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Author(s): Paul H. Gebhard

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The Acquisition of Basic Sex Information

PAUL H. GEBHARD*

Abstract

Previously unpublished data from the Kinsey sample concerning the acquisition of basic sex information are presented. These are contrasted to data obtained from a similar, but smaller sample of respondents from the current generation. Basic facts about sex are being learned at considerably younger ages today, apparently as a result of increased maternal effort to provide information, increased sex education in the schools, and more explicit treatment of sex in the media. Same-sex peers remain the dominant educators, but other sources, notably mothers, have increased in importance. The sex differences in age of acquisition found in the Kinsey sample have largely disappeared.

Because of limitations of time and space, some of the data collected by the Institute For Sex Research between 1938 and 1960 were never published. One such body of data is that concerning the acquisition of basic sex information. Ten basic items were selected: coitus, pregnancy, fertilization, abortion, venereal disease, menstruation, female prostitution, penile erection, condoms, and male homosexuality. Respondents were asked at what age they first learned of each of these items and how they acquired this knowledge. We were careful to phrase our questions with great simplicity and clarity so that we could elicit the respondent's first comprehension rather than some later and more detailed knowledge. For example, we did not ask, "How old were you when you first learned of pregnancy?" but "How old were you when you first learned that babies grow inside the mother?"

After assembling our unpublished data, I became curious as to what, if any, changes had taken place in the decades between our old sample (which I shall for brevity call the Kinsey sample) and the current generation. Consequently, I decided to limit the Kinsey sample to white males and females with at least some college education and then take a small sample of students currently enrolled at Indiana University. The

* Paul H. Gebhard, Ph.D. is Director of the Institute for Sex Research, Inc., Indiana University, Bloomington. A version of this paper was initially presented at the annual meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Sex, 1975.

recent sample is small, but it suffices in my opinion to indicate roughly the extent and direction of changes in the acquisition of early knowledge about human sexuality. Since I had no time for interviewing, I resorted to the easier expedient of a questionnaire handed out to two anthropology classes, one psychology class, and to student employees at the Institute. These respondents were primarily undergraduates—chiefly juniors and seniors. I had hoped to get returns from 50 males and 50 females, but the class composition was such that I ended with 47 males and 67 females.

Knowledge of Coitus

Knowledge of coitus steadily increases from early childhood until near puberty when there is a marked acceleration in learning. In the Kinsey

TABLE 1
Age at First Knowledge of Coitus

Age	Male		Female	
	Kinsey Sample	Recent Sample	Kinsey Sample	Recent Sample
	%	%	%	%
<4	0.2	0	0.2	0
4	0.7	0	0.7	0
5	3.1	0	1.8	1
6	5.0	2	2.5	0
7	6.8	4	3.2	3
8	9.4	9	5.2	14
9	9.9	11	5.9	14
10	15.9	24	11.8	25
11	12.9	15	11.8	15
12	16.1	17	16.8	5
13	9.8	6	11.6	14
14	6.0	9	9.1	5
15	2.5	2	5.9	3
16	1.2	0	4.7	0
17	0.5	0	2.8	1
>17	0.2	0	5.6	0
<i>N</i> , classified responses	4388	46	4081	65
<i>N</i> , unclassified responses ^a	306	1	277	2
<i>N</i> , inapplicable responses ^b	0	0	0	0

^a Throughout the tables *unclassified* responses include both no response and unclear responses.

^b Throughout the tables *inapplicable* means the respondent did not know of the phenomenon.

TABLE 2
Source of First Knowledge of Coitus

Source	Male		Female	
	Kinsey Sample	Recent Sample	Kinsey Sample	Recent Sample
	%	%	%	%
Same-sex peer	73.3	50	49.1	48
Opposite-sex peer	0.6	0	0.6	5
Father	3.3	5	0.9	0
Mother	3.1	9	17.7	15
Other relative	2.9	2	5.1	5
Experience or sight	3.7	2	3.3	0
Mass media	3.9	12	9.8	5
School and other formal training	0.6	5	3.8	6
Authority figures not in school	0.4	0	0.6	0
Other	1.2	0	1.8	1
Mixed sources	6.9	14	7.2	15
<i>N</i> , classified responses	4551	42	4164	65
<i>N</i> , unclassified responses	143	5	194	2
<i>N</i> , inapplicable responses	0	0	0	0

sample the years from 10 to 13 were those in which about half or more boys and girls learned of coitus, but, after early childhood, boys acquired this knowledge more rapidly than girls, and more girls learned at older ages. This picture has changed in subsequent years; the recent sample reveals that girls now learn as early as, if not slightly earlier than, boys. Both sexes learn of coitus at a younger age now; over half of each sex knew of coitus by the end of their tenth year, whereas only a third of the Kinsey sample females and half the males had this knowledge at that age. The chief source of knowledge remains same-sex peers; about half to three quarters of the respondents from both samples derived their knowledge of coitus from that source.

