues:

*I just let everything pass me by and when they stop and shun me I'm like well at least I'm one step closer to figuring myself out. (Kira, 15 years)*

*Try to get away by myself, think things through. Maybe talk to my female friend, she listens to me alot. But mainly get away by myself. (Julio, 16 years)*

*Generally avoid people like the plague. I don't make contact or talk to strangers. Keep to myself. Continually monitor what i am saying and doing. Avoid people who look suspect. (Juan, 21 years)*

In summary, young people had many creative strategies for feeling safe, however, there was often a high price to pay. Constantly self-censoring their own behaviour, hiding and spending a lot of time alone will not help young people feel good about themselves or improve their social networks. Such strategies are likely to lead to inner conflict and isolation. Accessing support, however, has been shown to make a positive difference to both feeling safe and developing networks and a positive sense of self. For this strategy to be successful, support services need to be available. Unfortunately, at the time of writing this report, many social support groups for these young people have been de-funded and others are at risk.

### **Is there anywhere that you feel safe?**

Knowing the importance of young people having places where they feel safe, we asked them about where they really felt safe. We coded the answers from 'there is nowhere that I feel safe' to 'i feel safe everywhere', with some variation in between.

There were around 10% of young people who said there was nowhere that they felt safe. Alana did not even feel safe at home:

*no. at home, i worry about housemates, because in the past i have had been told that a girl i shared with, would lock her door at night in case i tried to go into her room. out at clubs i worry because i have very open friends and the [name of city] gay scene is only very small. walking from the 'wickam' to the 'beat' for example, can make one quite vulnerable. (Alana, 19 years)*

Around 10% of young people did report feeling safe in their room at home. This did not mean that they felt safe in other areas of the house. Alex, for example felt safe in his room with the door locked:

*In my room with the door locked and music blaring, with my mobile turned off. (Alex, 19 years)*

Half of the young people specifically mentioned home in general as a place that they felt safe. Gloria wrote about supportive life in her share house:

*At home. I live with my best friend and my soul-mate, and soon another gay guy is moving in. Nothing is taboo here, we are all around the same age (20, 19, 19 & 18), All of us are gay (2 dykes and 2 fags), and we know if we need*



*something, or need to know about something, chances are we can get it off each other. This is the closest thing i have ever had to a real family, and its great! (Gloria, 19 years)*

Lara wrote about feeling safe at home with her mother:

*when i'm at home, my mums great, she was really excited for me when i came out. shes done heaps of charity work for the [name of AIDS organisation] since the early 80's and has stacks of gay (male and female) friends, so it has been really important to me to have her cause she is so supportive of me and she helped me come out and i think that without her i would be a lot less confident about myself. Also when i'm with my extended family and my friends. (Lara, 15 years)*

Other young people also had other spaces that they felt safe, such as clubs, friends' houses or, as Diana mentioned, school:

*at school cause i know nothing should happen there, very tolerant society, and in my room, cause no one invades my privacy there. (Diana, 14 years)*

Around 14% of young people talked about specific places that they felt safe. These included the car, the beach, the library, work and spaces in the city. Others wrote about larger geographical spaces. For Eric it was inner city Melbourne:

*i feel completely safe in the inner suburban areas surrounding melbourne. living in such inner suburban areas [although not specifically within an area designated as a 'queer-community'] and working and studying in the melbourne cbd i would very very rarely feel unsafe or threatened in these environments. (Eric, 20 years)*

And for Kirk it was the hills on the edge of his major city:

*I live in the hills near the main city of my state, and there are areas where i can go for long walks with my dog completely alone without any worry of being seen, watched, looked for, or bothered. (Kirk, 18 years)*

Around 40% of young people attached feeling safe to the proximity of supportive people who made a difference to whether multiple places felt safe. Robert wrote about the importance of people to him:

*not a place, it's more like when i'm with people i really love, and respect, i feel safe. (Robert, 17 years).*

Related to this, 10% of young people, for example, Rick and Renee, specifically mentioned social support groups, clubs, services, queer spaces at university and other GLBTI friendly areas:

*When i'm at my SSA Youth Group, every Wednesday, i always feel safe there. i feel that i just simply, couldn't survive without it. (Rick, 20 years)*

*Completely safe at home and gay run venues and functions. Gay run activities, i tend to stay within my community as it is always safer. (Renee, 17 years)*

Finally around one in 20 young people felt safe in many places, if not everywhere. Sylvia extended her notion of safety to feeling comfortable to be herself:

*Yes many places. Home, Uni (pretty much), friends houses, out to dinner etc. For me the feeling of being 'unsafe' is not only a physical one, like safety from harm, but where i feel comfortable to be exactly who i am. i think when you feel compelled to modify your behaviour, to 'fit in' better or to not bring attention to yourself, then that is not a 'safe' environment. (Sylvia, 19 years)*

In summary, young people were very clear about where they felt safe and, in many cases, the conditions that were necessary for them to feel safe. Most young people negotiated spaces which were not safe for them while at the same time having access to limited spaces that were safe. This process was clearly an important one for young people as only a minority felt safe nowhere or everywhere.

We have learned from the data presented in this chapter that there are many negative health impacts on



young people who endure homophobic environments. Same sex attracted young people who have been abused because of their sexuality are more likely to use a range of legal and illegal drugs, to feel unsafe in a range of environments and to contemplate self-harm through suicide attempts and/or cutting. They are also more likely to reach out to other people for support. Fortunately, over the last six years support services that embrace sexual diversity have increased, however, the funding in many cases is precarious. Until homophobia ceases to exist, these supports are likely to make the difference to many of these young people's safe journey through adolescence.

### **NIKKI, 17 years**

*I'm about as ordinary as they come. I'm fairly conservative, quiet and shy. Until I hit college I didn't have many friends, and I did whatever had to be done to remain unnoticed. Things are a bit different now - I'm exuberant and loud, and have friends of all genders and sexuality. If I hadn't come out when I did, I probably wouldn't have found this side of me. Throughout high school I was thinking about being gay, without ever really knowing what I was. I only ever voiced my inner thoughts to one of my now extremely close friends, because I already knew that she was bi, and would help me think through what was going on in my head. It can really help to have someone like that - I never would have survived without her. In year ten I was feeling trapped in a personality that wasn't mine, hiding behind the friends that, at the time, I thought were the only people who I would ever be able to trust (and even then, did not feel completely comfortable with), and doing whatever I thought was expected of me - anything to stay out of the spotlight, anything to keep my friends from abandoning me. Anything to be vaguely normal. I got fed up with being a shadow, and spontaneously asked out a boy. I liked him as a friend, but convinced myself my feelings ran deeper. We stayed together for a long time because we were basically friends - and because I was desperate to prove myself to my friends, my family, the general public. I never felt comfortable with him touching me, with touching him. I wasn't sexually attracted to him, although I enjoyed his company. I didn't want to have sex with him, and rarely let him touch me, although it feels like I delivered a thousand blow jobs out of guilt - I was afraid he'd leave me if I wasn't a good enough girlfriend. If I knew now what I knew then... but of course I didn't. And these experiences, which make me shudder remembering them, have helped me work out who I really am. While dating this boy, I told my friends that I thought I was bisexual. I had known for sometime that I was attracted to girls. It was something I couldn't deny to myself, however much I wanted to be "normal". The reactions I got were pretty good - no violence, no broken friendships. One of my closest friends of the time flatly refused to believe me, but promised she'd support me if it turned out to be true. We have since drifted apart - in fact, I've drifted from most of the friends I had at that time - it happens when you move from high school to college. Anyway, it turns out my friend was right - I wasn't bisexual. I'm gay. I dreamt about girls instead of my boyfriend, I used to start crying whenever I was with him, out of fear, frustration, confusion. I wished he was a girl. We broke up, of course. I was at college by now. I was changing schools half way through the year (reasons I won't go into), and a few weeks before the change I just got so fed up with everything that I did something ... I started to be myself. I stopped sitting quietly by myself, I stopped pretending to be straight. I was exuberantly gay, I was loud and funny and insane. I thought that it didn't matter anymore, because I was changing schools and no one would see me again. To my complete and utter shock, I realised that I could make more friends by being myself than I had ever made in my entire life. People who just wanted to be friends with me because of who I was, and not because they had to sit next to me in maths every friday. Since everyone knew I was gay, only people who were ok with it befriended me, so I had a lot of bisexual friends, and a lot of friends who were as far removed from homophobia as you could be without being gay yourself. When I changed schools I didn't go back into my shell. I soon had been adopted into a group of friends made up of the most awesome people I have ever known in my entire life.*

*Because of the awesome reception I had gotten, I'd convinced myself that homophobia was an extinct disease confined to the nether regions of backwards villages on islands no one had ever heard of. Then I met some other lesbians and had my little idyll shattered. Some of the stories I was told still make me cry when I think about them. The saddest thing of all is how these girls have been affected. They are all mostly good people, and some of them are excellent people, but not a single one of them lacks some form of self-harming behaviour. I went out with one girl*

*who cut herself almost religiously - her entire body is covered in scars, under her clothes where no-one but a lover could see them, and fresher, red lines that she adds to when she feels desperate. I know lesbians that, at 17, are already alcoholics, that steal to support drug problems, that will sleep with anyone that walked across their path, simply because they fear that the lesbian population of the world is below 100, and they have to get some love whenever and wherever they can.*

*My own girlfriend has been beaten up by girls who thought she "looked like a dyke". This was before she knew herself that she was gay. Thankfully, unlike a lot of lesbians I know, her bad experiences have only served to make her a stronger, more loving person who wants to help others. I'm glad we've found each other. It's hard enough to find other gay people, let alone ones who you feel strongly about and who share those feelings for you. I'm happier than I've ever been in my life. I would do anything - absolutely anything - for my girlfriend- to make her happy, to love her, to protect her. Knowing that she loves me, I don't need anyone else's blessings or support (although I have the support and love of my friends and mum). I'm completely happy with who I am. That is - a human, a girl, and a lesbian - in that order of importance.*

*For myself, I have no fears. The reason I try to fight homophobia and wish to educate people is because of what ignorance and hate has done to other people - to people I've met for a brief second, to my friends, to my lover. No one should suffer like they have. One incident of hate can have a deep effect on people- I've seen it. I sometimes wonder how many of the lesbians I know will survive their teenage years. Of those, I wonder how many will ever be truly happy?*



## 8. ABOUT YOUR DRUG USE

### BRITTNI, 15 years

*i first realised exactly what i was soon after i got to high school. i had my first girlfriend before the end of the year which was my best friend at the time and we were together for 17 months... we were closet girlfriends for most of that time. after that i went out with another girl in my class for 6 months. We were closet for most of it, even though our friends were pretty sure of what was going on. The bad times in my life coincide with when i was getting over heart break from my second girlfriend. they r filled with drugs and alcohol and cigarettes and stupidity. but now i have my life back on track. anyway... all to tell u about my life now is that i'm in love and happy... and in a stable relationship... school is going well... and home doesn't know yet i think i will keep it that way for a few more years if i can at least till i move out.*

### Key findings

- In 2004, the reported use of all drugs, including alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, party drugs and heroin was down on reported use in 1998;
- Percentages of young people who had injected drugs had dropped from 11% to 4% in 2004;
- Drug use remains substantially higher than for heterosexual youth, for example, over double the number of SSAY have injected drugs;
- As in 1998, young women were more likely to have used marijuana, tobacco and to have injected drugs than the young men;
- There remains a significant relationship between homophobic abuse and drug use;
- Drug use serves a number of important functions in these young people's lives.

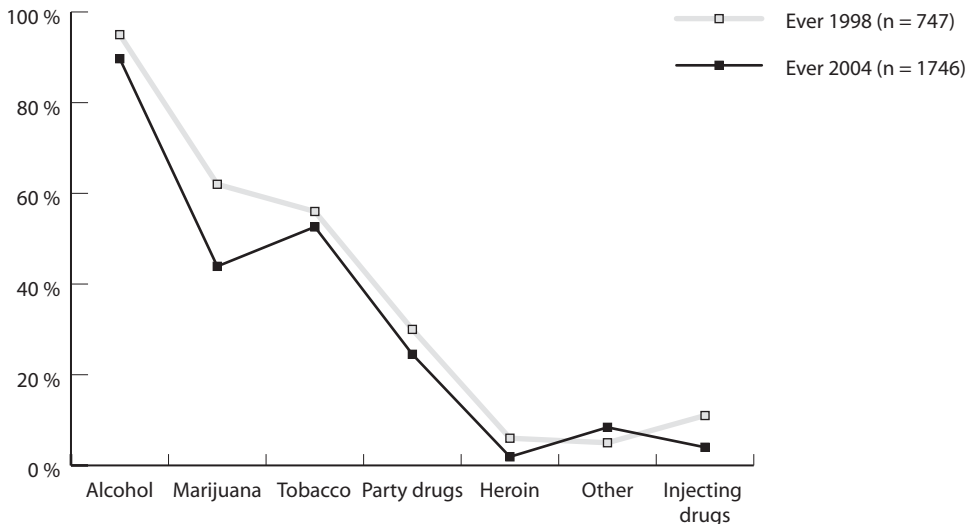
We have learned over the last decade of the serious impact of homophobia on young people's health in that those who suffer from homophobic abuse tend to be more likely to engage in risky health behaviours, including the use of a range of legal and illegal drugs (Hillier et al, 1998; Hillier et al, 2003; Murnane, 2003). In 1997 a national high school study of 3500 senior students found that SSA students were more likely than heterosexual students to inject drugs (Lindsay et al, 1997). In the 1998 *Writing Themselves In* study 11% of the young people had injected drugs compared with 2% of students in the Lindsay et al, study. The 1998 data also showed that more SSA than heterosexual young people were using a range of drugs including alcohol (95%), marijuana (63%), party drugs (30%), and heroin (6%).

In this chapter on drug use we will make comparisons between the present data and two other Australian studies. The first is the *Third National Study of Australian Secondary Students, HIV/AIDS and Sexual Health* (Smith et al, 2003) in which questions were asked about alcohol use and injecting drugs (for an accurate comparison with the high school study sample we have separated out a sub sample of 15–18 year

old students from the current study). The second comparison is with the original 1998 national study of SSA youth, *Writing Themselves In* (Hillier et al, 1998).

In the current study we asked young people about the same drugs as in 1998, including the frequency of their use, including, alcohol, cigarettes, marijuana, party drugs and heroin. We also asked about injecting drug use.

**Figure 29. Drug use comparison between 1998 and 2004.**



When we look simply at whether young people had ever used each of the drugs, the data shows that percentages have fallen (see Figure 29 above). This is a positive finding and may be related to the ameliorating effect of the many supports now available to SSAY and the increase in popular culture of the positive visibility of alternate sexualities, both of which reduce the isolating impacts of abuse. As well, the reduction in the percentages of young people using drugs could be due to the drugs' changing availability, the introduction of new drugs onto the market and changing fads in drug use. Related to these possibilities, 8% (n = 108) of the young people mentioned that they used other drugs besides those listed. Of those 108, 40% mentioned amphetamines, 13% prescription drugs and 9% LSD. Inhalents (1%), ecstasy (1%), ketamine (3%), amyl nitrate (6%), steroids (2%) and mushrooms (1%) were also mentioned in the 'other drugs' section.

