

A critical analysis of *you: an introduction*

It seems that we can't understand ourselves without some help.
There's nothing we want more than our freedom.
Our dreams keep us going. They are our momentum.
Whose idea of the body will win? Who will get to determine the body's meaning?
We know how good it could be, but we don't know why it never is.
So what are we to make of this 'life'?
My stuff is an extension of my self. To steal my stuff is to violate me.
Let's start with a story. It's the story of the man named Job.
It's loathsome to waste it and painful to kill it. Time is money.
It's got me thinking about human beings. Who are we really?
This may not surprise you, but You are alive.
To be a man or a woman is first and foremost a matter of being human ...

you: an introduction by michael jensen

Why should we accept the way other people want to define us?
We do not trust words because we do not trust the people who use them.
I think we should just calm down. Here are two reasons why.
It matters because here was human life as it ought to have been lived.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report evaluates a set of texts, *you: an introduction*, which was developed for use in Special Religious Education (SRE) in NSW secondary schools.

The texts include a paperback book, a teacher's manual, a student manual and an accompanying DVD.

In the texts the authors, Michael Jensen and Vicky Jeliffe, set out to explore 'some of the different facets of the human condition' to help students answer 'the question of who You are'. Jensen asserts that 'who we are is essentially bound up with the question of who Jesus is'.¹

The report author concludes that the texts are divisive, promote gender inequality and discrimination towards same-sex attracted and gender diverse students, students with a disability, chronic or terminal illness, and those from culturally and linguistically diverse communities (CALD).

The texts can have a negative emotional impact on students as they are told that 'there is something deeply wrong with you'². Students are encouraged and frightened into conforming with a narrow definition of being. The ideal student will be heterosexual, conform to narrow gender norms and be a 'hygienic and healthy westerner'³. Students are expected to become Christians if they are not already.

The texts proselytise and serve to isolate students from others whose values differ from those of the texts' authors. This includes their parents.

This report concludes that these texts have no place in Australian government schools and promote messages contrary to NSW Department of Education policies and educational best practices.

The report has been reviewed by numerous senior professionals across the issues examined.

¹ *you: an introduction*, Michael Jensen, back cover blurb

² *ibid* p56

³ *ibid* p38

Introduction

This report is a critical review of **You: an introduction**, a set of texts used in NSW Special Religious Education (SRE) classes and intended for years 9 and 10 students.

The texts developed for this course are:

- you: an introduction, by Michael Jensen
- you: an introduction – teacher's manual, by Vicky Jelliffe
- you: an introduction – student handbook, by Vicky Jelliffe
- you: an introduction – DVD to accompany the teacher's manual

Michael Jensen is the rector at St Mark's Anglican Church, Darling Point, and teaches theology at Sydney's Moore College.

Vicky Jelliffe is a student at the Presbyterian Theological College Sydney and is a youth minister at the Epping Presbyterian Church.

This report is a review of the lessons and themes found in these resources (henceforth known as 'the texts') and raises the question of whether the lessons are compatible with the policies set by the NSW Department of Education and Communities, which were developed to ensure best educational and care standards for the young people in NSW schools.

Principles For Equity In Education And Training ...

4. The diversity of the population is recognised and valued by inclusive approaches to the development, conduct and evaluation of programs.
 5. A demonstrated commitment to these equity principles and practices is a core responsibility for all those involved in education and training.
- New South Wales Government Charter for Equity in Education and Training

This report is written in two sections.

The first asserts that the authors of the texts intend for their work to be used to **proselytise** in NSW state schools and explores the methods they use to achieve this aim. It also looks at how this curriculum may **make students vulnerable to damaging messages**.

The second looks at some of the themes in the texts that promote **discrimination** against women and minority groups in our community. Particularly affected are the LGBTIQ community, disabled, chronically or the terminally ill and students from CALD communities.

The NSW Department of Education has developed policies to reduce discrimination that students may face at school and individual schools, principals and teachers work tirelessly to ensure that each child is honoured for their unique attributes.

The report concludes that the texts' negative messages and proselytising are in conflict with the **best interests of students** as defined by the NSW Department of Education and calls on them to be removed from use in Australian state schools as instructional materials.

Comment on this report has been provided by:

- Georgie Harman, CEO, *beyondblue*
- Dr Michael Carr-Gregg, Managing Director Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre, child and adolescent psychologist
- Professor Marion Maddox, Department of Modern History, Politics and International Relations, Macquarie University
- Fiona McCormack, CEO, Domestic Violence Victoria
- Cathy Byrne, religion sociologist, Southern Cross University
- Justin Koonin, convenor, NSW Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby
- Sally Goldner, Executive Director, Transgender Victoria
- Daniel Witthaus, CEO, National Institute for Challenging Homophobia in Education (NICHE)
- David Zyngier, Senior Lecturer, Department of Education, Monash University
- Dr Naomi Priest, Fellow, ANU available for comment on anti-racism

About the report's author

Deanne Carson is an educator, youth advocate, author and parent. She works in sexuality and relationship education.

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Comment from specialist professionals

Georgie Harman

It's not ok to make any young person feel that being different is wrong," said beyondblue CEO Georgie Harman.

Messages linking gender identity and sexuality with sin or uncleanness are archaic, and to suggest 'something is deeply wrong' with people who express their true identity is disturbing.

Being exposed to a range of community views helps build resilience, but beyondblue's own research shows that discrimination and homophobic views can have a profound effect on the mental health and well-being of young LGBTI people.

Research shows that one in five gay, lesbian and bisexual Australians is currently experiencing depression and one in six young LGBTI people have attempted suicide.

