Sex (Etc) On the Internet

Using the Resource Kids/Teens Know and Love to Help Them Learn About Sexual Health

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Summary: Kids and teens across the United States of America receive different versions of Sexual Health Education courses at school. But the wide range of topics, and often politically sensitive discussions required to get a full understanding of sexual health, prevents many students from getting all of their questions answered. Previous studies have shown that things like STI/STD rates and teen pregnancy percentages, are often much higher in areas with limited Sex Education, as opposed to areas where students receive a version of Sex Education that covers a vast amount of topics. The one commonality amongst these different areas of the country is that these students have access to, and are consistently using the internet to obtain information. In an effort to show the value of using the internet as a reliable resource for furthering and clarifying sexual health education, we utilized and advertised the website SexEtc.org as one of those reliable internet resources. We conducted interviews, using questions found on the website as guidance, to gauge just how much knowledge students had about these basic sexual health topics. We then reached out to the NTSA and My Central Jersey asking them to include these interviews in their newsletters that are accessed by thousands of people daily.

Video Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h8kjLdlAH-o

The Issue: Sexual Health Education is NOT As it Should Be

The Parent’s Role (AS)

In a society such as todays where technology has become such a prevalent tool in receiving information, teenagers are increasingly becoming more and more disconnected from their surroundings. Instead of coming home from school and making conversation with their parents and siblings, teens are glued to their smartphones, laptops, and tablets. When it comes to talking to their children, parents seem to be tuned out more than they are turned in by their teens. Teenagers can be too caught up in things such as their social media pages to even lend an ear to their parents. So when the topic of sex comes up, how are parents supposed to get information across to their children in an effective manner? Or better yet, are these parents even taking on the challenge of initiating these types of conversations with their kids? Simply put, there is an assortment of beliefs that different parents have in regards to sexual education for their children. These beliefs vary from some parents wanting their children to have all of the facts and resources pertaining to sex all the way down to other parents not wanting their children to have any access to this type of education. Many factors can play into what type of education in sexual health a
parent may want for their teen. A survey conducted between 2006 and 2008 showed that a teen’s gender and different sexual health topics have an impact on if a parent will talk to their teen regarding sex (Martinez, Abma, and Copen). Figure 1 displays the differences in the amount of females versus males that talk to their parents about sex as well as the range of topics that parents discuss with their children.

Figure 1. “Teenagers 15-19 who talked with a parent about sex education by topic and sex: United States, 2006-2008” (http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db44.htm)

In most cases, it is apparent that fewer males and more females are having these types of conversations with their parents. However, overall, the percentages of both female and male teens that are receiving information on sex from their parents are quite low. From this data it appears that only roughly fifty percent of teenagers are being educated by their parents. In a society such as today’s, these numbers won’t suffice. Above all, when parents are deciding to talk with their children, abstinence is at the forefront. When looking at the effectiveness of abstinence-only education, it suffers as being a powerful tool in preventing teen pregnancy and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases (“Abstinence-only Education”). Having these parental opinions combined with the varying sexual education given in different schools in all different states provides as an unsteady and unthorough framework to students and teenagers in obtaining the information they need to be fully informed about sexual health.

Sex tends to be an uncomfortable subject for many people to discuss and an even more uncomfortable subject for teens to discuss, especially with their parents. Because of this, a divide is created between kids and their parents. Teens may feel awkward and parents may feel uneasy delving into the topics at hand and, in turn, never have an extensive discussion about these important issues. In a nationwide survey conducted in 2012, this exact issue was studied and brought to light. The survey found that a high percentage (fifty percent) of teens felt
uncomfortable talking to their parents about sex. On the other hand, parents expressed that they were more open to these types of discussions with nineteen percent of parents surveyed saying they also felt uncomfortable talking to their teens about sexual health (“Half of All Teens”). In any way this data is looked at, it is apparent that generally, teens (and even some parents) are likely to avoid communicating about sex because of the uneasy feelings it gives them. Unfortunately, even those parents and teens who are having these types of conversations are not exactly having such clear communication. In the same article written by Planned Parenthood that this study comes from, the author explains that parents and their teens are disagreeing on how often they talk about sex and what topics they actually discuss. The article states:

The report finds that while 42 percent of parents say they’ve talked to their teens “many times” about how to say no to sex, only 27 percent of teens agree. In fact, 34 percent of teens say they’ve “never” or “only once” talked with their mom or dad about how to delay sex. Moreover, only small percentages of teens said they plan to discuss these and other sexuality-related topics with their parents in the future. This resistance is likely a result of teens’ discomfort discussing these topics (“Half of All Teens”).