**Figure 30. Young men and women's use of drugs.**

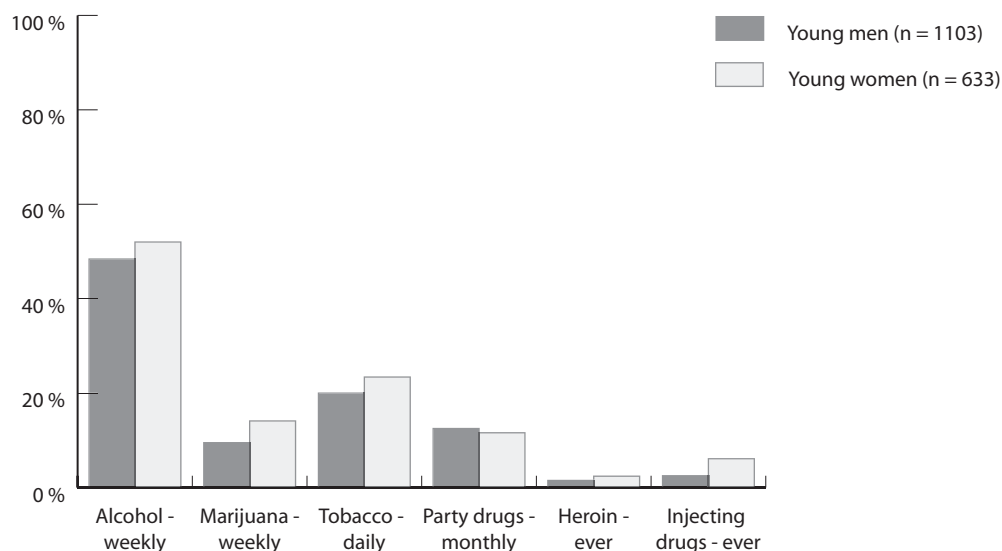


Figure 30 above reflects the significant differences in young men and women having used a number of drugs at a level that might be problematic including alcohol weekly, marijuana weekly, tobacco daily, heroin ever as well as ever injecting drugs. In general drug use, especially illicit drug use, is more likely to involve young men (see for example, Lindsay et al, 1997 and Smith et al, 2003). We have found however, that SSA young women do not follow the norms of other young women. They are frequently testing gender boundaries in a range of areas and drug use is one of them.

## **Alcohol**

Ninety percent of the young people indicated that they had drunk alcohol in 2004, compared with 95% in 1998. Of those, five percent drank daily, 51% weekly, 28% monthly and 16% a few times a year. Though the percentage of young people who had drunk alcohol in 2004 was down by 5%, drinking patterns between young people in the 1998 and 2004 studies were very similar.

When we compare the 15-18 year old student sub sample in this study with their Year 10 and 12 counterparts in the national secondary schools survey (Smith et al, 2003), the percentages of young people who had drunk alcohol were similar (88% in the high school study compared with 86% of young people in this study).

In terms of age, the 18-21 year olds were drinking more frequently than the 14-17 year olds, (55% compared with 32% drank weekly) and more of them had ever drunk alcohol (93% compared with 85%). Conversely, 37% of the 14-17 year olds were drinking less than monthly, compared with 20% of the 18-21 year olds.

Significantly more young women reported having drunk alcohol (92%) than young men (82%).

## **Marijuana**

The number of young people who had smoked marijuana had dropped from 63% in 1998 to 44% in 2004. Of the forty-four percent of the young people who had used marijuana, 10% used it daily (compared with 7% in 1998), 16% weekly, 23% monthly and 51% a few times a year.

More SSAY in the 18-21 age bracket (49%) had used marijuana than those in the 14-17 age bracket (38%) with increased numbers in every category of frequency from daily to once or twice a year.

As in 1998, more young women (53%) than young men (39%) had used marijuana. The difference was concentrated in those who smoked a few times a year (19% of the young men and 28% of the young women).

## **Cigarettes**

Fifty three percent of young people reported having smoked cigarettes compared with 56% in 1998. Of these, 40% smoked daily, 16% weekly, 16% monthly and 27% a few times a year.

While the numbers of young people who had ever smoked was consistent across the two age groups, 18-21 year olds were more likely to smoke daily (25%, compared to the 17%).

As with marijuana use, young women were more likely to smoke cigarettes than the young men (59% vs. 49%).

## **Party drugs**

Twenty-five percent of young people reported that they took party drugs compared with 30% in 1998. Of these, three percent used them daily, 19% used them weekly, 29% monthly and 50% a few times per year.

More young people in the 18-21 age range had used party drugs than the 14-17 year olds (32% vs. 15%).

As in 1998, there were no gender differences in the use of party drugs.

## Heroin

Two percent ( $n = 33$ ) of the young people reported having used heroin compared with six percent in the 1998 survey. Most of these young people ( $n = 24$ ) were using a few times a year. At least six of them, however, were using at least weekly, indicating an addiction to heroin.

There were no significant age or gender differences in heroin use.

## Injecting Drug Use

As in 1998, we asked young people if they had ever injected drugs. Four percent ( $n = 67$ ) indicated that they had injected drugs. This is a significant drop from 11% in the 1998 survey.

The numbers of 15-18 year old students who had injected drugs (2%) was double that of the Year 10 and 12 students (1%) in the national secondary school study (Smith et al, 2003).

There were no significant differences between the younger and older age groups in numbers who had injected drugs.

As in 1998, more young women (6%) had injected drugs than young men (3%).

## Contexts in which young people were using drugs

Young people explained their drug use in a number of places in the survey. Most commonly they mentioned drugs in the items about self-harm, the impacts of homophobia and as part of their stories at the end of the survey.

There are at least two explanations of SSAY drug use. The first is that drug use is a lifestyle choice and these young people take drugs while participating in some aspects of gay recreational culture. The second is that young people take drugs to escape the isolation and pain of homophobia as it manifests itself in negative self-talk and in abuse from others in the community. Young people's descriptions of their drug use indicate a number of different contexts which throw light on the functions which their drug use serves. Drug use was also often accompanied with other health risk behaviours such as bodily mutilation through cutting.

Some young people used drugs as a vehicle to suicide. Their stories indicated that in some cases life's challenges were too much to bear and death seemed a preferable option. Painkillers were one chosen route for Abigail, Astrid took hay fever tablets and Derrick was admitted to hospital after a drug overdose:

*Knowing what was facing me religion-wise and with my family I was pretty suicidal between the ages of about 16 and 19. Overdosed on painkillers once and used to cut a bit and engage in other very dangerous behaviours like driving VERY recklessly not so much because of people's homophobia but because of feeling totally trapped between a religion/family that didn't accept homosexuality and being who I was. (Abigail, 20 years)*

*I cut myself when I was 13 down my arms and legs and tried to overdose on hay fever pills. I cut myself down my wrist and arms and on my thighs. I just go home and curl up on my bed with a piece of metal wire in my hand, music in my ears and sometimes try to overdose on pills. The thoughts of killing myself are always on my mind but I know I don't want to die. It's like flirting with the escape route from my pain. (Astrid, 15 years)*

*I tried to commit suicide about four times and once succeeded in doing certain pills and had to have my stomach pumped. (Derrick, 18 years)*

Other young people used drugs for the immediate, temporary escape from the pain. Often this was triggered by a crisis in the young person's life to do with their sexuality. In Dehlia's case someone asked her if she was gay and Samantha said the abuse made her behave recklessly:

*I went on an all out bender once when I was asked if I was gay. Got drunk, took a whole heap of drugs, had sex with a guy (ewwwwww) and ended up feeling very very ill and sorry for myself. (Dehlia, 18 years)*

*[The abuse] made me feel hurt and angry, it can make me act more recklessly when it comes to alcohol. (Samantha, 17 years)*

Young people also took drugs in order to escape the longer term isolation and pain of homophobia. In these cases the drug use was consistent over a longer period of time and could be regarded as becoming part of a young person's lifestyle, though the catalyst was always homophobia. Peter started smoking weed, Aden became very inward looking and took drugs and Edwin used drugs to help him forget his difference:

*Through yr 12, being a difficult year to begin with, plus the continued harassment and verbal abuse, on a daily basis, gave me depression, and i started smoking weed, so i could get away from everything in my life, and the people i was associated with, it was a social thing. I still smoke today! (Peter, 18 years)*

*well it was difficult, i became very VERY introverted, and due to teasing and stuff i stopped seeing a lot of my friends, i started drugs, i had random sexual encounters, i started hating myself, im alone. (Aden, 18 years)*

*Going to a public school was when i learnt about homophobia. The moment i walked into the school i could see that i was so different in my persona and character from all the other guys. I had never seen this in the previous school, as its numbers were so small. From that point onwards i started taking prescription drugs more frequently to try block out my differences in my head, and it worked for a while till i started lacking in my health and mental awareness which was when i stopped just a few months ago. (Edwin, 16 years)*

For many young people drugs were a temporary crutch while they were dealing with the painful effects of homophobic abuse. For them, the triumph over the struggle with homophobia and for self acceptance came with a reduction in drug use and a more positive frame of mind. For young people, such as Sean, drug use clearly helped them escape the pain in their lives and when the pain subsided the drug use decreased:

*Feelings for the same sex started young, perhaps at around the age of 10. Self confidence diminished, and self hatred kicked in. Throughout first two years of high school i was pretty depressed and angry. Suicidal, a cutter, using many drugs, and on and off the streets. Family relationships had distanced and trust was gone. At 14 things became progressively better socially with peers, and i was socially accepted as the creative unique person. Hopes for the future? There is a little hope left. I hope to achieve great things for myself, surround myself with genuine people who show their true goodness from the inside. I've had enough of immature fools who revolve around the idea that a hardcore life is fulfilling. The hope is still there. i just have to find it. (Sean, 16 years)*

Frank had to leave his family and small country town when he was outed. His travels interstate and heavy drug use ceased when he became involved in an organization that was supportive of him and his sexuality. He is now proud of who he is and drug free:

*I guess I first knew when I was about 13, when I didnt quite find the thrill in girls that I did in guys. I didnt quite know what name to put to this but I knew that somehow I was different. I was outed in the town by a close friend of the family and then the rest of the town knew. I was in a small relationship with a guy who was about 2 years older than me and then when people started knowing about me he told me to piss off. My mother was not supportive and told me to leave so I did and went to [name of city] and then moved to [name of city]. I went heavy into drugs when i was in [name of city] and then went into youth work at TAFE etc. I then when I was about 18 moved back to [name of city] and worked with the [name of youth organisation]. I dont know what else to say here apart from the fact that I am happy with who I am and the fact that I have encountered alot in my youth just makes me better at what I do. My outlook on life is simple. I AM ME, IF YOU DONT LIKE THAT FINE THEN PISS OFF. (Frank, 20 years)*

Despite the triumphal stories of these young people overcoming adversity and leaving drugs behind, there is also evidence that many young people continue their drug using practices into later life. This is especially the case for young women, whose rates of marijuana, tobacco and injecting drug use were significantly higher than the young men in this study. Evidence from the Women's Health Australia study with 9000 women aged 22-27 years has shown that non-heterosexual young women are using a range of legal and



illegal drugs at a far higher rate than their heterosexual peers (Hillier et al, 2003). The Australian Drug Foundation's study of alcohol and other drug use among gays and lesbians found higher rates than in heterosexuals (Murnane et al, 2000). These data indicate the importance of intervening early to reduce homophobia and to prevent the long-term over use of a range of drugs.

The decrease in the use of many drugs between 1998 and 2004 is a very positive trend. The link between abuse and drug use remains significant and given that verbal and physical abuse rates have not dropped since 1998, we must look for other ameliorating factors in young people's lives. From young people's stories it is clear that the provision of services and supports have made a difference in their lives and in many cases are the catalysts for the turn around in young people's feelings about themselves and their consequent lower drug use.

### **SARINA, 18 years**

*I've always been a freak! Girls didn't like me because I was such a "boy". I liked being with the boys but they pushed me away because I was a girl... Confused??? I was, and lonely. I hated High School because I didn't date, and wasn't interested in the opposite sex. Pretty much I was picked as a lesbian from the start, of course I didn't want to be labeled like that so I tried... And tried... And then tried again.*

*I found my place when I found my drugs, people expect less of druggies and the pain of being "normal" got dulled away. I didn't like any of the guys that I was sexually involved with and usually felt abused afterwards.*

*Soon all the guys I knew were so off their face that they weren't interested in sex either so I kept to myself and got more and more involved with these druggies. I hated myself more every day for being such a waste, I couldn't function as a person and definitely was going anywhere. It was through that hate that I found strength to move on and do what I wanted instead of hiding it.*

*I met a guy who helped me get off drugs and I started to feel better about myself, unfortunately he lead me to many other problems. He was Catholic as was my father and began involving me in Christian groups. I got involved because I was lonely and the only other people I knew were on drugs... And I tried to deny myself of who I was again, only through a different channel. Until my best friend had trouble with her husband, she had wanted to leave him for years but couldn't because they were Catholic. She could not take living with him anymore. I loved her and wanted to help so I stayed with her.*

*One day she told me that something had been torturing her for some time, and I could not believe what she told me... She told me about her attractions to females and in particular me! We sat and cried for hours from our pain of previous suppression, relief and fear of this new acceptance and challenge. We became involved in a sexual relationship and at the time were in a small country town. It didn't take long for rumors to go around town...*

*We are now living in Adelaide and have been together for nearly 2 years. It is hard to meet people as a couple because of our fear of over-reactions, but we hope to soon.*





## 9. DISCLOSURE AND SUPPORT

### APRIL, 16 years

*female friends were most supportive. and my guy friend likes the fact that we can "check out girls together". But my female friends were just great about the whole thing. they totally understand and feel no different towards me, in fact, they respect me and admire me even more for i was brave enough to say it and was honest and proud about it.*

### JOEL, 20 years

*I was 15 when I told my mum. She wasn't surprised or upset, she said OK it's about time you told me, give me the goss, do you have a b/f...LOL, not what I was expecting that's for sure....*

#### Key findings

- More young people in 2004 had disclosed their same sex attractions to at least one person than in 1998 (95% vs 82%);
- Support from all confidantes was higher in 2004 than it was in 1998;
- Young people who had support felt significantly better about their sexuality;
- There was an increase in support from teachers and student welfare co-ordinators in 2004;
- Almost three quarters of young people had talked to someone on the internet about their sexuality;
- Friends continued to be the most popular choices as confidantes for young people disclosing their sexual feelings.

Social support networks are integral to young people's health. In order to find out more information about young people's support networks and how they went about disclosing their sexuality and seeking support, we asked: 'Have you talked to anyone about your feelings of being attracted to people of your own sex?'. We provided a list for those who had told someone to indicate whom they had spoken to and who had given them support. For clarity, we divided the list into three groups: professionals, family members and friends. A final item asked young people to list groups and organisations that support SSAY that they had had contact with.

