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# Communication Barriers Between Teenagers & Parents About Sex & Sex-Related Topics: A Survey of Teenagers in Sex Education Class

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Karen H.

1990



COMMUNICATION BARRIERS  
BETWEEN TEENAGERS AND PARENTS ABOUT  
SEX AND SEX-RELATED TOPICS:  
A SURVEY OF TEENAGERS IN SEX EDUCATION CLASSES

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Department of  
Communication and Broadcasting  
Western Kentucky University  
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

by

Karen H. Bonnell

April 13, 1990

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SEX AND SEX RELATED TOPICS:  
A SURVEY OF TEENAGERS IN SEX EDUCATION CLASSES

Date Recommended

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COMMUNICATION BARRIERS  
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SEX AND SEX-RELATED TOPICS:  
A SURVEY OF TEENAGERS IN SEX EDUCATION CLASSES

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95 Pages

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Public concern about teenage pregnancy and the threat of sexually transmitted diseases like AIDS make sex education information vital for today's teenagers. A 1986 Harris survey of 1,000 teenagers cited parents as their primary source of sex education information, but 42% said they would be too nervous or afraid to bring up the subject of contraception or birth control with their parents. States like Kentucky have mandated sex education courses for all public schools to provide necessary instruction for teenagers.

This study identifies communication barriers which teenagers say prevent communication with their parents about sex and sex-related topics. Questionnaires were administered to 249 high school sex education students. The majority of teenagers (71%) said they could

communicate freely with their parents about most topics, but only half (52%) said they could communicate freely with their parents about sex or sex-related topics. Thirty percent of the teenagers said they could not talk comfortably with their mothers about sex as compared to 47% who said they could not talk with their fathers. Results showed gender differences in the ability to talk with fathers about sex. Fifty-eight percent of the females reported closed communication with fathers about sex topics as compared to 33 percent of males.

Teenagers cited 13 main reasons why they could not talk with their parents about sex or sex-related topics: embarrassment (20%), poor communication in general (11%), different values about sex and dating (11%), avoidance of conflict (10%), teenager chooses not to discuss it with parents (10%), it's a topic simply not discussed (9%), parents might accuse them of being sexually active (7%), parents think they are too young (5%), they are too busy to talk about it (5%), parents don't want to discuss it (4%), parents are overprotective (4%), teenager is not close to parents (3%), and parents wouldn't understand (2%).

Items which teenagers say would make it more comfortable to discuss sex topics with parents include: parents being more understanding, non-accusing, not

embarrassed, willing to listen, closer in age, less old fashioned, more informed about today's teens, open minded and less judgmental.



## CHAPTER ONE

### PARENT-TEEN COMMUNICATION BARRIERS ON SEX-RELATED TOPICS

#### Rationale

Societal Concerns. The Planned Parenthood Federation of America reports that over one million American teenage girls get pregnant each year and that 80% of those pregnancies are unintentional (Wattleton, 1988). A poll conducted by Lou Harris and Associates reported that more than half of American teenagers are sexually active by age 17, but that only about a third of them use contraceptives (Harris, 1986). Concern about teenage pregnancy and the threat of sexually transmitted diseases such as Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome which threaten public health have prompted many public education systems to mandate sex education courses for teenagers. In 1989, the state of Kentucky mandated family life skills curriculum for elementary, middle, and high school students. Such action fuels public controversy about the role and responsibility of parents to provide sex education for their children.

Adolescent Development Concerns. Planned Parenthood officials say the results of the Harris poll indicate the need for significant improvement in parent-child communication (Wattleton, 1988). Other researchers agree that communication between parent and child about values is one of the prime factors of child socialization, and that family sex education can be important in delaying adolescent sexual activity (Moore & Peterson, 1986). In their research into parental attitudes and the occurrence of adolescent sexual activity, Kristin Moore and James Peterson concluded that good communication relationships between parents with traditional family values and their daughters result in lower incidence of adolescent sexual activity (Moore & Peterson, 1986). In a study of parent-child communication about sex and young adolescents' sexual knowledge and attitudes, Terri Fisher concluded that sex education communication in the family is an important source for the transmission of values and attitudes (Fisher, 1986).

Authors of sex education textbooks and essays believe communication between parents and their children about sex is vital. Tim LaHaye writes, "If it is 'embarrassing' or 'difficult' and you ignore it as so many parents do, your decision may be fatal to your children--or it may cause them to enter marriage already pregnant or emotionally



crippled" (LaHaye, 1985). Sol Gordon believes many parents feel uncomfortable discussing sex-related topics with their children because the parents grew up in homes where discussion about sex was avoided. He believes it is important to overcome this barrier because, "Without one's parents to draw upon as a model, the cycle of noncommunication is repeated from generation to generation" (Gordon, 1986).

#### Review Of Literature

Research-Based Literature. Terri Fisher's research on the ability of parents and adolescents to communicate about sex and sex-related topics has focused not only on child sexual knowledge and attitudes, but also on family relationships and the characteristics of parents who talk to their children about sexuality. Fisher found that mothers are generally the parents who talk with both sons and daughters, but that mothers tend to have more communication with daughters. Fathers report less communication with children about sexuality than mothers (Fisher, 1988). In another study, Fisher concluded that the quality of family communication in general was not related to parent-child communication about sex (Fisher, 1987).

A Lou Harris and Associates survey of 1,000 teenagers on a variety of topics concerning sexuality emphasizes the need to improve parent-child communication about sex (Harris, 1986). The researchers found that 31 percent of the teenagers had never talked to their parents about sex or birth control. Nearly half (42%) said they would be too nervous or afraid to bring up the subject with their parents. The study found that girls were more likely to have talked with their parents than boys. Despite the fact that many had not talked with their parents about sex, 29 percent listed parents as their prime source of information about contraception and birth control.

The second most frequently cited source was courses or teachers at school (19%) followed next by friends (14%). Television, books and magazines were the prime source of information for 14 percent of teenagers. Other sources included a doctor or nurse (5%), brothers or sisters (4%), family planning clinics (4%), other relatives (2%), and sexual partners (2%).

Other research focuses on the sources of sex education information. Gregory Sanders and Ronald Mullis asked female college students to identify their various sources of sex information (Sanders & Mullis, 1988). Friends were the most frequently cited source by 85



percent of the students, followed by books (80%), school (79%), parents (46%), siblings (22%), and church (11%). The majority of students in the survey reported they had discussed sexual topics with their parents, but 43 percent said their parents had avoided the topic.

Hazel Rozema studied defensive communication climate as a barrier to parent-child communication about sexuality (Rozema, 1986). She concluded that adolescents may prefer to discuss sex-related topics with same sex peers rather than parents or others based on the communication climate. Same sex peers tend to generate support, while opposite sex peers may create embarrassment or criticism and parents may generate defensiveness. Rozema found that college students obtained more of their information about sexuality from mothers than fathers and more from peers than parents.

On the general topic of communication with parents, Dennis Papini studied early adolescent age and gender differences in patterns of emotional self-disclosure to parents and friends (Papini, 1989). Papini found that among 12 to 15 year old students, females tended to have greater emotional self-disclosure to parents and peers than did males, and that older adolescents exhibited greater self-disclosure to friends than younger adolescents. Emotional self-disclosure to parents was



most closely associated with the adolescent's perception of open, satisfying, and close family relationships.

Popular Literature. Authors of sex education textbooks and help books for parents encourage openness in communication about sex-related topics. Many parents may be uncomfortable about their own sexuality and may be sending nonverbal messages to children. About some parents, author Ruth Bell writes, "For others, sex is a more private thing, and their kids rarely see them even kiss and hug. This might make you more shy and private about sex. If your parents talk freely and in a relaxed way about sex, this will make a difference" (Bell, 1988). Author Lynda Madaras encourages parents to overcome the "embarrassment barrier" (Madaras, 1984). Some families have an "unspoken agreement to be silent" on the subject of sex, according to authors Mary Calderone and Eric Johnson (Calderone & Johnson, 1981). Author Wardell Pomeroy says avoidance of the subject is sending a negative message, "Not talking is telling your daughter that this is a taboo subject that is not to be discussed and must therefore be bad" (Pomeroy, 1969). The topic is also avoided by adolescents in some cases, according to author Kenneth Guentert: "They become more private, especially from parents, just as their bodies begin to change and their load of questions increases"

(Guentert, 1984). Other authors suggest improving parents' interpersonal communication skills, particularly listening skills (McDowell, 1987).

#### Problem Statement

The general research question is: What are the communication barriers which may prevent communication about sex and sex-related topics between parents and teenagers? Specific research questions are: (1) How do teenagers in sex education classes rate their communication relationships with their parents? (2) How do those teens rate their ability to communicate with their parents about sex or sex-related topics? (3) What are teenagers' preferred face-to-face sources of information about sex or sex-related topics? (4) What are the reasons teenagers say they would be reluctant to discuss sex or sex-related topics with their parents? (5) What communication strategies do teenagers prefer that parents use?

## CHAPTER TWO

### RESEARCH METHOD

The general design of this research project is a survey of teenagers in sex education classes. A confidential questionnaire called a sex education communication questionnaire was developed to measure students' attitudes about communication with their parents, communication with their parents on sex education topics, communication with parents and others on specific sex education topics, and the reasons that teenagers say they can or cannot discuss sex with their parents. Additionally, the questionnaire was designed to identify those barriers which may exist.

#### Development of the Instrument

In addition to a review of current research and popular literature on the topic of sex education communication barriers between parents and teenagers, a survey of 22 young adults enrolled in college freshman



interpersonal communication courses provided additional data to develop questions for the questionnaire. The college students were asked to list ten reasons why they would not want to discuss sex or sex-related topics with their parents. Their 90 separate responses were classified into nine key categories listed here in rank order: (1) fear of conflict, accusation, or disappointing their parents, (2) fear of embarrassment, (3) conflicting values or teens thought their parents were too old fashioned, (4) unwillingness to self-disclose, (5) parents avoid the subject, (6) parents wouldn't understand or don't communicate well with their teenager, (7) the teenagers prefer to discuss sex with persons other than parents, (8) the teenagers feel they know all they need to know about sex or sex-related topics, and (9) the parents don't know enough or the teenager knows more than the parents. This list with response percentages is found in Appendix A of this report.