These statistical differences are staggering. It is clear that parents are not coming across as effectively to their children as they had imagined. Whether it is a misunderstanding on the teens’ or their parents’ part, they are not communicating as adequately as they should. Sadly, the embarrassment that teenagers and their parents have over these topics are preventing them from having fluid and incisive conversations that can lead to a better understanding of sexual health for these teens.

**Sex education-Teen Birth Rate Correlation (AS)**

Regardless of what type of sex education a parent believes their child should get, the facts show proof that there is a high correlation between sex education (or lack thereof) and teen pregnancy and STI rates. It has statistically been determined that things such as abstinence-only education are extremely ineffective when it comes to preventing teen pregnancy and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases (“Abstinence-only Education”). In a Teen Birth Rate Comparison of the United States conducted in 2013, the state with the lowest teen birth rate was Massachusetts with a rate of 12.1 births per 1,000 girls, and the state with the highest rate was Arkansas with a rate of 43.5 births per 1,000 girls (“Teen Birth Rate”). Upon further investigation, data shows that the types of sex education provided to students in both states are significantly different from one another. Statistics from sexetc.org lay out the educational format that is used to teach teens in both states. Although Massachusetts and Arkansas both do not require sexual education in schools, while Massachusetts decided not to receive any federal funding for abstinence-only programs, Arkansas received hundreds of thousands of dollars to fund these abstinence programs (“Sex in the States.” Arkansas)(“Sex in the States.” Massachusetts). It is with this money that the teens in the state of Arkansas are solely taught about being abstinent before marriage; Sexetc.org explains, “If sexuality education is taught, then abstinence must be covered and stressed as the only completely effective protection against unplanned pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and HIV/AIDS” (“Sex in the States.” Arkansas). To get a broader perspective, New Jersey could be brought into the equation. In the Teen Birth Rate Comparison, New Jersey ranked number five for the lowest teen birth rate in 2013 with a rate of 14.8 births per 1,000 girls (“Teen Birth Rate”). Sexetc.org states, “New Jersey state law requires sexuality education. In fact, New Jersey
law mandates at least 150 minutes of health education during each school week in grades one through 12”. The site also goes on to explain, “Health education must address a wide variety of topics for students in kindergarten through high school, including families, peer pressure, media stereotypes, the reproductive system, pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, abstinence, contraception, gender assumptions, sexual orientation, and marriage” (“Sex in the States.” New Jersey). This data shows the huge divide between an area that receives extensive sex education and an area that receives almost none. Figure 2 displays the teen birth rates for all 50 states as of 2013 (“Teen Birth Rate”). From this map, it is quite clear that it is predominantly the northeast and western areas of the United States that have the lowest rates of teen births. On the contrary, a number of southern states exhibit rather high teen birth rates. This data is parallel with the findings that show that southern states (such as Arkansas) and northeastern states (such as Maryland and New Jersey) receive an extensively different form of sex education.

![Figure 2. 2013 Teen Birth Rate Comparison map of the United States.](https://thenationalcampaign.org/data)

This representational map of teen birth rates can be directly compared to maps that outline what states don’t require sex education and what states don’t require HIV education (Klein). Not surprisingly, the comparison shows that the southern states that have the greater rates of teen births are the same states that do not require either sex or HIV education.
Figure 3. Maps displaying which of the United States do not require sex education and which do not require HIV education (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/04/08/sex-education-requirement-maps_n_5111835.html).

There seems to be a correlation between the amount and type of education teens receive and how apt they are to become pregnant. With this type of data, it appears to be safe to say that those students that receive a substantial amount of sexual education tend to have lower instances of becoming pregnant in their teen years.

