

**THE INFLUENCE OF THE MOTHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIP ON
MEXICAN-ORIGIN ADOLESCENT GIRLS' SEXUAL AGENCY**

by

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the mothers and daughters who volunteered to talk about sexuality and thus make a contribution to the promotion of women's sexual health.

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ABSTRACT

Mexican-origin adolescent girls have some of the highest rates of unplanned teen pregnancy and births in the United States. Family ecological and feminist perspectives indicate that gender and sexual socialization processes contribute to girls' ability to promote their sexual health, yet little is known about how Mexican-origin girls develop sexual agency. In this culture, mothers are a primary socializing agent about sexuality in the family, and this study examined how mother-daughter sexual communication fostered or inhibited girls' sexual agency.

The narrative method "scaffolded interviewing" was used to facilitate open talk about sexuality. Interviews were conducted with 25 girls ages 15-17 and separate interviews with mothers in a southwestern city, with a pilot study first conducted to refine the interview script. Mothers and daughters were asked reciprocal questions about what girls learned about sexuality from mothers and other contexts. The Listening Guide, a voice-based relational approach, was used to interpret the data.

Analysis suggested that girls whose mothers provided more open and comprehensive sexual communication, and talked to them before puberty, felt more agentic to assert their needs for sexual safety. Girls who had infrequent, content-limited communication with mothers felt less able to manage fear-based school sex education messages and peer sexual exposure. Analysis of concordance between mothers' and daughters' narratives showed that different perceptions of what constitutes sex talk and sexual autonomy inhibited daughters' disclosure to mothers about sexual concerns.

These findings suggest that mother-daughter relationships are critical for sexual health promotion. Implications for educators, practitioners, and families are discussed.

CHAPTER 1

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY AND RATIONALE

More than a decade ago, in her groundbreaking study on young women's sexual desire, Tolman (2002) argued that divergent constructions of male and female adolescent sexuality in the United States presented girls with a dilemma, making it difficult for them to develop a healthy sexuality. Building on previous feminist research (e.g., Fine, 1988; Thompson, 1990), Tolman argued that girls are discouraged from feeling, knowing, and acting on their sexual desire, that is, developing *sexual subjectivity*. If girls do express desire, they are often quickly labeled as "slut" or "promiscuous." Rather than have sexual feelings, girls learn to see themselves as longing for emotional connection and romantic involvement. Ironically, due to the increasing sexualization of girls in U.S. culture (American Psychological Association, 2007), girls receive opposite messages about their bodies from what they are taught about sexual desire. Especially through media images, girls learn that to attract boys, they must dress and act sexy for them. To make matters more confusing, girls must also manage the sexual double standard that gives boys freedom to explore their sexuality and to prey on them as sexual objects. Boys are portrayed as having insatiable, uncontrollable sexual desire that poses a danger to girls, who must be protected from that desire. In her analysis of narrative interviews with adolescent girls, Tolman (2002) found that this sexual double standard in both desire and behavior presented girls with a dilemma: how to manage their developing sexuality – which includes acknowledging, negotiating, and taking responsibility for herself as a sexual being, entitled to both sexual pleasure and safety – without being perceived as violating sexual norms or putting themselves in danger.

Tolman's (2002) study underscores how narrow prescriptions of sexual subjectivity for girls adversely affect their sexual well-being. The young women Tolman interviewed had limited means to resolve contradictory messages about sexuality. A majority of them suppressed their sexual feelings to varying degrees to preserve their safety, well-being, and personal aspirations, or they explored desire within prescribed social norms, such as having sex within a committed relationship. Many of the sexually active young women denied their own sexual volition by claiming that "sex just happened," a predominant storyline also found in Thompson's (1990) study of adolescent girls' first intercourse experiences. In both Tolman's (2002) and Thompson's (1990) studies, many participants could not identify their own sexual desire as driving their behavior to engage in intercourse. As one girl put it, "I tell you, I don't know why or how I did it. Maybe I just did it unconsciously" (Thompson, 1990, p. 343). In other words, girls struggled with knowing whether they were choosing or being coerced into having sex. Other scholars have reached a similar conclusion: narrow constructions of sexuality inhibit sexual subjectivity, putting girls at risk for negative sexual health outcomes, including unplanned teen pregnancy and births, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), coerced sex, and interpersonal violence (Fine & McClelland, 2006; Impett, Schooler, & Tolman, 2006; Hirschman, Impett, & Schooler, 2006; Horne & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2006).

Sexual Agency and Latina Sexual Health

My work focuses on a key factor that contributes to the development of sexual subjectivity and, in turn, sexual health—that is, sexual agency. Sexual agency is defined here as the belief that one can regulate one's sexual feelings (Bandura, 1997, 2006) and act on one's sexual needs in a relationship, such as refusing unwanted sex, insisting on

the use of protection, and consenting to and enjoying sex (Impett et al., 2006). As this definition indicates, agency is both an individual and a relational process. To fully understand how sexual agency develops and impacts sexual health, I assert that individuals' inherent attributes and abilities as well as their learned sexual values and behavior both need to be considered, and examined at both the micro level of individual experience and daily interactions and the macro level of socialization processes and societal discourse. This information can contribute to a theory of sexual agency that guides future research in this area.

That no comprehensive theory of sexual agency exists is likely due to long-held debates about whether sexual behavior is determined by biological drives and psychological processes or by the particular social, cultural, and historical structures in which people live (DeLamater & Hyde, 1998; Fuchs, 2001). Yet clarifying a theory of sexual agency has important implications for Latina adolescents' sexual health because researchers' theories about the capacity for sexual agency, as well as the source of that agency, influence how they account for and study sexual behavior and outcomes (Fuchs, 2001). Some theorists attribute sexual outcomes to people's knowledge, motivation, and beliefs (individual subjectivity) to engage in healthy sexual and reproductive behaviors (e.g., Bandura, 1997). Others associate sexual outcomes with social discourses that liberate or inhibit agentic behavior (e.g., Impett et al., 2006), such as sexual socialization, which refers to how families and societies educate children about sexual values and behaviors. However, little is known about how these two ideas—individual subjectivity and sexual socialization—together contribute to adolescents' development of sexual agency.

This project integrates the roles that individual subjectivity and sexual socialization play in sexual agency development through the narrative analysis of a subgroup of the Latina population, Mexican-origin girls and their mothers. The design of this study strategically centers on Mexican-origin girls, given that Latinos are the fastest growing population in the United States and that Mexican-origin is the largest subgroup of Latinos (U.S. Census, 2000b), that this population has some of the highest rates of unintended teen pregnancy and births (Allen, Svetaz, Hardeman, & Resnick, 2008), and there is very little information about Mexican-origin girls' sexuality development, and the role of family relationships as the central socialization unit for this collectivistic culture (Gaines, 1995). . However, the findings potentially have relevance and generalizability for adolescents of all ethnicities and genders, since all youth are impacted by culture and family contexts to one degree or another. The study design includes 20 interviews with Mexican-origin girls ages 15 to 17 and separate interviews with their mothers. Latina mothers play a central role in their daughters' sexuality development (Liebowitz, Castellano, & Cuellar, 1999) and are the key individuals involved in socializing daughters about sexuality in most cultures (see Lee, 2008, for a review). While the main purpose of the interviews is to document how sexual agency emerges within the interplay of individual subjectivity and sexual socialization, it is also to examine how the degree of agency mediates the internalization, reenactment, and transformation of familial and cultural messages about sexuality. Thus, in the current study, I integrate a new concept—the interplay between individual subjectivity and sexual socialization—with what we already know about sexual agency to get a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of girls' sexual socialization. This work will move a theory of sexual agency

forward by integrating aspects of sexuality messages from family and cultural contexts through an agentic perspective.

To clarify what I mean by sexual health outcomes, I endorse the World Health Organization's (WHO) definition, which describes health as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. Reproductive health . . . implies that people are able to have a responsible, satisfying and safe sex life and that they have the capability to reproduce and the freedom to decide if, when and how often to do so" (WHO, 2012). This definition assumes that, ultimately, people have the right to sexual well-being, satisfaction and fulfillment in their sexual relationships, and freedom to make their own reproductive health decisions. It is also supported by the U.S. *Surgeon General's Call to Action to Promote Sexual Health and Responsible Sexual Behavior* (Satcher, 2001), which states that sexual health "is connected with both physical and mental health, and it is important throughout the entire life span, not just the reproductive years" (p. 2). Together, these definitions highlight the idea that sexuality is not limited to procreation, that it is integrated into all areas of physical and cognitive development, and that to be sexually healthy, we must be able to act on our sexual feelings in effective ways to realize well-being. At the same time, I recognize, accept, and support cultural diversity in sexual socialization and sexuality practices. Therefore, the goal of my research is to help individuals and communities find pathways to sexual health and well-being that are aligned with their cultural values.

To understand how sexual agency is constructed, I draw on self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1997), which asserts that attitudes and self control are important factors for sexual agency. I also ground sexual agency in the empirical work of feminist researchers

(e.g., Davila, 2005; González-Lopez, 2003; Moncloa, Wilkinson-Lee, & Russell, 2010; Raffaelli & Ontai, 2001), who have shown that sexuality messages received in family and cultural contexts also contribute to sexual agency. Integrating theory and empirical work, this study focuses on the following dimensions of girls' sexual agency: (1) girls' sexual knowledge; (2) girls' sexual subjectivity; and (3) girls' beliefs about negotiating safety and fulfillment in their sexual relationships. I focus on three similar dimensions of mothers' sexual agency, as well as what mothers believe they are teaching their daughters about sexual agency. The findings from the study may provide insight into how societal messages about sexuality operate at the levels of daily life, the family, and the culture for Mexican-origin adolescent girls. The results may provide evidence for a theory of sexual agency that can account for the roles of both individual subjectivity and sexual socialization in sexual agency development. Most importantly, the findings may shed light on how Latina young women's sense of agency may allow them to recontextualize and transform sexuality messages to promote their sexual health.

To accomplish my goal, I grounded myself in the feminist tradition of using qualitative methods to bring out the voice of the young women themselves, as well as their mothers' voices. I have been particularly inspired by Chicana feminist scholarship, such as Hurtado's (2003) study of Latina young women in college, in which she wanted to "verify whether the basic tenets of Chicana feminisms are validated in the life experiences of these young women" (p. 3). For example, she asserts that claiming one's sexuality, specifically seeking sexual pleasure even when their communities place sexual restrictions on them, is a central goal of Chicana feminists. In a similar vein, specific descriptions I wanted to verify include the following areas:

- *Descriptions about sexual communication in Latina/o communities.* In many Mexican-origin communities, conversations about sexuality are infrequent, and most mother-daughter communication contains a strong emphasis on virginity for girls until marriage (Davila, 2005; González-Lopez, 2003; Moncloa, Wilkinson-Lee, & Russell, 2010; Raffaelli & Ontai, 2001). Latina mothers are more likely than fathers to communicate about sexuality with their daughters, but their messages tend to be broad, vague, and cautionary (Moncloa et al. 2010; Raffaelli & Ontai, 2001; McKee & Karasz, 2006) .
- *Descriptions about the sexual scripts of Latina girls.* The high value of virginity for girls until marriage within Latina/o cultural contexts may perpetuate traditional gender expectations and norms. Parents often enforce virginity by strictly regulating daughters' dating behaviors, which may lead to young Latinas' silence, ignorance, passivity, and shame about sexuality (Davila, 2005; Raffaelli & Ontai, 2001).
- *Descriptions about sexual agency among young Latinas.* Latinas have reported lower sexual assertiveness than their White peers, that is, they were less likely to believe they could effectively communicate their sexual beliefs to their sexual partners or control aspects of their sexual behavior, and were therefore less able to keep themselves safe and healthy (Rickert, Sanghvi, & Wiesmann, 2002). Difficulty talking about sexuality has been connected to Latina women's feelings of sexual shame and an inability to refuse unprotected sexual activity (Davila, 2005).

While I expected these descriptions to apply broadly to Mexican-origin girls' experiences, I also hoped to reveal these girls' unique perspectives about sexuality that could illuminate the degree to which they internalize, reproduce, or transform the

messages they receive. I wanted to dispel myths about what they knew or did not know, and the sources of their information. I wanted to understand what gaps existed in their knowledge of sexuality that could prepare them to make informed sexual decisions. I wanted to understand what they were experiencing sexually, their awareness of themselves as sexual beings, their sexual desires for others, and how they negotiated sexual feelings with others. The ultimate goal was to understand what information and skills were absent to cultivate fulfilling sexual relationships and sexual well-being.

The Use of Labels

I use Latina/o as a pan-ethnic label to describe the distinct national groups whose heritage can be traced to Spanish-speaking countries of Latin America, including Puerto Rico, a U.S. territory. The use of Latina/o is an attempt to avoid sexism in the language, as Spanish language conventions often indicate gender by placing the vowel *a* for female or *o* for male. I use Latina to refer to the female Latina/o. In addition, many people feel the label Latina/o is more politically progressive than the term Hispanic (Hurtado, 2003), which is often used by the U.S. government to categorize race and ancestry in census undertakings and by a large minority of people of Latina/o origin (Passel & Taylor, 2009). The label Chicana/o refers to people of Mexican origin and encompasses a certain ethnic, racial, and sexual consciousness that indicates knowledge of social oppression and empowerment of marginalized groups (Castillo, 1994; Martinez, 1998). I use Chicana to refer to the female Chicana/o. I've chosen these labels based on my understanding of how they are used in Latina/o culture; however, as Hurtado (2003) notes, "most individuals in the United States with origins in Latin America use multiple labels depending on the social context and their own particular historical and immigration experiences" (p. 5).

To describe immigrant status, I use the term first-generation to refer to individuals who were born outside of the United States; second-generation refers to individuals who were born in the United States but at least one of their parents were born in Mexico, and so forth. Although age at immigration and gender of parent suggest wide differences in the use of second generation, I use the term 1.5 generation to refer to individuals who immigrated before their early teens (Zayas, 2011).

Researcher's Perspective

Which characteristics of my own experience have predominantly informed my work? I suggest the following: I am a woman who comes from a large family and a White European-origin middle class background, who is a Buddhist humanist, feminist, researcher of adolescent sexuality development, student of Spanish language, and friend and professional colleague of Mexican-origin women. These aspects and experiences have shaped the questions I ask, the assumptions I make, and the interpretations I form.

As I inquired into my biases and assumptions, I realized that the steps I needed to take to construct a research project about Mexican-origin girls' sexual agency was similar to the method I used in the actual study. The method I used during the interviews I conducted with mothers and daughters is called "scaffolded interviewing." This type of interviewing involves interspersing life-history with sexuality-related questions to facilitate open talk about generally forbidden topics and build a narrative in which the participant's authentic voice can emerge. In a similar way, I constructed a broader, more objective understanding of adolescent female sexuality and Latina sexual health. I did this by avidly engaging with scholars whose perspectives varied greatly from mine, through reading theoretical and empirical articles, journaling about them, and talking

with scholars available to me. I paid close attention to Chicana feminist understandings and approaches to the concept of a healthy female sexuality, which are attuned to the reality of Latinas' lived experiences and sensitive to essentialized understandings of both Latina/o culture and human sexuality. For example, Chicana feminists are concerned with narrow, dichotomized representations of Latina sexual practices (either traditional and sexually repressed or acculturated and sexually liberated) in dominant U.S. culture (Juarez & Herl, 2003). Through the process of attending to Chicana feminist scholarship, I was able to address many of my own biases, preconceptions, and misunderstandings, and articulate my own authentic voice about this topic. I realized I had so much to learn, and I wanted so much to learn it. I could sense I shared so many similarities with these girls, and yet so many differences. My inquiry into my own biases and assumptions led me to find intersections.

Because family dynamics is such an important influence on the population I study, I examined how my own experiences growing up influenced my beliefs about family. I grew up in a collectivist culture that gradually became more individualistic as my family situation changed during early adolescence. For the first part of my childhood, I was raised in a Jewish ethnic urban neighborhood with a large extended family living within a 3-mile radius. I lived amid a warm, close, diverse community filled with laughter and love, in which relatives were a part of my daily life experience. During early adolescence, my birth family moved to a predominantly white suburban neighborhood a minimum of an hour's drive to the nearest relative. This move resulted in a very different second half of my childhood, in which I lived in an isolated, lonely place without culture or connection. In addition, my parents eventually got divorced. Throughout adolescence,

my awareness of a multi-level rupture in my family dynamics and sense of identity was ever-present. I believe that my eventual transition into the role of researcher was part of a long process characterized by an attempt to heal this rupture by returning to my collectivist family roots despite geographical and psychical distances.

My White middle class background shaped my assumptions about how development unfolds. I learned that becoming independent and leaving one's family to attain educational and career aspirations was a natural part of development. The messages I received and internalized from family and school were to become an active agent in all aspects of my education. I was expected to excel academically, attend college away from home, achieve a career, and become financially independent. Inevitably, this process led to my sexual, intellectual, and spiritual agency as well, which I later realized was not necessarily an intended consequence. I also learned that growth is discontinuous, that important life changes often occur quite abruptly. For example, one day I was living at home; the next day I was at college 800 miles away, completely alone for the first time in my life. The experience shocked and unsettled me, and it took me a long time to recover. I was not taught that one could achieve one's aspirations through a more interdependent model, such as living with one's parents while going to school, or even delaying college and working – options I realized later were better suited to my personality.