The initial questionnaire consisted of 73 questions. Likert scale questions were used to determine the students' attitudes toward communication with their parents on general topics and on sex or sex-related topics. Open-ended questions asked why teenagers can or cannot talk with their parents about sex or sex-related topics, what would make it easier for this kind of

communication, why they say it is easy to discuss sex with the person they listed as their preferred source of information, and why a certain topic may be easier to communicate about with parents. Students were asked to rank order topics they feel are the easiest to discuss with parents: pregnancy & birth control, dating behavior, sexual activity, bodily changes associated with sexual maturity, and sexually transmitted diseases like AIDS or V.D. They were also asked to identify their preferred source of information about any of those topics by selecting from a list which included parents, an older brother or sister, another close relative, a teacher or school counselor, a minister or Sunday school teacher, a doctor or nurse, a friend their age, or someone else. Students were asked to circle words which described the way they might feel discussing sex or sex-related topics with their parents: interested, reluctant, childish, uncomfortable, relaxed, eager, mature, embarrassed, or nervous.

The initial questionnaire also asked students to complete a series of 49 yes/no questions on their ability to communicate about sex or sex-related topics with their parents. For example, students were asked to circle yes or no in response to this statement: "I would be afraid to discuss sex with my parents because they might think I am



sexually active." The final five questions of the initial questionnaire were demographic questions to determine the student's age, gender, race, person with whom they live, and whether they have older brothers or sisters. A copy of the initial questionnaire is found in Appendix A.

To determine the reliability of the instrument, the questionnaire was tested on a freshman sex education class at Ohio County High School in Hartford, Kentucky. The teacher of the class was asked to administer the questionnaire and make notes about the students' problems with any of the questions, to note the time it took to complete it, to stress the confidentiality of the survey, and mail the completed questionnaires back to the researcher.

Upon completion of the questionnaire, the teacher noted that it took 10 to 30 minutes to complete, that two students needed additional instructions on the answer key format for the preferred source questions, that two students needed clarification on the race question, and that some students indicated they did not like the short answer, open-ended questions. However, the teacher explained that some students are lazy and others do not have good writing skills which may explain the reluctance to respond to essay type questions.

With the initial questionnaire testing completed, the instrument was revised to a final questionnaire. The instructions were more clearly defined; the answer key format was changed, two of the five open-ended questions which provided repetitive data were eliminated as well as the question which asked the student to circle words to describe the way he or she might feel discussing sex or sex-related topics with parents. The 49 yes or no questions were reduced to 16 to eliminate repetitive data. Additional demographic questions were added to reflect the educational level of the students' parents, and the students' rural or urban backgrounds. A copy of the revised final questionnaire is found in Appendix B of this report.

#### Elements And Sampling Method

Because of the sensitivity of the subject matter, an availability sampling method was used to survey students in high school sex education classes where permission to do so could be obtained. An introductory letter was mailed to four sex education teachers at Ohio County High School in Hartford, Kentucky, and Henderson County High School in Henderson, Kentucky. The letter was accompanied by a copy of the questionnaire and a request for



materials form. A copy of the introductory letter and the request for materials form are found in Appendix B of this report. All of the teachers responded with requests for questionnaires to be administered to 294 students in 11 sex education classes.

#### Data Collection

Questionnaires and a letter of instructions were mailed to each teacher. A copy of the letter of instructions is found in Appendix B. The teachers were asked to administer the questionnaire to all students on the same day to minimize discussion of the survey among students to prevent any bias in those who had not yet completed the questionnaire. Teachers were asked to administer the questionnaire at the beginning of the class period to insure adequate response time. They were asked to read the instructions aloud to the class and stress the confidentiality of the survey. Teachers were asked to make sure that students completed the front and back of each page and all the demographic questions. When the questionnaires were completed, the teacher was asked to seal them in the post-paid envelope and mail them back to the researcher.



### Description Of Variables

For many of the analyses in this study, the independent variables examined included those factors identified by the demographic section of the questionnaire: the age, gender, and race of the student, person with whom they live, their parents' educational background, and whether they come from a rural or urban environment (see questions # 33-40 of the final questionnaire in Appendix B). Students were asked to list their age, whether they are male or female, whether they live with both parents, their mother, their father, their grandparents, or another relative or guardian, and whether they have older brothers or sisters. They were asked if their mother and their father attended high school but didn't graduate, completed a high school diploma or G.E.D., attended college, but didn't graduate, completed a college degree, or completed a master's degree or doctoral degree. They were asked if they live on a farm or in the country, if they live in a town with less than 5,000 people, in a town of between 5,000 and 20,000 people, in a city of between 20,000 and 50,000 people, or in a city of over 50,000 people.

Other independent variables included the students' willingness to discuss some particular sex-related

topics: pregnancy and birth control, dating behavior, sexual activity, bodily changes associated with sexual maturity, and sexually transmitted diseases like AIDS or V.D. The scores on these topics were treated as dependent variables when students were asked to rank them on their ability to discuss such topics with their parents (see question # 9 in Appendix B).

The primary dependent variable is the teenager's level of openness in communication with parents about sex or sex-related topics. The level was measured by closed questions # 4 through 6 which asked students to rate their degree of openness with parents, and to provide separate ratings for openness with their mother and father. The level of openness was also measured by responses to the yes/no questions # 17 through 32. Reasons for open or closed communication with parents and others on sex-related topics were identified through responses to the open-ended questions # 7, 8, and 16. Another dependent variable is the teenager's level of openness in communication with parents on general topics which was measured by closed-ended questions # 1 through 3.



## CHAPTER THREE

### RESULTS

The results of the analyses of the questionnaire responses will be discussed in this chapter. The demographic results are presented first to provide an overview of the independent variables which are characteristics of the test subjects. Results of the teenagers' openness in communication with parents about general topics, their openness on sex-related topics, their reasons for open/closed communication on sex-related topics, their ease of discussing specific sex-related topics, their preferred sources of information on sex-related topics, factors which influence their reluctance to communicate with parents on sex-related topics, and the teenagers' suggestions to improve communication with parents on sex-related topics will follow in subsequent sections of this chapter.

#### Demographics

The questionnaires were completed by 249 students



aged 14 to 19. There were 105 males and 142 females. The majority (84%) were aged 15 to 17. Most were white (93%), but a few (7%) were Black. Most of the teenagers lived with both parents (62%), but nearly a third (28%) lived with their mothers only, and the rest of the students lived with their fathers only, with their grandparents, or with other relatives or guardians. Most of the students (61%) said they had older brothers or sisters.

The majority of the students (64%) reported their fathers had a high school diploma, GED, or less, while the rest said their fathers had attended college or received college or graduate degrees. The majority (62%) reported their mothers had a high school diploma, GED, or less, while the rest said their mothers had some college or had received college or graduate degrees.

Nearly half of the students (48%) reported they lived on farms, rural areas, or in towns of less than 5,000 people; however, almost as many (46%) reported they lived in cities larger than 20,000 persons. The rest said they lived in towns of between 5,000 and 20,000 people. Complete demographic results are displayed in Table 1.

TABLE 1

## DEMOGRAPHICS

VARIABLE	GROUP	CASES	PERCENTAGE
AGE	14	23	9
	15	67	27
	16	69	28
	17	73	29
	18	16	6
	19	1	-
GENDER	male	105	42
	female	142	58
RACE	white	228	93
	Black	16	7
	Hispanic	1	-
RESIDES WITH:	both parents	150	62
	mother	68	28
	father	17	7
	grandparents	5	2
	other	3	1
SIBLINGS	yes	151	61
	no	95	39
FATHER'S EDUCATION	Not H.S. graduate	47	20
	H.S. diploma or GED	104	44
	Attended college/ no degree	22	9
	college degree	43	18
	graduate degree	21	9
MOTHER'S EDUCATION	Not H.S. graduate	42	17
	H.S. diploma or GED	109	45
	Attended college/ no degree	24	10
	college degree	53	22
	graduate degree	16	6
RURAL/URBAN RESIDENCE	farm or country home	81	33
	town less than 5,000	35	14
	town 5-20,000	16	7
	city 20-50,000	109	45
	city more than 50,000	3	1



Openness In Communicating With Parents  
About General Topics

General Responses. Responses to the first three questions on the survey instrument indicate that most of the students feel they have good communication relationships with their parents, but some indicated they are not able to communicate well with their fathers. The majority (71%) said they agreed with question # 1: "About most topics in general, I can communicate freely with my parents." Most (62%) agreed with question # 2: "My mom and I can talk about anything." Results for question # 3 were more widely distributed. The statement read: "My dad and I can talk about anything." Only 40 percent of the students agreed with the statement, while 37 percent disagreed with it and the rest were uncertain. A gender crosstabulation on question # 3 revealed that over half the males (53%) agreed with the statement while less than a third of the females (30%) agreed with the statement.

Significant Differences. Analysis of variance tests to compare differences in mean scores on these three general openness items according to the father's education, mother's education, the age of the teenager, person with whom the teenager lives, and their rural or urban environment showed significant differences on some



items. On question # 1: "About most topics in general, I can communicate freely with my parents.", an ANOVA for father's education indicated a strong trend toward significance,  $p=.052$ . There was no significant effect for mother's education or person with whom the teenager lives, but there was a significant two-way interaction between father's education and person with whom the teenager lives. The most open relationships occurred among teenagers whose fathers have attended or graduated from college. Those mean scores are shown in Table 2. Results showed no significant differences on question # 1 for the age of the teenager, the mother's education or the rural/urban environment of the teenager. T-tests on question # 1 yielded no significant differences comparing gender, race, or the presence or absence of older siblings.