**Abstinence-Only Education (AS)**

With information such as this, it is quite easy to debunk the idea that abstinence-only education leads to abstinent behavior. The collected data actually tends to show the opposite. In 2011, a study conducted by researchers found that public schools that only provided students with abstinence education have a significantly greater rate of teen pregnancy and birth rates than those states that give their students a more inclusive and complete education in sexual health (“Abstinence-only Education”). Ultimately, it is clear that a more vast education in sexual health does not imply or associate with teenagers having more sex or becoming pregnant at a young age. In this study where researchers looked at teen pregnancy and birth rates of 48 out of the 50 states, the researchers concluded that, “the more strongly abstinence education is emphasized in state laws and policies, the higher the average teenage pregnancy and birth rates” (“Abstinence-only Education”). The research also states:

…states with the lowest teen pregnancy rates were those that prescribed comprehensive sex and/or HIV education, covering abstinence alongside proper contraception and condom use. States whose laws stressed the teaching of abstinence until marriage were significantly less successful in preventing teen pregnancies (“Abstinence-only Education”).

This correlates almost perfectly with the data of birth rates and education in Arkansas, Massachusetts, and New Jersey. In a state such as New Jersey that tries to supply their teens with as much sexual information as possible, there is a reduced risk of these teens becoming pregnant. Similar findings were reported in an article written in 2014. The article demonstrates that teens
that receive an abstinence-only education have higher rates of teen pregnancy and higher birth rates. Figures 4 and 5 display these findings graphically and geographically (Essert).

**Figure 4.** A numerical figure displaying the correlation between an abstinence-only education and the amount of teen pregnancies per state (http://mic.com/articles/98886/the-states-with-the-highest-teenage-birth-rates-have-one-thing-in-common).

**Figure 5.** Geographical representation of the link between states receiving abstinence-only education and their higher teenage birth rates (http://mic.com/articles/98886/the-states-with-the-highest-teenage-birth-rates-have-one-thing-in-common)
From Figure 4, one can see that Arkansas students that receive the highest level of abstinence-only education have higher rates of teenage pregnancy than states such as Massachusetts and New Jersey where abstinence is only a small portion of the sex education teens in these states receive. This holds true for many southern states where abstinence is heavily stressed as the only form of sexual health education for teenagers. Figure 5 puts this data into a geographical form. This map gives backing to the rest of the collected data; it shows the great parallel between the areas of the United States receiving minimal sex education with the high teenage birth rates in these same areas.

**The Solution: Using the Internet to Deliver Sex Education (RM)**

In an ever-changing world where it is nearly impossible to keep up with all of the information that is available at any given time, the internet has very quickly become the ultimate resource for people to access this excessive amount of information. Whether it is looking for news updates, weather updates or even any random question that may pop into someone’s mind, people use the internet on a daily basis. Additionally, it is a well-known fact (that will be displayed with facts and figures later) that students are using the internet more and more to get the answers they need about topics spanning from science topics to tips for writing. In more specific terms, kids and teens (students) are using the internet to get answers to their most embarrassing or difficult questions, helping them avoid the embarrassment of asking them in their in-school health class or their possibly judgmental parents. In addition, some of these students questions simply are not being answered or even addressed in their health classes, and choose to go to the internet as a way to get the answers they need. But exactly how much are they using the internet for these questions? Are they using the internet at all? To start to address these very important questions, one must first analyze how much EVERYONE is using the internet. That way it is easy to see who is using it more, how they are using it, and if they are using it correctly to get reliable information. While it may be obvious that almost everyone uses the internet today, this is not a fact that really developed until recent years.

**The Internet as the Ultimate Resource (RM)**

Over the past 20 years the use of the internet has grown exponentially. The Pew Research Center conducted a study in January of 2014 that showed that overall internet use increased to 87% from just 14% in 1995. (pewinternet.org) That means that the internet is being used 73% more this year, than it was just 20 years ago in 1995. So it can be inferred that any decade or year before that time would have shown percentages even more staggering than the very low 14% usage. And while these figures are incredible, there is a lot more behind these numbers that say more about the way the world works today, and what it means for various aspects of how this nation will function in the future.