Engaging with Mexican-origin families, I observed that Mexican-origin girls generally experience a more continuous model of development. That is, girls establish autonomy from their families gradually and often only partially, as they are expected to maintain a high degree of closeness, support, and obligations to their family from childhood to young adulthood and throughout their lives (Sabogal, Marin, Otero-Sabogal,

Marin, & Perez-Stable, 1987). In many ways, adherence to strong family values has been identified as a protective factor for adolescents coping with risky behaviors (e.g., deviant peers, substance use, aggression, early sexual activity) such that adolescents who adhere more strongly to family values may be less likely to engage in risky behaviors (Germán, Gonzalez, & Dumka, 2009; Romero & Ruiz, 2007; Van Campen & Romero, 2012). Yet strong adherence to family values can also produce challenges to developing sexual agency. What I learned, and what became part of my assumption about how individuals develop, is that with independence comes the freedom to make decisions about sexuality without sanctions. In contrast, in many Mexican-origin families a young woman's virtue is highly valued and she is discouraged from exploring her sexual feelings and desires until she is a young adult and, preferably, married (Davila, 2005; Raffaelli & Ontai, 2001). As a result, Mexican-origin girls who grow up with a strong sense of family obligations may struggle to become active agents in their sexual decision-making and health.

As a feminist, I pay special attention to gender and sexual socialization practices in the family and culture, and the ways that gender ideology impacts a person's pathway to sexual health. At the same time, my feminism is largely subsumed by the humanistic Buddhist philosophy that I was fortunate to encounter at a young age. This philosophy emphasizes honoring and embracing life's diversity and fostering change with compassion, respect, and care – characteristics that are often integral to feminism as well. Further, real change comes from building on strengths and commonalities, while diminishing disadvantages and transcending differences. As a Buddhist humanist, I have been able to integrate multiple perspectives into my approach to research, to recognize

that people's sexual decision-making is informed by multiple factors, and to accept that not all decisions lead to sexual health as defined by WHO.

As a researcher of adolescent sexuality development, I bring with me the experiences of other adolescents whom I have studied in other projects. Coming from other cultures and backgrounds, these young people have enhanced my understanding of cultural diversity in sexual socialization and sexuality practices. In that sense, my approach to adolescent female sexuality is to honor cultural variation in gender roles and sexual values, while highlighting the ways in which narrow understandings of gender, sexuality, and reproductive rights can lead to social injustice and sexual health disparities.

My experiences and research are what inform my inquiry in chapters four, five, and six, where I describe how girls are learning about sexuality, their experiences of sexual feelings, and the messages they receive, particularly from their mothers, about negotiating safety and pleasure in their sexual relationships.

The Adolescent Girls in the Study

The Mexican-origin girls in this study are adolescents who are only just awakening to themselves as sexual beings. Many of them have just begun to sense emerging sexual feelings, while some have already explored them. They are neither a generic group nor a statistically representative sample of Mexican-origin girls. As individuals they live in a southwest city in the United States, close to the Mexican border, and many travel back and forth to see their relatives in Mexico. Their acculturation status ranges from first-generation to fifth-generation. To varying degrees, often regardless of acculturation status, they are aware of their cultural heritage, and they fall on a fairly

wide spectrum of acceptance of cultural prescriptions for traditional gender roles and sexual behavior.

I struggled with what to call these individuals. In many ways, they are young women in that they have recognized they are growing up and transitioning into adult roles. Yet in important ways related to this study, they are not yet women. Even the most sexually aware and active of these individuals had not achieved the degree of sexual agency that is perceived to be associated with young adulthood. Furthermore, the majority of them had not yet experienced their sexual feelings in a way that they could talk about without consistent scaffolding. For this reason, I have settled on calling them girls. Moreover, I refer to them in this thesis by the pseudonyms they gave themselves, as a way to recognize their individual voice in the stories they told about sexuality.

The 20 girls in the study were between 15 and 17 years of age, with an average age of 16 years. Demographically, this group of girls is homogeneous. They all self-identified as Mexican-origin and grew up in families with mothers who self-identified as Mexican origin as well. All of them attended various secondary schools throughout the city. Likewise, in many ways these girls shared similar experiences of sexuality growing up. All of them had mothers who had encouraged them to delay sexual activity until they completed their high school education. The girls took this message to heart in that a majority of them had not yet been sexually active. Despite these similarities, the girls were different from each other in the way they talked about and experienced sexuality. Some girls were acutely aware of gender ideology and its affect on their sexuality; others rarely if ever considered it. Some had pledged virginity until marriage with their mothers' blessing while others had become sexually active without their mothers' knowledge. Also

of note is that all of the girls said they had never had a conversation about sexuality like the one they had in their interviews with me. To varying degrees, they acknowledged how important the conversation was, and how little they had reflected on what they had been learning about sexuality or their own sexual feelings and experiences. In subsequent chapters, and especially in the stories which these girls tell about sexuality, I will be describing the ways in which their experiences illuminate how sexual agency appears in their lives.

Organization of the Chapters

In the next chapter, I provide the theoretical framework for the study design and a review of the empirical research on the topic. Chapter 3 describes the methods used for the study, including the research design, the recruitment process and selection of participants, the narrative analysis process with the Listening Guide method (Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg, & Bertsch, T., 2003), and the development of the interview script. Chapter 4 provides a synthesis of findings from content and narrative analyses of 20 Mexican-origin girls' interviews, focusing on the influence of the mother-daughter relationship on Mexican-origin adolescent girls' sexual agency. The emphasis is on protective and problematic characteristics of mother-daughter sexual communication from the girls' perspectives. Chapter 5 provides an in-depth analysis of four mother-daughter dyads to examine the concordance between mothers' and daughters' narratives about what is being taught and learned about sexuality, and how that concordance impacts girls' sexual agency. This analysis also provides insight into the degree to which daughters internalize, reproduce, and transform the sexuality messages they receive from their mothers, and intergenerational similarities and differences in how mothers teach

their daughters about sexuality. Chapter 6 contains a discussion of the study and findings, addresses limitations, and discusses future directions for research on Mexican-origin young women's sexual agency.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this collection of interviews, enhanced by the narrative method, I sought to gain insights into the role of agency in Mexican-origin girls' sexual knowledge, feelings, and experiences by asking the questions: How are Mexican-origin adolescent girls socialized regarding gender and sexuality in the context of the mother-daughter relationship, school, and peers? To what extent do girls internalize, reproduce, or transform gender and sexuality messages from their mothers? What aspects of this socialization process contribute to or inhibit these girls' sexual agency? Sexual agency for this study incorporates a bio-psychosocial perspective that includes the belief that one can experience and regulate one's sexual feelings (Bandura, 1997), and can act on one's needs in a sexual relationship, such as refusing unwanted sex, insisting on the use of protection, and consenting to and enjoying sex (Impett, Schooler, & Tolman, 2006). High levels of sexual agency are associated with more positive sexual health outcomes for girls in multiple areas (Hird & Jackson, 2001; Hirschman, Impett, & Schooler, 2006; Impett et al., 2006; O'Sullivan, Meyer-Bahlburg, & McKeague, 2006; Rostosky, Dekhtyar, Cupp, & Anderman, 2008). Yet compared to White adolescent girls, Latina adolescents demonstrate low sexual assertiveness; that is, they are less likely to believe they can effectively communicate their sexual beliefs and desires to their sexual partners, and are therefore less able to keep themselves safe and healthy. This chapter unpacks the terms and concepts contained in the leading and guiding questions to more thoroughly understand and explore the issues they introduce.

First, I delve into theories and research on sexual agency, some of the enduring challenges of clarifying a theory of sexual agency, and a new framework for understanding agency.

Second, I show how family ecological frameworks and feminist perspectives are useful for understanding how gender and sexual socialization processes during adolescence fit together. Gender socialization is the process of learning socially and culturally defined expectations and attitudes associated with one's biological sex, while sexual socialization involves learning about sexual values, attitudes, and behaviors. A growing body of evidence shows that gender and sexual socialization processes frequently work in tandem in the development of adolescent female sexuality and sexual agency. In particular, gender ideology and societal conceptions of male and female adolescent sexuality are major influences in the extent to which girls' develop feelings of empowerment in the sexual domain. Further, family ecological frameworks are particularly relevant for explaining the micro processes through which gender and sexual socialization occur, while feminist perspectives effectively explain the macro processes.

Third, I inquire into values in Latina/o culture that influence family socialization processes and specifically what Latina girls learn about expectations for gender roles and sexual behavior. I review literature that highlights the important role of the mother in Latina/o children's sexual socialization; in this regard, I discuss the importance of incorporating family conceptual models into the study of young women's sexual agency. Additionally, I explore the challenges of studying sexuality in Latina/o populations, and discuss important guideposts that Chicana feminist scholars have laid out in order to avoid simplistic or narrow understandings and approaches to studying this topic.

Fourth, I provide evidence for the need to use multiple methods in studying female adolescent sexuality, and discuss how narrative inquiry is particularly useful for investigating the development of Mexican-origin girls' sexual agency. I provide empirical examples of how narrative inquiry has been adapted in such methods as scaffolded interviewing and the Listening Guide (Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg, & Bertsch, 2003) to liberate the voice of young people who have historically been silenced regarding sexuality.

Sexual Agency

It is important to acknowledge upfront that my definition of sexual agency draws from sociological, psychological, feminist, and family theories of development. The primary reason I drew from so many diverse fields to craft a definition is because, in studies of sexual agency, there has been a lack of consistency and clarity in how agency is defined. For example, agency has been considered separately from sexual subjectivity and likened to sexual decision-making (Allen, Husser, Stone, & Jordal, 2008; Froyum, 2010; Garcia, 2005); sexual assertiveness, or the pursuit of one's goals (East & Adams, 2002; Morokoff et al., 1997; Rickert, Sanghvi, & Wiemann, 2002); and perceived efficacy to act upon one's own needs in a sexual relationship (Impett et al., 2006). It has also been considered in conjunction with subjectivity and likened to the interaction between the bodily practice of sexuality over time and consciousness (Bryant & Schofield, 2007), and embodiment, or experiencing one's body holistically, being aware of bodily sensations, and controlling who gets to interact with one's body and in what ways (Hirschman, Impett, & Schooler, 2006).

This lack of consistency and clarity derives, first, from a fundamental disagreement about how agency arises. For decades, a comprehensive theory of sexual agency that integrates personal agency and social structure has been hindered by a fundamental disconnect between essentialist and social constructionist frameworks. To summarize this disconnect briefly, essentialists believe that agency is part of human nature, a biologically determined potential to form and pursue goals that is reliant on other natural characteristics such as consciousness and free will (DeLamater & Hyde, 1998; Fuchs, 2001). Social constructionists, on the other hand, assert that all of reality, including agency, is socially constructed; people are not autonomous, but rather human behavior is determined by the particular social, cultural, and historical structures in which people live. Language is the primary means through which people construct reality, and in this sense, people interpret the possibility for agency largely through social interactions (Foucault, 1978; DeLamater & Hyde, 1998). Social constructionists do acknowledge biologically based sexual drives, but assert that these drives provide only generalized motives for behavior. How, where, when and with whom sexuality gets expressed is driven by societal proscriptions of sexual norms (DeLamater & Hasday, 2007).

Leading scholars of sexuality, most of whom have sociology backgrounds, do not believe that essentialism and social constructionism can be conjoined in the study of sexual agency (DeLamater & Hyde, 1998). This belief stems in part from the fact that sociological research on sexual agency in the last few decades has been dominated by the theoretical work of Foucault (1978). Foucault's work rejects the idea that biological or psychological processes guide sexual behavior. Sexuality is not an inner drive but a human potential for consciousness, behavior, and physical experience that is defined,

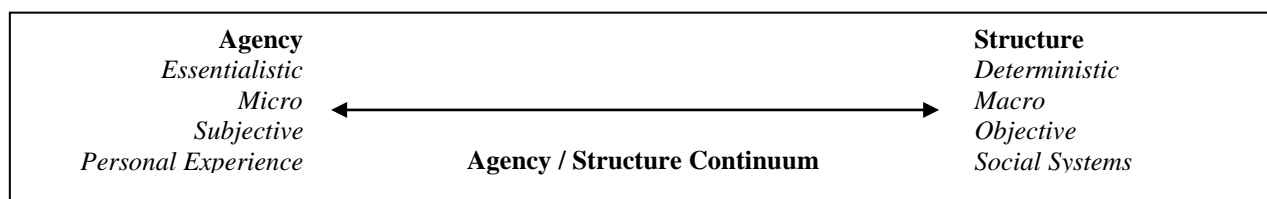
regulated, organized, and changed through social discourses. The word *discourse* refers to how language and knowledge are linked to power such that whoever determines what can be said also determines what can be known and how we think about whom we are as sexual beings. Sexual behavior emerges from a dialectical between freedoms and constraints in the social environment, and sexual agency can be seen as the act of submitting to or resisting the social control of sexuality. Two key conceptual frameworks of sexuality have been influenced by Foucault's ideas and have guided much sexuality research. The first is based in feminist theories, which focus on how normative discourses of femininity, masculinity, and heterosexuality have shaped female sexuality (e.g., Impett et al., 2006). For example, the theory of performativity (Butler, 1993) states that we internalize symbolic norms of what it means to be a man or a woman by "doing gender" (West & Zimmerman, 1987); that is, we repeatedly enact gender norms in our daily activities (e.g., the way we walk, talk, and dress). Resistance to normative inscriptions of sexuality is what constitutes sexual agency, although it is usually seen only in the marginalized domains of sexual activity. Another framework, which resonates with performativity, is scripting theory (Gagnon & Simon, 1986), which sees social actors performing roles directed by scripts that determine our actions; individual improvisation of scripts allows for individual expression and agency, but the scripts remain essentially unchanged.

Social constructionists have been criticized for not accounting for the "creative dimension of agency" that can explain how "individuals may respond in innovative and unanticipated ways that hinder, reinforce, or catalyze social change" (McNay, 2000, p. 5). As McNay accurately points out, a theory of agency must be able to explain, for example,

how women have been able to act autonomously in the past despite overwhelming cultural sanctions and social inequalities. The theory must also account for how women's agentic power has transformed constraining discourses. Recent theoretical work on the agency / structure dualism offers a framework of integration. For example, Fuchs (2001) suggests that we view agency and structure not as two opposite natural pairs, but instead look at agency as something we ascribe to a person based on the situation or condition. When we allow for variation in this way, agency and structure become two temporary poles of a continuum, with a person moving along this continuum. The goal of theoretical work then is to explain how this movement takes place.

A continuum framework permits the researcher to take on multiple lenses to capture the interplay between agency and structure. As illustrated in the figure below, it allows for individual consciousness and structural constraints to coexist and for both to influence the development and practice of sexual agency. It concedes that individuals with strong motivations can exercise control over their lives (Bandura, 1997); at the same time, it acknowledges that their sense of agency can be undermined by counteractive social and cultural forces (Díaz & Ayala, 2001). Thus, sociologists need to understand both how internal motivations and external forces influence sexual agency. Fuchs (2001) points out that researchers ascribe more agency or structural explanations depending on the lens they are using to account for social causes and outcomes. More agency is ascribed in settings with fewer people, when the observer and observed are close in distance and relationship, and when the researcher assumes that people have intentions, minds, goals, and mental states, which drive behaviors. More structure is ascribed in settings with large numbers of people, when observer and observed are far in distance

and relationship, and the researcher conceives of observed behaviors and effects as driven by impersonal causal forces.



A continuum framework is particularly relevant for examining the tensions inherent in Latina adolescents' sexuality. For example, do young Latinas feel guided more by their personal desire, or more by external constraints? A young woman might feel more agentic to challenge sexual socialization practices with friends, as indicated by adult Latinas' recollections of childhood exploration of sexual pleasure (Zavella, 1997). Yet she may be more compliant with gender and sexual norms when interacting with her parents and the broader cultural community. This reasoning is supported by research on Latina/o sexuality that has identified core cultural values that influence family socialization processes related to adolescent gendered and sexual behavior (e.g., Davila, 2005; Raffaelli & Ontai, 2001). However, the influence of family socialization processes specifically on Mexican-origin adolescent girls' sexuality and sexual agency is less clear.

Gender and Sexual Socialization

The term socialization has been generally understood as “the continuous collaboration of ‘elders’ and ‘novices,’ of ‘old hands’ and ‘newcomers’ in the acquisition and honing of skills important for meeting the demands of group life” (Bugental & Goodnow, 1998, p. 389). This definition is based on early efforts to study socialization

processes with an emphasis on the development of correct moral behavior. Over time, the content matter of socialization expanded to encompass all aspects of daily life. Now less emphasis is placed on the deterministic view that parents shape children. Not only have children come to be seen as actively contributing to their socialization as they change, but many people are seen as stakeholders of socialization, including parents, friends, siblings, teachers, community members, and so forth. In other words, societal forces and individuals are now viewed as interdependent (Bugental & Goodnow, 1998).

Although children are influenced by many stakeholders, parents are still considered major socializing agents, especially in childhood and early adolescence, because the family is the principal context in which children develop (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). During mid to late adolescence, children's cognitive abilities increase and they spend less time at home, and parents play a less direct role in educating children about gender and sexuality. However, even as school, peers, and media become increasingly important in shaping adolescents' views of gender and sexuality, parents still play an important role in guiding and facilitating their children's agentic behavior (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Parents' socializing practices are also affected by the larger contexts in which they live, and one of the challenges of socialization studies is to determine which sociocultural forces parents transmit to children and how children internalize, reproduce, and transform the messages they receive.

