

2021

R29 SEX RE-EDUCATION

information
desk

insights from

VICE MEDIA
GROUP

Reimagine the future of sex education.

● APPROACH

We fielded an online survey to our proprietary insights communities, VICE Voices and Mad Chatter, throughout March & April 2021. This survey explored where traditional sex-ed has fallen short, how young people get information about sex and sexual health now, and the questions they are still seeking answers to.



● COMPOSITION

N=1,425

● GENDER

43%
MALE

52%
FEMALE

5%
NON BINARY

● AGE

20%
GEN Z
(18-24)

34%
YOUNG
MILLENNIAL
(25-34)

27%
OLDER
MILLENNIAL
(35-40)

19%
GEN X+
(41+)

● MARKETS

US, Canada, & UK



SEX ED: THE SHORTCOMINGS

Sex ed is often the first place young people learn about sex and sexual health

80%

Of young people received a formal sexual education in middle/high school or college.

Q: Where did you first learn about sex/sexual health?

#1

Sex Ed in School (45%)

2. Friends (44%)
3. TV & Movies (31%)
4. Parents (27%)
5. Pornography (26%)
6. Siblings/other family (11%)
7. Google (11%) ▶ 29% CA; 9% UK; 8% US ▶ 17% Gen Z; 9% Millennial
8. Articles/videos from trusted publishers (8%)
9. Social media (7%) ▶ 27% CA; 6% UK; 3% US ▶ 13% Gen Z; 2% Millennial
10. Medical professionals (4%)

**But sex-ed did
not equip them
for the real world**



ONLY 5%

of young people say:
“Sex ed prepared me fully
for the real world.”



1 IN 2

say, “Sex ed just barely
prepared me for the real
world, if at all...”



LESS THAN

1 IN 4

felt “**Informed**”
after sex ed

Sex-ed did not speak to all sexual and gender identities

“There was **no LGBTQ+ contraceptive advice**. I didn’t learn about dental dams until I was out of high school.”

- Gen Z Woman, UK

“[It didn’t address] the opposite sex and their anatomy (the only sex ed class I took was **separated into girls and boys groups** and only discussed puberty and pregnancy).”

- Gen Z Non-binary, US

“[The most misleading thing I learned was] that sex is **very binary and restrictive in its definition** - always taught as only heterosexual sex, no mention or discussion of oral/manual/anal sex, or LGBTQ+ sex.”

- Gen Z Woman, UK



80%

say their sex-ed didn't cover sex as it relates to the LGBTQ+ community.

89% UK; 82% US; 58% CA

“We had nothing on LGBTQ sex (I am a lesbian) so **I had no idea what to do and how to feel safe.**”

- Millennial Woman, UK

“**I was told in school that gay people didn't exist.** Also incorrect information regarding gender, being told that intersex people and chromosomal variations didn't exist.”

- Gen Z Man, US

“[There was] little or **misleading information on lesbian sex.**”

- Gen Z, Non-binary, UK

Sex-ed did not address pleasure, especially for women

“Why didn't they bother focusing on women's pleasure? (We know why). There was plenty of talk about what a man's orgasm looks like. **I thought I was broken for YEARS because I couldn't climax.** I don't think any of my formal in-school sex ed was ***wrong*** necessarily, but they sure as hell didn't tell us nearly enough, or make us feel safe enough to ask.”

- Millennial Woman, US

“[I learned] false information about women (non-existence of female orgasm, teachings that women shouldn't enjoy sex), false medical information about sex and arousal.”

- Millennial Man, US



72%

say their sex-ed didn't cover the topic of pleasure.

76% US; 74% UK; 44% CA

“[The least useful thing I learned was] sex being a simple means for procreation only, or the idea that women do not desire sexual relationships or pleasure.”

- Millennial Woman, US

“I wouldn't say anything [I learned] was wrong or misleading, but there was a definite lack of information around consent, pleasure or same sex relationships.”

- Millennial Woman, UK

“I didn't really have a strong insight or understanding that the typical female sexual response was different compared to my sexual response. I was too embarrassed to start doing anything like speaking to girls about orgasm at the time.