To begin to understand what these changes might be and exactly what parts of this nation will be affected, there must be consideration and more understanding of who exactly is using the internet. In addition to putting research into the use of the internet, the Pew Research Center also conducted research to understand who is using the internet within certain demographics for adults. (pewinternet.org)
Figure 6. Shows exactly who is using the internet by a variety of categories such as age, gender, and community type. (pewinternet.org)

The general trends from this research, seen in the image above, show a variety of differences amongst different demographics. But the most important to take note of, is the differences in percentage of internet use depending on age. In general, the older a person is the less likely they are to be using the internet. For ages 18-29 the use of the internet is at about 97%, while for ages 50-64 it is a much lower 88%. This nearly 10% difference displays the very evident generational gap, and how that gap is consistent with internet usage.

Social Media Use (RM)
This trend or pattern is consistent for Social Media use as well. Since social media is one of the major ways that the internet is utilized it is important to take note of this trend. Social media for this study, again conducted as a follow up study by the Pew Research Center, included mobile
application accessible medias, as well as medias that were accessed directly via the internet through a search engine.

![Social Media Use by Age Group Over Time](image)

**Figure 7.** Displays the steady increase in social media use over time, as well the apparent age gap in the amount of usage. (pewinternet.org)

The graph above shows that there has been a steady increase in the percentage of adults who use social media/social networking sites to about 74% usage. Although again, the generational differences are evident. The Pew Research Center notes that specifically “For adults ages 18-29, 89% of them use social networking sites. For adults ages 30-49, 82% of them do. For adults ages 50-64, 65% of them do, and for adults ages 65+, 49% of them use social networking sites”. (pewinternet.org) The numbers between each age group are all almost 20% apart! And again, the highest usage comes from the ages 18-29. This is just another way that people are accessing the internet for information on daily basis, but what about the kids and teens? Do the children of today’s world utilize the internet more or less than their parents? And if they do, can the internet actually be used as an effective method to educate kids and teens about their sexual health.

**Who Is Using the Internet (RM)**

Now the really interesting information can be addressed. It should be noted that in an effort for consistency the remainder of the statistics, facts, and figures came from the Pew Research Center, unless otherwise noted. To start, the Center in collaboration with information from the Census Bureau, looked at who is using the internet within a household in the United States. Which eventually lead to the derivation of the graph below.
This chart compares that average internet use for adults (18+) at 79%, to the percentages for various age groups that may be within a household. The percentages are all around the same, aside from the one outlier that seems to be the 65+ age group. This outlier seems to be easily explained by the fact that the internet was not really available until this generation was in their early 40’s. The low percentage can be accounted for by this generation simply not wanting to use the internet, not knowing how to, or not having a specific reason to. Although otherwise, all of the other age groups are within 3% of each other. Of specific interest for this research is when comparing the 0-17 age group (identical to the 18-34 age group) at 81.2% with the next comparable generation that includes the 35-44 age group at 83.3%. That implies that kids as young as 1 year may be using the internet only slightly less or the same amount, in some form or another at home, as their 18-44 year old siblings/parents/guardians. That statistic is staggering, and really pretty shocking!

Key Ages for Sexual Health and Internet Use (RM)
Although there are statistics that exist for kids spanning from 1 year to 17 years, the focus point to start understanding the possibilities of using the internet for sexual health education really needs to look at ages 12-17. The ages of 12-17 are the peak ages when a pre-teens body really starts to change, their understanding of the world around them is changing, and they have more and more questions about everything, especially sex and their sexual health. While it may be true that people have questions about their sexual health at any age, this research aims to understand how teens today are getting their questions answered, very possibly via the internet. For this reason, the next study focuses on children/teens between those ages and their internet use, as compared to the generations above them. First, the basics must be considered; who has access to the internet? A recent study for the Pew Research Center looks at just that:
Figure 9. Displaying the steady increase in internet use overall, as well as the huge gap between specific age groups. (http://www.pewinternet.org/)

