# Media as the Main Choice for Sex Education amongst the Youth: The Case of Radio in Nairobi, Kenya

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# Abstract

What is scientifically indisputable is the fact that sex is among the basic biological motives or drives in human life. The other fact is that over the years humans have set rule governing sexuality. While we define sexuality as everything that defines us as girls and boys, women and men, regulating sexuality requires more than simply explaining anatomy and reproduction. First and foremost, sex should be understood as a social construct: That its meaning, the interdicts and imperatives surrounding sex, are socially constructed. Today as the African Communities are facing "sex lawlessness" information on sexuality can be accessed easily and from different forms of media- radio, television, and print. Amidst this is a great concern on how sex content created and presented by the media is affecting the behavior and attitude of the youth. The youth in need of sex knowledge are having the radio as their favorite avenue and the end result is that most of the youth are consuming sex content aired through radio without much restrictions. The fact the youth are consuming sex content aired through radio and the fact that they request for more time is confirmation that the youth consider the topics that are aired on radio to be relevant to them and to add value to their lives. In Kenya today a big share of audiences who tune in to listen to the programs on air are the young who are seeking entertainment as well as information on issues they think are important to them. Among the popular topics Kenyan youth listen to, participate in by way of discussion and questions & answers when they are aired and which they prefer to be allocated more air time are topics on love, HIV/AIDS testing, abstinence, contraceptives, dating, abortion, alcohol & sex, drugs & sex and safe sex. These topics have finally found their way into a "public and unrestricted space" (open to all who choose to participate either as creators or consumers) as opposed to the earlier "closed and guided space" (where there were clear guidelines of who should discuss what with who taking into consideration the age, gender and relationship of the interacting parties) the topics had in the traditional African Society. This shift of space for sex content has raised a lot of concern especially amongst parents who are polarized between those who are opposed to sex content aired on radio and those who find nothing wrong with the content. Whether something is wrong or not, what needs to be considered is how the present society has constructed sex regardless of the primary orientation of any member of the African Society today. Otherwise as it is now the African Society is experiencing the strain of social change (which is normal) and soon the society will strike equilibrium in a new socially constructed meaning of sex. It is at this point that radio and other avenues of communication will be guided to air content that is "universally" acceptable (acceptable by majority if not all).

Keywords: sex, sexuality, Sex education, sex anomie, Media, cognitive map, social cognition.

# 1.0 Introduction

One of the sociological themes that has reigned so powerfully is that of motives: The humane drives; what makes you and I socially connect. What is scientifically indisputable is that sex is among the basic biological motives or drives in human life. The other fact is that over the years humans have set rules governing sexuality. While we define sexuality as everything that defines us as girls and boys, women and men, regulating sexuality requires more than simply explaining anatomy and reproduction.

This is because sexuality encompasses our physical development, sexual knowledge, attitudes, values, and behaviors (Peel Public Health, 2011). Giddens (2009) considers sexuality to be a broad term that refers to the sexual characteristics and sexual behavior of human beings. It is shaped not solely by our biology and psychological, but also our culture, family, history, education and experiences.

On the other hand, Freud (1943) defines sexuality as the 'improper' and hence which must not be mentioned.

This definition aptly captures the taboo issue that is sexuality- after all any issues involving sexuality, are seen and understood as largely private activities, subject to varying degrees of social, cultural, religious, moral and legal norms (Ntarangwi, 2009). So should we know about it? Should we talk about it? If we should know, what of it, how much of it and for who? If we should talk about it with whom should we? Precisely, this is the dilemma the Kenyan family is faced with and we believe most modern African families.

## 1.1 Sex and Sex Education in Kenya Today

First and foremost, sex should be understood as a social construct: The meaning, interdicts and imperatives surrounding sex, are socially constructed. On the other hand, from the scientific point of view, sex should be seen as a variable given the various perspectives (biological, psychological and behavioral) from which it has been and continues to be studied. Despite the scientific meanings and explanations of the why and for what of sex, its real manifestation (how, where, when and with whom we satisfy the motive) is social, finally telling what the actor (the woman and man in society) has construed as socially correct or incorrect in matters concerning sex. The reality about social constructs is that they are never static. The constructs change with the time and therefore, the way in which sex is constructed is ever evolving: The elements in the construct including meaning, ideas, attitude and taste have been changing with time and they will continue to change.

