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ADOLESCENT SEXUALITY AND POPULAR CULTURE

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R E P O R T

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FROM THE EDITOR: THE MEDIA BRINGS ISSUES TO LIFE

Mac Edwards

I grew up in a small Virginia town in the 1950s when Hollywood reigned supreme. I spent many afternoons and weekends at my town's only movie theatre (on Main Street) watching films with such stars as Elizabeth Taylor, Rock Hudson, Doris Day, Montgomery Clift, Debbie Reynolds, William Holden, Shelley Winters, Marlon Brando, Grace Kelly, and Paul Newman. These people were real to me. They came to life not only in the movies but also in the dozens of movie magazines I read at the corner drug store.

In terms of media, life was much simpler when I was young. There were no home computers, no audio cassettes, no video cassettes, no portable radios, no portable televisions, and no boom boxes. Television consisted of three (network) channels—and they all went off the air with a “test pattern” at approximately 11 p.m. and resumed the next morning at approximately 7 a.m. Programming consisted of such sitcoms as *Ozzie and Harriet*, *I Love Lucy*, and *Dobie Gillis*; such dramas as *Playhouse 90*; and such variety shows as *Ed Sullivan* and *Jackie Gleason*.

Even recognizing the major differences between the media of the 1950s and the media of today, I firmly believe that young people are looking to film, television, music, and the Internet today in much the same way that I looked exclusively to movies. They are looking for people to respect and idolize. They are looking for ways to express their feelings. They are looking for answers to questions about their lives. Give the right messages in these media, and they will listen. I would have.

SIECUS FORUM

We decided to publish this issue of the *SIECUS Report* on “Adolescent Sexuality and Popular Culture” because we know that young people very often learn about sexuality through the media.

We started by convening a Forum early this year funded by the William T. Grant Foundation. Over 20 professionals spent an entire day talking with SIECUS staff.

In synthesizing the Forum, Monica Rodriguez, SIECUS director of information and education, offers readers a series of recommendations: learn how young people currently use and interpret the media, how the media craft and disseminate messages, how media technologies are constantly changing, and how to encourage the media to present realistic portrayals of sexuality. These suggestions are very important if you want to reach young people with your sexual health messages.

As a result of discussions at the Forum, we learned that Susannah Stern, a doctoral student at the University of North Carolina School of Journalism and Mass Communication, had written a portion of her dissertation on “Adolescent Girls’ Homepages As Sites for Sexual Self-Expression.” We immediately contacted her and, as a result, are proud to publish her findings under the same title.

We also learned that The Media Project in Los Angeles was working with Advocates for Youth and the Kaiser Family Foundation to help television producers and writers incorporate sexual health messages into their various program scripts. We contacted Kate Folb, who heads The Project, and she agreed to write “Don’t Touch That Dial! TV As a—*What!*?—Positive Influence” about her organization’s work.

A key point made at the Forum was that sexuality educators need to involve young people in the planning and development of their programs. In other words, they need to become “youth culture” competent. Two articles in this *SIECUS Report* will help you—and us—take necessary steps. They are “Understanding Youth Popular Culture and the Hip-Hop Influence” by Patricia Thandi Hicks Harper, president and chief executive officer of the Youth Popular Culture Institute, and “Understanding Hip-Hop Culture and Keeping it Real” by Todd Elliott, a research assistant and youth advocate at McFarland & Associates.

We have concluded this issue on “Adolescent Sexuality and Popular Culture” with contact information on key Web sites currently offering sound information to adolescents on sexuality-related issues.

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

This issue of the *SIECUS Report* also includes a policy update from William Smith, SIECUS director of public policy, titled “More Federal Funds Targeted for Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Programs.” This program is up for renewal next year.

We have also included a new SIECUS Fact Sheet on “Public Support for Sexuality Education” in this issue. It points to the fact that the majority of Americans want comprehensive sexuality education programs for young people.

We are proud of the information we have compiled for this *SIECUS Report*. We hope you will find it useful in your work to disseminate sexual health information to young people as well as to people of all ages.

SIECUS FORUM ON ADOLESCENT SEXUALITY AND POPULAR CULTURE

Monica Rodriguez

SIECUS Director of Information and Education

The media is one of the most powerful sexuality educators in our country. Whether it is music lyrics, advertising, movies, television shows, music videos, books, magazines, the Internet, or other media, few sources have as much access to the American public and provide as much sexuality-related information.

From very young ages, we have learned all sorts of sexuality-related information from the media: how women and men are supposed to act and think, what families should look like and how they should relate, how people in romantic relationships and friendships are supposed to interact, who is attractive and sexy, and what are the cultural norms about love, romance, and sex.

Increasingly, people are acknowledging the prominent role that the media plays as a source of sexuality information—both positive and negative—and are trying to do something about it: namely “use media proactively to reach young people with information or positive messages.”¹

THE MEDIA’S REACH

Kids & Media @ The New Millennium, a recent report from The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, analyzes children’s media use nationwide. And the results are staggering. Young people aged eight to 18 spend an average of six and three-quarters hours a day using both electronic and print media—not including any media used in school or for homework.

The average American child grows up in a home with three television sets, three tape players, three radios, two video cassette recorders (VCRs), two compact disc players (CDs), one video game player, and one computer.

Young people’s media use is increasingly isolated and out of the context of their family. More than half of all children have a radio (70 percent), tape player (64 percent), television (53 percent), or CD player (51 percent) in their bedroom; a third (33 percent) have a video game player in their bedroom, and almost a third (29 percent) have a VCR there. More than one in seven (16 percent) has a computer in their bedroom. Two-thirds of children eight and older have a television in their bedroom and about one in five (21 percent) have a computer there.

It is within this context that educators must compete for young people’s attention.

A SIECUS FORUM

In February 2000, with the generous support of the William T. Grant Foundation, SIECUS brought together a group of professionals from diverse fields for a roundtable discussion on adolescent sexuality and popular culture.

Participants included Jane Brown, professor, School of Journalism and Mass Media, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill; Sue Castle, executive producer, *In the Mix*; Mac Edwards, editor, *SIECUS Report*; Todd Elliott, research assistant, McFarland & Associates; Andrea Elovson, producer, *In the Mix*; and Lawrence Gianinno, vice president, strategic communications, The William T. Grant Foundation.

Also Billo Harper, president, biLLO Communications; P. Thandi Hicks Harper, president, Youth Popular Culture Institute; Debra Hauser, vice president, Advocates for Youth; Karen Hein, president, The William T. Grant Foundation; Hubert Jessup, president, Mediascope; and Ivan Juzang, president, MEE Productions.

Also William Juzang, special projects manager, MEE Productions; Amy Levine, SIECUS librarian; Susan Maguire, vice president, Porter Novelli; Monica Rodriguez, SIECUS director of information and education; Carla Sacks, president, Lifelike Productions; Christine Summer, executive editor, *Twist Magazine*; and Renee Turner, executive producer, Teen Summit/Black Entertainment Television (BET).

RECOMMENDATIONS

This article summarizes the major themes and recommendations that emerged from the dynamic discussion generated at the forum.

Become culturally competent in youth culture.

Roundtable participants agreed that one of the most important things that adults working with and on behalf of children can do is become culturally competent in youth popular culture. Participants were concerned that media alienates adults from young people because adults look at the media and say: “I’m not going to go anywhere near these kids. I wouldn’t know how to talk to them. I wouldn’t know how to deal with them.”

One of the ways adults can overcome some of the misunderstanding, fear, and confusion about youth culture is to apply the concept of “media literacy” to themselves. They need to look at and understand the media that young people

“The media is one of the most powerful sexual educators in our country.”

are consuming so they can use it to make a difference. They need to craft messages about sexuality that young people can—and will want to—integrate into their lives. (See the articles by Thandi Hicks Harper and Todd Elliott in this issue of the *SIECUS Report* for specific recommendations). One of the biggest challenges is that it will require adults to conduct research “24/7” because young people’s popular culture is constantly changing.

In the experience of roundtable participants, the building of this intergenerational understanding and trust—in other words, adults showing youth that they have at least some understanding of youth culture—will result in young people becoming more honest and adults becoming more effective in their work.

Learn from the media. As educators, adults can learn a great deal from the media about communicating sexual health messages to young people. The media uses techniques and approaches that are market driven and audience based. They also use audiences to craft and test their messages. Several roundtable participants even “confessed” that they were working closely with the media in order to better understand these communication techniques and approaches themselves.

If educators want their prosocial messages to reach their intended audience, they need to understand they are competing with the media. They need to develop an approach that is going to enable them to compete and win. Popular culture is evolving and moving far beyond its original genres—for example, Hip-Hop is moving beyond music into fashion, print, and movies. The fact that young people are willing to pay for a two-hour movie version of a five-minute video is something that educators need to consider. As a community, educators need to stay abreast of these developments and use them to their advantage.

Understand the media’s “reality.” Those participants who work regularly with the broadcast media assured us that the creative community is interested in many of the social issues that concern sexuality educators. It is usually willing to engage in discussions about the broader consequences that result from what it chooses to do.

At the same time, the broadcast media is a business that measures success in terms of revenues and ratings. The creative community is under a great deal of pressure to compete. It is protective of its creative freedoms and guards its right to determine what it will produce.

Forum participants emphasized that educators must understand these realities when working with the media. They must also realize that it is ultimately up to the artist, the marketplace, and the viewers to determine programming. (See Kate Langrall Folb’s article on how The Media Project works with various media.)

Help young people become media literate. There was unanimous agreement among Forum participants that adults need to do a better job of teaching young people the skills to interpret media messages. They felt strongly that youth need to become critically aware of how the media works in their lives, the meaning of the images it projects, and the reasons for those images.

In particular, participants pointed to advertising as a prominent source of information that signals trends, indicates popularity, and tells young people what they need to achieve a certain look or identity. Educators are challenged to help young people understand the difference between media and real life. They are also challenged to help them critique the media in the same way that they critique other aspects of their lives. (For example, the wary student will ask: “Why do I need to learn calculus anyway?”)

Use young people to craft and deliver the message. Young people are savvy about the media as a means of communicating. Roundtable participants encouraged educators to talk to approach them and ask them what to do. Ask them the best way to communicate a message. In other words, generate a peer-to-peer communication effort where the sender and the recipient of the message are the same. Young people know their culture, they know the vernacular, they know the language, and they know who they can talk to. They will translate messages in the ways they need translating.

Roundtable participants gave numerous examples of how they involve young people in the work of their organizations—from asking teen magazine readers to answer questions about relationships, to involving young people in the development and delivery of media campaigns, to having young people assist social scientists in coding and analyzing focus group data because they were picking up on things that the scientists were misreading, to involving young people in the development of a report or video. By involving them, we are building skills that young people can use for their whole lives.

Research needs to keep up with changes in media and culture. Roundtable participants expressed frustration that much of the current research isn’t keeping up with the changes in media, with youth culture, or with the ways young people use media—particularly the Internet. (Read the article on girls’ Web pages by Susannah Stern in this issue.)

The participants also expressed strong interest in qualitative research that provides a fuller sense of how young people use media in their lives, how they interpret the media and its messages (and perhaps oppose or resist those messages), and what the media really means in their lives. They felt research on media content was important but that research on young people’s interpretation of that content was more relevant to educators and their work.

More emphasis on developing interactive educational interventions for young people. To paraphrase one roundtable participant: “Just observing a teenager doing his homework on the computer or surfing the Web while listening on headphones to his favorite music on a portable music player while watching videos on the television will convince anyone that today’s teens are the most capable of multi-tasking of any generation we’ve ever seen.”

Many traditional approaches to providing young people with information and positive messages related to sexuality don’t account for young people’s increased sophistication, comfort, and expectations in their use of media. Slides, videos, and print media cannot hold the interest of a generation that is used to interactive, multimedia approaches with vivid audio and visual tracks. Educators must challenge themselves as well as those who develop new forms of interactive media to consider how these media can help young people develop and practice the skills they need to make healthy decisions relating to sexuality.

Pay attention to evolving technologies. One of the most fascinating Forum discussions involved an explanation of the future of media and how technology is converging. For example, television and the Internet are well on their way to becoming one. The Web has enabled television to become more interactive. Most networks and television shows have Web sites. Viewers can even play along on the Internet while they watch *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire* on television. Programming is currently in development that will overlay an Internet site onto a television show so that a viewer can click an image on the show to get information based on the content. Individuals will most likely use this technology to purchase products, but they can just as easily use it for educational purposes (such as getting more information on a specific topic).

Incredible advancements in technology are changing the way that people are using the Internet. One participant shared how her organization is capitalizing on these technological advancements to help gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and questioning youth decrease their sense of isolation by

creating virtual communities. Young people are spending time in chat rooms communicating in “real time” in ways that they felt uncomfortable doing in their “live” community.