Knowledge of Pregnancy

In our older sample the major years for learning of pregnancy were those from 8 to 12 with the modal year being 10. This was true for both sexes. Now matters have changed: over half of boys and girls know of pregnancy before age 7 and the modal year for boys is 6, and for girls 5. Formerly the source of knowledge for boys was mainly same-sex peers (53%) with mothers a poor second (14%). In the recent small sample,

mothers are by far the most important source (53%) with same-sex peers becoming inconsequential (3%) as a source of information. Among girls, the importance of the mother – always the main source – increased from 36% to 70% and the importance of same-sex peers declined from 34% to 6%. Obviously, contemporary mothers inform their sons and daughters of pregnancy at an earlier age than did mothers in the Kinsey sample.

Knowledge of Fertilization

This rather technical knowledge has always been a part of formal education – frequently as part of a biology course. Today with accelerated courses and more sex education, our recent sample acquired the knowledge of fertilization at an earlier age (10–14) than did the Kinsey sample (12–15). Only 10% or fewer in the recent sample learned after age 14, whereas in the Kinsey sample over a quarter learned after that age. The major source of information for the recent sample remains the school with mass media ranking second.

TABLE 3
Age at First Knowledge of Pregnancy

Age	Male		Female	
	Kinsey Sample	Recent Sample	Kinsey Sample	Recent Sample
	%	%	%	%
<4	0.3	0	1.3	9
4	1.4	12	2.5	9
5	3.8	10	5.2	25
6	5.9	19	6.4	8
7	7.4	5	6.8	6
8	12.1	17	11.2	19
9	10.2	7	11.1	9
10	17.2	17	15.1	3
11	11.9	0	11.5	8
12	14.1	10	12.6	0
13	7.4	0	6.0	2
14	5.2	2	3.9	0
15	1.9	0	2.2	0
16	0.8	0	1.5	0
17	0.3	0	1.0	0
>17	0.1	0	1.4	0
<i>N</i> , classified responses	4155	41	3820	63
<i>N</i> , unclassified responses	539	6	538	4
<i>N</i> , inapplicable responses	0	0	0	0

TABLE 4
Source of First Knowledge of Pregnancy

Source	Male		Female	
	Kinsey Sample	Recent Sample	Kinsey Sample	Recent Sample
	%	%	%	%
Same-sex peer	52.7	3	33.5	6
Opposite-sex peer	0.3	0	0.4	2
Father	4.8	0	1.2	0
Mother	14.2	53	35.7	70
Other relative	3.5	6	4.9	2
Experience or sight	3.0	6	1.7	0
Mass media	8.1	6	7.3	2
School and other formal training	1.0	3	2.0	2
Authority figures not in school	0.5	0	0.6	0
Other	3.4	3	5.3	6
Mixed sources	8.3	21	6.6	11
<i>N</i> , classified responses	4394	34	4030	53
<i>N</i> , unclassified responses	300	13	328	14
<i>N</i> , inapplicable responses	0	0	0	0

TABLE 5
Age at First Knowledge of Fertilization

Age	Male		Female	
	Kinsey Sample	Recent Sample	Kinsey Sample	Recent Sample
	%	%	%	%
<6	0.4	0	0.9	1
6	0.8	0	0.8	0
7	1.1	0	0.9	0
8	1.8	4	1.8	0
9	2.8	8	2.6	11
10	6.2	17	6.0	27
11	6.1	11	7.1	13
12	14.7	25	12.9	17
13	16.5	8	14.3	21
14	20.2	15	16.8	1
15	12.2	6	10.3	3
16	7.3	4	7.1	5
17	3.9	0	6.3	0
>17	5.7	0	12.0	0
<i>N</i> , classified responses	4268	47	3922	63
<i>N</i> , unclassified responses	421	0	434	4
<i>N</i> , inapplicable responses	5	0	2	0