It will be futile, therefore, to imagine that sex education and by and large information about sex in Kenya today should be done the same way by the same institutions that used to up to the early 70s. It is worth noting that change has not just happened in certain fields and others fields have remained unaffected. Change has happened across the board and its impact is being felt in all social institutions. One such institution that has changed drastically is the family.

Among the major changes within the family in Kenya and which demands a fresh look at what constitutes sex, sex information & education, is the death of the grandparent and housewife institutions. In the Kenyan traditional family set up grandparents were solely responsible for the socialization on grandchildren backed up by mothers who were purely housewives and had the time to regulate the behavior of the young ones on matters relating to sex. This means that two crucial socializing agents have been phased out. The obvious strain we are therefore faced with as a society is that of who should be tasked with the responsibilities that these two institutions used to play in socializing the young ones, and especially on matters concerning sex. Alongside these changes, are changes on sex itself: as a social construct, its meaning, values, who should be involved in it and with whom. These changes have created an environment that can only be described as "sex anomie": that is, an environment lacking in clear and precise interdicts and imperatives about sex. Does this mean that sex education has been overtaken by events and it is no longer necessary? The answer is obviously no and as Masters, Johnson and Kolodny (1995:3) argue;

Acquiring accurate information about sexuality can help prevent sexual problems, and it can enable us to educate our children better about sex [and] deal more effectively with certain types of problems if they occur in our lives (e.g. infertility, sexual dysfunctions, sexually transmitted diseases, sexual harassment).

## 1.2 Media and Sex Information

As we are facing "sex lawlessness", information on sexuality can be accessed easily and the different forms of media- radio, television, and print provide different avenues to channel this information. Radio is one form of mass media that is easy to consume and it is also fairly easy to access. Access to an FM station can be as easy as tuning in via mobile phone handsets, or music players such as I-pods, with no subscription charge.

In Kenya today a big share of audiences who tune in to listen to the programs on air are young, and they are seeking entertainment as well as information on issues they think are important to them (Ipsos Synovate, 2013). This has in return triggered reaction from adult Kenyans who are now questioning the nature, and amount of content concerning sexuality in the media. There are those who are calling for a total ban on content touching on sexuality from being aired in the media, with the claim that such content imparts negative values on the youth. 250

The question one would ask at this point is whether Kenyan media is impacting anti-social sex value on the Kenyan youth.

In light of the changing attitudes on sex and sexuality, and also in understanding the broadening role of the media in educating young Kenyans on matters of sex, there is need to refer to Klapper (1960) who asserts that mass (media) communication does not directly influence people, but rather, just reinforces people's predispositions. He referred to this phenomenon as Selective Exposure. Meaning people tune in to stations, or purchase products, or even go to events that resonate with who they are, and what they agree with. These decisions are based on what people know, and the media simply reinforces those beliefs, attitudes or predispositions. People gravitate towards the material that agrees with them and away from that which goes against what they believe or understand.

So people actively choose what kind of media content they would like to consume, based on their attitudes and beliefs. In this context it will be argued that the people who expose themselves to content have an already established cognitive map (a mental idea of what their world is). The cognitive map acts as a filter for any social stimuli in the one's environment leading to the selection of what an individual would want to exposed himself/herself to. This explains why individuals in society have taken different positions on issues surrounding them and developed likes and dislikes of objects surrounding them. To note however, is the psychological fact that the individual's cognitive map is very dynamic and it evolves with time. Therefore, we do not expect the construct sex to have a universal meaning for the youth today (but there are likely to be aspects where majority converge) nor do we expect their attitude towards sex today to be a replica of yesteryear's youth.