Encourage the media to present realistic portrayals of sexuality. The media’s portrayal of sexuality was another area where participants expressed considerable frustration but also hope for change. They talked a great deal about how media images of sexuality are idealized—in their portrayal of what bodies are supposed to look like, of what sexual and romantic relationships are supposed to be like, and of what sex can bring to an individual—without much discussion about how these things are in real life. Too often the media casts sexuality as a “forbidden fruit” instead of normalizing it and making it a healthy part of people’s lives. This latter approach would allow people to talk more about sexuality from a realistic perspective and in a way that would help people make good sexual decisions.

Several of the media producers at the roundtable—particularly those creating television programs—talked about their approaching sexuality-related programming through the concept of self-knowledge. They felt that part of their responsibility was to provide young people with the information they needed to assess their feelings about sexuality-related issues, particularly sexual behavior, so that they could ultimately act according to their individual values.

CONCLUSION

Participants left the roundtable discussion with a clear understanding that educators and others interested in reaching young people with their sexual health messages must become literate in—and involved with—evolving media realities as well as youth popular culture. It is only then that they will succeed in providing youth the tools they must use to lead healthy sexual adult lives.

REFERENCES

1. *Kids and Media @ The New Millennium* (Menlo Park, CA: The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, 1999), p. 4.

ARTICLE ON SEXUALITY EDUCATION IN TURKEY

The article “Reflections on An Adolescent Sexuality Education Program in Turkey,” which appeared in the April/May 2000 issue of the *SIECUS Report*, was cowritten by Dr. Figen Cok, an associate professor at Ankara University in Turkey, and Dr. Lizbeth Gray, associate professor in the School of Education at Oregon State University. The article listed Dr. Cok as the author and mentioned Dr. Gray as a contact for Dr. Cok.

ADOLESCENT GIRLS' HOMEPAGES AS SITES FOR SEXUAL SELF-EXPRESSION

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It's 9:10 P.M. Anastasia, a high school senior, just concluded her daily journal entry. Tonight she narrated, in great detail, her most recent sexual encounter with her high school boyfriend. Anastasia described how they "rented a hotel room," "made love" using a condom ("We may be teenagers with raging hormones, but we're not stupid."), and afterward, stopped at Wal-Mart to "buy a brush so I could fix my hair" before going home. She expressed how wonderful she felt and how she thought her boyfriend loved her "even though he hasn't said it yet." She marveled, "If this is as close to being high as I get, I hope I never come down."

Remarkably, when Anastasia finished her intimate entry, she did not hurriedly shut her diary, lock it with a key, and hide it under her pillow. Rather, she clicked twice on her computer mouse and immediately uploaded her journal entry onto one of the most public and far-reaching media in existence: the World Wide Web (WWW).

Like countless other girls across the globe, Anastasia is the architect of her own WWW home page. Communicating not just with words, but also with images, sounds, and hypertext,¹ she posts her page to a geographically removed yet potentially global public. Personal home pages have been considered "people's self-created windows on themselves,"² and girls like Anastasia display the selves they think they are, the selves they wish to become, and the selves they wish others to see.³ They represent their multiple selves in diverse ways and with varying degrees of security.⁴ Some engineer intricate sites that carry their visitors through detailed writings, photo galleries, and personal histories; others compose uncomplicated sites devoted to unusual hobbies and favorite musicians. And, as Anastasia's sexually candid entry illustrates, many girls' home pages also feature themes rarely spoken about, as the girls say, IRL ("In Real Life").

Sexual discussions and representations on adolescent girls' home pages are especially intriguing because the amalgam of private authorship and anonymous global readership offered by the WWW enables girls to speak both confidentially and publicly about a conventionally taboo topic. Adolescence in particular is frequently recognized as a life stage during which individuals actively and consciously begin to engage in identity construction. Sexuality is an important part of this burgeoning identity and one with

which adolescent girls are likely to be preoccupied.⁵ Adolescent girls with WWW access and expertise can take advantage of an assortment of technical features (aural, visual, textual, and hypertextual) to express their evolving sexual selves. Considering the unique intersection of these phenomena, I have endeavored to learn more about the nature of adolescent girls' sexual self-expression on their home pages.

HOME PAGE ARCHITECTS

In light of the mutable and disorganized nature of the WWW (home pages appear and disappear literally every day), no master index of sites exists to clarify exactly how many girls have created home pages or who they are. Moreover, relatively little attention has been paid to girls as home page creators, or even as new media producers in general. Within the academic community, the focus has shone predominantly on Web offerings either *for* girls or *about* girls, rather than those *by* girls. Manufacturers and market research companies (i.e., *Smartgirl*, *Internette*, *GirlGames*) seem to be making the greatest effort to identify and communicate with girls online in their efforts to capitalize on the "new" teen girl market.⁶

Despite the current lack of information about girls who create home pages, it is reasonable to conclude that they comprise a small portion of the American adolescent girl population at large. Considering that WWW home page construction necessitates repeated access to a computer, an Internet connection, space on a server, familiarity (if not dexterity) with Web navigation and site publication, at least elementary Web design skills, and ample time for building and publishing the page, the likelihood of *any* adolescent maintaining a home page is presumably quite small. Teens with computers and access to the Internet at home (slightly more than one third of households with children ages eight to 17 in 1998) are most likely to maintain WWW home pages, since most teens are not granted sufficient time or guidance in school to develop computer and Web navigation skills, let alone Web design capabilities.⁷ The most basic requirement, access to a computer, thus makes it difficult for almost one third of all American teens to maintain WWW home pages, and one third of those with computers are also hindered because they lack an Internet connection.⁸ Notably, even of those with Internet access (8.4 million teens ages 13 to 17), far fewer girls than boys spend time online.⁹

Not surprisingly, teens with Internet access at home usually are privileged socioeconomically. A 1997 study found that teens from families that earned more than \$50,000 per year were much more likely than those from middle or low-income families to have computers and Internet access at home.¹⁰ A 1999 study by the Annenberg Public Policy Center concluded that parents' experience with the Web outside the home was the primary predictor of an online connection in a household.¹¹ Income disparities also tend to correlate highly with race, suggesting that girls who currently create homepages are most likely white.

Altogether, we can assume that the girls who create home pages are at least currently an elite group. Their race and privileged socioeconomic status are noteworthy in light of this study's focus on sexual expression. Girls from different classes often harbor differing values, worries, and expectations concerning sexuality. For instance, body image concerns have (at least until recently) largely been the preoccupation of upper-middle and upper class, white girls.¹² Musings on girls' home pages about their "fat thighs" or "need to lose weight" signal as much about their specific culture's emphasis on physical perfection as they do about individual girls' idiosyncrasies or adolescent girl culture more broadly. White bourgeois culture has also historically emphasized self-development, and girls of this class commonly have been encouraged to document their self-evolution in such works as diaries and journals.¹³ Even for economically privileged girls who never kept a diary, their familiarity with the custom of journal-keeping presumably makes them more familiar with and accepting of self-reflection and projection. In this context, self-expression might reasonably be seen as a legitimate, if not customary, undertaking for the girls who currently create home pages. *Sexual* self-expression seems an obvious natural outgrowth of self-reflection, particularly for girls during adolescence.

A CLOSER LOOK

Despite the current inability of most girls to create home pages, it is important to explore how those with means and interest choose to represent themselves. Not only can we learn more about how a select group of girls represent sexuality in a public forum, but we can also gain a better understanding of how the WWW might facilitate certain forms of self-expression.

To begin this exploration, I systematically analyzed ten WWW home pages created by girls who were 13 to 18 years old in Spring 1999.¹⁴ The term "personal home page"¹⁵ is used to refer to not-for-profit Web sites with a personal focus constructed by individuals. Despite their name, most home pages actually consist of multiple "pages" or screens within a Web site. Thus, a "home page" could actually consist of, for example, 60 pages (screens). I selected

the home pages for this study randomly from a list of more than 100 that was compiled by conducting key word searches¹⁶ in prominent WWW search engines¹⁷ and following appropriate links. Only those home pages that addressed sexuality (broadly defined as "an integral part of development through the life span, involving gender roles, self-concept, body image, emotions, relationships, societal mores, as well as intercourse and other sexual behaviors"¹⁸) were included.¹⁹

Qualitative content analysis was used to analyze the home pages.²⁰ Many researchers have endorsed qualitative analysis of material culture.²¹ A qualitative approach seemed most appropriate at this point particularly because the subject is so new and unexplored. Qualitative analysis also allowed greater room for description, analysis of both manifest and latent content, and the development of significant themes.²²

The girls' home pages were analyzed following a basic protocol that focused primarily on substantive features (content) and formal features (style of writing, images, and links).²³ Analysis began by compiling a descriptive summary sheet for each home page, and then these summaries were read and reread. The original home pages were visited multiple times. The constant comparison method was used to help organize and reorganize data on dimensions that emerged as distinctive and significant.²⁴

Although it is impossible to know girls' intentions or motivations when creating their home pages, I assumed that girls created their Web pages intentionally and strategically. Girls who design home pages make decisions about how their page will look and what their audience will learn about them.²⁵ This interpretation of girls' home pages is also grounded in studies of material culture that attest to the ability of artifacts to speak about the people who produced them.²⁶ Conclusions for this study were drawn from the home pages themselves, based wholly on the selves the girls portrayed.

PARTITIONING THE SEXUAL SELF

Despite the variety of substantive and stylistic differences in the girls' home pages, striking similarities in their structure suggested the presence of already well-established home page conventions. The 10 sites all began with an entry page that announced either the title of the site (for example, *A Keen City*) or the author's real or assumed name (for example, *Caitlin, Diva, Misanthrope*). Initial entry pages usually led to a directory where most girls had organized their sites into category-specific pages. With considerable creativity and varying degrees of self-evaluation, the girls intertwined representations of their sexual selves into each of the sections. The most common sections included:

- biography ("All About Me")
- online journal

- original writings (editorials, poetry, essays)
- photo gallery (pictures of self, friends, favorite media stars)
- music archives (favorite songs, lyrics, and performers, listings of acquired CDs)
- guest book
- listing of favorite links on the WWW and Web ring memberships²⁷

Although I initially tried to analyze the girls' home pages as whole bodies of work, I slowly realized that the girls did not present a coherent, uniform sexual self throughout their home pages. On the contrary, the girls appeared to use the various sections of their home pages to speak in different ways about a variety of subjects. Overall, the girls' home pages suggested that certain types of expression *belonged* in particular provinces within the site, and such apportionment gave girls the opportunity to be inconsistent without being inauthentic.

Not only did the different sections of girls' home pages contain distinct genre of writing but each also seemed to offer girls disparate opportunities for self-definition. In some areas of their home pages, girls overtly referenced their sexuality (such as self-concept and body image). In others, girls more vaguely represented their sexuality (such as physical pleasure and desire). Moreover, it seems that the girls used the various formats of each section to either affiliate themselves with or distance themselves from certain public identities. These self-presentation tactics suggested that the girls were still grappling with how they wished others to view them.

BIOGRAPHIES

The biography sections of girls' home pages communicated with the most deliberate and lucid voice. Because the fundamental aim of biography is self-explication, the girls willingly defined themselves in their own words. Girls have less control over the impression they create in the other sections of their home pages because their self-focus is less apparent and anticipated. Self-concept was a key sexuality element addressed in a definitive manner in biography sections. For example, on her "me" page, Katie elaborately explained herself in terms of her age (14 although "I don't look my age"), hobbies (reading, writing, watching "teevee," surfing the net), and psychology ("weird," "antisocial"). She even offered a character summary: "I'm a typical freshman. I have erratic mood swings, and can go from mild-mannered bookworm to psychotic mad-girl on a rampage in less than five seconds." Not only does Katie's self-synopsis suggest that she has likely bought into the "temperamental teen" stereotype, but it also allowed her to present herself—on her own terms—as a complex and changeable individual. In other sections of Katie's site (e.g., her poem "Overcoming

the Jabberwock" or short story, "Destiny of Darkness"), her home page visitors must draw their own conclusions about Katie (e.g., "she seems angry" or "she sounds imaginative"). By offering self-selected descriptors, girls more easily create the selves they want others to perceive.

The biography sections of girls' home pages tend to be the simplest in terms of length and structure (usually only one screen, often written in list form). For the most part, they tend to have few links, if any, and are heavily text-based with little or no images or music. In addition to the types of information the girls would likely supply on any autobiographical statement (age, hobbies, et cetera), they also include statements about their personality types ("I'm Dana and I'm the type of girl your mother warned you about") and idiosyncrasies. Katie, for example, explained, "I don't like animals, including small children that stare at me. I don't like the concept of being abandoned. Money frightens me, and I have trouble buying things. I aspire to be geekier than I already am."

Interestingly, but perhaps not surprisingly for girls in adolescence, relationships also often emerged as a component of girls' self-descriptions in their biography sections. For example, after identifying her birthday (1982), car model (gray 1989 Dodge Omni), nicknames (happy, hey you), and zodiac sign (Aries), Katie documented her "status" as "single." Katie apparently viewed her dating situation as a central part of her current identity. Leigh Ann's "About Me!" page approached dating status from another angle. Rather than emphasizing being single, Leigh Ann relayed her "CRUSH AT SCHOOL: C... he knows who he is" as well as her obsession with various media celebrities such as the musical group, the Moffatt Brothers. Dana also posted her personal profile (*My Real Self*) in a series of phrases that describe who she thinks she is:

Dana
 15 years old
 American Egyptian
 Not a very happy person although I try and pretend to be...
 Very passionate about things I love
 A Riot Grrl
 In love with a guy, Jafry...