TABLE 6
Source of First Knowledge of Fertilization

Source	Male		Female	
	Kinsey Sample	Recent Sample	Kinsey Sample	Recent Sample
	%	%	%	%
Same-sex peer	17.8	0	11.5	3
Opposite-sex peer	0.1	0	0.2	0
Father	4.2	4	1.1	0
Mother	4.4	13	14.6	14
Other relative	2.0	0	2.5	0
Experience or sight	0.4	0	0.1	0
Mass media	24.1	23	19.9	22
School and other formal training	39.5	45	43.4	44
Authority figures not in school	1.3	0	1.7	0
Other	0.8	2	0.7	2
Mixed sources	5.3	13	4.2	14
<i>N</i> , classified responses	4284	47	4011	63
<i>N</i> , unclassified responses	405	0	345	4
<i>N</i> , inapplicable responses	5	0	2	0

TABLE 7
Age at First Knowledge of Menstruation

Age	Male		Female	
	Kinsey Sample	Recent Sample	Kinsey Sample	Recent Sample
	%	%	%	%
<6	0.3	2	0.7	0
6	0.4	2	0.9	3
7	0.4	0	1.2	1
8	1.7	4	3.9	11
9	1.9	6	8.8	19
10	5.9	8	19.5	33
11	5.9	11	28.4	21
12	14.0	19	22.4	11
13	15.4	17	10.2	0
14	19.4	15	3.1	0
15	14.4	8	0.7	0
16	9.9	4	0.2	0
17	4.8	0	0	0
>17	5.4	2	0	1
<i>N</i> , classified responses	4119	47	4232	67
<i>N</i> , unclassified responses	573	0	126	0
<i>N</i> , inapplicable responses	2	0	0	0

Knowledge of Menstruation

The pattern for acquisition of this particular knowledge differs markedly for males and females. As menarche draws near, girls between ages 10-13 are very likely to be told about menstruation. By the end of age 13 virtually every female in the Kinsey sample knew, whereas over half (54%) of the boys were still ignorant of menstruation. While the recent generation of boys was less naive, there were still 29% who learned after age 13 as opposed to only 1% of the girls. The mother was and still is the primary information source for girls, but for boys their same-sex peers remain their major source. Schools are gradually becoming somewhat more important while peers are waning as a source of menstrual education for both sexes.

Knowledge of Venereal Disease

In the Kinsey sample, 75% of boys and 68% of girls learned about venereal disease between the ages of 12-16. In this sample, more girls (25%) than boys (13%) learned about venereal disease after age 16. In the recent sample, 83% of boys and 87% of girls learned about venereal disease between the ages of 12-16. However, in comparison to the

TABLE 8
Source of First Knowledge of Menstruation

Source	Male		Female	
	Kinsey Sample	Recent Sample	Kinsey Sample	Recent Sample
	%	%	%	%
Same-sex peer	51.5	27	18.7	12
Opposite-sex peer	1.9	7	0	0
Father	2.9	0	0.5	0
Mother	9.3	16	46.6	36
Other relative	4.6	7	6.5	3
Experience or sight	0.4	4	19.2	8
Mass media	13.8	14	2.6	6
School and other formal training	5.9	16	0.5	9
Authority figures not in school	0.8	0	0.4	0
Other	3.2	0	0.1	9
Mixed sources	5.6	9	3.9	16
N, classified responses	4067	44	4291	64
N, unclassified responses	625	3	67	3
N, inapplicable responses	2	0	0	0

TABLE 9
Age at First Knowledge of Venereal Disease

Age	Male		Female	
	Kinsey Sample	Recent Sample	Kinsey Sample	Recent Sample
	%	%	%	%
<6	0.1	0	0	0
6	0.2	0	0.2	0
7	0.3	0	0.1	0
8	1.0	2	0.6	0
9	2.0	0	1.1	1
10	4.8	2	1.9	1
11	4.0	9	2.7	3
12	12.8	15	7.5	17
13	14.8	22	12.2	27
14	19.2	15	17.0	21
15	16.1	11	16.6	8
16	12.0	20	14.2	14
17	6.4	2	9.2	5
18	4.0	0	7.9	0
19	1.2	0	3.1	1
20	0.5	0	2.0	0
>20	0.6	0	3.3	0
<i>N</i> , classified responses	3579	45	3665	63
<i>N</i> , unclassified responses	1114	2	693	4
<i>N</i> , inapplicable responses	1	0	0	0

Kinsey sample, fewer girls (6%) and boys (2%) in the recent sample learned about V.D. after age 16. Among males same-sex peers remain the major source of information on venereal disease (41–44%), but the school appears to be gaining in importance (rising from 14 to 20%). Among females of the Kinsey sample, mass media and schools vied for first place (29 and 27%) with peers a distant third (19%). Among the females of the recent sample the school has become the dominant source (42%) while mass media and peer influence declined. The increasing role of the school in imparting venereal disease information probably reflects that this is a safe topic to teach since it ostensibly discourages sexual activity.