TABLE 2

DIFFERENCES IN OPENNESS ON GENERAL COMMUNICATION WITH  
PARENTS ACCORDING TO FATHER'S EDUCATION AND  
PERSON WITH WHOM TEENAGER LIVES (ANOVA)

VARIABLE	GROUP	MEAN <sup>1</sup>	CASES	SIGNIFICANCE
father's education	Not H.S. graduate	2.43	42	p=.052
	H.S. diploma or G.E.D.	2.47	97	
	Attended college/ no degree	1.86	21	
	College or graduate degree	2.17	61	
teenager lives with	both parents	2.31	143	p=.952
	mother	2.35	61	
	father	2.30	17	

Two-way interaction of father's education  
and person with whom teenager lives p=.045

	Both parents	Mother	Father
Not grad.	2.24	2.56	*
Diploma	2.54	2.50	2.09
College	1.85	2.13	2.50
College grad.	2.19	2.13	2.00

<sup>1</sup> Lower means indicate greater openness. Range=1-5.

\*Only one case

On question # 2: "My mom and I can talk about anything.", an ANOVA showed significant differences in means when comparing the same variables of father's education and person with whom the student lives in a two-way interaction. Results are shown in Table 3. The most open communication with mothers was reported by teenagers who lived with their fathers and whose fathers had attended college, but did not graduate. No significant differences were found for any of the other independent variables on this particular item.



TABLE 3

DIFFERENCES IN OPENNESS OF GENERAL COMMUNICATION  
WITH MOTHER ACCORDING TO FATHER'S EDUCATION AND  
PERSON WITH WHOM TEENAGER LIVES (ANOVA)

VARIABLE	GROUP	MEAN <sup>1</sup>	CASES	SIGNIFICANCE
father's education	Not H.S. graduate	2.62	42	p=.706
	H.S. diploma or G.E.D.	2.37	97	
	Attended college/ no degree	2.00	21	
	College or graduate degree	2.46	61	
teenager lives with	both parents	2.40	143	p=.723
	mother	2.49	61	
	father	2.18	17	

Two-way interaction of father's education and  
person with whom teenager lives

p=.009

	Both Parents	Mother	Father
Not grad.	2.32	2.94	*
Diploma	2.42	2.25	2.18
College	2.23	1.67	1.50
College grad.	2.41	2.73	1.67

<sup>1</sup> Lower means indicate greater openness. Range=1-5.

\*Only one case

On question # 3, "My dad and I can talk about anything", an analysis of variance showed significant main effect for the person with whom the teenager lives,  $p=.034$ . It also revealed significant differences in a two-way interaction with the mother's education and father's education. Table 4 shows the differences in mean scores for each of those variables. The lower mean scores reflect the most open communication with fathers by teenagers who live with their fathers only and whose fathers and mothers have attended college or are college graduates.



TABLE 4

DIFFERENCES IN OPENNESS OF GENERAL COMMUNICATION WITH FATHER  
 ACCORDING TO FATHER'S EDUCATION, MOTHER'S EDUCATION,  
 AND PERSON WITH WHOM TEENAGER LIVES (ANOVA)

VARIABLE	GROUP	MEAN <sup>1</sup>	CASES	SIGNIFICANCE
father's education	Not H.S. graduate	3.23	42	p=.178
	H.S. diploma or G.E.D.	3.12	97	
	Attended college/ no degree	2.62	21	
	College or graduate degree	2.82	61	
mother's education	Not H.S. graduate	3.11	34	p=.993
	H.S. diploma or G.E.D.	3.03	103	
	Attended college/ no degree	3.00	21	
	College or graduate degree	2.93	63	
teenager lives with	both parents	3.01	143	p=.034
	mother	3.21	61	
	father	2.29	17	

Two-way interaction of father's education  
 and mother's education

p=.014

Father's Education	Mother's Education			
	Not grad.	Diploma	College	College Grad.
Not grad.	2.90	3.56	4.50	3.17
Diploma	3.69	3.02	3.13	3.11
College	3.67	2.13	2.33	3.00
College grad.	*	3.14	2.20	2.78

<sup>1</sup> Lower means indicate greater openness. Range=1-5.

\* Only one case



Another ANOVA on this particular item comparing the age of the teenagers indicated more openness in communication with fathers about general topics from teenagers who were 17 or 18 years old and more closed communication reported by the younger teenagers (see Table 5). Other ANOVAs comparing the teenagers' rural or urban backgrounds resulted in no significant differences in responses to any of the general openness items.

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TABLE 5

DIFFERENCES IN OPENNESS OF GENERAL COMMUNICATION WITH  
FATHER ACCORDING TO AGE OF TEENAGERS (ANOVA)

VARIABLE	VALUE	MEAN <sup>1</sup>	CASES	SIGNIFICANCE
age				p=.024
	15	3.15	61	
	16	3.37	68	
	17	2.75	72	
	18	2.77	13	

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<sup>1</sup> Lower means indicate greater openness. Range=1-5.

T-tests to compare differences in means on these three general openness items according to gender, race, and the presence or absence of older siblings confirmed a significant difference between males and females in response to question # 3: "My dad and I can talk about anything." Table 6 shows males were more likely to agree with this statement than females, but race or having older siblings did not make a difference.

TABLE 6

DIFFERENCES IN OPENNESS OF GENERAL COMMUNICATION  
WITH FATHER ACCORDING TO GENDER (T-TEST)

VARIABLE	GROUP	MEAN <sup>1</sup>	ST.DV.	CASES	SIGNIFICANCE
gender					p=.001
	male	2.80	1.34	103	
	female	3.28	1.25	138	

<sup>1</sup> Lower means indicate greater openness. Range=1-5.



An "openness" index was created for questions 1 through 3 to measure the degree of open communication about most topics in general between teenagers and their parents. The teenagers' scores for those questions were totaled to provide an index score ranging from 3 to 15 with 3 representing the most open communication relationship and 15 representing the least open. This index is called Openness Index I. T-tests to compare differences in means for this index according to gender, race, and the presence or absence of older siblings revealed no significant differences. However, an ANOVA comparing differences in means according to parents' education and the person with whom the teenager lives did reveal significant differences as shown in Table 7. The lower mean scores reflect more open communication, indicating that teenagers who live with their fathers report more openness as do teenagers whose mothers and fathers have attended college. The differences in mean scores for the variables of age or rural/urban background were not significant.



TABLE 7  
 DIFFERENCES IN OPENNESS OF GENERAL COMMUNICATION WITH  
 PARENTS (INDEX I) ACCORDING TO PARENTS' EDUCATION AND  
 PERSON WITH WHOM TEENAGER LIVES (ANOVA)

VARIABLE	GROUP	MEAN <sup>1</sup>	CASES	SIGNIFICANCE
father's education	Not H.S. graduate	8.29	42	p=.054
	H.S. diploma or G.E.D.	7.96	97	
	Attended college/ no degree	6.48	21	
	College or graduate degree	7.49	61	
mother's education	Not H.S. graduate	8.12	34	p=.894
	H.S. diploma or G.E.D.	7.70	103	
	Attended college/ no degree	7.29	21	
	College or graduate degree	7.75	63	
teenager lives with	both parents	7.72	143	p=.219
	mother	8.05	61	
	father	6.77	17	
2-way interaction of father's and mother's education				p=.013
2-way interaction of father's education and person with whom student lives				p=.039

<sup>1</sup> Lower means indicate greater openness. Range=3-15.

Openness In Communicating With Parents  
About Sex-Related Topics

General Responses. Slightly more than half of all the teenagers (52%) agreed with question # 4: "When the subject is sex or sex-related topics, my parents and I have an open communication channel." One fourth of the teenagers (25%) disagreed with the statement, and the rest were uncertain. Slightly more than half (53%) agreed with question # 5: "My mom and I can talk comfortably about sex or sex-related topics." Nearly a third (30%) disagreed with that statement, and the rest were uncertain. Nearly half of all teenagers (47%) disagreed with question # 6: "My dad and I can talk comfortably about sex or sex-related topics." Less than a third (29%) agreed with the statement, and the rest were uncertain. A gender crosstabulation on question # 6 revealed that a third of the males (33%) disagreed with the statement, and more than half of the females (58%) disagreed with it.

Significant Differences. ANOVA's and t-tests on these three sex communication openness items revealed significant differences in means for several independent variables on two items. While no significant differences were found on question # 4, analysis of questions # 5 and



6 did reveal significant differences. Table 8 shows that older teenagers reported more openness in their responses to question # 5. It stated: "My mom and I can talk comfortably about sex or sex-related topics." Teenagers who were 16 through 19 years old had lower mean scores than those teenagers who were 14 and 15 years old indicating more openness.

T-tests to compare differences in means on these three sex communication openness items according to gender, race, and the presence or absence of older siblings confirmed significant differences between males

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TABLE 8

DIFFERENCES IN SEX-RELATED COMMUNICATION WITH MOTHER  
ACCORDING TO AGE (T-TEST)

VARIABLE	GROUP	MEAN <sup>1</sup>	ST.DV.	CASES	SIGNIFICANCE
age					p=.009
	14-15	2.98	1.31	89	
	16-19	2.52	1.28	159	

---

<sup>1</sup> Lower means indicate greater openness. Range=1-5.



and females on question # 6: "My dad and I can talk comfortably about sex or sex-related topics." Table 9 shows that males tended to agree more with this statement than females.

ANOVAs on question # 6 revealed differences in means when analyzing by the parents' education and the person with whom the teenager lives. Table 10 shows that teenagers who live with their father had more openness in communicating with their father about sex-related topics as did teenagers whose parents had

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TABLE 9

DIFFERENCES IN SEX-RELATED COMMUNICATION WITH FATHER  
ACCORDING TO GENDER (T-TEST)

VARIABLE	GROUP	MEAN <sup>1</sup>	ST.DV.	CASES	SIGNIFICANCE
gender					p<.001
	male	2.98	1.29	101	
	female	3.64	1.30	139	

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<sup>1</sup> Lower means indicate greater openness. Range=1-5.