Like the other girls, Dana implied that her romantic interest in Jafry is as central to her current sense of self as her personality ("not a very happy person," "very passionate") and ethnic background (American Egyptian).

Farther down her autobiographical list, Dana included: "Attracted to older guys (When I say older I mean 17, 18)." Such statements about romantic preferences were a frequent part of biographies. Katey, for example, listed what she

“looks for in a guy”: “Nice smile, smart, good looking, funny, athletic, ... i used to only like guys with blonde hair but for some reason now i like guys with dark hair, esp... WALTER!!)...”²⁸ Articulating romantic ideals in an online biography is a noncommittal task considering that preferences may be modified and updated as they change (as Katey indicated her recent interest in dark-haired boys). Jocelyn, an eloquent 16-year-old from the Boston suburbs, explained on her home page: “I feel an almost constant need to change my Web page to reflect who I am all the time.” Comments like Jocelyn’s imply that home pages probably are no more stable than the developing identities of the girls who create them.

ONLINE JOURNALS

Sexual behavior is most explicitly and saliently addressed in the online journals girls post on their WWW home pages. The online journals used the same spontaneous, stream-of-consciousness form that is the hallmark of most offline journals. They also followed conventional journal formats by including the date at the beginning, first person voice, an almost ritualistic coverage of recent events, and detailed description and analysis of feelings. Jocelyn explained: “...I use [my online journal] as an outlet and as a way to express my feelings. My journal helps me to organize my thoughts into some form of coherence, to look back and see how much I’ve changed over the past few months, and has added a dimension of self-examination to my thinking.”

Journals seem to be the preferred location within girls’ home pages to ponder the morality of engaging in sexual activities. The girls’ entries reflect their confusion about when and for whom it is “right” to “go all the way.” Anastasia, who described an evening with her boyfriend at the beginning of this article, used her journal entry as a place to evaluate and assuage her worries about the progression of her relationship:

We haven’t had sex yet, but we have talked about it. We parked in a secluded spot last night, but we got run off by some guy before we could actually do more than kiss. And his sister wouldn’t let us use her house for a little while. I have been thinking a lot about sleeping with him. I love him, I really do, though I haven’t told him.... I’m nervous about saying it.

Anastasia *did* decide to sleep with her boyfriend just days after she wrote the above words. Both before and after, she voiced concern that she had not yet told her boyfriend that she loved him, and she worried that he also had not yet articulated his love for her. Anastasia’s preoccupation with actually verbalizing their love seems reflective of a belief that sexual intercourse should occur only in loving relationships. Thompson explained how the notion that love justifies sexual intimacy is supported both by mass culture and by sexuality education in schools.²⁹ Tolman also described

how we have a “cultural story that girls’ sexuality is about relationships and not desire.”³⁰ Anastasia used her journal to announce the love for her boyfriend that she could not yet admit face to face. Perhaps knowing that her journal is accessible to the general public makes her statements of love feel more authentic, and, thus, her actions more legitimate.

Anastasia’s conviction that her own sexual experiences are an acceptable part of a loving relationship correspond closely with what author Peggy Orenstein has termed girls’ “fear of falling.”³¹ Orenstein conducted interviews with and observed eighth-grade girls and concluded: “There is only one label worse than ‘schoolgirl’ at Weston, and that’s her inverse, the fallen girl, or in student parlance, the sl**. A ‘sl**’ is not merely a girl who ‘does it,’ but any girl who—through her clothes, her makeup, her hairstyle, or her speech—seems as if she might.”³² Anastasia is quick to form such judgments about her peers:

I found out something today that made me kind of glad that Brian and I didn’t go to Derrick’s party Saturday night. Kim Hunter, a sophomore, had a little too much to drink that night. She sucked two guy[s] at the same time at the party. She didn’t even know one of the guys. Then she stood in the middle of the room and pulled up her shirt and bra and let the guys do whatever they wanted to her boobs. Maybe it was a good thing we went to the movies instead. That girl is turning into a little sl**. And she wonders why I never talk to her. I told her I talk when I have something to say and left her standing there.

Anastasia’s fear not only of being perceived as a “sl**” but of even associating with one testifies to the seriousness with which the girls regard their perceived sexual identity. Anastasia shrewdly took advantage of the situation she described above to provide her online readers with a point of comparison: she is chaste when contrasted with the likes of Kim Hunter.

Kate, an Illinois high school junior, similarly fretted about the “sl**” identity in her online journal and pondered the possibility that her closest friend, Anna, may have “fallen”:

I don’t f**king believe it. Anna is such a sl** I could barf. I was talking to her at work and she was talking about her going to see her little Argentine friends last night. She goes, “I did what Amy did” aka she gave some guy she doesn’t even know a bl*****. She gives someone a bl***** who she doesn’t even KNOW and she thinks she’s all better than me or something now. She didn’t come right out and say it, but I could just tell by the way she was acting.

She said something like, “I guess I’m like Amy now.” The girl LIKES being a sl**. She f**king LIKES being a f**king sl**? What the hell?

Is this the f**king twilight zone?

Ok, when school starts, I'm on the f**king lookout for a new friend[s].

Kate's entry signals her own sexual standards. How could a girl—indeed, her *friend*—willingly participate in sexual activities in a noncommitted relationship? Like Anastasia, she seemed unsure of the precise conditions that make a girl a “sl**,” but she used her journal to hash them out. She also was concerned that Anna “thinks she’s better than me or something now.” If being a sl** is bad, Kate seemed to be deliberating, why would Anna be proud of it? Kate’s confused and hostile feelings toward her friend reflect a culture that has provided mixed messages about sexuality from all sectors, including families, religion, school, and the mass media. Especially in television and film, the line between what makes one woman a sl** and another simply a beautiful, sensuous woman is often difficult to distinguish. Perhaps Kate’s words waver between disgust and uncertain envy because she is loathe to become a “sl**” herself but scared of being left out or behind. Indeed, later in her journal, Kate posits that she is “the only f**king virgin left on the face of the earth, and the only person f**king proud of it and the only person who won’t f**king degrade herself for sex from some f**king [person] I don’t even know!” Kate’s profane language suggests she may be as angry and afraid as she is confident with her sexual standards.

ORIGINAL WRITINGS

The original writings the girls posted on their home pages ranged from poetry to short stories to essays. In each, the girls seemed to relinquish the deliberateness of their biographies and the conjecture of their journals in exchange for a more creative, mysterious, and theoretical voice. In these original writings, girls appeared to tackle the biggest issues in their lives—the issues that resurface often enough that the girls have devised multiple styles to express their complexity and consequences.

In their content, creativity, and candor, girls’ original writings on their home pages resemble the type of expression commonly represented in ’zines, another late-twentieth century mode of self-expression. ’Zines have been defined in numerous ways, but essentially the term (derived from “fanzine”) refers to nonprofit works usually self-published by those without access to mainstream communication resources. ’Zine producers often type or hand-write their pieces, photocopy them at a local copy shop, and distribute them by hand, by mail, and at local book and music shops. Recently, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of “personal, confessional” ’zines by teenage girls.³³ “Girl ’zines” (publications by and for girls and women) have emerged as a distinct genre—and one that allows girls to represent themselves and their thoughts in a variety of ways. Alternative communities such as lesbian and bisexual subcultures, teenage

mothers, and abused daughters publish their own ’zines to share and reflect on their stories of sexuality.

As in ’zines, the original writings girls post on their home pages also frequently detail matters of sexuality, especially love, sexual relations, and heartbreak. The girls editorialized about such topics as homophobia, feminism, and bisexuality. Caitlin, for example, authored a lengthy three-screen essay entitled, “Yes, I am bisexual.” She began:

At first I was debating whether to broadcast my sexual orientation to the whole World Wide Web. I decided not to, because i am pretty damn closed about it, at least in the high school world. After some thought i decided to put up my views because they should be heard (or maybe i just think so)...and because this is who i am, and i can't hide from it.

Caitlin appeared to view her home page as an appropriate forum from which to test-run her identity claims. Despite her concern about broaching such a personal topic, she apparently felt entitled to express herself. Like the girls who author ’zines, she seemed eager to address topics frequently ignored by the mass media, and she anticipated mainstream reactions to her statements. She continued:

First off—i know some of you are shaking your heads saying one of two things: either “she’s a lesbian in denial,” or “this is trendy, she likes ani difranco, it’s a trend.” You are both wrong. i was very confused at first knowing i like (((gasp!))) men and women, how could i? Isn’t it gay or straight? Then i was introduced to the idea of bisexuality, and it all made sense... “this is me...”

It seems almost as though Caitlin was carrying on an imaginary conversation—or perhaps it is one that she has experienced in her past. She wrote as though presenting an argument, conceding her point so that she could gain credibility by anticipating her readers’ doubts:

Next, i would like to explain how i “know” for those who don’t believe me. Yes, i am a virgin, no you don’t need to have sex to know your sexuality!...So, just recently i was thinking about this bi versus lesbian business, and i was trying to figure out if i really did fall under the bi category. Then i thought—f**k it! why do i need to figure out who exactly i am at this point? Why can’t i say i’m open to either sex at this point? (Because I am.) I think I’ve been leaning towards girls more lately, which is fine with me. Although, I always have a guy or two in mind :) And come to think of it, of all people, my mom described it perfectly to me—she said—“You may not feel this way, but what i’m sensing is that you are attracted to a certain type of person, regardless of gender.” And i couldn’t have worded it better myself. Yeah Mom!

It is interesting that Caitlin referenced her erratic interest in each gender and that she explained her rationale as though it should make perfect sense. *Of course* you should like someone because of *who* they are, not *what* they are, she seemed to intimate. In so stating, Caitlin resists cultural pressures that she must choose one gender (preferably male) over the other. It is also noteworthy that she acknowledges her lack of sexual experience. Perhaps Caitlin included this information to persuade her audience (and perhaps even herself) that her sexual orientation is inherent and self-evident. Her commentary seems the culmination of much thinking about who she is and who she wants to be. Her ability to publicly present her logic may reassure her that her argument is reasonable.

Jen likewise took advantage of her home page to editorialize about sexuality, even titling one of her essays, *Sexuality*. Her statement was less organized and defiant than Caitlin's perhaps because Jen was not defending herself but rather a lifestyle she finds acceptable for others. Jen outlined the conflicting ideas she encounters in her real life regarding sexual orientation. She wrote:

It's really stupid, the things people say. The stupidest of them all must be that "if you're not homophobic, you must be gay..." So I'm not gay. I don't fit into the ideal riot grrl picture, but whatever. I don't really go for cliches anyways. The guys I hang out with try to get a rise out of me by calling me a lesbian, but I could really care less, I just agree with them and let them figure it out for themselves.... I'm not homophobic. I don't see why I should be. It would really suck if I was, considering that enough of my friends are gay or bi. I just don't see why anyone cares.

Jen identified just one of the many contradictions she is likely to observe between accepted societal norms (homosexuality is something to be made fun of) and her own experience (some of her own friends are homosexual). She explained she "could really care less" about sexual orientation yet her designation of an entire page in her Web site about the topic suggests otherwise.

Jen and Caitlin's original writings imply that they are beginning to establish personal beliefs based on real-life experience (e.g., bisexuality is fine), and yet they find it difficult to completely discard the more mainstream expectations they have likely encountered their whole lives (girls should like boys). They effectively distance themselves by placing these essays in a distinct section of their home page that is clearly separated from such autobiographical writing as the biography and journal. They seem prepared to state their opinions in the relatively "safety" of the WWW, where their real identities are somewhat protected. For example, Jen concluded her essay with a weak call to arms:

I wish I could change the world and get rid of homophobia because it is stupid. Get over it. But I can't change the world, although I can try. So here's my efforts: if you're homophobic, stop that!

Poetry was another frequent component of girls' original writing sections of their home pages. Like their essays, poetry allowed the girls to address serious and intimate matters without claiming personal authenticity. Although it seemed likely that much of the girls' poetry was based on personal experience, the genre provided a dimension of obscurity not possible in biographical and journal formats. That is, the scope of topics girls broached in their poetry may have been wider than in other forms of expression on their home pages because poetry is not intrinsically and expectedly self-descriptive. Indeed, it was in their poetry that girls addressed those ideas and feelings that American culture tends to teach them to repress or deny, such as sexual desire and physical pleasure. In their poetry, girls could express these "unladylike" feelings with the reassurance that, if necessary, they could deny their personal applicability. Amelia's poetry, for example, frequently referenced one of the least-discussed topics relevant to adolescent girls' sexuality: lesbian sexual pleasure. A final stanza of one of her poems read:

violet on my bed
arms and bras and sweaters
and the glowing light
of my phone off the hook
she is under me
at one a.m.
in my room

Like Amelia's, most of the poems on the girls' home pages detailed sexual desire, pleasure, and confusion, topics less blatantly (if at all) approached in the other home page sections. Jen's poem, entitled *My Only*, provided another example:

at every minute
you're always on my mind
my longing
not turned to despair
like it was for him
you're always in my heart
you make me so...
i know it's love because
i thought i'd melt that night
ready, waiting for you
just to surround you
to feel the thrust
and the touch
of your perfect lips
soft fingertips
blue eyes

make me feel pretty
maybe i'm not
but you need me now
i'll take your release.