Knowledge of Abortion

In the Kinsey sample this was asked only of females. The knowledge was spread chiefly over the five years from 13–17, during which two-

TABLE 10
Source of First Knowledge of Venereal Disease

Source	Male		Female	
	Kinsey Sample	Recent Sample	Kinsey Sample	Recent Sample
	%	%	%	%
Same-sex peer	44.3	41	19.3	15
Opposite-sex peer	0	0	0.4	0
Father	5.7	2	1.6	0
Mother	3.8	4	10.1	3
Other relative	1.8	0	2.5	2
Experience or sight	0	2	0	0
Mass media	19.1	11	29.1	12
School and other formal training	14.3	20	26.7	42
Authority figures not in school	1.1	2	2.6	0
Other	1.4	2	1.2	2
Mixed sources	7.4	14	6.3	24
<i>N</i> , classified responses	3567	44	3681	59
<i>N</i> , unclassified responses	1126	3	677	8
<i>N</i> , inapplicable responses	1	0	0	0

thirds of the girls learned of abortion or miscarriage. The source was mainly other girls (36%) with mass media (19%) and mother (18%) competing for second place. Our recent sample indicates that today girls learn much earlier: 59% knew before age 13, whereas this was true for only 15% of the Kinsey sample. In this recent generation the mother has become the most important source (24%) with peers (17%) pushed down to second place.

We asked males of the recent sample about abortion and found that they learned of it later than did females: 67% learned after age 13. They learned mainly from mass media with mothers as the second most important source.

Knowledge of Female Prostitution

In the Kinsey sample the boys learned of prostitution before the girls, but in the recent generation both sexes learned at earlier ages than those of the Kinsey sample. By the end of age 12 about one-third of the Kinsey male sample knew of prostitution, whereas only one-fifth of the girls did. In the recent generation about half of both sexes knew by that

age. In both samples same-sex peers were the primary information source with mass media second.

Knowledge of Penile Erection

The Kinsey sample females were surprisingly tardy in acquiring this knowledge: only one-third of them knew of erection by the end of their 15th years. Most (53%) learned between ages 15 and 18. No fewer than 16% learned at or after age 20. In the recent sample girls learned much earlier: almost 80% knew by the end of their 15th year, and none learned after than age 19. The Kinsey sample learned chiefly from same-sex peers (36%) and from experience (23%). For the recent sample same-sex peers are still the primary source (37%) with experience second (18%).

By error, males of the recent sample were not asked to disregard the question on penile erection, and I was dumbfounded to find that many

TABLE 11
Age at First Knowledge of Abortion

Age	Male		Female	
	Kinsey Sample	Recent Sample	Kinsey Sample	Recent Sample
	%	%	%	%
<6	No data	6	0.1	3
6		2	0.2	3
7		0	0.2	8
8		2	1.1	2
9		0	1.1	3
10		11	2.3	12
11		7	2.4	13
12		9	7.7	15
13		9	10.7	8
14		18	14.9	13
15		18	15.6	10
16		11	14.0	5
17		2	10.1	3
18		2	8.3	0
19		0	3.5	0
20		0	3.2	0
>20		0	4.4	0
<i>N</i> , classified responses		44	3117	60
<i>N</i> , unclassified responses		3	1237	7
<i>N</i> , inapplicable responses		0	4	0

TABLE 12
Source of First Knowledge of Abortion

Source	Male		Female	
	Kinsey Sample	Recent Sample	Kinsey Sample	Recent Sample
	%	%	%	%
Same-sex peer	No data	8	36.1	17
Opposite-sex peer		0	0.2	0
Father		5	0.9	2
Mother		20	17.7	24
Other relative		3	3.4	0
Experience or sight		0	0.5	0
Mass media		31	19.2	11
School and other formal training		8	9.0	13
Authority figures not in school		0	1.6	0
Other		8	5.5	11
Mixed sources		18	5.7	22
N, classified responses		39	3204	46
N, unclassified responses		8	1150	21 ^a
N, inapplicable responses		0	4	0

^a Most unclassified responses were statements such as: "My mother had one" or "My aunt miscarried."

males reported they were unaware of erections until near or at puberty. In fact, slightly over half (56%) said they learned after age 10. I suspect that many boys are not particularly conscious of erections until puberty connects erection with a more intense erotic response and their growing knowledge of sexuality invests erections with social meaning.