Rather than review the entire body of research on gender and sexual socialization, I integrate theories and perspectives from several disciplines that I have identified as the most accurate and comprehensive explanation of how gender and sexual socialization occur, with special attention to family ecological frameworks and feminist perspectives.

Family Ecological Frameworks

Family ecological frameworks are particularly relevant in explaining the micro processes through which gender and sexual socialization occur. These frameworks explain that socialization processes first occur at the micro level of development, which is the most proximal and therefore principal context in which children develop (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Larger socialization forces get transmitted to children through the daily interactions children have with their proximal environments, such as family members and friends. In the domain of gender development, for example, children learn from observing the gender-linked outcomes of their and others' behavior that leads to parental approval, praise, and reward or to disapproval and punishment, and they adapt to socially sanctioned behaviors (Bussey & Bandura, 1999).

Zone of proximal influence. The sociocultural perspective of Vygotsky (1978) provides insight into gender and sexual socialization in the family context because of its focus on how context shapes parents' transmission of values, attitudes, and behaviors to their children. According to Vygotsky, development is a co-constructed rather than a constructed phenomenon—that is, a culture defines both the content of an individual's development and the structures through which the content functions. As such, children engage in culturally defined practices and gradually internalize the psychological structures and dimensions relevant to that particular setting (Goldhaber, 2000). One of the core principles that grew out of Vygotsky's work is the *zone of proximal development*, which defines the relationship between development and learning as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under

adult supervision or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). In other words, learning involves narrowing the gap between where the child is developmentally and what the child is capable of if some support or scaffolding is provided, either by adults or more capable peers. The primary means of this scaffolding is through oral communication.

Although most empirical research on the zone of proximal development has been conducted on language and meaning acquisition in educational settings, the concept has also been used to study how children acquire culturally defined ideas from their mothers (see, e.g., Rogoff, Mistry & Mosier, 1993 as cited in Goldhaber, 2000). It is arguably useful in examining parental socialization of children about appropriate gender roles and sexual behavior. My study addresses this topic by asking: To what degree have mothers scaffolded core features of sexual agency to their daughters? In what ways has that scaffolding been gendered?

Gender intensification hypothesis. The gender-intensification hypothesis is another lens for understanding gender and sexual socialization processes in the family context. The gender intensification hypothesis pinpoints adolescence as the time period during which gender socialization processes have a particularly strong impact on how children are socialized about sexuality (Hill & Lynch, 1983). This hypothesis is an attempt to integrate biological, cognitive, and socialization approaches to understanding the development of and changes in gender-related characteristics rooted in childhood (Galambos, Berenbaum, & McHale, 2009). Biological approaches have focused special attention on puberty because it clearly marks the onset of adolescence brought on by hormonal changes. Cognitive approaches emphasize how adolescent thoughts about

gender originating in childhood shape how they perceive and assimilate information from the environment and motivate subsequent gender-related behavior and preferences.

Socialization approaches focus on social learning processes such as observation and reinforcement of gender-typed roles that influence choices about gender conduct and attitudes.

The gender intensification hypothesis explains that starting in early adolescence, as girls and boys undergo pubertal changes, they receive increased pressure to conform to traditional masculine and feminine sex roles both in new domains and in domains in which pressure to behave in gender-specific ways was already present (Hill & Lynch, 1983). This increased pressure in turn causes them to develop increasingly differentiated gender-role identities, attitudes, and behaviors. For example, during middle childhood, tomboy behavior among girls is tolerated but in adolescence girls' social success involves being attractive to boys and putting aside masculine interests. This new emphasis for girls negatively affects them in the domain of achievement because traditional sex-appropriate standards for achievement de-emphasize competition, competence, and equal opportunity for girls so as not to threaten the heterosexual relationship (Bardwick & Douvan, 1971, as cited in Hill & Lynch, 1983). In other words, performing as well as boys might threaten girls' long-term success in attracting a husband.

In the last few decades, findings about differential effects of gender intensification for girls and boys have been inconsistent. Studies have shown that child and adolescent attitudes toward traditional gender roles vary by individual characteristics and family context. For example, Crouter, Whiteman, McHale, and Osgood (2007) found that, from middle childhood to early adolescence girls' gender attitudes moved in a less traditional

direction and boys' gender attitudes moved in a more traditional direction, although both sexes stayed more traditional if parents' attitudes regarding gender were more traditional. In another study, Priess, Lindberg, and Hyde (2009) examined whether gender-role identity explained gender differences in depressive symptoms; they found no evidence of gender intensification in their sample because there was no gender difference in masculinity traits and because boys and girls differed only in femininity, which did not predict depressive symptoms. The authors wondered whether the gender intensification hypothesis might be better at describing rather than explaining gender differences, or whether patterns of socialization have changed in the last 25 years and contemporary adolescents feel less socialization pressure than their earlier cohorts did.

I suggest that the gender intensification hypothesis may be particularly useful for explaining observed behavior in domains in which pressure for traditional gendered conduct is stronger, such as the domain of sexuality. As other scholars have noted, individuals are not necessarily consistent in their gender typing across domains; under different social conditions and influences, people adopt gendered roles and behaviors differentially and follow different gendered trajectories (Galambos et al., 2009; Bussey & Bandura, 1999). The domain of sexuality lends itself to increased pressure to conform to gendered roles for several reasons. First, there are pronounced biological and physical differences in sexual maturation that in turn have differential gender implications for sexual behavior and outcomes. For example, especially during puberty, parental concern about girls' reproductive maturity may lead parents to adapt their messages to girls, for example, by stressing the need for daughters to delay sexual activity and to protect themselves from potentially dangerous situations (e.g., being alone at night). In turn, girls

who report parental disapproval of their sexual behavior are less likely to engage in sexual activity than their male peers (Fisher, 2004; DeGaston & Weed, 1996). Depending on parents' goals for children (i.e., virginity until marriage, motherhood, or educational success), parents may limit or redirect girls' activities, for example, by having more dating rules for girls than boys (Madsen, 2008). Second, sexuality education policies in the United States severely limit opportunities for young people to access accurate information about sexuality, and they often depend on unreliable sources such as media, which construct sexuality in highly gendered ways, and peers, who often do not have accurate information themselves (APA, 2007; Fine & McClelland, 2006; Guttmacher Institute, 2012). Given sexual maturation differences, an environment in which conceptions of adolescent sexuality for boys and girls tend to be polarized along traditional gender lines, and little education to evaluate gendered messages about a sexual behavior, my study asks: To what extent do girls feel intense pressure to conform to gendered expectations for sexual behavior? In what ways do mothers enforce these set gendered expectations for their daughters?

Perceived self-efficacy. Self-efficacy theory also supports an ecological framework for understanding gender and sexual socialization in the family context. It provides an agentic explanation for how scaffolding regarding gender and sexuality occurs within families through the concept of perceived self-efficacy. Perceived self-efficacy refers to one's beliefs in the capacity to produce desired effects from one's actions and is considered the foundation of human agency because unless people believe they can exert control over their environment, they have little incentive to act or persevere in the face of difficulties (Bandura, 1997).

People develop self-efficacy starting in childhood, through an increasing sense of personal mastery or regulation over themselves and their environments. Parents facilitate children's early mastery experiences that influence social and cognitive development by providing exploratory experiences, modeling, and instruction that allow children gradually to improve their evaluative skills to predict outcomes, and their self-appraisal skills, or accurate judgment of their capabilities, to achieve desired outcomes (Bandura, 1997; Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Parents start modeling gendered behavior at birth, and children learn how to predict the consequences of gendered conduct and behaving accordingly. They observe outcomes that they and others experience in the social environment, and their evaluation of the consequences is what influences how they regulate their behavior. For example, people are more motivated to perform activities linked to their sex-typed gender because these behaviors are socially sanctioned and lead to approval and reward; people are less motivated to behave according to the other gender because such conduct generates disapproval and even punishment. Over the course of development, people's gendered behavior is guided and motivated more by personal standards of approval and disapproval that they have cultivated as a result of observational learning. In the domain of gender, young women's beliefs about their capabilities are often undermined by social practices with the family, culture, educational system, peer relationships, and mass media (Bussey & Bandura, 1999).

According to self-efficacy theory, in the domain of sexuality, young women's beliefs about their ability to influence sexual outcomes may be compromised because they have few opportunities for personal mastery experiences. One reason is that parents often lack knowledge and skills to teach children about sexuality. They also tend to keep

their discussions focused on the threats of sexual behavior rather than on providing information about sexual maturation to help children understand how they are growing and developing (Byers, Sears, & Weaver, 2008; DiIorio, Kelley, & Hockenberry-Eaton, 1999; Nolin & Petersen, 1992). As a result, parents are less likely to be able to foster sexual agency in their children. Yet during adolescence, perceived self-efficacy about sexuality becomes increasingly important (Bandura, 1997, 2006). To manage their sexuality, young people need to be equipped not just with sexual information, but also with skills to put that information into practice consistently in the face of counteracting social pressures. Individuals who are not equipped with sufficient information and skills are at greater risk for unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases (Bandura, 1997, 2006; Fisher & Fisher, 1998). In this regard, my study asks: In what ways are mothers providing their daughters with skills for regulating their sexual feelings and navigating safety and fulfillment in their sexual relationships? What experiences have contributed to girls' perceived sexual self-efficacy?

Communication processes. While not an ecological perspective, family communication represents a key aspect of family socialization processes regarding gender and sexuality. Research in this area has focused on the association of parental communication, primarily mothers' conversations with teenage children, and adolescent sexual activity (Fisher, 2004). For example, mothers' communication about sexuality has been associated with reduced sexual activity, depending on factors such as the quality of the conversation, how conversations get resolved, parents' comfort level with the topic, parents' affect, and adolescents' perceptions of the openness of their relationship with their mother (Lefkowitz, 2002; Romo, Lefkowitz, Sigman, & Au, 2002). Even this

research has limitations, given that family communication about sex is a relatively infrequent behavior (Fisher, 2004). However, evidence indicates that girls want to talk to their mothers about sexual topics, especially more than just about delaying sexual debut and the threats of sexual activity (Guilamos-Ramos et al., 2006; Lefkowitz & Stoppa, 2006; Moncloa, Wilkinson-Lee, & Russell, 2010).

There is little research about mother-daughter communication about sexual feelings, desire, and pleasure, largely because researchers do not often ask those topics (Lefkowitz & Stoppa, 2006; Yalom et al., 1982). However, one study about experiences of first sexual intercourse showed that the only girls who shared “pleasure” narratives and positive first experiences were the ones who reported talking with their mothers about these topics (Thompson, 1990). Given that negotiating sexual feelings, safety and pleasure are core aspects of sexual agency, my study asks questions about the nature and quality of mother-daughter conversations about sexuality, and the degree to which there is silence or openness in the family and culture around this topic.

Cultural variations in sexual socialization. Culture is another important feature of an ecological approach to understanding family socialization processes. The type of society in which young people grow up reveals a great deal about what they are exposed to and how they are educated about gender and sexuality. Anthropologists who studied sexual behavior in 190 societies classified them as restrictive, semi-restrictive, and permissive (Ford & Beach, 1951). In restrictive cultures, adolescents are pressured to abstain from sexual activity until marriage; boys and girls may even be segregated to prevent sexual activity until they attain adult status. In semi-restrictive cultures, those same pressures may exist but are not strictly enforced; parents may openly discourage

sexual activity, rarely mention sexuality to their children, and restrict access to contraception; however, many parents recognize the inevitability of adolescent sexual activity and overlook it when it occurs. In permissive cultures, children and adolescents can freely explore sexual activity; sexual experimentation by both genders is treated openly and casually during childhood, and sexual anxiety is relatively absent. It is likely that the degree of restrictiveness in a culture would correspond to the degree to which adolescents are required to adhere to traditional gender and sexual roles. There is little empirical evidence to support this idea directly, but Schlegel (1995) suggests that the value a culture places on a girl's virginity (e.g., as part of a dowry) is more likely to predict restrictions on a girl's sexual behavior than any other factor.

The United States is considered a semi-restrictive culture because, although sexual behavior often appears permissive in contemporary society, most U.S. adults disapprove of children's sexual exploration, masturbation, and explicit sex play; rarely talk with their children about sexual matters; regulate children's viewing of sexual content in the mass media; and openly discourage children from becoming sexually active (Diamond & Savin-Williams, 2009).

Mexico, the country of origin for the participants in my study, is still considered a restrictive society in many ways (Herrera, 2001). Historically in Mexico, the concept of sexuality has been connected with reproduction, and there is a greater emphasis on traditional gender roles (Gonzalez-Lopez, 2003; Herrera, 2001). Girls are encouraged to be submissive, chaste, and relationship-oriented, while males are more dominant and given greater freedom to explore their sexuality. Only in the last 30 years has the idea that women should enjoy their sexuality been advocated as part of a larger social

movement for women's sexual and reproductive health and rights (Herrera, 2001). One outgrowth of this movement was a demand for more comprehensive sexuality education in public schools. Since 1997, a new approach to sexuality has been introduced in some textbooks and curricula, allowing for more comprehensive and nuanced discussions of gender and sexuality, and social differences between men and women. However, continued resistance from conservative groups has kept much of the curricula consistent with historical approaches. Current mothers of teenage daughters, who migrated to the United States at age 16 or older, likely received Mexico's more traditional sexuality education and presumably transmit these messages to their daughters and/or struggle to prepare their daughters for U.S. sexual practices.

Another way cultures may vary in their sexual socialization practices is the extent to which they value independence or interdependence (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Within the culture itself, the extent to which women are encouraged to be more interdependent than men may also reflect socialization practices (Cross & Madson, 1997). For example, Western cultures (North America, Europe) tend to encourage independence or separation from others; people seek to discover and express their unique attributes (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Within these cultures, men construct more independent selves, and women more interdependent selves (Cross & Madson, 1997). Non-Western cultures (Asia, Latin America, Africa) tend to encourage people to become connected to others and develop sensitivity to the thoughts and feelings of others (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). An interdependent person tries to exercise control over one's inner attributes so as not to disturb the harmony of interpersonal relationships, unlike the independent person who seeks to control one's outer aspects, particularly public behavior

and the social situation. Again, within these cultures, women are often socialized to play more relational, nurturing roles (Schlegel, 1995). The implications of an interdependent self-construal, especially for women, are that women would develop greater awareness and sensitivity to others, a willingness to be responsive to the needs of others and to become engaged with them (Gilligan, 1982; Cross & Madson, 1997). The potential danger of interdependence for women is a loss of connection to one's self and an inability to assert one's own needs (Brown & Gilligan, 1993), particularly for safety and fulfillment in one's sexual relationships (Impett et al., 2006).

The adolescent and adult women in my study are all of Mexican-origin, and the majority of mothers received sexuality education in Mexico before coming to the United States. Their daughters, on the other hand, have been educated about sexuality in the United States. In this regard, I am very interested in the intergenerational transmission of sexuality messages in the context of a shift from living in a restrictive to a semi-restrictive society. My study asks: To what degree are there similarities and differences in how mothers were taught about sexuality and what they are teaching their daughters? In what ways are the daughters internalizing, reproducing, or transforming their mothers' messages in the backdrop of growing up in the United States?

Feminist Scholarship on Female Adolescent Sexuality

The other perspective that grounds this study is feminist theory, which provides a macro understanding of gender and sexual socialization processes. For the last several decades, feminist scholars have been building a body of evidence to show how contemporary U.S. social constructions of adolescent girls' sexuality make it difficult for girls of all backgrounds to develop a healthy sexuality (e.g., Impett et al., 2006; Fine &

McClelland, 1988, 2006; Lamb, 2010; Thompson, 1995). Although definitions of “healthy sexuality” may vary, there is almost universal consensus that sexual agency is a core feature of sexual well-being. However, in empirical research, definitions of sexual agency have lacked consistency and clarity, and these conceptual issues will be explored in a later section.

Historically, societal constructions of adolescent sexuality have been guided by traditional gender ideologies, which dictate gendered prescriptions for normative sexual behavior. In general, young women and men are given radically different messages about the sexual experiences they can have, with more disapproval placed on adolescent girls’ sexual exploration (Tolman, 2002). These messages in turn influence the degree to which they are allowed and feel safe to experience their sexuality. From a biological perspective, part of the reason that males have greater awareness of sexual feelings than females is because their physiology allows them to more easily detect their arousal, as well as gain more experience with producing and identifying arousal (i.e., through masturbation) (DeLamater, 1981). At the same time, from a contextual perspective, females are given fewer learning opportunities to become aware of their sexual feelings than males (Laan & Janssen, 2007). They are socialized to restrict knowledge of their genitalia and to mistrust their bodily cues of physiological arousal. These findings are consistent with a study that showed that less than 50% of girls reported that they could always detect their sexual arousal while 90% of boys said they could (Savin-Williams & Diamond, 2004). Furthermore, in Western cultures, more men than women engage in masturbation, and women who masturbate do so less frequently than men (Laan & Janssen, 2007). Masturbation has been shown to be an excellent way of learning one’s

arousal cues, and women who masturbate often have higher correlations between subjective and physical arousal than women who do not or rarely masturbate. These findings suggest that girls' sexual responses and behaviors are more shaped by cultural, social, and situational factors than boys' (see Laan & Janssen, 2007 for a review).