Although girls have written about similar topics for decades (if not centuries),³⁴ their opportunity to showcase them before the public eye has been limited to such cloistered locations as bathroom stalls. Scholars have, indeed, developed a surprisingly large body of literature about such graffiti, coined “latrinalia” and sexual expression has been identified as the most prominent of all topics addressed in girls’ bathrooms.³⁵ Girls’ home pages, although similar to graffiti in their potential anonymity, provide a potentially more diverse audience for girls and also allow for more permanent and lengthy exhibitions.

PHOTO GALLERIES, MUSIC ARCHIVES

The images and music the girls represented on their home pages reveal a great deal about how the girls would like to be seen (sometimes literally) and with whom they would like to be affiliated. Although a few of the girls posted “real life” photographs of themselves or their friends, far more common was the appropriation of mass media representations, ranging from photographs of celebrities to song lyrics to “real audio” clips to scanned CD covers. Leigh Ann’s *Moffatt Pics* section of her home page was scattered with images of her favorite music group, the Moffatt Brothers, a rock band of four brothers. Caitlin’s page exhibited scanned photographs of all her favorite musicians, ranging from Bob Marley and Tori Amos to Bob Dylan and Dar Williams, and Dana portrayed a large image of Courtney Love from the band *Hole*. Some of the girls included captions for the images (“Scott was born on March 30 and he’s 15 yrs. old! He’s the oldest Moffatt and he is the leader in a way”), although others merely posted images without commentary.

The girls’ photo galleries and musical archives provided a view of girls both as mass media users and mass media producers. Indeed, in these sections of their home pages, girls’ roles intermingle; a girl can produce entire portions of her site by appropriating media materials that simultaneously document her use and understanding of them. Jeanne Steele and Jane Brown suggested that media artifacts such as posters and pictures served to “...remind teens of who they are, while at the same time telegraphing to parents and friends the selves they are constructing.”³⁶ Steele and Brown examined girls’ bedrooms to learn how adolescent girls used media to construct their identities. Girls’ home pages resemble bedrooms in that girls frequently draw from media resources to construct a sense of who they are. Indeed, the WWW allows for greater physical appropriation of media materials than ever before.

Adolescents who create their own home pages can present entire collages of media products merely by clicking on an image on another Web page and saving it to a file, accumulating pictures of events, places, and personalities to paste onto their pages.

Not only do media representations on girls’ home pages speak to their authors’ media preferences, but they also allow the girls to communicate to their online audience how and with whom they would like to be identified. For example, Kate’s references to Marilyn Manson (a heavy metal, self-described Anti-Christ musician) helped distinguish her from Leigh Ann, an evident fan of the Backstreet Boys and Moffatt Brothers (clean-cut, all-boy, music groups). These diverse representations of taste help signal to other Web users girls’ affiliation with particular subcultures.³⁷

Interestingly, not only did the home pages frequently reference a musical celebrity about whom their authors romanticized (i.e., Leigh Ann’s love for the Moffatt Brothers) but many also included images of women with whom the girls would like to associated. Many of the female celebrities cited are well known for their free-spoken sexuality. Ani DiFranco, for example, is a celebrated bisexual musician whose song lyrics often address the difficulty of, as she writes in one song, being a member of “more than one club.” Caitlin, who has recently discovered her own bisexuality, included representations of Ani DiFranco (photographs, song lyrics) intermittently throughout her site as well as in her “music” and “photos” sections. Her representations reflected her identification with DiFranco and her interest in connecting herself with a popular and accepted bisexual. For example, before she lists the song lyrics for one of DiFranco’s songs, Caitlin explained, “I like Ani DiFranco. No, I love Ani DiFranco. What can i say, i have an obsession.” Her e-mail address is also a derivative of DiFranco’s name-sake (AniDchica@...)

Not all representations appropriated from the mass media by the girls in this study glamorized sexuality issues. Jen, for example, designed a game to provide commentary about impossible beauty standards. She called the game “Make Kate Fat,” and it began with a picture of the famous “waif” model, Kate Moss. Visitors to Jen’s site could decide what Kate Moss should eat (i.e., hamburger or hot dog), and each time they select a food by clicking on it, Kate’s image would be enhanced to make her look heavier. By the game’s end, Kate Moss is an overweight woman. Although body image was addressed in many of the girls’ sites (i.e., musings about weight loss in online journals), Jen’s use of images to convey her frustration with unhealthy appearance ideals is simultaneously poignant and humorous. The game is also a fitting example of how Web technology allows for innovative, interactive self-expression.

GUEST BOOKS

Girls' guest books on their home pages included the fewest sexual representations of any section in the home pages. This comes as little surprise considering that most guest book commentary is written by home page visitors rather than by the authors. What was interesting about the girls' guest books, however, was the degree to which most of the girls solicited feedback about their sites and the views espoused within them. ("Please sign my guestbook!") They seem eager for feedback and for a sense that the self they present on their home pages is both understood and appreciated.

Not only did the girls include guest books on their home pages for their guests to sign, but many also posted their signed guest books for their visitors to peruse. In addition to leaving my own message, for example, I could visit Dana's signed guest book to see how others had responded to her home page. These responses provided a window on both the confirming and aggravating responses girls with home pages received. Although many of the responses in girls' guest books were vague ("cool site") and kind ("you look nice and pretty. email me"), some responses were hostile and accusatory ("this page f**king sucks....you are just a bitter little girl who is jealous of everyone who is better at the things you pretend to be good at..."). Some commentary, however, directly reacted to the content of girls' home pages and touched on issues relevant to girls' developing identity and navigation through adolescence. Jen, for example, discussed at length in her home page her disdain for people who discussed depression and suicide on their home pages, characterizing such people as sensationalistic and pathetic. Numerous girls responded to this commentary, and one outraged girl wrote:

ok... i saw most of yer Web site. After the "depression" article, though, i lost interest. Since i myself have a Web site and on the Web site there is a page for my thoughts on my depression, manic-depression, drug use, suicide attempts, and self-mutilation yer comments were meant for me or someone like me. Do you really believe someone would "fake" attempting suicide just for attention? Yeah i guess your right. I LOVE looking at the scars from 8 stitches on my left wrist. I felt i needed something a little "extra" and just being sad is so pase'. C'mon kids lets all die! No honey...just because you don't understand the reasoning for broadcasting your pain (maybe you were looking for someone to say, it's ok. Maybe it might help someone to know that their not alone.)

Responses like these likely compel girls to reconsider the views they present on their home pages and perhaps even their understanding of their own emotions and experiences. They might also help girls gain a better understanding of the responsibility of public expression.

LINKS AND WEB RINGS

Links, a feature truly distinctive of the WWW, were present but not prevalent on girls' home pages. The most common type of links girls presented was to other girls' home pages. The girls seemed to seek to create a community of teens, and they promoted one another's pages in apparent understanding that the favor would be reciprocated. For most of the girls, merely linking to other's sites seemed insufficient because many belonged to multiple Web rings as well. Web rings interlink a series of individual Web sites to one another. Visitors who happen onto a site in a Web ring need only click on the ring's icon to be carried to a site similar to its predecessor. Web rings ensure that the girls will receive more visitors to their home pages because the number of gateways into their pages is boosted through their Web ring memberships.³⁸

Most of the Web rings to which the girls in this study belonged were specifically about adolescence or sexuality. Anastasia belonged to "Femme Fatales," a ring of "girls' diaries or real lives, real stories." Dana was a member of more than a dozen Web rings, including "I am Angry," "[gerl]," "Stronger girls" and "Revolution Grrl-Style." Each of these rings either explicitly or implicitly projected a self-identity, most often from an alternative, feminist and/or liberal bent. Like their media appropriation in their photo galleries and music archives, it seems that the girls used their rings to ally themselves with a community of like-minded others. Much like wearing a particular brand of clothing or engaging in "alternative" behaviors (i.e., smoking, skateboarding, etc.), the girls signalled their subculture affiliations through their Web ring memberships.

Despite the prominence of links and Web rings to other home pages, many of the girls also linked to organizations that aimed to improve, celebrate, or build awareness of issues concerning sexuality. Dana, for instance, linked to a site for rape abuse and incest, and several of the other girls linked to alternative girl sites (i.e., Chick Click at <http://www.chickclick.com>) whose site creators aim to provide girls with information and entertainment rarely offered to them from mainstream media.

"WINDOWS ON THE AUTHOR'S FOREHEAD"

To conclude that girls are using their WWW home pages to explore and discuss sexuality (among other topics) is an understatement. In fact, the girls in this study clearly engaged in Web authorship to document an identity in which sexuality plays a major role. They even have established conventions for appropriate sexual expression in the various sections of their home pages. Biographies include reflective, explicit descriptions of self, and original writings range from sensitive poetry to outspoken social critiques.

Photo galleries depict snapshots of real-life sweethearts and adored celebrities, and musical archives commemorate favorite performers with whom girls most identify or fancy. Guest books allow site visitors to comment on the girls' pages, encouraging girls to reflect on their expressive representations on their pages, and links to various sites on the WWW suggest girls' affiliations with various sexual communities or subcultures that espouse particular identities. Web ring memberships imply girls' committed relationship to a cooperative of sites that share common themes or philosophies.

The girls seemed to take strategic advantage of different expressive modes (e.g., poetry, journals, et cetera) to define and/or distinguish their self-identities. Indeed, in all facets of their pages, as perhaps in their lives, the girls who create home pages are broadcasting a sense of their developing self—a self that inherently intersects with sexuality in adolescence. The WWW's ability to provide girls with an arena to document their passage through adolescence is even more extraordinary given that home pages are living documents that can be updated as often as desired.

Overall, it appears that the girls used their home pages to say what they could have said before, indeed in the very *ways* they might have said it before, but with one distinct difference: home pages grant them the potential for a large audience. The importance of speaking and being heard seemed paramount for the girls who created home pages, as Jocelyn explained:

You may want to ask me, "Why do you do this? Why do you share your inmost thoughts with the entire world?" Frankly, I think it's therapeutic. It helps me to realize that I'm not the only one out there, that we're all connected through our experiences. It's great to meet someone, whether it be in real life or on the Internet, who has shared your experience, who knows how you feel and who can relate to you. Somehow the knowledge that there's someone else like you who shared how you feel, makes it a whole lot better.... [Home pages]...are more like windows on the author's forehead, allowing you to look inside and see another person's thoughts.

Indeed, home pages offer a windowlike view into a space we might otherwise be blocked from seeing. Girls' home pages, in particular, provide a look at many aspects of girls' lives that often go unseen, especially "inappropriate" aspects, such as sexuality. Their apparent willingness to design the very window from which we can view inside their 'forehead[s]' and hear their stories of sexuality suggests they are eager for an audience to see what they have to say about being female, adolescent, and sexual.

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15. Hereafter, the term "personal home page" is referred to only as "home page."
16. Key words included: "girl home pages," "high school and girl," "teen girl." These terms elicited the 100 home pages included in

the constructed universe. It is not known what proportion these 100 pages represent of the entire population of girls' pages online. Based purely on personal experience navigating the WWW, I would estimate that there are well over 500 girls' pages on the WWW and likely as many as several thousand.

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This article is excerpted from the upcoming book Sexual Teens, Sexual Media coedited by Drs. Jane D. Brown, Jeanne R. Steele, and Kim Walsh-Childers and scheduled for publication the end of this year. For more information, contact Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 10 Industrial Avenue, Mahwah, NJ, 07430-2262; Website: <http://www.erlbaum.com> —Editor

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October/November 2000 issue.

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"DON'T TOUCH THAT DIAL!" TV AS A—WHAT!?!—POSITIVE INFLUENCE

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Television is everywhere—in our homes, schools, and workplaces. It is a powerful communicator that influences the thinking and attitudes of its viewers. From hairstyles, to fashion, to attitudes, television provides an idealized glimpse into the adult world for many young people.

