



# Sexual Education Outside of the Classroom

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## Introduction

- Sexual education is most often thought of as an in-school activity that occurs for the younger generations of the world; however, it often comes in many different forms.
- We see through survey data and journal entries that sexual education through school programs is often not the first-time adolescents are learning about different sexual topics.
- Media, pornography, and peer relations function as some of the largest pieces to an individual's sexual education. These different sources are easily accessible and shape perceptions of sexual culture in both positive and negative ways.
- Both of us had an interest in the ways in which individuals obtained sexual knowledge and our study works to demonstrate that the ways in which individuals gain sexual knowledge is a multi-faceted experience that works in diverse ways and the information gained differs from person to person.

## Research Question

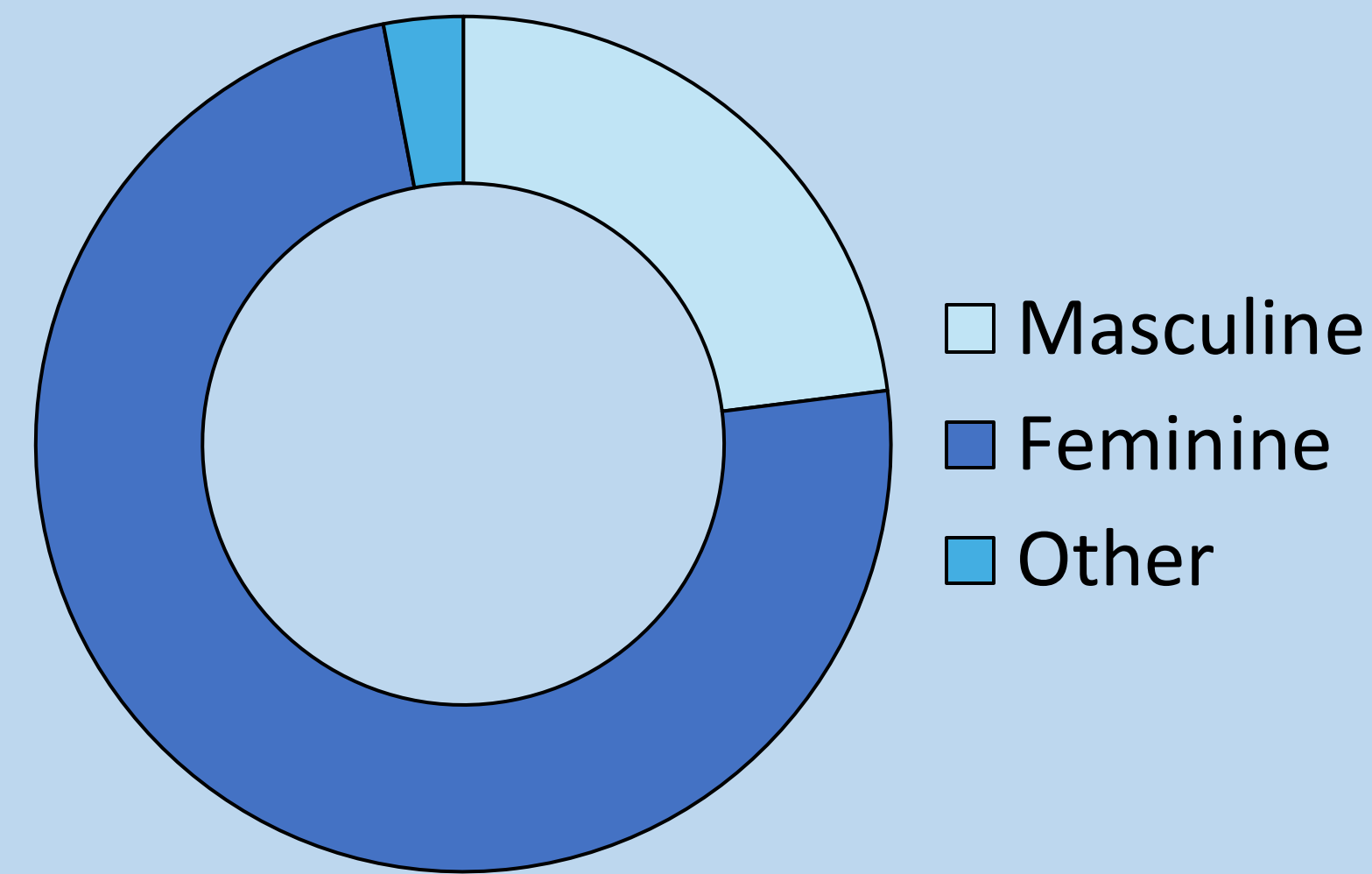
How do MSU students learn about sexual health and how does that influence their participation in sexual activity?

