**Title page**

**Learning from commercial entertainment producers in order to create entertainment sex education**

Alan McKee

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**Abstract**

The *Girlfriend Guide to Life* was a commercial entertainment product co-edited by an entertainment producer and an academic researcher to reach 14-17 year olds with information they wanted to know about sexual health, in language, genres and designs that they wanted. Entertainment-Education is a familiar approach to distributing information, including information about sexual health, in non-formal learning contexts. However previous accounts of E-E have highlighted a tension between the audience-centred approach of entertainment production and the message-centred approach of education. Using a practice-led methodology and drawing on reflective practice this article suggests that if educators go deeper than asking entertainment producers to simple make cosmetic changes to content, and accept that entertainment producers have a vital understanding of what target audiences need to know about sexual health, a reciprocal working relationship can be developed that overcomes some of the differences in habitus between entertainment producers and educators that have been identified by previous researchers.

**Keywords:** entertainment, entertainment-education, health communication, sexual health, practice-led research

**Introduction**

This article describes the creation of *The Girlfriend Guide to Life*, a commercially produced entertainment magazine, co-developed by an entertainment producer and an academic researcher to reach 14-17 year olds with information they wanted to know about sexual health, in language, genres and designs that they wanted. It reports on the audience responses to the *Guide*. In discussing this project it suggests that educators and commercial entertainment producers can work together in reciprocal ways to produce Entertainment-Education when we each accept that we have something to learn from the other.

[Figure 1]

Entertainment-Education – ‘the intentional placement of educational content in entertainment messages’ – is a familiar approach to distributing information, including information about sexual health, in non-formal learning contexts, using soap operas or other forms of entertainment ([Singhal and Rogers 2002, 117](#_ENREF_45)). However the practicalities of doing this remain in many ways unresolved. As Singhal et al note ‘[e]very entertainment-education project is a hybrid product of two very different types of expertise’ ([Singhal et al. 2007[2004]](#_ENREF_43)). On the one hand, entertainment is ‘audience-centred culture’ ([Collis, McKee, and Hamley 2010, 921](#_ENREF_15)), commercial production that aims to give audiences what they will want. Entertainment producers thus have expertise in reaching audiences and providing them with content they want to consume. This means (despite the concerns of some mass communication researchers) that power in the system of entertainment lies with the receivers (the audience) rather than producers ([McKee 2013](#_ENREF_32)) (this point is discussed in more detail below). By contrast, and although the fundamental basis of education as the transmission of knowledge implies no particular relationship between the educator and the learner (and some traditions have actively tried to share power with students - ([Freire 2000[1970]](#_ENREF_20))) it is generally the case that in Western cultures of formal learning, ‘the understanding of classroom power that prevails for most people … focuses on the opposition between teachers and students’ and ‘assigns power to the teacher’ ([Manke 2009[1997], 1](#_ENREF_30)).

It is worth taking some time to consider this point. Readers may wonder if Manke is caricaturing formal schooling by describing it in this way. For example, in the reality of classroom practice power relations can fluctuate and teachers can find themselves in positions of powerlessness. Best practice in classroom teaching emphasises the active role of students as learners, and many teachers strive to be creative in finding ways to engage students by respecting the students’ perspectives and expressed wishes. Nevertheless I would suggest that there remains a difference between entertainment and education. In entertainment the audience has total power over its own consumption. Audiences for entertainment are under no compulsion to remain engaged with a text and face no consequences if they choose to disengage and walk away from it. Entertainment producers give audiences what they want – they do not have to balance this with any consideration of whether what the audience *wants* is also what (the producer thinks) audience members really *need*. Formal schooling involves a complex play of roles where teachers must find ways to manage their authority in order to produce outcomes that the students may not actually (in the short term) want. Entertainment producers, by contrast, make no claims to having any authority over what audiences will watch.