Research shows that television plays an important role in the lives of most Americans. The average American family has a television turned on for seven hours every day. By the time teenagers graduate from high school, they will have watched approximately 20,000 hours of television—more hours than spent in the classroom.¹

The power of television has never been more profound. Today, teenagers spend little time with parents and other family members. One study of 1,000 adolescents found that they spend an average of five minutes each day with their fathers and about 20 minutes each day with their mothers. Approximately 40 percent of their waking hours are discretionary, and they spend virtually all this time without the companionship or supervision of responsible adults. Consequently, if they lack positive role models among family or friends, they may look to television for models of behavior.²

The few existing studies on television and sexuality indicate a relationship between exposure to sexual content and sexual beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. Teenagers appear less susceptible than young children to media violence, but are probably more susceptible to sexual content. They often believe what they watch on television is real.³ Many talk about the characters from favorite programs as if they were real. Sometimes they even form vicarious relationships with these characters. In one study conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation, 75 percent of teens said the fact that “TV shows and movies make it seem like it is normal for teenagers to have sex” is one reason teenagers have sex.⁴

The Kaiser Family Foundation recently conducted a study to examine the amount and nature of sexual messages on television today. They found that more than two thirds (67 percent) of all network prime time shows contain either talk about sexuality or sexual behavior, averaging more than five scenes with a reference to a sexuality-related topic per hour. And, of all shows with sexual content, just nine percent include any mention of the possible risks or responsibilities of sexual activity, or any reference to contraception, protection, or safer sex.

But television’s role as a sexuality educator need not be harmful or destructive. Recent polls have found evidence of television’s positive influence in sending health messages. In 1997, a study by the Kaiser Family Foundation found that awareness of emergency contraceptive pills increased by 17 percent among regular viewers of *ER* (those who watched three to four episodes per month) after seeing a one-minute dialogue about this option to prevent pregnancy after unprotected intercourse. Even before this episode aired, viewers were more likely to say they knew about emergency contraception from television than from their doctors (63 versus 11 percent). Furthermore, regular viewers of *ER* say they learn about other important healthcare issues from the show. Thirty-two percent say that what they learn from *ER* about health issues helps them make choices about their own or their family’s healthcare. Twelve percent say they have contacted their doctor about health concerns because of issues raised on *ER*.

THE MEDIA PROJECT

The Media Project—a partnership of Advocates for Youth and the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation—works with the television industry to provide accurate, up-to-date information on adolescent sexuality and reproductive health.

The goal of The Project is to help American teens make informed decisions about their sexuality. It does this by keeping television writers and producers updated on the issues and by encouraging the industry to incorporate positive, healthy portrayals of sexuality into their programs. It does not aim to eliminate sexuality from television. Rather, it helps television paint a more realistic picture of the responsibilities of sexual activity.

In recent years, The Media Project has witnessed a slow shift in the attitudes of some decision-makers in the television industry—particularly those involved with teen programs. Writers, producers, and network executives are beginning to understand the teen audience and are beginning to assume some responsibility for providing them with accurate portrayals of many tough issues, including sexuality.

Below is a brief description of some of the ways The Media Project works with the television industry to encourage realistic sexual health messages in today’s television programming.

FELICITY

Last season, The Media Project worked with the creative team of the WB hit teen drama *Felicity* on a two-part episode about date rape. In addition to advising the writers on the legal and medical protocol involved with making a claim of rape, it encouraged the show's producers to place a toll-free rape crisis hotline number at the end of the episode. The hotline received over 1,000 calls directly after the show aired.

Later in the season, The Media Project conducted an unscientific online survey around another episode of *Felicity* in which the lead character visited a health clinic to learn about birth control and condom use. The episode provided not only important information about birth control but also included a scene showing the correct way to use a condom. Out of the 103 girls between 12 to 21 years of age that responded to the survey, 26 percent said they personally learned something new about birth control and safer sex from the "condom demonstration" on *Felicity*. Fifty-eight percent said they felt the demonstration was informative, and 35 percent said it was the first time they had seen such a demonstration. Eighty-six percent said that teens get helpful information about sexual relations and birth control from television.

PRIVATE MEETINGS

The Media Project also works with other popular television shows. Each season its staff meets with the executive producer and writers of WB's *Dawson's Creek* to discuss story lines and offer information. It has also worked closely with WB's hit twenty-something show *For Your Love* on an episode about condom use. This episode was particularly interesting because it approached the issue of a couple deciding to stop using condoms. Executive producer Yvette Lee Bowser worked with The Project to develop a message that condoms are an assumed part of a sexual relationship and that abandoning their use should be carefully considered.

The Media Project has also conducted in-depth meetings and provided factual information for WB's *Jack & Jill*, which featured an episode on unwanted pregnancy; Lifetime's *Any Day Now*, which featured an episode on teenagers and oral sex; and Fox's *Get Real*, which featured episodes on becoming sexually active for the first time, parent-child communication, and HIV testing and counseling. In addition, The Project has met with and/or provided information regularly for executives at David Kelley Productions' *The Practice*, *Ally McBeal*, and *Chicago Hope* as well as *Judging Amy* (CBS), *King of the Hill* (Fox), *Boy Meets World* (ABC), *Mo'Nisha* (UPN), *City of Angels* (CBS), and *Stark Raving Mad* (NBC).

LOVE AMERICAN STYLE

Advocates for Youth recently conducted a study tour of The Netherlands, Germany, and France to discover why these countries, with acknowledged open attitudes about sexuality, have the lowest teen pregnancy and HIV-infection rates in the Western world. (For example, the teen birth rate in the United States is almost nine times higher than the teen birth rate in The Netherlands.)⁵

The study tour found that sexuality in these three European countries is considered a normal, positive aspect of a young person's growth and development and that no sexual health information is withheld from teenagers either in the classroom or in the media. Condoms are easily accessed and frequently advertised on television. In short, teens are trusted to make positive, healthy decisions about their own sexuality and reproductive health. As a consequence, they delay first intercourse nearly two years longer than their American counterparts. (The average age of first intercourse in The Netherlands is 17.7 years; in the United States, it is 15.8 years.)⁶

In February of this year, The Media Project gathered 35 top network executives and industry decision-makers for a lively discussion of the European approach to adolescent sexuality. Held at the Television Academy of Arts & Sciences and moderated by Academy President Meryl Marshall, the event, appropriately titled *Love American Style: Some Like It Hot, Some Like It Not*, featured a video presentation of European "safe sex" commercials and interviews with both European and American teens. It generated amazement among television executives and was cited as the major reason why a major commercial network began to rethink its approach toward sexuality messages.

NETWORK WORKSHOPS

Recently, The Media Project has presented sexual health workshops with the children's departments of several television networks. In fact, positive reactions to the *Love American Style* presentation mentioned above resulted in NBC's entire Saturday morning department participating in a Media Project Workshop. In addition, The Project held a workshop on preteen growth and development for the writers, producers, and executives in the Kids WB! department of the WB network.

In an effort to consistently provide the entertainment industry with accurate, up-to-date reproductive health information, The Media Project also offers regular panel discussions, symposia, and workshops on a variety of sexuality and sexual health topics. Recent topics have included: *Beyond the Birds and the Bees: How Teens Learn About Sex Today*; *Adolescents and HIV*; *Hookin' Up: Sex, Love and Relationships Among Teens*; *The Politics of Teen Sex*; and *Generation X (Y): Guys and Sex*.

SHINE AWARDS

To encourage the American television industry to embrace the issue of positive sexuality and to highlight some of the current programs that have succeeded in portraying sexual health issues without compromising entertainment value, The Media Project sponsors the annual SHINE Awards for Sexual Health IN Entertainment.

Winners of last year's awards—given at a ceremony in Los Angeles hosted by Caroline Rhea of *Sabrina the Teenage Witch*—included *Moesha*, in the comedy category, for an episode on birth control; *Felicity*, in the drama category, for its condom demonstration episode; ABC's *20/20—Safe Sex and Seniors*, in the informational/documentary category; MTV's *Loveline*, in the talk show category; NBC's *Sunset Beach*, in the daytime drama category; and ABC's *Swing Vote*, in the entertainment special category.

Over 300 entertainment industry executives and celebrities attend the SHINE Awards each year to support the *good* things television is doing with regard to teenage sexuality and reproductive health.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Parents and viewers sometimes feel powerless to affect change in what teens see on television or in how they perceive what they are seeing.

Instead of complaining about television, parents should watch with teenagers. Watching a teenager's favorite program may present opportunities for dialogue on sometimes difficult subjects like sexuality.

These tips can help parents and other adults use entertainment television to spark discussions with children:

- **Watch what your children watch.** Watch their shows as often as you can—and find out about and suggest shows you would like them to see.
- **Watch with them once without offering any opinions.** Just sit back, relax, and take in what you see and hear. You'll gain a better understanding of what appeals to your child.
- **Ask your child's opinion.** "How do you feel about...?" "What do you think...?" You may not get a thoughtful response, but that's okay. You've begun to nurture the thinking skills that help children question media messages.
- **As you continue to watch with your child, share your opinions in a noncombative way.** Discuss your thoughts and express your opinions. Young people need to know your bottom line as they form their own views.
- **Take advantage of "teachable moments."** Use the opportunity of a joke or a poignant scene to discuss a subject.
- **Use commercial time to talk.** Take the commercial break to deliver your own brief messages. Young people may pay more attention during a break in the show.
- **Even "bad" shows can provoke discussion.** Even so, stick to discussing the *behavior*, not the *character*.

- **Be sensitive.** Be aware of what shows your teens choose to watch with friends or other family members. Young people often feel embarrassed by discussions of sexuality in front of their friends or other adults.
- **Use keys to good communication.** As you're talking, use such phrases as these to build give-and-take: "What do you think?" "That's a good question." "I don't know but I'll find out." "I'm glad you told me about that."
- **Have fun!** Keep discussions informal and fun. Avoid lecturing. Young people will quickly build barriers against criticism. Ask young people for their views.

CONCLUSION

Finally, viewers must realize they *do* have power over what is shown on television. Television networks pay close attention to viewer comments. Advertisers watch carefully to see if programming will affect their product sales.

The Media Project encourages people to write when they see something they *like*. Networks receive many letters criticizing programming. They receive fewer expressing praise.

By providing young people with accurate, comprehensive information on sexuality and sexual health and by creating a media climate that trusts teens to make their own decisions regarding their sexual health, we may achieve a greater reduction in teen pregnancy, STDs, and HIV infection than we've seen in the past.

Television can play a positive role in helping to change cultural norms and give vital, even life-saving information to America's young people.

So, don't touch that dial! You—or your teens—might just learn something.

For more information on The Media Project, contact Kate Folb at 818/262-9668 or KateTV@aol.com—Editor

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UNDERSTANDING YOUTH POPULAR CULTURE AND THE HIP-HOP INFLUENCE

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America's youth represent a distinct group with their own unique popular culture—a culture within which Hip-Hop recurrently permeates.

Despite adult attitudes (both positive and negative) about youth culture, we know we must have a working knowledge of this culture that engulfs and contextualizes our young people's lives if we are to effectively communicate with them. It is important to understand the information that they process. The rules of social marketing are pertinent and suggest that effective communication begins with knowing your target audience.

Collectively, youth in America represent a powerful movement that transcends race, ethnicity, gender, and social or economic status. America's youth are a walking depiction of their worldview that is externally manifested through clothing, art, attitude, style, movement, music, video, television, film, language, and the World Wide Web.

Youth are big business, and everyone is struggling for their attention: advertisers; large and small businesses; media conglomerates; the sports, fashion, and entertainment industries; faith communities; health arenas; schools; community-based organizations; families; and even local, state, and federal governments.

Many of America's youth need adult assistance, nurturing, supervision, and resources because they are at-risk for making negative and harmful behavioral choices. Those entities that will succeed in reaching these young people with their messages or products are those who are the most culturally competent in youth popular culture and who use this knowledge and experience as a foundation for their education and information dissemination outreach strategies.

The need for cultural competence in understanding and appreciating racial and ethnic diversity is well recognized in corporate, community, and governmental arenas. The influx of international racial and ethnic groups over the past 20 years has made it necessary for America to develop communication efforts that are targeted, authentic, culturally sensitive, and designed to speak appropriately to cultural nuances.

Yet, America has not voiced the same urgency in understanding the culture of youth. It is time that we understand that culture is not limited to race, ethnicity, gender, or sexuality. Programs targeting youth *must* demonstrate

a sensitivity to and an understanding of young people and their design for living and interpreting their environment.

By examining youth culture, we can form a guide for predicting behavioral choices and for determining the strategies necessary to change and influence those choices.

YOUTH POPULAR CULTURE COMPETENCE

Youth popular culture is simply defined as that which is “in,” contemporary, and has the stamp of approval of young people. It is that which has mass appeal; it is nonlinear and eclectic. The culture dictates what become the shared norms that provide young people “with a deep sense of belonging and often with a strong preference for behaving in certain ways.”¹ It is “psycho-socio-cultural” in that its primary elements involve the reciprocal interaction of individual, social, and cultural forces.

Youth popular culture has aspects that cross racial, ethnic, and geographical boundaries, and while all youth do not behave or think in the exact same ways, many similarities suggest that the vast majority of adolescents fit somewhere within the mainstream of an American youth popular culture. How youth spend their time; what they value; their attitudes, styles, and behaviors; their concerns; and how they interact with mass mediated messages, their peers, and society-at-large constitute youth popular culture.