There is also Selective Retention (ibid). The argument put forward here is that at any given time, humans are exposed to a barrage of information in the different forms of mass media they consume, but ultimately, they choose to keep and recall, only certain packets of information from all that they were exposed to. People remember only those messages that are key to their needs, plans, or, are in line with their beliefs and attitudes.

It can therefore be argued, that the Kenyan youth have already formed a culture, and they are tuning in to information that is reinforcing who they are, and what they believe is true, reflective and definitive of their reality. This is clearly illustrated in the following diagram.



**Diagram 1: Illustrating How the Media Reinforces the Youth Culture** 

In the diagram above, the media as a socializing agent is viewed from its three broad categories. There are forms of media outlets that are strictly regulated- such as religious stations, those that are very liberal- commercial stations that allow for a lot more flexibility in the nature of content and style of delivery on air than the others and the in-between which are not very tightly regulated, but are still governed by policies and guidelines, be they internal or external regulations.

The media outlets all air content that is available for young audiences but depending on the existing attitude set of those tuned in to these stations, and the content that is broadcasted, these audiences choose what they want to listen to. What they listen to on the other hand is guided by their attitudes and beliefs. This is how they keep tuning in to the same media which reinforces what they believe in. It can be said therefore, that the youth today are living in a set belief systems which they have internalized and it is rewarding when their belief is acknowledged and institutionalized in the media. So they go for that which is rewarding.

#### **1.3 Study Objectives**

It is against this background, that this study sought to furnish information on how young people are learning about sexuality, what it is they perceive from the content they hear, and what they wish they could hear about sexuality on air.

The specific objectives of the study were:

- 1. To establish the dominant form of media for the socialization of the urban youth in Nairobi.
- 2. To establish the nature of the content that is consumed by the urban youth.
- 3. To establish the themes on sexuality the urban youth are able to discuss with different agents of socialization viz-a-viz radio.
- 4. To establish whether radio was reinforcing the urban youth's beliefs and attitudes, by aptly addressing their concerns and needs on sexuality.

## **1.4 Research Methods**

The study was purely descriptive looking into the socialization of the Kenyan youth on sexuality by FM radio stations. Therefore, this was a fact-finding investigation, which aimed at providing a detailed interpretation of youth socialization on sexuality by the media, specifically through radio.

This study was conducted in the city of Nairobi, covering the central business district which houses major government and private organisations and companies, and hosts many young people who come here in search of formal and informal employment. There are many institutions of learning also located in the city. In this study, the central business district of Nairobi was divided into two clusters: the Uptown CBD and the Downtown CBD.

The study also included two sections of the city – Eastlands and Westlands- that represent very different socioeconomic profiles. Eastlands is an area associated with members of the population who may not have a huge income, yet represent a majority of the city's population. Westlands is an area associated with affluence, and a more niche population whose tastes are considered to be aspirational.

This study incorporated both primary and secondary sources of data. Youth who participated in the study, as well as the key informants, were the primary sources of data.

Secondary data used, included consumer based research findings, global research reports, as well as reports from media monitoring agencies on radio listenership patterns, and radio consumption. Secondary data also included radio station policy guides, national communication broadcasting guides, and material from church-based programs and content on socialization on sexuality from social and psychological studies in articles and journals.

From the three clusters (Central Business District, Eastlands and Westlands) a total of 115 youth aged between 15 and 24 years were sampled for interview using convenient sampling. The study also selected 5 Key Informants who provided information and insights.

# 2.0 Findings

The findings of the study are discussed below in three broad sections namely; the demographic information (Gender, Religion, Employment status, Education and Family type) of the youth who participated in the study, youth consumption of sex content in radio, and reinforcement.

# 2.1 Religion

Kenya is home to many religious faiths, as well as indigenous based faiths, and the findings from the youth are listed below. Churches, mosques and temples are places where the youth spend a considerable amount of time while growing up, and it is here where they learn about spirituality, which subsequently has an impact on the habits, and attitudes that the youth will subscribe to. These attitudes and beliefs play a part in how the youth grow up, and the choices that they make, as these institutions impart the knowledge of the spiritual dimension to their actions, the consequences of said actions, and other spiritual matters. For instance religion disapproves of sex before marriage, and encourages that matters on sex be handled within the institution of marriage. The virtue of purity is extolled and encouraged among the youth, thus making for a more conscientious approach to matters concerning sexuality.