Social constructionist and feminist researchers and theorists have taken the idea that sexual socialization presents barriers to adolescent girls' experience of sexual feelings even further by suggesting that the sexual socialization of desire is mediated by gender ideology (Laub, Somera, Gowen, & Diaz, 1999; Tolman, 2002; Tolman, Striepe, & Harmon, 2003). Gender ideology refers to the attitudes about appropriate roles, rights, and responsibilities of biological males and females in a given culture or society (Kroska, 2007). These scholars believe that gender ideology is the mechanism through which conceptions of male and female adolescent sexuality are linked to sexual outcomes for all youth, but especially for girls. Through sexual socialization, individuals learn in very scripted ways how they should behave in sexual situations (DeLamater & Hasday, 2007). For example, girls are pressured to conform to feminine norms in their relationships with others (e.g., they must suppress anger, avoid conflict, be nice) and their relationships with their bodies (e.g., they must manage their bodies to conform with ideal standards of female beauty; Impett et al., 2006). In contrast, boys are socialized to adopt masculine norms such as acting tough in public, avoiding the disclosure of feelings, and hiding distress or vulnerability (Oransky & Maracek, 2009). These ideologies get internalized at young ages and are perpetuated through external rewards and punishments through family, teachers, coaches, peers, religious leaders, and the media (Laub et al., 1999). The

internalization process happens so early that most youth do not realize that gender ideologies are socially constructed, and instead think of them as normal and natural.

When gender ideology and sexuality intersect, a sexual double standard usually develops (Attwood, 2007; Jackson & Cram, 2003; Tolman, 2002). The messages that adolescents receive is that boys are privileged to explore and experience their sexual feelings and pleasure, but girls are denied a right to theirs; in addition, adolescent male sexual desire is portrayed as a demanding physical urge that takes on a life of its own once it is activated and is impossible to control and can become aggressive to the point of violence (Hird & Jackson, 2001; Tolman, 2002). The sexual double standard for boys and girls gets further complicated by the increasing sexualization of girls in popular culture, which creates intense pressure for girls to become the object of boys' sexual desire, that is, to be sexy for boys but without expressing any sexual desire of their own (American Psychological Association, Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls, 2007). This sexual double standard conveys to girls that they are the object or victim of male sexual desire, and to protect themselves from danger, they must control their sexuality or have it controlled by others. The double standard also leads to the social censure of women who engage in casual sex, as well as the pathologizing of teen mothers, while the same phenomena in men are condoned or even applauded. The image of a good, pure, feminine girl is pitted against that of the bad, sexual, deviating girl (Attwood, 2007).

According to many feminist writers, the conceptualization of girls as the potential victims of male sexual aggression seriously compromises both girls' and boys' sexual subjectivities and behaviors (Fine & McClelland, 2006; Hird & Jackson, 2001). It sets up a developmental dilemma for girls: a choice between sexual feelings or personal safety

(Tolman, 2002). They are positioned to embrace their sexual subjectivity at the risk of censure, punishment, or disastrous consequences, or to deny or distract themselves from their sexual feelings and thereby disconnect from an important part of their lives. Those girls who become disconnected from their sexual feelings are therefore unable to be guided by those feelings. As such, they compromise or forfeit their sexual arousability, sexual agency, sexual self-concept, and sexual protection behaviors. In turn, they are subsequently more at risk of putting themselves in potentially dangerous situations, contracting sexual diseases and having unplanned pregnancies.

The idea that gender ideology mediates the relationship between girls' sexual feelings and sexual behavior finds support in research. One study found that adherence to traditional ideas about femininity is associated with lower sexual agency and self-efficacy to engage in protective behaviors during sexuality activity (Impett et al., 2006). Another study examined self-objectification, the process by which girls are socialized to treat themselves as objects to be viewed and evaluated by others (Hirschman et al., 2006). The more a girl was disembodied, or dissociated from her own physiological experiences, the harder it was for her to assert or even know her own needs, and the more likely she was to engage in unwanted or risky sexual activity.

One of the few safe places for girls to explore their sexuality is within the confines of heterosexual romantic relationships (Tolman, 2002; Savin-Williams & Diamond, 2004). Girls report being more likely to have a positive experience if sex occurs within a steady, intimate relationship that is high in commitment and communication. Preference for relational sex is consistent with research on women's self-construal that shows relationships as an integral part of a woman's identity (Cross &

Madson, 1997). However, heterosexual romantic relationships have limits to the safety they can provide. For example, girls with low sexual agency are more likely to let their male partners dictate sexual activity than girls with higher sexual agency (Hird & Jackson, 2001; Hirschman et al., 2006; Impett et al., 2006; O'Sullivan et al., 2006; Rostosky et al., 2008).

Tolman (2002) suggests that, rather than scrutinize girls' individual choices around sexuality, we should focus on the obstacles that society creates for girls to experience their sexual feelings. Yet when women try to upset existing meanings of sexuality, many difficulties arise, including a tendency to define female sexuality on the male model or a struggle to view female sexuality in positive terms (Attwood, 2007). The Riot Grrrl movement of the 1990s tried to reclaim the word "slut" by hypersexualizing female sexuality. This effort has clashed with that of an earlier generation of feminists who cannot reconcile what looks like contemporary young women's engagement with a very consumer-oriented, sexual culture, which they perceive as a key source of oppression.

A gendered model of adolescent sexual health. Feminist scholars have pointed out that many adolescent health models continue to locate risk in the individual and focus on skill-building to avoid unwanted pregnancy and disease (e.g., Laub et al., 1999; Tolman et al., 2003). They argue that risk is also located within the social contexts of groups and communities, and young women's beliefs about sexual assertiveness can be undermined by gender and sexualization socialization processes; as such, health models need to address the complex relationship between gender and adolescent sexuality. In other words, we need to understand how individual capacities intersect with external

forces to influence sexual agency. Some scholars have asserted that knowledge about the processes through which young women's sexual behavior patterns are generated, sustained over time, and reproduced—both across and specific to particular cultures—may be more important than knowledge about the prevalence of sexual behavior for intervening in and changing those patterns (Fox & Murry, 2000).

In 2003, Tolman and colleagues presented a new model of adolescent sexual health that addresses the complex relationship between gender and adolescent sexuality. The model reconceptualizes adolescent sexual health by making gender a central component for health professionals to address as they help adolescents transition successfully to adulthood. The model's template is based on ecological developmental theory, in which the individual is placed within concentric circles of expanding social contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). The individual level includes knowledge, attitudes, and values not typically seen in sexual health models, such as the ability to feel one's own sexual feelings, to resist objectification, and to feel entitled to one's own pleasure (Tolman et al., 2003). The dating/romantic level goes beyond traditional prevention qualities to include the ability to regulate heterosexual relationships and feel entitled and able to make active choices in romantic contexts. The social relationships level includes both factual knowledge about sexuality and cultural influences, as well as relational dimensions such as the ability to get social support to evaluate the quality of relationships, to leave abusive relationships, and to work through conflict and questions about sexuality in relationships. The outermost layer is the sociocultural/sociopolitical level, which focuses on conditions that make resources inaccessible and ways to

challenge or disrupt those conditions (e.g., advocate for access to information, contraception, and modes of sexual expression other than intercourse).

Initially, the model examined the developmental concerns of adolescent females, drawing on feminist research on girls' sexuality and a "web of theories," including feminist theory, social construction theory, phenomenology, and relational theory. In the process of developing their ideas, the researchers recognized the need to build a companion model for boys, who face a different developmental dilemma from girls. Boys are forced to choose between securing their masculinity or having satisfying, emotional intimate relationships (Tolman, Spencer, Harmon, Rosen-Reynosis, & Striepe, 2004). They often engage in heterosexist behavior (e.g., objectifying female bodies, boasting of heterosexual escapades) and homophobic behavior (e.g., name-calling such as gay or fag of boys who show signs of weakness or vulnerability; Pascoe, 2007). In one study, most early adolescent boys expressed an ability and desire to have a romantic relationship; however, many boys lost opportunities for intimacy because they succumbed to pressures to create public images as sexual players in pursuit of heterosexual sex (Tolman et al., 2004). Another study found that males who adhere to a more traditional gender ideology report having less intimate relations, more adversarial relationships, and more sexual partners (Pleck, Sonenstein, & Ku, 2004). Additionally, these males were less likely to take responsibility for using condoms, and more likely to believe their partner did not want them to use a condom and that a pregnancy would validate their masculinity.

Based on these findings about boys, the researchers shifted from a gender-specific model to an integrated gendered model of adolescent sexual health. This model addresses gender similarities and distinctions, and notes how specific pressures on boys and girls

undermine essential aspects of sexual health (Tolman et al., 2003). Recognizing that gendered experiences are comparable and complementary, not parallel, Tolman and colleagues introduced the concept of *gender complementarity*. Guided by Rich's (1983, as cited in Tolman et al., 2003) theory of compulsory heterosexuality, the concept of gender complementarity shows how "ideologies of masculinity and femininity, which infuse constructions of adolescent male and female sexuality, fit together to reproduce particular and limited forms of sexuality that are deemed to be 'normal,' all in the service of reproducing and sustaining compulsory heterosexuality" (p. 10). Gender complementarity reveals how the idea that adolescent boys are supposed to be sexual predators fits together with the idea that adolescent girls are supposed to be sexually passive recipients. Another example is how boys' homophobia leads boys to act coercively toward girls, a behavior that in turn diminishes girls' ability to embody their sexuality. These examples illustrate how the specific pressures and barriers to sexual health for adolescent girls and boys are profoundly different.

One of the main goals of my study was to test this model by conducting interviews with Mexican-origin girls. At the individual level, I asked girls about their sexual knowledge, subjectivity, and agency. At the dating/ romantic level, I asked girls about their ability to assert their needs for safety and fulfillment in their sexual relationships. At the social relationships level, I asked girls about their awareness of cultural values and societal norms that might be influencing their sexual behavior and relationship decision-making. I was also able to ask the mothers of these girls what they believed they were teaching their daughters and to examine the correspondence between

the mothers' and daughters' responses. In this way, I hope to expand an understanding of how family socialization processes and cultural values influence girls' sexual agency.

Gender and Sexuality in Latina/o Culture

Research on Latina/o sexuality has identified core cultural values that influence family sexual socialization processes related to adolescent sexual behavior. These values include *familismo* (an emphasis on strong family ties and obligations) and *respeto* (behaving in ways that honor one's parents and elders) (Raffaelli & Ontai, 2001). Some studies that have explored cultural values among Latina/os have shown that Mexican and Puerto Rican mothers value obedience and respect from their children more than European American values such as independence, autonomy, and being assertive (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994; Gonzalez-Ramos, Zayas, & Cohen, 1998); another study showed that the most important values that Dominican and Mexican mothers sought to transmit to their pre-school children were *respeto*, family, and religion to their children (Calzada, Fernandez, & Cortes (2010). In important ways the transmission of values such as familism and respect have been associated with positive health outcomes for girls. For example, studies of Latino families have shown that strong, positive, family relationships, which parents typically model through communication, participation in family activities, and emotional closeness with children, have been shown to protect against adolescents' risky behaviors such as substance use and juvenile delinquency (Romero & Ruiz, 2007). However, the influence of family socialization processes on Latina girls' sexuality and agency is less clear.

Some studies suggest that Mexican-origin adolescents' beliefs about their parents' strong expectations regarding educational attainment and negative messages about

premarital sex and pregnancy may delay the age of their sexual debut (Gilliam, Berlin, Kozloski, Hernandez, & Grundy, 2007), and that strong congruence between parent-child sexual values, that is, adolescents respect and agree with parents' values, are also related to less adolescent sexual activity (Liebowitz, Castellano, & Cuellar, 1999). Other studies indicate that certain values may have a detrimental effect on adolescent sexual behavior. For example, the value of virginity for girls until marriage may lead to young Mexican American women's silence, ignorance, and shame about sexuality (Davila, 2005). Likewise, the emphasis in Mexican-origin culture on conformity to traditional gender roles, which encourage girls to be submissive, chaste, and relationship-oriented while males are afforded a more dominant role and greater freedom to explore their sexuality, may create power differentials that make it difficult for women to assert their needs for sexual safety and pleasure in their relationships with men (Casas, Wagenheim, Banchemo, & Mendoza-Romero, 1994; Davila, 2005; González-Lopez, 2003). Although gender attitudes may become less traditional as individuals acculturate to the United States (Sabogal, Binson, & Catania, 1997), many second- and third-generation Latina girls still need to navigate respecting their own need for sexual and relational autonomy while honoring familial obligations and their parents' restrictions on dating and sexual experiences (Raffaelli & Ontai, 2001; Zayas, Lester, Cabassa, & Fortuna, 2005). These examples reveal how varied and complex are the processes by which Mexican-origin girls are socialized about sexuality, and highlight the need to better understand the ways that these social processes influence adolescent girls' sexual agency.

Many Latina academics have broadened the discussion of sexuality from their own agentic perspective (Castillo, 1994; Espin, 1997; Anzaldúa, 1999; Hurtado, 2003;

Zavella, 2003). In fact, Chicana/Mexicana feminists have made the reclaiming of their own discourse on gender and sexuality a central part of their theorizing (Hurtado, 2003). The term Chicana has been adopted by many Mexican American feminists as part of their goal to challenge oppressive gender and sexuality discourses in their culture and communities. For Chicana feminists, creating their own discourse is a critical means of transforming culturally specific definitions of womanhood produced by multiple sources of oppression, including the historical colonization of native peoples by Spain, the imposition of Catholicism on indigenous people, and the conquest of Mexico by the United States. The gendered construction of Chicana/Mexicana sexuality plays a key role in the production of sexual agency (Zavella, 2003), and transformation of discourse is a key means to increase sexual empowerment. Work in this area has also documented the importance of family context in the socialization and regulation of Latina girls' sexuality (Delgado-Bernal, 2001; Raffaelli & Ontai, 2001).

In this study, through conducting interviews with young women and separate interviews with their mothers, the focus is on the critical role of the mother in the regulation, socialization, and role modeling of her daughter's sexuality. Latina mothers play a major role in sexual communication and can shape their daughters' sexual values and attitudes through conversations with them (Romo et al., 2002). Yet much less is known about how mothers' sexual socialization practices foster girls' sexual agency to promote their sexual health. Many Latina mothers recognize the importance of being able to talk to their daughters about delaying sexual intercourse to focus on education and the health-related consequences of sexual activity (McKee & Karasz, 2006). Girls, too, value open conversations with their mothers about sexuality and regard it as a sign of closeness,

but find it difficult to achieve. One barrier may be mothers' tendency to dominate in these conversations, although given the value placed on daughters' respect and obedience toward their parents, some researchers interpret mother-dominated conversational styles as an indication that the family is close and gets along well. Mothers also report barriers to having conversations: they lack practice because their own parents did not talk to them about sexuality; they do not want to cause embarrassment to themselves or their daughters, or be perceived as condoning sexual activity; and their daughters are not always receptive to sexual health messages (Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2006; McKee & Karasz, 2006).

Difficulty talking about sexuality has been connected to gendered constructions of sexuality, which produce in women feelings of sexual shame and an inability to refuse unprotected sexual activity (Davila, 2005). Mothers can be caught in the tension between upholding cultural beliefs and encouraging girls to be themselves (Taylor, Gilligan, & Sullivan, 1995). However, some Latina mothers challenge themselves to talk openly with their daughters to diminish the impact of sexual shame (McKee & Karasz, 2006; Nadeem, Romo, & Sigman, 2006). Overall, these findings support the idea that mother-daughter narratives are deeply intertwined. This study seeks in part to understand the extent to which a mother's sexual agency shapes her daughter's sexual agency, and how her daughter's agency might in turn reproduce or alter her mother's sexuality messages. Young women whose mothers have low sexual agency may have a different narrative process because they have been given fewer maternal-based opportunities to build agency skills.

Qualitative Methods and Sexuality Research

Feminist scholars advocate eclecticism and methodological pluralism as the best approach to examining complex questions about female sexuality (Ussher, 1999). They argue for the need to integrate qualitative and quantitative methods to explore the interplay of agency and structure in the area of gender and sexuality. For example, theoretical work on individual subjectivity shows how women's transformative psychological experiences that occur through interpersonal encounters can foster agency to lead meaningful lives (Chodorow, 1999). Voice-based relational analyses of girls' coming-of-age experiences are uncovering unconscious processes that reveal how cultural sanctions against being outspoken may be disconnecting girls' thoughts from their behaviors (Gilligan, 2006). A recent study of women's sexual life histories reveals how the practice of sexuality over time is itself a dynamic force that interacts with consciousness to alter a sense of agentic power (Bryant & Schofield, 2007). These examples point to the need to listen to women's stories at multiple levels in order to understand how personal experience and social discourse interact to produce and transform a sense of sexual agency.

Similarly, Latina feminist researchers have argued for the need to conduct qualitative research that creates space for the agentic voices of marginalized individuals to come through from their own perspectives (Delgado-Bernal, 2001; Hurtado, 2003; Zavella, 1997). They assert that quantitative methods may limit the expression of sexuality and agency that may be particular to certain oppressed groups. In addition, traditional means of measurement that are based in hegemonic and heteronormative views of sexuality—that is, views that favor the dominant culture's sexual norms and that

consider desire for the opposite sex the natural state for men and women—may overshadow the reality of Latina girls' experiences.