Given these different orientations it is not surprising that the ‘intrinsic tension between entertainment and education’ ([Bouman 2002, 238](#_ENREF_7)) is ‘probably the most important single problem that E-E faces’ ([Piotrow and Fossard 2007[2004]](#_ENREF_38)) and ‘[h]arnessing these two kinds of professionals to produce an E-E intervention poses important management challenges’ ([Singhal et al. 2007[2004]](#_ENREF_43)). As Rob Morgan explains, these are two very different models of learning:

It remains pertinent … to distinguish between pedagogies of pleasure and those of decipherment. The experiential learning fostered by [entertainment] is self-selected, routed through a commercial nexus and driven by personal desire. It is also thoroughly conditioned by its dialectical tension with the 'scriptural economy' of schooling ([Morgan 1995, 54](#_ENREF_35))

Given that this is the case it is unsurprising that – as Morgan pointed out two decades ago - many teachers have been uncomfortable with the encroachment of entertainment into the classroom: ‘they often appeared to be threatened by television by 'saying things like that's a "leave your brains at the door type of show"’. As one student put it:

they sort of have a conflict with TV... They think a lot of students are wasting their time when they could be improving their reading and be more interested in ‘good books’ ([Morgan 1995, 53](#_ENREF_35))

Recent research suggests that even now there remains among many educators a suspicion of commercial entertainment and its lessons about sex ([Albury 2013](#_ENREF_1)). In this context it is not surprising that some researchers have reported an almost adversarial relationship between educators and entertainment producers trying to work on Entertainment-Education projects. In part this can be explained by important differences between the fields of practice ([Bourdieu 1991](#_ENREF_9)) of entertainment and education. For example, entertainment production often work at a speed that is unfamiliar to those in educational bodies: the educators interviewed by Bouman about their experiences of working with entertainment producers described the process of producing Entertainment-Education ‘using metaphors such as, “fast moving trains,” “galloping horses,” or “a whirlwind”’ ([Bouman 2002, 234](#_ENREF_7)). Entertainment production can also exhibit a flexibility, where key decisions are not locked down until close to the final deadline, that can be disconcerting to those used to more structured processes:

In an E-E collaboration there is always tension between following systematic plans, as [education] professionals are trained to do, and following creative impulses, as [entertainment producers] are trained to do ([Bouman 2007[2004]](#_ENREF_8))

Given this context it is not surprising that several Entertainment-Education researchers present stories of conflict between educators and entertainment producers, with the educators claiming that they have encountered ‘resistances to entertainment-education by message producers in the message environment’ ([Singhal and Rogers 2007 [2004]](#_ENREF_46)), or they may find ‘[t]o his surprise, some of his comments were not taken seriously’ ([Beck 2007[2004], np](#_ENREF_4)); while, from the other perspective, entertainment creators ‘often felt that they could not satisfy the [educators].’ ([Bouman 2002, 238](#_ENREF_7)). At its most problematic this can lead to staff walking off projects because of their inability to reconcile the demands of entertainment and education ([Bouman 2007[2004]](#_ENREF_8)).

In this context, one model that educators have recently experimented with is the production of entertainment education without the involvement of commercial entertainment producers ([Gilliam et al. 2016](#_ENREF_21), [Bouris et al. 2016, 354](#_ENREF_10)). While this minimizes problems of incompatible fields of practice it also excludes vital skill sets and possibilities for distribution from the Entertainment-Education practice. For example, as Bouris et al note, it is important when creating entertainment to produce something that will ‘engage’ ([Bouris et al. 2016](#_ENREF_10)), and ‘emotionally resonate’ with consumers ([Bouris et al. 2016, 363](#_ENREF_10)): this is the primary skill set of entertainment producers and thus it makes sense to work with them on these projects. Similarly, entertainment producers have access to vast audiences that cannot be otherwise be directly reached by educators – once again, working with commercial entertainment producers offers possibilities that are simply not there if they are not involved in the projects.