RELIGION	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Christian	86	74.8
Muslim	21	18.3
Hindu	5	4.3
None	3	2.6
TOTAL	115	100.0

<b>Table 1: Religion</b>	of the Respondents
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From table 1 above, it is clear that majority (74.8%) of youth who participated in the study are Christians whereby the Christian faith encompasses those of the Catholic, Protestant, and modern day faith churches. The assumption here except for the 2.6 percent, who do not belong to any religion, is that these youth have been brought up in accordance with the Christian, Muslim and Hindu values. So exposure to sex content aired through radio should be guided by these values. The other assumption is that before exposure to sex content in radio these youth must have been taught about sex as guided by their different faiths. It is therefore, assumed that if the youth who have been brought up in a strong religious foundation have to expose themselves to sex content in radio then the rule of Selective Exposure will apply where they will only expose themselves to content that reinforces who they are.

# 2.2 Level of Education

Learning institutions are key to socializing young ones. Masters et al (1995:3) have pointed out clearly that many college students who enroll in sexuality courses do so for personal rather that academic reasons [... which is an indication that] learning about sexuality has a number of practical applications that other subjects may not provide as easily. This means one thing, that if sex content is included in the learning institutions, the learners will go for it since the subject addresses practical aspects of their lives. It is against this background that the study sought to know whether the youth have been to a learning institution and at what level.

EDUCATION	FREQUENCY	PERCENT	
Primary	11	9.6	
Secondary	41	35.7	
College	38	33.0	
University	25	21.7	
TOTAL	115	100.0	

## Table 2: Level of Education

Findings in table 2 above, indicate that the level of education with the highest representation of youth from the study, was secondary level education with 35.7 percent of the total respondents sampled. Youth respondents with a college level of education, registered second with 33 percent, followed by those with university level of education at 21.7 percent and finally those with primary education at 9.6 percent. This is a good indication if and only if sex education is part of the school curriculum. Attempts to in cooperate sex education in the Kenyan

School curriculum has been met with resistance. It is at universities that Kenyan youth (and not all of them) are exposed to some sex content in their learning.

#### 2.3 Family Background of the Youth Respondents

Family is key in youth socialization. In establishing the family background of the youth respondents, the study sought to find out whether the respondents were from a single parent family, a two-parent family, or a different form of parental background structure. The different parental background structure here will include strictly the youth born in the streets and grown up in the street without physical connection with mother and father.

FAMILY	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Single parent	23	20.0
Both parents	90	78.3
Other	2	1.7
TOTAL	115	100.0

#### **Table 3: Family Background**

From table 3 above the results show that the majority of the youth (78.3%) respondents were from a family background with both parents present while 20 percent of the respondents were from a single parent family background. Only 1.7 percent were from backgrounds that were neither characterized by neither both parents nor a single parent (street youth).

The implication here is that majority of the youth have grown up in a social structure that has allowed them to experience the different social roles that are played by both parents. The assumption is that they have been exposed to a fairly balanced upbringing with the presence of a mother and a father. However, the situation in Kenya is one that raises a lot of concern in regard to the amount of time parents spend with their young ones and who is permitted by culture to discuss sex matters with which child (girl or boy).

It is worth noting Rage's (2014: 58-59) observation that 32 percent and 14.1 percent of Kenyan fathers and mothers respectively are not available on a daily basis to socialize their young ones. That for those who are available on average 54 percent are only available between 8.00 and 10.00 pm. This obviously compromises the quality of interaction and time available to discuss all matters concerning life and in particular sex.