Yet to date, sexual agency among Latino youth has primarily been studied with survey methods (Morokoff et al., 1997; Impett et al., 2006; Bourdeau, Thomas, & Long, 2008), which have critical limitations in their capacity to obtain accurate information, particularly from among this population. For example, researchers are typically concerned with adolescents' truthfulness and, in turn, with validity issues related to self-disclosure bias and social desirability bias (Wiederman, 2004). In Latina/o communities, scholars have pointed to cultural scripts of *simpatico* and *respeto*, which emphasize positive behaviors in agreeable social interactions and avoidance of confrontation, to explain why Latina/os are more likely to give socially desirable responses, disclose less to a stranger, and produce extreme responses to survey questions (Marín & Marín, 1991; Sagobal et al., 1997). At best, survey methods offer only a partial perspective on Latina/o sexual behavior and likely inhibit the expression of sexuality and agency among this population.

In contrast, narrative interviews can capture the lived experience of people who have been traditionally silent in the area of sexuality and who struggle with sexual agency in their lives. They can reveal the way that knowledge gets socially constructed and transmitted individually and collectively (Plummer, 1995). In particular, Chicana feminist researchers have argued for the need to conduct qualitative research that creates space for the agentic voices of marginalized individuals to come through from their own perspectives (Delgado-Bernal, 2001; Hurtado, 2003; Zavella, 1997). They point out that methods of measurement that are historically based in hegemonic and heteronormative

views of sexuality—in others words, methods that privilege the dominant culture's sexual norms and that consider desire for the opposite sex the natural state for men and women—may overshadow the reality of Latina girls' experiences.

Given the need to gather information on people's lived experiences of sexuality, I recognized that conducting in-depth interviews with Latina women might present certain challenges. Latina/os generally have less knowledge about and exposure to sexuality education than other groups, adhere to more traditional sex roles, and have more conservative attitudes toward sexuality than whites (Sabogal et al., 1997). Despite these challenges, professionals working with Latina/o populations believe that such conversations would greatly benefit Latina youth (Allen et al., 2008). Furthermore, investigators have successfully used narrative inquiry to help young women share their sexual stories (e.g., Thompson, 1995; Lee, 2008; Tolman, 2002). Even when talking about sexuality itself may feel risky to young women, many report that the conversations are beneficial to them (Tolman, 2002). Therefore, in developing my interview script, I paid special attention to places where I could establish a research partnership with the participants (Weiss, 1994) to facilitate the sharing of personal experience. Although obstacles occurred, I kept in mind how important it is to encourage people usually not invited to share their sexual stories to find their voice in order to transform limiting discourses (Plummer, 1995) and, more importantly, to make a positive impact on their sexual well-being.

Biographical Narration to Empower Adolescents

My initial thinking about an interview script was inspired by the work of Welle and Clatt (2007), who used biographical narration with sexual minority youth to foster

building blocks of sexual agency such as awareness and information about HIV prevention. Narrative theory explains that people come to understand their lives through their interactions with cultural messages and settings at a given time and place. Narrative interviews can effectively illuminate individuals' perspectives on cultural and social phenomena. The focus is less on understanding a "truth" or normative standard of accuracy about people's experience and more on the way they make sense of personal experiences in relation to culturally and historically specific discourses (Chase, 2005). Social scientists have used narrative inquiry to investigate how people draw on, resist, and/or transform dominant discourses by the way they tell their stories (Plummer, 1995). The choice of narrative inquiry is consistent with Chicana feminists' call for qualitative studies to allow for agentic voices to emerge and inform the inquiry. This type of inquiry may be especially useful for facilitating conversation with Mexican-origin young women living in the United States. These women are given particular societal and cultural messages about what they are supposed to think about sexuality and what they are allowed to experience sexually; some of these messages can be protective, others may be problematic. The ways in which Latina youth internalize, reproduce, or transform those messages play an important role in their ability to negotiate their sexual fulfillment and health; by talking about and acknowledging these messages, they can begin to recognize their own perspectives about themselves.

While storytelling represents an important way for young people to develop self-understanding, the use of narrative method with adolescents presents certain challenges because the cognitive skills to tell a coherent life story only emerge in adolescence (Habermas & Bluck, 2000). To cultivate these emerging skills, Welle and Clatt (2007)

and their colleagues developed a method called “scaffolded interviewing,” which involves carefully placing life-history and sexuality-related questions within the interview to help adolescents develop their own narratives of sexuality awareness and risk prevention. The idea that children’s development is “scaffolded” comes from the work of Vygotsky (1978), who showed that development is not only supported but extended beyond the child’s current capacities through interaction with adults, primarily through oral communication. Vygotsky’s ideas were further expanded by Bruner (1991), who emphasized that children construct meaning through immersion in their own culture’s process of arriving at meaning, particularly through exposure to storytelling. Although scaffolded interviewing has not been used to study the construction of sexual agency among Latina adolescents, it has the potential to increase their awareness of sexual feelings, socialization, and empowerment.

Summary

In summary, clarifying a theory of sexual agency involves deepening and broadening our understanding of how gender and sexual socialization processes are deeply intertwined for girls. Family ecological frameworks and feminist perspectives offer insights into the micro and macro processes through which gender and sexual socialization occurs in the family and cultural contexts. Girls are particularly vulnerable during early adolescence to intensified pressure to behave in gendered ways that puts them at a disadvantage for developing the building blocks of sexual agency, such as sexual knowledge, subjectivity, and self-efficacy. Feminist perspectives provide a framework for understanding how societal conceptions of adolescent sexuality make it difficult for girls of all backgrounds to develop a healthy sexuality. Research on Latina/o

sexuality has identified core cultural values that influence family sexual socialization processes related to adolescent sexual behavior, and better understanding of these processes may offer insight into factors that promote Latina girls' sexual well-being. Qualitative methods, particularly narrative, can illuminate how sociocultural constraints and opportunities contribute to how girls' internalize, reproduce, and transform the sexuality messages that influence their sexual agency.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

As I have outlined in earlier chapters, in choosing methods to study Latina young women's sexual agency, I had to consider alternative methods that go beyond narrow reductionist frameworks that conceptualize sex as a physical behavior or bodily response. My project addresses broader interwoven questions about the interplay of physiological, psychological, and contextual factors that shape a person's sense of empowerment in the sexual realm. I assumed the need to study individual subjectivity and social context concurrently, and my review of empirical research led me to conclude, as many feminist scholars have, that eclecticism and methodological pluralism offer the best approach to uncovering answers to complex questions about female sexuality (Ussher, 1999). This approach also functions as a form of methodological triangulation in that it draws from complementary but also distinctive methods for data collection and analysis. In this chapter, I describe the decisions I made regarding data collection and analysis and the ways in which I tried to focus on the interplay of subjectivity and social context that guided the work.

This work is qualitative, feminist, and ecological, and I use those theories to frame the discussion of methods. I used a qualitative approach to collect data for this study. I used a purposeful sampling strategy to select adolescents and their mothers. To interview participants, I used a narrative method that incorporated elements of phenomenological and journalistic techniques. This data collection approach is feminist, too, in that it is grounded in women's experiences and uses a voice-centered, relational approach to guide the listening and interpretation of women's voices and stories (Miller,

1991; Way, 1998). To facilitate an open and nonthreatening environment for young women to reflect on what they have learned about and experienced with sexuality, I used a method known as “scaffolded interviewing” (Welle & Clatts, 2007). Scaffolded interviewing helps people construct coherent life stories about topics for which there are complex, contradictory, and culturally contested meanings and values. As the word “scaffolding” suggests, the purpose of this method is to help participants unaccustomed to talking about a particular topic such as sexuality construct a story in their own voice. This is another way that the method uses a feminist approach. The method also draws on ecological theory in that it facilitates conversation at both the micro and macro level of development because it elicits details about lived experience as well as larger societal forces that might be influencing a person’s cognitive and social processes. The method involves using several modes of qualitative inquiry, including narrative, phenomenological, and journalistic techniques, to intersperse relevant life history and sexuality-related questions throughout the interview. Using this method with a culturally sensitive script, I was able to generate rich and informative narratives from Mexican-origin mothers and daughters.

In the following sections, I describe each step of the study, including the initial design of the interview script, the pilot study to test and refine the script, the recruitment process for the full study, and the process of data collection, data management, and data analysis.

Design of the Interview Script

To create a culturally sensitive script that would facilitate open talk about sexuality among Mexican-origin women, I first identified relevant questions from the

scholarly literature, synthesized them, and then refined them during the pilot interview process. I developed the daughters' interview script first, and it served as the foundation for the mothers' script. The daughters' script came first mainly because the young women's perspectives lie at the heart of my project, the purpose of which is to promote young women's sexual health by better understanding the contexts that shape their sense of sexual agency. I paid particular attention to what they were learning from their mothers, as mothers play a central role in Latina girls' sexuality development (Liebowitz, Castellano, & Cuellar, 1999) and are the key individuals involved in socializing children about sexuality in most cultures (see Lee, 2008, for a review). Another reason for starting with the daughters' script is that the family and cultural context in which these girls are growing up may place restrictions on talking about sexuality that had to be carefully considered. In many Mexican-origin communities in the United States, as well as communities in Mexico, conversations about sexuality are infrequent,¹ and most mother-daughter communication contains a strong emphasis on girls' virginity until marriage (Davila, 2005; González-Lopez, 2003; Moncloa, Wilkinson-Lee, & Russell, 2010; Raffaelli & Ontai, 2001). The prevalence of sexual silence, that is, the discomfort with and avoidance of talking about sex and sexuality, and a one-dimensional focus on sexual behavior presents unique challenges to the researcher trying to learn through in-depth interviews about Latina women's sexual agency.

Relevant Questions from Empirical Research

Along with relevant cultural information, I drew upon recommendations that sexuality scholars have been making for the last two decades about the kind of information that needs to be collected from adolescent females in order to promote their

¹ Sexual communication in families is also infrequent across cultures (see e.g., Fisher, 2004).

sexual well-being. Recommendations from pivotal studies include Thompson's (1990) suggested checklist to address girls' sexual perspectives; Rosenthal and colleagues' (1991) items on sexual self-efficacy; O'Sullivan and colleagues' (2006) Sexual Self-Concept Inventory for adolescent girls; Rostosky and colleagues' (2008) items on sexual self-concept; Horne and Zimmer-Gembeck's (2006) Female Sexual Subjectivity Inventory; Mahalik and colleagues' (2005) Conformity to Feminine Norms Inventory; Levinson's (1986) contraceptive self-efficacy scales; and Tolman's (2002) questions about sexual desire. I found only three sets of studies that provided detailed questions about sexual socialization and sexual agency for Latina adolescents (Bourdeau, Thomas, & Long, 2008; Raffaelli & Ontai, 2001; and Van Campen & Romero, 2012), and the paucity of research in this area demonstrates the need to conduct in-depth interviews with young Latinas about this topic.

The next step was to synthesize the recommended questions into an initial draft of the interview script, which contained the following components: sexual knowledge; sexual subjectivity; sexual agency for self-regulation, pleasure, and safety; sexual socialization; gender role expectations; and cultural influences on sexuality.

At the forefront of the script's development was my awareness of criticism set forth by Latina feminists about a tendency in academia, research, and popular culture to "essentialize" understandings of Latina/o culture and especially Latina/o sexuality. That is, in the United States, Latina sexuality has often been portrayed as inherently negative or has been dichotomized as either traditional and repressed or acculturated and liberated (e.g., Juárez & Kerl, 2003). These feminist theorists argue that a pervasive ethnocentrism in the United States assumes that less acculturated Latinas are more

repressed, and that modern white sexuality is more natural and normal. This type of thinking, they assert, reflects a tendency of scholars of Latina/o and Latin American cultures to “blame” Latina/o culture for Latinas’ oppression; they argue that when white American women experience similar challenges with their sexuality, scholars do not suggest that American culture is sexually repressive. While it can be argued that white American sexuality is just as essentialized as Latina/o sexuality although perhaps in different ways, I took to heart the concerns of Juárez and Kerl about how Latina sexuality has frequently been framed in the empirical literature.

To forestall this phenomenon from occurring in my interviews, I framed questions to reflect current knowledge about both adolescent female sexuality and family and cultural influences on Mexican-origin female sexuality. For instance, given the important role of mothers in Latina girls’ sexual socialization (Raffaelli & Ontai, 2001; McKee & Karasz, 2006), I decided to ask each young woman to tell me about a time when her mother talked to her about sexuality, and whether her mother had taught her how to protect herself in sexual situations. In addition, Zavella (2003) pointed to the importance of quinceañeras, or the Mexican Catholic coming-of-age rituals for girls turning fifteen, as a way to celebrate a young woman’s sexual purity and express gratitude to La Virgen. In more recent times, quinceañera practices have expanded beyond religious celebrations to become an obligation to practice one’s ethnic culture (Davalos, 2003) and/or as an opportunity to give young Latinas a sense of empowerment and individual importance (Alvarez, 2007). Thus, the interview script contained questions about the relevance of the quinceañera and whether it was a milestone of womanhood.

Pilot Study

I conducted a pilot study in order to test and refine the interview questions. After a first draft of the interview script was completed, it was translated by a bilingual undergraduate research assistant (RA) into Spanish and checked by another bilingual RA. After the project received approval from the university's Internal Review Board (IRB), I recruited two pairs of mothers and daughters. One pair was recruited through a local community organization with whom I had an established relationship, and one pair was recruited through a referral from a member of my dissertation committee. The consent and interview processes were conducted separately. I first met with the mother and daughter to explain the study and obtain their consent and assent; at that time, I also scheduled separate interview times for both of them. The interviews took place at locations convenient for the participants and included a local library, a participant's office, and a participant's home. Except for one Spanish-speaking participant, I conducted all of the interviews in English. Interviews were recorded digitally then transcribed and translated by RAs (please see pp. 16-17 for more details on interviewers for the project and data management).

Refining the interview format and questions. The pilot interviews raised my awareness of the need to structure questions in ways that facilitated building rapport with the young women before asking intimate sexuality-related questions. Creating rapport at the onset of the conversation was critical, since many of the young women interviewed had little experiencing talking about themselves in the context of sexuality. Another concern had to do with what, how, and when to ask participants about their social and demographic backgrounds. Besides basic questions about age, socioeconomic status, and

education, I asked the women detailed questions about their family's acculturation status, birth order, relationship status, and religious affiliation and practice. During the pilot study, at their initial meeting to learn about the project and to consent interviews, I had participants complete a pre-interview questionnaire. Part of the reason for asking these questions at the initial meeting was to provide essential information to show they met the study's inclusion criteria (listed here). However, as I soon discovered in the first few interviews, asking these questions at an earlier meeting left me with few topics with which to build rapport during the actual interview. The solution was to incorporate the background questions into the beginning of the interview, along with integrating multiple methodologies into the scaffolding process.²

The pilot interviews also alerted me that I might have to integrate multiple methodologies into the scaffolding process in order to elicit more comprehensive sexuality narratives. Studies using narrative inquiry typically begin by asking an open-ended question such as "Tell your life story" (Welle & Clatts, 2007). The goal of asking such broad versus structured questions is to allow the voice of participants to emerge with as little probing as possible. As such, in my pilot study, I kept my interview questions as general as possible. Another reason I kept the questions general was because I believed that asking more concrete sexuality questions might raise concerns of the IRB, making it harder to get approval for the project. My fear was based on the fact that I planned to

² Overall, asking the background questions during the actual interview was an effective solution to overcoming the girls' initial awkwardness. However, the solution backfired on me once, when I learned too late that one of the participants did not meet the age criteria. Both she and her mother had represented her age as 15, but when I asked the birth date during the actual interview, I learned she was still 14. For subsequent participants, I made sure to ask the birth date during the consent process.

conduct the study in a state with conservative policies regarding adolescent sexuality education and access to comprehensive sexual health services.³

The mistake of using a general approach with Mexican-origin adolescent girls became obvious fairly quickly. By integrating narrative with phenomenology and journalist techniques, I found a balance between asking general and concrete questions based on the topic. To give an example of how my questions often shifted from narrative inquiry to phenomenology to journalistic techniques, let me share the evolution of my questions on sexual feelings during the pilot interviews. I would start by asking the participant to tell me a story: “Can you tell me about the first time you ever felt sexual?” What I was looking for was an account of her experience with specific, embodied feelings. In the first interview, the young woman responded that she woke up from a dream and felt like she wanted to give birth to something. When asked to describe the feeling of wanting to give birth, she said it felt like she was on her period yet she was not menstruating at the time. While these responses lent themselves to fascinating interpretations, no matter how I asked her to talk about the actual physical sensations she felt, she could only refer to them in metaphorical language.

At first, I attributed my difficulty in eliciting a more literal response to asking a question that was too broad. Perhaps I needed to ask questions from a more phenomenological perspective. Phenomenological methods focus on eliciting the lived experience of a person without necessarily providing causal explanations or interpretative generalizations (van Manen, 1990). The focus is more on the person’s living sense—feelings, sounds, smells—of the experience. I sought out my Mexican-origin female

³ My fear turned out to be unfounded. By providing clear and adequate justification for asking concrete questions, the IRB approved the questions fairly quickly.

undergraduate research assistants and asked if they would assume various teenage personas so I could practice this approach with them. They willingly complied, and we greatly enjoyed the improvisation, that is, until I asked them, “When was the first time you ever felt sexual, and what did you feel?” Immediately, they looked confused and wanted to know what I meant by *sexual*, suggesting that I provide them with a definition. Yet I was afraid to use leading questions, and instead developed a few probes, such as: “To be clear, when I say *sexual feelings*, do you know what I mean?” or “What do you think I mean?” or “What do you think sexual feelings are?” Then, if they still could not improvise a response, I provided the following general definition: *By sexual feelings, I mean feelings you might have physically, perhaps when you are attracted to someone, when you have a sexual daydream, or when you are with a romantic partner.* Since these interviews with the undergraduate research assistants were not personal, and they were free to respond however they wished, if they still could not provide an embodied response, I did not explore the question further.