The figure above demonstrates the incredible percentage at 95% of teens (between ages of 12-17) that have access to the internet and are noted as being “online”. It should be noted that the teens in this category have the highest percentage amongst all of the age groups. For teens ages 12-17, their parents ages can be estimated from anywhere between 30 and 64 (as a general range). Both of these potential parental age groups fall 6% between the ages of 30 and 49, and a staggering 18% between the ages of 50 and 64. This means that teens are using the internet a lot more than their parents do, and probably ever did. From these statistics it is easy to see that teens are definitely going to the internet to obtain almost all of the information they receive outside of school everyday. This most likely means that they are obtaining more information from the internet than their own parents. In terms of sexual health education, this is a something very important to take note of; if teens are more heavily relying on the internet for information, than even their own parents, it is critical that teens have an accurate and reliable website to go to for this type of information. Something that may be missing in the information above, when discussing teens and their use of the internet, is answering more specifically WHAT teens are using the internet. Perhaps there are only specific demographics of teens using the internet.

The Wide Range of Teen Internet Users (RM)
The next bit of information and statistics also comes for the Pew Research Center, and acts as a follow up to understanding the trends of teens using the internet. In the figure featured below, different demographics that exist amongst teens in the United States are stated and then compared to that specific demographics percentage of access to the internet, mobile access to the internet, and the percentage that accesses the internet mostly via their cell phone.
Figure 10. Showing the incredible diversity amongst teens using the internet. (http://www.pewinternet.org/)

One incredibly interesting fact delineated in this figure is that there is not much variation amongst each demographic when comparing the same sections, such as access to the internet. For instance, in urban areas the access is 94%, with suburban only slightly higher at 96%, and rural only a little higher again at 99%. This shows that almost all teens, no matter where they live, have a lot of access to the internet. And it is in the rural areas, where less sex education might actually occur in school, that the access is the highest. This may indicate that when a teen has a question about their sexual health, and cannot use school as a resource, may turn to the internet instead because it is so readily accessible. In general, it seems that no matter the demographic, teens are using the internet nation-wide. Although, their ability to use the internet to actually find information, possibly about their sexual health remains unknown. It cannot simply be assumed that because teens can get on the internet, means they know how to use it in a meaningful way.
What the Professionals Think (RM)
To learn more about how teens are using the internet, and if they know how to use it effectively, the Pew Research Center and their Internet Specialists teamed up with the American Life Project. Pew and the American Life researchers, reached out to teachers to find out exactly how they felt about not only the teens, but students in general using the internet. The teachers they specifically interviewed were teachers in Advanced Placement (AP) and/or part of the National Writing Project (NWP). These teachers are highly trained and experienced, so their opinions are therefore highly regarded in this field.

First, the AP and NWP teachers were asked if they felt technology and the use of the internet provides students with a wider range of sources. The staggering results showed that 99% of these teachers agreed, saying that the internet was a great way to get students more resources to use towards their education. This was then followed up with multiple questions which lead to even more interesting statistics such as, 77% of teachers say that the internet has a “mostly positive” impact on the research their students do. Additionally, 65% of teachers agreed that it made students more self-sufficient in their research. Both of these statistics indicate that teens use the internet specifically for research, and that they really can conduct this research on their own. Indicating that students and teens most likely go home and do research of their own on topics they may not want to have to ask their teachers about, such as their sexual health.

Teachers were then surveyed on what they know to be true about their students’ usage of the internet, and what they actually do when utilizing it. Some categories included participating in online discussions at about 39%, and accessing or downloading assignments at 79%. But once again, at a staggering 95%, teachers know their students to be conducting research or searching for information online. This statistics, coming from highly experienced professional educators, points out that students and teens really do mostly utilize the internet to obtain information. The fact of the matter is that if these teens are using the internet to look for information for school, they are definitely using it to find information on lots of other information regarding their sexual health or general sexual curiosities/confusions. On the other hand, there is a serious problem here. In another piece of the study Pew and the American Project found that 67% of teachers say that internet usage discourages wide use of resources and makes it harder for them to find credible materials. Clearly, students have access and will flock towards the abundant information online, but do they know how to find credible information? Do they know where to go to get their questions answered or do they assume that the first result on google search is always right? This can be a major issue when discussing sexual health information, the wrong information can really cause a lot of very severe problems (health and otherwise) for a teen, who is simply looking for help and turned to the often unreliable internet.