Knowledge of Condoms

As for other topics, in the Kinsey sample, the males learned about condoms at earlier ages than did the females. By age 14 slightly over half (61%) of the boys knew of condoms in contrast to fewer than one-quarter (23%) of the girls. In recent years this difference has decreased, but boys still learn somewhat earlier than girls. The boys of the recent sample learned earlier than did the males of the Kinsey sample, reaching the 50% mark not at age 14, but between 12 and 13. For both samples and both sexes, same-sex peers remain the dominant source of information regarding condoms.

Knowledge of Male Homosexuality

In the Kinsey sample half the males had heard of this by the end of their 14th years, but over a quarter (28%) didn't learn until after age 16. The Kinsey sample females learned more slowly, only 18% by the end of age 14 and nearly two-thirds (63%) not learning until after age 16. Knowledge came earlier to the recent sample: among males, the difference is mainly that fewer learned after age 16 (6% vs. 28%). Among females there is a dramatic change. By the end of age 14, some 61% of the girls of the recent sample knew versus 18% of the Kinsey females. In fact, at that age as many girls as boys in the recent sample knew of male homosexuality. For all generations, same sex-peers were by far the major source of information. For Kinsey sample males, experience was in second rank (20%), but second rank for females was held by mass media (29%). The recent sample showed some change. Experience for

TABLE 13
Age at first knowledge of female prostitution

Age	Male		Female	
	Kinsey Sample	Recent Sample	Kinsey Sample	Recent Sample
	%	%	%	%
<6	0.1	0	0	0
6	0.5	0	0.1	0
7	0.8	0	0.3	0
8	2.0	4	0.9	3
9	2.0	0	1.4	8
10	6.4	15	3.5	7
11	6.1	2	3.7	8
12	14.0	26	10.4	24
13	15.0	15	13.1	19
14	19.9	13	17.6	12
15	14.2	15	15.6	12
16	10.3	4	12.6	3
17	4.1	2	8.1	2
18	2.5	2	6.0	2
19	1.0	0	2.6	0
20	0.4	0	1.7	0
>20	0.6	0	2.1	0
<i>N</i> , classified responses	3492	46	3405	59
<i>N</i> , unclassified responses	1201	1	952	8
<i>N</i> , inapplicable responses	1	0	1	0

TABLE 14
Source of first knowledge of female prostitution

Source	Male		Female	
	Kinsey Sample	Recent Sample	Kinsey Sample	Recent Sample
	%	%	%	%
Same-sex peer	80.6	51	52.1	36
Opposite-sex peer	0.1	0	0.4	0
Father	2.1	5	0.8	2
Mother	1.5	0	6.9	7
Other relative	1.0	0	2.0	0
Experience or sight	0.2	0	0.1	2
Mass media	8.5	30	26.9	29
School and other formal training	1.1	2	4.1	2
Authority figures not in school	0.4	0	0.7	0
Other	1.1	0	1.2	2
Mixed sources	3.2	12	4.7	21 ^a
N, classified responses	3615	43	3641	56
N, unclassified responses	1078	4	716	11
N, inapplicable responses	1	0	1	0

^a Mainly mass media plus some other source.

females and males almost vanished as a source of information. Mass media, for males, took over second place.

Knowledge of Female Homosexuality

This question was not asked of the individuals in the Kinsey sample, but I appended it to the current questionnaire to ascertain whether or not one tends to learn of homosexuality within one's own sex before learning of its existence in the opposite sex. This hypothesis was not supported. Instead it appears that, while boys begin learning of both male and female homosexuality earlier than do girls, this initial difference soon disappears, and by the midteens and thereafter the girls are as well informed as the boys. By the end of their fourteenth year about three-fifths of both the boys and girls knew of male homosexuality and slightly over half knew of female homosexuality. For both sexes the major sources are same-sex peers and mass media.

The Role of Parents and School

In the Kinsey sample the father was distinguished by his unimportance as a source of sexual information (Table 23). Two-thirds of the boys

and nearly nine out of ten of the girls answered "none" to the question, "How much sex information did your father give you?" The figures for the recent sample show that fathers have become more communicative but that they remain a minor source of sex education.

Mothers were more productive sources of sexual information, particularly for their daughters (Table 24). In the Kinsey sample, about three-fifths gave no information to their sons, but only slightly over a quarter similarly neglected their daughters. The number of respondents who reported getting no sex education directly from their mothers decreased markedly: 25% of the males and 10% of the females. It is clear that mothers are becoming more important as information sources.