In light of the increased services and support available to SSAY in the last six years and the increased positive visibility of SSAY issues in the media, we expected that more young people would have spoken to someone about their sexual feelings. Our expectations were confirmed with 95% (n = 1641) of young people having spoken to someone about their sexuality in 2004 compared with 82% in 1998. This is an encouraging finding because it means that young people were taking advantage of new opportunities and maximising their chances of gaining some support. From Figure 31 below we can see that the pattern of disclosure is

similar to 1998, with friends being the most likely confidantes and mothers the most likely to be told out of family members. In 2004, we found higher percentages of young people disclosing across every support possibility, with the exception of counselors.

**Figure 31. Who have you talked to about your sexuality? 1998 and 2004.**



In terms of those who had told no one, in 1998 we found that these young people were often internally conflicted and fearful about someone finding out. In 2004 those who had told no one were a small group (5%, n = 94) and they were less likely to write about their experiences than the rest. However, we can say that this group tended to be younger, less sure about their sexuality and less likely to feel good or great about their sexual feelings than those who had told someone (35% vs 78%). Brook and George's stories are typical:

*I've always known I was sexually attracted to the same sex, but never told anyone. I learnt very quickly (especially at school) that homosexuality isn't tolerated in our society. I feel like there's a part of me that I can't express and hate my life. I can't imagine that ever changing. (Brook, 14 years)*

*i noticed it probably in 3rd grade when i suddenly was watching some kid i didnt know at lunch. then every day i would watch him. never talked to him though. then after that i noticed id watch shows and stuff with other boys in it and wonder what they looked like. i dunno if im curious, weird or normal. (George, 15 years)*

It was also clear from young people's stories that despite the cultural changes, young people were very careful about their disclosure targets. As Kirk admitted:

*I was very selective in who i spoke to. I was virtually sure of their reaction. (Kirk, 18 years)*

There was a strong and significant relationship between having support and how young people felt about their sexuality, with 79% of those who had support feeling good or great about their sexual feelings compared with 54% of those with no support.

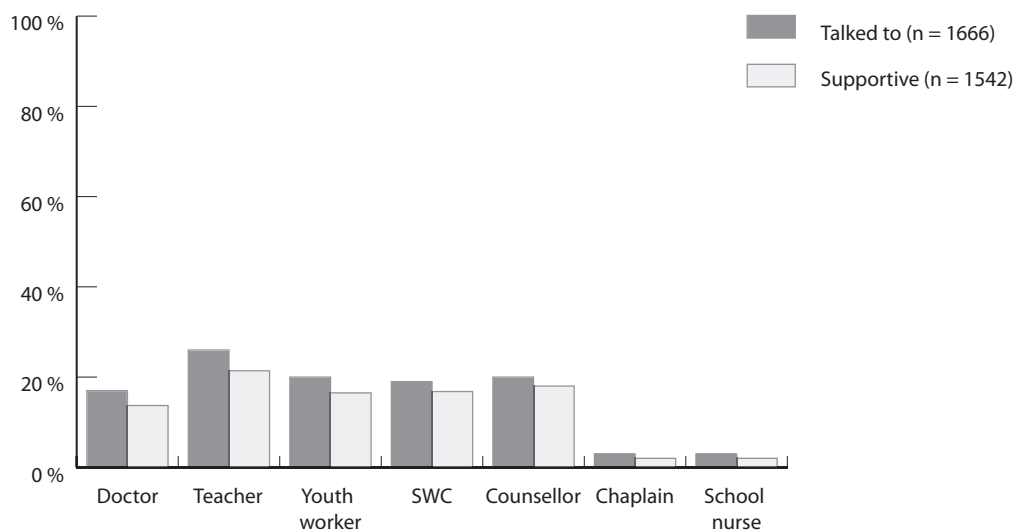
### Disclosure to, and support from, professionals

*...i came out to a teacher I was friends with whose first reaction was "How wonderful!" She told me about some books and set me up with the school counselor ... (Ruth, 21 years)*

Of the three groups young people disclosed to - professionals, family and friends - professionals continued to be the group that young people were least likely to speak to and there are reasons for this. Young people have to go out of their way to speak to a professional, whereas family and friends are part of their informal daily

pattern of interaction and therefore easier to access. A successful disclosure to family and friends, risky though it may be, will also provide future support and understanding on a day to day basis from someone close. In 2004 more young people disclosed to teachers (26%), youth workers (20%), student welfare co-ordinators (SWC) (7%), and doctors (17%). In comparison with the 1998 study, the greatest increase in the types of professional targeted by young people were teachers and SWCs or school-based welfare staff. We suspect this may in part be attributed to some of the intensive professional development work that has been carried out in schools via the *Federal Talking Sexual Health* curriculum and a number of other state based initiatives. In addition, states and territories have responded to the greater visibility of the issue by clarifying policy positions and making it less difficult for individuals to offer support at the school level. A number of Catholic and independent schools have also increased their visible support for SSAY over this time.

**Figure 32. Percentage of young people who disclosed to, and were supported by, professionals.**



In 2004, young people were also more likely to be supported by the professionals they spoke to (average support from professionals in 1998 was around 65%, and 75% in 2004). Counsellors and SWCs were most likely to be supportive (80%) followed by teachers (77%), youth workers (77%), doctors (75%) school nurses (73%) and chaplains (57%). (We have written about young people and religion separately in Chapter 11).

In relation to professional support we also asked young people to 'List any support groups or any other organisations that support SSAY that you have had contact with'. Fifty-five percent (n = 973) of young people listed one or more groups or organizations. The following is not an exhaustive list because many young people mentioned groups without including the name. Groups named included social support groups such as YAK at the Action Centre, Pride & Diversity, Generation Q, EGG and Minus 18, a Parents and Friends of Gays and Lesbians (PFLAG) initiative – all in Melbourne. The Gold Coast Matrix, Open Doors in Brisbane, Twenty10 in Sydney, the Freedom Centre in Perth, Working It Out in Tasmania, Inside Out, Second Story and BFriend in Adelaide. University queer organisations such as CLAG Collective in Canberra and Armidale Queer Association (AQUA), as well as online resources such as Mogenic.com, GLYSSN (gay and lesbian youth social support network) and LOTL (Lesbians on the Loose) were also mentioned. A small number of young people told us that they had set up SSAY groups themselves. Young people also wrote about the importance of groups and organisations in their positive growth and development. Joelle is one example:

*I go to [name youth group]. That's where all of my friends go, and I can be free to be myself. (Joelle, 19 years)*

That these young people were accessing supports and finding them life-changing, and in some cases life-

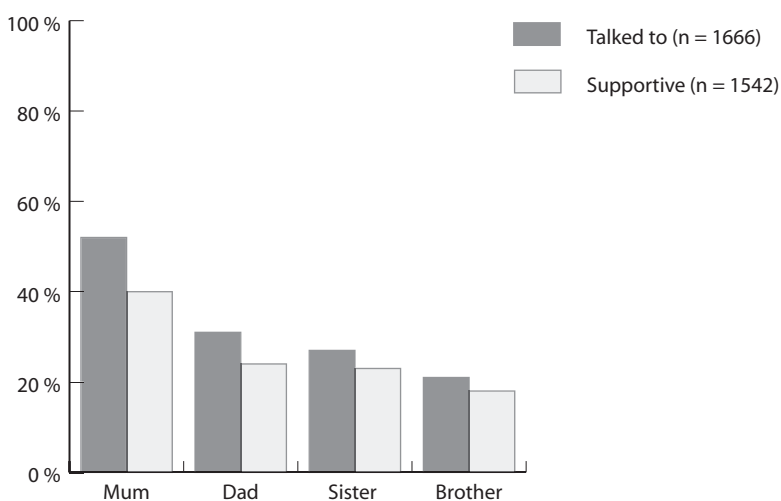
saving, is important, especially given the finding that young people who have been abused are more likely to access supports. The number and range of the groups and organizations is impressive. It reflects a degree of goodwill on the part of the community and a change in policy for some organizations. Many young people do not have access to a group in their local area and this finding indicates the importance of universal secure provision of these groups which could perhaps be part of the routine youth services in local councils.

### Disclosure to, and support from, family

*coming out to my friends and family about my sexuality has made me a nicer person, i no longer have a frustration inside me, the day i told my family it was like a weight had been lifted off my shoulder. (Guy, 20 years)*

Young people were more likely to disclose to family members than professionals. In 2004 they were also more likely to disclose to family members than in 1998.

**Figure 33. Percentage of young people who disclosed to, and were supported by, family.**



Unlike the 1998 study where sisters and mothers were told more often than fathers and brothers, in 2004, mothers (52%) and fathers (31%) were more often told than sisters (27%) and brothers (21%). A supportive response from all family members was more likely than in 1998, with mothers (73%) fathers (71%), sisters (80%) and brothers (80%) all showing high levels of support (see Fig. 33 above). This finding, however, cannot be generalized to all families. Young people are very careful about telling their parents because they have so much to lose. Parents will only be told if their child believes there is a good chance that they will be supportive. As a result we can assume that parents who are told are likely to be less homophobic than those who are not.

Support is also likely to be given slowly, in stages. Many parents, for example, Tony's mother, were shocked and unsupportive to begin with and then the relationship improved as they went through a process of change:

*Everyone except my mum, she is still coming to terms with the shock. She was totally blind sided by it, but like i said, she is dealing and she is a lot better now than what she was a few months ago. Telling these people has made us - i think - a lot closer, as it has made me more confident and open with them. (Tony, 21 years)*

And for some family members the path to acceptance was a particularly long one:

*Well, I think my parents were trying to be supportive... Uh, my sister's known longer than many of the others. Ha! It was only last week she came up to me and said: "Hey, I've finally accepted it!" Only took three years. It was a joyous moment for all. (Ross, 14 years)*

As well, it was not uncommon for us to read the stories of young people whose parents were so upset by the disclosure that they withdrew support from their children, which in some cases led to them leaving home. Paul and Jess were typical:

*My mom said that i was a disappointment to the family and that i was no longer her son. (Paul, 18 years)*

*I got smashed by my Dad. I was forced to sleep on the streets. (Jess, 15 years)*

In some cases even grandparents turned their backs. Oscar was clearly devastated at his grandparents' rejection of him:

*I decided to be honest with my grandfather about being gay. At first he seemed fine but on my return to his house one week later I was told never to come to his house again and that I was no longer welcome to make any contact with him or my grandmother. (Oscar, 16 years)*

Unfortunately, not telling could also have negative impacts on relationships with the family:

*I have a very withdrawn relationship with my parents. I'm so secretive of my sexuality that i've become secretive of everything. We barely even speak to each other anymore, and I'll be moving out as soon as I'm able. (Adam, 18 years)*

In many cases, these critical situations improved after a time. However, the impact it had on young people in terms of negative physical and mental health outcomes could be severe if appropriate support was not available when they needed it. What was often inspirational about young people's stories was the way that seemingly impossible situations could be turned around. As Karen wrote, after tough beginnings, her mother is now her best friend:

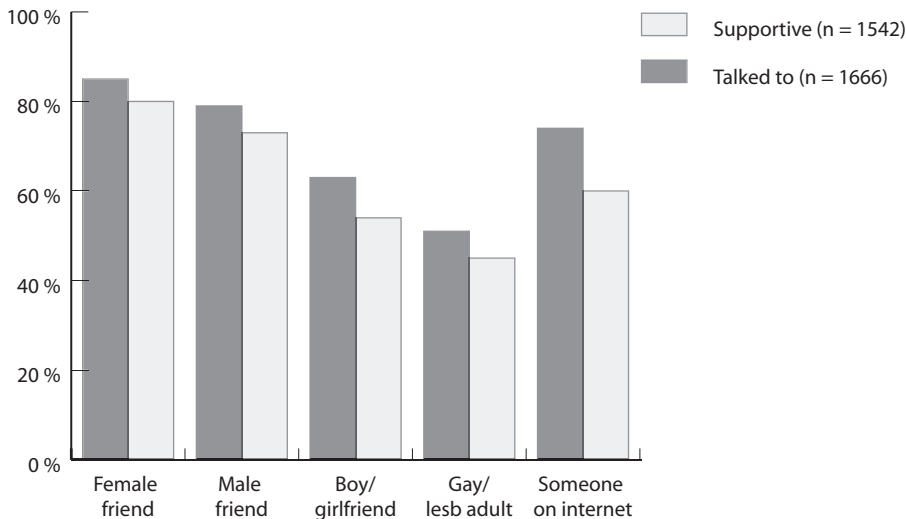
*I was out of home at fifteen. Have the best relationship with my parents that anyone could possibly wish for. My mother is my best friend. (Karen, 20 years)*

Finally, having their child disclose to them was often a life changing experience for parents. In many cases it politicized them and gave them new understandings about sexuality. Abbey was lucky enough to have parents who were prepared to question their own values because of her:

*My parents have been the most supportive. They have educated themselves about lesbians and helped me too. They have really stood by me even though it has meant changing their politics (they were always Liberal voters but now get so angry with what John Howard says, does and doesn't do, about GLBTI's that they won't vote Lib again), and also they have protested to the church they used to belong to, when my mum heard the Pope called gay people "depraved" she just went off about how these people call themselves "christians" etc. Its been hard for them but they know I am the same as I have always been, I just don't have a huge secret from them anymore. It has made our relationship heaps more honest and so heaps better. (Abbey, 20 years)*

## **Disclosure to, and support from, friends and peers**

Young people were most likely to talk to friends and peers (see Fig. 34) about their sexual feelings with 85% having spoken with a female friend, 79% a male friend and 63% a boy/girlfriend. As well, 74% had spoken to someone on the internet and 51% a gay or lesbian adult.

**Figure 34. Percentage of young people who disclosed to, and were supported by, friends and peers.**

Support from friends was generally high (see Fig. 34). The 79% support from a boy/girlfriend often included opposite sex partners. In some cases it meant the end of a sexual relationship with that person and change to a close friendship. Jane's story is an example of this:

*I told a friend of mine that I might be gay and then freaked out and spent the next 5 months trying to convince myself that I was straight to the point that I went out with a couple of guys, one for a few months which was a record for me. It went as far as having sex which convinced me that guys don't turn me on at all... Eventually this resulted in me realizing that that I wasn't ever going to be interested in men sexually. I then told this guy that I was interested in women. I was really nervous about this but he took it really well. We work together and are still friends, although he's the only person at work that knows I'm gay. (Jane, 21 years)*

Surprisingly there was little evidence of acrimony from heterosexual partners although one boyfriend, a Christian, was so traumatized by his girlfriend's disclosure that he refused to accept that she was attracted to women because he felt he 'would [should] have known'.

Young people described many happy examples of the support afforded by their friends. Jeff was one of them:

*All people have been supportive, a lot of my friends in fact surprising me at times by being so supportive it was really not even an issue to be considered to them. They don't think of me as a "gay person" I'm just a "person" like them and whether I'm gay or have blue eyes really doesn't mean anything at all, it's just one part of a whole lot of me! (Jeff, 18 years)*

There were also many examples of young people turning to the internet for information and support and this data confirms the many studies which attest to the importance of the internet for young people to meet and communicate with other young people in the same situation as they are, especially when they are sorting out their feelings (Hillier et al, 2001; Murphy et al, 2004; Weatherburn et al, 2003).