Upon reflection, I realized that the questions were troublesome because they were not getting at what *I* wanted to know, which was more than just *when* and *what* Mexican-origin teenage participants learned about sexual feelings. I wanted to understand their sexual subjectivity, that is, the extent to which they were aware of the actual physical sexual sensations they were experiencing. My goal was to break through the sexual silence around sexual feelings that pervades the literature about adolescent girls and especially Mexican-origin adolescent girls. But how would I do that? I went back to the science, to the study by Thompson (1990) on young women’s experiences of losing their virginity. The study’s findings convinced Thompson that health professionals and sex

brochures should focus less on questions about whether girls think they are mature enough and ready to have a baby and more on whether they know what sexual feelings are. From rereading Thompson's study, I realized I needed to be more concrete with my examples. One of the pitfalls I was trying to avoid was making broad, inaccurate statements about Latina sexuality, which could happen if I did not explore the phenomena sufficiently. For example, if in response to my general question about whether they had experienced sexual feelings, the girls told me that they had not, that they did not know what I meant, or that they feel uncomfortable talking about sexual feelings, it could be tempting to infer that cultural and sexual socialization processes had influenced their ability to know what they were feeling sexually. Yet if I explored concretely to make sure they knew exactly what I was asking, and then they told me, "I don't know" or "I don't want to talk about this," then I would have more accurate information from which I could make inferences about their awareness of sexual feelings.

Therefore, adapting a list of hypothetical questions that Thompson (1990) generated for eliciting girls' sexual perspective, I grouped together physical sensations that might occur if a girl were experiencing sexual feelings. For example, "Did your heart beat differently than usual? Did your mouth water? Did you have butterflies in your stomach? Did your toes curl? Did your nipples get hard? Did your vagina feel moist and warm? Did your vagina seem to be opening and closing, reaching out?" Such questions reflect the factual accuracy that a journalist might ask someone when trying to uncover a compelling news story (Rolnicki, Tate, & Taylor, 2007). In this way, I was able to get more concrete responses to my questions about sexual feelings.

Breaking the sexual silence. Now that I had figured out how to ask the questions, my concern was whether the girls would be too embarrassed to be asked about taut nipples and wet vaginas. I was also anxious that, having elaborated my method enough to require submitting a modification to IRB, the questions might not be approved. So I came up with the plan of creating a transitional step to talking about the physical sensations by giving the young women a sheet of paper with the list and asking them to check off “yes, no, or unsure” next to each. When I shared the plan with my advisor, he thought it ironic that although the goal was to break the sexual silence, in order to help them speak, I felt I needed to allow them to be silent (e.g., look over the list by themselves). He encouraged me to journal about this dilemma—about how the silence that pervades sexuality for Mexican-origin young women is part of what has to be the method—and to find the “science” that provides evidence and/or methods for transitional steps. This suggestion has roots in certain feminist scholarship that views the process of writing itself as a method of inquiry for discovering and analyzing the topic at hand (Richardson, 2000).

Through writing, I recalled Gilligan’s (2006) use of photographs to help girls talk about feelings. In one study, the investigator put a photograph in front of a girl and asked her to describe what was happening; Gilligan explored by asking the girl where the girl in the picture was feeling the emotions that she had described. The use of the photo helped the girl give voice to difficult inner complex processes in her psyche. Other research findings on collecting sensitive information show that people are more likely to admit to things on a self-administered questionnaire than to a human interviewer (Cooley et al., 2001). Still, these methods did not seem appropriate for what I was trying to accomplish.

I decided to reach out to a Latina scholar with whom I had previously corresponded about my study on the Qualitative Research for the Human Sciences (QUALRS) listserv (www.listserv.uga.edu). With a background in research on Latina adolescents, she shared her thoughts based “on her experience and not by literature” (C. Hausmann, personal communication, September 23, 2010). She suggested that I start the dialogue mode of the interview in a more impersonal way, perhaps with a short survey that asked for background information, because this informality helps create a nonthreatening environment and allows the interviewer to forecast the interviewee’s difficulties. In one example she provided about a very sensitive project, she said her team allowed the participants to warm up by completing a short survey about the phenomenon, a task that allowed the interviewer to assess how open the participant was to talk so it was easier to explore. In another project, the team asked questions in the context of a semi-structured questionnaire but used the girls’ language, saying funny things like, “Oh my god, look at the things we’re asking you!” In this way, the researchers made the situation more open and comfortable, and often the girls would laugh at the questions, the researchers would laugh with them, and the laughter broke the ice. The researchers also accepted that some girls, about 10 percent, could not talk openly with them about their sexual lives. This scholar discouraged me from handing the participants the list of physical sensations, because this action could set an unspoken non-dialogue framework and because it might reinforce the idea that sexuality is very private and cannot be talked about with others.

This scholar’s response provided me solutions to two different dilemmas. The first involved where in the interview process to ask the background questions. The second

revolved around how to create an encouraging interview environment. Immediately, I knew how I had to incorporate the Pre-Questionnaire into the beginning of the interview, and use it to build rapport with the participants. I also recognized that, with this rapport, by the time I reached the sexual feelings questions, it would be relatively easy to introduce the topic through dialogue. This new placement of the Pre-Questionnaire accomplished both goals. Furthermore, the inclusion of the concrete questions on physical sensations met quickly with IRB approval, as I had carefully explained to the IRB reviewers the above rationale for including the questions in the study.

One ice-breaker offered by a member of my dissertation committee provided an excellent means of starting the interview. She suggested that I be as transparent as possible by having an upfront conversation with participants about what to expect in the interview. I developed a mini-script in which I told the young women: “Some of the questions may surprise you, and you might say ‘I have no idea,’ or ‘I don’t know.’ At those times, I’ll ask more questions to help you answer them. At other times, you might feel uncomfortable with a question and tell me you don’t want to answer it. At those times, I won’t try to help you, we’ll just move on to the next question. You may not be surprised by any question, and you may feel comfortable answering all the questions, but I just want you to know that you have a choice about what questions you answer.” When I said these things, the relief on their faces was palpable. Up until then, many of them seemed stiff and nervous about the interview. Then I explained that my goal was for them to talk about their experiences, that they were the experts of their own lives, and about not wanting to interrupt them, so if they saw me writing, it was because I was taking notes to follow up with things later. By the time I described the two-part interview format

(i.e., semi-structured background questions and in-depth conversation), they had visibly relaxed and were ready to start.

Having incorporated these suggestions into the interview script, when I conducted my next pilot interview, I could see an immediate change in the quality of the conversation. For example, when I asked the initial question about sexual feelings, at first the young woman described an objective experience of something that happened to her body, rather than a subjective experience that occurred inside of her. For example, she talked about her embodied feelings for a boy she liked: “My ears got so red and my face got so red, and I just like couldn’t speak and it was ridiculous.” Then I asked her about the concrete physical sensations. She easily understood what I intended and was able to tell me whether she had experienced them or not.

I knew I was on the right track. However, there were still hurdles to overcome. In the full study, with the first six participants, the responses were still not quite what I had hoped, until I realized that their lack of sexual experience partially contributed to the limited sexual feelings they acknowledged. Only later when I talked with more sexually aware and active girls, who represented a minority of my sample, was I truly assured that my questions were effective. Although the sexually active girls could not always speak with forthrightness about their experiences, they were able to acknowledge having sexual feelings, and a few smiled in a way that seemed to indicate a secret pleasure at the memory of having those feelings. (See Appendix A for interview questions.)

Full Study Data Collection

My data source was drawn from among Mexican-origin women in greater Tucson, Arizona. The criteria for participating in the study was to be a young woman

between the ages of 15 and 17 who self-identified as Mexican-origin and whose mother also self-identified as Mexican-origin. The age of 15 is a critical time when many girls go through coming-of-age events such as the *quinceañera*, commonly known as a milestone of reaching womanhood in Latina/o culture. It is also when they begin to drive, which is another key milestone that potentially leads to greater individual independence. This population is especially appropriate for my research question of how the mother-daughter relationship influences young women's sexual agency. Mexican-origin mothers are the primary socializers of cultural values in the family, and specific cultural values deliver clear messages about gender and sexual roles for women.

Recruitment

Recruitment for both the pilot and full study for this project took place between September 2010 and May 2011. My sampling method included identifying venues in which I could recruit young women or their mothers through local youth centers, Latina/o community groups, and adolescent health organizations. I also had the support of my dissertation advisors, who already had substantial partnerships with many agencies and agreed to work with me to provide access to recruit in these places. I recruited by presenting information about the study to youth or parent groups in either English or Spanish, and asking if any of the women might be interested in participating. I also asked organization liaisons to refer mothers or adolescents of the right age and ethnic background to come talk with me. For young women, I gave them details about the study and got contact information for their mothers.

The consent process generally took place during an initial meeting with both mother and daughter to explain the study in more detail, to answer any questions they

had, to review the consent and assent forms, and to have them sign the forms. I arranged with participants to conduct the interviews either at the venue in which they were recruited or at a comfortable place of her choosing, such as a private room in a local library or her home. I also arranged for a Spanish-speaking translator to be present at each interview in which Spanish was the participant's primary language. Both the young women and their mothers were compensated for their time spent participating in the study. I finished recruitment once I arrived at a sufficient and manageable number of interviews for analysis.

Interview Process

Including the pilot and the full study, in total I interviewed 25 mothers and 25 daughters. The girls' interviews took approximately 1 and ¼ hours, while the mothers' interviews took approximately 2 and ½ hours. The difference in length was partly because the interview script for the mothers was longer (mothers were asked not only what they taught their daughters but what they learned from their own mothers) and because 75% of the mothers (18) were interviewed in Spanish. Only two girls were interviewed in Spanish.

Data Management

All interviews for the pilot and full study were recorded digitally. All of the interviews were transcribed in a secure lab setting by undergraduate RAs whom I trained on the transcription process and software. Spanish-speaking interviews were transcribed in Spanish and then translated into English by bilingual undergraduate RAs. Each interview was transcribed by one RA and then checked by another RA. The same procedure was set for the translation process, with the two RAs meeting to discuss any

discrepancies in the translation. Occasionally, when an interview was particularly difficult to transcribe, a third RA was asked to check the transcript. Spanish-speaking interviews were transcribed in Spanish and then translated into English by bilingual undergraduate RAs. Each interview was transcribed by one RA and then checked by another RA. The same procedure was set for the translation process, with the two RAs meeting to discuss any discrepancies in the translation. Occasionally, when an interview was particularly difficult to transcribe, a third RA was asked to check the transcript.

Interviewers for the Project

I conducted all of the interviews for the full project. During the pilot interviews, however, I initially had a colleague conduct a Spanish-speaking interview while I was present in the room. Both the colleague and I later realized that my questions and expertise on the topic needed to propel the project forward, and that the interviews would be best served if I conducted them myself with the help of a translator. Translators included one bilingual graduate student and two bilingual undergraduate RAs whom I thoroughly trained in the interview process.

Fieldnotes

After each interview, I wrote fieldnotes, either immediately or no later than 48 hours after the interview, a process recommended by qualitative researchers (e.g., Glesne, 2006). I created a template for writing fieldnotes that incorporated elements of ethnography and reflectivity (see Appendix B for fieldnotes template). The goal was to document my observations of the interview setting and the girls' physical characteristics, summarize information I got (or failed to get) for each target question, identify things that struck me as salient, reveal my responses to or biases about the interview, and identify

new hypotheses, hunches, or questions to consider for the next interview. This process was another form of data collection, and another way for me to raise and document ideas to explore in subsequent analyses.

Girls' Background

For this dissertation project, I focus on the interview texts of 20 Mexican-origin adolescent girls, as well as the interview texts of four of these girls' mothers. Three girls who were interviewed for this study were excluded for the following reasons. I learned too late in the interview process that one girl was still 14 at the time of the interview and therefore did not meet the criteria. Both she and her mother had represented her age as 15 because she was to turn 15 in 8 weeks. I did not learn her actual birth date until after I interviewed the mother separately and had started the interview with her daughter. I decided to complete the interview with the girl but excluded her from the current dissertation project; however, I recognize the need to address in a future project how her interview differed in substantive ways from other girls in the study because she had not yet turned 15. Another two girls were first-generation Mexican-origin immigrants who had come to the United States within the last three years in order to live with their mothers, who had been living in the United States for approximately 10 years each. The girls had come to the United States because of an opportunity regarding immigration status. Unlike the other girls in the study, these two girls' primary language was Spanish, they had not lived with their mother for most of their elementary and middle school years, and their mother was not their primary socializing agent in the family regarding sexuality. Because the content of their interviews showed substantial differences from the other girls in key aspects of the interview, and rather than be forced to address them as

the exception throughout my current analysis, I excluded them and intend to address the impact of migration on mother-daughter relationships and sexual socialization in a future publication.

Table 1 “Girls’ Background Information” presents salient demographic and personal history information for each girl. All names are pseudonyms selected by each girl. A multitude of factors are relevant to their sexual learning experiences. The range of the girls’ sexual and romantic experiences was limited. A majority of girls still considered themselves virgins, including one bisexual girl whose multiple sexual encounters with girls included penetration but whose sexual encounters with boys did not. Seven girls had experienced sexual intercourse, though only two girls were currently sexually active. Two girls said with certainty that they had experienced orgasm, one girl said that she had ever masturbated, and none of the girls said they had engaged in oral sex. Four girls identified as bisexual or gay, and only one of them had any sexual experience. Five of the girls had been in a serious romantic relationship that included sexual intercourse, two of the girls had been in a serious romantic relationship that did not include sexual activity, and the other girls had either never dated or had gone out with someone only casually. The girls’ acculturation status ranged from first to fifth generation, and more than half represented 1.5 and 2nd generations. The girls came from a variety of family structures, and six girls did not have a father living at home with them. All of the girls’ religious roots can be traced to Catholicism, but only eleven girls considered themselves Catholic, and one of those girls (Lilly, a pseudonym) left her religion and became an atheist because of her church’s views on homosexuality. Eight girls considered themselves Christians because their families had converted to a form of

Evangelical Christianity upon migrating to the United States, and two of those girls (Maria and Diana) left their church, also because of its views on homosexuality. One girl (Teresa) attended both Catholic and Christian church because her father had converted to Christianity and wanted her to participate in church services with him. One girl had no religious affiliation, and neither did her mother.

Girls' Background Information

Name	Age	Generation	Religious	Father Presence at	Sexual	Relationship	Ever had
		Status	Affiliation	Home	Orientation	Status	intercourse
Victoria	16	3	None	no father at home	Straight	Dating boy casually	Yes
Mary	15	2	Christian	stepfather at home	Straight	Single	No
Maria	15	2	Christian	no father at home	Straight	Single	No
Diana	15	2	Christian	no father at home	Gay	Dating girl casually	No
Luisa	17	3	Catholic	father at home	Straight	Single	No
Carol	16	3	Catholic	father at home	Bisexual	Single	No
Teresa	16	5	Catholic	father at home	Straight	Dating boy casually	No
Ashley	16	1.5	Catholic	no father at home	Straight	Single	Yes
Melissa	17	1.5	Catholic	father at home	Straight	Single	Yes
Lilly	16	3	Catholic	no father at home	Bisexual	Dating boy casually	No
Nicki	15	1.5	Christian	father at home	Straight	Steady boyfriend	No
Andrea	16	2	Catholic	stepfather at home	Straight	Single	No
Pati	17	1.5	Christian	father at home	Straight	Single	No
Sandy	17	1.5	Catholic	father at home	Straight	Steady boyfriend	Yes
Tina	17	2	Christian	stepfather at home	Straight	Steady boyfriend	Yes
Sabrina	17	1.5	Catholic	father at home	Straight	Steady boyfriend	Yes
Veronica	15	2	Catholic	no father at home	Bisexual	Steady boyfriend	No
Dakota	16	2	Christian	father at home	Straight	Single	Yes
Shelly	17	3	Catholic	father at home	Straight	Single	No
Sally	16	2	Christian	father at home	Straight	Dating boy casually	No

Data Analysis

For this study, I chose four different analytic strategies, all of which are qualitative in nature, to highlight the interpretative process. My goal was to emphasize

the ways in which my own questions, ideas, and biases inform each of these strategies. Rather than conceal such features, my intention was to identify and use them to my advantage as a way of keeping alive alternative explanations. In this way, my ongoing questions and concerns help to establish the validity of my analysis.⁴

I chose these strategies because they complement and reinforce each other and because they function as a kind of methodological triangulation (see, e.g., Tolman & Szalacha, 1999). The strategies overlap in some ways, but are quite distinctive in other ways. I will also show how this approach is feminist and ecological in nature.

