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Young adults experience a variety of changes as they mature through adolescence. Sexual development is one of the processes affected by the onset of puberty. Factors that have the potential to affect adolescent sexual development include peers, media, and print materials. Nonfiction adolescent sexual health books are a potential source of information on sex, sexuality, and puberty for teenagers. This paper studies a selection of fifteen sexual health books to analyze the portrayal of sexuality and puberty information found in the books. The results showed that most books provided a fairly broad overview of various aspects of teenage sexuality and puberty. However, since no single book provided a completely comprehensive depiction of these topics, a wide selection of these books is needed to present a balanced portrayal to young adults.

Headings:

Sex, Adolescent sexuality, Puberty

THE PORTRAYAL OF SEXUALITY INFORMATION IN ADOLESCENT  
NONFICTION SEXUAL HEALTH BOOKS

by  
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Approved by

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**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Literature Review.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Methodology.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Results.....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Discussion.....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Bibliography.....</b>	<b>42</b>

## INTRODUCTION

Publications of the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States include five criteria of healthy interpersonal sexual behavior; it is consensual, honest, mutually pleasurable, protected, and non-exploitative (Haffner, 1995).

Young adults experience a variety of changes as they mature through adolescence. Sexual development is one of the processes affected by the onset of puberty. Pubertal changes are the results of hormonal changes within a teen's body. Among many other things, these changes contribute to the growth and development of sexual organs, rapidly changing emotions, and questions concerning identity. Teenagers face pressures regarding their sexuality from outside sources as well as within their own changing body. Factors that have the potential to affect adolescent sexual development include peers, media, and print materials. These stressors have the potential to greatly influence an adolescent's sexual activity.

The sexuality information young adults encounter from these sources may be accurate or inaccurate. There is a need for accurate, comprehensive information that is accessible to teenagers. Nonfiction adolescent sexual health books are a potential source of information on sex, sexuality, and puberty for teenagers. In addition, these books may also be used by parents or caretakers of teenagers who do not wish to deal with the

subject directly. These books may provide some anonymity to teenagers searching for information on these topics. This paper studies a selection of fifteen sexual health books to analyze the portrayal of sexuality and puberty information found in the books.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Young adult sexual development

There are many different aspects to the sexual development of young adults. According to Ward (63-71), adolescents are coming to terms with developing sexuality and physical body changes as well as developing positive relationships with the opposite sex. The changes that occur during a teen's life at this time period are exacerbated by these sexual development issues, as these have the ability to affect a teen socially, emotionally, physically, and mentally. The onset of sexual behavior does not appear to be an isolated event but rather part of a complex pattern of interrelated activities. (Harvey and Spigner 253) This literature review examines some of the issues inherent in adolescent sexual development.

Developing and defining relationships have been identified as important elements in a teenager's sexual growth. Adolescent sexual behaviors generally occur within the context of a romantic relationship. Therefore, it is important to understand the development of adolescent romantic relationships. (Auslander, Rosenthal and Blythe 694-702) Forming romantic relationships and developing a sexual identity are related, as an adolescent must be prepared to deal with the ramifications of his own sexuality in order to develop a romantic relationship. Adolescents are faced with many developmental tasks related to

sexuality, such as forming romantic relationships and developing their sexual identities. (Auslander, Rosenthal and Blythe 694-702) However, each of these elements carries its own challenges for young adults. Teens deal with acquiring interpersonal skills for dealing with the opposite sex and mate selection (Elliott and Feldman 323-334).

Along with developing these interpersonal skills, adolescents face the challenge of determining their sexual identity when forming romantic relationships. The physical, cognitive, and social changes that occur within these stages enable teens to achieve intimate relationships and to explore their identities as sexual and romantic beings (Auslander, Rosenthal and Blythe 694-702). This process may or may not present a host of difficulties to adolescents.

A recognition of one's sexual orientation emerges during adolescence. According to studies of gay, lesbian and bisexual youth and adults, sexual feelings toward a member of one's own sex or of the other sex is followed by thinking about one's own sexual identity, and then by self-identification as gay/lesbian or bisexual. (Huston 27)

To outsiders it may seem that teens vary their sexual habits randomly. For many adolescents first beginning to explore the idea of having a personal sexual orientation, sexual behavior and sexual identity may or may not correspond with each other (Auslander, Rosenthal and Blythe 694-702). This illustrates teens' complex sexual development path. Through the process of sexual experimentation, young adults can increase their sexual knowledge as relating to themselves and others. Just as adolescents experiment with a variety of communication skills in their romantic relationships, they also can experience and experiment with a range of sexual behaviors (Auslander, Rosenthal and Blythe 694-702). Again, the connection between romantic relationships

and sexual behaviors is strong. “The most recent national survey of students enrolled in high school indicates that approximately 47% of female adolescents and 46% of male adolescents are sexually experienced and about one-third are currently sexually active” (Auslander 697).

While teens may be increasing their sexual knowledge through their behaviors, trends show that they may not be increasing or utilizing their knowledge of physical sexual consequences along the way. Adolescents in the United States and Western Europe report about the same rates of sexual activity, but our rates of pregnancy are considerably higher. The most immediate reason appears to be that American teens use contraception less effectively (Huston *et al* ). Relationship pressures may affect teens as well in the area of contraceptives. Teens who communicate about contraception before sex have greater odds of contraceptive use. Teens in romantic relationships, and who are older when engaging in sex for the first time, have greater odds of ever using contraceptives but reduced odds of always using contraceptives (Manlove, Ryan and Franzetta 603-621). Even with knowledge of contraceptives, adolescents may lack adequate knowledge of the toll that physical consequences of sex may take on their lives. One study measured the emergency contraceptive use of teens. The results showed that advance possession of emergency contraceptives did not significantly decrease the repeat teen pregnancy rate because half of these conceptions are not unwanted, and most teen mothers who want to remain non-pregnant under utilize ECPs even when they have them on hand (Kelly, Sheeder and Stevens-Simon S118-S119).