*I found lesbians on the internet via livejournal, so it was good to have a group of people who were going through the same thing as me. The female friend had had experiences so i knew i could count on her. They were all supportive thank goodness. (Kate, 16 years)*

## In summary

In 2004 young people were more likely to disclose their sexual attractions to a range of people than they were in 1998. Moreover, in 2004 they were more likely to receive a supportive response, including from family, friends, and youth and health professionals. This is a pleasing result which we suspect reflects

significant cultural change in Australia over the last six years. We know that feeling supported is a necessary step in developing trust and building healthy social connections with others, all necessary components in developing into well-adjusted, mentally healthy human beings. Support from others acts as a protection from the negative health outcomes of homophobic abuse, with those who have support feeling better about their sexuality.

Given the high rates of abuse in schools, the finding that teachers and student welfare coordinators were disclosed to more often than in 1998, and mostly gave support, is important. It may be that the intensive professional development work that has taken place in schools over the last six years has impacted on teachers' practice and the ways they deal with sexual diversity. Having support from teachers is especially important because most abuse happens in schools and young people who have been abused are more likely to look for someone to talk to.

### **LOGAN, 20 years**

*I first knew I was attracted to other guys when I was 13. I had my first sexual encounter the same year .... I started to come out to my friends one by one, but only after talking about gay subjects like mardi gras and the like, to get an idea of if they were homophobic or not. Most of my friends were supportive, although no one made an actual scene when I told them. A few just conveniently drifted away. Coming out to my Mother was the hardest of all. I was extremely scared and it took me weeks to go through with it. I got so worried and confused that I did all this research on the internet of coming out stories and the like. I even felt like I needed to do it over the phone, because I couldn't do it face to face. I feel ashamed that I didn't trust my mother as much as I should have, because I rang her from the public phone booth outside the Police Station so I could make a quick getaway if need be.*

### **SOPHIE, 19 years**

*This isn't something that I can really say in a few sentences. I guess I first thought I had same sex feelings when I had my first girlfriend, in a mental institution [name of institution] in 2000, then I met this guy, who was trying to hurt my best friend, so I went out with him, not cos I was attracted to him, but because I thought that it would take his attention off my friend, it did. But things didn't work out, as I fell in love with my best friend. I had an incredible experience with her one night, when I realised, this is the way I want to be for the rest of my life. But the next day she ran from me. I've had other relationships since then, but I still love this girl. The first thing I did at the age of 16 when I first thought I was gay was told my friends, there was a gay guy in our friendship group, who quickly got me over my fear of coming out. Screaming "we are so gay, we are so gay, everybody knows it we are so gay" down the main hall of the school! We are still good friends though. I knew I could always rely on him, still do call him from time to time. When I left my ex-boyfriend because I loved my best friend, she didn't know, so I told another friend, who was gay. He introduced me to his boyfriend, who promptly introduced me to [name of youth group], my youth group, and it's leader, who is a really great lady. If not for the [name of youth group] I would probably be dead right now as so often she (the group leader) has been there for me when I felt really depressed, and so many fun times with the group, making friendships, that mean a lot to me now. I actually feel wanted as everyone seems to want to talk to me about things, they trust me, and that makes me feel special. My mother and father, I told my mother when I was 16 ... she doesn't talk of it often, but sometimes, she can be really sweet and understanding. Sometimes, not so. I told my dad, when I was 16, cos I cared for him, but at 17 we stopped talking, we haven't talked since I came out to him. For the future, I just want to keep on going to my youth group till I'm 21, and then join the Gay and Lesbian Chorus, hopefully being in another youth group then - they are so fun! I hope for a life full of love, happiness and appreciation for the world around me, I hope they like me too. ... I hope to end up ... having a loving girlfriend. Loving life, and life seeming to love me.*

### **PAUL, 20 years**

*I first had feelings for a guy (same-sex) in year 10 of high school. I first recognised what these feelings actually were towards the end of year 12. I was in an all boys school, very shy, the atmosphere was very anti-gay and homosexuality was never even mentioned by any of the teachers which I believe kept me from working things out and then not*



*being able to deal with it for a few years after that. My experience with friends have mostly been positive, some incredibly so and only one negative (who is not known for being tolerant and friendly anyway). Family was 'alright'. It's not talked about, though coming out to them was just an 'oh... ok...' kind of deal. The people around me are great about my sexuality, They were probably comfortable about it before I was, ;) Though I believe this is only so because I'm out of high school. I think society in general is either neutral or positive towards gay relationships and think it's about damn time governments around the world realise this and grow up. I was in high school in 2000, at that time there was no mention of non-straight sexuality anywhere. I think that if it's just mentioned in english classes as an 'issue', or hopefully discussed in sex ed., that first 'hurdle' would be so much easier to cope with. My ultimate hope is that there'll never need to be such a thing as 'coming out'.*



## 10. SEX EDUCATION INFORMATION

### JIMMY, 16 years

*apart from what you know, i have been a very lucky guy with a lot of support from people and resources. but i must say that the major issues as i have grown up (for me personally) have been education on gay health ... education on same-sex relationships especially when it comes to adults and schools, plus, same-sex education and tolerance education preferably from independent bodies for schools (that includes religious schools).*

#### Key findings

- The internet was the most important source of information about homophobia and discrimination (71%), gay (73%) and lesbian (60%) relationships and gay (69%) and lesbian (54%) safe sex;
- There is strong evidence that schools are beginning to provide relevant sex education information for same sex attracted young people with the 14-17 year old group being significantly more likely to learn about homophobia and discrimination (51%), gay (26%) and lesbian (27%) relationships and gay (33%) and lesbian (29%) safe sex than the 18–21 year old group;
- 80% of young people found sex education at school to be useless or fairly useless, while 20% found it to be useful.

#### Sources of information

It is generally accepted in Australia, especially since the advent of HIV/AIDS, that the community has a responsibility to provide young people with information about safe sex and relationships so that they can protect themselves from infectious diseases and unwanted pregnancy. This responsibility is generally seen as most appropriately divided between parents and the school. In the 1998 study *Writing Themselves In*, however, we learned that the information provided by the family and the school was largely confined to heterosexual safe sex and relationships. This left young people who had same sex encounters with little information about protecting themselves from sexually transmissible infections (STIs). In 2001, the *Talking Sexual Health* with a new inclusive national curriculum was introduced with accompanying teacher training, and specific curriculum initiatives in many states. We were interested in whether schools were now catering for the sex education needs of SSA young people and how useful they felt sex education had been for them.

As in 1998, we were interested in whether young people access information about safe sex and relationships from sources they traditionally trust, such as, the school and the family, as well as other sources, such as the media and friends. In response to criticism in 1998 that we had omitted a raft of information sources attached to gay community (Curran, 2003) we included four additional information sources: SSA friends, gay media, the internet and gay community. We also added the information category 'homophobia and discrimination'

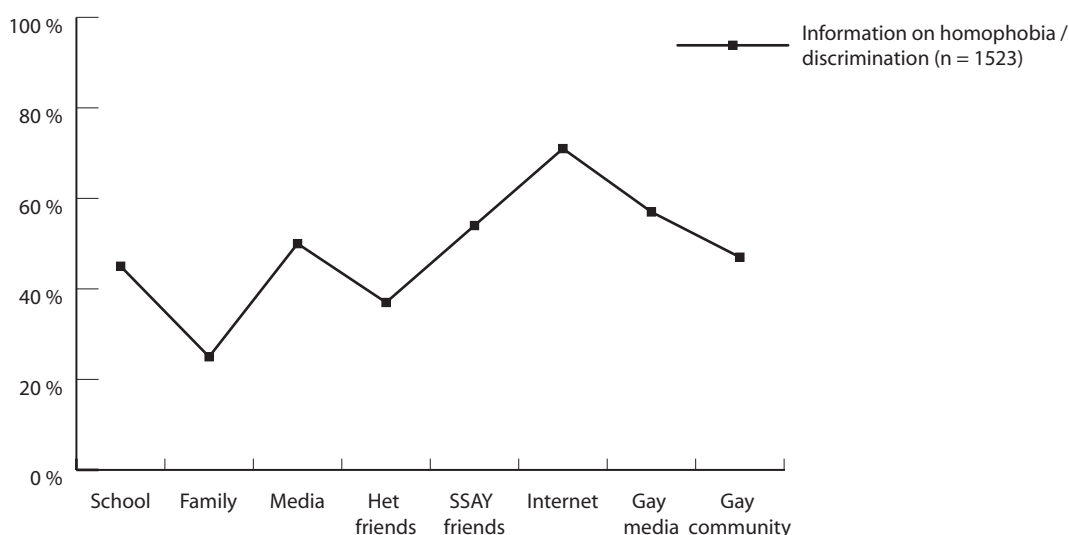
because we wanted to know where young people learned new ways of thinking about community negativity in regard to sexual difference. Finally, we asked young people how useful sex education in school had been and the following question about their needs: 'In regard to being same sex attracted, name three things that would make a positive difference in your life?'

### Sources of information about homophobia and discrimination

Understanding about homophobia and discrimination is important for young people because it can help them reframe negative messages about sexual difference to ways that describe a problem with the culture rather than with themselves, and this shift can help protect them from the negative impacts of homophobic abuse. This information has the power to decrease discriminatory attitudes and homophobic behaviour among young people who are opposite sex attracted which, our data indicates, is still a real problem in schools.

The young people in this study learned about homophobia and discrimination mainly from non-traditional sources such as the internet (71%), gay media (57%), SSA friends (54%) and the gay community (47%) and to a lesser extent from the more traditional sources such as the media in general (50%), school (45%) heterosexual friends (37%) and the family (25%). It is clear from this finding that new ways of thinking that are critical of community negativity about sexual difference, are moving into the mainstream and becoming widely accessible. The finding that nearly half of the study sample had heard about discrimination and homophobia at school is a positive one, especially given the high rate of homophobic abuse that occurs in school. Even more encouraging in terms of school is that the 14-17 year old sub-sample were significantly more likely to have learned about homophobia at school than the 18-21 year old (51% 14-17 year olds vs 41% 18-21 year olds). In contrast the older group was more likely to have learned about homophobia from the gay media (45% 14-17 year olds vs 66% 18-21 year olds) and the gay community (36% 14-17 year olds vs 56% 18-21 year olds).

**Figure 35. Sources of information on homophobia and discrimination.**



### Sources of information about relationships

In 1998 we found that only one in eight young people were able to access information about gay (GR) and lesbian relationships (LR) from school and the family, whereas information about heterosexual relationships (HR) was much more readily available from these traditionally trusted sources. In 2004 little had changed with regard to the school and the family as information sources about gay or lesbian relationships (see Fig. 36 below). However young people found other avenues, in particular the internet, to be an important source

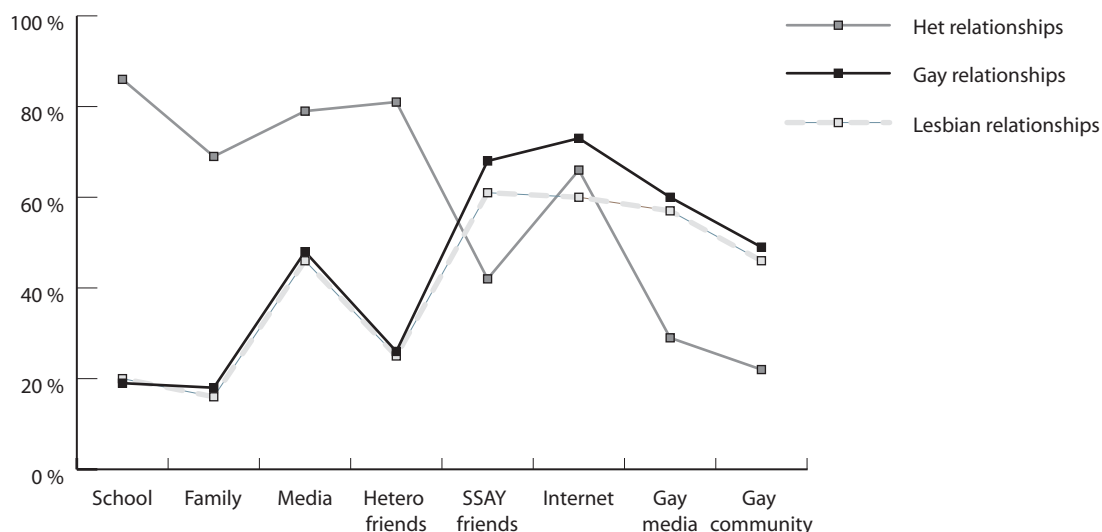
of information about gay (73%) and lesbian (60%) relationships. We have learned from the 2003 national high school study (Smith et al, 2003) that heterosexual young people use the internet widely, however, they do not use it for information about safe sex and relationships because they receive that information from other more trusted sources, such as, the school and the family. Because those trusted sources did not provide them with safe sex information, many young people in this study wrote about turning to the internet for information when they realized they were same sex attracted. Garrett was typical:

*I first realised feelings for other guys when i was about 13 years old. I explored internet sites and went searching for information on gays. I began chatting on internet sites around that time. No one knew i was gay. (Garrett, 20 years)*

Gay media (GR 48% and LR 46%), SSA friends (GR 68% and LR 61%) and gay community (GR 49% and LR 46%) were gay-connected sources of information that young people used that tended to help address the lack of information in traditional sources though general media was also an important traditional information source for over half of the young people in the study (60% GR and 57% LR). Fewer than one in five young people learned about gay and lesbian relationships from the family (GR 18% and LR 16%) and school (GR 19% and LR 20%).

A further age analysis on the data shows that this finding is not as disappointing as it first appears. There is evidence of change over time, with sex education at school becoming more inclusive. The 14-17 year old sub-sample was more likely to have learned about gay (26% 14-17 year olds vs 14% 18-21 year olds) and lesbian (27% 14-17 year olds vs 14% 18-21 year olds) relationships at school.