## Methods

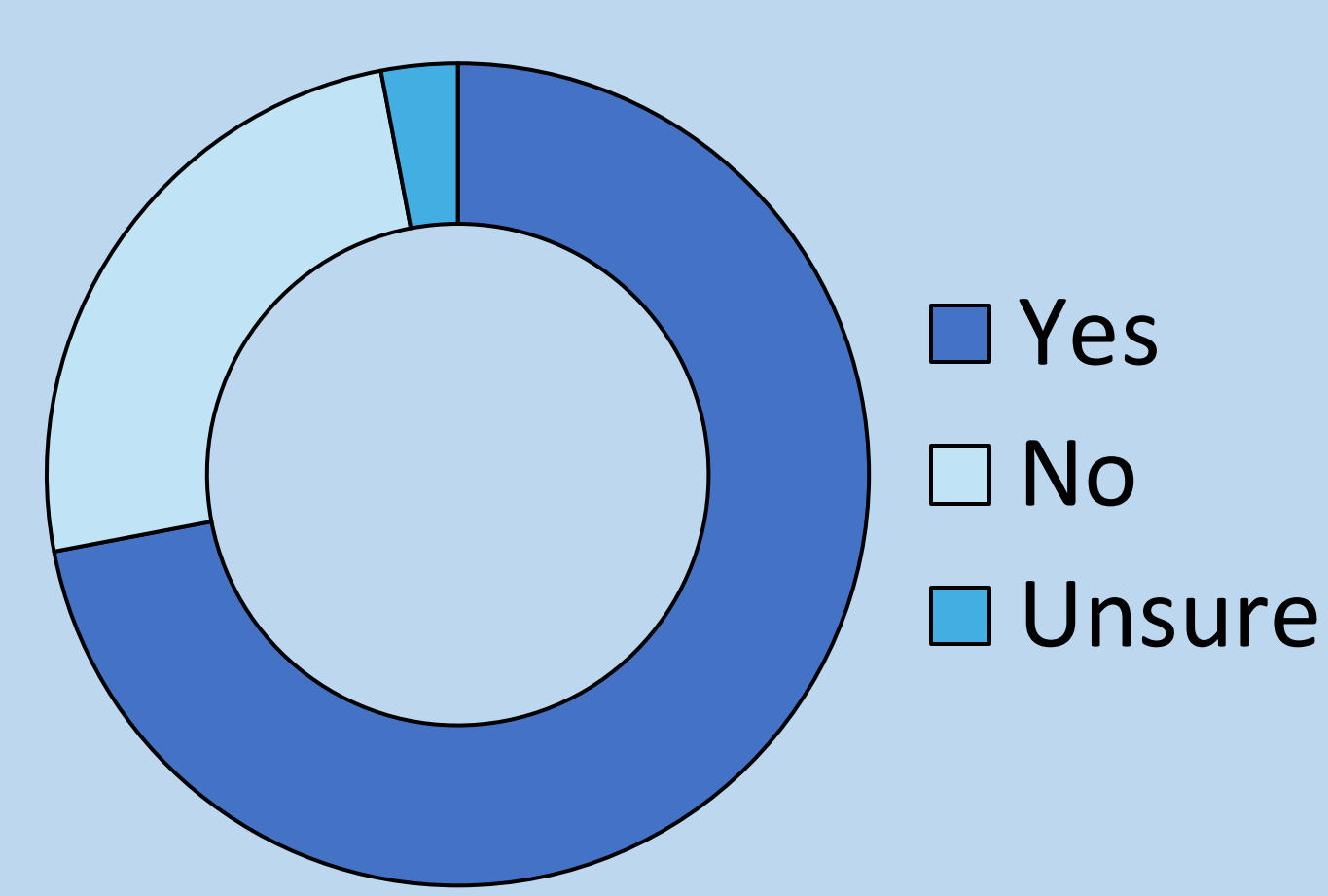
- Conducted in Dr. Sarah Prior's Campus Sexual Culture lab using data from Michigan State Students in social science courses
- Collected data from journal entries (n=50) from MSU students from 2022-2024 and survey responses (n=288, some incomplete) from a range of students in 2026.
  - Journal entries were asked to select a pseudonym to protect their identity, then reflect on questions such as "How did you learn about sex?"
  - Entries were then open coded to find similar themes, such as influence of pornography and the internet, or personal religious upbringings.
  - Survey responses were collected in Qualtrics and were given multiple choice answers to questions such as "Did you receive a formal sexual education?" or "To what extent has pornography influenced how you understand sex?"
- Compared both the qualitative and quantitative data through continued open coding for themes and notable patterns.