TABLE 10

DIFFERENCES IN SEX-RELATED COMMUNICATION  
WITH FATHER ACCORDING TO PARENTS' EDUCATION  
AND PERSON WITH WHOM TEENAGER LIVES (ANOVA)

VARIABLE	GROUP	MEAN <sup>1</sup>	CASES	SIGNIFICANCE
father's education	Not H.S. graduate	3.39	42	p=.477
	H.S. diploma or G.E.D.	3.40	97	
	Attended college/ no degree	2.96	21	
	College or graduate degree	3.28	62	
mother's education	Not H.S. graduate	3.33	34	p=.970
	H.S. diploma or G.E.D.	3.30	103	
	Attended college/ no degree	3.23	22	
	College or graduate degree	3.39	63	
teenager lives with	both parents	3.39	144	p=.038
	mother	3.37	61	
	father	2.53	17	

3-way interaction:  
father's education,  
mother's education,  
and person with whom  
teenager lives

p=.041

<sup>1</sup> Lower means indicate greater openness. Range=1-5.



attended college.

An index of openness toward communicating with parents on sex-related topics was created by totaling students' scores for questions # 4 through 6. This index ranges from 3 to 15 with 3 being the most open and 15 being the least open. This index is called Openness Index II. T-tests and ANOVAs to compare differences in means for this index according to gender, race, person with whom the teenager lives, and the presence or absence of older siblings revealed no significant differences. However, T-tests to compare age did reveal significant differences as shown in Table 11. Older teenagers

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TABLE 11

DIFFERENCES IN OPENNESS OF COMMUNICATION  
WITH PARENTS ON SEX TOPICS (INDEX II)  
ACCORDING TO AGE OF TEENAGERS (T-TEST)

VARIABLE	GROUP	MEAN <sup>1</sup>	ST.DEV.	CASES	SIGNIFICANCE
age					p=.007
	14-15	9.42	3.16	86	
	16-19	8.29	2.98	156	

---

<sup>1</sup> Lower means indicate greater openness. Range=3-15.



reported more openness on these items compared to younger teenagers. ANOVAs comparing differences for the remaining independent variables showed no significant differences on Openness Index II.

Comparison Of Openness Indexes I and II. A T-test compared the difference in means between the students' openness in communicating with their parents on most topics in general (Index I) and the students' openness in communicating with their parents on sex-related topics (Index II). Results shown in Table 12 indicate that students are significantly less open in communicating with their parents about sex-related topics than about general topics.

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TABLE 12

DIFFERENCES IN COMMUNICATION OPENNESS WITH PARENTS  
COMPARING INDEX I AND INDEX II (T-TEST)

VARIABLE	SCORE	MEAN <sup>1</sup>	ST.DV.	CASES	SIGNIFICANCE
Openness				239	p<.001
	Index I	7.87	2.67		
	Index II	8.69	3.10		

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<sup>1</sup> Lower means indicate greater openness. Range=3-15.

Reasons For Open Or Closed Communication With Parents  
About Sex-Related Topics

Reasons For Open Communication. Question # 7A asked students to complete the following phrase: "My parents and I can talk about sex or sex-related topics because:...." Over half of the teenagers (53%) indicated they were able to talk with their parents about sex-related topics for a variety of reasons. As shown in Table 13, the most frequently cited response was a feeling of openness between the teenager and parents (28%) followed next by understanding (17%). Other teens (11%) said their parents want to be their prime source of sex education information. Some (11%) indicated they had a close family relationship. Others (7%) said their parents remember what it was like when they were young. Some teenagers (6%) said they were able to communicate with their parents because they feel it is important to prevent pregnancy. A similar number (6%) said they are mature enough and their parents trust them. A few (5%) said they were not embarrassed to talk about it, and fewer (2%) said their parents had experienced past problems with older children and did not want to make the same mistakes with them.

The following verbatim responses from teenagers



illustrate the relationships of openness and understanding they say they have with their parents: "My family is very open. My parents are very understanding." "They want me to be open."

TABLE 13

## REASONS GIVEN BY TEENAGERS FOR OPEN COMMUNICATION

REASON	CASES	PERCENTAGE
We are open.	37	28.0%
They are understanding.	23	17.4
My parents want to be my prime source of sex information.	15	11.4
We are a close family.	15	11.4
My parents remember what it was like when they were young.	9	6.8
It's important to prevent pregnancy.	8	6.1
I'm mature enough and they trust me.	8	6.1
Miscellaneous	7	5.3
We are not embarrassed to talk about it.	7	5.3
They had problems with older siblings they don't want to repeat.	3	2.3
Total	132	100.0



Reasons For Closed Communication. Question # 7B asked teenagers to complete the following phrase: "My parents and I cannot talk about sex or sex-related topics because:...." Less than half of the teenagers (42%) indicated they were not able to talk with their parents about sex-related topics for a variety of reasons. As shown in Table 14, the most frequently cited response was embarrassment (20%). Communication problems in general were frequently cited (11%), and just as many teenagers (11%) said they and their parents have different values about sex. Other teenagers (10%) said they hoped to avoid conflict, and as many others (10%) said they simply did not want to discuss sex-related topics with their parents.

Some teenagers (9%) said sex-related topics are simply not discussed in their family, and a few (4%) indicated their parents specifically did not want to discuss it. Some teenagers (7%) were afraid to discuss sex-related topics with their parents because their parents might think they are sexually active. A few (5%) said their parents think they are too young to talk about such things, and just as many (5%) said they or their parents are too busy to take time for such communication. Other teenagers described their parents as too overprotective (4%), or reported a lack of closeness (3%)

TABLE 14  
REASONS GIVEN BY TEENAGERS FOR CLOSED COMMUNICATION

REASON	CASES	PERCENTAGE
We're too embarrassed.	21	20.0%
We don't communicate well.	11	10.5
We have different values about sex and dating.	11	10.5
I try to avoid conflict.	10	9.5
I don't want to discuss it with them.	10	9.5
It's a topic we don't discuss.	9	8.6
They'll think I'm having sex.	7	6.7
They think I'm too young.	5	4.8
We're too busy to talk about it.	5	4.8
They don't want to discuss it with me.	4	3.8
They're too overprotective.	4	3.8
I'm not close to my parents.	3	2.9
Miscellaneous	3	2.9
They won't understand.	2	1.9
Total	105	100.0

or understanding (2%) with their parents.

The following verbatim responses from teenagers illustrate the problem of embarrassment: "Neither one of us feel right talking to each other." "Because I feel uncomfortable talking to my mom about it." "I get embarrassed and so do they."



Here is how some teenagers expressed the problem of communication: "I'm a person who doesn't talk to their parents when I've got a problem." "We don't communicate about anything very well." "We have a very hard time talking about anything, much less sex. I feel that if they talked to me as I was growing up, I could go to them now."

Some teenagers reported having different values than their parents about sex and dating in these words: "She doesn't want us to have sex before getting married. And if birth control is mentioned, she goes crazy and assumes we aren't virgins. I do wish she would let me use birth control." "My dad is strongly against it." "My mom is 58 years old and is very old fashioned and believes that it's disgraceful for an unmarried person to interact or even talk about sex."

Relative Ease of Discussing 5 Categories  
Of Sex-Related Topics With Parents

General Responses. Question # 9 asked teenagers to consider five sex-related topics and rank them in order from 1 to 5 with 1 being the easiest and 5 being the most difficult topic to discuss with their parents. The topics and their overall ranking are displayed in



TABLE 15

RELATIVE EASE OF DISCUSSING FIVE CATEGORIES OF  
SEX-RELATED TOPICS WITH PARENTS

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TOPIC	RANK	MEAN <sup>1</sup>
Dating Behavior	1	1.82
Bodily Changes Associated With Sexual Maturity	2	2.63
Sexually Transmitted Diseases Like AIDS Or V.D.	3	2.75
Pregnancy And Birth Control	4	3.65
Sexual Activity	5	4.16

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<sup>1</sup> Lower means indicate greater ease. Range=1-5.

Table 15.

Significant Differences. T-Tests comparing the means of teenagers' responses for each category of sex-related topics showed all were significantly different from each other ( $p < .001$ ) with the exception of mean scores for "bodily changes associated with sexual maturity" and "sexually transmitted diseases." T-tests and analysis of variance tests compared the differences in means of each individual topic according to gender, race, the presence or absence of older siblings, the mother's education level, the father's education level,

person with whom the teenager lives, and their rural/urban background.

After testing for differences in means for all independent variables on each topic on question # 9, significant differences were found only when comparing means for gender, father's education, and rural/urban background. Significant differences between males and females were found on the ease of discussing sexual activity as shown in Table 16. Females had more difficulty talking with their parents about sexual activity than males.

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TABLE 16

DIFFERENCES IN EASE OF DISCUSSING SEXUAL ACTIVITY  
WITH PARENTS ACCORDING TO GENDER (ANOVA)

VARIABLE	GROUP	MEAN <sup>1</sup>	CASES	SIGNIFICANCE
gender				p=.006
	males	3.93	86	
	females	4.34	135	

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<sup>1</sup> Lower means indicate greater openness. Range=1-5.



Significant differences in the mean ranking of ease of discussing sexually transmitted diseases were noted when comparing the father's educational level. Table 17 shows that teenagers whose fathers had lower levels of education reported more difficulty talking with parents about sexually transmitted diseases than those teenagers whose fathers had higher education levels.

Another ANOVA found significant differences in teenagers' responses on their ability to discuss pregnancy and birth control with parents when comparing

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TABLE 17  
DIFFERENCES IN EASE OF DISCUSSING SEXUALLY  
TRANSMITTED DISEASES WITH PARENTS ACCORDING TO  
FATHER'S EDUCATION LEVEL (ANOVA)

VARIABLE	GROUP	MEAN <sup>1</sup>	CASES	SIGNIF.
father's education	Not a HS Grad.	3.02	41	p=.012
	HS Dip. or GED	2.87	95	
	College, No Grad.	2.38	18	
	College Degree	2.57	40	
	Masters or PHD	1.90	20	

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<sup>1</sup> Lower means indicate greater openness. Range=1-5.



their rural/urban backgrounds. Teenagers who lived in towns of 5,000 to 20,000 in population reported this topic easier to discuss than did teenagers in more rural areas or larger cities. Table 18 shows the difference in mean scores.

