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Who Really Teaches Sex Education?

Bridget Kiely⁵

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether or not adolescents find out about sex from their parents or their peers. After reviewing several articles that are from the past as well as articles that are more present I was able to see how views have changed as well as compare the information to my data. My literature review goes over how sex education may have been failing our youths, how sex talks should be done at school rather than at home, how many parents maybe equipped for the tasks but the general guidelines are not there, the fact that it takes a certain personality in order to teach this subject, an authors own experience related to sex-segregated school, how girls prefer same sex education classes over boys, and how a lesbian mother approaches the birds and the bees with her children. After reviewing these findings and comparing them to my results I was able to discuss ideas for future studies as well as go into detail of my own.

The research question I am studying is whether or not adolescents become educated about sexual information from their parents or peers. I designed a study to demonstrate whom adolescents whether in middle school or high school receive their information from when it comes to sex. The phenomenon I am studying is how much sex education is emphasized in school and at home at a young age. Children have become more advanced when it comes to being educated about sex at a young age. When looking at what advanced means, it may mean that individuals may become more progressed and precocious sexually at a young age rather than being ignorant their whole life. Sex education can also cover areas such as same-sex encounters, although this study did not approach this subject, it is still important.

Jordan, (1925) talks about how sex talk should be done at school rather than the home,

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because the home is not as focused on children, especially when it comes to city life. The environment that surrounds the children in this case can encourage children to learn about sex through casual observations. He also stated how this matter should be taken up in the high school period of a child's life, which is what I am experimenting in my study. By this time their attitude on the subject will be more developed than at a young age and approaching it can be most successful during this time frame. Lirgg, (1994), looks at the preferences of genders when it comes to physical education classes. Lirgg, (1994), conducted a survey regarding whether or not boys and girls would prefer to have same-sex classes or coed. This is a long standing debate and this specifically asked the boys and girls what they would prefer. Girls preferred having same-sex education classes and boys did not favor it as much as they did coed classes. This may help conclude the question as to whether or not involving sex education in high school should be coed or same-sex classes due to how comfortable the students may feel. I think giving the student a preference and have both options when entering a school will make all genders feel comfortable when going to gym class.

When looking at suggestions on this subject I came across a manual that reviewed sex education in schools. It states that sex education needs to take a better approach when teaching it not only in school but by parents as well. As stated in the article written by (Jordan, 1925), children are bound to learn things at home so it would be better for parents to continue the education rather than just leaving it to the school system. This manual was put out to touch the delicate subject of sex education. Growden, (1923), believes it takes a certain personality in order to teach the subject of sex and make it valuable enough to produce practical methods.

This next piece of writing suggests that sex education contains social importance. Many teachers and parents are equipped for the task but the general guidelines and practical

information needed are not there, (A Manual of Suggestions on Education Related to Sex, 1923). When a teen learns about sex from their peers they could easily receive misinformation and then get the wrong idea about the subject in general this leads us to look at the problems in sex education. Brown, (1919), classifies sex education into two methods, old fashion and modern types. The old fashion way approaches sex by letting the child receive instructions and information on their own, which would be through peers. The idea would be to educate our children through schooling and by talking to them as parents (Brown, 1919). Most mothers and fathers do not know how to approach the subject without reading how to books and worrying about overwhelming their child. Either approach can be backed up and explained in a way that will make it relevant at the time, but are either correct?

Certain educational rights should be required when it comes to sex education in schools. Author Roger Levesque, (2000) claims that sex education has been failing our society and youths. He believes that sex education not only prepares adolescents for the future but also for social interactions with their peers. It prepares them for responsible intimate relationships as well as teaches you how to treat a significant other. Some adolescents grew up in schools that were sex-segregated meaning they went to an all girls or all boys school. At one time Americans only accepted this type of schooling and coeducation had not been thought of. The author discussed how his own experience of going to a sex-segregated school altered his life by hurting his sexuality, career, energy, and risk, (Graebner, 2006). Graebner feels it is important for a child to experience the gender differences in schooling, teaching them how to produce intimate relationships the right way as well as releasing sexual tension responsibly. Findings in an article by Mitchell, (1998), are presented in a different manner approaching it from a lesbian's perspective, although my survey does not at all focus on this subject, he brings up a lot of solid

facts on what they call, the birds and the bees. (Mitchell, 1998), looks at the concerns and values gay parents may face when teaching their child about sex. There are many themes linked to the ages involved in the study, showing that adolescents in teen years approached their mothers more thoroughly than those of a younger age. Mitchell supports gay-friendly sex education, which is important so that children know what is in the real world and are not hidden from the truths of what lies within society.

After looking at all this previous research I feel as if it maybe lacking in the area of what is right and wrong and how any of these methods may benefit a child's education when it comes to sex. They are potentially flawed in the fact that they are from so long ago so maybe a lot has changed since then. My hypothesis stated that adolescents in high school learn about sexual intercourse through their peers rather than their parents. My survey looked at the educational aspects of this to find out what education was provided in your middle school or high school.