But the problem remains – how can these two radically different fields of practice be brought together? Breed and de Foe propose ‘cooperative consultation’ ([Breed and De Foe 1982, 98](#_ENREF_11)) as a model to understand best practice in the creation of Entertainment-Education. Cooperative consultation

is a shared and continuing exchange process between media personnel and a knowledge consultant that works to change certain media contents in a direction approved by both parties

They note that under this model:

The relationship is cooperative and collegial rather than adversarial, and no pressure is placed on media personnel. The eventual goal is for media workers to have the capability to monitor their own performance on the topics under consideration ([Breed and De Foe 1982, 98](#_ENREF_11))

Despite foregrounding cooperation, however, this model still institutes a relation of power between the educators – who are seen to be more informed – and the entertainment producers – who are seen to be in need of training from the educators. Breed and de Foe note that, in their project, ‘Our overall goal was to educate television personnel’ ([Breed and De Foe 1982, 98](#_ENREF_11)) and that their intention was to change the focus of the media workers from the production of entertainment to ‘social benefit’ ([Breed and De Foe 1982, 90](#_ENREF_11)). That is to say, the relationship may be *named* as cooperative – but, importantly, it is not understood as *reciprocal*. There is little sense in the literature that educators need to learn anything *from entertainment producers* during the process of creating of Entertainment-Education products, nor that the educators have changed their own practice as a result of what they have found out during the process of working with entertainment producers. Rather, when accounts of the process acknowledge the contribution made by the entertainment producers it tends to be in the form of access to the institutions of entertainment production ([Glik et al. 1998](#_ENREF_22)) rather than particular skills or insights. Even when researchers acknowledge that particular skills are necessary to produce successful entertainment – as when Kincaid notes that it in order to engage an audience it is necessary to ‘create drama that involves the audience’ ([Kincaid 2002, 136](#_ENREF_26)) – this insight is attributed to ‘theories of drama’ – not to the entertainment producers who actually have the skills to do this ([see also Moyer-Gusé, Chung, and Jain 2011, 388](#_ENREF_37)). As Smith et al note ‘most studies selected to focus on the “edu” in edutainment … Less attention has been paid to the “tainment” portion of edutainment’ ([Smith, Downs, and Witte 2007, 134](#_ENREF_47)).

Educators clearly bring a set of skills and knowledges to Entertainment-Education projects. But it is vital to recognise that entertainment producers working on Entertainment-Education products also bring to bear a set of relevant skills. The *Girlfriend Guide to Life* – a special issue of Australian *Girlfriend* magazine targeted at 14-17 year old young women – aimed to provide its target audience with a range of important information about sex and relationships that they wanted to read, gathered in one place, using language and imagery that they liked. It was edited by an academic researcher and two commercial entertainment editors who worked on the main Girlfriend brand, and who had a pre-existing relationship through the research of the academic into entertainment’s role in sex education.

Reflecting on the *Girlfriend’s Guide to Life* project it is apparent that a profound understanding of their target audience – one of the most important skills for entertainment producers – puts them in a position where they have much to teach educators.

**Entertainment producers understand the language of the target audience**

As noted above, entertainment is audience-centred culture. Citizens are not required to consume it and thus it is ultimately the audience who are powerful in the system of production, distribution and consumption of entertainment. This is a surprising idea for some academics, who have traditionally assumed that entertainment audiences are powerless and will take whatever they are given, allocating absolute control over content to the producers ([McKee 2007](#_ENREF_31)). This traditional mass communication model – which as Albury has recently shown, is still employed (at least implicitly) by some sex educators ([Albury 2013](#_ENREF_1)) misunderstands how entertainment works. Unlike students in formal educational institutions, entertainment audiences can choose to disengage at any time – and multiple historical examples demonstrate that if the entertainment materials offered to them do not meet their approval they will reject them, seek out illegal alternatives, or simply go and do something less boring instead ([McKee 2013](#_ENREF_32)). Media scholars employing uses and gratifications theory to explore audience uptake and use of media content and platforms have come to similar conclusions ([Arnett 1995, 519](#_ENREF_3)).

This means that a key skill for entertainment producers is to understand their audiences’ interests. Singhal and Rogers note that ‘Audience letters and e-mails represent a rather "pure" form of audience feedback’ ([Singhal and Rogers 2007 [2004]](#_ENREF_46)) – and entertainment producers commonly use those forms of feedback in order to understand their audiences as well as they can. In the case of *Girlfriend*, for example, Tarca read readers’ Facebook comments, tweets and emails every day. During the course of this project her detailed knowledge of her target audience became apparent and I learned much about how young women understand sexual health, what they perceive as the key issues, and what forms of information would engage them.