The Australian Psychological Society issued a position statement in February, 2015, that condemned 'conversion therapy' for stigmatising homosexuality and opposed any form of mental health treatment seeking to change a person's sexual orientation.

Schools can create inclusive and respectful environments where gender diverse young people are able to thrive and feel welcome.

Dr Michael Carr-Gregg

My view is that there is nothing wrong with classes on comparative religion - who knows, it might result in this generation being better global citizens than their parents. It is also helpful for some young people - especially those who are interested to understand the foundational role that Christianity played in western civilisation, *however some of the content being taught in this workbook is simply over the top fundamentalism and potentially may do psychological harm.* (emphasis Dr Carr-Gregg's own)

Research shows that many young people are struggling with managing their wellbeing. One in seven primary and one in four secondary students have psychological problems. It is hard to see how these students in particular, might benefit by being told that they have 'sinned and deserve God's punishment' and that the world is in 'deep trouble'.

Many of the views expressed about sex, sexuality, abortion, suicide, homosexuality, sin, death and gender roles in these workbooks are simply obsolete and anachronistic and will not provide young people with the skills, knowledge or strategies to cope with modern life.

Professor Marion Maddox

The NSW Public Instruction Act 1880 established public schools where students of many backgrounds could learn "without sectarian or class distinction." Passing the Act, parliamentarians insisted that such learning was needed to build "mutual sympathy and respect", and could only take place if students met "independently of their creed."

Today, NSW Education Department policies guarantee that: "Schools will ... recognise and value the backgrounds of all students and promote an open and tolerant attitude towards different cultures, languages, religions and worldviews" (Multicultural Education Policy) and that: "There is no place in government schools for any form of discrimination or harassment against students or staff," including "on the grounds of race, sex, marital status, disability, homosexuality or age" (Homophobia in Schools Policy). Moreover: "Schools are not places for recruiting into partisan groups" (Controversial Issues in Schools Policy).

As our founders foresaw, these vital, democratic values are difficult to maintain alongside a proselytising worldview that divides the world into strict hierarchies and tries to recruit students onto one perceived path to salvation.

Fiona McCormack

Violence against women is rife in the Australian community and international evidence shows us that violence against women occurs as a result of unequal power relations between men and women; rigid stereotyping about the roles of men and women in our society and; a broader culture of violence in which sexist and misogynist attitudes are able to thrive.

Recent research by VicHealth (the National Community Attitudes study) shows some worrying trends among young people in regards to their attitudes about violence against women. This is particularly alarming since this age group is also over-represented among both victims and perpetrators. As many as one in five women experiencing sexual violence, and one in three physical violence from the age of 15, there can be no doubt that Australia has a long way to go to overcome this problem

These comments are very concerning as young people's attitudes don't exist in a vacuum - they are reflective of and reinforced by broader community attitudes. When material which explicitly supports gender inequality is endorsed by schools and other institutions which are important to young people it can mean that some people are more likely to feel it is okay to behave disrespectfully or even violently and we as a community are less likely to take action to intervene, or to support a victim. For example, in a culture that fails to take rape seriously, victims feel afraid to seek help. They are unsure of what kind of response they are going to receive from friends, family and institutions like police and courts.

Cathy Byrne

Extremism is a learned mindset and behaviour. Religious instruction that demoralises students, describes them as helpless sinners, creates fear of diversity and encourages them to offer their own lives for their faith is obscene. This type of religious instruction is a burden on youth who already suffer from mental health pressures and can be a doorway to violent extremism.

Justin Koonin

It is extremely important to affirm the identities of gender diverse young people. These young people are some of the most marginalised in our community and have rates of suicide and depression many times the national average. Educators have a responsibility to ensure that they are not causing harm, and need to be mindful of the language they use.

Sally Goldner

I am deeply concerned about any aspect of this so-called SRE that would devalue any person in relation to gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation or body.

Further, any inaccuracies in these areas that make the SRE less than fully inclusive need to be totally exposed.

Daniel Witthaus

This report shines a light on a resource that would otherwise be operating in the shadows of NSW classrooms. It highlights how this resource leaves little, if any, room for same-sex attracted and gender diverse young people to feel safe, included and supported - something that every young person in Australia deserves.

The reports focus on the discrimination against women and minorities is doubly important given that homophobia and transphobia have their roots in gender inequality.

At a time when we should all be preaching about how we can live and work together, this resource instead preached the opposite.

David Zyngier

The messages both explicit and implicit in Jensen's work are often clearly contrary to good teaching practice in Australia. The pedagogical approach is to tell students to uncritically accept

without any discussion or contrary evidence the premise he puts forward in his texts as THE truth. This is not the expected way that teaching occurs in our 21 century classrooms.

Elsewhere Jensen has written that:

True education is itself the result of a commitment to the kind of world God has made - a world which is ordered according to the divine plan. In the gospel it is revealed to us the goodness and beauty and truth with which the holy God has imbued the creation, and for which he will hold we human beings accountable.

And this could prove more significant than we realise, for the barbarians are today at the gates of Western civilisation. In flight from its Christian roots, the West is pursuing a self-destructive course. In its denial of God, it is wilfully blinding itself to the realists of his beauty and truth and goodness.

Without God, it turns out, everything is permissible - the ugly, the false and the evil.⁴

It is obvious that Jensen and the Christian Religious Education (CRE) propose that if you are not a Christian believer then you are less worthy as a person, and even a barbarian or savage.

So much for tolerance and multiculturalism. This is a terrible message to be giving to our young impressionable children that can only serve to isolate, alienate and other those who are not believers in Jesus as their saviour.