**Figure 36. Sources of information about relationships (n = 1532).**

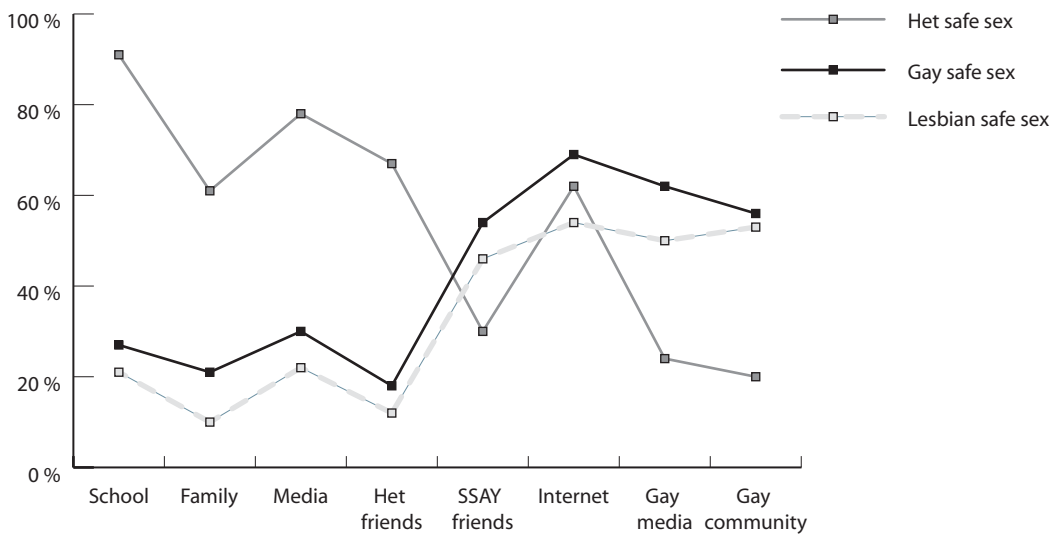


### Sources of information about safe sex

A similar trend was found in data on information sources about safe sex (see Fig. 37 below). Most young people (93%) learned about heterosexual safe sex (HSS) at school whereas few learned about gay (GSS 27%) or lesbian (LSS 21%) safe sex at school. Many young people learned about HSS from the family (61%) but few families provided information about gay (GSS 21%) or lesbian (LSS 10%) safe sex. As with sources about relationships, SSA young people gathered information from the internet, an information source poorly used by heterosexual young people for information about safe sex (Smith et al, 2003), (GSS 69% and LSS 54%) and gay connected sources such as SSA friends (GSS 54% and LSS 46%), gay community (GSS 56% and LSS 53%) and gay media (GSS 62% and LSS 22%). As with school and family, general media provided less information about gay (30%) or lesbian (22%) safe sex.

Once again, an age analysis showed that the 14-17 year olds were more likely than the 18-21 year old group to have learned about gay safe sex (33% vs 22%) and lesbian safe sex (29% vs 15%) at school.

**Figure 37. Sources of information about safe sex (n = 1519).**



## Sex education at school

Ninety-three percent of young people had been taught sex education at school. In response to the item 'How useful was it?', 856 young men and 589 young women explained their answers. Of those who responded, 40% felt sex education was not useful at all, 40% felt it was only partly useful because it had no same sex content, 10% said it was moderately useful and 10% found it very useful.

Josh who was gay was one of the 40% of young people who found the classes to be of no use to him:

*Not at all. It [sex education] only covers heterosexual sex, it really doesn't cover anyone outside the heterosexual, gender binary type system .... Perhaps they need to make note that there are others like us out there (and in school).*  
(Josh, 20 years)

For those young people who had opposite sex partners, sex education was to some degree useful. Kelley, who was bisexual, found she was only partly catered for:

*It was mostly Hetero-related and of course thats always useful, youre not as scared when you go to have sex with a guy because youve been told how it all works. But at high school they dont exactly tell you how same-sex relations work. They would maybe think they were encouraging you and no one wants that. They talked a little bit about homophobia etc. but the concept of "bisexuality" is ignored, sometimes there is less of an understanding or tolerance of that than homosexuality itself.* (Kelley, 18 years)

Robin, who was part of the 10% who found sex education fairly useful, could supplement what he learned with information from elsewhere:

*Fairly useful... I felt the need to look up where I was unsure or wanted to know more about.* (Robin, 20 years)

Finally, about ten percent of young people found their sex education classes to be entirely satisfactory because they learned everything they needed to know and same sex experiences were included:

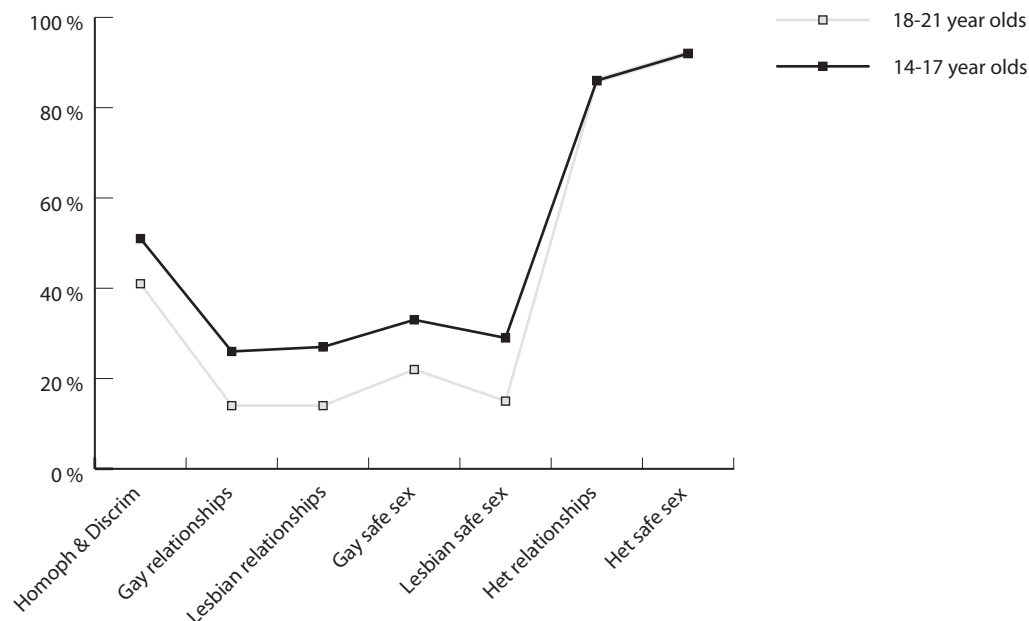
*Sure, [sex education] it was useful because we were taught that its ok, and that its being accepted.* (Rodney, 16 years)

The criticism that sex education has a heterosexual focus needs also to be reconsidered in the light of the higher rates of STIs and pregnancy amongst SSA young people. This may suggest such young people "tune

out” when they do not see themselves included in classes and so miss health and safety information that would be important for when they are having sex with someone of the opposite sex.

Our age analysis of school as a source of information about homophobia, discrimination, relationships and safe sex (see Fig. 38 below) shows a clear shift towards inclusive sex education over the last few years and this is a very positive sign. The shift is so recent that few of the 18-21 year olds were able to take advantage of it.

**Figure 38. An age analysis of school as a source of information about homophobia and discrimination, gay and lesbian relationships and safe sex (n = 1492).**



These findings reflect the beginnings of change but they suggest significant work still lies ahead to ensure that young people are provided with information they need at school to support them having fulfilling and safe sexual relationships. Without strong ongoing support from state and tertiary departments of education, and from within school administration, there is no guarantee that the momentum will be maintained. The information is not only important for same sex attracted young people, it is also vital to help reduce discriminatory attitudes in all young people and the very high incidence of homophobic abuse that is occurring in Australian secondary schools.

### Three things that would make a positive difference

We asked young people to list three things that would make a positive difference in their lives regarding their sexuality. What was striking about these young people’s wishes was their day-to-day ordinariness and commonality among the group. Most young people (80%) mentioned general acceptance by the community, including equal rights and within this, acceptance by their parents, friends and the church. Abolishing homophobia was an important part of the wish for acceptance. Over half mentioned the availability of support people, and especially accessible support groups, as something that would make a positive difference in their lives. Forty percent wanted a girlfriend or boyfriend, especially one who loved them. Twenty-percent wanted better sex education in schools and a smaller number, around 10%, wanted changes in themselves, for example wanting to be less suicidal, less depressed, to have a different body and to have better self-esteem. The major gender difference was the number of young men (about 10%), who wanted the stereotypes of the ‘gay man’ abolished, both in the gay and the wider communities.

In summary, we are beginning to see a movement in schools towards the provision of inclusive information about same sex relationships and safe sex in sex education classes but there is a long way to go. That around half of the young people had been taught about homophobia and discrimination at school is also a positive sign and may have been a reaction in some schools to high levels of homophobic abuse. These young people's use of the internet as their major source of information about same sex relationships and safe sex is a reflection of the lack of availability of this information from traditional sources. Heterosexual young people use the internet widely, but not as a source of sex education (Smith et al, 2003). The significant and consistent age difference in whether sex education is inclusive leads us to conclude that a small percentage of schools are beginning to cater for all young people in their sex education courses, however, without clear guidance from education departments there is no guarantee that this change will eventually include all schools. Some school communities need to be reminded that it is their responsibility to run a safe and inclusive school program.

### **TERESA, 20 years**

*I only really realised I was a lesbian in the last year. I know it took me a long time to actually decide that all my feelings added up to it, but I don't think I grew up same-sex attracted. If anything, I grew up asexual. I can't remember being genuinely interested in men physically, but I didn't really consider homosexuality as a real possibility until much later. The fact that I knew so little about homosexuality as a real way of life for so long disappoints me and the fact that I wasn't corrected in my ignorance. Education about homosexuality needs changing, no doubt. It seems treated as a perverse, adult-only knowledge when it really isn't.*

*My parents don't know and while I got nervous with the possibility of telling mum, I can't see why I would. I considered telling dad (which would've been easier) but I just didn't need to. I realised in that moment (of considering) that I didn't care what he would say. I know neither of them are homophobic in general, in which case I would be more likely to tell them. I really do want to know why people have those ideas, whatever they are. They made no sense when I thought I was heterosexual too. Lately my friend (since I said I was definitely a lesbian and who was there nearly the whole time I was questioning it) has asked me questions like why do they have to have a parade about being gay, there's no straight parade and why is there so much gay TV now. I really had to search my beliefs to answer her which I wanted to do efficiently, even tho it's hardly my job to be an authority on the subject just because I like women, and only some of them at that! I have no idea why people started mardi gras, I just thought it was cool. I told her about my views on gay TV, in that it's pretty poor representation but it's much much better than nothing. And I watch it anyway.*

*I've noticed lately that I really enjoy gay media, that it felt so much better to be at a queer-friendly dance than back dancing at the regular pub where you can spot queers a mile off, that there's something relieving about talking to the few people I know who are gay or lesbian.*

### **DON, 20 years**

*i grew up in the northern suburbs of adelaide in a fairly homophobic family totally cut off from the queer world -and until about the age of 18 or so, unaware of gay communities and the like...i had known since about the age of 13 or 14 [if not earlier about the start of high school] that i was not attracted to girls, and instead attracted to boys. not having met anyone at this point in my life that was gay [or queer] i felt that i was isolated and could not speak to anyone about this. further more, my parents, friends and to an extent, mass media at this time made me feel that the feelings that i had were WRONG.. it was a slow process to convince myself that i was not wrong to have these feelings, and to find others who also felt this way. i think that the seclusion that i encountered was directly because of the lack of supportive gay and lesbian material available in this region.*





## 11. MULTIPLE LAYERS OF INFLUENCE

This report would not be complete without paying special attention to some of the multiple layers of identity that impact on SSA young people's lives. In this chapter we have chosen to particularly focus on culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, religion, rurality and gender because young people often referred to these aspects of their lives in their stories.

### CALD youth

There are a number of ways of thinking about the impacts of homophobia on young people from CALD backgrounds. One is that belonging to two minority groups will result in double the marginalisation and double the negative health and other outcomes. This additive model is in part represented by Kumashiro (2001). A second very different theory is that young people from a CALD background may develop resilience early in life which will put them in a better position to deal with homophobia later on. In the first case we would expect CALD youth to have worse outcomes on quality of life, general health, drug use and other measures. In the second, case, we would expect CALD youth to be doing better. This second theory was supported by Russell and Truong, (2002) in the data from the very large US Adolescent Health Study which found that SSA African American and Latino youth scored higher on a number of well-being measures than white SSA youth.

A third possibility might be that there is little difference in the health outcomes of these two groups and that cutting the study sample into ever smaller independent pieces to be weighed up and compared will not provide insight into these young people's lives. It may be that these young people's lives are not solid and fixed, rather part of a dynamic, shifting multi-layered, multi-dimensional fabric and when two marginalised identities come together, everything changes (Kalantzis et al, 1990; Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1999).

Despite arguments against reductionism, it can be useful to apply this separating, fragmenting process, while at the same time, gathering stories to remind us that we are not talking about distinct and independent intrapersonal identities here, rather layers of influences that go to make up who we are.

We arbitrarily identified a young person as CALD if they and/or one or both of their parents were from a CALD background. The 360 CALD youth in this study were from over 30 different countries from all over the world. We searched the data for differences between the groups on a range of health outcomes and social isolation issues.

We found that there were NO differences between the groups in their feelings about being SSA, in the abuse directed at them, in whom they had spoken to about their sexuality and whether they had received support. There were also no differences between the two groups on feelings of safety at school, on the street, at social occasions and sport, their drug use, self harm and contact with support groups and organisations.

There were differences between the groups on four items and these all centred around the family and home. CALD youth were less likely to have spoken to Mum (40% vs 55%) and/or Dad (23% vs 34%) and consequently less likely to have received support from Mum (29% vs 43%) and Dad (18% vs 26%) for their sexuality. CALD youth were also less likely to have received information about gay safe sex (13% vs 23%), lesbian safe sex and heterosexual safe sex (52% vs 64%) from parents. They were also less likely to feel safe at home (77% vs 86%).

Difference between groups per se should never be regarded as better or worse and the tendency is always to devalue the difference of the marginalised. With this in mind it is possible to see non-disclosure to parents as one way of keeping relationships with parents positive, where constraints such as religion may make it very difficult for parents if their child disclosed to them. Given that young people did not score worse on any of the health outcomes, this strategy may well be working for these young people. We would not recommend disclosure to parents unless the young person is feeling secure and confident in him or herself and has other supports. However, it may be that in not telling their parents and in not receiving support, more of these young people feel unsafe at home. Despite this, from their stories we see that these young people are very capable of garnering support from other places and finding ways to think about their sexuality that positions them in positive ways. Their cultural identity is but one part of the multiple layers that make them who they are.

*Never really figured out i was bisexual until i finished my hsc. I went from a public coed high school to a girls private school but i was straight all the way through my high school years, mainly because i was having a serious relationship with my bf at the time. I've had crushes on females, but they were always someone older and i didn't think of it as a crush at the time.*

*I was just bi-curious one day and did something about it. My first kiss with a female was when i was 18 after i broke with my 4 yr bf. My first sexual experience was a month later. I met the girl through the internet. She was the same age as me and had a bf at the time. I've been sexuality active with females ever since...Most of my friends know of my bisexuality and only my closest female cousins. No one in my family knows because of my asian culture and my family is very religious (christian) and that the fact that i'm an only child i wouldn't want to disappoint them. Overall, i've accepted my sexuality and i'm currently in a relationship with my gf, been going out over 6 months. I'm quite happy at the moment and i haven't regretted my bisexuality... yet. (Ali, 19 years)*

*coming from an asian family and culture, homosexuality is not something widely accepted with open mind. it's hard to sit there when your parents start discussing your wedding, your kids, your future as a heterosexual. i hadn't done anything until i was 15 where i met my first boyfriend who was 22 at the time. he was my "first love" which, after a year, i realised that it was more so an infatuation because he was the first person who seemed to like me back. so naturally i got addicted quick, to the feeling that he gave me.*

*Now i just feel like all i need is myself. i dont need a relationship or anything.... i am entitled to be happy, but to be so, i need to learn to be happy with myself, my own person. happy with being alone. without being constantly with people. i hope for the future, the gay community will become more understood and accepted by the heterosexual-dominated society. i wish for that normal life that hetero's have, marriage, kids, housing, entitlement to equal rights. etc. (Vincent, 17 years)*

## Religion

For those young people who were involved in religion, the struggle in coming to terms with a different sexuality appeared to be more fraught than for those who were not. Though we did not ask formal questions about religion, it came up in young people's stories so often that we felt it should be included as a layer of influence in their lives. The difficulties occurred in three contexts: that of the religious school, the religious family and of the personal religious faith. Popular culture brings with it taboos about same sex attraction,

though this has in recent years been changing and the taboos no longer have the support of many of society's main institutions. Religion, and in the case of the young people in this study, Christianity, remains a last bastion of resistance to what is regarded in legal and health arenas as a normal part of human sexuality. Homosexuality is no longer regarded as a mental illness and it is illegal to discriminate against people on the basis of their sexuality in most areas of life. However within many Christian circles, homosexuals are refused the priesthood, the sacraments, the blessing of God and the prospect of afterlife in heaven.