Method

Participants

Adults of various ages were recruited through Facebook using a link through SurveyMonkey posted through my personal page. This occurred between the dates of March 4, 2014 through April 4, 2014. The participants had the option to volunteer for this study and there were a total of 60 participants recruited. All of the subjects were my Facebook friends and there were a total of 46 women, 12 men, and 1 transgender, all ranging between the ages of 19 and 69 years old. Some of the demographic questions in my survey provided me with the necessary information to interpret my data. There were a total of 57 Caucasians respondents, 2 Hispanic respondents, and 1 chose to skip the question. There were 0 freshmen, 2 sophomores, 6 juniors, 10 seniors, 38 other, and 4 chose to skip the question. I informed all of my participants that it was a voluntary study and they were able to opt out and anytime whether or not the survey was

complete, if they felt any discomfort. If someone who approached my survey under the age of 18 they were asked to not continue and to choose the option to not participate in the rest of the survey.

Materials and Procedure

I started out by constructing a survey that consisted of general demographic questions, and other questions related to the subject of sex education. The demographic questions included gender, age, race, and grade level. I then followed by posting the survey, (https://www.surveymonkey.com/MySurvey_EditorFull.aspx?sm=6uBrHM_2Bwprt1F5wXVclpMMroK4Dw4UOzVNQJne8a9E8_3D) onto my personal Facebook account and asking my friends to volunteer their time to answer the questions while remaining anonymous. I used the website SurveyMonkey to construct and link the survey to my volunteers. The survey was posted for a month in hopes to take in around 50 participants. The survey overall should have taken the subject about 20 minutes and consisted of a total of 21 questions. The first question is the informed consent, participants have the choice to continue with the survey or opt out. If the participant decides to opt out than it will bring them to the end of the survey and thank them for their time. Question 2 through 8 are based on demographic questions, 9 through 21 are based on sex education and the last question is the feedback form. The participants took these surveys on their own time and received no compensation for taking it. I had one participant who was 17 so I had to omit their data leaving me with 59. When the participants began the study they started by clicking on the link and reading over the inform consent and then agreeing that they are at least 18 years of age by electronic signature. They were then asked to proceed and answer several questions over sex education. Then at the end they were asked to read the feedback form and this told them where they can be directed in order to receive the results. I also informed them the

purpose of our study and then thank them for taking time out to participate. After collecting data from all 59 participants I recorded their data and then keep them safely for records.

Results

When analyzing the data I used the method of descriptive statistics in summarizing multiple variables. 61% of my participants did not attend a religious based school and the other 39% who did, all went to Catholic. First, I compared whether or not participants had sex education in elementary, middle, and high school. There was a noticeable change in percentages when looking at the different levels of education. The percentage increased a great deal from elementary to high school showing that many more high school children receive sex education than elementary and middle school; 45.8% received sex education in elementary school, 50.8% in middle school, and then 71.2% in high school. Another variable I looked at was who informed my participants about sex; 49.2% were informed by parents, 52.5% by school, 54.2% by the media, 25.4% by their siblings, 8.5% by religion, and then 78% by their friends. I also asked my participants who they think should be the educator when it comes to this subject; 93.2% said parents, 81.4% said school, 20.3% said friends, 15.3% said religion, 8.5% said the media, and 20.3% said siblings. When looking at who the participants are most comfortable discussing the subject of sex, I found that; 10.2% said parents, 23.7% said siblings, 84.7% said friends, and 1.7% said other. The participant had the option to fill out an example of other and they put a counselor.

Discussion

My hypothesis itself stated that adolescents learn about sexual intercourse from their peers rather than their parents or in a school environment. The hypothesis was supported in the results showing that most participants feel most comfortable discussing sex with their friends or siblings rather than an adult. When looking at the findings of this study the results interpret that

most of the participants who attended religious-based schools growing up went to Catholic schools.

Some flaws or concerns that came up when analyzing my data, were that some data that was not relevant. When asked what age children should be educated about sex someone answered 126, I removed this as an outlier because this is likely a typing error and it skews by data too much to include. I also had a participant that was only 17 years old so his or her answers were removed as well considering the participants needed to be at least 18 years old.

Throughout analyzing my data, there were a couple questions that were combined because they asked along the lines of the same questions. The answers were so similar that deleting one only made the data less complicated and did not affect any results as a whole. There were no implications of the results and a lot of descriptive statistics were used giving me a lot of suggestions and ideas for future research. It would be interesting to focus on whether or not men or women sex education more important. Most of my participants were women so it was hard to compare these variables as specifically as I would have liked to. In conclusion of this study I was impressed with the results I received because I not only received a lot of data but my hypothesis was also supported. My questions were answered and I was able to analyze the data thoroughly with the large amount of participants.