First Read-Through

The first analytic strategy consisted of an informal reading of the text and corresponds, in part, to the first step of the Listening Guide (see Appendix C for sample first read-through).⁵ It served to familiarize me with the texts as well as allow me to start systematically charting my responses, questions, and the content. I was able to identify themes, metaphors, societal frameworks, and rough summaries of the various stories heard. Throughout the data analysis process, I paid special attention to my responses to the stories and the participants interviewed, which are data too and documenting them is a way of honoring that data.

Content Analysis

This analytic strategy is a standard technique of qualitative analysis that is often called coding or categorizing. Content analysis is defined as “a research method for the

⁴ I used these strategies in a similar way as did Miller (1991), a scholar who used the Listening Guide Method for her dissertation research and adapted a creative method for graphing the content analysis into conceptually clustered matrices.

⁵ The sample first read-through for Victoria includes my notations regarding the full scope of themes that were part of the Interview Script. However, for the purposes of this dissertation, I focused on the nine conceptual codes that are listed in Appendix D.

subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278). I use content analysis in this study as a way of identifying and categorizing characteristics of sexual agency (which includes sexual subjectivity and sexual socialization) that I heard in the text. By using content analysis I can reduce the bulk of the interview data to focus on selected characteristics. The purpose of identifying characteristics within each text is to make comparisons across texts of other adolescent girls and to create descriptions of salient aspects of girls’ sexual socialization and agency in this study (Miller, 1991).

The content analysis was undertaken in three steps. In the first step, I combined two approaches to identifying codes. I used a directed approach, in which I first created codes based on concepts and characteristics of sexual agency identified in the empirical literature. I also used a conventional approach in which codes are data driven, that is, characteristics of sexual agency were allowed to emerge from the texts themselves. This dual approach allows the researcher to support and extend theory as well as generate new knowledge (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). After identifying the codes (see Appendix D for conceptual codes), I proceeded to systematically read all of the texts using the qualitative data software program MAXQDA, marking the texts for evidence of each code. Some texts were double-coded, representing evidence of two codes. In this way, the categorization process highlighted similarities between discrete pieces of data (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

In the second step, I organized the coded data into data displays, a technique recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994) to further reduce and present data. I chose to use conceptually clustered matrices, which bring together items that “belong together”

conceptually (p. 127). This step was done in two parts. First, I compiled a descriptive background of each adolescent girl that I drew from the interview data and field notes. Next, I created two sets of matrices. The first set of matrices I designed presented a synopsis, for each adolescent, of each of the eight core conceptual codes. All of an adolescent's responses that shared a code were clustered together sequentially according to when they were mentioned during the interview. This resulted in 20 matrices,⁶ one for each adolescent, with nine conceptual clusters (see Appendix E for sample matrices). In the second set of matrices, I aggregated the data collected for each conceptual cluster from all the girls. Given that there were nine conceptual codes, I constructed nine different conceptual matrices.

Working primarily from the second set of matrices, I then sketched provisional descriptions of characteristics of adolescent girls' sexual socialization and agency as represented in the content analysis. By raising questions to be examined in subsequent analyses, I began to construct an interpretation of experience of sexual agency for these girls, working to keep alive alternative explanations as a way of continually assessing the validity of these interpretations.

It is important to note that content analysis was only the first step of the larger analytic plan for this study. Although content analysis is useful for categorizing similar ideas both throughout an individual narrative and across multiple narratives, the method gives little attention to the original context of these categories. Data is fractured in order to focus attention on selected themes that are coded in the text. Yet examining partial expressions of the texts constitutes only part of the analytic process. For the overall story

⁶ In total, I created 24 matrices, four of which are the matrices of the four mothers used for this study. However, the mothers' matrices were limited in scope, and were completed only to address the thematic and narrative content for Chapter 5.

being told to become viable, the researcher needs to show how the parts relate to each other and the whole (Bruner, 1991); “the events themselves need to be *constituted* in the light of the overall narrative” (p. 8, authors italics). Therefore, it was necessary to summarize the various narratives that the girls told.

Narrative Analysis

The third analytic strategy I used was narrative summaries. Narrative summaries have two important analytic features. The first is to provide narrative diachronicity, or an account of events as they occur and change over time (Bruner, 1991). The second analytic feature is the reduction of a data. By summarizing the stories told by the adolescents, rather than repeating them verbatim, I was able to work with more manageable chunks of data.

The process by which I created the narrative summaries involved three steps. The first step was to determine the narrative. The second step involved organizing the textual data to facilitate a concise presentation of storylines relating to sexual agency for each adolescent. The third step involved a consideration of ideas that cut across all the narratives, which was an attempt to formulate interpretative “meta-narratives” (Miller, 1991). In this process, I raised and documented ideas to explore in subsequent analyses.

For this study, I identified a narrative as a “discrete” story told by the adolescent about learning about or experiences of sexuality. The key is that the story is rooted in personal experience and that it contains sufficient elaboration so that the reader might gain some insight into their experience of sexual agency. The story may have conventional elements of a beginning, middle, and end, or it may be organized around a particular learning experience. Victoria, one of the girls in this study, presented what I

heard as different kinds of narratives. (See Appendix F for narrative summaries from Victoria's text.)

At one point in the interview, Victoria talked about how sexual feelings are beautiful but require caution in terms of expressing them. While Victoria related her ambivalence about sexual feelings in the context of talking about a boy she kissed spontaneously at a skate park but whom she was not sure she trusted, I also heard it as a story in which I could learn more about how "nerve-racking" it felt for Victoria to manage her sexual arousal. As such, I considered it a narrative for analysis.

Victoria also talked about the value of having sex within a relationship and repeatedly referred to the dangers of promiscuity. She also mentioned how important it was to be responsible for one's actions and to accept the consequences of inappropriate behavior. While Victoria did not relate a particular incident, she reflected upon what she had learned from her mother, peers, and the larger culture about sexual behavior. If Victoria had only spoken in general terms about her conception of sexual feelings and behavior and I had been unable to determine whether her ideas were based on personal experience, I would not have included that portion of her text in the analysis. What is common to these different narratives is that each is rooted in the girls' personal experiences of sexuality. Using these guidelines, I identified narratives to be summarized in the girls' texts. A girl may tell one story about embodied passion or several different stories.

Having determined what constituted the narratives in the text, I proceeded to the next step, the summary of each narrative. I tried whenever possible to preserve the original storylines presented by the girls, but given the difficulty the girls had in talking

about sexuality, it was rare to find a cohesive description of a given event in the text. Instead, the narrative came out in bits and spurts and was interspersed throughout the interview. I therefore drew upon the conceptually clustered matrices, field notes, and several readings of the entire interview to assist me in determining the storyline. They may also have mentioned an idea which they did not elaborate on until a later point in the conversation. Therefore, unlike in the conceptually clustered matrices, I was less concerned with maintaining the temporal order of the interview text when summarizing the narratives. Instead, I constructed a more succinct yet comprehensive diachronic account of events and learning experiences. To preserve the girls' voice, as I condensed the stories heard, I used direct quotes as much as possible.

The third step in the narrative summary process was the most interpretative step. Reviewing the various narratives, I began to raise questions about similarities in the narratives and whether I could hear a continuous theme or overarching plot in the individual stories about sexual learning and experience. I took this step as a way of documenting the developing ideas I had about the nature of the girls' experiences of sexual agency. By listening to all the narratives together, by reflecting on the particularities of the various stories, and by considering ways in which the girls chose and crafted stories to present in the interview, I was raising and documenting ideas to be explored in subsequent analyses.

Although I see the main function of the narrative summaries as preserving the context and the particularity of a girl's sexual learning and experience, this analytic strategy serves other functions as well. Narrative summaries complemented the content analysis by providing a context from which to better understand the characteristics of

sexual agency for these girls. For Victoria, this involved considering what sexual expression meant in the story about one's own comfort level with arousal in a sexual relationship and in the story about concerns about appearing promiscuous. The depiction of narratives in this analysis was the springboard for the final method of analysis, the Listening Guide.

The Listening Guide

The fourth analytical strategy I used was an interpretative approach called the Listening Guide method (Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg, & Bertsch, 2003). The Listening Guide is a voice-centered relational approach to interpretative analysis in which the researcher listens for the voice of the participant as well as the "voices" or themes that compose the narrative; it is a relational process because the listener's own voice is accounted for in the process. The Listening Guide is also a feminist method that has been used effectively in interviews with girls in elementary through high school (Tolman, 2002; Gilligan, 2006) and ethnic minority women (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2008).

The process consists of three steps (Gilligan et al., 2003; Kiegelmann, 2009). The first step involves listening for story plots, repeated images and metaphors, and the voice that is speaking, to whom, in what body, and in what societal and cultural frameworks; the researcher simultaneously notes her responses to what is being said. This step was addressed in large part during the earlier analytic phases of initial read-through, content analysis, and narrative summaries.

The second step involves accessing a person's "associative logic," or the way her mind makes connections, which runs under the logic of the spoken sentences. In this way, the researcher can capture what people know about themselves often without them being

aware of it. The process of accessing associative logic involves making “I-poems.” To create the I-poems, the researcher chooses a passage from a girl’s interview, identifies “I” statements and their associated verbs and relevant accompanying words, and then lines them up vertically in a poem format. In this way, the researcher can see how a young woman tends to express herself, for example, from a place of agency (e.g., “I believe,” “I can”) or structure (e.g., “I don’t know,” “I’m not allowed to”).

The I-poem process was the one area in which I included my undergraduate RAs in coding and interpreting the data. First, I trained the RAs in how to identify passages that highlighted the eight conceptual themes, and how to format the I-poems. After I edited the poems, I created an interpretative community with my RAs, as suggested by Gilligan and colleagues (2003). Together we read the poems aloud, discussed the content, and documented our shared understanding of the girl’s voice and the underlying meaning we heard in the poem (see Appendix G for sample I-poem). We also documented interpretative disagreements or alternative perspectives.

In the third step, the researcher listens specifically for contrapuntal voices, or distinctive voices in the conversation that may be more or less aligned with the self. This third step can be used to understand how language mediates the internalization, reproduction, and modification of social discourses. Reading through the text separately for each contrapuntal voice allows for the possibility that one statement may contain multiple meanings. The reader starts to see the relationship between the person’s first-person voice and the contrapuntal voices, and get a sense of the “agentic voice” of the speaker. When does a girl feel more agentic regarding her sexuality and when does she

feel constrained by social structures such as ethnicity, race, gender, sexual orientation, age, religious background, personal history, and character?

Generalizability, Reliability, and Validity

The purpose of the study is to examine the construction of sexual agency in Mexican-origin young women and their mothers. Given the relatively small sample size and the specificity of the population, my ability to generalize the findings to the entire Latina/o population is limited. However, I will show how the findings generalize to a theory of sexual agency that integrates the roles of individual subjectivity with sexual socialization in the development of Mexican-origin women's sexual agency. The reliability of the findings will be confirmed by determining their consistency with findings from national surveys on Latina adolescent sexual behavior. I will also compare the findings with that of the few published retrospective qualitative studies about the impact of sexual socialization on Latina sexual behavior. Further, I will consider how the findings relate to what we know about collectivistic cultures' sexual norms and the importance of family and mothers within any culture.

To verify the validity of the data, I plan to use the following verification procedures (Creswell, 2009):

(1) *Triangulation*. I have used four different analytic strategies that complement and reinforce each other but are also distinct enough to function as a kind of methodological triangulation. These converging strategies allow me to examine the text to build a coherent justification for themes and narratives. In addition, for the I-poem analysis, I trained undergraduate research assistants to be part of an interpretative community in which we analyzed the I-poems in groups of three to five people. This

communal interpretation allows for a deeper and richer interpretation of the textual data that contributes to validity.

(2) *Multiple sources of data.* Validity of the data may be threatened by the accuracy of participants' narratives. I need to address the possibility that young women may tell me misleading information about what they learned from their family and culture about sexuality. Truthfulness may be a problem because the topic of sexuality may be considered risky by these young women. They may also fear that the information will be shared with their mothers, although they will be assured of confidentiality. Scaffolded interviewing can support young people in providing accurate information. In addition, mothers' and daughters' interviews can be used to validate each other, particularly with regard to sexuality messages received in the family.

(3) *Reflectivity.* I am invested in the development of sexual agency of Latina young women. My attachment to this field of study may lead me to data that support my own objectives. I recognize that I may hear what I want to hear and see what I want to see. I may easily find ways of discrediting those that disagree. To address researcher bias, I will continuously explore my own subjectivity. By writing both before and after my interviews, and using the Listening Guide's built-in process of reflectivity, I will be able to address pre-conceived opinions and reflect upon my subjectivity.

(4) *Negative or Discrepant Information.* Whenever it arises, I will present information that runs counter to the themes I identified. By discussing contrary information, I add credibility and realism to the interpretation.

(5) *Rich, thick description.* The report of the interview process and analysis will be written up in a way that allows the reader to enter the research context. The

interpretation I provide will be based on analyzing all possible meanings of the story plots, images, and metaphors presented and uncovered in the narrative, and then selectively presenting the most salient characteristics that I believe represent the situation or perspective (Emihovich, 1995). The goal is to redescribe the participants' situations usefully and meaningfully.

CHAPTER 4

PRIMARY CONTEXTS OF GIRLS' SEXUAL SOCIALIZATION

My focus in this chapter will be on the mother-daughter relationship as a primary context in which Mexican-origin adolescent girls are socialized about sexuality. In particular, I examine mother-daughter sexual communication, that is, how mothers and daughters talk about sexuality with each other, what sexuality messages mothers give their daughters, and how daughters respond to their mothers' messages. I then examine how mother-daughter sexual communication influences girls' sexual agency, specifically girls' ability to navigate sexuality messages at school and from their peers – two other primary contexts of girls' sexual socialization found in this study. I elaborate on protective and problematic characteristics of mother-daughter sexual communication from the girls' perspectives, highlighting the importance of the mother-daughter relationship for the girls' development of sexual agency.

To clarify the findings I chose to present in this chapter, the stated purpose of the study was to investigate the influence of the mother-daughter relationship on Mexican-origin girls' sexual agency. Sexual agency was defined as having two components: (1) the ability to experience and regulate sexual feelings and (2) the ability to assert one's need for safety and fulfillment in sexual situations. There was little evidence from the mothers' interviews that the mothers ever taught their daughters specifically about regulating sexual feelings, masturbation, or pleasure; similarly, from the girls' interviews, there was little evidence that the girls learned about these topics from their mothers or in other contexts. There were, however, many instances in which girls talked about learning

about abstinence and safe sex. Therefore, the findings I present in this chapter focus on one aspect of the second component of sexual agency, that is, how mothers socialized their daughters about keeping themselves safe. To the degree that any information about how mothers' taught their daughters about the first component of sexual agency is available, I present those findings. In addition, I present findings on two aspects of the Latina/o cultural context that contributed to girls' sexual agency: the values of familism and respect. I then briefly mention contexts that seemed to play a more secondary role in girls' sexual socialization.

I wish to stress that my intention is not to suggest that these characteristics and contexts of sexual socialization are gender specific or to intimate that these girls, by virtue of being Mexican-origin, communicate with their mothers in unique ways compared to their non-Mexican-origin peers. Instead, I propose exploring the experiences of these girls communicating about sexuality with their mothers in order to understand which features of the communication influence their sense of sexual agency as they navigate sexuality messages in primary contexts.

It is also important to note that these girls had varying levels of comfort and experience with talking about sexuality. All but two of the girls had never before spoken in detail regarding their thoughts and feelings about sexuality to anyone. Only one girl refused to answer a question during her interview, and it was only one question about a sexual experience that she wanted to keep private. The three girls who seemed most at ease talking about the topic included two girls who had been provided with fairly extensive sexuality education by their mothers and one girl who had educated herself extensively about the topic. The rest of the girls struggled to put in words the opinions

and feelings about sexuality that they had been subconsciously forming. As a result, the girls often told their stories in discontinuous segments rather than sequentially. When I organized the segments chronologically and thematically, the girls' narratives became more coherent and revealed how the mother-daughter relationship was shaping their sexual agency.

The girls' stories revealed complex feelings about how their mothers conveyed sexuality messages and the content of those messages. They spoke about the ubiquitous abstinence and fear-based messages about sexuality they received from their families, school sex education programs, and peers. They shared how their mothers were often an anchor in the process of navigating these messages, but also could be barriers to managing their own growing curiosity about sexuality and awareness of sexual feelings. Many girls struggled with how to explore their sexuality while honoring their mothers' expectations for their sexual behavior.

I believe that these stories show the interplay of individual volition and contextual forces, and how girls adapt to the messages they hear. The majority of girls talked about choosing abstinence out of fear of incurring negative sexual health consequences or disappointing their mothers; others delayed becoming sexually active because they did not feel ready for sex or wanted to pursue educational and career goals first. Six girls spoke of acting independently of their parents' wishes by having sexual intercourse. Some of these girls' stories revealed how restrictive access to sexual knowledge and awareness led to their sexual risk-taking. Other girls shared a deep sadness that their mother did not trust them to handle sexual situations responsibly or intense anxiety about disappointing their mother if they were to become sexually active. There were also girls

who told stories of presenting a persona of innocence to the world, and being secretly grateful for their family's strict rules against dating because they felt unready to handle their budding sexual feelings. The overall picture that emerged was that these girls were very aware of their mothers' expectations as they navigated their own curiosity, ambivalence, and fear about sexuality.