- Millennial Man, UK

Sex-ed did not cover consent and all of its nuances



“There could have been more information regarding consent. It also would’ve been helpful to have **more discussion around appropriate behavior outside of sex (i.e. what kind of comments or actions could be classified as sexual harassment).**”

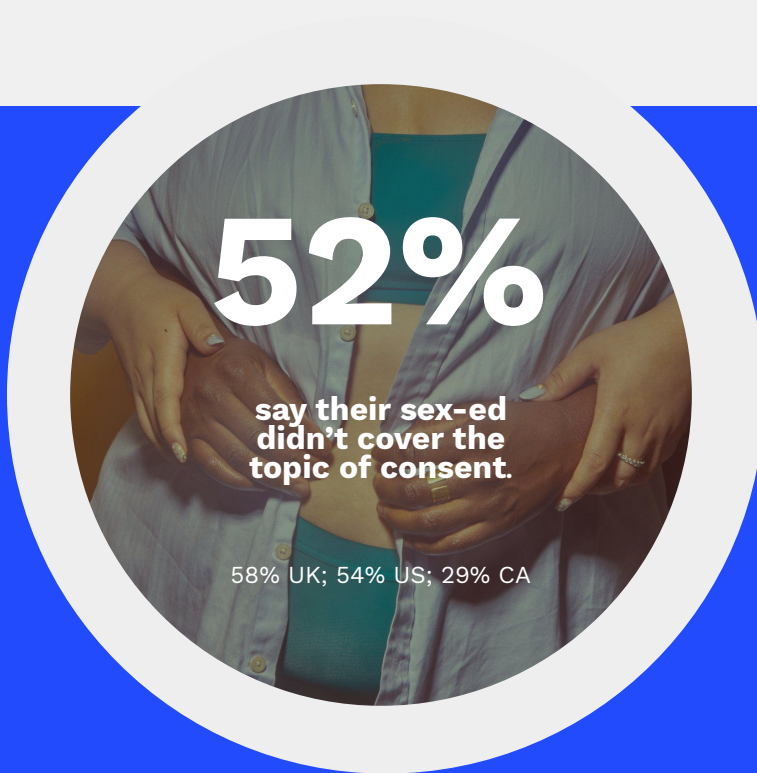
- Millennial Woman, US

“[I did not learn] **much or anything on consent** and how to enjoy/be safe/explore sex and sexualities.”

- Millennial Man, US

“[The most misleading thing I learned was] that if you're in a relationship with someone **you automatically give them consent.**”

- Gen Z Woman, UK



“Would have liked **more info about consent and sexual harassment.**”

- Millennial Woman, UK

“[There were] **inconsistent explanations** for consent.”

- Millennial Man, US

“[We were] never taught about consent properly, **we were just told ‘just say no’.**”

- Gen Z Woman, UK

Fear took precedence over confidence

Q: What information has not proven useful, or even been wrong?

ONLY
7%

felt **"CONFIDENT"**
after sex ed

22% CA
5% US
4% UK



STDs

"My middle school sex ed teacher literally **told us sex with a condom was like playing Russian roulette**; you may not get AIDS today, but some day you will because that's just how useless and ineffective condoms are."

- Millennial Woman, US

"Condoms don't work, **STDs will destroy you**, and no one will want to sleep with you."

- Millennial Man, US

"STDs were way, way, way over-emphasized, and not even in a "you should get tested before sexual encounters" way, but rather **"if you have any type of intimacy with any person you will get a life-long, disgusting, painful, untreatable STD."**

- Millennial Woman, US



Pain

"I remember my sex Ed teacher telling us getting **Pap smears were very painful**, which kind of dissuades folks from getting a Pap smear. She took out a speculum and said "doctors use this to crank you open." I'm 24 and I've never had one because that really freaked me out."

- Gen Z Woman, US

"**Sex will hurt and be bloody** the first time, and that hymens are indicators of virginity. I was actually terrified to "lose my virginity" but thought I just had to get through it."

- Millennial Woman, US

"[My teacher] pulled a condom over her arm and said "girls if anyone says the can't wear one because they don't fit they are lying". This made me feel like **something was wrong with me**. I had no idea you could get XL ones that would help this issue."