“Because our mass popular culture is the most influential in the world;”² youth, as the drivers of the culture, are very powerful. While some scholars maintain that today's youth are extremely diverse in terms of their culture (whether they be heroes, nerds, urban martyrs, or valley girls),³ we contend that the strength of youth popular culture today is in what young people have in common with each other. The challenge for health professionals, educators, and others who intend to effectively communicate with youth is to get a good read on what is happening within this culture and to recognize the commonalities. The key, again, is to become and/or remain youth popular culture competent.

The U. S. Department of Health and Human Services' Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP) defines cultural competence as:

A set of academic and interpersonal skills that allow

individuals to increase their understanding and appreciation of cultural differences and similarities within, among, and between groups. This requires a willingness and ability to draw on community-based values, traditions, and customs and to work with knowledgeable persons of and from the community in developing focused interventions, communications, and other supports.⁴

CSAP stresses the importance of cultural competence for effectively maximizing substance abuse prevention and intervention efforts. The point is that health professionals, educators, and anyone else targeting youth must honestly address the following questions:

- “How well do I really know the target audience?”
- “How much do I really know about their racial, ethnic, and adolescent culture?”
- “How much do I really understand about their worldview and how they interact within society?”
- “How much do I really know about how young people use media?”
- “How important is it for me to be culturally competent about youth popular culture?”
- “Do I base my responses on newly obtained information about today’s youth culture, or do I make judgments based on speculation or the opinions of others and/or media?”

Once these questions are addressed, the knowledge, understanding, and appreciation gaps must be filled. The related issues must be explored by taking the most appropriate actions (based on the definition), which will lead to increased cultural competence. The result would be more effective communication with youth populations because health professionals and educators would be more cognizant of their psycho-socio-cultural realities. Communication would be more directly targeted.

A 17-year-old female living in an urban area of Washington, DC, describes effective communication from her perspective. She states:

Sometimes when young people are being criticized, they get so angry [that] they’re not actually listening to what these people have to say. The older generation is not communicating because they’re being so critical without really looking and listening. If they would just listen to what matters to us, they might be able to communicate better. We’re not that bad. But the younger people have to check themselves too and listen to what the older generation is saying. They do know a lot. Everybody has to listen to each other. Maybe then we’ll get on the same page.

We at the Institute maintain that it is imperative for those who work with youth to seriously explore and con-

sider the potential effectiveness of using what we call youth popular culture’s inherent and associated “formal features,” contexts, and appropriate content for effective communication. We contend that it is important to move beyond society’s and professionals’ negative associations with the culture and to explicate how its characteristics and attributes can best be utilized in the interest of those who are captivated by it on a daily basis. At the same time, we know we must clarify that we are not implying that anyone should give his or her blessing to all aspects of youth popular culture or that anyone should encourage an unexamined conformism by young people.

THE FORMAL FEATURES

Formal features are those elements that give communicative strength to messages and are usually discussed within the context of visual media.⁵ The formal features of youth popular culture, for purposes of this article, include elements and characteristics that can be manifested through all media and personal communication.

The role that youth popular culture’s formal features play in the everyday lives of youth suggests them as integral factors of youth popular culture. Leading contemporary anthropologist C. P. Kottack discusses the “features” of popular culture, indicating that these “features are sometimes regarded as trivial and unworthy of serious study.”⁶ We beg to differ, as does Kottack, and contend that ideology, predilection, belief, language, and formal features (which to some degree encompass the other cultural aspects) constitute youth culture—which influences the choices youth make.

The features allow for the shaping and customizing of messages and materials that target youth and that illustrate the creative relationship between distinct styles of form and content. The formal features of youth popular culture provide resourceful pathways for effective *and* affective communication with target audiences. Examples of these formal features include:

- bold
- “rhythm” driven
- eclectic
- colors
- urban
- non-governmental
- “popular music” driven
- “attitude” driven
- humorous
- power-to-the-youth centered
- family connected
- spiritual

- celebrity-icon driven
- non-linear
- jargon specific
- dance
- “sports” focused
- to the point
- technological
- “keeping it real” driven
- full of verve
- “posse” driven

The formal features of youth popular culture are multi-directional, eclectic, familiar, and nontraditional (compared to European standards of traditional culture, which may be described as linear, hierarchical, standardized, individualistic, and rule-oriented).

The use of these features in designing pro-health and education messages would make a youth’s cognitive processing and sanctioning of these messages more likely because of the features’ cultural appropriateness and relation to a youth’s already existing mental frameworks of prototypical experiences (schemata).

Youth will respond positively to information couched within a cultural context that genuinely acknowledges their worldviews. Knowledge of youth popular culture’s formal features will assist educators and health professionals:

- in more creatively facilitating their students’ learning process
- in their efforts to develop and design messages targeting youth
- in their efforts to get youth interested about sexuality education and living healthy lifestyles
- in their efforts to effectively communicate using a variety of formats
- in enhancing their cultural competence as it relates to youth as a cultural group

HIP-HOP CULTURE

Hip-Hop culture is America’s dominant youth popular culture today. This is the reason why adults who target youth must be clear about it. Hip-Hop is a cultural phenomenon in the American mainstream. Noted writer of popular music culture, Nelson George, suggests that we all exist in what can legitimately be called a “Hip-Hop America.”⁷ While some may argue that other youth cultures (e.g., Rock and Punk youth culture) are just as pervasive in the lives of youth, we profess that the masses of young people are engulfed in selected aspects of Hip-Hop and that other

popular youth cultures have embraced its vastness, thereby creating an interchange of styles for popularity.

Hip-Hop’s legacy lies in the old and ancient traditions of African people,⁸ however, its contemporary status has evolved from a subterranean Bronx NY expression in the early 1970s to a profitable commodity worldwide. The origin of what is now contemporary Hip-Hop lies in the backyards, basements, and communities of inner-city Black and Hispanic/Latino youth.

The name Hip-Hop also has a distinct origin. According to P. T. Perkins⁹ and the nationally and internationally acclaimed founder of the “Universal Zulu Nation Movement” and “Godfather of Hip-Hop and Rap” Afrika Bambaataa:

The term Hip-Hop was taken out of verses that Love Bug Starski used to say “to the Hip-Hop you don’t stop” and it was the Zulu Nation that took it and named the whole culture Hip-Hop. Hip-Hop is something that’s the whole culture, the whole picture of the movement which is the break dancing, the graffiti art, the rapping, the scratching, the deejaying, the style of dress, the lyrics, the way you look, the walk, it’s all this combined...the attitude.¹⁰

Hip-Hop is an “all encompassing” culture for many of America’s youth. It includes forces that affect and influence the choices these youth make in their everyday lives. Hip-Hop represents a strong and unified youth consciousness; it is a powerful and pervasive movement among youth worldwide. Youth, regardless of who they are or where they come from, very likely will identify with at least some aspect of Hip-Hop culture.

Today, the formal features of Hip-Hop are successfully used to communicate a myriad of messages and to sell products which profitably, ethically, and unethically target the masses of young people. The understanding of Hip-Hop and its influence within popular culture has proven to be very effective for influencing behavioral choices and drawing the attention of young people to various subject areas. An exploration of Hip-Hop music (particularly Rap music) will show that youth of various races and ethnic groups are purchasing the music to significant degrees. Research indicates that white American teens purchase Rap in larger numbers than do their African-American counterparts. “More than 70 percent of Hip-Hop albums are purchased by Whites,”¹¹ all of whom contribute to the fact that the music is now a billion dollar industry.¹²

Rap music continues to lead the way in album sales growth when compared to other music genres (e.g., R & B, Country, Alternative). According to Byran Turner, president and CEO of SoundScan:

Rap album sales shot up 32 percent in just 12 months, breaking the 80 million-album-a-year mark for the

first time. That jump makes for the largest single-year gain by any genre since SoundScan began collecting sales data eight years ago.¹³

Hirschorn, past editor of *Spin* music magazine, compares Hip-Hop and rock music sales data. He supports the argument that “the energy now days is in Hip-Hop” and contends that:

When Hip-Hop albums as strong as Lauryn Hill’s or Outcast’s sell as well as they did, it’s hard to argue about the quality. The question is whether rock is going to lose a whole generation of young listeners, who are naturally gravitating to Hip-Hop now.¹⁴

Hip-Hop’s pervasive influence within the fashion, film, television, and dot.com industries clearly show the culture as one of choice for many of America’s youth. It is a culture that must not be ignored because of its mainstay status within the American mainstream. It is a culture whose elements *must* be explored as a useful contextual backdrop for effective communication. (See “Reaching the Hip-Hop Generation with ‘Pro-Social’ Behavior Messages” in the June–July 1999 issue of the *SIECUS Report*.)

CULTURAL COMPETENCY IN THE CLASSROOM

Many of America’s educators, regardless of their subject area, still fail to consider culture when determining their teaching methodologies and exploring the best ways to

communicate with and to their students.

Consequently, there is an evident lack of cultural responsiveness, relevance, and significance in the classroom environment, and too many students remain uninterested and lack the motivation required to process important information.

Those educators who continue to conduct classroom “business as usual”—failing to realize that “traditional approaches to pedagogy have tended to be rigid and uncreative [and that] they are far from exhausting the wonderful possibilities for teaching and learning”¹⁵—must work hard to take the classroom experience to higher heights by increasing their youth popular culture competence and, therefore, creativity. As a result, their relationships with students will be enhanced; and students will more readily enjoy their learning experience.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Today’s youth popular culture has evolved into a phenomenon much different from what it was 40 years ago.

Unlike the days of *Ozzie & Harriet*, when youth listened to one popular radio station and looked forward to the annual school dance, many of today’s youth are taking risqué spring breaks at summer resorts; going to clubs that cater to adult audiences; participating in gang-related activities; surfing the Net; experiencing peer pressure to use drugs and to have sexual relationships; choosing from over 100 television channels and at least four popular radio stations;

HOW TO BECOME HIP-HOP/YOUTH POPULAR CULTURE COMPETENT

- Read and/or view print and electronically produced youth popular culture magazines such as *The Source*, *Launch*, *VIBE*, *Rap Pages*, *Rolling Stone*, *Seventeen*
- Go to movies targeted to youth
- Download the lyrics of popular rap songs from the World Wide Web and study them
- Surf the World Wide Web and review the over 100 Web sites catering to the Hip-Hop culture
- Ask your students to provide you with information related to youth popular culture
- Carefully listen to your students or other youth as much as possible
- Talk with youngsters from all types of backgrounds
- Observe cable and network television programs that target youth in their music, talk show, magazine-format, and sitcom programming (such as MTV, BET, WB, and UPN)
- Research and then read the very limited but available scholarly literature related to youth popular culture
- Watch music videos
- Listen to all types of popular music
- Consult with youth music experts (the vast majority of young people) and then purchase enhanced music CDs to get inside information on the artists and their perspectives on various issues.
- Start your own list of youth popular culture formal features and how they might be used for effective communication
- Enlist youth to assist you in determining the best ways to communicate with their peers

having direct access to images of pornography, violence, and drug-use live and via broadcast media; and much more.

Given these realities, and in order to stimulate critical thinking, influence attitudes and behaviors, and maintain the attention, curiosity, and interest of today's young generation, we need a revolution in the way that health and education-related information and messages are designed and delivered. We must supplement our traditional communication strategies with ones that are more sensitive to the worldviews of our youth.

Hip-Hop culture can be convincingly argued to be the leading force within youth popular culture nationwide. It is the pipeline for effectively communicating to and with young people. The pipeline connects to the mental, social, and cultural tenets of the vast majority of America's youth. As legendary rapper, activist, and author Chuck D puts it: for many young people Hip-Hop is their CNN.

It is my hope that this article will stimulate professional dialogue around the related issues and that all of us will focus even more thoroughly on increasing our youth popular culture competence in an effort to enhance and improve our relationships and communication targeting this very vulnerable population.

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MOVIE MOM AUTHOR SAYS: LISTEN AND THEN TALK

It is often easier for parents to talk to their children about what is happening on the screen than what is happening in their lives.

Neil Minow, the author of *The Movie Mom's Guide to Family Movies*, says parents should take advantage of this opportunity to talk about sexuality-related issues.

She suggests that parents should routinely ask their children to select television programs or movies to watch as a family. Parents should watch these programs without criticism. As the stories progress, she says, young people will likely begin talking about how they feel. Parents should listen and then discuss their own values and their views with their children.

"As powerful as movie messages are," she says, "they cannot compete with the real life models around young people, as long as parents are there to make sure they get the message."

For more information on Minow and her book, check her Web site at <http://www.moviemom.com>.

UNDERSTANDING HIP-HOP CULTURE AND KEEPING IT REAL

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Hip-Hop culture hits harder than Mark McGuire or Sammy Sosa taking little league pitches “blind-folded” in the Bronx. There is no other medium that evokes more passion or emotion. It is a modern day refuge where diverse young people mingle and discuss what is really going on in their communities and in America.

For many young people—regardless of race, color, or economic standing—Hip-Hop culture is the voice of their often misunderstood and misinterpreted generation—a voice that, up until now, was generally ignored.