Young people who were Christians, who attended Christian schools and/or belonged to Christian families were very well aware of this anomaly and wrote about their anguish. In most cases they were forced to choose between their sexuality and their religion. Kaden tried for a while to embrace his faith and ignore his sexuality, however when this became impossible he had to 'dump' Christianity. In his words 'I couldn't do both at the same time':

*i kinda thought i'd be [gay] in early high school, but put it off thinking that'd be something i'd deal with later. I got a rude shock in my catholic high school when the teacher was talking about 'poofas' one day and when i finally read the section in our bibles about homosexuality...after that I went hard core Christian and hated myself for a good few years and although I didn't think I was gay, I disliked that I couldn't be so attracted to girls and that I found guys more interesting. One day in year 12 I woke up (although it had been coming some time) and said to myself 'look, you're gay, get used to it' that was also the same day that I dumped Christianity. I just couldn't do both at that time. the next few months were quite difficult with year 12 and the loss of faith and family breakdown all happening at once. coming out was fearful but rewarding at the same time. my friends supported me a lot, and by the time year 12 was over I was quite ok and out and enjoying life. (Kaden, 20 years)*

In many cases the rejection of their sexuality and the embracing of their religion left young people hating themselves. This is to be expected given that they found no positive positions within their religion for a same sex attracted person. Kiley is a good example of what happens when a young person tries to deny part of herself. In her case, self-hatred turned to self-harm and suicide attempts. Fortunately, she survived because she eventually chose herself above her religion. However, the price she paid for this was very high.

*Had my first g'f when I was 15 and that felt very right, even if we did have to sneak around and hide when we were kissing and have people whisper about. About 16 everything clicked, that yes i was a thru & thru lesbian and that that was gonna cause major problems due to my family and their religion. Came out to everyone except my family and religious friends and then attempted to turn into a celibate, non-practicing lesbian, got lonely and more and more depressed = suicidal and self harming. Suicidal because i couldn't see how i could NOT be a lesbian and i couldn't see how i could NOT live without my family/religion so stuck between the proverbial rock and hard place death looked like a good and logical option. Got a LOT of counselling (for about 4years). At 18 met my present g'f. We went out in secret for 4months and then it all came out in the open. Eventually got kicked out of my religion for being an unrepentant lesbian and due to being excommunicated some of my family shun me (that's the rules of the religion). Lost all my religious friends, too. Have had 1000s of conversations with my parents over it all - my Dad isn't happy with what's happened but he understands and we get along well. My Mum doesn't get it at all, can't get past her own grief/anger/shame, and so she doesn't talk to me. Still makes me sad sometimes but overall it's OK. Probably wouldn't have coped if it wasn't for the fantastic support of some very long suffering, understanding friends (both lesbian and straight), and of course my g'f. (Kiley, 20 years)*

Ray is another example of the self-harm that is likely to result when a young person feels compelled to deny an integral part of himself. As he commented, self-hatred is a lot worse than hatred by others:

*When i was going through the religious conviction it was very hard because i hated myself which is a lot harder than when someone else hates you. I tried to hang myself and tried to overdose on ventolin. (Ray, 21 years)*

Sam worked through a process of embracing Christianity and then critiquing it and finding it wanting. The process may have been easier for him because his parents were not Christians.

*The reason i went to a fundamental christian school was not due to my parents being religious, but they wanted me to have a better education and my school was relatively cheap for a private school. Homosexuality was seldom mentioned at the school however the people who ran the school were \*very\* charismatic (as extreme religious groups often are) and made a strong impression on most students, who were usually emotionally vulnerable etc at such a young age. The environment made me want to be like them and be saved by jesus. So i believed that i could overcome my sexuality and i reasoned with myself that i was born heterosexual (as everyone was) and that i could overcome this bizarre deviation. I was therefore quite depressed at the time, however this was also attributed to self-esteem. So anyway at about 15 i tried to be 'one of them' and did things like pray constantly about my 'problem' and i destroyed anything 'gay' in my life, like pornography or masturbation, i actually tried to masturbate about girls instead. After a number of months my depression deepened and i thought that this isn't working.... At this time i decided to look into the validity of the religion. I firstly looked at my most feared verse (something in leviticus) which states that homosexuality is strictly wrong and those who commit a homosexual act must be put to death. I read some more of this book and found that it was very amusing (i highly recommend it) and realised that some of the 'rules' were obsolete crap. There were so many holes in the religion and bible that i realised it was ridiculous to take it seriously. And even if the christian god did condemn homosexuals i couldnt care less at that stage as that god would be a total bastard. So it was generally with these revelations that i suddenly became happy (with my sexuality) and i saw through christians and my school fellows. (Sam, 19 years)*

There were, however, one or two young people who were able to find a connection with God while not denying their sexuality.

*I had religious difficulties, but now I understand god loves me for me. (Eddy, 17 years, transgender f-m)*

Finally, it was very encouraging to find that there were Christians who did not reject young people for their sexuality and more importantly, some were supportive of them. In Krista's case the school chaplain and some religious friends gave some support.

*The first person I talked to was our school chaplain (although I'm an atheist) and he was great. My best friends were all fantastic. Some of my more peripheral friends were a bit uneasy. One very religious friend said "I'm undoubtedly against homosexuality but I'll make an exception for you and Alison because I can see you're so smitten and very cute together". Talking to other queer people is awesome because they can relate much better. Talking to my Mum was not much fun. She said she was supportive but was clearly VERY uncomfortable and not very understanding. (Krista, 19 years)*

There were also one or two examples of Christians who changed their outlook over time.

*I think i always knew i was attracted to guys, but in my younger years i didn't have a label for it, or any bad feelings about it. I know people would tease homosexuals but i never thought it was a bad thing (being gay). At age 15 my feelings very stronger and i wanted to come out. I told a lot of friends, teachers, all were supportive. Then i told my mum who was great but said i was too young to know, she told dad who said it didn't change anything. My brother was fine. My other brother, being more religious, said it was ok but to never have sex, then he looked into having me converted. But it blew over and he's a lot older and wiser now and accepts me. I still haven't been in a relationship. I have a lot of self esteem issue, which i'm trying to sort out and build my confidence. I have a long road ahead of me. I feel i don't fit into the gay community nor my 'normal' one either. I feels there is no place for me. But as i'm getting older i'm learning more and changing. (Elliot, 18 years)*

Though the norm in these young people's stories was a rejection of a young person's sexuality by the church and Christians in their lives, there were examples of Christians embracing young people and their sexuality. . In most cases young people tried to reject or 'cut out' their sexuality first, but in every case this had negative health outcomes, including suicide attempts. Leaving their faith for many was a painful but necessary road to recovery – a sad loss for the church and a survival choice for the young person.

## Rurality

In the 1998 study, young people from rural areas experienced a greater sense of isolation and lack of access to information than their urban peers. They were also less likely to use a condom at last penetrative sex and more likely to inject drugs. In this report we defined rural as 'outside of the major Australian cities'. We looked for significant differences between the rural and urban young people on a range of factors including age, schooling, discrimination, abuse, feelings of safety, safe sex, pregnancy, STIs, use of a range of drugs, disclosure and support, general health and information sources.

Though young people expressed concern about their precarious position in their country towns, we found few differences between them and urban young people. The rural group was slightly younger (17.6 years vs 18.07 years) and therefore more likely to be at school and less likely to be at university or TAFE. There were no differences between the rural and urban groups on discrimination and abuse, feelings of safety at school, home, on the street and at sport. However, young people from rural areas felt less safe at social occasions than their urban peers (63% urban vs 54% rural). We suspect this may have something to do with perceptions of extra surveillance in rural areas which, combined with more community conservatism, may make it harder to be anonymous and easier for people to 'find out', and the consequences worse.

There were no differences between the urban and rural groups in their use of alcohol, marijuana, tobacco, party drugs and heroin or in percentages of young people who injected drugs. In terms of sexual behaviours rural young people were no more likely to have been pregnant, to have used a condom at last penetrative sex or to have been diagnosed with an STI. Finally, in terms of information about gay and lesbian safe sex and relationships, the only difference between the rural and urban groups was in access to gay (rather than lesbian) media about gay safe sex with rural young people having less access (63% urban vs 54% rural). We suspect it would be unusual to find a gay newspaper in the local country store or library whereas these are available in places in larger cities.

Despite the absence of quantitative differences in rural and urban young people's circumstances and behaviours, there was still a strong sense that rural youth were experiencing more isolation and felt more concerned about the safety of their situation than those in urban areas. Many of the stories documented these concerns and some of the more extreme reactions to them.

*I have become more stressed since moving because i am scared of people's reactions in rural areas. I am used to being in a major city. So my cutting has become worse (Connor, 17 years)*

Secrecy and vigilance were the strategies adopted by Justin who came out later and in a cautious way while he was away at college. This controlled process was especially important as he was, at the time of the survey, still living in a rural area.

*I grew up in a small country town where I didn't really know anyone that was gay (well there were stories going around about who was and wasn't but nothing to be believed). I started to think about guys when I was about 13 or 14. I didn't think a lot about them because the other guys were starting to notice girls, so that's what I was supposed to be doing and did it. I thought me thinking about guys was sorta normal and I was just curious about it. When I was about 16 we finally got the internet at home I looked up gay websites when ever I got a chance, I hadn't really had any feelings for any certain guys at that stage, just fascinated by their bodies, and the way they made me feel .... I finally got up the guts to tell my best friend (female) she took it very well as was very supportive and is still the most supportive person I have. She helped and talked me through everything I was feeling (listened at the right times, made jokes at the right times, and most importantly gave advice when she could). She was so good to talk to because she talked to me about it as if it was 'normal' and didn't avoid any part of the topic which made me more comfortable with it. Slowly I picked people that were important in my life and shared my secret. Which I'm still slowly doing now. I think my future will hopefully be better as I'm gaining more supportive friends and feeling more comfortable with my feelings as time*



*goes on. I really hope I meet Mr. Right but I'm not to sure how it's going to happen, living 45km out of a small town in central NSW isn't really the best place. But hopefully a miracle will happen sometime soon.* (Justin, 21 years)

A common theme in the narrative of rural young people was one of escape to a more supportive and less isolated situation, usually, but not always, a big city. Pierre and Caroline started to pull their lives together in a meaningful way only after they made this move.

*My life living in a rural area was pretty tough, but after i moved to the NSW coast i found the atmosphere less threatening, and i felt FAR less alone.*

*These days I'm very involved with queer activism and politics and socialising with queers, and this really has brought out the best in me. i feel like my life is verging on complete (if i just didn't stress so much).* (Pierre, 18 years)

*I grew up in a country town and didn't know any gay people. I realised I was gay at 14, when I was in year 8. I kept it a complete secret for the remaining four years of high school. For most of this time I was clinically depressed. I tried to commit suicide once. In 2003 I moved to the city to start uni, and pretty much straight away I came out to everyone in my life. All of my new friends were fine with it. Most of my high school friends had trouble dealing with it, probably because I'd spent four years lying to them. My parents are still having trouble dealing - I'm not allowed to tell my siblings, in case they get 'confused' about their own sexuality. I had my first girlfriend in October of this year. That was fantastic; so much better than relationships with boys! We broke up after a month and I was devastated, but that's life. Mostly I'm happy about being a dyke. I have experienced a fair bit of homophobia, but basically I'd a million times prefer the occasional nasty comment to going back into the closet. I'm still on medication for my depression and may always be, but that's okay. Maybe I'll come off it eventually, once I've had more time to sort my life out. The future - who knows? All I know is that it's going to be fantastic, and I can't wait to get there!* (Caroline, 19 years)

There were no positive stories about rural life making the journey easier for SSA young people. It is important to acknowledge then that young people are telling us that living in a rural area does compound the difficulties and creates an additional layer they need to manage despite the lack of differences in the quantitative data.

## Gender

Gender has been shown to be a major organising feature in young people's lives and we are accustomed to seeing strong gender differences between heterosexual young men and women. For SSA young people gender is also powerful, however, the impacts of gender can be quite different from how it plays out in the lives of their heterosexual peers. For this reason we have included a synopsis of gender differences in the study. We have also included differences between these same sex attracted young people and their heterosexual peers in the two national high school studies, as well as some comments on transgender young people in the study.

In terms of sexual attraction, identity and behaviour, young men in 2004 are still more likely than young women to be having sex in line with their sexual attractions and to choose a sexual identity that is in line with their attractions and behaviour. We believe there are a number of possible reasons for this. First, constructions of the 'good girl' who has sex only within a relationship as opposed to the 'good boy' who can have casual sex mean that more young men than young women have opportunities to try out their attractions in casual sex encounters. Second, the notion of the 'passive feminine' means that it is more difficult for young women to instigate sexual encounters with each other. Third, young women can date young men and even have sex without feeling desire – this is more difficult for young men. Finally, the strenuous policing of gender conformity which is more pronounced in male cultures may preclude the young men from sitting with uncertainty for too long and push them to resolve the situation.

The young women in this study were sexually active earlier than their heterosexual peers and at least as likely to have been pregnant (Smith et al, 2003). This is an especially concerning finding and reflects the

sometimes chaotic and unsafe sexual experimentation of many of these young women when trying to come to terms with their sexual feelings.

Young men were more likely to be the victims of homophobic verbal and physical abuse though the differences were not large except at school where young men were far more likely to be verbally and physically abused because of their sexuality than the young women. As mentioned previously, however, young women's homophobia can tend to be in the form of exclusion and subtle behaviours that may not be recognised as homophobic abuse.

Another important gender difference was in legal and illegal drug use with young women using significantly more alcohol, tobacco, marijuana and heroin and being more likely to inject drugs. This contradicts the literature about heterosexual young people and drug use (Lindsay et al, 1997; Smith et al, 2003) which indicates that more young men than young women use drugs. It may suggest that gender expectations amongst heterosexual young people constrain young women from using at the rate of young men. If this is the case then same sex attracted young people who are frequently involved early in gender transgression might be expected to show the reverse pattern. However, this finding, which confirms and extends the finding of the 1998 study needs further investigation.