## Findings

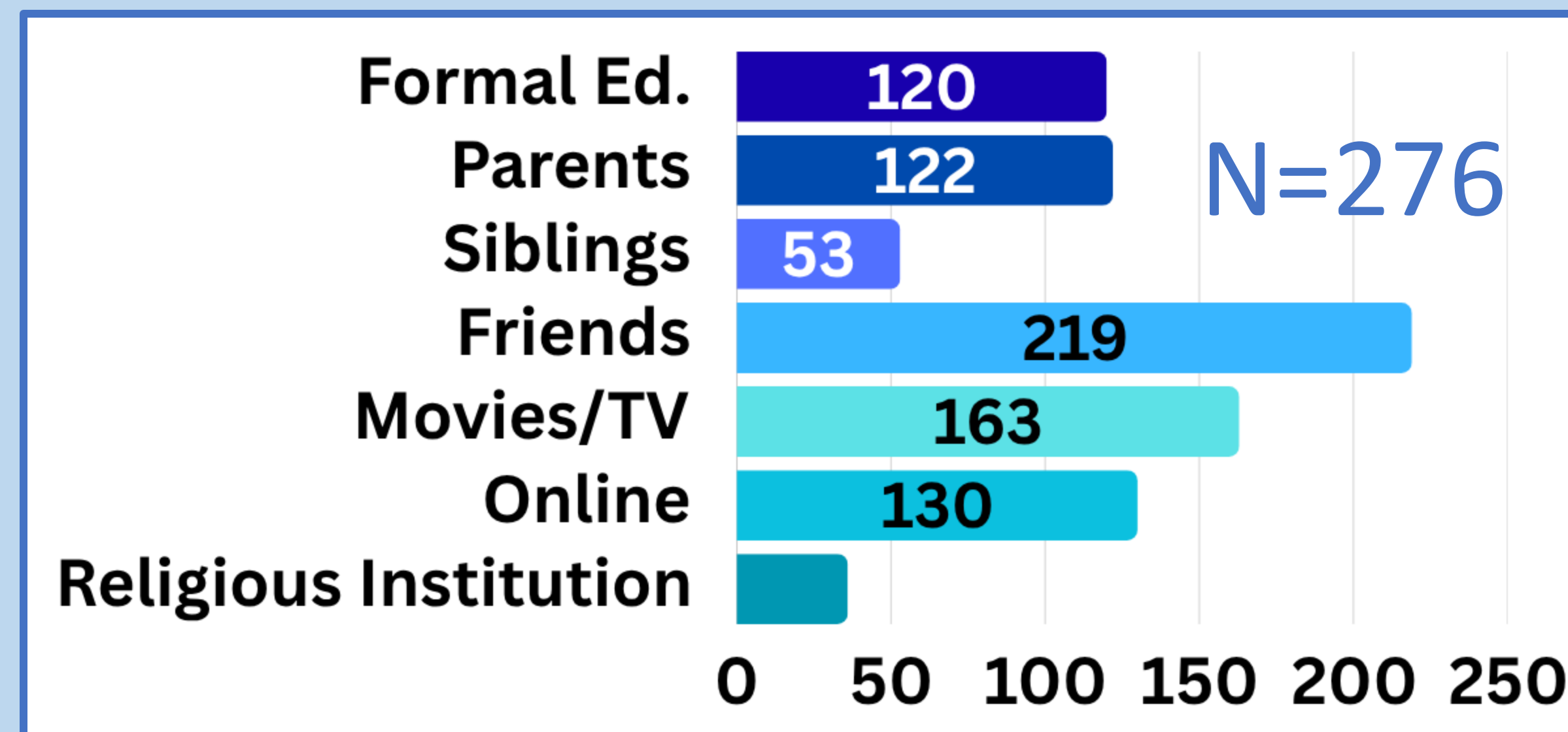
Gender Identity (n=288)