⁴ Educating for Failure, Michael Jensen, sydneyanglicans.net Jan 7 2014

PART ONE

'Becoming a Christian' - proselytising in the classroom

To this end, members of religious persuasions are not to engage in attempts to proselytise or convert non-adherents of their religion to their faith in the course of school endorsed activities.

- Letter from David Cullen, Director, Early Learning and Primary Education. Addressed to Lara Wood, CEO of FIRIS, dated 30 March 2015

Special Religious Education (SRE) providers argue that proselytising, the act of attempting to convert individuals to a faith, cannot occur in SRE as students are identified as being of a particular faith prior to being enrolled in the corresponding SRE program. The texts indicate that, in reality, SRE providers know that students may not be practising Christians or may not subscribe to their particular interpretation of the Bible's teachings.

If you are thinking of becoming a Christian, you're embarking on something that will take the whole of you. It will show you who You really are and who You are not. It will change how you think about your life, body, freedom, stuff, parents, gender, dreams and death. It will do much more than this, too.⁵

This statement in the student handbook acknowledges that students may not already be Christians and spells out the author's intent to change the students' values, priorities and even their relationships with their parents.

The teacher's manual tells instructors not to assume the students have any knowledge of Christianity:

We can no longer assume that teenagers have any understanding of who or what we are talking about when we talk about God, Jesus, the Bible and the Church. It presents something of a problem when our students have probably spent more time looking in the fridge for something to eat than reading the Bible.⁶

It also references Matthew 9:35-38 and uses the metaphor of shepherds or disciples for SRE teachers, with the students as sheep and the SRE teachers as shepherd to bring them to God.

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples 'the harvest is plentiful but workers are few. As the lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers in to harvest the field. Matthew 9:35-38⁷

How do we open their [the students'] eyes to Jesus and help them to comprehend his incredible love?⁸

How indeed?

⁵ You, an introduction, student handbook p 59

⁶ You: an introduction, teacher's manual p10

⁷ ibid p 5

⁸ ibid p10

"Something is deeply wrong with you': psychological persuasion

Jensen and Jelliffe have put together the curriculum in such a way that instructors can gain significant influence over students. The techniques are similar to those identified by psychiatrist Robert Lifton in his work on psychological persuasion. The texts' authors work to break down students' self-esteem, alienate students from influences not congruent with the texts' teachings, and have students question their values around equality, inclusivity and transparency. The texts then use a pincer move of fear and enticement to find the solution to students' problems in the form of God.

Lifton identifies the three main stages of psychological persuasion as:

1. Breaking down the self
2. The possibility of salvation
3. Rebuilding the self

A quick glance at the chapter headings show that Jensen has also split his book into these stages. Early chapters have titles such as 'What, anxious, me?' and 'What You are not', the penultimate chapter is titled 'What next?' while the final chapter is, 'The real You'.

In chapter one of you: an introduction, Jensen outlines the seven points of anxiety for 'modern human beings'. He asserts that 'we are a confused race, unable to master our own power, unable to even know ourselves, bewildered by our own destructiveness.'⁹

Other examples of disempowerment of students, breaking down self-esteem and creating doubt include:

*God is God and you are not ... Stop kidding yourself that you have godlike powers. Stop pretending you can live independently of your creator. Stop acting like you are wiser than he is.'*¹⁰

*An activity you could use to reinforce the uncleanness of sin would be to bring in an old, but clean T-shirt to class. Have the students dirty it with writing or another way to try to represent as many different sins as they can. Point out to the students that these sins become something you wear, but unlike this T-shirt, you can't take them off.'*¹¹

*Freedom used to mean something noble ... but now freedom mostly means the freedom to buy ... individual freedom has now been reduced to sex and shopping - the unbridled consumption of people and things - the quest for the perfect orgasm and the best pair of shoes.'*¹²

*And I am sorry to have to be so blunt, but it's obvious to everyone who knows you: something is deeply wrong with you.'*¹³

*As much as our society values tolerance, we go too far when we sacrifice the pursuit of truth for the sake of tolerance. Not all ways can lead to heaven.'*¹⁴

⁹ Jensen p12

¹⁰ *ibid* p 18

¹¹ you: an introduction: teacher's manual p 44

¹² you: an introduction, Jensen p 56

¹³ *ibid* p115

¹⁴ you: an introduction, teacher's manual p113

[Teenagers] struggle to love themselves, with low self-esteem leading to self-loathing, self-harm and mutilation. There is often unhappiness and a desire for what they don't have.¹⁵

If there is any doubt as to the intent behind the above examples, this is a directive in the teacher's manual:

[The aim is] to leave students with the knowledge that our world and humanity are stuck in sin, to help them understand the sense of powerlessness we have in not being able to rescue ourselves, and to help them to search for a saviour.¹⁶

In a classic 'good cop, bad cop' move, students are simultaneously offered salvation in the form of God while the texts use fear of damnation and reckoning to drive them to accept God.

"Try and help them understand the weight of their sin and God's judgement, which hangs over them. Assert that they need a rescuer or saviour. It might be helpful to remind them that this isn't fantasy like a film. Rather it is a truth that they one day will have to face."¹⁷

To reinforce this message, instructors are directed to play an animated video called 'Stuck in Sin', which depicts a boy burning in the fires of 'L' because he has chosen a life of sin. The boy is eventually redeemed when he meets a preacher who leads him to the truth through Jesus.