- Millennial Man, UK



Pregnancy

"I always thought if you have sex without birth control, almost **guaranteed you get pregnant**. I feel like the fertility window was not thoroughly explained, and in conversations with my husband, he feels the same."

- Millennial Woman, US

"[The most misleading thing I learned was that] sex mostly **just leads to pregnancy**."

- Millennial Woman, US

"I was so **terrified to get a girl pregnant**. It took me a while after high school and even college to know that it's only possible during certain times."

- Millennial Man, US

Shame took precedence over power

Q: What information has not proven useful, or even been wrong?

ONLY
5%

felt **"EMPOWERED"**
after sex ed

11% CA
4% US
3% UK



Number of Partners

"The whole women and chewing gum analogy (**no one wants someone that's "used" / not a virgin**) is so wrong and damaging!"
- Millennial Woman, US

"Implying you're **"tainted"** if you have **sex with lots of people.**"
- Gen Z Non-binary, US

"The idea that **people who have sex with a number of people are inherently engaging in "risky" behavior** and will be less capable of forming emotional connections with future partners."
- Millennial Woman, US



Sex til Marriage

"The trope that **one should only have sex after marriage**/with someone they want to spend their life with. That notion has created a taboo around the subject in my experience, limited my understanding, and created a guilt tied to my sexual experiences."
- Millennial Woman, US

"**Abstinence only.** I went to Catholic school and, surprise, it doesn't work."
- Millennial Man, US

"Everything was whack. It made me not have sex until my mid 20's. **I thought I would burn in hell if I touched myself.** I didn't know half the things I was feeling. I now struggle with my sexual expression, giving and receiving sexual attention."
- Millennial Woman, US



Virginity

"Lots of stuff around virginity has been wrong and unhelpful (e.g. **you can't wear tampons because they will ruin your virginity**; virginity is something that can be "taken"; losing your virginity can damage your and your family's reputation). I didn't believe this stuff then and still had sex as a teen, but I could feel the shame/disappointment around it anyway."
- Millennial Woman, US

"[The most misleading thing I learned was] that love was mandatory to enjoy sex & that **virginity was special.**"
- Millennial Woman, US

"We were taught **if you have anal you're still a virgin??**"
- Gen Z Non-binary, US

Sex-ed left them feeling uneasy vs. in control



HOW DID YOU FEEL IMMEDIATELY AFTER SEX ED?