This understanding of the target audience means that that entertainment producers understand the language of their target audiences (including the visual language). This may seem like an obvious and familiar point but as I discuss below, it remains challenging for some educators. The use of ‘colloquial’ ([Singhal and Rogers 1999, 211](#_ENREF_44)) or ‘vernacular’ ([Van de Ven and Aggleton 1999, 462](#_ENREF_55)) language helps to reach target audiences. But as Cohn and Richters demonstrate in their article ‘My vagina makes funny noises’, formal sexual health resources consistently fail to use the language of their target audiences:

a Google search for a sexual health symptom in lay language such as ‘itchy vagina’ returned 5 user-created forum sites [as opposed to formal sexual health sites] on the first page (10 results). ‘Sore penis’ also returned 5 forum sites on the front page, and ‘itchy balls’ returned 9 of 10 … This suggests that Web sites providing accurate information would not be accessed by their target audiences because the official health information Web sites do not use lay language ([Cohn and Richters 2013, 94](#_ENREF_14))

In developing the *Girlfriend Guide to Life* Sarah Tarca, Claire Starkey and I began by agreeing on the topics that needed to be covered, using the taxonomy developed in ‘Healthy sexual development: a multidisciplinary framework for research’ ([McKee et al. 2010](#_ENREF_33)) as a guide. This process is discussed in more detail below. Once this had been done, two kinds of articles were gathered for the collection. Firstly, Tarca went through the *Girlfriend* archives to find existing material that could be repurposed for the collection. Each of these existing articles was then refreshed with contemporary information and I checked them for accuracy. Secondly, in those cases where no relevant material already existed, new articles were commissioned. I worked with the writers of these to ensure accuracy and relevance. As I made suggestions of possible material to be included, Tarca and Starkey rewrote it to ensure that it was presented using language relevant for the teen audience. As Tarca described this process in the Editors’ Letter: ‘Professor McKee was there to make sure we covered everything you needed to know … and I was there to let him know we don’t use the word “funky” any more’ ([Tarca and McKee 2014, 5](#_ENREF_52)).

[Figure 2]

For example, my first draft of the introduction to the article on ‘Let’s talk about sext’ read:

We’ve all got a collection of selfies on our phones. With some of them you wouldn’t care who sees them – you’d happily put them up on Facebook. But some are a bit more … intimate. What happens when a pic that was only meant for you to see – or perhaps your close friends or boyfriend – goes public?

The final version was changed, as Tarca put it, to ‘be more teen speak’

Let’s be honest: we’ve all got a few (ok, a lot) of selfies on our phones. Some of them, like the awesome Cara-lookalike ones, you couldn’t care less if the world saw. But some could be a bit more … intimate. So, what happens when those photos – the kind that were only meant for you or perhaps your close friends or boyfriend to see – go public?

Entertainment producers have the ability to translate health communication materials into suitable language for the target audience. They insert more instances of informal communication and more shared cultural referents. The language is more appropriate, and in some cases the material has been simplified to exclude information that wouldn’t be relevant to readers.

**Entertainment producers know how target audiences think about sexual health**

The fact that entertainment educators can speak the language of their target audience is important but, in itself, familiar to the point of banality. This analysis goes further in suggesting that this skill is superficial in comparison to another – entertainment producers know what is appropriate *content* for an Entertainment-Education product. David Gere has noted that Entertainment-Education projects cannot simply ask entertainment producers to design already existing material generated by educators: ‘It should not be just a pretty package wrapped around a message, a ‘cherry-coated pill’ ([Storey and Sood 2014, 28, quoting Gere](#_ENREF_51)). If the idea of allowing entertainment producers to rewrite their carefully worded messages is challenging to educators, the idea of giving some control over content to those producers is even more so. But the processes of decision-making about what content to include in an Entertainment-Education product are teachable moments for educators, who have something to learn from entertainment producers on this point. Unlike Breed and de Foe, whose goal during an entertainment project was to ‘educate [entertainment] personnel’ ([Breed and De Foe 1982, 98](#_ENREF_11)), in this project the researcher was open to being *educated by* the entertainment producers.