The need for information pertaining to safe sexual practices for adolescents extends to the necessity to prevent sexual violence. Recent studies investigating prevalence and risk factors of child and adolescent sexual assault highlight the need for programs to educate adolescents about sexuality, including sexual assault (Danielson and Holmes 383). People and material involved with primary and secondary dating violence prevention efforts should recognize and address the important developmental factors of young adults (Houston and Tucker 15-15). These factors could have an impact on the manner in which sexual violence information is acquired and used. This information is important because sexual violence affects the emotional well-being of adolescents. In particular, dating violence has been shown to be associated with higher levels of depression, suicidal thoughts, and poorer educational outcomes (Banyard and Cross 998).

The emotional and cognitive development that teenagers undergo during their adolescent years towards becoming emotionally and behaviorally autonomous affects their ability to understand emotional responses to sexual behavior. In addition, the stresses of adolescence during this time of huge emotional change may affect their level of sexual activity (Elliott and Feldman 323-334).

It is noteworthy that stress was a significant predictor of sexual activity for both males and females... We are, however, limited in determining antecedent effects of relationships because our study was correlational. We cannot know if stress was a result of early sexual activity or that adolescents engage in sexual activity because they are stressed. (Harvey 262)

The emotions that teens experience during adolescence are often connected to the relationships they engage in. These relationships can become romantic and sexual, further

compounding the emotional effects of puberty. Some teens become sexually active in the hope of inspiring romantic feelings. Rather than exploring a deep emotional attachment first, teens tend to assume that if they engage in the physical act, the emotional attachment will follow (It, Do These and Teens ).

Young adults also face pubertal changes during these times of emotional development. The increase in sexual interest and activity during and after puberty is based on both biological changes and cultural expectations (Huston *et al* ). They must manage these changes with the above mentioned stresses and cognitive development. Cognitive developmental change and physical/physiological growth may contribute to age changes in comprehension, attitudes, and sexual behavior (Huston *et al* ). The effects of biological changes on a young adult may lead to a greater proclivity for sexual experimentation. The hormonal and physical changes associated with puberty are important predictors of sexual behavior; early maturing youth of both sexes are apt to initiate sexual activity earlier than others (Huston *et al* ).

The issues that young adults are faced with in their adolescent development are both varied and interconnected. Sexual development encompasses a wide range of these issues. In addition, sexual development is informed by many of these same issues. The present findings suggest that adolescent sexuality is a complex phenomenon associated with multiple factors and occurs within the context of other high-risk behaviors (Harvey and Spigner 253). Studying the manner in which these factors interrelate can lead to a greater understanding of adolescent sexual development.

## **Factors influencing young adult sexual development**

While sexual development occurs within a teen, factors in an adolescent's life have the potential to influence this development dramatically. Teens are searching for information from all kinds of sources to help understand the changes going on within them. "Studies show that young people also want more information whether or not they are sexually active" (Levine 45). The information need that teens are experiencing can be fulfilled from a variety of sources. These sources include others in the adolescent's life and the books and other popular media the teen is exposed to. In this literature review, sources of information available to teens on sexual health topics are discussed.

Support from the teen's community can be instrumental in a teen's sexual development. "Parents, clinicians, and communities can help support adolescents in making healthy sexual decisions" (Auslander 700). Teens may or may not be open to seeking out this kind of help by themselves. "Although teens say they would prefer to get sexual education from their parents, more than half of adolescents report learning about sexual issues from TV, movies, and magazines" (Boies 344). This may be due to teen's fears over approaching an adult about sexual issues. Some, especially those who have fewer alternative sources of sexual norms, such as parents or friends, may use the media as a kind of sexual super-peer that encourages them to be sexually active (Brown *et al* 1018-1027). Teens also receive messages about sexual development from their peers. Whether peer involvement encourages sexual activity or not probably depends on the norms of the

group. Adolescents generally have friends whose sexual experience is similar to their own, and males' sexual behavior is influenced by that of their friends (Huston *et al* ).

Popular media's effects on children and young adults cannot be overlooked. Media use is also likely to contribute to shaping children's beliefs about themselves and about others around them. One such area concerns basic beliefs about masculinity and femininity (Ward 63-71). Sexual identity has the propensity to be formed in part by the views young adults see expressed through music, television, magazines, and literature. In recent years, stemming from concerns about teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted infection, renewed attention has focused on possible connections between media use and adolescent sexual behavior (Ward 63-71). The effects of media on sexual development in young adults can be seen in the sexual actions that young adults carry out. There have been many studies on media usage and teenage sexuality since 2000.

Problems with the influence of media on sexual development stem from the idea that popular media may not present sexual messages in a holistically healthy manner. Effects of the mass media have been found to be far-reaching and potentially harmful in influencing the health-related behaviors of children and adolescents, many of whom are not yet mature enough to distinguish fantasy from reality, particularly when it is presented as 'real life' (Escobar-Chaves *et al* 303-326). For individuals who are determining an individual set of moral, ethical, religious, and political principles, the lack of consequences in the messages presented by media may be detrimental to their sexual development. If sexually healthy behavior is not modeled in the media used by teens, it

is less likely that young people will adopt sexually healthy behavior themselves (Stover and Tway; Hust, Brown and L'Engle 3-23). Quantitative analyses of television, magazines, and newspapers have found little content that might promote healthier sexual behavior (Hust, Brown and L'Engle 3-23).

Fiction and non-fiction books can provide a context for the huge amount of sexual information presented to teens. Young adult literature that deals explicitly with adolescent sexuality and that situates discussions of sexuality within a developmentally and socially relevant context can become a valuable source of information for teens (Pattee 30-38). Fiction can provide a safe place for young adult readers to relate to their own sexual experiences and those of their peers. Books can also help adolescents explore questions relating to sexuality. Books may again present sexual information in varying degrees of accuracy and healthiness. While we may recognize that adolescents may read and share this type of material because they perceive the passages (and the novels) as titillating, we must also recognize these novels as the alternate information sources they become (Pattee 30-38).