All hope of reaching today’s youth must begin with a basic understanding of the features that make up Hip-Hop. There is not a single topic of debate or civil discussion that Hip-Hop has not yet touched upon—from dealing with issues of sexuality to understanding issues of social justice. Hip-Hop culture strikes a nerve in all who survey it.

INTERGENERATIONAL UNDERSTANDING

Though educators have had tremendous success over the years in getting the word out to young people about positive decision-making, they still need to make a concerted effort to level intergenerational understanding.

Today’s young people have (arguably) experienced more social and psychological barriers in a relatively shorter period of life than older generations. Twenty to thirty years ago, some of these barriers (such as HIV and AIDS) were either nonexistent or were not as visible. Young people are asking for, and need, life-skills training based within a framework that reflects the society in which they live. This framework must include the Hip-Hop world where music, fashion, political activism, spirituality, and respect for individuality are key interactive components to their surviving everyday confrontations.

Sexuality educators interested in communicating with young people must learn to shift the attitudinal constructs which have traditionally stood in the way of their understanding Hip-Hop as a means of developing and sustaining relevant discussions targeting this generation.

KEEPING IT REAL

Just as there are formal features that govern today’s youth culture, there are also principles of exploration to which young people favorably respond when an older person approaches

them on a non-traditional playing field. While dialogue is certainly the key component to understanding thought patterns, processes, and decision-making techniques among these young people, sexuality educators need to make certain that their interactions with youth people are authentic, that they show respect, that they value the culture, that they include listening, and that they are open to learning.

Be authentic. Perhaps the main principle driving Hip-Hop culture is authenticity. Each member of the culture—male and female alike—feels that he or she represents an unyielding authenticity in dress, language, and personal tastes that aligns, yet also separates, them from their counterparts.

It is important that educators spawn a trusting relationship where they can probe, analyze, and debate with young people, while presenting a format that is not only analytical but also authentic in design. If they decide to use Hip-Hop music as a starting point, they should begin by examining popular song lyrics, looking at a video with sexual overtones, or asking the young people to creatively express themselves through the spoken word accompanied by acoustical beats.

This interaction will be completely interactive and different from the usual lecture-and-listen format applied to most presentations. Educators will find that the more authentic their knowledge and understanding of the youth popular culture the easier their discussion will flow into other realms of positive social prevention.

In the process, they will excite and energize these young people because they will be using ideologies with which the youth are familiar. Participation will be honest but more importantly, educators will reveal an authenticity about their efforts to help young people examine positive living and positive decision-making.

Show respect. It is often hard for people unattached to the Hip-Hop culture to respect it. If educators truly wish to help youth, they should non-critically examine and study the culture in an effort to understand and respect it. Their initial respect for the culture will allow their young audience to respect them and the information they have prepared. As a result, the young people will revere them, not fear them.

Value the culture. No matter how tough or rugged their exterior, young people are truly fragile, gentle beings on the inside. Whether they realize it or not, they look to adults for

guidance, stability, and direction as they grow. Thus, it is important that adults value their opinions, attitudes, and perceptions when they talk with them. Because of basic humanistic and generational bias, there is a tendency to immediately disregard youthful commentaries. When youth culture is sincerely valued, youth will share their ideals and cultural insight more readily and will feel less threatened and restricted in their response to inquiries. Before educators can begin to help young people re-think or re-develop their behaviors, they must value and validate young people's views.

Listen. To truly or efficiently make headway in forging change among youth, a person must always listen. Often easier said than done, the art of listening is one that requires educators to step down from the "soapbox" and become more passive as they communicate.

Within Hip-Hop culture, young people listen intently. However, educators are charged with the responsibility to help young people not only listen but also to "hear" messages. In order to better equip young people with listening skills, educators have to begin by tuning into the youth culture themselves.

I am not saying that they have to become avid Hip-Hop fans, but I am saying that they must start by showing interest: by asking them which artists they listen to (both mainstream and underground), by asking them to borrow some tapes or CDs, and by reading related magazine interviews about artists concerned with social change, youth, and positive decision-making.

When educators open lines of communication and listen, they will find that young people will listen, too. When they study the culture (through observation, music, print, and television), they will begin to "listen to" and "hear" the voice young people have been using to cry out for years. Once they begin listening to youth, their music, and their ideals, they will clear up their own perceptions and open the door to generational optimism.

Learn. The last—and perhaps most vital—principle to engage youth culture is to be constantly in the learning mode. Educators will learn from the discussions they have

with youth. They will learn to accept their truth. They will learn not to judge. They will learn to be open-minded and non-traditional in reaching out. They will learn from the interactions youth have among peers. They will learn how to navigate into the young person's world, and in turn they will have the young person navigate into theirs. They will learn to celebrate differences while also learning the things that will bring the generations closer to "common ground." They will learn that young people need and want our help. They will learn about Hip-Hop literature, the language, and the culturally-relevant materials. Most importantly, they will learn authenticity, respect, value, and the art of listening.

CONCLUSION

Hip-Hop culture is a vast and ever-changing entity. More than just a phenomenon, it is an international vehicle of communication.

Sexuality educators often ask: "Where should I start?" They should begin by challenging themselves (including their agency and its motives) in prevention efforts. They should do their "Hip-Hop homework" and become conscious of the current trends and attitudes prevalent among youth. They should search the Web, read magazines, and consult the "experts" (the young people themselves).

Isolated paradigms that preach "just say no" are simply not responsive to young people's realities. Once educators become knowledgeable about this culture (just as marketers have), they will realize the tremendous potential to successfully use the culture's features to market social commodities such as the importance of making healthy lifestyle choices, the importance of knowing one's self, and the importance of identifying and avoiding risky situations which lead to risky behavior.

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SIECUS WEB SITE HAS SECTION FOR TEENS

SIECUS's Web site (www.siecus.org) has a section titled "For Teens" that provides a starting point for young people to learn about sexuality issues.

Topics include "What Is Sexuality?," "Teen's Sexual Rights," "Tips for Talking About Sexuality," "What Is Sexual Orientation?," "Sexual Choices," "Feeling Good Means Feeling Safe," "How Do I Know If I'm Ready for Sex?," "How Are HIV & STDs Spread?," "Safer Sex," "Sexual Abuse," "Hotlines," "Web Sites for More Information," "Books for Teens," and "Fact Sheets on Teens and Sexuality."

WEB SITES FOR ADOLESCENTS ON SEXUALITY-RELATED ISSUES

There are many Web sites on the Internet that provide sexuality information to adolescents. This list consists of sites that provide age-appropriate, unbiased sexuality information. For additional sites, visit www.siecus.org and click on “Other Organizations.”

Coalition for Positive Sexuality includes sexuality information in both English and Spanish for teens who are sexually active or who are thinking about becoming sexually active. It provides a forum for teens to chat,* to find information on sexuality issues, or to ask questions of sexuality experts.
www.positive.org

For Teens, sponsored by SIECUS, is a starting place for teens to learn about sexuality issues. It includes information about communication, abstinence, sexual involvement, safer sex, sexual abuse, resources, and links.
www.siecus.org

Go Ask Alice!, developed and maintained by Columbia University’s Health Education Program, uses a question-and-answer format to provide information on relationships; sexuality; sexual health; emotional health and fitness; nutrition; alcohol; nicotine and other drugs; and general health. Visitors can search the database or ask anonymous questions.
www.goaskalice.columbia.edu

guRL is committed to discussing issues that affect the lives of girls 13 years and older. The site helps girls with a wide range of experiences and interests. It warns visitors they might find frank information. It also offers chats,* posting boards, pen-pal lists, and homepage listings.
www.gurl.com

It’s Your (Sex) Life, a project of The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, provides information about pregnancy, contraception, sexually transmitted diseases, and related issues.
www.itsyoursexlife.com

Iwannaknow, sponsored by the American Social Health Association, provides a safe and fun place for teenagers to learn about sexual health. The site includes a chat room* and games related to sexual health services. It also provides guidance for parents.
www.iwannaknow.org

Scarleteen offers two sexuality Web sites—*Pinkslip* for girls and *Boyfriend!* for guys—targeted to adolescents 14 to 18

years old. Both provide advice and articles about sexuality. Both also provide links and information for parents. In addition, *Pinkslip* provides a “Rant” section which links to message boards* on a site called chickclick.com.
www.scarleteen.com/pink and www.scarleteen.com/boyfriend

Sex Etc., sponsored by The Network For Family Life Education, includes articles on a variety of sexuality topics as well as an online newsletter, advice, message boards,* resources, links, and information for parents.
www.sexetc.org

Sex Sense, sponsored by Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania, provides sexuality advice and quizzes for and by teens.
www.ppsp.org/tpe.html

Sextalk, sponsored by Planned Parenthood of Tompkins County (PPTC), NY, includes information on safer sex, self exams, and sexual orientation. It also provides links.
www.sextalk.org

Teen Advice Online (TAO) provides information on teenage problems through a worldwide network of peers 13 years and older. It also includes articles, a chat room*, and sexuality-related topics such as dating, relationships, gender, and friendships. Interested teens can apply to become a TAO counselor.
www.teenadvice.org

Teen Scene, part of the Advocates for Youth Web site, includes a chat area,* articles, a link to “Do Something” (a national nonprofit that inspires young people to believe that change is possible), and a link to the Peer Education Web ring.
www.advocatesforyouth.org
www.teenscene.com

Teenwire, sponsored by Planned Parenthood Federation of America, provides sexuality and sexual health information. It also encourages teens to contribute their opinions and ideas in certain areas. It includes advice, articles, polls, clinic information, and a ’zine for teens by teens.
www.teenwire.com

**Message boards and chat rooms are generally unsupervised and can contain inaccurate information. Parents or caregivers should supervise young teens using these features.*

PUBLIC POLICY UPDATE MORE FEDERAL FUNDS TARGETED FOR ABSTINENCE-ONLY-UNTIL-MARRIAGE PROGRAMS

William Smith

SIECUS Director of Public Policy

In 1996, without adequate discussion or debate, the federal government attached a provision to a popular welfare reform law that established a federal entitlement program for abstinence-only-until-marriage education.

This entitlement program, Section 510(b) of the Social Security Act, funneled \$50 million per year for five years into the states. Because the program was an entitlement, no debate was needed over the next five years for the federal government to release the dollars to the states.

REAUTHORIZATION APPROACHES

With reauthorization of this law a little more than a year away, conservative members of the U.S. Congress are already jockeying into position to dramatically increase the level of financial commitment by the federal government to the promotion of abstinence-only-until-marriage programs.

Last November, U.S. Representative Ernest Istook (R-OK), an ardent opponent of comprehensive sexuality education, family planning, and reproductive rights, began a process that successfully secured an additional \$20 million for abstinence-only-until-marriage programs for fiscal year 2001. These dollars are available to programs that conform to the strict eight-point definition of abstinence-only-until-marriage education put forth in the welfare reform law, which, among other things, requires programs to teach “that sexual activity outside of the context of marriage is likely to have harmful psychological and physical effects.”

A fundamental difference from this appropriation compared with the dollars currently available under welfare reform is that this money will be awarded competitively to programs and not given to states based on a formula relating to population. This provision was particularly important to conservative lawmakers like Rep. Istook, many of whom are displeased with the way a number of states have used the abstinence-only-until-marriage dollars available under welfare reform. For example, they take exception to the use of these dollars for media campaigns as well as youth development and after-school programs.

LARGER PROGRAM ON HORIZON?

This May, during the regular appropriations cycle for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Rep. Istook came back for an additional \$30 million for fiscal

year 2002. This advance funding, while not uncommon, results in a considerable increase in federal funding for abstinence-only-until-marriage programs. In fiscal year 2001, the year in which reauthorization of the dollars under welfare reform will take place, the federal government will be allocating \$70 million. With such a significant investment, voting against it is all the more problematic for lawmakers

Though the present version of the U.S. Senate’s appropriations bill does not include this advance funding, sources close to the Senate subcommittee dealing with the bill have recently indicated that Rep. Istook will get the funding because no one—neither Republicans nor Democrats—wants a fight over this issue.

Also troublesome is that Rep. Istook earlier indicated that he wanted to include *charitable choice* language for the new funding for abstinence-only-until-marriage programs. This language, included in the overall welfare reform bill but excluded from the 510(b) funding, would allow churches, houses of worship, and other pervasively sectarian organizations to apply for the competitive grants.

Creating the obvious constitutional issues around church/state separation, organizations like the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and People for the American Way (PFAW) have also enumerated other significant landmines such as the possibility of employment discrimination arising from the faith beliefs of individual entities providing services and the fact that there are no safeguards that those receiving such education would not be subject to religious worship or instruction once in the funded program.

While opponents of *charitable choice* have devised a number of legislative avenues to mitigate its impact, it nonetheless continues to enjoy a high tide of popularity, and not just among conservative Republicans. Though in the end, *charitable choice* language was excluded from the new funding, this issue will likely rear its head again during the reauthorization of Section 510(b) funding.