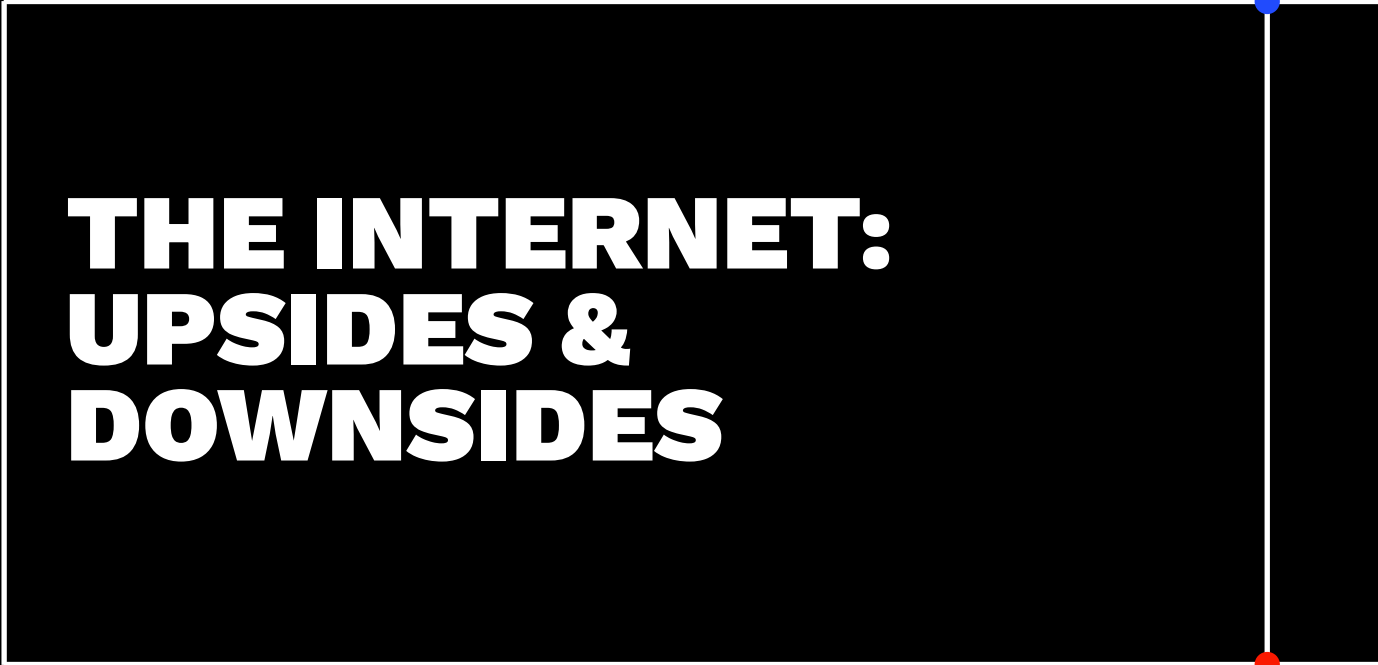

#1 NERVOUS

#2 EMBARRASSED

#3 SILLY

#4 CONFUSED

#5 TIMID



THE INTERNET: UPSIDES & DOWNSIDES

Google has become their best friend for questions & curiosities

74%

Of young people **have sought out sex ed information out of curiosity.**

▶ 86% Gen Z

▶ 79% UK; 76% US; 56% CA

Q: Where do you turn when you have questions about sex/sexual health?

#1

Google (60%) ▶ 70% Gen Z

2. Articles/videos from trusted sources (48%)
3. Friends (38%)
4. Medical professionals (38%) ▶ 43% Millennial
5. Social media (9%)

One of the most common reasons they seek information is to check if something they experience is “okay” or “normal”



67%

seek sex ed to **check if something they experienced was okay/normal**

▶ 85% Gen Z

▶ 79% UK; 68% US; 37% CA



75%

have **questioned whether something that happened during sex was okay/normal**

▶ 82% Gen Z

▶ 87% Non-binary*

*Based on low sample size (<75); use directionally

They've also learned about sex from porn

• **1 IN 2**

young people say:
“**Porn shaped my idea of what sex looked like before I had sexual encounters.**”

► 63% Men; 42% Women

87%

Feel that porn can be entertaining and enjoyable.

► 91% Men; 84% Women

70%

Have tried to replicate something they saw in porn.

► 79% Men; 65% Women

50%

Believe porn can be educational.

► 55% Men; 46% Women

But without
proper
perspective, porn
can create
misleading ideas
around sex



84%

do not believe the way **pleasure**
is depicted in porn is accurate.



82%

do not believe porn does a
good job of addressing
consent.



79%

of young people say:
**"Porn can have a negative
impact on real-life sex."**

► 75% Men; 84% Women



CONSENT: IN CONCEPT VS. PRACTICE

Vocalizing boundaries and desires is a powerful tool

Q: What has been the most valuable thing you've learned about sex/sexual health?

“Learning how to set boundaries with sex and telling people no or that you’re uncomfortable or that they need to use a condom was very valuable.”

- Gen Z Woman, UK

“Everybody is different and likes different things. Communicate well with whoever you’re having sex with. Figure out what they like and **communicate what you like.**”

- Millennial Man, US



67%

of young people say they often/always feel comfortable **communicating to their partner about their pleasure**

70% US; 62% CA; 60% UK



61%

of young people are often/always **vocal about what they want and don't want**

65% US; 54% CA; 51% UK

64% Millennial; 54% Gen Z



But consent by definition and consent by practice have different understandings

82%

say they feel fully informed on what consent is

85% US; 81% UK; 65% CA

YET...

69%

feel only somewhat or not at all informed on **how to manage non-consensual sexual encounters**

65%

feel only somewhat or not at all informed on **what is consensual around sexting**

42%

feel only somewhat or not at all informed on **how to understand consent signals**

52% CA; 41% US; 41% UK



**For more information,
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