For the *Girlfriend Guide to Life* the starting point was to identify what the target audience – young women – wanted to know. It is well-known in the area of sex education research that the information provided by formal schooling often does not match up with what the target audience (young people) are interested in ([Allen 2008](#_ENREF_2)). The first priority for young people is understanding the emotional side of physical intimacy – how to start, manage and if necessary end relationships, and understand the place of love and physical intimacy in them ([see for example Halstead and Reiss 2003](#_ENREF_24)). Their second priority is an attention to pleasure – learning how to make physical intimacy more pleasurable for themselves and for their partners ([see for example Allen 2008, 573](#_ENREF_2)). But these two areas are commonly excluded from sexuality education as it is currently taught in Australia, New Zealand, America and the UK ([Farrelly, O'Brien, and Prain 2007](#_ENREF_19), [Spencer, Maxwell, and Aggleton 2008](#_ENREF_49)), which focuses on ‘the physical aspects of reproduction’ ([Halstead and Reiss 2003, 143](#_ENREF_24)), puberty, and scientific information about STIs and unwanted pregnancy ([Carmody 2009, 43](#_ENREF_13)). As described by young people, sexuality education is currently about ‘mechanics’ ([Carmody 2009, 42](#_ENREF_13)), ‘plumbing’ ([Carmody 2009, 59](#_ENREF_13)), or ‘puberty, procreation and penetration’ ([Sorenson and Brown 2007, 34](#_ENREF_48)) – ‘what Sears conceptualizes as the techno-rational approach to sexuality education’ ([Allen 2008](#_ENREF_2)).

In putting together the *Girlfriend Guide to Life*, I drew on the fifteen domains of healthy sexual development that was previously developed by an interdisciplinary group of researchers: freedom from unwanted activity, an understanding of consent and ethical conduct more generally, education about biological aspects of sexual practice, an understanding of safety, relationship skills such as assertiveness, agency, lifelong learning, resilience, an atmosphere of open communication in sexual learning, sexual development should not be ‘aggressive, coercive or joyless’, self-acceptance, awareness and acceptance that sex can be pleasurable, an understanding of parental and societal values, awareness of public/private boundaries and competence in mediated sexuality ([McKee et al. 2010](#_ENREF_33)).

However, it was not the case that these topics were then simply given to the entertainment producers for them to turn into a ‘pretty package’. Rather, the fact that Tarca and Starkey knew their target demographic so well meant that they were able to suggest articles that would not even have occurred to me to be included under the topic of ‘sexual health’. For example, they suggested the inclusion of an article on how sex feels – one of the most common questions they’re asked by their readers – as well as one explaining how to tell if you’re still a virgin. The most important way in which Tarca and Starkey’s understanding of their audience impacted the content was in their understanding that for the target audience, relationships with friends are just as important as – and are closely imbricated with – sexual relationships. It was Tarca and Starkey’s idea to include in the collection a series of articles that explored how emerging sexual identities interact with friendship groups. ‘Let’s talk about sex’ includes a section on how to talk about sex with your friends. ‘Early birds’ addresses the difficulties of being the first in your friendship group to go through puberty; while ‘Are you a late bloomer’ addresses the issues of being the last to mature physically. ‘Odd girl out’ explores the difficulties of being the only one in a friendship group who isn’t partnered up, while ‘Bestie gone wild’ discusses what to do when friends are behaving in risky or atypical ways, including sexually. Many of these topics would not normally fall under the rubric of ‘sexual health’, but based on their expertise Tarca and Starkey understood that for the target audience, these were important issues.