For those students who may question the teachings in the texts and seek counsel from parents, there's this:

you might want to focus on what limits our earthly parents have in caring for their children and how parents have been given the role of imitating God. Help draw the students to a point where they appreciate all that their parents do for them, but understand that their parents aren't perfect because none of us are. This will help you

¹⁵ you: an introduction: teacher's manual p13

¹⁶ ibid 98

¹⁷ teacher's manual p 102

*lead into the next section pointing to God's love which is directed towards us, even though we are undeserving.*¹⁸

As people start to become radicalised, they will often pull away from their normal, mainstream activities and friendship groups. They may also disagree and create conflict with family and friends over political or ideological views.
- Preventing Violent Extremism and Radicalisation in Australia. Living Safe Together, Australian Government

Not all students are going to be vulnerable to the messages in the texts. However, there will be some students who are very susceptible to the concept that 'something is deeply wrong with you' who will then seek solutions from the same source that has convinced them of their worthlessness.

Many people who become radicalised to violence may have personal welfare problems or have encountered social marginalisation.
- Preventing Violent Extremism and Radicalisation in Australia. Living Safe Together, Australian Government

¹⁸ ibid p 81

'Dying for our faith' creating potential for radicalisation and condoning self-harm

What defines radicalisation has been hotly debated recently. At one extreme is 'violent extremism', inciting people to commit acts of violence to achieve their religious or political goal. To be clear, the texts do *not* call for acts of terrorism from students. As can be seen in the previous section, they *do* work to bring vulnerable students to a point where the students are: committed to a version of Christianity; isolated from peers and parents who may hold different values to those promoted in SRE; and wanting to know how they can redeem themselves from the sin they are stuck in - how they can take off the dirty T-shirt.

While the texts do not call for acts of violence, there are messages contained within them that

Radicalisation happens when a person's thinking and behaviour become significantly different from how most of the members of their society and community view social issues and participate politically. Only small numbers of people radicalise and they can be from a diverse range of ethnic, national, political and religious groups.

- Australian Government, Living Safe Together: building community resilience to violent extremism

would make students susceptible to violent extremism if it were promoted by a 'Christian' speaker.

A recent example would be the American Christian anti-abortion activist, Troy Newman. While the vast majority of Christians - whether pro or anti choice - would not be moved to acts of violence by Newman's rhetoric, those who have been radicalised would be vulnerable to perpetrating acts of violence at his urging.

Any lingering dissonance between students' values and those of the speaker is addressed by Jelliffe:

*We are careful of our speech not because it makes us a good person, but because our ability to communicate imitates God and we should use our speech to praise him.*¹⁹

The goal is not to be 'a good person' but to use speech to praise God. Again, for most Christians this is a fairly innocuous, even positive, notion as the two are fairly synonymous, yet this notion gives a lot of power to individual instructors or speakers to define for young people what is and isn't God's will, power that individuals with a radical agenda could use to make extremists of students.

In the process of radicalisation, a person can experience a significant ideological shift which changes the way they view the world. Ideologies are only concerning if they advocate the use of violence or other unlawful activity to promote particular beliefs.

- Preventing Violent Extremism and Radicalisation in Australia. Living Safe Together, Australian Government

¹⁹ ibid p 72

Another troubling message is contained in chapter five of the teacher's manual, where Jelliffe encourages instructors to explain that students' bodies are not their own, they are on loan from God and are God's to decide how they are to be used.

...the clay cannot direct the potter, but the potter shapes the clay. This can then lead to a discussion about how the students' bodies are made by God and are therefore "on loan".²⁰

Radicalised teens who believe their bodies do not belong to themselves are more likely to entertain a suggestion of dying in the name of religion. And, in fact, this is explicitly stated:

We can submit our bodies to God's will in a similar way, using them to obey God by keeping them sexually pure, by working them hard for Christian service, even by dying for our faith if necessary.²¹

It is not clear from the texts under what circumstances it would be appropriate for a teen to die for their faith. While radicalisation of individuals may be unlikely, given that the authors have worked hard to break down the self esteem of the young people in the class, this message is troubling in that it condones self-harm or suicide.

Meet the Apostle Paul

The life of Jesus mattered to the Apostle Paul. You might not know much about him. Paul (originally called Saul) was a Jewish leader who hated Christians. He made it his job to persecute Christians just because they were Christians.

But everything changed for Paul. While travelling to a place called Damascus, ready to kill more Christians, he was stopped. Jesus, risen from the dead, appeared to him. Jesus demanded to know why he was persecuting Jesus' Church (his followers). This meeting with Jesus turned Paul from someone bent on destroying Christianity into someone determined to speak of Jesus whatever the cost!

²⁰ ibid p 52

²¹ ibid p 54

Part Two: Themes

Violence comes in many forms and while the texts do not call for acts of physical violence towards individuals or groups, they do condone and promote discrimination.

'Women are feminine and men are masculine': LGBTIQ Discrimination

There are numerous instances of LGBTIQ discrimination or the promotion of homophobia and transphobia in the texts.

Actively addressing homophobia wherever it occurs, recognising it, naming it and reacting is the most important challenge arising out of this report.
- Teaching Sexual Health, NSW Department of Education

Strategies for addressing issues that affect people of diverse sex, sexuality and gender in high schools include:

- fostering inclusive classroom practices that celebrate diversity
- intervening to stop bullying, name calling and gender stereotyping

- Gender, Sexuality and Identity: decision of the 2011 annual conference of the NSW Teachers Federation

This discrimination is most obvious when the authors discuss gender identity and gender presentation. There is a strong focus on needing students to identify as the gender they were assigned at birth and act in such a way as to fit neatly into the authors' definitions of acceptable masculinity and femininity.