Recognizing this very possible, very serious issue, Pew Research went out again in search for more information. This time the information was found in a ‘new talk that was given as a part of Dartmouth College’s Strategic Planning process and their “Leading Voices in Higher Education Series”’ (http://www.pewinternet.org). In this talk, researchers individually picked skills for teachers to grade their teen students on in regards to their ability to use the internet. The results are quite interesting and are listed as follows:
In some sections, such as “ability to use appropriate and effective search terms and queries” most students (about 62%) rank in the ranges of good to excellent. On the contrary, in other sections such as “ability to assess the quality and accuracy of the information they find online” only about 39% of students rank in the ranges of good to excellent, with a very small 2% in the excellent range. This is troublesome in regards to teens using the internet to learn or inquire about their sexual health. It may established that teens definitely use the internet, they use it far more than any other age group, but if they do not know quite yet how to use the internet properly it is all for nothing. These statistics are the reason that students need to be able to have specific resources on the internet to go to when looking for answers for their sexual health questions.

Given the proper tools, students know how to use the internet, and can do so to their advantage. In further research featured in the International Journal of Sexual Health conducted by Laura Simon and Kristian Daneback in 2013, they look into just that. In this research students were given a specific online program to use for sexual health education. Students were of varying ages falling between 13 and 20 years old, and were asked and assisted in using this online program as their form of sexual health education for that school term. Students were tested and assessed on their understanding of the information they were receiving and also asked about how they felt about the information they were learning and how they were learning it. A lot of amazing information came from this study but the four major themes really condense it all nicely stating:

“Four major themes could be discerned from the literature, revealing that: (a) adolescents report engaging with sex information online; (b) adolescents are interested in a number of topics, including sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy; (c) the quality of adolescent-targeted sex information online can be lacking, but adolescents can evaluate these sources; and (d) Internet-based interventions can increase adolescents’ sexual health knowledge”
The statements above really say it all, students, specifically teens can learn sexual health information online as long as they were given the proper resources. In other words, and put more simply:

“If adolescents are motivated to go online because they do not have access to classroom-based sex education (either because their school does not offer it or because they do not have access right now), the Internet could serve as an important replacement resource.”

For this reason the remainder of this research invests time in finding a reliable resource for students to go to, and making sure that all teens that need it can know about it! While their need may stem from not receiving the proper education at school, simply being afraid to ask, or not feeling comfortable enough to go to their often unrelatable parent figures, the internet can serve as a way to get all of the important questions answered!

Community Action: Getting the word out about the internet site “Sex, etc” (RM & AS)

http://sexetc.org/

1. Although the research and statistics of teenage pregnancy and STI rates demonstrated the lack of sexual health education teenagers are receiving, we decided to perform research of our own to see how much people actually know about sex related topics. We compiled a list of questions related to sexual health that we found people should have learned at some point of their middle or high school education. The question topics included things such as female sexual health, condom usage, sexually transmitted diseases/infections, and oral sex among others. The questions were presented to both male and female participants, ranging in age from 16 to 23. All of the participants were either still in high school or currently attending college. Each participant was asked one or two questions from the compiled list and their answers were video recorded. After they had provided their answer, we pulled up that exact question and the correct answer on the Sex Etc. website and showed them if they had answered correctly. It was our goal to demonstrate that this website held just about everything that somebody would want to know with regard to sex.

Not surprisingly, we found that many of the participants were unable to give complete or accurate answers to the questions asked. Most responses proved to even be humorous. It was demonstrated through this answer and question approach that even college students who received sexual education in their middle and/or high schools could not process even the more basic factual questions. This outcome really drove home the idea that the sexual education that students are given in school is not sufficient enough for them to even know the most essential facts. Many of the participants even had trouble with terms such as hymen, fellatio, and intersex. When we brought up the Sex Etc. site, most participants were surprised to learn the correct answers to the questions they had been asked. They would then proceed to explain that they had never learned these things in their sex education classes. However, a small fraction of the participants had a slight understanding of the questions and were able to give a semi-correct answer. When asked where they learned this information, they stated that it had been learned in a college-level course or the internet.
We compiled all of the short clips of each participant into a single video (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h8kjLdIAH-o) to use to spread awareness about the lack of sex education teenagers are receiving as well as to highlight the Sex,etc. website as a useful tool for people of all ages to obtain answers to all of their sexual health questions.