Sexual education books also benefit others in a teenager's life. "Reading a good sex education book with my daughter gives me a script to consult when I get flustered. It's not as if I need someone to feed me all my lines, but I also don't want to just stumble onto the stage to improvise and, in my stage fright, risk conveying a message that I didn't mean to convey" (Heppermann 493). As noted above, teens may prefer to receive at least some form of sexual information from the people important to them. A sexual health

book has the potential to aid these conversations while presenting accurate information to readers.

### **Analyses of sexual health messages in young adult media and literature**

The number of sexual messages in young adult media and literature is enormous.

Analyses have been done that focus on the sexual content of electronic and print media and literature that young adults are exposed to. The coding done in these studies tends to focus on individual units of analysis based on specific topics in young adult sexuality. In addition, some research focuses on the total amount of sexual content present in media or literature. Previous studies have suggested that the total amount of sexual content is perhaps more important rather than the specific type of sexual content (Brown *et al* 1018-1027). This section of the literature review covers a variety of studies and their coding rubrics.

One study based its units of analysis on the following Sexual Information and Educational Council of the United States (SIECUS) guidelines. Among other recommendations, the task force suggested that both boys and girls should learn to take responsibility for their sexual health, which includes using contraception to prevent unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Teens should be made aware of the high incidence of STDs, should know how to identify potential symptoms of STDs, and should be taught how to take preventive measures. The guidelines also

recommended that younger children should know about the process of puberty, what to expect as their bodies mature sexually, and that masturbation could be discussed as a normal part of sexual development and perhaps as a preventive measure (Hust, Brown and L'Engle 3-23). These guidelines were used to develop the following rubric in a 2002 study that analyzed sexual messages in mass media. "A complete description of each sexual health unit present in the vehicle was documented, including summaries of visuals, character interactions, factual information, and relevant quotations. The gender of the characters, tone (positive or negative), and prominence (central to the plot) of the health message within the program were also noted. These written descriptions served as initial codes of both the broadcast and print content" (Cope-Farrar 12).

The following rubric was developed for use in a 2006 study relating to sexual content in music, movies, and television. Categories were analyzed for portrayals or references to pubertal development, romantic relationships, body exposure or nudity, sexual innuendo, touching and kissing, and sexual intercourse (Brown *et al* 1018-1027). Some similarities can be seen in the codes given here and in the rubric above. Other codes developed for a 2002 study on the sexual messages in prime-time television programming related to the consequences of sexual behaviors. Consequences of sexual behaviors were coded as positive, negative, or none shown. Examples of positive outcomes included obtaining personal satisfaction, enhancing peer status or popularity, or establishing a desired relationship. Possible negative outcomes included damage to a relationship, a loss in peer status or popularity, or experiencing personal guilt or remorse (Cope-Farrar and Kunkel 59-78).

Another example of a content analysis rubric can be found in a 2004 study on sexual health messages on a teen web bulletin board. This study examined the questions and answers posted to the online bulletin board. Content analysis was used to classify the range of topics reflected in the threads. Topics were devised by reading the material. The main topic of each question was summarized, and these topics were grouped according to topic similarity to form an initial set of categories. The category sets were then distilled to form the final set of fourteen question topic categories: “Parents/Adults, Peers, Romantic Relationships, Personality/Mental Health, Grooming, Body Image/Exercise, Physical Health, Sexual Health, Pregnancy/Birth Control, Sexuality—Interpersonal, Sexuality—Techniques, Physical/Sexual Abuse, Drugs/Alcohol, and School” (Suzuki and Calzo 685-698).

Other studies mentioned the problems when trying to code media and books for sexual content. It is very often the case that content codes are selected and coded by adults whose perceptions and interpretations of what is sexual or violent could be quite different from a child viewer (Huston *et al* ). The objectivity of determining sexual content is affected by many factors, including the age of the coders.

Sexual content can be categorized many different ways. Developing categories based around the topics of the material studied allows researchers to analyze the frequency in which different facets of adolescent puberty and sexuality appear across a selection. The studies that have been done in the past have focused on the sexuality messages appearing in media, including online media, music, television, movies, and magazines.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Book Sample**

The sample was chosen through random sampling and convenience sampling of a larger dataset of books. This original dataset was selected through WorldCat's online database of books. Using the advanced search box found on the website, items were searched by keywords "sex\*" and "puberty." Results were limited by format (book), publication date (2000 to 2009), content (non-fiction), audience (juvenile), and language (English). This resulted in 50 books. WorldCat allows users to determine the location of the closest books. Books with the closest location listed as out of the United States were eliminated. A random number generator was used to choose 25 books from the remaining 47 books. Each of these 25 books was submitted to the Interlibrary Loan services at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The first fifteen books to be received were chosen for the study.

### **Criteria**

The criteria for scoring the books were developed from the information found in the literature reviews and the books themselves. After reviewing articles about adolescent sexual development, factors influencing adolescent sexual development, and other

analyses of sexual health messages in young adult literature, the literature was scanned for analyses of sexual health messages in young adult non-fiction books. There was nothing on this subject, so a set of criteria was developed based on the ideas presented in the adolescent sexual development literature reviewed. These criteria were tied to the content and illustrations of each book. The following categories were chosen: Pubertal development, Identity, Safe sexual practices, Emotions and sexual activity, Physical consequences to sexual activity, Sexual practices, and Illustrations.

In addition, as the books themselves were read, certain topics within each criterion continued to appear in all of the books. The following chart lists each specific topic chosen for scoring within each of the categories.

### Scoring categories and topics

Figure 1

Category #	Category	Specific Topic
1	Pubertal Development	Adolescent hormones; growth and development of sexual organs; onset of menstruation; acne
2	Identity	Heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, transsexual, transgender identities; struggles with identity
3	Safe Sexual Practices	Abstinence; contraception; sexual violence
4	Emotions and Sexual Activity	Emotions before
5	Physical Consequences to Sexual Activity	Sexually transmitted diseases; pregnancy
6	Sexual Practices	Intercourse, oral sex, anal sex, masturbation
7	Illustrations	Type: photographs, cartoons, line drawings, diagrams

### Scoring

For categories 1-6, each specific topic was coded with a “yes” or “no,” based on whether this content appeared in the book. For category 3, a list was compiled of all unique methods of contraception appearing in all of the books. Each book was examined to determine which contraceptives appeared in which books. Similarly, in category 6, a list was compiled of all unique sexually transmitted diseases appearing in all of the books.