This [gender] is a hard subject to discuss because we tend to focus on fringe examples - people who cross or bend gender in various ways - people who publicly gain lots of attention, perhaps by playing with the 'rules' and conventions we normally accept about the way men and women act in society.²²

I observed a huge variety of people on my walk - people of all sorts and shapes and sizes and races - and it was bleedin' obvious who was a man and who was a woman. Almost all of us are unembarrassed by our gender ... women are feminine and men are masculine. Gender-bending is the exception, and we know it when we see it.²³

What we do see is that there is a bodily difference between man and woman. It's a constant - something they are given to live life with.²⁴

We can now choose our hair colour, our skin colour and gender ... We have rights over our body, but they are never absolute as we are always dependent on God. True human

²² you: an introduction, Jensen p 93

²³ ibid p94

²⁴ ibid p94

*identity is not something we create or construct, but something we receive and realise ... Christians understand that their bodies are not their own.*²⁵

*But, nonetheless, we [men and women] do delight in each other. At least, we should.*²⁶

All of these statements seek to 'other' people who do not conform to rigid gender presentations. Jensen is asserting that gender non-conforming people, transgender people, effeminate men and masculine women are intentionally 'gender-bending' to 'publicly gain lots of attention'.

When discussing transgender students, Jeliffe directs instructors to a book since banned for use in SRE.

*If you happen to have questions from teenagers who may be wrestling with their gender, Patricia Weerakoon has written an excellent chapter on this subject, entitled 'Boy or Girl' in Teen Sex by the Book, available from CEP.*²⁷

In May 2015, the NSW Department of Education decided that Patricia Weerakoon's book cannot be used in classrooms, in part because of the homophobic and transphobic messages it contains. It directs students who may be questioning their gender or sexuality to organisations that promote conversion therapy, a process condemned by the Australian Medical Association as ineffective and dangerous.

Jensen and Jeliffe also seem unable to differentiate between consensual sexual acts and sexual acts of violence:

*We want sexual freedom to do what we want with whomever we want, but we don't want everyone to have this freedom (rapists and pedophiles for example).*²⁸

While this quote could refer to any sexual act beyond sex between a man and a woman within a marriage, this is an argument often used by homophobes to support their 'slippery slope' campaign against same-sex marriage. It is also frequently used to police sexuality, particularly of women, young people and non-heterosexual people.



²⁵ You: an introduction, teacher's manual p 51

²⁶ you: an introduction, Jensen p97

²⁷you: an introduction, teacher's manual p84

²⁸ ibid p17

'Wives, submit to your husbands': Gender Inequality

The Jensen/Jelliffe texts are in conflict with the NSW Department of Education's focus on promoting gender equality in schools.

Gender differences clearly emerge from this research and indicate that an approach which places health information in the broader context of social interactions between young people and which assists them to appreciate and deconstruct the limitations of gender expectations and stereotypes is necessary.
- Teaching Sexual Health, NSW Department of Education and Communities

Respectful relationships between and among boys and girls are promoted through the curriculum and civic life of the school, and procedures are in place to address sex-based discrimination and harassment, including homophobia.
- Boys and Girls Education Strategy, NSW Department of Education and Training
2008

Through submission to their husbands, wives will model the way in which God's people yield to the headship of Christ.²⁹

These texts are not specifically sexual health education, they do, however, instruct teens on relationships and the role gender plays within them. The narrow roles prescribed by Jensen and Jelliffe are in direct conflict with sexual health education policy.

In some pages, the texts go to great lengths to assert that men and women are equal members of society under God. Jensen asserts that although Eve was made from Adam's rib, she was not subservient to him but his 'helper'. 'So there is no implication of inferiority: the woman is the man's co-worker - his partner - his counterpart.'³⁰

In fact, Jensen says, the problems we see today are because we have 'forgotten how we complement each other'.³¹

His message is inconsistent, however, and he approvingly quotes Paul's letter to the Ephesians, which says:

Wives, submit to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Saviour. Now, as the church submits to Christ, so also wives submit in everything to their husbands.³²

Not only does Jensen seek to make women subservient, he denigrates feminism and the movement's understanding that women need spaces where they can be free from men's

²⁹ you: an introduction, teacher's manual p85

³⁰ you: an introduction, Jensen pp90 - 91

³¹ ibid p89

³² ibid p97

domination and violence. By doing so he places women at greater risk of intimate partner violence and effectively limits their ability to seek help if they are victims of gendered violence.

For a long time we have tried to protect women and girls by segregation. Feminism even argued for the necessity of 'women's space' - a place where women can flourish and grow unhindered. But I don't think that works. It just gives men a licence to ignore women.³³

What Jensen does give women permission to do, is be attractive. He promotes the attention paid to women due to their physical beauty as more than compensation for their submission.

At every wedding I have been to, the bride has always been the centre of attention. Her husband does not outshine her on this day. Her clothes are meant to make her utterly glorious.³⁴

In fact, she is only awarded that attention if she has remained sexually pure for her husband. Jensen finishes the above thought by saying, 'In addition, brides traditionally wear white to symbolise their innocence and purity.'³⁵

Similar but different

Read 'The great disintegration' in Chapter 10 of *You: An Introduction*.

Jensen says, as males and females, 'we have forgotten how we complement one another'. When two different things complement one another, such as guitar and piano in a piece of music, they make each other complete, whole or at least greatly improved, when placed together.

AGREE **DISAGREE**

EXPLAIN YOUR ANSWER.

The Bible says, 'It is not good for the man to be alone'. Genesis 2:18

● Why do you think that is?