Have you had sex? (n=275)



## How did you learn about sex?



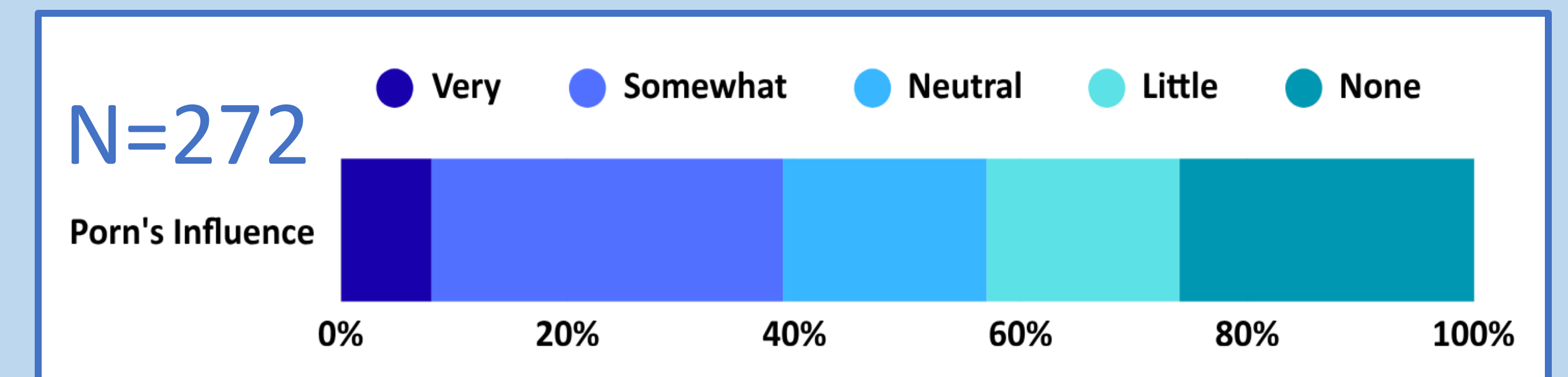
"It wasn't until my friends started having sex and describing it to me where I got the most knowledge... I feel like from multiple sources I got a full sex education, but from school alone I did not." - Daisy

"I learned about sex, sadly, mostly through pornography and the internet... The social aspect of sex was never really talked about in school." - Ludo

"I learned about sex from my friends when we were in elementary school. [...] My friends and I learned what it truly was by watching porn." - Meredith Gray

"Showed porn by a friend. My mom talked to me about sex, but it was not a long conversation because I was embarrassed. I learned this mostly through the internet." - Stitch

## Findings II



When looking at how much influence porn has over Michigan State University Students and their understanding of sexual education it can be noted that it is close to an even split with 39% having influence ranging between very influential and somewhat influential. 42% of respondents stated porn had no or little influence on their understanding.

## Conclusions & Future Research

- Of the Michigan State University students that took part in the survey we can see that 79% learned about sex from their friends.
- We can also see that movies and television make-up 59% of responses and the next closest category is online sources at 47%.
- Formal education sources are the third lowest percentage of the seven total categories at 43%.
- This data allows us to see that the ways in which Michigan State students learned about sex are dominated by informal sources, this can be seen as stemming from close relationships and exposure to related topics online and through media.
- We recommend for future research that we expand the diversity within the sample by including more masculine identifying individuals.
- We also recommend that in the future we include more questions in the survey about how queer communities obtained their sexual education.

## Literature

Across time, abstinence-based sexual education had decreased, yet there continued to be gender, racial, and economic differences in the quality of sexual education in public schooling. In conclusion, the study urged the need for expansion of sexual education to account for these differences that are harmful to marginalized communities (Lindberg & Kantor, 2021).

Studying participants in Sweden, this study concluded that pornography was a growing form of sexual education for young people, and was primarily, though not only, used by young men. Also, peer influence was a factor of some sexual education outside the classroom, to account for questions and gaps within the curriculum (Wallmyr & Welin, 2006).