Each book was examined to determine which STD appeared in which books.

For all of the topical content in categories 1-6, a note was made if the material was mentioned, defined, or explained. Material was considered “mentioned” if the specific terms appeared in the text. “Defined” material had some kind of 1-2 sentence definition

that described the term. Material was considered “explained” if the explanation of the term was more than 2 sentences.

Category 7 was coded to determine which kind of illustration was present in the book. In addition, the illustrations were examined to find out if the illustrations depicted the content of the text.

## RESULTS

The following results are presented first by book and then by topic category. The books have been identified by numerals below:

- 1) *Sex, puberty and all that stuff : a guide to growing up*
- 2) *Sexual Readiness-When is it Right?*
- 3) *Healthy Sexuality*
- 4) *101 Questions about Sex and Sexuality*
- 5) *Doing it Right*
- 6) *The underground guide to teenage sexuality : an essential handbook for today's 7) teens and parents*
- 7) *Puberty Boy*
- 8) *The guy book : an owner's manual for teens : safety, maintenance, and operating instructions for teens*
- 9) *Sex, love, and you : making the right decision*
- 10) *The sex book : an alphabet of smarter love*
- 11) *Safe sex 101 : an overview for teens*
- 12) *Ready or not? : a girl's guide to making her own decisions about dating, love, and sex*

13) *Sex explained : honest answers to your questions about guys & girls, your changing body, and what really happens during sex*

14) *Girl stuff : a survival guide to growing up*

15) *Hang-ups, hook-ups, and holding out : stuff you need to know about your body, sex, and dating*

## **Categorized by Book**

### **Book 1**

This book is divided into eight chapters. Compared to other books, this book provides more comprehensive information on sexually transmitted diseases and pubertal changes. It lacks information on sexual orientations other than heterosexual or homosexual. It also lacks information on anal sexual practices. It uses a lot of cartoon illustrations to further explain the content and to provide levity to the tone of the book. This book is split fairly evenly between pubertal information and sexuality information.

### **Book 2**

Book 2 is sixty-four pages, and the shortest book analyzed. The depth of the information provided is due to the brevity of the book. Each of the sexual health categories was mentioned and defined, but there was not much information about any of the topics. It was the only book to mention asexual orientation. Compared to other books, it did not

have as much information on puberty, sexual practices, contraceptives, and sexually transmitted diseases. It contained some photographs of contraceptives, but nothing else that illustrated content. The book contains more information on sexuality than on puberty.

### **Book 3**

At eighty pages, this is the second shortest book analyzed. It covers briefly a wide range of topics, but it lacks the descriptions of some of the other books. It does not have information on transsexual, transgender, or intersex individuals. In addition, while it mentions a website to find if a teen finds himself a victim of sexual abuse, it has nothing about other forms of sexual violence. Oral sex and intercourse are briefly described. Compared to other books, it has very little descriptive information on sexual practices.

### **Book 4**

This book is presented in question and answer form. The 101 questions are divided into five chapters based loosely around subject material. Finding specific information was difficult at times due to this structure. The book was more comprehensive than some others in the area of sexual identity, as it only lacked information on intersex individuals. It also lacked information on options other than having a child in the subject area of pregnancy. In addition, the book contained photographs and diagrams. The book focused mainly on sexuality information, but it did provide some puberty information.

**Book 5**

Book 5 is divided into fifteen short titles, each of which is quite specific. Compared to other books, this book provided a more comprehensive view of sex and sexuality. It lacked information on acne as a byproduct of changing hormones in adolescence. In addition, it had very few illustrations. It was one of the three books to explore all types of contraceptives coded for. This book is focused more specifically on sexuality than on puberty, but it does provide information on biological changes.

**Book 6**

At 312 pages, this book was the longest analyzed. It provided the most descriptive explanation of pregnancy (from fertilization to giving birth) out of all of the books. While it did contain information on homosexual, heterosexual, and bisexual identities, it lacked information on transsexual, transgender, and intersex individuals. Compared to other books, it was more comprehensive in the area of contraception. It mentioned information on all types of contraceptives coded for in the study. It was lacking in emotional information other than the connection between romantic relationships and sexual activity. Illustrations in this book depicted the most graphic content out of any of the books. The book contained slightly more information on sexuality than on puberty.

**Book 7**

Book seven is a book for males interested in puberty and their sexuality. It does contain some information on female sexuality and pubertal changes. Compared to other books, it contains very little information on safe sexual practices (it mentions STDs as negative), the results of pregnancy, and sexual practices. It also contains very little information on contraceptives, mentioning only male condoms. This book contains a lot of information on emotions that develop during puberty, including ones that are related to sex and sexuality. Illustrations in this book include photographs, line drawings, and cartoons. The book focuses the majority of its content on puberty rather than sexuality.

**Book 8**

This book was written for males, and it based its text on the metaphor of taking care of an automobile. While the majority of the content was male-centric, it did contain information on female pubertal changes. It lacked information about transsexual, transgender, and intersex individuals. In addition, while it provided a lot of information on the emotional changes brought on by the onset of puberty, it provided less information than other books on emotions related to sexuality.

The illustrations in this book did not relate to the textual content on sexuality. The photographs depicted car parts, diagrams, and general automobile maintenance. In addition, the photographs of individuals depicted an era much earlier than the current one. The book focused more on puberty information than on sexuality information.

**Book 9**

This book was published by a Catholic press, and the views of the Catholic Church influence the book's messages about sex and sexuality. Compared to other books, it provides more information about the negative emotions that may occur before and after sexual activity. It lacks specifics about pubertal development. It discusses homosexuality and practicing chastity as a response to this sexual orientation. It lacks information on other sexual orientations. In addition, it presents information on condoms and natural family planning, but it lacks information on other forms of contraceptives. Other books describe the hazards of natural family planning (also referred to as the rhythm method), but this book highlights the positive aspects of this form of birth control. The book was the only one to not include any illustrations.