There were nine transgender young people in this study, are numbered too small for quantitative analysis. Seven were m-f and two were f-m. Six were exclusively same sex attracted, two were bisexual and one exclusively attracted to the opposite sex (though this attraction would have been to the same sex prior to the new gender identity). These young people faced many of the same issues around homophobia, as the rest of the group, however on top of this, their gender confusions and transitions were a very heavy burden. These issues provide an even greater challenge to schools and families than issues of same sex attraction, and the isolation and lack of information for these young people is even more acute. The high rate of exclusively same sex attracted transgender youth in this study are likely to be the result of the advertising campaign which focussed on same sex attracted young people and not a reflection of the sexuality of transgender young people in general. We have included the story of Tristan (though he does admit at the end of his story that he is 23 years and not 21 as reported in the survey) because it encapsulates many of the issues facing these young people, particularly in relation to substance use and finding a place to belong.

### **TRISTAN, 23 years, m-f transgender**

*Kinda known I was trans since age 8-10. From that point onward I had an almost pathological fear of all things feminine. I suppose I tried to bury any feelings I had, hoping they'd go away. They didn't. I suppose I had a sexuality throughout adolescence, but I didn't really know what to make of it, because the trans stuff confused everything eg, I knew that I liked women, but I wasn't sure if that was because I wanted to be a woman, or if I wanted to have sex with them. I took 6-8 years to realise it was both. I knew I was attracted to guys, so I figured I was gay and left it at that. It wasn't until the age of 18 or so that the trans feelings came back strongly. At this point, I assumed all gay people felt like they wanted to be the opposite sex, but just made the best of the situation. I was still pretty freaked out by the idea of being gay, so most of that year was spent trying to block my problems out with alcohol. That didn't work, so by 1999, I'd moved on to self-medicating with marijuana. That helped to block things out for a bit, but in the end I was using it so much, (several times a day, every day), that I had some kind of episode. I never got this diagnosed, but I'm pretty sure it was cannabis psychosis. I was pretty ill for six months or so, but I realised I had to get my problems sorted out, so I started making some changes. I saw the counselling service at uni, and joined the queer group at uni. That helped heaps. I came out to family and friends (as gay), and 2000 was the best year I've had in a long time. By the end of the year, those niggling trans thoughts were coming back. In 2001, I moved out with some friends I'd met through the group at uni. This is when I found out that gay people didn't think like me. 2001 was another bad year, involving a lot of alcohol abuse. At the end of the year, I thought, fuck it I need to get out of here, so I bought a Kombi van with a few (straight) friends. We spent the summer driving around Australia, which was great. One of the best*



times I've had in my life. When, I came back around March 2002, I moved out with a different bunch of friends. 2002 was pretty bland, but during the middle of the year, I went to Queer Collaborations, a NUS affiliated conference. This was a catalyst for me to start exploring my trans feelings. This year, I really got my shit together. I got elected to both the Student Council at my campus, and the state branch of NUS. (As Sexuality Officer). Running the queer collective and presenting reports, etc, at meetings was a very rewarding experience for me. Although my self-confidence wasn't that bad before it is a hell of a lot better now. Maybe I just like the sound of my own voice, but I've developed a taste for public speaking) I took a queer theory unit at uni, and that got me interested in postmodernism. It's been a useful tool to analyse and help me deal with my life. I went to QC again in July, (it was my responsibility to get the local people there), and had one of the shittiest times of my life! I realised then, that I had to get the trans stuff sorted out once and for all. So, when I got back, I went to the counselling service and told them everything. That was a great relief. Since then, I've seen a psychiatrist and been diagnosed as gender dysphoric, (and nothing else, thank God!). I've been prescribed anti-androgens by the endocrinologist I saw, and plan on starting oestrogen in March. Since starting transition, I feel so much better, better than I have ever, I think. I've come out to my friends (as trans), and they were all really supportive. I've yet to do the family thing, but will sooner or later. Despite the fairly bumpy ride I've had over the last few years, I feel pretty good about myself and my life. I think I actually feel stronger for enduring all the bad stuff. If I can get through that, I can get through anything. I suppose the only concerns I have for the immediate future are: - money. I may have to quit my job in 8 months or so, when the changes start to get noticeable. I've got a fairly well-paid job, (and I've graduated Uni now), but I still need to save up a fair bit of \$ for electrolysis, speech therapy and maybe SRS. - relationships. I'm kinda worried about being alone. I guess I'm lucky in that I have two pools to pick from, but I'm worried that people might freak out about the trans stuff. - how I'll end up looking. I'm not too bothered about this, I'm pretty slender and not that masculine-looking, but I suppose it is a doubt in the back of the mind. (By the way, I'm actually 23, but I figured I'd do this survey anyway, because I feel it's important that more people learn about trans issues. We tend to get lumped in with gay and lesbians, but we're really quite different. Of course, we can be gay \*too\*, which is something that people don't seem to get).



## 12. THE WAY FORWARD

In the time since we completed the 1998 survey we have seen a considerable shift in the world in which young people experience same sex attraction. There is now a greater visibility of gay and lesbian people in the media and in public life. There are more support groups for these young people and a growing awareness in schools of their support and information needs. In some states and territories legislative change has given the issue more public legitimacy. It is therefore not surprising that more than double the young people who completed the survey in 1998 did so in 2004. Many more young people have spoken to someone, indeed a range of people, about their sexuality and have been more likely to have found them supportive. This indicates that these young people are becoming more visible, more conscious of their rights and more likely to have a noticeable impact on schools, families and the community generally.

This increased visibility is also likely to account for the fact that rates of discrimination and violence are up in 2004 and that at least as much of this abuse is taking place in schools. School remains the major place where SSA young people experience verbal and physical violence. Nevertheless they are reporting feeling safer in schools and the experience of abuse is more likely to have motivated them to seek support, on the whole successfully, from teachers and counsellors within the school setting. A comparison between the younger and older participants in the study also indicates that schools are now clearly playing a greater role in teaching about homophobia and discrimination as well as about same sex relationships and safe sex. Nevertheless the numbers of schools doing so is still quite small.

It is pleasing to note a decline in drug use from 1998 but it is also important to bear in mind that the rates of alcohol and drug use for SSAY are still far higher than their heterosexual peers. For example, SSAY are at least twice as likely to be injecting drugs. They are more sexually active in 2004 with rates of condom use being higher than for their heterosexual peers. While there is a shift in the identity of young people to feel more sure about being gay or lesbian and less uncertain of their identity this is no more likely to correlate with behaviour than it did in 1998. It is still a very fluid picture, but in general the young people of 2004 are feeling better about their sexuality than those of 1998.

One of the most striking aspects of doing research with same sex attracted young people is their very evident enthusiasm and willingness to participate. They thank the researchers for the opportunity to be involved and respond in detail in very personal and thoughtful ways. The increased numbers in this study compared to 1998 indicates the degree of trust these young people place in the process and it would be remiss of us not to explore fully the implications of these findings and to make some recommendations for future action. We hope that readers of this report will feel the same imperative to act wherever possible to strengthen the

situation of these young people and prevent some of the damage which comes from the attitudes of those around them.

There are some clear calls to action that emerge from these data and the most important of these arises from the capacity to demonstrate for the first time that those young people who have been abused and discriminated against are doing worse than their peers who, often by remaining silent, have avoided violence and abuse. It is unacceptable that preventable abuse is predisposing the young people who experience it to the health risks associated with high rates of drug and alcohol use and to increased self-mutilation, overdosing and other forms of self-harm. This is a situation for which the whole community must take some responsibility. Actively addressing homophobia wherever it occurs, recognising it, naming it and reacting with zero tolerance is the most salient challenge arising out of this report.

This is particularly the case in relation to schools where most of the abuse still occurs and there is a strong duty of care for all those responsible for young people's safety and well-being within a school environment to take up this issue and deal with it. In order to facilitate this process there needs to be, within the education sector, a clearly articulated system-wide policy developed and implemented. No individual teacher should feel uncertainty about how or when to act on this issue or feel unsure about whether or not they have institutional support for their actions.

There are several other important obligations for schools. The finding that young people who experience abuse are more likely to seek support is an encouraging one and points to the importance of ensuring that SSA students understand that someone is available to talk about these issues with them when they are ready. The mixed, although improving, success of the support-seeking efforts of SSAY are evidence enough that "being available if asked" may be insufficient to gain the confidence of uncertain young people. Those in a welfare or counselling role within schools or youth services need to actively signal by displaying posters or other material that they are willing to hear about same sex attraction and prepared to offer support for working these issues through.

The power of learning about homophobia and discrimination and to have the concepts and language which locates the problem, not in themselves and their own essential failure, but in the attitudes of society generally, is well documented here. Schools have an obligation to teach about homophobia, its nature and its history, to enable all young people to access a more constructive way of thinking about and acting on these issues. Schools also have a responsibility to provide a safe space for the 10% of the student population who are same sex attracted to receive a fully rounded education. We suspect that this will only happen with clear direction from education departments in each state and territory that schools in their constituencies are required to address homophobia and discrimination where it occurs.

In relation to sexual health education in schools, there is a real opportunity to provide SSAY with information about relationships and safe sex which both normalises their feelings and gives them necessary health information in a classroom environment. Such an environment is the one most nominated as an effective place for getting information to heterosexual young people as it gives them information without the exposure of actively asking for it. The very common early recognition of feelings of same sex attraction and higher levels of sexual activity amongst SSAY at an early age make them a group of particular concern. Their higher levels of pregnancy and STIs are indicative of their need for gay and heterosexual safe sex information in a way which is made relevant for them. These issues indicate the importance of inclusive programs in which all young people recognise themselves and take note of the educational messages from an early age, at least at all levels in secondary school. Drug education is equally important and needs to be well-integrated with an inclusive sexual health program.

The journey in identity development for SSAY and the very fluid nature of their explorations are well documented here and suggest that it is important not to make any assumptions about either the current situation for these young people or about their potential future. The nexus between attraction, identity and behaviour is a complex one for human beings of all ages and in adolescence more uncertainty and confusion is to be expected. It is important that counsellors, teachers, youth workers and families are respectful of these explorations but do not foreclose on them. Being with the young person in the moment and collecting as much information as possible about what is going on for them and taking a non-judgmental approach will be the most useful response in helping them through this ongoing complexity.

This research makes absolutely clear the value of support to young people who seek it and get a favourable response. The opportunity to find such support must be increased particularly for rural, regional and remote young people. Face-to-face support groups for SSAY have made a marked difference since the 1998 study and are clearly a critical factor in providing a turning point for many young people. These groups need to proliferate further and to become more secure. At present they are most often short-term and project-based with staff stretched to the limit to meet the demand. They need to be established as a routine part of the youth service provision of local councils, many of whom are failing to meet any of the needs of this significant portion of their young residents. State/territory governments need to look at this issue too in relation to options for more secure funding as a critical contribution to the future health of 10% of our young people.

The higher levels of alcohol and drug use, including other associated risks such as binge drinking and needle sharing are a largely unrecognised problem amongst SSAY. Nevertheless they are clearly demonstrated in this report and appear to be one of the most likely consequences of early abuse that they will carry into later life. Comparative data between heterosexual and non-heterosexual women in the current Women's Health Australia study indicate that this difference is also evident in the alcohol and drug use of women in their twenties and is still seriously impacting on their health (Hillier et al, 2003). Alcohol and drug treatment services and educators need to be made aware of the relevance of same sex attraction, homophobia and abuse to a proportion of their client group and be required to purposively target this group. This means actively advertising the willingness of services to hear about these issues and to treat the whole person. It may well involve system-wide sensitivity training for staff to be alert to the issues and to respond constructively.

The role of the church and church schools remains a difficult one around this issue, although many individuals in schools and churches play an important and positive role in supporting SSAY and addressing homophobia. A number of young people in this survey have reported on the conflict between the church's expectations and teachings and what they perceive to be part of their essential selves. The self-denial required to remain within the church drives them to self-hatred and painful negative behaviours which are only resolved when the effort is finally abandoned. In this way the church is casting out many committed young people who wish to be part of a religious community at a time when they most need support. This may be an issue which requires further consideration and debate.

One of the most fraught issues for SSAY relates to their families and the extreme price they fear, sometimes with reason, they may pay if their sexual feelings become known. This is particularly so for CALD young people who feel less safe at home and are less likely, again possibly with reason, to have spoken to their parents about it. Telling parents and negotiating acceptance within the family is a major step in achieving safety and wellbeing for SSAY and they mostly do it alone and without resources. There is a need to recognise the difficulty of these issues for parents and to strengthen the support available for them. P-Flag groups and other support and/or counselling options need to be well publicised and accessible as the need arises. Sound

information which enables parents to understand and come to terms with a SSA child and to be able to offer ongoing love and support, is a vital part of the process. Such information needs to be visible and widely available through mainstream health promotional channels. In this way it will lend legitimacy to the issue for parents and be accessible in a confidential manner when required.

Meeting the challenges provided by this research will not, on the whole, require vast amounts of new funding to be dedicated to the area. The setting up and strengthening of support groups in all communities is the major area in which funding needs to be secured. Good work can be done on few resources by building the confidence of the able people who already work with young people that they can address SSA issues within their current skills base when encouraged to do so. Providing legitimacy through policy is part of this process. Work done so far in schools and other areas of the community is clearly shown here to have had an impact and should inspire those already engaged in this work to develop it further, taking others with them.

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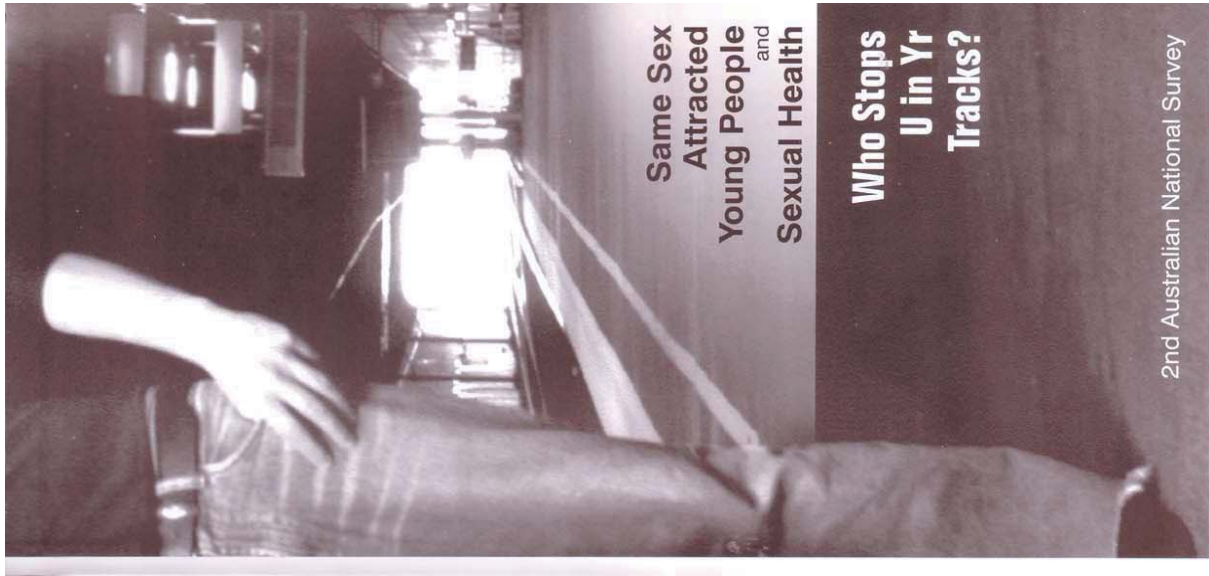
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Same Sex  
Attracted  
Young People  
and  
Sexual Health

Who Stops  
U in Yr  
Tracks?