#### 2.4 Radio as a Popular Media

Given the scenarios above one is left to ask who socializes the Kenyan youth. Thanks to the media and specifically the liberal media that have created sex content and which they are airing. Amidst this is a great concern whether sex content created and presented by the media is affecting the behavior and attitude of the youth. The answer is obvious; the sex content presented by the media is reinforcing the youth values. The reinforcement can be established by finding out the extent of active participation by the youth in shaping the content the media should present to them. This study took the case of radio with a view to find out time the youth spend in a day exposed to media. Apart from time the study, guided by the rule of Selective Exposure sought to know the content, specific sexual themes the youth expose to and active participation through discussions.



**Graph1: Media Frequently** 

It is evident that radio is a popular form of media with 60 percent youth reporting that that is their main media. The form of media that ranked second, was the internet, accounting for 21.7 percent. Slightly fewer respondents (14.8%) reported using television as the main media, and even fewer still (3.5%) stated that print was the media frequently used by the youth from the different regions sampled.

Due to its reach and easy access, radio is non-intrusive and allows for very personal and individual consumption. Radio has become popular with the youth because of its availability (especially via mobile phones) and portability (radio is everywhere the youth is)





From the findings in graph 2 above, 66.1 percent of the youth spent more than five hours a week listening to radio, with 20.9 percent spend about 5 hours a week tuned in to radio and 13 percent of the youth spend less than 5 hours listening to radio per week. Is radio taking over as the main socialization agent? The answer is yes. This means therefore, that if other institutions such as the family and schools have to compete favorably for the youth time they have to create more than five hour a week and this will also depend on the content of the discussion.



#### Graph 3: Most Appealing Content on Air

From graph 3 above is evident that the most appealing content for the young audiences is relationships/ sex and music. News is the preferred choice for 8.7 percent of the youth, while politics is selected by 7.8 percent of the respondents. This basically tells us what the youth culture is all about: Relationship and music. They have very little taste for politics and news.

Themes	Frequency	Percent	
Love	115	100.0	
Testing	115	100.0	
Abstinence	115	100.0	
Contraceptives	114	99.1	
Dating	112	97.4	
Abortion	110	95.7	
Rape	109	94.8	
Pregnancy	105	91.3	
Safe sex	102	88.7	
Infidelity	101	87.8	
Prostitution	95	82.6	
Alcohol and sex	94	81.7	
Drugs and sex	93	80.9	
Fidelity	90	78.3	
Sexual desire	88	76.5	
Sexual partners	82	71.3	
Gay relationships	77	70.0	
Chastity	76	66.1	
Masturbation	72	62.6	
Sexual pleasure	70	60.9	
Sexual practices	68	59.1	
Kissing	67	58.3	
Sexual dysfunction	65	56.5	
Sexual myths	50	43.5	
Sexual pain	50	43.5	
Sex aids and toys	46	40.0	
Negotiating for sex	44	38.3	
Assexuals	33	28.7	

## Table 4: Exposure to Sexual Themes on Air on Radio

The popular themes on sexuality that the youth expose themselves to are love, dating, rape, pregnancy, safe sex, and testing from STI's amongst others rated very high. The youth have converged around these themes meaning therefore, that the themes have acquired a universal appeal to the youth. In return radio stations air this content on a daily basis and are accessed by all social classes. This 'universal content' would thus explain the similarities we see in the youth in terms of sex behavior. From a psychological point of view the themes around which the youth converge can be said to acquire the property of "social cognition" (similarity in the individuals' cognitive map)

Themes	Frequency	Percent	
Dating	43	37.4	
HIV Testing	40	34.8	
Love	37	32.2	
Sexual pleasure	34	29.6	
Contraceptives	34	29.6	
Safe sex	27	23.5	
Abortion	26	22.6	
Abstinence	24	20.9	
Rape	21	18.3	
Sexual myths	16	13.9	
Pregnancy	14	12.2	
Alcohol and sex	14	12.2	
Chastity	13	11.3	
Gay relationships	13	11.3	
Drugs and sex	13	11.3	
Fidelity	13	11.3	
Sexual desire	11	9.6	
Infidelity	11	9.6	
Sexual partners	11	9.6	
Sex aids and toys	10	8.7	
Masturbation	9	7.8	
Prostitution	9	7.8	
Sexual practices	6	5.2	
Kissing	4	3.5	
Negotiating for sex	3	2.6	
Sexual dysfunction	2	1.7	
Sexual pain	1	0.9	
Assexuals	1	0.9	

Table 5: Participation on air in Discussions on Sexual Themes

It is obvious that the youth are interacting on air in matters concerning sexuality. Dating was the theme with 37.4 percent participating in discussions about dating. HIV testing was also a subject that 34.8 percent of the youth are discussing on air. Sexual pain and assexuals are not soliciting much on air participation from the youth, with each one being selected by only 0.9% of the respondents.