In the Kinsey sample over 90% of both sexes stated they received no sex education of any sort from their elementary school teachers (Table

TABLE 15
Age at first knowledge of penile erection

Age	Male		Female	
	Kinsey Sample	Recent Sample	Kinsey Sample	Recent Sample
	%	%	%	%
<4	No data	2	0	0
4		14	0.1	0
5		2	0.5	0
6		2	0.6	0
7		5	0.7	0
8		7	1.0	3
9		7	1.2	0
10		5	1.8	8
11		21	1.8	6
12		14	3.9	12
13		9	5.1	17
14		7	7.3	15
15		5	10.0	18
16		0	14.8	9
17		0	14.8	3
18		0	13.6	1
19		0	6.7	6
20		0	4.5	0
>20		0	11.2	0
<i>N</i> , classified responses		42	3405	65
<i>N</i> , unclassified responses		5	908	2 ^a
<i>N</i> , inapplicable responses		0	45	0

^a Both respondents reported age as "in college."

TABLE 16
Source of first knowledge of penile erection

Source	Male		Female	
	Kinsey Sample	Recent Sample	Kinsey Sample	Recent Sample
	%	%	%	%
Same-sex peer	No data	2	36.3	37
Opposite-sex peer		2	0.9	3
Father		0	0.4	0
Mother		0	4.1	5
Other relative		2	3.3	2
Experience or sight		79	22.6	18
Mass media		7	16.8	11
School and other formal training		2	10.4	14
Authority figures not in school		0	1.2	0
Other		0	0.7	0
Mixed sources		5	3.2	10
<i>N</i> , classified responses		43	3512	62
<i>N</i> , unclassified responses		4	801	5
<i>N</i> , inapplicable responses		0	45	0

TABLE 17
Age at first knowledge of condoms

Age	Male		Female	
	Kinsey Sample	Recent Sample	Kinsey Sample	Recent Sample
	%	%	%	%
<6	0.1	0	0	0
6	0.5	0	0.1	0
7	0.7	0	0.2	0
8	2.2	2	0.5	1
9	1.9	2	0.5	0
10	5.9	13	1.1	0
11	5.4	8	1.1	3
12	12.2	21	4.3	16
13	15.2	17	5.4	14
14	17.4	13	9.6	21
15	13.3	11	12.0	22
16	10.1	8	15.5	14
17	5.4	0	13.9	0
18	4.0	1	11.6	4
19	1.9	0	6.3	3
20	1.3	0	4.4	3
>20	2.5	0	13.2	0
<i>N</i> , classified responses	3589	47	3852	63
<i>N</i> , unclassified responses	1105	0	480	4 ^a
<i>N</i> , inapplicable responses	0	0	26	0

^a Three of these reported "in high school."

TABLE 18
Source of first knowledge of condoms

Source	Male		Female	
	Kinsey Sample	Recent Sample	Kinsey Sample	Recent Sample
	%	%	%	%
Same-sex peer	89.7	67	66.8	51
Opposite-sex peer	0.1	2	1.3	0
Father	1.4	2	0.5	0
Mother	0.6	0	5.4	3
Other relative	1.3	0	7.3	5
Experience or sight	0.1	0	0.8	0
Mass media	1.8	5	6.7	8
School and other formal training	1.5	5	6.8	16
Authority figures not in school	0.5	0	1.5	2
Other	1.6	7	1.7	8
Mixed sources	1.3	12	2.4	8
<i>N</i> , classified responses	3702	42	3944	63
<i>N</i> , unclassified responses	992	5	388	4
<i>N</i> , inapplicable responses	0	0	26	0

TABLE 19
Age at first knowledge of male homosexuality

Age	Male		Female	
	Kinsey Sample	Recent Sample	Kinsey Sample	Recent Sample
	%	%	%	%
<6	2.0	0	0	0
6	3.0	2	0	0
7	0	2	0	0
8	3.0	0	1.0	0
9	3.0	4	0	0
10	3.0	4	1.0	1
11	4.0	8	0	6
12	10.0	8	3.9	11
13	8.0	15	2.7	20
14	18.0	19	9.0	23
15	9.0	13	6.6	18
16	10.0	17	13.2	13
17	8.0	2	18.9	5
18	7.0	2	15.5	0
19	7.0	2	8.1	1
20	1.0	0	4.3	0
>20	5.0	0	15.9	0
<i>N</i> , classified responses	100	47	258	61
<i>N</i> , unclassified responses	4593	0	4089	6
<i>N</i> , inapplicable responses	1	0	11	0

TABLE 20
Source of first knowledge of male homosexuality

Source	Male		Female	
	Kinsey Sample	Recent Sample	Kinsey Sample	Recent Sample
	%	%	%	%
Same-sex peer	59.9	49	48.2	36
Opposite-sex peer	0	2	1.0	5
Father	2.1	2	0	0
Mother	0	0	2.1	3
Other relative	2.1	2	2.1	0
Experience or sight	19.8	2	1.4	0
Mass media	8.3	24	29.1	20
School and other formal training	3.1	4	7.1	5
Authority figures not in school	2.1	0	1.0	0
Other	1.0	0	0	2
Mixed sources	2.1	13 ^a	7.8	29 ^a
<i>N</i> , classified responses	96	45	141	59
<i>N</i> , unclassified responses	4597	2	4206	8
<i>N</i> , inapplicable responses	1	0	11	0

^a Mainly mass media plus some other source, often same-sex peers.