2nd Australian National Survey

Fold the rest of the questionnaire between this  
panel and the envelope

YOUTH SURVEY

Delivery Address:  
1 Kingsbury Drive  
BUNDOORA VIC 3083

No stamp required  
if posted in Australia



La Trobe University  
Reply Paid 66611  
BUNDOORA VIC 3083

Are you attracted to people of the same sex? Are you aged between 14 and 21 years? Would you like to have a say about the issues affecting your life?

If you are a guy who has sexual feelings for guys or a girl who has sexual feelings for other girls, whether or not you have ever acted on those feelings, we would like to know how you are going. We are particularly interested in finding out how you are coping with things such as relationships, family and friends, school, abuse or violence and sexual health. The results of this research will be used to help make education and services better for you and focus more attention on how to make Australia a more supportive place for young people like you.

This questionnaire has been put together by a team of researchers from La Trobe University, Melbourne with the help of a number of young people and youth workers from a range of different organisations. It is funded by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aging.

The survey will take about 15 minutes to complete and is anonymous and confidential. This means there will be no information which can identify you on any of the publications which come out of the research, including perhaps, a collection of your stories. For this reason, we ask that you don't write your name anywhere on the survey. By sending us your stories you will be assigning copyright for them to La Trobe University.

Please answer the questions as honestly as possible and if you don't feel comfortable with a particular question, just leave it blank. When you have finished, fold the survey up, lick the adhesive and post it. You don't need a stamp as the postage is pre-paid. You can also find the questionnaire online at [www.latrobe.edu.au/ssay/](http://www.latrobe.edu.au/ssay/). The results will be posted on this site towards the end of 2004.

Any questions regarding this project may be directed to Dr Lynne Hillier at the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health & Society at La Trobe University on, Telephone: (03) 9285 5360 or email: [L.hillier@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:L.hillier@latrobe.edu.au).

If you have any complaints or queries that the researcher has not been able to answer to your satisfaction, you may contact the Ethics Liaison Officer, Human Ethics Committee, La Trobe University, Victoria, 3086, ph: 03 9479 1443, e-mail: [humanethics@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:humanethics@latrobe.edu.au).

## About You

- 1A. Please write the postcode of the town/city in which you live \_\_\_\_\_
- 1B. Please write your age in \_\_\_\_\_ years \_\_\_\_\_ months.
- 1C. Are you (please tick one box only)  
 1 ☐ Male? 2 ☐ Female?  
 3 ☐ Transgender m-f? 4 ☐ Transgender f-m?
- 1D. What country were you born in? \_\_\_\_\_
- 1E. Are you of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent? 1 ☐ Yes 2 ☐ No
- 1F. In what country was your mother born? \_\_\_\_\_
- 1G. In what country was your father born? \_\_\_\_\_
- 1H. What are you mainly doing at the moment?  
 (please tick as many boxes as apply)  
 1 ☐ I am at school  
 2 ☐ I am at University or TAFE  
 3 ☐ I am unemployed  
 4 ☐ I am working full time  
 5 ☐ I am working part time  
 6 ☐ other (please write) \_\_\_\_\_
- 1I. Where do you live? (please tick one box)  
 1 ☐ in the family home  
 2 ☐ with relatives in their home  
 3 ☐ at your girlfriend/boyfriend's house  
 4 ☐ shared flat/house  
 5 ☐ boarding house/hotel/dormitory  
 6 ☐ refuge  
 7 ☐ streets/car/squat/caravan  
 8 ☐ on your own (rented or own place)  
 9 ☐ other (please write) \_\_\_\_\_
- 1J. Where did you first hear about this survey?  
 (please tick one box)  
 1 ☐ heard on the radio  
 2 ☐ saw it on the web  
 3 ☐ read about it in a magazine  
 4 ☐ at the SSAY group I belong to  
 5 ☐ a youth worker told me about it  
 6 ☐ other \_\_\_\_\_

## About Your Sexual Feelings

- 2A. Which of these statements best describes your sexual feelings at the moment? (please tick one box only)  
 1 ☐ I am attracted only to people of my own sex  
 2 ☐ I am attracted to people of both sexes  
 3 ☐ I am attracted only to people of the opposite sex  
 4 ☐ I am not sure whom I am attracted to
- 2B. Please tell us more about your answer to 2A.  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
- 2C. Do you think of yourself as: (please tick one box only)  
 1 ☐ Gay, homosexual, lesbian?  
 2 ☐ Bisexual?  
 3 ☐ Heterosexual (straight)?  
 4 ☐ I don't label myself  
 5 ☐ Other? (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
- 2D. Please tell us more about your answer to 2C.  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
- 2E. On the whole, how do you feel about being attracted to people of the same sex?  
 (tick one box only)  
 1 ☐ Great  
 2 ☐ Pretty good  
 3 ☐ OK  
 4 ☐ Pretty bad  
 5 ☐ Really bad
- 2F. Has this changed over the last 12 months?  
 1 ☐ Yes  
 2 ☐ No
- 2G. Please tell us more about your answers to 2E and 2F.  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

## How do people treat you?

3A. Do you feel that you have been unfairly treated because of your sexuality?

- 1 ☐ Yes  
2 ☐ No  
3 ☐ No because no one knows

3B. Has anything specific happened to make you feel this way? (please briefly tell us)

The next five questions are about abuse. Abuse can make you feel uncomfortable or fearful. Abuse can be physical or verbal.

3C. Has anyone ever been abusive to you because of your sexuality? (tick as many as apply)

- 1 ☐ Yes verbally (eg. called names)  
2 ☐ Yes physically (eg. bashed up)  
3 ☐ No. If no, go to question 3H

3D. If you were verbally abused, what was said?

3E. If you were physically abused, what happened?

3F. Where did this happen? (tick as many as apply)

- 1 ☐ At school  
2 ☐ On the street  
3 ☐ At home  
4 ☐ At a social occasion (party etc)  
5 ☐ At a sporting event (eg. football)  
6 ☐ Other

3G. Who did it to you and what did you do about it?

3H. Please tell us how these experiences have affected you (if at all) e.g. leaving home, using drugs OR have made you stronger etc.

Most people have times when they worry about their physical and emotional safety. To feel safe is to feel protected from harm, to feel comfortable, relaxed and happy. In this question we want to know how safe you feel in different places where you spend your time.

3I. How safe do you feel: (please mark only one box in each line)

- |   | Very Safe                  | Safe                       | OK                         | Unsafe                     | Very Unsafe                |
|---|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| At school?                              | 1 <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 <input type="checkbox"/> | 5 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| On the street?                          | 1 <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 <input type="checkbox"/> | 5 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| At home?                                | 1 <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 <input type="checkbox"/> | 5 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| At social occasions? (party etc.)       | 1 <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 <input type="checkbox"/> | 5 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| At a sporting event (eg. football game) | 1 <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 <input type="checkbox"/> | 5 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other                                   | 1 <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 <input type="checkbox"/> | 5 <input type="checkbox"/> |

3J. What do you do to help you feel safer?

3J. Is there anywhere you feel completely safe?

3K. Have there been occasions when you have thought about (or have succeeded in) harming yourself as a result of other people's homophobia?

- Yes No (please circle)

3L. If yes please tell us more about 3K.

## About Your Sexual Behaviours

4A. Which of the following best describes your sexual behaviour over the past 2 years? (please tick one box only)

- 1 ☐ I have never had sex  
2 ☐ I've had sex with both guys and girls  
3 ☐ I've only had sex with guys  
4 ☐ I've only had sex with girls

4B. How old were you when you first had an experience of ... (Please tick one age box for each type of experience.)

- |  | Under 13                 | 13                       | 14                       | 15                       | 16                       | 17                       | 18+                      |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Deep kissing?  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Touching a partner's genitals with your hand?                | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Being touched on your genitals by a partner's hand?          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Giving oral sex?   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Receiving oral sex?  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Had penetrative sex (including girl with girl, boy with boy) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

4C. The last time you had penetrative sex, if it was penis/vagina or penis/anus sex, was a condom used?

- Yes No (please circle)

4D. Have you ever been pregnant?

- Yes No (please circle)

4E. Have you ever been diagnosed with a sexually transmissible infection?

- Yes No (please circle) If yes which one?

4F. Have you ever been diagnosed with hepatitis?

- Yes No (please circle) If yes which one?

4G. Are you in a relationship at present?

- Yes No (please circle one), if yes please tell us about it?

## About Your Drug Use

5A. How many times, if ever, have you used or taken the following: (tick one box only on each line)

- |                           | Daily                      | Weekly                     | Weekends Only              | Monthly                    | Once a Month or less       | A Few Times a year         | Never                      |
|---------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Alcohol                   | 1 <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 <input type="checkbox"/> | 5 <input type="checkbox"/> | 6 <input type="checkbox"/> | 7 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Marijuana                 | 1 <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 <input type="checkbox"/> | 5 <input type="checkbox"/> | 6 <input type="checkbox"/> | 7 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Cigarettes                | 1 <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 <input type="checkbox"/> | 5 <input type="checkbox"/> | 6 <input type="checkbox"/> | 7 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Party drugs (eg. ecstasy) | 1 <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 <input type="checkbox"/> | 5 <input type="checkbox"/> | 6 <input type="checkbox"/> | 7 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Heroin                    | 1 <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 <input type="checkbox"/> | 5 <input type="checkbox"/> | 6 <input type="checkbox"/> | 7 <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other                     | 1 <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 <input type="checkbox"/> | 5 <input type="checkbox"/> | 6 <input type="checkbox"/> | 7 <input type="checkbox"/> |



5B. Have you ever injected drugs?

- 1 ☐ Yes  
2 ☐ No

## About Your Family and Friends

6A. Have you talked to anyone about your feelings of being attracted to people of your own sex?

Yes, I have talked to... (tick as many boxes as apply)

- 1 ☐ mum  
2 ☐ dad  
3 ☐ female friend  
4 ☐ male friend  
5 ☐ brother  
6 ☐ sister  
7 ☐ doctor  
8 ☐ teacher  
9 ☐ worker with young people  
10 ☐ student welfare coordinator/school counsellor  
11 ☐ counsellor (outside school)  
12 ☐ boyfriend/girlfriend  
13 ☐ school chaplain  
14 ☐ gay or lesbian adult  
15 ☐ school nurse  
16 ☐ someone on the Internet  
17 ☐ other \_\_\_\_\_

☐ No. I haven't talked to anyone.

6B. If you said yes to 6A, of those people you talked to, who was supportive?

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6C. Please list any support groups or any other organizations that support SSAY that you have had contact with.

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## Your General Well-Being

7A. How do you feel about your life as a whole?

(Please tick one box only)

- 1 ☐ Extremely happy  
2 ☐ Pleased  
3 ☐ Mostly satisfied  
4 ☐ Mixed feelings  
5 ☐ Mostly dissatisfied  
6 ☐ Unhappy  
7 ☐ Terrible

7B. How do you feel about yourself most of the time.

(Please tick one box only)

- 1 ☐ Extremely happy  
2 ☐ Pleased  
3 ☐ Mostly satisfied  
4 ☐ Mixed  
5 ☐ Mostly dissatisfied  
6 ☐ Unhappy  
7 ☐ Terrible

7C. I seem to get sick a little easier than other people.

(tick one box)

- 1 ☐ definitely true  
2 ☐ mostly true  
3 ☐ don't know  
4 ☐ mostly false  
5 ☐ definitely false

7D. I am as healthy as anybody I know (tick one box)

- 1 ☐ definitely true  
2 ☐ mostly true  
3 ☐ don't know  
4 ☐ mostly false  
5 ☐ definitely false

7E. I expect my health to get worse (tick one box)

- 1 ☐ definitely true  
2 ☐ mostly true  
3 ☐ don't know  
4 ☐ mostly false  
5 ☐ definitely false

7F. My health is excellent (tick one box)

- 1 ☐ definitely true  
2 ☐ mostly true  
3 ☐ don't know  
4 ☐ mostly false  
5 ☐ definitely false

7G. In regard to being same sex attracted, name three things that would make a positive difference in your life.

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## Sex Education Information

8A. Have you received any information about the topics below from these sources: (tick as many as apply)

	School	Media (eg. TV, Magazines)	Gay Media (eg. TV, Magazines)	Friends (Hetero-sexual)	Friends (Gay, Bi, Trans & Other)	Family (eg. Parents & Other Relatives)
Homophobia and discrimination	1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5 <input type="checkbox"/> 6 <input type="checkbox"/> 7 <input type="checkbox"/> 8 <input type="checkbox"/>					
Gay relationships	1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5 <input type="checkbox"/> 6 <input type="checkbox"/> 7 <input type="checkbox"/> 8 <input type="checkbox"/>					
Lesbian relationships	1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5 <input type="checkbox"/> 6 <input type="checkbox"/> 7 <input type="checkbox"/> 8 <input type="checkbox"/>					
Heterosexual relationships	1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5 <input type="checkbox"/> 6 <input type="checkbox"/> 7 <input type="checkbox"/> 8 <input type="checkbox"/>					
Gay safe sex	1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5 <input type="checkbox"/> 6 <input type="checkbox"/> 7 <input type="checkbox"/> 8 <input type="checkbox"/>					
Lesbian safe sex	1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5 <input type="checkbox"/> 6 <input type="checkbox"/> 7 <input type="checkbox"/> 8 <input type="checkbox"/>					
Heterosexual safe sex	1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5 <input type="checkbox"/> 6 <input type="checkbox"/> 7 <input type="checkbox"/> 8 <input type="checkbox"/>					

8C. Have you had any sex education at school?

Yes No (Please tick one) If yes, how useful has it been?

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In addition to this questionnaire, we are interested in reading more about your experiences of growing up knowing that you are sexually attracted to people of your own sex. We want to know about your own story including when you first knew about your sexual feelings, your experiences with friends and family, your good times and your bad, and your hopes for the future. If you would like to, please include this with the letter.

Do you feel that you would like some support with regard to any of the issues you have been thinking about while completing the questionnaire? If you are 18 years or under you can contact KIDSHELPLINE on their 24 hour toll free number 1800 55 1800 or kidshelpline@bystown.org.au. If you are over 18 contact Lifeline on 131 114. As well, there are many links on [www.latrobe.edu.au/ssay/](http://www.latrobe.edu.au/ssay/) to organisations that might be useful to you.



[www.latrobe.edu.au/ssay/](http://www.latrobe.edu.au/ssay/)