One factor can account for low participation and that is connecting through. Radio as a medium is accessible by many and at any given time, getting through to the radio station can be a challenge especially if the topic is compelling enough. Besides, there are only so many callers that the presenters on air can accommodate at any given time. In light of this, it is understandable that the numbers of youth who have participated in discussions on air is not very high, but the interest in taking part is substantial.

Themes	Frequency	Percent
HIV Testing	112	97.4
Contraceptives	110	95.7
Abstinence	109	94.8
Alcohol and sex	107	93.0
Drugs and sex	106	92.2
Abortion	105	91.3
Safe sex	101	87.8
Sexual myths	98	85.2
Chastity	95	82.6
Dating	94	81.7
Rape	93	80.9
Fidelity	86	74.8
Love	80	69.6
Sexual dysfunction	77	67.0
Pregnancy	75	65.2
Sexual partners	74	64.3
Sexual pain	68	59.1
Infidelity	56	48.7
Assexuals	53	46.1
Sexual practices	45	39.1
Prostitution	42	36.5
Sex aids and toys	39	33.9
Sexual desire	38	33.0
Masturbation	36	31.3
Negotiating for sex	34	29.6
Kissing	33	28.7
Gay relationships	30	26.1
Sexual pleasure	29	25.2

Table 6: Sexual Themes/Topics That the Youth would like to hear more of on Radio

From the findings as indicate in table 6 above, HIV testing was a theme that majority (97.4%) of the youth would like to hear more about. Contraceptives also rated highly amongst the youth with 95.7 percent wanting to hear more of it. Abstinence too, featured strongly with 94.8 percent of the youth stating that they would like to hear more content on this on air.

Generally, these findings, show that the youth, are happy to hear a lot more concerning a wide range of themes concerning sexuality air on radio. Technically therefore, they are going for reinforcement where they can access it – through radio.

## **2.5** Conclusion

It is evident that the youth in Kenya are exposed to sex information created and aired on radio. It is also evident that radio is popular among the Kenyan youth as compared to other communication avenues. What is indisputable is that sex topics that where discussed in a "closed and guided space" (where there were clear guidelines of who should discuss what with who taking into consideration the age, gender and relationship of the interacting parties) have now found their way into a "public and unrestricted space" (open to all who choose to participate either as creator or consumers)

The fact the youth are consuming sex content aired through radio and the fact that they are requesting for more time is confirmation that the youth consider the topics that are aired on radio, as being relevant to them and adding value to their lives. The message is clear, that the sex topics that are aired on radio actually add value to the lives of the youth and that the content that they are tuning in to reflects the real life they are living. Therefore, radio is reinforcing what the youth know about sexuality. This is happening amidst the weakening of key

institutions which should be playing a vital role in educating the youth on matters of sex. These institutions are the family, the religious institutions and schools. Now that the media and especially mass media has occupied the center stage in creating and airing sex content that has been a shift of space for sex content from closed and guided space to public and unrestricted space. This has raised a lot of concern especially amongst parents who are polarized between those who are opposed to sex content aired on radio and those who find nothing wrong with the content. Whether something is wrong or not, what needs to be considered is how the present society has constructed sex regardless of the primary orientation of any member of the African Society today. Otherwise as it is now the African Society is experiencing the strain of social change (which is normal) and soon the society will strike equilibrium in a new socially constructed meaning of sex. It is at this point that radio and other avenues of communication will be guided to air content that is "universally" acceptable (accepted by majority if not all).

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