TABLE 21
Age at first knowledge of female homosexuality

Age	Male		Female	
	Kinsey Sample	Recent Sample	Kinsey Sample	Recent Sample
	%	%	%	%
<6	No data	0	No data	0
6		2		0
7		0		0
8		0		0
9		2		0
10		2		1
11		4		5
12		9		11
13		17		13
14		17		26
15		17		18
16		17		16
17		6		5
>17		4		2
<i>N</i> , classified responses		46		61
<i>N</i> , unclassified responses		1		6
<i>N</i> , inapplicable responses		0		0

TABLE 22
Source of first knowledge of female homosexuality

Source	Male		Female	
	Kinsey Sample	Recent Sample	Kinsey Sample	Recent Sample
	%	%	%	%
Same-sex peer	No data	41	No data	39
Opposite-sex peer		0		0
Father		2		0
Mother		0		2
Other relative		2		0
Experience or sight		0		0
Mass media		39		25
School and other formal training		2		7
Authority figures not in school		0		0
Other		2		2
Mixed sources		10		25 ^a
<i>N</i> , classified responses		41		56
<i>N</i> , unclassified responses		6		11
<i>N</i> , inapplicable response		0		0

^a Mainly mass media plus some other source, often same-sex peers.

TABLE 23
Contribution of father to respondent's sex education

Amount	Male		Female	
	Kinsey Sample	Recent Sample	Kinsey Sample	Recent Sample
	%	%	%	%
None	67.4	42	86.7	76
Little	21.0	38	8.4	15
Some	6.2	15	2.5	9
Much	5.4	4	2.4	0
<i>N</i> , classified responses	4050	47	4107	67
<i>N</i> , unclassified responses	547	0	166	0
<i>N</i> , inapplicable responses	97 ^a	0	85 ^a	0

^a Respondents did not know father.

25). This dismal situation has ameliorated, for in the recent sample such a wholly negative report was given by only 64% of the males and 42% of the females. Nevertheless, most of what was given was rated as "little" by the respondents.

The picture for high schools is similar but brighter (Table 26). In the

TABLE 24
Contribution of mother to respondent's sex education

Amount	Male		Female	
	Kinsey Sample	Recent Sample	Kinsey Sample	Recent Sample
	%	%	%	%
None	62.6	25	26.7	10
Little	25.7	45	43.1	39
Some	6.1	21	13.2	33
Much	5.6	8	17.0	18
<i>N</i> , classified responses	4006	47	4247	67
<i>N</i> , unclassified responses	665	0	101	0
<i>N</i> , inapplicable responses	23 ^a	0	10 ^a	0

^a Respondents did not know mother.

TABLE 25
Contribution of grade school teachers to respondent's sexual knowledge

Amount	Male		Female	
	Kinsey Sample	Recent Sample	Kinsey Sample	Recent Sample
	%	%	%	%
None	92.9	64	94.4	42
Little	6.1	23	4.5	42
Some	0.7	11	0.5	13
Much	0.3	2	0.5	3
<i>N</i> , classified responses	4318	47	3903	67
<i>N</i> , unclassified responses	375	0	454	0
<i>N</i> , inapplicable responses	1 ^a	0	1 ^a	0

^a Respondent did not go to grade school.

Kinsey sample roughly half of both sexes said their high-school teachers made no contribution to their sexual knowledge, but in the recent sample only 11% of the males and a few more (16%) females reported this. More important, slightly over half of both sexes stated that their high school teachers had given them a substantial amount ("some" or "much") of sexual information.

Main Source of Early Sex Information

A tabulation of the main source of early information (in answer to the question, "What was the main source of your early knowledge about

sex?") is complicated by the fact that one-fifth to one-third of the respondents could not name a single main source but maintained that two or more were of equal importance. This naming of multiple major sources was particularly common in the recent sample, which is what one might expect in an era when sexual information may be found in a wider variety of sources than was previously available.

