

**ADOLESCENT SEX INFORMATION
SOURCES: 1964-1974***

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ABSTRACT

Comparison of adolescent sex information sources for black and white males and females in a Northeast Texas community was made from 1964 and 1974 questionnaire data (N = 367 and 432 respectively). A general change from parents to friends as the stated sources of major sex information was noted over the decade. While parents are still the preferred source of sex information for most of these adolescents, friends as a preferred source increased in frequency especially for males. Overall, both stated and preferred sex information sources showed more significant changes for males than females.

Various sources of sex information for preadolescents and adolescents are reported in the literature. For example, Ramsey (1943) found that "other boys" in their own age group was the main source for males in his study. Angelino and Mech (1955: 323) stated that girls learn from "their companions and printed matter." "Friends" and "mother" were the major sources listed by girls according to Poffenberger (1961: 75). Ehrmann (1959: 98) reports that "children" and "books" were the main sources for boys while "parents" and "children" were most often listed by girls. Landis and Landis (1968: 516-517) show from their studies in 1952 and 1967 that the source of most male college students' sex information was "other children" while "other children" and "mother" were the main sources for females. Juhasz (1969: 38) found that three-fifths of the boys and half of the girls in her study said their chief source of sex information was "printed matter." Thornburg (1975: 385) revealed from his data of 958 college students that over one-third of all subjects' information came from peers and that males were more dependent upon them than were females for initial sex information.

Selected literature cited above concerning the major sources of sex information focuses primarily on males and/or females with limited emphasis on differences by race and change over time. Calderwood (1965: 291) noted that much of the literature concerns the role adults should play in handling the sex education for youth, but little is available to the family life educator which comes directly from

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early and middle adolescents to reveal their own views about this vital part of their education. The objective of this research is to compare major sex information sources of black and white males and females in a Northeast Texas community in 1964 and 1974 and to relate the *stated* source to the *preferred* source, thus attempting to respond to Calderwood's dilemma of an absence of literature on adolescents' views of their own sexual socialization.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Source of Data

The population from which data were obtained was composed of the sophomore, junior, and senior classes of the two segregated high schools in 1964 and the desegregated high school in 1974 in a Northeast Texas community (population of 4000 in 1960 and 5000 in 1970). The school system was desegregated in 1970. The number of respondents in 1964 was 367 (119 white females, 57 black females, 141 white males, and 50 black males) with a total of 432 adolescents (159 white females, 73 black females, 130 white males, and 70 black males) responding in 1974.

Procedures

The research instrument was a questionnaire administered during the school day by the author in all English classes of the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grades in both 1964 and 1974. The respondents both in 1964 and 1974 constituted 87 percent of the student enrollment. Less than one percent of the students present on the days the questionnaires were administered refused to complete the questionnaires. The other students were absent on the days of administration. No attempt was made to follow up the absentees. The 18 multiple-choice questions in the 1974 survey were taken from the 1964 questionnaire which contained a total of 56 questions. The questions analyzed here pertain to one's *stated* major source of sex information and his/her *preferred* source.

Because of the nature of the data, the Chi-square test of significance was used for analysis. The dependent variables are stated source of sex information and preferred source of sex information; independent variables are race (black and white), sex (male and female), and time (1964 and 1974). The acceptable level of statistical significance is $p < .05$.

FINDINGS

As can be seen in Table 1 the stated major source of sex information for white males and black males and females revealed a statistically significant change in distribution over time ($p < .05$) using the Chi-square test with white females showing no statistically significant change over time. "Friends" is the source most frequently named in the 1974 survey for all but black females. Since only white males named "friends" most frequently in 1964 and since "friends" has increased in frequency for all groups (as much as from less than two percent to 25 percent for black females), it appears as if this source is rapidly becoming the major source of sex information for the adolescents of this community.

TABLE 1. FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION (IN PERCENTAGES) FOR THE RESPONSE TO THE QUESTION "WHAT IS YOUR MAJOR SOURCE OF SEX INFORMATION?" BY YEAR, RACE AND SEX

Stated Source of Sex Information	White Males		White Females		Black Males		Black Females	
	1964	1974	1964	1974	1964	1974	1964	1974
Parent of the Same Sex	8	13	39	31	27	12	31	25
Parent of the Opposite Sex	6	0	0	0	8	19	2	9
Both Parents	18	15	12	13	18	14	24	12
Books and Pamphlets	26	15	16	16	31	16	41	29
Friends	42	57	33	40	16	39	2	25
(N)	(117)	(95)	(90)	(135)	(45)	(57)	(54)	(65)
	$\chi^2=11.76$		$\chi^2=1.65$		$\chi^2=12.181$		$\chi^2=17.373$	
	$p < .05$		NS		$p < .05$		$p < .05$	
	df = 4		df = 4		df = 4		df = 4	

Mothers are still a major sex source for females in 1974 although less than in 1964. Fathers play a less significant role as sex educators than mothers. With the exception of black males in 1974, the parent of the opposite sex has rarely been the major sex information source for these adolescents. The impersonal source of books and pamphlets has declined rather sharply as a major source for all except white females where it has remained the same.