An ANOVA comparing differences in means on teenagers' ease of discussing dating behavior according to rural/urban background and gender showed no significance when examining each variable independently. However, Table 19 shows significant differences in a

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TABLE 18

DIFFERENCES IN EASE OF DISCUSSING PREGNANCY  
AND BIRTH CONTROL WITH PARENTS ACCORDING TO  
RURAL/URBAN BACKGROUND (ANOVA)

VARIABLE	GROUP	MEAN <sup>1</sup>	CASES	SIGNIF.
rural/urban background				p=.035
	farm or country	3.65	74	
	town < 5,000	3.79	34	
	town 5-20,000	2.78	14	
	town 20-50,000	3.68	98	
	city > 50,000	3.00	3	

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<sup>1</sup> Lower means indicate greater openness. Range=1-5.

two-way interaction of those variables. Females and teenagers from more rural environments reported more difficulty in discussing dating behavior with their parents.

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TABLE 19  
DIFFERENCES IN EASE OF DISCUSSING  
DATING BEHAVIOR WITH PARENTS ACCORDING TO  
RURAL/URBAN BACKGROUND AND GENDER (ANOVA)

VARIABLE	GROUP	MEAN <sup>1</sup>	CASES	SIGNIF.	
rural/urban background				p=.184	
	farm or country	1.98	74		
	town < 5,000	1.83	34		
	town 5-20,000	1.43	14		
	town 20-50,000	1.75	98		
	city > 50,000	.99	3		
gender				p=.577	
	males	1.79	89		
	females	1.86	134		
Two-way interaction of rural/urban background and gender				p=.047	
	farm	<5,000	5-20,000	20-50,000	>50,000
male	2.09	2.06	1.20	1.49	*
female	1.88	1.61	1.56	1.89	*

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<sup>1</sup> Lower means indicate greater openness. Range=1-5.

\*Fewer than 3 cases



Teenagers' Preferred Sources Of Information/Advice  
On Sex-Related Topics

General Responses. Questions # 10 through 15 asked teenagers to select their most frequent source of information on sex-related topics from among their parents, an older brother or sister, another close relative, a teacher or school counselor, a doctor or nurse, a friend their own age, or a minister or Sunday school teacher. Generally, teenagers listed parents or friends as their primary sources of information and/or advice.

On question # 10, "If I have a question about sexually transmitted diseases like AIDS or V.D., I would most likely discuss it with:....", the most frequent response was parents (29%) followed closely by a friend (25%). On the topic of pregnancy or birth control in question # 11, the most frequent response again was parents (31%), followed by a friend (27%).

On the topic of dating behavior in question # 12, a friend was the most frequent response (44%), followed by parents (34%). Nearly half of the teenagers listed friends (48%) on question # 13 as their primary source of information/advice about sexual activity, followed by parents (22%). Parents were the primary source of



information about bodily changes (53%) on question # 14 followed by a friend (19%).

Teenagers indicated on question # 15 that they get most of their information about sex or sex-related topics primarily from friends (40%), then teachers (26%), parents (20%), and others (14%). While most teenagers did not list teachers as their primary source of information/advice on any of the specific topics, over a quarter of those surveyed said they get most of their information about sex and sex-related topics in the classroom. Table 20 shows how teenagers rated their parents, teachers, friends, and others as primary sources of information/advice on each of the sex-related topics.

Reasons For Teenagers' Preferred Source. Question # 16 asked teenagers to report why they feel comfortable discussing sex or sex-related topics with their primary source of sex information. There were 231 responses which fell into 19 categories. The most frequently cited reason was understanding (14%). Some teenagers (12%)

TABLE 20

TEENAGERS' PREFERRED SOURCES OF INFORMATION/ADVICE  
ON SEX-RELATED TOPICS

TOPIC	PARENTS	FRIENDS	TEACHERS	OTHERS
sexually transmitted diseases	29%	25%	19%	27%
pregnancy or birth control	31	27	15	27
dating behavior	35	44	1	20
sexual activity	22	48	4	26
bodily changes/sexual maturity	53	19	6	22
most information	20	40	26	14



said the person they get most of their information from is knowledgeable. Nearly as many (11%) reported that their primary source of information about sex is open with them. Some teenagers (8%) felt they could talk with their prime source comfortably because they were the same age or close in ages.

Closeness was also cited by some teenagers (7%) as a reason for comfortable communication. Truth and honesty were qualities of primary sources for many teenagers (7%). Some teenagers (7%) said their source understands what it is like to be a teenager in today's society. Experience was another quality listed in some responses (6%). Some teenagers said they felt comfortable talking with someone who is going through the same thing (5%).

Other responses by the teenagers indicated they preferred to talk to someone who will listen, give them good advice, who cares about them, who won't judge them, get upset, or laugh at them, and can keep a secret. Table 21 shows a complete listing of the reasons why teenagers feel comfortable talking with their preferred sources of sex information.

The following verbatim responses illustrate the importance of understanding in the communication relationship when selecting a source of sex information: "They will understand what I am talking about." "I feel



TABLE 21

REASONS FOR FEELING COMFORTABLE TALKING WITH  
PREFERRED SOURCE OF SEX INFORMATION

REASON	CASES	PERCENTAGE
They understand me.	32	13.9%
They are knowledgeable.	27	11.7
They are open.	25	10.8
We are the same age or close in age.	19	8.2
We are close.	17	7.4
They understand what it's like to be a teenager today.	16	6.9
They are honest, and I trust them.	16	6.9
They are experienced.	13	5.2
They're going through the same thing.	11	4.8
I am not embarrassed or uncomfortable.	10	4.3
They will give me good advice.	10	4.3
They will listen.	8	3.5
They will not tell anyone.	5	2.2
Miscellaneous.	5	2.2
They love or care about me.	5	2.2
They won't judge me or force their beliefs on me.	4	1.7
They don't laugh or joke about it.	3	1.3
They won't get mad or upset with me.	3	1.3
Everybody's talking about it.	2	.9
Total	231	100.0

they know how I feel and would explain better or help me...." "He understands and tells me the facts and doesn't tell if I can or can't. The decision is mine."

Teenagers also indicated they sought out persons who are knowledgeable about sex-related topics: "He is just a little older than me and he is real smart." "My teacher understands and knows a lot about it." "They understand a lot that I don't."

On the topic of openness, teenagers wrote: "They are open and honest whenever I need information. We have a more open communication line than I do with my parents." "They don't mind if you ask like parents do." "My best friend and I can talk about anything and trust each other."

Many teenagers also indicated they preferred to talk to someone their own age about sex: "They're my age, and they understand a lot better about what I'm talking about these days." "They are my own age, and I feel I can relate to them better than with my parents." "They are my age and going through about the same thing. We can talk and not worry about what we say."



Factors Which Influence Reluctance To  
Communicate With Parents On Sex-Related Topics

General Responses. Questions # 17 through 32 are statements containing factors which may influence teenagers' willingness or reluctance to discuss sex or sex-related topics with parents. Students were asked to circle yes or no to indicate whether or not the statement applied to them. The majority of the students disagreed with most of the statements, thus indicating openness in their communication relationships with their parents as shown in Table 22. Most of the students (66%) said they would not be too embarrassed to discuss sex or sex-related topics with their parents. Even more (71%) said their parents would not be too embarrassed to talk with them. Most (69%) did not think their parents would get upset or angry with them, but just over half (57%) were confident their parents would not accuse them of being sexually active if they tried to talk about it, and the rest (43%) thought their parents would accuse them. The students were evenly divided (50%) on whether or not their parents would start "hassling" them about relationships with a boyfriend or girlfriend. The majority (61%) thought parents should discuss sex-related topics with them, but a sizeable number (39%) felt it is none of their parents' business.



TABLE 22

FACTORS IN TEENAGERS' RELUCTANCE TO COMMUNICATE  
WITH PARENTS ON SEX-RELATED TOPICS

FACTOR	CASES	%NO	%YES
I know enough already.	245	80	20
My parents say I'm too young.	248	77	23
My parents lack information.	246	74	26
My parents avoid the issue.	246	74	26
We have poor communication.	246	73	27
My parents are too embarrassed.	247	71	29
I might make my parents upset.	249	69	31
I'm too embarrassed.	249	66	34
My parents are too old fashioned.	245	65	35
My parents won't understand.	247	64	36
I may disappoint my parents.	247	62	38
It's none of my parents' business.	247	61	39
It's too personal.	246	60	40
My parents may accuse me.	248	57	43
My parents may hassle me.	246	50	50
I prefer other sources.	245	43	57

Most of the teenagers (60%) said sex was not too personal to discuss with parents, and a large majority

(80%) said that as teenagers they do not have all the information they need to know about sex. Most (74%) thought their parents were well informed, and most (74%) thought their parents would be receptive to the subject. The majority (77%) said their parents felt they were old enough to be discussing sex topics. While most teenagers (64%) said their parents would understand their needs, the rest (36%) said their parents wouldn't understand what they need to know. Nearly three-quarters of the teenagers (73%) indicated they communicate well with their parents. Most (65%) said their parents were not old fashioned when it comes to sex, but over a third (35%) said their parents were old fashioned and did not believe the same way they do. Despite their general positive attitude toward communication about sex-related topics with their parents, most (57%) said they have other persons to discuss such things with, so they don't need to go to their parents. Almost two-thirds (62%) said they feared disappointing their parents if they started talking about sex or sex-related topics.