**Entertainment producers understand the value of ‘dumbing up’**

Perhaps the most challenging lesson that educators can learn from entertainment producers is the appropriate level of information about a topic that is necessary to engage a target audience. Bouman notes that the educators to whom she spoke about their Entertainment-Education experiences:

were accustomed to designing their health communication materials in-house (brochures, leaflets, books, magazines, videos, and documentary films) and found this new process difficult to manage. They were accustomed to spelling out their goals, creating a message following a carefully structured plan, and checking and double-checking the message ([Bouman 2002, 235](#_ENREF_7))

Bouman notes that educators are trained to operate in a field of practice in which there is little tolerance for ambiguity. They want clear, scientifically correct messages, presented without the possibility of the audience answering back or having a different perspective. For educators, the typical attitude is that the power to decide on what is important information should rest with the trained experts:

[t]he health message had to be presented in a trustworthy context, be based on scientifically correct, objective information, and on a consensus among subject matter specialists in the specific field of health expertise … Sometimes, television professionals thought the content of the message needed to be sacrificed for entertainment ([Bouman 2002, 234-235](#_ENREF_7))

In accounts of the practice of Entertainment-Education we find an ongoing tension between ‘truth’ (the speech domain of educators) and ‘communication’ (the realm of entertainment producers). Buckingham and Bragg, speaking to young people about how they learned about sex, love and relationships from popular media, noted that they were likely to reject worthy programs that they saw as ‘preaching’ to them ([Buckingham and Bragg 2004, 162](#_ENREF_12)). Indeed:

the overt imposition of moral lessons …. is precisely [the] kind of approach that leads some viewers to perceive [entertainment] as preaching and lecturing and to reject them on these grounds ([Buckingham and Bragg 2004, 168](#_ENREF_12)).

By contrast, entertainment products (Buckingham and Bragg take the example of soap operas) can let young people work things out for themselves: they ‘encourag[e] viewers to make their own judgments, rather than simply commanding their assent’ ([Buckingham and Bragg 2004, 168](#_ENREF_12)). However, the challenge of these forms of communication is that the more they engage young people, the less likely they are to have a single clear didactic ‘message’ that all viewers will agree on. The soap opera stories that the young people were most engaged by, remembered best, and discussed with most passion also led to disagreements between them about what message they actually communicated ([Buckingham and Bragg 2004, 174](#_ENREF_12)). Bouman similarly notes the ratings failure of a Dutch Entertainment-Education television program where:

The way the health message was incorporated in *Villa Borghese* proved to be overly didactic. The storyline lacked suspense and developed too slowly … There were only 13 episodes, so the educational content was brought into play too quickly ([Bouman 2007[2004]](#_ENREF_8)).

The need to avoid didacticism is challenging for educators. Tully and Ekdale recount the example of a Kenyan Entertainment-Education soap opera where:

the producers attempt to avoid disseminating simple moralistic messages and, instead, present complex situations in which the characters face difficult decisions with no clear right or wrong choice. As a result, audience members sometimes respond in ways that the producers do not anticipate … the ambiguity of the character affected the producers’ ability to connect audience members to the intended educational message … audience members may have interpreted Priest’s complex character as realistic and responded to his death with greater pity than moral contemplation. For them, the loss of the character was more significant than messages about the consequences of immorality ([Tully and Ekdale 2014, 140, 151](#_ENREF_54))

For Tully and Ekdale this is problematic – they would wish for a clearer message, even if that resulted in a program that was less engaging for viewers. Similarly Singhal and Rogers note of an Indian E-E soap opera that:

The first *Hum Log* episodes earned disappointing ratings …Individuals … complained of … didactic sermons … scriptwriter Manohar Shyam Joshi … [added] A subplot addressing underworld activities and political corruption was also added, which, while popular with the audience, diminished the soap opera’s major educational purpose ([Singhal and Rogers 1999, 76](#_ENREF_44))

They note with disappointment that the final outcome was a ‘compromise’ ([Singhal and Rogers 1999, 103](#_ENREF_44)). The question about the presentation of information – whether it should be explicit or implicit, worthy or entertaining – continues to exercise Entertainment-Education researchers ([Moyer-Gusé 2012](#_ENREF_36)). Some educators fear that Entertainment-Education risks ‘dumbing down’ information ([Rahoi-Gilchrest 2010, 167](#_ENREF_39)). ‘Dumbing down’ is a non-academic and often poorly defined phrase which implies that sacrificing any level of scientific detail or precision in order to reach an audience is a bad thing. By contrast, for entertainment producers, finding ways to identify what is important to the target audience, and how to communicate that – simplifying it, or, as we might say, ‘dumbing it up’ – is a vital part of their skill set, and one that educators might learn from.