In addition to the video, we also created an account to be able to answer some sexual health based questions on Yahoo Answers by suggesting the use of sexetc.org. We went on the site and answered many questions that were on a variety of topics that are covered on Sex,etc. Some of the questions were about bodily changes; others were about rape and abortion. With each answer given by our account we made a small comment on the situation, as an attempt to not come off as just an advertisement, and then proceeded to suggest sexetc.org as a great resource to get these questions answered. We feel that this will be effective in ensuring that if someone types any type of sexual health question into Yahoo Answers, they are very likely to stumble upon one of the many questions we answered with sexetc.org as a suggestion and use the site for reliable information about the situation they may be having. Then, hopefully next time they have a question they will go immediately to Sex,etc knowing that they will be able to find their answer there. This will likely lead to word of mouth about the website and hopefully promote even more people using sexetc.org for their questions!

2. In order to further promote our video and the research we conducted, we decided to write to the National Science Teachers Association. Because the NSTA is a teachers association that most likely health teachers use, we figured that they could help promote our video and our findings throughout schools. If the association were to publish our letter, research, and/or video in their newsletter or their website, many educators could stumble upon it and use it in their classrooms. This would be the ultimate goal in that the information we have compiled and the Sex Etc. website would be reaching teachers, students, and parents.

TO NSTA:

My name is Rebecca Morris and I am currently an undergrad student at Rutgers University, working towards graduation with a BS in Biology in Spring 2016. I am currently taking a class called “Ethics in the Sciences” lead by Julie Fagan, who is guiding me through this venture. In this class, we had the opportunity to pick a topic within the sciences that had some ethical nature, research it and find an issue, and then provide a proposed solution. As part of this proposed solution we are also required to perform some form of community action to help work towards or utilize that solution. My topic is Sexual Health Advocacy and Education. As someone that hopes to one-day practice in the medical field, as well as a sexual health advocate here at Rutgers, this topic is something that is very important to me. In researching this topic, as well as from personal experience, I know that there are many issues within this topic. But the main issue seems to be that students are not getting all of the information they need from their sexual education classes due to how politicized it has become, as well as the lack of any additional reliable resources for students to turn to. However, through my research I have found that the Internet and particularly the site Sex Etc., which is actually a site created by Rutgers college students, can serve as an incredibly reliable resource for students to get the answers they need!

I am writing to you today, because I am aware of the incredible e-newsletter that NSTA sends out to its members. I have also read about different sections and varieties of this newsletter that
include “Encouraging Young Scientists” and “Science Matters”. And I believe that my research, with my proposed solution utilizing SexEtc.org, with the addition of a fun, yet eye-opening video would be perfect to be something included or featured in this newsletter. My research uses a lot of statistical analysis to really show how the lack of sex education in some parts of the country is a serious issue, and how not having sex education has many correlations with things such as teen pregnancy and STI rates in teens. But unlike a lot of other research that science teachers may read, it also has a solution. The solution is the Internet, and using it as an advantage and supplement to teaching in order to ensure that students are getting the correct information that they desperately need. I would love to introduce teachers around the country to this amazing website (SexEtc.org) and prove to them that this site can act as a very viable resource that they can encourage their students to go to for any question they may have outside of the classroom! There are also various videos, testimonials and diagrams on the site that the teachers may use in their classes as a way to introduce this reliable website to their students.

Overall, I would love to share my research, as well as my video and introduction to Sex Etc. via your newsletter. I believe that the entertaining video, along with the various types of research and statistics would go over very well with the members of the NSTA. This could open up many opportunities for teachers to show why science really does matter to their students, and how sexual health as a science is something that can be understood through a portal they are familiar with and enjoy. This is also a wonderful opportunity to show teachers the work of a young scientist hoping to educate the world and become a part of the world of science education, which I am certain they would be ecstatic to see! In conclusion, I would love to send you my research, video, and proposed research solution for you to review and consider for your e-newsletter!