Sexual activity before marriage was presented strictly with negative connotations. This was the only book to do so. In addition, this was the only book to prescribe chastity as a response to a homosexual orientation. This book focused exclusively on sexuality information as opposed to information on puberty.

**Book 10**

The format of book 10 is that of an encyclopedia. It contained alphabetized entries about a variety of topics on sexuality and puberty issues. It was more comprehensive than others on the subject of sexual identity, as it only lacked information on intersex individuals. It was also more comprehensive than others on the subject of sexual practices, containing explanations on all practices coded for. It lacked pictures other than

a few small cartoon drawings. This book focused more on sexuality issues than on puberty issues.

### **Book 11**

Book 11 contains eight chapters, each of which addresses an aspect of sexuality or puberty for adolescents. Compared to other books, it is more comprehensive in the area of contraception. It describes all types of contraceptives coded for this study. It is lacking in the area of sexual identity. It contains an anecdotal account of a homosexual individual, but it does not describe homosexual orientation. It mentions sexual abuse, but it lacks any information regarding other forms of sexual violence or steps to take before/after sexual violence. All four sexual practices coded for this study were mentioned, but oral and anal sex were mentioned only in anecdotal form. Further information regarding these sexual practices was not provided. It contains some photos and diagrams that are illustrative of the content of the text. The book focused more on sexuality information than on puberty information.

### **Book 12**

Book 12 describes itself as a “girl’s guide” to sex, sexuality, and puberty. While the book is written for the female perspective on these issues, it does contain information about male sex and sexuality. This would be helpful to females reading the book. Compared to other books, it lacks information on sexual identities other than homosexual/heterosexual. It explains all of the sexual practices coded for in the study, making it more comprehensive than some other books in this area. It contains some cartoon drawings and

diagrams. It was also the only book to contain a variety of quizzes throughout the book that would help the reader ascertain her level of knowledge regarding issues in sex and sexuality. This book was balanced well between puberty information and sexuality information.

### **Book 13**

This book was divided into four sections: “Sexuality and life,” “Your growing body,” “Sexual intercourse,” and “The adventure continues.” These terms are fairly general, and the last term is a bit vague. However, the information contained within each of these sections was not vague. It divided its focus fairly evenly among each of these sections. Compared to other books, the main thing lacking was information on sexual orientations other than homosexual/heterosexual. It also lacked any mention of anal sex. The cartoon illustrations in this book depicted content that was found in the text. This book is 110 pages, and the illustrations cover the majority of the space in the book. This book provides a good general overview of topics in sexual development, and it is balanced between puberty information and sexuality information.

### **Book 14**

This book was written for females, and the majority of the information covered in this eight chapter book relates to female puberty and sexuality. It does contain information on growth and development of male sexual organs. Compared to other books, it is more comprehensive in the subject material of sexual practices. It explains all of the sexual practices coded for. It lacks information on transsexual, transgender, and intersex

individuals, and it also lacks information on pregnancy options other than keeping the child. It has a few cartoon pictures and diagrams. The book splits its content evenly between puberty and sexuality information.

### **Book 15**

This book was written for females, and the majority of the information in this book pertains to female puberty and sexuality. It does contain some information on growth and development of male sexual organs. Compared to other books, it is somewhat comprehensive in the subject area of sexual practices. It is lacking information that explores sexual orientations other than homosexual/heterosexual. The book began each chapter with an anecdotal story that relates to the content of the chapter. In addition, each chapter ends with flow charts that demonstrate the path of the characters from the chapter-starting story. These charts provide another way for the information in each chapter to be understood by teenagers. The book splits its content evenly between puberty and sexuality information.

## **Categorized by Content**

### **Pubertal Development**

Most of the books addressed puberty and the biological changes that happen then in some way. All but two (2, 9) discussed the effects of hormones on puberty. Three of the books (1, 3, 7) included charts that gave the specifics of hormonal changes at different periods in an adolescent's life. Some of the books reviewed were written targeted to a specific gender. These books included more information on one gender than on the opposite gender. However, two of the male-centered books (7, 8) gave information on both genders, and three of the female-centered books (12, 14, 15) did the same.

There was a wide range of topics covered within physical pubertal development. All but one (9) of the books mentioned the growth and development of male and female sex organs. In the books that mentioned sex organ growth and development, breasts were the most common female sex organ explained, and penises were the most common male sex organ explained. Each of these was mentioned within all of the books that explained sex organ growth.

In addition to sex organ development, the onset of acne (caused by hormones during the teenage years) or oily skin was mentioned in 67% of the books. Acne or oily skin was not discussed as a byproduct of hormones in books 2, 4, 5, 9 and, 11. Menstruation was discussed in all books except for 2 and 9, although book 2 mentions that "puberty is the time when physical changes allow the body to reproduce, or have a baby" (Endersbe 9).

## Identity

All of the books discussed the importance of romantic relationships as stemming from adolescent sexual development. Developing and understanding one's sexual identity is a crucial part of an adolescent's exploration of romantic relationships. The books defined several different sexual orientations to which teens could identify. All of the books discussed heterosexual and homosexual identity. Book 11 discussed homosexuality only in anecdotal form (p 57). Book 9 defined chastity as an appropriate response to identifying as homosexual. Bisexuality was defined and discussed in 73% of the books. It was not in books 9, 11, 12, and 15. Transsexual and transgender identities were explained in books 4, 5, and 10. Intersex individuals were discussed in books 4 and 5. Asexual orientation was defined only in book 2.

Specific struggles relating to sexual identity were also explored in the books. The most common were the difficulties faced when determining sexual identity (73%) and the societal pressures relating to "coming out" as homosexual (books 5, 6, 10).