BOY/GIRL 39

³³ ibid p100

³⁴ ibid p98

³⁵ ibid p98

'Because of sin we suffer': Gender Inequality and Intimate Partner Violence

Violence is more common in families and relationships in which men control decision making, and less so in those relationships where women have a greater degree of independence."
- Australians' Attitudes To Violence Against Women, VicHealth 2013

The texts work in two ways to normalise family or intimate partner violence and create an environment where gendered violence is more likely to exist.

The first is to portray God as a father/husband figure. Bible stories are then told that show God behaving in a way that would be identified as family violence if perpetrated by a father or husband. This serves to normalise and even endorse what are actually abusive behaviours.

The second is to reinforce damaging gender stereotypes, seek to isolate and disempower women, and instil shame around women's sexuality and reproductive health.

Looking at the Duluth Power and Control Wheel, we can clearly see parallels between the messages in the texts and abusive relationships.



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Jensen's assertion that 'God is God and you are not ... stop pretending that you can live independently of your creator' can be seen on the wheel as emotional abuse and is frequently used in intimate partner violence to belittle the victim and make them dependent on their abuser.

Jensen goes on to say, '... the Lord is more powerful than we are. He can blot Job out in a second. But he doesn't. And at this point: *the Lord is gentle with Job*. He jokes with Job and even pokes fun at him ... We have a God who stoops to talk to us and listen to us.'³⁶

In Jensen's retelling of the story of Job, the behaviour is minimised and the students are to believe that Job should be grateful that he wasn't killed and that God poking fun at him is a sign of God's affection for Job.

Having set up a scenario where abuse is acceptable, the texts then turn their attention to sex. In the teacher's manual, Jeliffe says, 'We must convey that God is not trying to spoil our fun, and it's not that he is against sex. Rather we have to point our students to an understanding that God values sex so much that he desires to protect us from abuse, pain and suffering by keeping sex to a relationship between husband and wife.'³⁷

The implication in this statement is that any sex before marriage will likely be filled with 'abuse, pain and suffering' and that any sex within a marriage will not.

The first assumption, that young people need to be protected from sex outside of marriage, is disempowering and infantilising. Rather than teaching young people about healthy, respectful relationships and how to negotiate consent, the texts seek to instil fear of sex in young people as a way of ensuring 'purity'.

The second assumption, that marital sex is always healthy, is just as dangerous. Marital rape has been a criminal act in NSW since 1981.

*While this [rape in marriage not being a criminal act] no longer holds true in the law across Australia, and in numerous overseas jurisdictions, it continues to hold some sway in community understandings about what is sexual assault. This influences the extent to which these cases continue to be less likely to be reported, prosecuted and result in conviction.'*³⁸

Despite this, 9%³⁹ of Australians still believe that a woman cannot be raped if she is in a sexual relationship with someone. This dangerous myth is perpetuated by the texts.

While not all of these messages are gendered, and can, in fact, be used by a perpetrator of any gender towards a victim of any gender, the fact that texts promote male headship over women and children sets up a gender imbalance that allows more readily for gendered violence. (see 'male privilege' on the Duluth Wheel)

Gender stereotypes appear to be having a significant negative impact on young people's expectations and behaviours when it comes to intimate relationships.

- The Line Campaign: summary of research findings, Hall & Partners/Open Mind 2015

Jensen's dismissiveness of feminism and 'women's spaces' can also be seen on the Duluth Wheel as being an act of using isolation as a power and control tactic.

³⁶ *ibid* p18

³⁷ you: an introduction, teacher's manual p84

³⁸ sexual assault and family violence, Australian Law Reform Commission 24:60

³⁹ Australians' Attitudes to Violence Against Women, VicHealth p 10

In the teacher's manual, Jelliffe explores relationships. 'Relationships have great potential for good as Genesis 2 highlights. Why has it all gone wrong? It has gone wrong because of sin.' She continues, 'Try and address different types of relationships and think of examples of how they can damage us. You might feel that you're being too negative about relationships, but it's important to convey that we were created for so much more, but because of sin we suffer abuse, lies and failure to meet our needs.'⁴⁰

Jelliffe then directs the educator to deliver a positive lesson about the husband/wife relationship.

The message here is strong, sexual relationships entered into outside of marriage are to be emphasised as sinful and described in negative terms whereas marriage is described positively. Again, the implication is that if there is suffering within the relationship it is because of sin.

The potential repercussions for a heterosexual women in a marriage who is a victim of intimate partner violence are that she feel she deserves the abuse because she is 'stuck in sin', that the abuse is something she must accept as she has been told to 'submit to her husband' or that she is not free to seek help as it is the role of her husband 'is to be sacrificial, caring for her needs and dying for her if necessary.'⁴¹

⁴⁰ you: an introduction, teacher's manual p88

⁴¹ ibid p 89

'Menstrual impurity': Gendered Shame

The texts further feed gender inequality and provide a breeding ground for gendered violence by promoting - overtly and subliminally - gendered shame. Gendered shame is where a person or culture seeks to control a person's behaviour by shaming them for their biology or how they express themselves. An example would be shaming men for not being masculine enough ie: 'big boys don't cry' or women for being sexually active ie: calling women sluts.

'Gender differences clearly emerge from this research and indicate that an approach which places health information in the broader context of the social interactions between young people and which assists them to appreciate and deconstruct the limitations of gender expectations and stereotypes is necessary.
- Teaching Sexual Health, NSW Department of Education and Communities

The texts draw stories from a variety of places; the Bible, popular culture, personal anecdotes, and the news. The vast majority of these are negative, which fits with the authors' need to cultivate in students a sense of hopelessness and helplessness from which they are then offered a solution in the shape of a particular brand of Christianity.