An example from the *Girlfriend Guide to Life* can be found in the article ‘The Big O’. I originally wrote a section about the myth of the vaginal orgasm:

People used to make a distinction between ‘clitoral orgasms’ - resulting from stimulation of the clitoris – and ‘vaginal orgasms’ – resulting from the penetration of the vagina by a penis, dildo or vibrator. Some psychoanalysts even used to say that vaginal orgasms were ‘better’ or more ‘mature’. However Jocelyn Klug says that this is an old-fashioned way of thinking about orgasms. ‘Modern sexologists don’t like that distinction’, she says. ‘Because it sets up women to feel incompetent – as though they can only have a proper orgasm when there’s a man there’. She says that all female orgasms are clitoral: ‘Whether it’s by oral sex, masturbation, penetration with penis, or a vibrator, there’s always some form of clitoral stimulation involved in giving women orgasms – even if it’s pressure through the vaginal wall on the anterior side’. And even though a small number of women can get sufficient clitoral stimulation to orgasm through vaginal penetration, Klug says that this is rare and you certainly shouldn’t feel any pressure to have orgasms this way.

The revised version of this section was shorter and simpler:

Jocelyn says that all female orgasms are clitoral: ‘Whether it’s by oral sex, masturbation, penetration with penis, or a vibrator, there’s always some form of clitoral stimulation involved in giving women orgasms – even if it’s pressure through the vaginal wall on the anterior side’

The first version gives historical context on this issue. But for the vast majority of young women reading *The Girlfriend Guide to Life* historical information is not relevant. The revised version identifies the information that is relevant to the readers and focuses on that. By making the information more accessible and interesting to readers it is more likely to reach the target audience. This is a positive outcome. When aiming to provide young readers with the information to promote an aspect of healthy sexual development – an awareness and acceptance that sex can be pleasurable – it isn’t necessary for young people to understand the history of debates about female pleasure. It is only necessary for them to be given the information that is directly applicable to their own situation. This may be disappointing to an educator like myself who is personally passionate about and interested in the history of this issue – but he can learn from the entertainment producer what the perspective of the target audience is likely to be on this issue and what is most likely to engage the reader.

**Reception**

Education can only be considered successfully if it reaches, and is taken up by, a target audience of learners. It is my hypothesis that the involvement of entertainment producers in the creation of the *Girlfriend Guide to Life* allowed it to reach and be accessible to an audience of young women that would have been difficult to reach in other ways. A review of audience/learner feedback suggests that the topics, language and approach that the producers brought to the project successfully achieved this. Forty thousand copies of the *Girlfriend Guide to Life* were published and distributed to newsagents and supermarkets around Australia. The editors of the *Guide* received informal feedback from readers suggesting that this project was both fully entertaining and genuinely educational:

I would love to thankyou so much for creating the 'Guide To Life' book it was definetly $14.95 that changed my life! Reading this has helped me gain positive relationships with not only others but myself and has made me a happier brighter person. It has only been about a month and I know that I have changed for the better. Thankyou so much for helping teens through real life struggles you all are amazing at building self confidence and just really connecting with readers. Thankyou so much without this mag I would not have been the person I am today. Keep up the great work.

Another wrote:

finished reading it and it was amazing. Very informative and kept me entertained. Being a teenager is a very confusing part of our lives and I believe this book will help all teen girls out there! It is reassuring to know that awkward issues as those discussed in the book, are able to be opened up about. I'll be sure to keep this book nearby as my teen years continue!

In order to seek more quantitative data about the *Guide’s* reception, in the month after it had been distributed McKee and Tarca used the *Girlfriend* webpage, facebook page and Twitter account to invite readers to complete a survey about the *Guide*: ‘Have you read GF’s *Guide to Life*? Tell us what you think and you could win your very own iPad!’. One hundred and eighty-nine readers responded.

Of these, the majority (61.5%) were between 14 and 17 years old; and almost all (98.7%) were female. 91.9% described themselves as straight, 3.9% as bisexual and 0.3% as gay or lesbian.