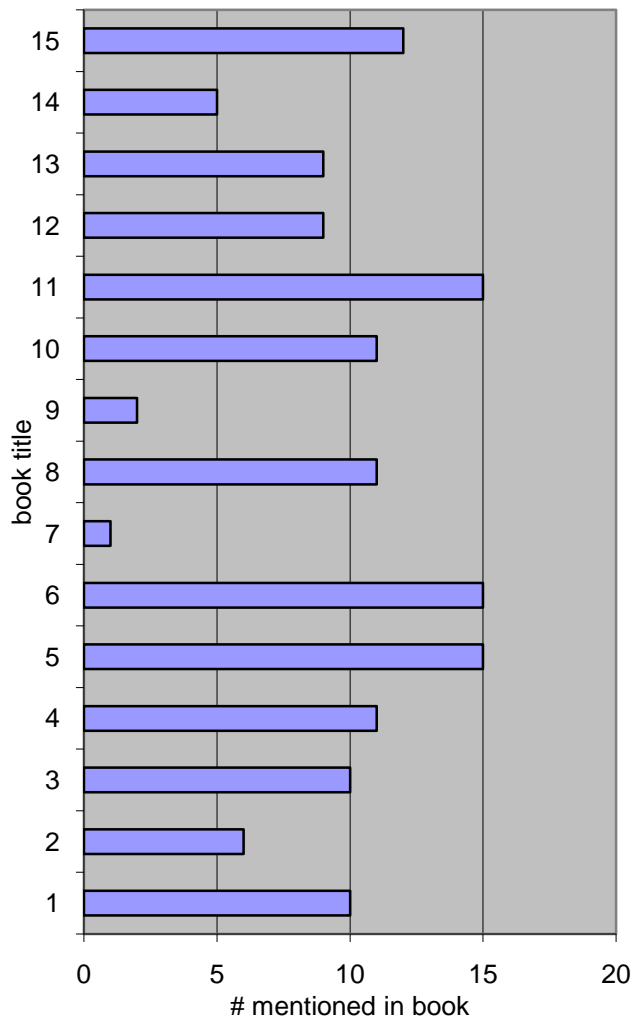
## Safe Sexual Practices

### Contraception

The books explained a wide variety of birth control measures. All of the books defined abstinence as the only form of birth control that is 100% effective. In addition, the array of birth control options included hormonal or barrier methods as well as emergency contraception. The male condom was mentioned in every book, making it, along with abstinence, the only contraception mentioned in all books. Hormonal birth control pills and female condoms were mentioned in all of the books except 7 and 9.

The books did vary in the amount of contraceptive methods presented per book. The following chart illustrates the cumulative number of unique contraceptive methods listed per book.

**Contraceptive Methods by Book**  
**Figure 2**



Books 5, 6, and 11 mentioned all types of contraceptives coded for this study. On the other end, book 7 only mentioned male condoms, and book 9 only mentioned male condoms and “natural family planning,” or the rhythm method.

In addition, the process of the male withdrawing his penis from his female partner’s vagina before ejaculating, or *coitus interruptus*, was explained in seven of the books (4,

5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 13, 15). The process was accompanied by a warning of the low success rate of this method in preventing pregnancy. The rhythm method, or natural family planning, was explained in books 4, 5, 6, 9, 11, and 13. All of these except book 9 discussed the hazards and frustrations present with this method.

Emergency hormonal contraception was mentioned and explained in all books except 7, 9 and 14.

### **Sexual violence**

Situations involving sexual violence were identified in all of the books. In addition to defining sexual harassment, sexual abuse, sexual assault, and rape, 73% of the books included tips for staying safe in situations with the potential for sexual violence. The remainder of the books provided a description of some type of sexual violence but did not include advice for protecting oneself. 80% of the books included information for survivors of sexual assault, rape, or sexual abuse. This advice focused on the importance of telling someone about the attack.

All of the books except 7 and 11 defined and explained sexual abuse, sexual assault, and rape. Book 11 mentioned sexual abuse, but did not define or explain it in any way. 53% of the books mentioned sexual harassment. Another topic mentioned was the risk involved in online sexual contact (33%).

## **Emotions and Sexual Activity**

In general, books mentioned emotional responses to sexual activity as they related to the emotional changes during puberty. Puberty is described as a time in which hormones effect constant emotional shifts. These emotions impact romantic relationships. Sexual activity and relationships brings up a number of emotions and emotional responses.

“Choosing to be part of any relationship can be an emotional risk. When sex is involved, the emotional risk can increase. This is because sex can change a relationship” (Endersbe 21). Reasons for waiting to begin sexual activity were often tied to this idea.

Feelings involved with sexual activity can be divided into feelings before sexual activity and after sexual activity. In addition, the books also discussed the importance of expressing emotion during sexual activity. Books discussed the importance of a committed relationship as part of a natural progression to a sexual relationship.

Emotional readiness was described both in terms of understanding ones’ emotions as well as considering reasons to wait. Expressing emotions during sexual activity was explained as the readiness to communicate with a partner regarding frustrations and desires.

Emotional regrets after a sexual experience and emotional consequences of abortion were discussed as feelings occurring after sexual activity. The following chart shows which books covered these subjects.