A troubling trend that emerges (and was also apparent in the *Teen Sex by the Book* texts) is that from all of these stories the most numerous and most graphic paint women in a negative, shameful light.

Like Weerakoon, Jensen tells the story from Mark 5:21-34 of the woman who was outcast but, when she touched Jesus' robe she became well and was accepted back into society. She is described as 'a woman who had a discharge of blood for twelve years'⁴².

While this is about a woman with a medical condition rather than one having a menstrual period, linking menstrual discharge with 'uncleanness' when speaking with a group of adolescents in a culture that shames women - particularly young women - for menstruating is ill thought out. Jensen's caveat that 'uncleanness was a human problem. It was not just a female problem or a male problem'⁴³ shows that he is aware of how it may be perceived. He undermines this statement of gender equality in uncleanness by going on to graphically discuss postpartum fistulas as an example of modern day uncleanness in Africa.

*Many of the girls - some of them barely teenagers - who have found their way to the hospital had to struggle through childbirth in distant villages where there is no medical assistance. As a result they were left with no bladder and/or bowel control. The constant flow of urine and feces makes them undesirable to their husbands, and because of the smell, they are usually left alone in huts on the fringes of their villages.*⁴⁴

⁴² you: an introduction, Jensen p33

⁴³ ibid p35

⁴⁴ ibid p34

Jeliffe continues the story, giving the case study of Shewage who is '15 years old and had a double fistula for three years'.⁴⁵ It cannot be coincidence that this horrific story features a fifteen year old girl, a girl the same age as the students for whom the curriculum is intended.

This example continues for several pages over the texts and includes details on the young woman's rape and subsequent abandonment because of the 'offensive smell I have'.⁴⁶

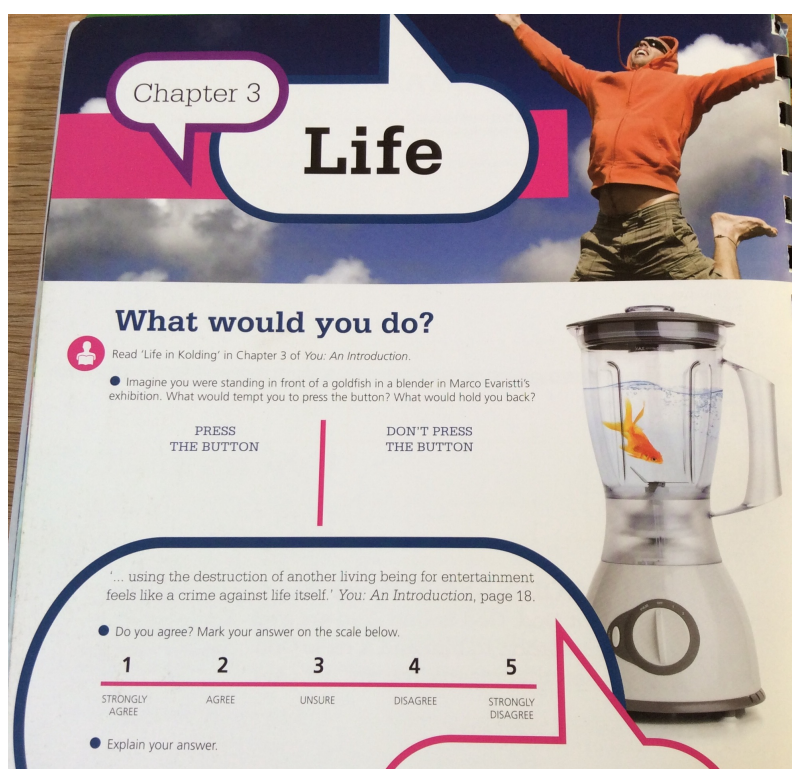
What purpose could this story have in these books except to further stigmatise young women who have sex (or are raped) and frighten them enough that they create chaste behaviour in both themselves and the boys who may want to date them?

In line with sending strong messages about women's fertility, the texts speak frequently about abortion. It is not surprising that *you: an introduction*, has an anti-abortion message where abortion is discussed as follows:

...we are horrified at the killings of criminals or whales but, at the same time, we're happy for the government to sanction the killing of the unborn (some 73,000) in Australia in 2011. And we say we 'love life'.⁴⁷

How as a society can we claim to respect human rights when we fail to protect unborn babies or the poor?⁴⁸

More disturbing is the juxtaposition of these (and several other) comments on abortion in the chapter that opens with this description of an art exhibition once held in the Danish town of Kolding.



The creation by artist Marco Evaristti consisted of goldfish swimming inside regular kitchen blenders. Exhibition visitors could switch on the blender, transforming the contents to - well, fish soup.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ *you: an introduction*, teacher's manual p48

⁴⁶ *ibid* p48

⁴⁷ *you: an introduction*, Jensen p24

⁴⁸ *you: an introduction*, teacher's manual p13

⁴⁹ *you: an introduction*, Jensen p21

One can only imagine the impact such an analogy would have on a young student who has experienced an unintended pregnancy, or indeed, a student whose mother or other relative had disclosed a previous abortion.