As noted above, one of the key domains of healthy sexual development is an atmosphere of open communication in sexual learning. Previous focus group work with 14-17 year olds had revealed that they were generally uncomfortable talking about sexual issues with family, friends or counsellors ([McKee, Dore, and Watson 2014](#_ENREF_34)). However, 52.5% of respondents said they had talked about any of the articles in the *Guide* with someone else. Given that this was reporting on naturalistic behaviour – the readers had not specifically been encouraged to talk about the contents, and as a commercial entertainment product it didn’t not require any particular behavioural response – this figure is heartening. The favourite articles for discussion included ‘Periods 101’, ‘The Virgin Diaries’, and ‘Self-harm is an addiction’, although a wide range of the articles were reported as promoting open communication about sex. 80% reported talking about the content to friends, 36.3% to their mum (only 1.3% talked with their dad), 23.8% with a sibling and 22.5% with a boyfriend or girlfriend. 63.7% answered yes to the question ‘Have you used any ideas from the *Guide to Life* in your own life’. Of these, fifty two took the opportunity to provide details about what they had applied. Apart from generic comments like ‘too many to list’ (thirteen respondents), the most common areas in which respondents said they had applied information were basic biological information about puberty, periods and so on (eleven); skills for improving their friendships (nine); and issues around mental health (nine).

On average, the respondents rated the magazine– on a 5 point scale from ‘Totally useless’ to ‘Amazing’ - as sitting in the ‘Amazing’ range (45.1% rated it 4 or ‘Pretty good’; 44.4% as 5, or ‘Amazing’). When asked what they would change about the *Guide*, the most common response was ‘Nothing’ – with other comments including ‘It is spectacular’, ‘It’s pretty perfect’, ‘It was brilliant’ and ‘it was amazingly helpful’. (although one reader did suggest ‘not as pink’).

**Conclusion**

I introduced Tarca and Starkey to the taxonomy of sexual health developed in ‘Healthy sexual development: a multidisciplinary framework’, which provided the basic structure around which this special issue of *Girlfriend* magazine was put together. But simultaneously he learned a significant amount from Tarca and Starkey in the process of putting together this Entertainment-Education project. Most importantly, he learned what ‘sexual health’ means as a concept to a target audience of young women – which is rather different from what ‘sexual health’ looks like in a clinical context, with more focus on how it feels to have sex, a greater focus on virginity and – of particular importance - the place of friends in puberty and the development of sexual relationships. This knowledge came directly from the entertainment producers working on the project, who spend all day every day gathering evidence to understand their target audience. Entertainment-Education continues to struggle with the relationship between the entertainers and the educators, particularly with the desire on the part of educators to ‘educate [entertainment] personnel’ ([Breed and De Foe 1982, 98](#_ENREF_11)). Acknowledging that we as educators have much to learn from entertainment producers is an important step forward in these relationships. Sex educators can learn from entertainment producers how their target audiences think about sexual health issues. Educators can learn how to present material in ways that engage target audiences – even if that involves making it simpler, less ‘scientific’ ([McKee, Dore, and Watson 2014](#_ENREF_34)), or less didactic than they may be comfortable with. At the same time, the knowledge that educators hold about sex education can provide an interesting new insight for entertainment producers who want to reach their audiences with information that matters to them. When we work together we can produce products like the *Girlfriend Guide to Life* that reach tens of thousands of young people in a way that engages them, and provides them with information that they embrace, and apply to their own lives.

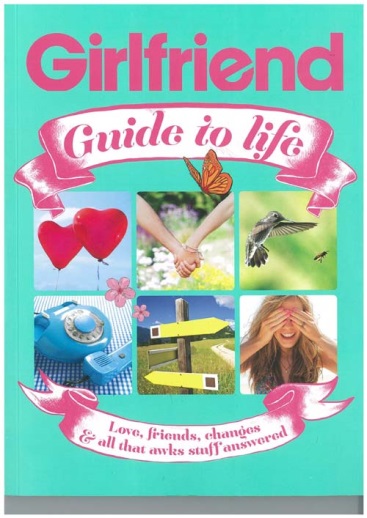


Figure 1



Figure 2

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