Significant Differences. T-tests to compare differences in means on these reluctance-to-communicate questions according to gender and the presence or absence of siblings yielded some significant results. Gender differences were found in question # 19: "If we discuss such things my parents might get upset or angry with



me"; also in question # 24: "I already know all I need to know about sex"; question # 31: "I have other persons I can discuss these things with, so I don't need to go to my parents"; and in question # 32: "If we started discussing such things, I'm afraid my parents might be disappointed in me." The differences are shown in Table 23 with higher mean scores indicating reluctance to communicate. Females were more likely than males to think that their parents might get upset or that they might disappoint their parents by talking with them about sex. Males were more likely to think that they already know all they need to know about sex and to say that they had sources other than parents to talk with.

TABLE 23  
DIFFERENCES IN RELUCTANCE TO COMMUNICATE  
ACCORDING TO GENDER (T-TEST)

FACTOR	GROUP	MEAN <sup>1</sup>	DEV.	CASES	SIGNIF.
Q.#19 "parents get upset"	males	1.23	.42	105	p=.013
	females	1.37	.49	142	
Q.#24 "I know enough"	males	1.27	.34	102	p=.009
	females	1.13	.34	141	
Q.#31 "I have other sources"	males	1.66	.48	104	p=.014
	females	1.50	.50	139	
Q.#32 "I might disappoint parents"	males	1.30	.46	105	p=.014
	females	1.45	.50	141	

<sup>1</sup> Lower means indicate greater openness. Range=1-5.

Differences were also noted for two questions when comparing means for teenagers with older siblings and those without older siblings. On question # 27: "My parents don't think I'm old enough to be discussing such things", teenagers who have older brothers or sisters agreed with this statement more than teenagers without older siblings. On question # 31: "I have other persons I can discuss these things with, so I don't need to go to my parents", those teenagers with older siblings agreed more with the statement. The results are shown in Table 24. No significant differences were noted when comparing mean scores on any of these reluctance factors according to any of the other remaining independent variables.

TABLE 24

DIFFERENCES IN RELUCTANCE TO COMMUNICATE  
ACCORDING TO PRESENCE OR ABSENCE OF SIBLINGS (T-TEST)

FACTOR	GROUP	MEAN <sup>1</sup>	DEV.	CASES	SIGNIF.
Q.#27 "Parents think I'm not old enough"	siblings	1.28	.45	150	p=.011
	no siblings	1.15	.36	95	
Q.#31 "I have other sources"	siblings	1.62	.49	143	p=.020
	no siblings	1.47	.50	94	

<sup>1</sup> Lower means indicate greater openness. Range=1-5.



An openness index was created for questions # 17 through 32 to measure the degree of openness of communication with parents as evidenced by responses to those statements. Point values were assigned to yes and no answers. The points were totaled to create an index ranging from 16 to 32 with 16 being the most open and 32 being the least open. The index is called Openness Index III.

T-tests on Openness Index III to compare differences in means according to gender, race, and the presence or absence of older siblings revealed only a difference for the presence of siblings as shown in Table 25. Teenagers without older siblings demonstrated a greater degree of openness than those who had older brothers or sisters.

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TABLE 25

DIFFERENCES IN OPENNESS TO COMMUNICATE ON RELUCTANCE  
FACTORS (INDEX III) ACCORDING TO PRESENCE OR  
ABSENCE OF OLDER SIBLINGS (T-TEST)

VARIABLE	GROUP	MEAN <sup>1</sup>	ST.DEV.	CASES	SIGNIF.
siblings	yes	22.04	4.32	141	p=.014
	no	20.63	3.87	87	

---

<sup>1</sup> Lower means indicate greater openness. Range=16-32.

Teenagers' Suggestions To Improve Communication  
About Sex-Related Topics

Question # 8 asked teenagers to complete the following phrase: "I would feel much more at ease discussing sex or sex-related topics with my parents if:...." Teenagers' answers were classified into 24 categories as shown in Table 26. While the response was varied, many of the suggestions recommended by teenagers center on improving the parents' interpersonal communication skills.

The largest category of responses (12%) was the teenagers' need to be better understood by parents. Here is what some of them said: "[We could communicate better if] they understood me and the way I felt." "[If] my dad was more understanding. Some things he's really understanding, but with others he isn't." "[If] they could see my point of view from the way I'm talking about."

Some teenagers (9%) were afraid their parents would think they were sexually active if they brought up the subject. Some responded this way: "[If] they wouldn't jump to any conclusions, like that I was thinking about having sex." "[If] they didn't act like I'm doing everything I bring up." "[If] they wouldn't suspect anything like if I have been or did something."



Embarrassment was a factor cited by some students (9%). Some of them wrote: "[If] I didn't have to face them face to face. I sometimes get embarrassed." "[If] they were more relaxed about it." "[If] I felt more comfortable around my parents, especially my dad. Like I said, we're an open family, we can always talk to our parents, but I don't always feel comfortable doing it."

TABLE 26

TEENAGERS' SUGGESTIONS TO IMPROVE COMMUNICATION  
WITH PARENTS ABOUT SEX-RELATED TOPICS

SUGGESTION	CASES	PERCENTAGE
They would understand me.	25	12.0%
They wouldn't think I was having sex.	18	8.7
We wouldn't get embarrassed.	18	8.7
Miscellaneous.	15	7.2
They would listen more.	11	5.3
They were younger or nearer my age.	11	5.3
They weren't so restrictive or old fashioned.	11	5.3
They could realize what it's like to be a teenager.	11	5.3
They would be more open minded and less judgemental.	10	4.8
They wouldn't lecture.	8	3.8
We had better communication in general.	8	3.8
They had talked about it with me at a younger age.	7	3.4
They weren't my parents.	6	2.9
They wouldn't get upset.	6	2.9
They didn't think I was too young.	5	2.4
They wouldn't avoid the topic.	5	2.4
If I was older or married.	5	2.4
They were more like friends.	4	1.9
They trusted and respected me more.	4	1.9
They would let me make my own decisions.	4	1.9
They could keep a secret.	3	1.4
My parents began the conversation.	2	1.0
They had more time for me.	2	1.0
They could remember their own youth.	2	1.0
Total	208	100.0%



## CHAPTER FOUR:

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

#### Answers To Research Questions

Teenagers' Communication Relationships With Parents. Generally, teenagers in the sex education classes surveyed in this study feel they have good communication relationships with their parents, but communication with mothers was more open than communication with fathers. Females, in particular, reported more openness when rating their communication relationships with their mothers than with their fathers.

Teenagers' Communication Relationships With Parents On Sex-Related Topics. When the communication is about sex-related topics, the teenagers' responses indicated more closed communication as compared to general topics. Both males and females reported lower ratings on their ability to communicate with their fathers about sex-related topics, and female ratings were even lower than males. These results concur with Fisher's finding that mothers are generally the parents who talk with both sons

and daughters about sexuality and that fathers have less communication with children on sex-related topics.

Preferred Sources Of Sex Information. Teenagers rated friends as their primary face-to-face source of sexual information. Teachers were next, followed by parents, older siblings, other relatives, a doctor or nurse, and ministers. These findings were consistent with Sanders & Mullis' survey of female college students who rated friends their primary source, then books, school, parents, siblings, and church. However, when the topic was pregnancy or birth control, sexually transmitted diseases, or bodily changes associated with sexual maturity, the teenagers in this survey rated parents as their primary source of information.

When the subject is pregnancy and birth control, the teenagers' next most frequent response was friends, then teachers, doctors or nurses, older siblings, other relatives, and ministers. These findings were similar to the Harris poll that also listed parents as the primary source of information about contraception and birth control; however, Harris found that teachers were the second source followed by friends.

Reluctance Factors. Embarrassment was a key reason why some teenagers can't discuss sex-related topics with their parents as evidenced by their responses to open-ended questions. Poor parent-teenager



communication was also cited as a reason. Nearly a quarter of the students (23%) said sex is a topic that isn't discussed. Either it is an "unspoken agreement to be silent" as Calderone & Johnson call it, or either the teenager or the parents specifically avoid the subject. These findings echo the Harris poll results that showed that 31 percent of American teenagers have never discussed sex topics with their parents.

The teenagers' responses to the closed questions on reluctance factors confirm some of the reasons why they may not communicate with parents about sex-related topics. Half of the teenagers indicated they thought their parents might give them negative feedback about a relationship with a boyfriend or girlfriend. In their open-ended responses, 11 percent said they didn't talk with their parents because they had different values about sex and dating. Over 40 percent of the teenagers said they were afraid their parents might accuse them of being sexually active. Nearly as many said sex was much too personal to discuss with their parents, and the majority of teenagers (57%) said they preferred to talk with someone else.

Strategies To Improve Communicaton. Teenagers listed many suggestions to improve communication with parents about sex-related topics. Those who already talk with their parents about sex said the main reasons were

openness, understanding, closeness, and the fact that their parents want to be their primary source of sex information. Responses from those teenagers indicate a supportive communication climate and may point to parents who actively assume the role of sex educators.

In general, teenagers said their communication relationships with parents might be more comfortable if parents were more understanding, less embarrassed, would listen more, did not accuse or judge, and weren't so old fashioned. These factors may indicate the need for a less defensive communication climate as studied by Rozema.

The qualities of the preferred sources of sex information for the students included openness, understanding, closeness, and knowledge. With the exception of knowledge, these four particular qualities were very similar to the suggestions students gave to improve their communication with parents.

### Conclusions

Summary. Even though teenagers may report general openness in communication relationships with their parents, this study shows that when the subject is sex or sex-related topics, certain barriers exist which result in more closed communication. Those barriers between



teenagers and their parents include: embarrassment, poor communication in general, a lack of closeness or understanding, differing values about sex and dating, avoidance of conflict and accusation, sex as a topic that is not discussed in the family, parents who may be perceived by the teenagers as being too overprotective or too busy to discuss sex education topics. Females may have reported more closed communication with fathers on sex-related topics because they feel closer to their same sex parent or because mothers generally assume the role of the primary source for sex education within the family unit.

Practical Significance. Findings of the sex education communication survey point to the need to improve parents' interpersonal communication skills to facilitate discussion of sex related topics with teenagers. The categorized responses to open-ended questions may be used as a basis for development of a parent-teen sex education communication program.