**Emotions and Sexual Activity****Figure 3**

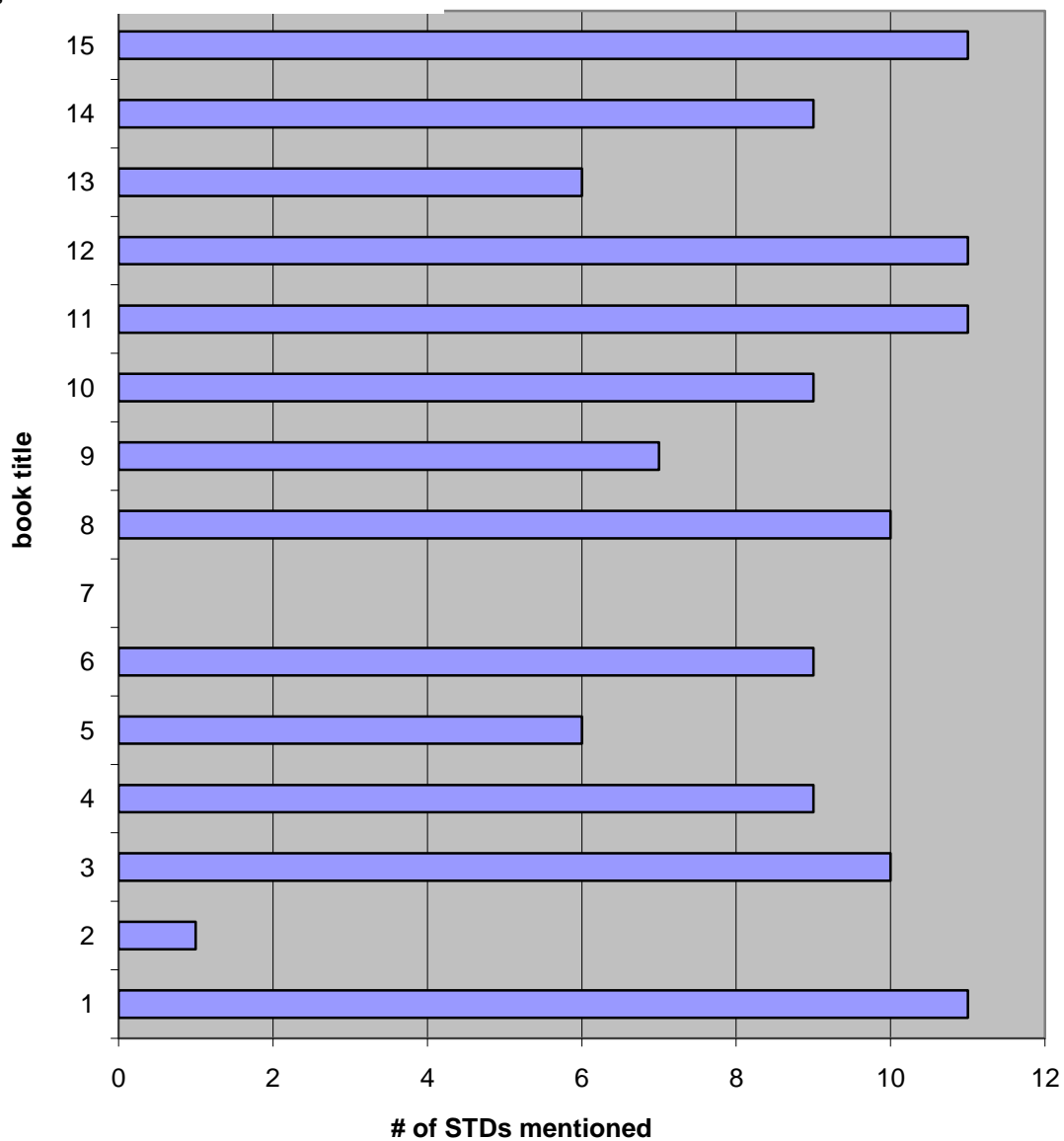
<b>Subject</b>	<b>Book Number</b>
Emotions and relationships	1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 13, 14, 15 (80%)
Emotional readiness for sex	1, 3, 5, 7, 10, 14, 15 (47%)
Emotional expression during sexual activity	1, 2, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15 (73%)
Emotional regrets afterward	4, 7, 9, 11, 12, 15 (40%)
Emotions with abortion	9, 10, 15 (20%)

**Physical Consequences to Sexual Activity****STDs**

Sexually transmitted diseases (also referred to as sexually transmitted infections) were mentioned in all of the books. Two of the books (2, 7) did not mention any specific STDs, but they did mention them as a physical hazard of sexual activity. The books included information on how to avoid STDs (abstinence, the use of a condom, limiting the number of sexual partners). Books that did provide information on individual STDs were fairly comprehensive.

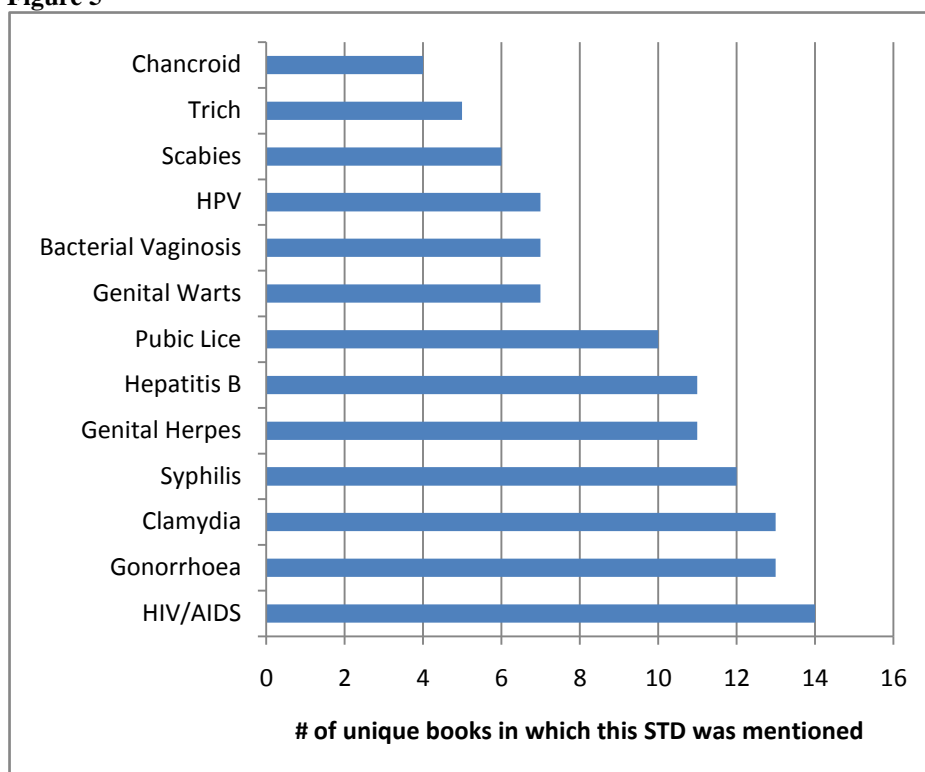
Thirteen unique STDs were searched for in all of the books. None of the books included information on all thirteen STDs. Books 1, 11, 12, and 15 contained the most information, each containing information on eleven STDs. The following chart illustrates the cumulative number of unique STDs listed per book.