NO SIGNIFICANT EVALUATIONS

By all indications, Rep. Istook is assembling the pieces for what will certainly be a larger and emboldened federal abstinence-only-until-marriage program. Yet, there remains no real and significant attempt to evaluate these programs in order to determine their effectiveness.

According to several prominent researchers in this area, at least 10 percent of a program's total funding is required to measure the behavioral impact of any program. Neither the 510(b) program nor Rep. Istook's competitive grants program even approaches a semblance of true commitment to evaluation. The 510(b) program, for example, originally contained no evaluation dollars, but currently funds an ongoing evaluation with less than 3.5 percent of the overall investment. This is the same amount Rep. Istook sets aside for evaluation of the newly funded program.

With no real commitment to evaluating abstinence-only-until-marriage programs in the current Congress, coupled with numerous reputable, peer-reviewed studies that show abstinence-only-until-marriage programs have no positive behavioral impact in delaying sexual intercourse, it is clear that ideology—and not science—is guiding the policy agenda in sexuality education.

A DEBATE ON THE ISSUE?

Convincing lawmakers to reign in abstinence-only-until-marriage funding is a challenge in the current political context. Even supportive members of Congress fear that a vote against abstinence-only-until-marriage will be construed as a vote for promiscuity—not a popular position in an election year. Further, both presidential contenders have come out on the side of abstinence, with Texas Governor George W. Bush declaring his administration would “elevate abstinence education from an afterthought to an urgent priority.”

The legislative battle is an uphill one, but it also presents an opportunity. Because of the way all of this past legislation was passed—mostly by negotiation—there has yet to be a real debate on the federal government's role in sexuality education. The next year provides the opportunity to begin that debate and educate policymakers about the destructive censorship of abstinence-only-until-marriage programs.

NATIONAL CAMPAIGN TO PREVENT TEEN PREGNANCY WORKS WITH BROADCAST, PRINT MEDIA

The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy has worked with a number of media partners, both in print and broadcast, to help get facts and information about preventing teen pregnancy to young people and parents.

Among its accomplishments:

- **PSA After Get Real Episode.** Actress Anne Hathaway, who portrays Megan on Fox's *Get Real*, appeared in a PSA after one of the program's episodes to encourage teens either to not have sexual relations or to protect themselves every time. The PSA directed teens to the National Campaign's Web site for more information.
- **Advertisement in Teen People.** Basketball star Grant Hill reached out to young people in an advertisement in *Teen People* that promoted the National Campaign's message: “At 15 you should be pushing your game. Not a stroller.”

- **Online Chat with People Magazine.** *People Magazine* held an online chat with the National Campaign about teen pregnancy after its cover story on “Babies Having Babies.”
- **One Life to Live Educational Video.** The ABC Television soap opera *One Life to Live* worked with the National Campaign on an education video based on its teen pregnancy story line. The video and study guide were distributed to 13,000 schools and youth groups.
- **Survey with People En Español.** The magazine examined the Hispanic community's perceptions and attitudes about teen pregnancy. In conjunction with the Campaign, the findings were disseminated nationwide, through the media and community groups.

For more information, contact the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, 1776 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Suite 200, Washington, DC 20036. Phone: 202/478-8500. Web site: www.teenpregnancy.org.

FACT SHEET

PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR SEXUALITY EDUCATION

The vast majority of Americans support sexuality education and believe that young people should be given information to protect themselves from unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

Even though they believe that abstinence should be a topic in sexuality education, they reject abstinence-only-until marriage education that denies young people information about contraception and condoms.

The statistics in this *Fact Sheet* on *Public Support for Sexuality Education* will help advocates for comprehensive sexuality education programs work to ensure that public policies keep pace with the desires of the American people.

SUPPORT FOR TEACHING SEXUALITY EDUCATION

- 93 percent of Americans support the teaching of sexuality education to high school age students, and 84 percent support sexuality education for middle/junior high school age students.¹
- 87 percent of Americans favor including sexuality education in the public high schools.²
- 86 percent of registered voters favor sexuality education for teenagers in public schools.³
- 85 percent of adults agree that sexuality education should be taught in the public schools.⁴
- 66 percent of registered voters are in favor of a proposal to increase efforts to provide age-appropriate sexuality education in the public elementary schools.⁵
- About four in 10 Americans think sexuality education should be required for all students, regardless of their parents' wishes, with 48 percent of African-American parents holding this view.⁶
- 54 percent of adults believe that eliminating sexuality education in schools would lead to more teenage pregnancies.⁷
- 89 percent of Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) presidents in North Carolina agree that family life education should be taught in public schools.⁸
- 88 percent of adults in California support teaching age-appropriate sexuality education in schools.⁹
- 58 percent of principals say that parents are "very supportive" and 36 percent say that parents are "somewhat supportive" of their school's sexuality education program.¹⁰

- 72 percent of principals say that the school board or school administrators are "very supportive" and 23 percent say that the school board or school administrators are "somewhat supportive" of their school's sexuality education program.¹¹
- 69 percent of principals say that teachers are "very supportive" and 28 percent say that teachers are "somewhat supportive" of their school's sexuality education program.¹²
- 55 percent of principals say that students are "very supportive" and 37 percent say that students are "somewhat supportive" of their school's sexuality education program.¹³
- 32 percent of principals say that religious leaders are "very supportive" and 38 percent say that religious leaders are "somewhat supportive" of their school's sexuality education program.¹⁴
- When asked if politicians are supportive of their school's sexuality education program, 21 percent of principals say that politicians are "very supportive," 29 percent say that politicians are "somewhat supportive," and 39 percent say that they "don't know."¹⁵
- 33 percent of principals say that community members are "very supportive" and 41 percent say that community members are "somewhat supportive" of their school's sexuality education program.¹⁶

SUPPORT FOR CONTENT

When adults were asked their views on the appropriate grade to teach specific subjects in sexuality education programs. The results were:

	7-8 Grades	9-10 Grades	11-12 Grades
Puberty	82%	94%	96%
Abstinence	79	91	95
HIV/AIDS	76	92	96
STDs	74	91	96
Love/Dating	63	86	92
Contraception/ Birth control	59	84	91
Condoms	58	82	90
Sexual Orientation	56	76	85
Abortion	40	68	79 ¹⁷

- If sexuality education is taught in high schools, 94 percent of Americans think it should include the basic facts of human reproduction; 92 percent think it should tell young people who are sexually active to use protection, such as condoms, to prevent pregnancy and disease; 74 percent think sexuality education should discuss knowing when you are ready to have sexual relations; 74 percent think it should include how to talk about sexual intercourse with a partner; 68 percent think it should tell young people not to have sexual intercourse before marriage.¹⁸
- When asked to name the topics to include in a high school sexuality education program, Americans said: STDs (92 percent), AIDS (92 percent), biology of reproduction (90 percent), teen pregnancy (89 percent), birth control (87 percent), premarital sexual relations (77 percent), nature of sexual intercourse (72 percent), abortion (70 percent), and homosexuality (65 percent).¹⁹
- Overwhelming majorities of Americans support the schools' role in teaching the biology of sexual reproduction and pregnancy. 95 percent say this is an appropriate area for public schools, and 78 percent would start this before high school.²⁰
- 97 percent of Americans say schools should teach students about the dangers of STDs, including AIDS, with 86 percent wanting this to begin before high school, 51 percent in junior high school, and 35 percent in elementary school.²¹
- 96 percent of all Americans support providing AIDS information in high schools.²²
- 97 percent of parents support providing AIDS information in high schools.²³
- 55 percent of voters agree with supporters who emphasize the importance of providing scientific information to young people regarding sexuality and health issues.²⁴
- 89 percent of Americans believe that it is important for young people to have information about contraception and prevention of STDs and that sexuality education programs should focus on how to avoid unintended pregnancies and STDs, including HIV and AIDS, since they are such pressing problems in America today.²⁵
- 83 percent of adults believe that, whether or not young people are sexually active, they should receive information to protect themselves from unplanned pregnancies and STDs.²⁶
- 81 percent of adults think sexuality education courses should teach about abstinence and give teens enough information to help them prevent unplanned pregnancies and the spread of STDs if they do decide to have intercourse.²⁷
- 56 percent of Americans think AIDS education should be required with 71 percent of African-American parents backing this approach.²⁸

- 51 percent of Americans support allowing schools to supply students with phone numbers of gay support groups.²⁹
- 56 percent of Americans feel “using models of nude men and women to demonstrate the correct use of condoms and diaphragms” is appropriate.³⁰

CALIFORNIA

- The majority (52 percent) of adults in California believe that age-appropriate sexuality education should begin by the sixth grade.³¹
- When adults in California were asked about the content of sexuality education in high schools, 99 percent said discussions should include information on AIDS and other STDs, 97 percent said discussions should include information on human reproduction, and 85 percent support high schools discussions with teens about how to talk about sexuality with a partner.³²
- 84 percent of adults in California believe young people should receive specific instruction about preventing pregnancy and STDs.³³
- 93 percent of adults in California believe sexually active teens should be encouraged in school-based sexuality education courses to use protection to prevent pregnancy and STDs.³⁴

INDIANA

- Adults in Indiana were asked if Indiana public high schools should educate teenagers about how to use condoms to prevent the spread of HIV. 50.1 percent strongly agree, 25.3 percent somewhat agree.³⁵

NORTH CAROLINA

- 91 percent of PTA presidents in North Carolina support instruction about abstinence and the use of condoms and birth control methods in the family life education curriculum.³⁶
- PTA presidents in North Carolina believe that topics related to family, communication, and child and sexual abuse should be introduced in grades K-3.³⁷
- PTA presidents in North Carolina believe that topics related to puberty, reproductive system, hygiene, pregnancy, STDs, and life management skills should be introduced in grades 4 and 5.³⁸
- PTA presidents in North Carolina believe that topics related to sexual behavior, including contraception and preventing STDs, should be introduced in grades 6 to 8.³⁹
- PTA presidents in North Carolina believe that topics related to marriage, prenatal care, and parenting should be introduced in grades 9 to 12.⁴⁰

- More than 82 percent of PTA presidents in North Carolina agree that students should learn positive and negative aspects of abortion, adoption, single parenting, and married parenting.⁴¹

SEXUALITY EDUCATION IN THE HOME

- 27 percent of registered voters agree that sexuality education belongs in the home and should be taught in accordance with parents' own values.⁴²
- 65 percent of adults in California say that encouraging parents to talk openly about sexuality and birth control with their children would be "extremely effective" in reducing teen pregnancy.⁴³

SUPPORT FOR CONDOM AVAILABILITY

- 53 percent of all Americans think that school personnel, such as nurses and counselors, should make condoms available to sexually active young people.⁴⁴
- 57 percent of adults think that high school health clinics should provide young people with condoms and other forms of birth control if students ask for them.⁴⁵
- 55 percent of Americans believe it is appropriate for schools to distribute condoms to students.⁴⁶
- 21 percent of Americans support making condoms available to middle school students, and 55 percent would allow high schools to distribute condoms.⁴⁷

INDIANA

- Adults in Indiana were asked if condoms should be made available to teenagers in the Indiana public schools without parental permission. 26.7 percent strongly agree and 27.1 percent somewhat agree.⁴⁸
- Of adults residing in Indiana, 36 percent strongly agree and 25.9 percent somewhat agree that the three major television networks should air commercials about condoms as one way to help prevent the spread of HIV.⁴⁹
- Of adults in Indiana, 48.8 percent strongly agree and 25.9 percent somewhat agree that the federal government should promote condom use as a way to prevent the spread of HIV.⁵⁰

NORTH CAROLINA

- 52 percent of PTA presidents in North Carolina agree that teen health clinics should make contraceptives and condoms available.⁵¹

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SIECUS PUBLISHES HANDBOOK ON DEVELOPING SEXUALITY EDUCATION GUIDELINES

SIECUS has just published a booklet titled *Developing Guidelines for Comprehensive Sexuality Education* to help educators, providers, policymakers, and activists develop guidelines appropriate for their countries or communities.

The handbook covers the components of comprehensive sexuality education; the steps and processes involved in developing a guidelines project; suggestions for using the guidelines; suggestions for distribution and advocacy; suggestions for coalition building; and resources.

"Though there is often agreement that young people should receive comprehensive sexuality education, there is a lack of broad-based consensus on the goals and components of such a program," said Smita Pamar, SIECUS director of international programs, in announcing the availability of the new handbook. "This new publication will help people and communities around the world who are working to provide young people with the tools, knowledge, and programs to become sexually healthy adults through sexuality education."

To obtain a free copy, contact: SIECUS, International Programs, 130 W. 42nd Street, Suite 350, New York, NY 10036-7802. Phone: 212/819-9770, extension 308. Fax: 212/819-9776. E-mail: intl@siecus.org.

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Each issue of the *SIECUS Report* features groundbreaking articles and commentary by leaders and front-line professionals in the field of sexuality and education, along with news, special bibliographies on varied topics, book and audiovisual reviews, recommended resources, and advocacy updates. All of this comes to members and other subscribers six times each year.

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