Sex and family life skills educators may find the survey results useful to develop curricula which might involve parents in parent-teen homework assignments. The survey instrument could be edited to include more specific sex education topics to yield more concrete data for classroom purposes.

Limitations Of The Study. Because this was a study

of teenagers in sex education classes, the subjects may have received classroom instruction in communication skills with parents on sex education topics prior to the survey. Consequently, their responses may be based on prior knowledge or experience in communication with parents on these topics which might differ from teenagers who had not been enrolled in sex education classes. Their responses to the source questions which included the category of teachers may also be different than those teenagers not enrolled in sex education classes. Other teenagers may not have a sex education teacher to consult for information or advice on sex-related topics. The teenagers surveyed attended Kentucky high schools serving counties with populations no larger than 50,000. A survey of teenagers in larger metropolitan cities or in other parts of the country may yield different responses.

Follow-up And Future Study. A companion study and sex education communication questionnaire could be developed to survey parents about their ability to discuss sex-related topics with their teenagers. An independent study may be justified to investigate reasons why fathers seem to communicate less with their children, even with their sons, about sex-related topics.



APPENDIX A

Results Of College Students Survey

Initial Questionnaire

DATA USED TO FORMULATE YES/NO QUESTIONS

Twenty-two young adults enrolled in freshman interpersonal communication courses were asked to list reasons why they would not want to discuss sex or sex related topics with their parents. Their 90 separate responses were coded and classified into nine key categories.

RESULTS

28% Fear of conflict, accusation, or disappointing their parents

20% Fear of embarrassment

14% Conflicting values, parents too old fashioned

10% Unwillingness to self-disclose

09% Parents avoid the subject

5.5% Parents wouldn't understand, don't communicate well with teen

5.5% Teen prefers other sources

04% Teen knows all he or she needs to know

03% Parents don't know enough or teen knows more than parents



## SEX EDUCATION COMMUNICATION SURVEY

The purpose of this survey is to better understand the communication relationship between teenagers and their parents about sex education topics. Do not put your name on this questionnaire.

Please read each question carefully and circle the answer that best describes your response.

Answer Key

SA= Strongly Agree

MA= Mostly Agree

U= Uncertain

MD= Mostly Disagree

SD= Strongly Disagree

1. I have an open communication relationship with my parent(s).

SA MA U MD SD

2. My mom and I can talk about anything.

SA MA U MD SD

3. My dad and I can talk about anything.

SA MA U MD SD

Sex or sex related topics may include sexual activity, pregnancy and birth control, bodily changes associated with sexual maturity, sexually transmitted diseases like AIDS or V.D., and dating behavior.

4. When the subject is sex or sex related topics, my parents and I have an open communication channel.

SA MA U MD SD

5. My mom and I can talk comfortably about sex or sex related topics.

SA MA U MD SD

6. My dad and I can talk comfortably about sex or sex related topics.

SA MA U MD SD

7. Please write a short paragraph to complete one of the following phrases which best applies to you.

(a.) My parent(s) and I can talk about sex or sex related topics because:

(b.) My parent(s) and I cannot talk about sex or sex related topics because:

8. Circle any or all of the following phrases which best describe the way you would feel about discussing sex or sex related topics with your parent(s):

interested	uncomfortable	mature
reluctant	relaxed	embarrassed
childish	eager	nervous



9. Please write a short paragraph to complete the following phrase:

I would feel much more at ease discussing sex or sex related topics with my parents if:

10. Please rank in order from 1 through 5 which of the following topics you feel are the easiest to discuss with your parent(s) with 1 being the easiest and 5 being the most difficult.

\_\_\_\_\_ pregnancy & birth control

\_\_\_\_\_ dating behavior

\_\_\_\_\_ sexual activity

\_\_\_\_\_ bodily changes associated with sexual maturity

\_\_\_\_\_ sexually transmitted diseases like AIDS or V.D.

11. Please write a short paragraph telling why you feel the topic you rated as the easiest is more easily discussed with your parents than the one you rated as most difficult.

For each of the next questions, please circle the letter which corresponds to the answer which best completes each statement.

- a. my parent(s)
- b. an older brother or sister
- c. another close relative
- d. a teacher or school counselor
- e. a minister or church counselor
- f. a doctor or nurse
- g. a friend my age
- h. other (please specify)\_\_\_\_\_

12. If I have a question about sexually transmitted diseases like AIDS or V.D., I would prefer to discuss it with:

- a.    b.    c.    d.    e.    f.    g.
- h. \_\_\_\_\_

13. If I have a question about pregnancy or birth control, I would prefer to discuss it with:

- a.    b.    c.    d.    e.    f.    g.
- h. \_\_\_\_\_

14. If I have a question about dating behavior, I prefer to discuss it with:

- a.    b.    c.    d.    e.    f.    g.
- h. \_\_\_\_\_

15. If I have a question about sexual activity, I would prefer to discuss it with:

- a.    b.    c.    d.    e.    f.    g.
- h. \_\_\_\_\_



16. If I have a question about bodily changes associated with sexual maturity, I prefer to discuss it with:

a.   b.   c.   d.   e.   f.   g.

h. \_\_\_\_\_

17. I prefer to get most of my information about sex or sex related topics from:

a.   b.   c.   d.   e.   f.   g.

h. \_\_\_\_\_

18. Please write a short paragraph about why you might feel comfortable discussing sex or sex related topics with the person(s) you selected in question #17.

Some teenagers are reluctant to discuss sex or sex related topics with their parents for a variety of reasons. Please read the following statements, and circle Y if the statement applies to you or circle N if it does not apply to you.

19. I would be afraid to discuss sex with my parents because they might think I am sexually active.

Y   N

20. My parents would tell me I shouldn't be thinking about such things.

Y   N

21. My parents might ask me how I know about such things.

Y   N

22. My parents don't know all the answers.

Y N

23. They would just give me a lecture, not helpful information.

Y N

24. They would try to tell me how to run my life.

Y N

25. They don't want to talk about sex or sex related topics with me at all.

Y N

26. I already know everything I need to know.

Y N

27. They would ask me why I'm interested in knowing about sex.

Y N

28. They would accuse me of having sex.

Y N

29. They would say I'm too young to be thinking about sex.

Y N

30. They would go on and on when I only wanted one simple answer.

Y N



31. They never let me ask questions or give my opinions.

Y N

32. I could never ask my parents about such things because I would die of embarrassment.

Y N

33. I'm afraid I would say the wrong thing.

Y N

34. I don't know what words to use for certain things.

Y N

35. My parents might answer my questions, but not in ways I can relate to.

Y N

36. I always get a one-sided lecture.

Y N

37. My parents would use technical language, and I don't know what some things mean.

Y N

38. When we talk about anything, it always ends up in an argument.

Y N

39. If I started asking questions about sex, they would change the subject.

Y N

40. I would much rather talk to someone else about sex, so I really don't try to talk with my parents about it.

Y N

41. My parents don't listen to me anyway.

Y N

42. My parents don't respect me as a person.

Y N

43. They talk to me like I'm a child and not like an adult.

Y N

44. We don't talk about anything anyway, so why should we talk about sex?

Y N

45. They would just talk to me about certain things, but wouldn't tell me what I really need and want to know.

Y N

46. My parents can't agree on things, so they end up talking to each other and not to me.

Y N

47. My parents just aren't very open.

Y N

48. My parents would die of embarrassment if I started asking them about sex.

Y N



49. My parents would argue about whose responsibility it is to talk with me about such things.

Y N

50. They would start talking about how it was when they were growing up.

Y N

51. They expect me to be just like them.

Y N

52. They keep telling me not to make the same mistakes they did.

Y N

53. They only want to talk about what kind of trouble you can get into.

Y N

54. All they want to talk about is birth control, but they never really discuss sex.

Y N

55. All they care about is that I don't get pregnant or get someone pregnant.

Y N

56. They would start asking me about my own relationships with my boyfriend or girlfriend.

Y N

57. They just tell me things I already know, but never really say anything important to me.

Y N

58. They don't seem to know where to start.

Y N

59. They just give me a book and tell me to read it.

Y N

60. They keep saying, "When you get older, you'll understand such things."

Y N

61. I don't talk with my parents about sex because I know they don't want me thinking about it.

Y N

62. They don't think I know enough to understand such things.

Y N

63. I never get their full attention. There are always too many interruptions for a really private conversation.

Y N

64. It never seems the timing is right to bring up the subject.

Y N

65. My mom always says, "Ask your dad."; or my dad always says, "Ask your mom.".

Y N

66. My parents only tell you things one time and don't want to go over it again.

Y N



67. They make such a big deal out of it.

Y    N

68. Please write a short paragraph to complete this statement:

The best thing parents can do to talk with their teenagers about sex or sex related topics is:

69. My age is\_\_\_\_\_.

Please circle the answer that applies to you.

70. Male                  Female

71. Caucasian    Black    Asian    Hispanic

American Indian                  Other

72. I live with:

both parents    my mom    my dad    my grandparents

other relative or guardian

73. I have older brothers or sisters.

yes                  no

APPENDIX B

Final Questionnaire

Introductory Letter To Teachers

Request For Materials Form

Instructions Letter To Teachers



## SEX EDUCATION COMMUNICATION SURVEY

## INSTRUCTIONS:

The purpose of this survey is to better understand the communication relationship between teenagers and their parents about sex education topics. Do not put your name on this questionnaire. Remember to answer questions on the front and back of each page.

For questions 1 through 3, please read each question carefully and circle the one answer that best describes your response.

1. About most topics in general, I can communicate freely with my parents.

Strongly agree, mostly agree, uncertain,  
mostly disagree, strongly disagree

2. My mom and I can talk about anything.

Strongly agree, mostly agree, uncertain,  
mostly disagree, strongly disagree

3. My dad and I can talk about anything.

Strongly agree, mostly agree, uncertain,  
mostly disagree, strongly disagree

## INSTRUCTIONS:

The following questions refer to sex or sex related topics which may include sexual activity, pregnancy and birth control, bodily changes associated with sexual maturity, sexually transmitted diseases like AIDS or V.D., and dating behavior.