TABLE 26
Contribution of high school teachers to respondent's sexual knowledge

Amount	Male		Female	
	Kinsey Sample	Recent Sample	Kinsey Sample	Recent Sample
	%	%	%	%
None	51.2	11	47.6	16
Little	42.0	36	42.7	31
Some	4.1	38	5.3	34
Much	2.7	15	4.4	18
<i>N</i> , classified responses	4525	47	4320	67
<i>N</i> , unclassified responses	165	0	37	0
<i>N</i> , inapplicable responses	4 ^a	0	1 ^a	0

^a Respondents did not go to high school.

TABLE 27
Main source of respondent's early sex information

Source	Male		Female	
	Kinsey Sample	Recent Sample	Kinsey Sample	Recent Sample
	%	%	%	%
Same-sex peer	61.2	42	39.1	32
Opposite-sex peer	0	0	0.2	2
Father	2.6	2	0.8	0
Mother	2.4	10	12.7	16
Other relative	1.3	5	2.7	2
Experience or sight	0.4	0	0.1	0
Mass media	9.6	7	13.9	9
School and other formal training	1.3	2	4.6	3
Authority figures not in school	0.6	0	0.9	0
Other	0.4	0	0.4	0
Mixed Sources	20.2	30	24.0	36
<i>N</i> , classified responses	4548	40	4265	63
<i>N</i> , unclassified responses	146	7	93	4
<i>N</i> , inapplicable responses	0	0	0	0

Inspection of the table confirms the impression that same-sex peers were by far the most important source for the Kinsey sample and remain the most important single source for the recent sample, although the importance has declined somewhat. Some of this decline is actually the result of the increase in the number of those who reported multiple sources such as "same-sex friends and books." Aside from multiple sources, the second most important source of knowledge for the Kinsey sample was mass media (named as the major source by about 10% of the males and 14% of the females). In the recent sample the mass media yield second place to mother and drop to third place. This shift, true for both sexes, was surprising. One would have thought that, with the greater attention given to sex in virtually all mass media, mass media would rise, not fall, in importance. The fact that they decreased in importance as a single major source is probably the result of loss to the multiple ("mixed") sources, plus some erosion from the greater role played by mothers in early sex education.

Conclusions

The most important and pervasive finding of this small study is that children and young people are learning the basic facts about sex at considerably younger ages than did their parents and grandparents. This change appears to stem largely from three factors: an increased maternal effort to impart information, increasing sex education in the schools, and a greater and more explicit treatment of sex in all the mass media.

A second major finding is that sources of early sex information have shifted in their relative importance. While same-sex peers remain the dominant educators, they are losing some of their importance to other sources, especially mothers. The number of persons reporting not one major source, but two or more major sources of equal importance, has increased and probably reflects the greater availability of sexual information. The schools, while still inconsequential as sources of first knowledge, are making laudable progress, particularly at the high-school level. Mass media remain an important source, particularly for more technical knowledge such as fertilization or for types of information avoided by schools and parents (e.g., homosexuality and prostitution). However, as sole major source of sex information, mass media have diminished in relative importance.

The third major finding concerns the difference in male and female

patterns of acquiring knowledge. Whereas in the Kinsey sample, males learned of nearly all sexual items at earlier ages than did females, there is now only one topic in which males still lead: knowledge of condoms. For a few years boys led girls in knowledge of male homosexuality, but the girls rapidly caught up. The females may boast of two topics in which they learn sooner than males: menstruation and abortion. In brief, boys and girls now learn at especially early ages most of "the facts of life."

In closing, it may be worthwhile to speculate where these trends in early acquisition of sexual information will take us. I suspect that ultimately we will have a generation of prepubescents who have a rather comprehensive knowledge of human sexuality including coital techniques and practices which we now regard as deviant or exotic. I also suspect that this knowledge will be superficial and that there will be considerable confusion because the children will be unable to discriminate between misinformation and fact. The scene on television or the passage in the pulp magazine may carry as much weight in their minds as the pronouncements of schools and parents. This situation, while unfortunate, would not be critical, since children in our culture are typically confused about sexuality, and, moreover, the confusion can be cleared up by remedial action by schools and parents. A more important problem and one less amenable to solution is the fact that these children, burdened with copious information of varying degrees of validity, will necessarily be unaware of the psychological and social aspects of sex which determine the meaning of any sexual act. It is today difficult to explain to a child the intricate relationship of sexuality to other parts of life and that a sexual act gains its significance from the psychosocial matrix in which it occurs. Nevertheless, it should be our duty to try to incorporate into sex education something of the roles that sexuality can play in a society with diverse mores and values. In so doing, we must avoid both the conventional repressive approach and also the ultra-liberal approach, both of which do not prepare the child for the realities of later life.