Please feel free to contact me at any time and I will gladly answer any additional questions you may have. I hope you are as excited about this potential venture as I am, and look forward to hearing your feedback!

Thank you in advance,
Rebecca Morris
Rutgers University

Second Letter Sent to the NSTA

Please consider publishing the paragraph below in your newsletter, perhaps as a Letter to the Editor

Kids and teens across the US receive different versions of Sexual Health Education courses at school. The wide range of topics (which are often socially and religiously sensitive) may not be covered in these courses which prevent many students from getting all of their questions answered. Previous studies have shown that topics like STI/STD rates and teen pregnancy, are often much higher in areas with limited Sex Education, as opposed to areas where students receive a version of Sex Education that covers a vast amount of topics. The one commonality amongst these different areas of the country is that these students have access to, and are consistently using the internet to obtain information. In an effort to show the value of using the internet as a reliable resource for furthering and clarifying sexual health education, we would like for your readership to examine the Rutgers University website http://sexetc.org/ and
potentially use this site in the classroom (or as reference for students to view on their own). We conducted interviews of high school and college students using questions found on the website as guidance, to gauge just how much knowledge students had about some basic sexual health topics. Most students had only a limited knowledge of sexual health and found the Sex,etc site to be extremely informative and a site they could go to on their own. We invite your readership to view our video that contains some short clips of these interviews (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h8kjLdlAH-o).

Thank You,

Ashley Smith
Rebecca Morris
Julie M. Fagan, Ph.D.

Rutgers University

3. To further help spread our message, a letter was sent to My Central Jersey. Because big changes usually begin at a smaller level, My Central Jersey seemed to be a perfect place to start the spread of our sexual health research findings throughout the communities in New Jersey. If the letter were to be published on the My Central Jersey website, it could reach many different people of all ages in New Jersey who would now be aware of our research and video and the Sex Etc. site.

**Letter to the Editor sent to My Central Jersey**

Dear Editor:
If one were to look at the statistics of unexpected and teen pregnancy in New Jersey, it seems that this may be a problem in the state. Although New Jersey has a somewhat low incidence of teen pregnancy compared to the rest of the nation, this should not give it reason to be ignored. Overall, teenage girls are still becoming pregnant quite frequently in our area. Upon further research into this issue, it is apparent that teenagers are not receiving the sex education that is needed for them to make informed and thought out decisions when it comes to sex. Fortunately, New Jersey is one of few states in the nation that require sex education. However, the type of education these students receive is just as important as them receiving it at all. The combination of not receiving a well-rounded sexual health education, the lack of parents talking to their teenagers about the topic, and the unwillingness of teens to speak to adults about it out of embarrassment is a perfect cocktail for uneducated adolescents and increased rates of teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases and infections. In this technologically savvy time, it is becoming more and more popular for teenagers to turn to the internet for everything. Instead of having to ask their parents or teachers an embarrassing question regarding sex, teens can do a quick Google search and get the information they’re looking for. However, because of their young age, many of these teens are unable to decipher between reliable and unreliable sources on the internet. Most will have no idea if the answers they stumble upon are in fact accurate. Researching into this topic has brought an excellent source of sexual health education to light: sexetc.org. The website is extremely user friendly, has an intriguing layout and above all, has *accurate and up to date information*. Any topic that a person could have a question about or just
be interested in can be found on the website. It is ultimately a one-stop shop for everything sex. It is packed with videos, frequently asked questions, games, discussion boards, blogs, clinic finders, statistics, and so on. It covers all areas having to do with sexual health including, but not limited to, birth control, STDs, pregnancy, LGBTQ, sex, relationships, and abuse. It is the perfect resource for preteens and teenagers to learn everything they need to make smart decisions. This website should be promoted and used throughout sex education classes in the state of New Jersey so more teenagers and their parents can take notice of it and take advantage of all of the information it has to offer. There is no better time than now to begin implementing reputable online resources for teenagers when it comes to topics as important as sexual health.

Ashley Smith

References:


"Internet Use Over Time." Pew Research Center Internet Science Tech RSS. Pew Research
Appendix 1

A picture of the Sex,Etc., to display it’s user friendly set up and teen/kid friendly color scheme.