For questions 4 through 6, please read each question carefully and circle the one answer that best describes your response.

4. When the subject is sex or sex related topics, my parents and I have an open communication channel.

Strongly agree, mostly agree, uncertain,

mostly disagree, strongly disagree

5. My mom and I can talk comfortably about sex or sex related topics.

Strongly agree, mostly agree, uncertain,

mostly disagree, strongly disagree

6. My dad and I can talk comfortably about sex or sex related topics.

Strongly agree, mostly agree, uncertain,

mostly disagree, strongly disagree

INSTRUCTIONS:

On the next question(#7), please write a few sentences to complete one of the following phrases which best applies to you. You may answer either 7a or 7b.

7.(a.) My parents and I can talk about sex or sex related topics because:

7.(b.) My parents and I cannot talk about sex or sex related topics because:



## INSTRUCTIONS:

On the next question (#8), please write a few sentences to complete the phrase.

8. I would feel much more at ease discussing sex or sex related topics with my parents if:

## INSTRUCTIONS:

On the next question (#9), please rank in order from 1 through 5 which of the following topics you feel are the easiest to discuss with your parents with 1 being the easiest and 5 being the most difficult.

9. Here's how I rank the following topics on my ability to discuss them with my parents:

\_\_\_ pregnancy & birth control

\_\_\_ dating behavior

\_\_\_ sexual activity

\_\_\_ bodily changes associated with sexual maturity

\_\_\_ sexually transmitted diseases like AIDS or V.D.

## INSTRUCTIONS:

For questions 10 through 15, please circle the one answer which best completes each statement.

10. If I have a question about sexually transmitted diseases like AIDS or V.D., I would most likely discuss it with:

- |                                     |                               |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| my parents                          | an older brother or sister    |
| another close relative              | a teacher or school counselor |
| a doctor or nurse                   | a friend my own age           |
| a minister or Sunday school teacher |                               |

11. If I have a question about pregnancy or birth control, I would most likely discuss it with:

- |                                     |                               |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| my parents                          | an older brother or sister    |
| another close relative              | a teacher or school counselor |
| a doctor or nurse                   | a friend my own age           |
| a minister or Sunday school teacher |                               |

12. If I have a question about dating behavior, I would most likely discuss it with:

- |                                     |                               |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| my parents                          | an older brother or sister    |
| another close relative              | a teacher or school counselor |
| a doctor or nurse                   | a friend my own age           |
| a minister or Sunday school teacher |                               |

13. If I have a question about sexual activity, I would most likely discuss it with:

- |                                     |                               |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| my parents                          | an older brother or sister    |
| another close relative              | a teacher or school counselor |
| a doctor or nurse                   | a friend my own age           |
| a minister or Sunday school teacher |                               |



14. If I have a question about bodily changes associated with sexual maturity, I would most likely discuss it with:

my parents	an older brother or sister
another close relative	a teacher or school counselor
a doctor or nurse	a friend my own age
a minister or Sunday school teacher	

15. I get most of my information about sex or sex related topics from:

my parents	an older brother or sister
another close relative	a teacher or school counselor
a doctor or nurse	a friend my own age
a minister or Sunday school teacher	

**INSTRUCTIONS:**

For the following question (#16), please write a few sentences about why you might feel comfortable discussing sex or sex related topics with the person(s) you selected in question #15.

16. I feel comfortable discussing sex or sex related topics with this person because:

## INSTRUCTIONS:

Some teenagers are reluctant to discuss sex or sex related topics with their parents for a variety of reasons.

Please read the following statements (#17 through #32), and circle yes if the statement applies to you or circle no if it does not apply to you.

17. I would be too embarrassed to discuss sex or sex related topics with my parents.

yes                      no

18. My parents would be too embarrassed to discuss it with me.

yes                      no

19. If we discuss such things, my parents might get upset or angry with me.

yes                      no

20. If I try to talk with my parents about sex, they might accuse me of being sexually active.

yes                      no

21. If I brought up the subject, my parents would start hassling me about my own relationship with a boyfriend or girlfriend.

yes                      no

22. I don't think it's any of my parents' business.

yes                      no

23. Sex is much too personal to discuss with my parents.

yes                      no

24. I already know all I need to know about sex.

yes                      no

25. My parents don't know enough to talk with me about sex in today's world.

yes                      no

26. My parents simply don't want me bringing up the subject.

yes                      no



27. My parents don't think I'm old enough to be discussing such things.

yes                      no

28. My parents wouldn't understand what I need to know.

yes                      no

29. My parents and I don't communicate well on any subject, so I can't talk to them about sex.

yes                      no

30. My parents are very old fashioned when it comes to sex, and don't believe they same way I do.

yes                      no

31. I have other persons I can discuss these things with, so I don't need to go to my parents.

yes                      no

32. If we started discussing such things, I'm afraid my parents might be disappointed in me.

yes                      no

INSTRUCTIONS:

This last section of questions about you will help categorize your answers with your fellow classmates. Your individual answers will not be revealed to your teacher, parents, or anyone else.

For question 33, please fill in the blank.

33. My age is \_\_\_\_\_.

INSTRUCTIONS:

For questions 34 through 40, please circle the one answer which applies to you.

34.        Male                                      Female

35.    White            Black            Asian            Hispanic            American Indian

36. I live with:

both parents	my mom	my dad
my grandparents	another relative or guardian	

37. I have older brothers or sisters.

yes                      no

38. My dad:

attended high school but didn't graduate  
has a high school diploma or G.E.D.  
attended college but didn't graduate  
has a college degree  
has a master's degree or doctoral degree

39. My mom:

attended high school but didn't graduate  
has a high school diploma or G.E.D.  
attended college but didn't graduate  
has a college degree  
has a master's degree or doctoral degree

40. I live:

on a farm or in the country  
in a town with less than 5,000 people  
in a town of between 5,000 and 20,000 people  
in a city of between 20,000 and 50,000 people  
in a city of over 50,000 people



Karen H. Bonnell  
5335 Hwy. 351  
Henderson, KY 42420

Ms. Nancy Long  
Henderson County High School  
2424 Zion Rd.  
Henderson, KY 42420

November 9, 1989

Dear Ms. Long:

I am a graduate communications student at Western Kentucky University conducting survey research on sex education communication between teenagers and parents. I am looking for strategies that teenagers say might improve that communication relationship.

You are invited to participate in this research by administering a questionnaire to students in your sex education classes. A preliminary draft of the questionnaire has been provided for you to review. Please do not discuss the questions with your students prior to the survey. Please complete the participation request form enclosed with this letter by November 15, 1989 to order adequate copies of the questionnaire and instructions. All materials and postage are provided to you at no cost. The questionnaires will be mailed to you and should be administered within one week of their receipt.

You may find the questionnaire will provide some valuable material for future classroom discussion. Once the data has been collected, coded, and analyzed, you will receive a summary of the final report. If you have any questions about the survey, please contact me at home any evening at 502-827-1750. Your participation in this survey research is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Karen H. Bonnell

## Request For Materials

Please complete this form and return in the pre-addressed envelope.

Your Name \_\_\_\_\_

School \_\_\_\_\_

School Street Address \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Please send me questionnaires and instructions for the following sex education classes:

Class #1 (No. of students) \_\_\_\_\_

Class #2 (No. of students) \_\_\_\_\_

Class #3 (No. of students) \_\_\_\_\_

Class #4 (No. of students) \_\_\_\_\_

(Additional Classes? Please list:)



Karen H. Bonnell  
5335 Hwy. 351  
Henderson, KY 42420

Marietta Peckenpaugh  
Henderson County High School  
2424 Zion Rd.  
Henderson, KY 42420

November 22, 1989

Dear Ms. Peckenpaugh,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my sex education communication research project. I have enclosed copies of the student questionnaire for four sex education classes of 25, 29, 29, and 20 students. You will notice that the questionnaires for each class are coded. Please return them in the appropriate postage paid envelopes. This will enable me to provide you with composite class responses for comparison.

Please follow these instructions to insure that the questionnaire is administered uniformly in all the survey classes:

1. Please administer the questionnaire to all participating classes on the same day within one week of the receipt of these materials. This should minimize discussion of the survey among students to prevent any bias in those who have not yet responded to the questionnaire. Please ask if any student in your classes has already answered the questionnaire. If so, they are not to respond to the survey more than once. Since Ms. McDannel and Ms. Long are also participating in the survey, it is important to make certain there are no repeat questionnaires among students in their classes.
2. Administer the questionnaire at the beginning of the class period. Based on pre-test results, the questionnaire will take less than 20 minutes to complete. This will allow you time for class discussion after the questionnaires have been completed and sealed in the envelopes, or you may have time for other class assignments.
3. Read the purpose of the survey aloud to your students before they begin. Be certain to emphasize the confidentiality of the questionnaire, and make certain they understand that no one except the researcher will see their answers. They are not to put their names on the questionnaire.

4. Make certain your students know they are to complete the front and back of each page. Please stress the importance of completing the final page which contains the demographic information. This will allow me to analyze the results by age, gender, and other background data.

5. If your students have questions about any part of the questionnaire, please read the appropriate instructions for that section aloud. If any student still does not understand the question, please ask them to write "don't understand" in the margin next to that question. Please do not elaborate on the terms or definitions on the questionnaire or suggest responses.

6. As soon as the students have completed the questionnaires, place them immediately in the appropriate post-paid return envelope and seal it in their presence. Explain that no one but the researcher will be looking at their answers, and that you will share the composite class results with them as soon as they are available.

7. Please drop the post-paid envelopes in the mail. The questionnaire analysis should take a few days, and you will be notified of composite class results and receive a summary of the final report as soon as it is available. Every effort will be made to provide you with at least preliminary data (if not complete results) prior to the end of this semester.

If you have any questions about the survey or the questionnaire, please contact me at work (812-426-1414) or at home (827-1750). Thank you again for your participation in this project.

Sincerely,

Karen H. Bonnell



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