Table 2 shows a statistically significant change in distribution over time ($p < .05$) using the Chi-square test for black and white males regarding preferred source of sex information but no significant change for females. The preferred source most often named in both surveys was parents. While "both parents" and "parent of the same sex" were the preferred source for at least 60 percent of adolescents in 1964, parents were less frequently named in 1974. "Parent of the opposite sex" and "books and pamphlets" as preferred sources changed only slightly in the decade.

The largest overall increase in preferred source is in friends with increases over time occurring for both sexes and racial groups. Friends as a preferred source has especially increased for males with over one-fourth of all males in 1974 preferring friends as compared to less than ten percent in 1964. Though evidence is not available here to support such an assertion, it is possible that friends in 1974 are better informed than were friends in 1964—hence a better source than formerly.

TABLE 2. FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION (IN PERCENTAGES) FOR THE RESPONSE TO THE QUESTION, "IN YOUR OPINION, FROM WHAT SOURCE SHOULD ONE RECEIVE SEX INFORMATION?" BY YEAR, RACE, TIME

Preferred Source of Sex Information	White Males		White Females		Black Males		Black Females	
	1964	1974	1964	1974	1964	1974	1964	1974
Parent of the Same Sex	37	28	54	38	27	14	22	27
Parent of the Opposite Sex	3	3	0	1	11	10	6	12
Both Parents	45	32	36	40	19	38	56	39
Books and Pamphlets	8	9	6	13	35	9	16	16
Friends	7	28	4	8	8	29	0	6
(N)	(119)	(106)	(101)	(149)	(48)	(66)	(55)	(69)
	$\chi^2=19.275$ $p < .05$ $df = 4$		$\chi^2=8.889$ NS $df = 4$		$\chi^2=21.336$ $p < .05$ $df = 4$		$\chi^2=6.822$ NS $df = 4$	

ADOLESCENT CONCLUSIONS

Analysis of the above data suggests that while changes in stated and preferred sources of sex information have changed in the decade, adolescents in this community are not receiving information from their desired sources. While the teenagers prefer sex information from their parents, their friends and impersonal sources are the main "educators." Generally, changes over the decade have been significantly greater for males than females.

According to Robert Sorenson (1972: 71-72), adolescents want to be able to talk with their parents about sex. However, they believe they must ask the right questions before they receive information from parents about sex topics they consider important. Sorenson further concluded that many, if not most, adolescents assume that their parents prefer them to learn about sex from their friends or other non-familial sources.

Calderwood (1965: 297) states that youth would respond openly to adults and actively seek honest communication between the generations if provided the opportunity. The hesitancy appears to be mainly on the part of adults. Calderwood (1965: 291) further states that transmission of the sex culture tends to rely on the peer group rather than, as in other aspects of the culture, descending from adults to youth. This lack of communication between the generations is both cause and effect of confusion concerning sex norms.

Both Sorenson and Calderwood's assertions concerning youth's desire to discuss sexual information more with their parents is borne out in these data. It appears, at least in this community, that youth have desired for at least a decade to have their parents "educate" them on sexual matters. However, some evidence is found to suggest that the pendulum of *preferred* source might be swinging in the direction of the *real* source—friends—as youth appear to bridge the gap between ideals and reality. Perhaps greater dependence on friends to share sex information and a slight trend toward *preferring* friends more—and parents less—reveals a certain amount of independence from parents on behalf of adolescents.

It appears from these findings that family life educators could best serve the desires of adolescents, at least in this community, by encouraging parents to be more open in discussing sexual matters with their children. At least ideally youth desire better communication with parents, yet the avenues are apparently not open. On the other hand, youth are not always so receptive to their parents' ideas, thus this obvious communication gap could probably be attributed to both

parties. Perhaps the most realistic contribution of family life educators is in their role of sex educator in the elementary and secondary school systems. Since this study reveals a definite trend toward friends as sex educators and an increasing preference for friends functioning in this role, family life specialists could assure that "these friends" are exposed to accurate sex information through the medium of school.

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