**Sexually Transmitted Diseases by Book**  
**Figure 4**



HIV/AIDS was mentioned most frequently, appearing in every book except (7). Chlamydia and gonorrhea infections were the next most frequent, appearing in all books except 2 and 7. The chart below depicts the cumulative number of books in which each STD was mentioned.

**Sexually Transmitted Diseases by Type**  
**Figure 5**



### **Pregnancy**

Some books described the entire process of pregnancy from fertilization to giving birth. Others explained the fertilization process, but did not provide any further information on content relating to pregnancy. Pregnancy was mentioned as a physical consequence of sexual activity, and a combination of some or all of the following options were discussed in the books: adoption, abortion, keeping the child.

All three were explained and presented as viable options in 60% of the books. Books 8, 11, and 15 presented abortion and keeping the child. Books 2, 4, and 14 only discussed pregnancy and having a child.

### **Sexual Practices**

Some books were focused more generally on puberty and adolescents. Sexual intercourse was mentioned as a part of this, but there were not descriptions of other sexual practices. Other books explained and defined additional sexual practices. In addition, in the books that did mention other sexual practices, there was a disparity relating to the amount of description given. Some books merely mentioned a variety of sexual practices, while others provided a more detailed description.

Intercourse, oral sex, anal sex, and masturbation were the sexual practices most commonly named in the books. All of these practices were mentioned in 67% of the books. The amount of detail varied. Intercourse was explained in all of these books. Books 5, 8, 10, 12, and 14 described masturbation, oral sex, and anal sex as well. Books 4 and 6 described masturbation, but not oral or anal sex.

Books 1, 9, 13, and 15 explained oral sex and masturbation but not anal sex. Book 11 mentioned oral sex without any kind of explanation of what this term meant. Book 7 explained masturbation, but not oral or anal sex. Book 3 described oral sex, but not masturbation or anal sex.

### **Illustrations**

Almost all of the books had some kind of illustration. The illustrations were usually tied to the content of the text, with one notable exception (8). Book 9 had zero illustrations. Book 15 had flow chart diagrams of certain situations that adolescents may find

themselves in, but no further illustrations. Types of illustrations present were photographs, cartoons, line drawings, and diagrams.

The most popular types of illustrations were cartoon illustrations, found in seven books.

Diagrams were found in five books, and photographs were found in five books.

Contraceptives were the item most often shown in photographs.

Book 8 contained metaphors comparing automotive care to male self-care. Therefore, the illustrations in this book were of auto parts and cars. In addition, 1950's era pictures were used.

## DISCUSSION

Overall, the results indicated that most books provided a well-balanced look at puberty and sexuality of adolescents. The categories with the widest coverage were sexual identity and sexual practices. Each book studied presented some information on each of these topics. However, for sexual identity, many books did not fully explore the variety of orientations with which teens may identify. Sexual practices were not always described or even mentioned in some books. Teens seeking information or more detailed explanations may find their information needs unfulfilled by these books. As noted by earlier studies, sexual behavior and sexual identity may or may not correspond in adolescents (Auslander, Rosenthal and Blythe 694-702; Huston *et al* ). This complicates the issues faced by information-seeking teens even further. Their needs would be best served by information on all facets of sexuality and sexual practices.

Some books focused mainly on puberty and did not include much information on adolescent sexuality. While the puberty information included in these books was thorough and descriptive, the lack of sexuality information could be a limitation. All of the books were found via searches on an online category with the keywords sex\* AND puberty. Someone interested in books that cover both of these types of information might be confused by the lack of sexuality information.

Illustrations varied across the range of books studied. Many books included descriptive drawings and/or cartoons. The information contained in the illustrations was not coded. However, research could be done in the future on these illustrations to determine the rate at which textual content was actually depicted. In addition, the type of illustrations could be further studied to understand the effectiveness of each style of illustration: photograph, diagram, cartoon, or line drawing. The information presented in each illustration could be the same, but the variation in illustration style could affect the ways in which the illustrations were interpreted.

*Hang-Ups, Hook-Ups, and Holding Out; Sex, Puberty and All that Stuff; The Guy Book; Doing it Right; The Underground Guide to Teenage Sexuality; Girl Stuff; 101 Questions About Sex and Sexuality; and The Sex Book* consistently presented thorough information in all of the categories. While each book left out some definition or description that others included, these books had the most comprehensive information.

*Sexual Readiness: When Is It Right?; Safe Sex 101; and Sex Explained* provided some information about most topics. However, each of these books was conspicuously lacking in some category. However, each of these books provided a thorough explanation of at least one other topic. For example, while *Safe Sex 101* did not include any information beyond anecdotes regarding sexual orientation, it did have one of the most thorough explanations of contraceptives.

*Puberty Boy; Healthy Sexuality; Sex, Love, and You; and Ready or Not* lacked information in more than one category. These books may complement other books, but

on their own they do not provide a comprehensive look at adolescent sexuality. *Puberty Boy* provided a wealth of information on puberty, but lacked information on almost every sexual topic coded for in this study.

Many factors impact teenage sexuality. Teens view and take in an enormous amount of sexual images and messages in the media. These messages may or may not portray an accurate representation of adolescent sexuality and puberty. Therefore, adolescents should also be able to have access to sexuality messages that are accurate, informative, and suited to their needs. Not all teens will access the information found in nonfiction sexuality books, but the young adults who do should be able to readily find the information they seek. None of the sexuality books studied presented a definitive, exhaustive study of all teenage puberty and sexuality information. Multiple books should therefore be available to teenagers to complement the information found in each book.

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