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Appendix A
PSYCHOLOGICAL TESTING QUESTIONS:

Sex Education

1. This is a modified version of the survey that was created by Bridget Kiely and Kendall Ryndak. The purpose of this survey is to find out the source of your knowledge about sex. It will take approximately ten minutes to complete. Although your participation will not result in direct benefits to you, information from this study may help us understand where people learned about sexual education the most. Please read the information below before deciding whether or not to participate.

Your participation is completely voluntary.

- You may discontinue taking the survey at any time.
- If you choose not to participate or stop participating before the end of the survey, you will not be penalized in any way; LPP participants will still receive extra credit.
- You may also choose to skip any questions you wish without penalty or judgment.

Your responses will be anonymous.

- No information that identifies you personally will be collected, not even your IP address.
- The primary investigator will not be able to identify your answers as belonging to you; data will be examined at the group level only.

The results of this survey will be used for scholarly purposes only. If you have any questions about the survey itself, please contact the primary investigator, Bridget Kiely at 314-304-4616.

Taking this survey could result in some distressing feelings, like guilt, confusion, frustration, or sadness for some participants, but these feelings are not expected to exceed what one experiences in everyday life. In the event that you feel uncomfortable answering any questions, you may stop participating at any time without any penalty or prejudice.

ELECTRONIC CONSENT: Please select your choice below.

Clicking on the "agree" button below indicates that:

- you have read the above information
- you voluntarily agree to participate
- you are at least 18 years of age

If you do not wish to participate in the research study, or are not at least 18 years old, please decline participation by clicking on the "I choose not to participate" button.

- I choose to participate in this survey.
- I choose not to participate. (people who choose this option will be taken directly to the end of the survey and will not continue on to the question portion.)

2. What is your age?

A. _____

3. What is your gender identity?

A. Woman

B. Man

C. Transgender Person

4. Race?

A. Caucasian

B. African-American

C. Asian

D. Hispanic

E. Other

5. Grade level?

A. Freshmen

B. Sophomore

C. Junior

D. Senior

E. Other

6a. Did you attend a religious-based school during elementary school? If yes, what religion?

A. Yes

What religion? _____

B. No (Skip to question 8)

b. Did you attend a religious-based school during middle school? If yes, what religion?

A. Yes

What religion? _____

B. No (Skip to question 8)

7. Did you have sex education in elementary school?

A. Yes

B. No

C. I do not know or remember

8. Did you have sex education in middle school?

A. Yes

B. No

C. I do not know or remember

9. Did you have sex education in high school?

A. Yes

B. No

C. I do not know or remember

10. What type of high school did you attend? (Pick all that apply)

A. Public

B. Private (non-religion based)

C. Private (religion based) (If so what religion) _____

D. Homeschooled

E. Other _____

11a. If you received sex education, did you learn about the consequences of sexually transmitted diseases?

A. Yes

B. No

12a. Do you think sex education should take place in school? (Rate one being low ten being high)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

b. If so at what age?

(Fill in the bank)

13. Do you feel it is important to have mandatory health classes that teach you about sex education in high school? (Rate one being low and ten being high)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

14. Who informed you about the act of sexual intercourse? (Mark all that apply) If you mark other, please specify your answer.

- A. Parents
- B. School
- C. Friends
- D. Religion
- E. Media
- F. Siblings
- G. Other _____

15. Who do you feel should inform adolescence about the act of sexual intercourse? (Mark all that apply) If you mark other, please specify your answer.

- A. Parents
- B. Friends
- C. Religion
- D. Media
- E. Teachers
- F. Siblings
- G. Other _____

16. Who do you think should be educating adolescence about sex? (Mark all that apply) If you mark other, please specify your answer.

- A. Parents
- B. School
- C. Friends
- D. Religion
- E. Media
- F. Siblings
- G. Other _____

17. When you were learning about sex, with whom did you feel most comfortable talking about the subject? (Mark all that apply) If you choose other, specify the person whom you are talking about.

- A. Parents
- B. Siblings
- C. Friends
- D. Other _____

18. At what age do you think children should learn about sexual intercourse in school, from their parents, and/or their peers?

Age? _____

19a. Would you feel comfortable informing your children about sex if you have any children or plan on having any?

A. Yes

B. No

b. If so at what age?

(Fill in the blank)

20. Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey for my class project at Lindenwood University. My hypothesis is that adolescence learn more about sex from their peers and people closer to their age rather than parents and teachers. Past research has found that more people have been educated more about sex from peers and individual research when they become curious about sex. If you found that taking the survey caused you emotional distress and you would like assistance, please contact the course instructor, Dr. Michiko Nohara-LeClair at 636-949-4371 if you are not a Lindenwood student, Dr. Colleen Biri, for community counseling referrals at 636-949-4519.

If you would like to see the results of my survey after May 14, 2014, please feel free to contact me using the contact information below. Again, thank you very much for your time and effort!

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