Other examples of gendered shaming include:

From Leviticus: *If a woman has a discharge of blood for many days, not at the time of her menstrual impurity, or if she has a discharge beyond the time of her impurity, all the days of the discharge she shall continue in uncleanness ... And everything on which she sits shall be unclean ... and whoever touches these things shall be unclean...*⁵⁰

*To this woman from Mark's story and her community, then, this woman reeked of death. She was a non-person - a walking semi-corpse.*⁵¹

From Paul: *The body is not meant for sexual immorality ... Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her ... Flee from sexual immorality.*⁵²

The ooze

Read 'The ooze' in Chapter 4 of *You: An Introduction* and explain in your own words why physical purity was important for God's people.

"The concept of uncleanness did not reflect a particular kind of sinfulness in the person ... Such things did not mean that the body was, by nature, evil; rather, it signified that the body lived in the realm of sin and was under the sentence of death."

You: An Introduction, pages 36-37

⁵⁰ ibid p35

⁵¹ ibid p37

⁵² ibid p47

'Untouchables': Illness and Disability

For students living - either themselves or a loved one - with a chronic or terminal illness, Jensen has a disturbing message.

But slowly I began to understand that God is God. He wasn't picking on me. He didn't have to answer me. My mum's cancer was the result of a mucked-up and broken world caused by sin. Sin was my problem, but God had gone out of his way to fix it. He did that when Jesus entered the world and took my place on the cross. His death is the new beginning that will one day mean that all death will cease, all sickness will end and there will be no more suffering.⁵³

While Jensen does not say that it is the child's 'sin' that is responsible for her mother's cancer, using the phrases 'sin was my problem' and 'Jesus entered the world and took my place on the cross' could certainly place an unfounded emotional burden on an already distressed young person.

The stories of the woman with the 'discharge' and the Ethiopian fistula patients are not the only incidences of Jensen and Jellife stigmatising those with disabilities:

I remember going to the Paralympics in Sydney. It was extremely confronting to spend a day watching amputees, blind people and people in wheelchairs ... Uncleanliness is not just an Ethiopian problem; our own community has its untouchables - this is, those who are the living dead: the disabled, the severely ill, the chronically ill, the addicted, the obese, the elderly and so on.⁵⁴

⁵³ you: an introduction, student workbook p10

⁵⁴ you: an introduction, Jensen p38

'Hygienic and healthy westerners': Racism

The department rejects all forms of racism. It is committed to the elimination of racial discrimination in NSW Government schools – including direct and indirect racism, racial vilification and harassment – in all aspects of the learning and working environment.
- Anti-Racism Policy, NSW Department of Education

Throughout the texts Jensen and Jelliffe have used negative portrayals of women, gender and sexuality diverse people and the disabled as examples of unclean people. This is also true of race. The extensive description of Ethiopian women and girls suffering from untreated fistulas serves to 'other' women from Ethiopia. This prejudice is driven home when Jensen says:

It is hard for us hygienic and healthy westerners to imagine the self-loathing, despair and unspeakable isolation that these women [fistula patients in Ethiopia] face.⁵⁵

The implication that westerners are 'hygienic and healthy' where Ethiopians are not is one steeped in racism. I cannot imagine what the impact of this statement would be on a student of Ethiopian birth - particularly the girls.

⁵⁵ ibid p34

Conclusion

Many of the messages conveyed in the you: an introduction texts are fairly benign and would be consistent with parents' understanding of the religious instruction their children are enrolled to receive.

Other messages are damaging and conflict with what we understand to be best practice in promoting resilience and optimum mental health in young people. Not only do the texts not support a celebration all students, they conversely promote discrimination based on gender, race, sexuality and ability and are therefore at odds with NSW Department of Education and Communities policies and guidelines.

While the texts do not promote violent extremism, they do increase students' vulnerability to messages of extremism.

I do not see a place for these texts in public schools in Australia. They are divisive, discriminatory and undermine the work done by teachers to foster an environment of inclusivity.

If the materials are to remain in schools, I would ask what specific training religious instructors have in the following areas:

- delivering this content in a sympathetic and inclusive manner,
- recognising students who may be vulnerable to radicalisation,
- anti-discrimination; how not to promote discrimination and identify it in the classroom,
- handling any discriminatory comments from students that may be prompted by topics within these texts ie: comments that are misogynistic, racist, homophobic, transphobic, ableist or that denigrate students of other or no religions.

I would also ask whether there are clear, documented processes and procedures in place that guide instructors on when it is necessary and appropriate to connect students with welfare professionals within the school due to:

- the student being identified as vulnerable to radicalisation,
- the student being a perpetrator or victim of discriminatory comments,
- the student being negatively emotionally affected by the content of the texts due to their personal circumstances.

In a recent article for The Drum, Michael Jensen asserts that 'the truth is this: in contemporary Australia, it is Islam, and only Islam, that has the problem with radicalisation.'⁵⁶ His message is that scrutiny should not be turned on Christian groups in schools, that it is 'absurd' to think of Christians committing acts of terror. Despite the fact that history is littered with people of all religions - including Christianity - committing acts of terror, one may ask why Jensen is so defensive about having SRE programs scrutinised. Why does he also feel it is appropriate to further malign Muslim Australians, particularly Islamic students, in his need to defend Christian instruction in schools?

When discussing the potential for students to be radicalised in schools, Premier Mike Baird recently said, 'Our schools should be, and are, havens of tolerance, places where students can explore the reaches of imagination and knowledge.'⁵⁷

Both the NSW and Australian Governments have recently committed to addressing gendered violence by providing respectful relationship education in schools. A core tenet of respectful

⁵⁶ 'Don't hang all religions with Islam's radicalisation problem' The Drum, October 6, 2015

⁵⁷ 'Probe into extremism in schools' The Australian, July 28, 2015

relationship education is the promotion of gender equality and respect for women, messages sadly lacking in these texts.