My intention in this chapter is to describe the core experience of these girls' sexual socialization by their mothers, and specifically the ways that mothers' sexual communication promoted or inhibited their daughters' sexual agency. Throughout the chapter, I consider what it meant for these girls to be female, to be socialized to be abstinent by their mothers, and to navigate sexuality messages at school and among peers in which they were frequently exposed to sexual information and behavior. In this intersection of gender and context, I raise some questions for consideration about the ways in which the mother-daughter relationship impacted girls' sexual agency.

The Mother-Daughter Context of Sexual Socialization

According to the girls' stories, two factors played a prominent role in how mothers socialized their daughters about sexuality: their mothers' attitudes toward adolescent sexual activity and the degree to which girls felt comfortable talking with their mothers.¹

Mothers' Attitudes toward Adolescent Sexuality

According to all the girls in the study, mothers preferred that their daughters delay sexual activity at least until they graduated from high school. All but one of the girls in

¹ Based on the mothers' interviews, mothers' educational background and personal sexual experience were also key factors in how mothers taught their daughters about sexuality, but for the most part, the girls did not refer to, and were often not aware of, their mothers' educational background and personal sexual experience.

the study expressed a high regard for their mother, and the majority of girls expressed an intention to honor their mothers' expectation to be abstinent, at least until high school graduation. Not surprisingly, girls who came from homes in which mothers had strong religious conviction were the most likely to endorse virginity until marriage. However, sexual decision-making by the girls was not just guided by their mothers' attitudes; a number of girls revealed how their own observations, attitudes, and beliefs about sexuality differed from that of their mothers'. For instance, one girl (Mary) with the most stringent restrictions placed on her sexual behavior of all the girls in the study was not afraid to talk about how she might digress from her parents' expectations to be abstinent once she turned 18.

Mothers' Expectations for Sexual Behavior

The main message all the girls heard from their mothers, regardless of how comprehensively their mothers taught them about sexuality, was: "Don't have sex," or at least not right now. This focus on the behavioral aspects of sexuality was influenced by religious, cultural, education, and health reasons. Regardless of the influence, the message did not always provide clear guidelines for an ideal time to have sex. Most girls believed their mothers wanted them to wait until marriage, but if that was unrealistic, at least until they graduated from high school or college or started their careers. Some girls accepted and honored their mothers' wishes, while other girls felt constricted by them even as they honored them. Some girls had already violated their parents' wishes and chose to become sexually active, while still others planned to make their own decision about sexual activity based on when they felt ready.

Lilly seemed to clearly understand and accept her mother's expectations. She said:

She doesn't expect me to get pregnant until I am married or at least until I can take care of the child on my own without having her do it while I'm in school. Definitely out of school, probably aimed towards when I have a career. I think she would be highly disappointed in me if I had a child at this age or at least until 19 or 20. Maybe a little later when I have a job and I have a house and I can support the child. Then she'd probably be more okay with it.

Teresa also said her mother would prefer her to be abstinent for now:

She wishes that I wouldn't because I'm at this age. She does not want me having sex, but she said if I chose to, that she wants me to be protected and for me to use a condom or if, even if I want to just ask her to be on birth control pills.

Teresa agreed with her mother, but also knew she would make her own decision: "I actually think that's nowhere near this point, but I would definitely have protected sex if I did."

Even Carol, the girl least aware of her parents' expectations about sexual behavior, knew that she should not have sex. She explained, "I guess they don't tell me because they know I won't do it or something."

Shelly said her mother did not give her messages about when to have sex, but even if she did, Shelly believed her mother's opinions would not greatly influence her. She said: "I'm capable of taking care of myself, and I will know when it's, when it's the right time to have it, and it's my decision."

Nicki said her mother “just tells me to wait, that’s pretty much it. And that um God’s not going to bless my family or bless me if I do something now.” Nicki agreed with this message, and added her own reasons for choosing abstinence:

I go along with what my parents told me, because like something might happen [STDs], I’m not sure. I don’t know how to explain it, but I think I know what I’m saying . . . [and] because I want it, my first time, to be special and I want that person to be there for a long time, and I’m afraid to just like throw everything away. If I do something right now, I might regret it later.

As if to assert her independence in the decision, Nicki then explained, “I could be sexually active if I wanted to but I don’t think that’d be the best idea.” In other words, she wanted to acknowledge it was not just her parents’ choice whether she had sex now or waited.

The girls also talked about their mothers’ rules about dating. Victoria was a girl who seemed comfortable with the rules because they gave her a fair amount of freedom:

I know she doesn’t want me to just, you know, go randomly have sex with someone. Like they have to be obviously someone you have strong feelings for Of course if I’m gonna go out somewhere and she’ll be like, ‘Okay you have to be home by this time’ . . . even if it’s just a friend . . . Even if I want to stay out later or whatever, I feel like it’s a good rule ‘cause it kinda shows that . . . my mom cares. She wants to know that I’m safe, and that, you know, she just wants to make sure that everything is a-okay.

On the other hand, 15-year-old Mary was unhappy with the strict rules her family set for her, which included not going out to the movies, to the mall, or to her friends’

house. Sometimes she convinced her mother to allow her to do something, but mostly her behavior was closely monitored by her older brother and stepfather. The following I-poem describes her situation:

I'm not allowed to have a boyfriend

I'm caged in

I should have a little more freedom

I can't have a boyfriend

I'm not gonna wait [until I'm 32]

I don't know

I'll ask her, "Can I sleep at my friend's house?"

She'll be like, "No, because I don't want you to come back the next day with a stomach"

I feel like she doesn't trust me

I don't know

I don't know

Mary felt her family's lacked trust in her because they gave her no freedom. Yet she seemed willing to follow the rules up to a certain point. Later on, she offered some insight into why she was obedient: "In our religion, like if you want to get married wearing a white dress and in the church you have to be a virgin . . . I think it's right."

Sexual Communication with Mothers

In their stories, all but one of the girls (Dakota) conveyed that they felt close to their mothers and could talk with them about many topics. However, the majority of girls did not feel comfortable talking with their mothers about sexuality. Seven girls (Teresa,

Lilly, Andrea, Pati, Sabrina, Shelly, and Sally) did perceive openness in sexual communication with their mothers. This openness often included discussions about aspects of sexuality that went beyond sexual behavior, such as the importance of emotional connection within a sexual relationship. At the same time, openness did not always mean comprehensive or broadminded, in that some mothers' taught narrow definitions of sexuality, for example, that sex is between a married man and woman. Primarily, openness meant for these seven girls that they felt comfortable talking to their mothers about sexuality-related topics, and accepted, at least to some degree, what their mothers were teaching them. Yet even some of these girls expressed discomfort talking with their mothers at times, and not all of them perceived their mothers as their first or primary source of sexuality education. The rest of the girls in the study spoke of struggling to varying degrees with the way sexuality was communicated by their mothers.

Comfort with communication. The seven girls who felt comfortable talking with their mothers about sexuality seemed to have mothers who established open communication early on, some of them when they were about 9 or 10. All of the girls stressed how important it was for them to learn the information. As Teresa explained:

I like when my mom tells me about like certain things about sex because I want to know, I want to be informed . . . I don't want to just have to not know about it. I think it's very important that my mom shares these things with me. . . . I feel good. And I understand a lot. It's not like in a position where it's uncomfortable, because she explains it to me.

Teresa's mother provided her with a fairly comprehensive education, explaining both the technical and relational aspects of sexuality, and Teresa readily grasped her mother's message:

She's explained to me that, like how pregnancy occurs, how you get, how when a male and a female have sex, you know. Um other forms of sex also, like oral or um anal sex. She's also told me that sex isn't just like something that you just share with someone. . . . It creates intimacy . . . between yourself and your partner. Like not just in a physical way but also in an emotional way . . . I thought that was really important that she told me, because I can understand. I mean . . . I'm still a virgin, but I see what she's saying.

For Shelly, since 5th grade when she took her first sex education class at school, her mother became heavily involved in teaching her about sexuality at home:

My mom bought me this . . . book that was about growing up and like developing. So from there it was like kinda fun to talk about 'cause I didn't really know that much about it, so it's just been kind of interesting. And then like as I grew up and like new things happen, like I learn about different things.

Like Teresa, Shelly's mother also emphasized the relational aspect of sexuality. The last time she and her mother talked about sexuality, they discussed friends of hers who engaged in casual sex:

We just kinda talked about how bad it was that they were having sex at their age. Just 'cause they weren't in committed relationships, like they were just doing it for fun . . . With sex comes other things, like emotions that you have to deal with,

and I think that they might just be not thinking about how it's gonna affect them later in life.

Through talking with her mother, Teresa had developed the idea that sex should be part of a committed relationship, and was concerned that her friends might have regrets.

Andrea, whose mother primarily taught her about the negative consequences of being sexually active, felt it was important to learn about sex as a teenager:

I think it's like the best time to actually learn about it, especially from my mom um because like she went through it already, she knows what the guys like are thinking at that age. So she informed me and like gets me aware of what can happen.

She greatly admired her mother and believed what she was being taught:

I think my mom's like the most important thing and what she tells me is true because she already went through it. So learning this from my mom is something that's like, "Oh she's not lying to me" or "She just is saying this for me to not have sex." It's something that's true that can happen.

What Andrea felt uncomfortable hearing about were details of her mother's own sexual experience. Andrea talked about "being like embarrassed of the stuff she says, like trying not to think of like what she did when she was younger." She said:

I'll be like, "Okay, like mom, I don't want to know what you did . . . I don't want to know like that information." Like that's kinda disturbing to hear . . . They're like my parents, and I don't want to hear about them too and how they had us or

anything [laughs] . . . It just feels uncomfortable to me to learn that stuff. Like I can hear it from anyone else but not from my parents.

Sabrina, on the other hand, felt like she could talk to her mother about anything and said she appreciated her mother's personal experience of how to handle sexual desire:

I feel like I can tell her stuff and ask her like, "How is this?" and "Why?" and stuff like that and she'll answer it, so. Or if she doesn't know the answer, she'll take me somewhere. She'll try to help me to understand it . . . I just asked her if it hurts. And then how it [sex] felt . . . [She said] like a mosquito bite, and then you scratch it. And then you keep scratching . . . She said that you can't control it like when you need it.

Sabrina knew that a mosquito bite felt "itchy" but was unsure what her mother meant until she experienced it herself: "I didn't really get it until later . . . when I had sex."

Sabrina was the only girl who told her mother beforehand that she was ready to have sexual intercourse with her boyfriend. She said her mother thought she was too young but accepted her decision:

She [my mom] wasn't really happy, but she's like, "Well, I don't want you to be doing stuff behind my back and not knowing what, and get pregnant or get like sexual disease and stuff like that." So she talked to me, and then she took me to the doctor, and they talked to me about it, and just gave me like pills and condoms and stuff.

Lilly, who is bisexual, said she appreciated her mother's openness to her sexual orientation:

I have friends who are Hispanic whose mothers have never experienced other than just men because it was wrong by their mothers, so like there was a line of just straightness. And I feel that I'm special to have someone that can explain things to me in a way that others won't, not just in one way but other ways. So it's pretty awesome.

In her comment about feeling special, Lilly seemed to imply that her Hispanic friends' mothers were primarily heterosexual and would perhaps have a more narrow view of bisexuality.

In some cases, Lilly's implication was accurate. Pati's mother was someone who taught her daughter narrow messages from her Evangelical Christian sect about same-sex sexuality. For example, when Pati told her mother about her gay male friend at school, "she [my mom] would just be like, 'Well that's wrong. They shouldn't. God made man for woman and woman for man.'" Pati, who felt comfortable talking to her mother about sexuality, agreed with her mother, who also told her that sex belonged in a marital relationship: "She was just like, 'No, God doesn't like when you have sex when you're not married.' So I just kept that in mind." The effect of her mother's messages on Pati, however, was that it made her more cautious about sex, although "cautious" for Pati was not something necessarily negative: "I think it's good because the more you learn, the more you know. The more cautious you become. The more I don't know. You know more, so your awareness is higher of what you should and should not do." As part of her

acquired cautious behavior, Pati took a virginity pledge in her church. The following I-poem reveals her thoughts about her readiness for sex:

I know I want to
But I wouldn't feel ready
I am not comfortable
I don't know
I'm not like comfortable with anyone touching me, seeing me
I feel like if I am in that situation of like going further
I am gonna feel so uncomfortable because I'm not ready
I'm not ready to show my body to someone else
So I believe that when you're married, you're already married
It's not like they're not going to like something about you because you're married
That's when you let yourself go, that's when you don't care about anything else

This poem suggests that Pati believed that the sanctity of marriage would allow her to overcome her self-consciousness and feel comfortable about being touched. Like Pati, a number of girls in the study seemed to have unrealistic expectations about sexuality in the context of the marital relationship. They believed that if they stayed virgins until they were married, their spouse would be faithful, their fears about pregnancy and disease would vanish, and their sexual experience would be satisfying. Their lack of knowledge about the reality of contemporary relationships and sexuality likely inhibited their sexual agency and made them vulnerable to negative sexual outcomes.²

² According to many of the mothers' interviews, the reality of mothers' experiences was that waiting for sex until marriage often proved disappointing and problematic. Yet few of the mothers shared their disappointments with their daughters. This topic needs to be further investigated.

For Sally, even though she talked openly with her mother about having sexual feelings for her boyfriend, her mother's constant warnings about the dangers of sex often wore her down. At 16, Sally said she was only the second girl in her entire extended family that had not gotten pregnant when she turned 15. Her mother constantly reminded her that "I shouldn't make her a grandma yet and I shouldn't have sex yet and stuff like that." Sally said:

It gets me embarrassed sometimes but I know she cares, so I let her talk to me about it. There's times I get mad 'cause I tell her I won't do it. But there's many childrens [sic] that say that. And it makes me more secure that my mom cares for me.

I put Sally with the group of girls who had open communication with their mothers because of how she resolved this tension for herself, by accepting her mother's repetitive message, as highlighted in this I-poem.

I should respect my body
 I should wait until I'm married
 I should actually be happy with the way I am
 I'm not like the other kids
 I thought it was good that she keeps repeating it
 But at the same time it's like *I get it*
 Once I hit high school
 It's a never-ending sex story
 I don't mind no more
 I'm like used to it

The bottom line for Sally, like many of the girls above, was that she put up with mother's constant remonstrations because she believed not only that her mother had her best interests at heart, but that her mother's lessons actually protected her.

“Awkward” and “weird” communication. Even though they believed that their mothers cared deeply about them, and even when they could openly talk with their mothers, many of the girls struggled with some aspect of mother-daughter sexual communication. One group of girls used words such as “awkward” and “weird” to describe what it felt like to hear their mother talk to them about sex, although it was difficult for them to explain what they meant. Mary said:

Sometimes it might be a little awkward talking to your mom about stuff like that [because] they ask you questions and they, they, I think they just wanna protect you . . . like if you're sexually active, if you've done anything . . . stuff like that.

Mary acknowledged that behind her mother's questions was concern about preventing sexual disease and pregnancy, but that understanding did not make the conversation less difficult. She said: “It is awkward for me to listen to her ask me those questions. . . . I don't know. It's just weird in a way.”

Along with “weird,” Carol characterized her mother's sexual communication as “different.” She said: “I don't know how to explain it . . . If your friends talk about it and then your mom talks about it, like it's different . . . It's like weird talking about it, talking about like sex.” She gave an example of the weirdness:

At home she [my mother] told me about this case that had been on TV about this little girl, that when she was six her mom's boyfriend made her give him oral sex,

and like she is like 16 now. And that she um, she got some disease in her tonsils. I don't know. It was just like weird.

When asked what "weird" meant, however, the girls had difficulty answering. Ashley explained:

I don't know. It's just awkward hearing that from my mom 'cause like she's your mom and like you've always been kind of her like-- It's just weird, hearing weird words from her . . . well, not weird but like, you know, well, intimacy . . . It's just like kind of weird hearing it from them [my parents]. I don't know, I guess I'd rather learn it at school. A little bit less weird than hearing it from your mom.

Veronica also preferred not to hear sexual explanations from her mother: "She's all telling me step by step, and stuff like that. It just makes it weird. She doesn't tell me like specifics, she just tells me to get protected and that's all." For Veronica, the only thing that would make it not weird is "if she was like, stop talking to me about it."

Conflictual about duality in communication. Some girls felt conflictual about sexual conversations with their mothers because these conversations often contained polarized elements, both openness and silence, both fun and suspicion. The girls spoke about wanting closer communication but felt their mothers kept them at a distance. This constant duality made them hesitate to talk with their mother about sexuality. As Victoria put it:

Whether it's like today or ten years from now, I feel like it's always going to be awkward talking to your parents about that stuff . . . If you say something wrong, your parents will be disappointed or something, and like the way you see things. . . . Like for instance if someone like has to tell their parents like that they had sex

for the first time or something . . . I don't think they'd want to because they'd feel like their parents would be disappointed in them. I think for reasons like that it's uncomfortable.

Victoria's comment highlights her feeling that if she expressed a different view about sexuality to her mother, her mother would be disappointed in her. Knowing that she cannot freely express her views made the conversation awkward for her. To avoid her mother's disappointment, Ashley simply did not tell her mother anything:

My mom is known for freaking out about everything . . . I can't really talk to my mom about stuff like that because she'd freak out . . . I have had sex. I'm on birth control. But I'm not going to tell her that. She'd freak out.

Another group of girls talked about how their mothers restricted the content of their talks. Melissa showed a sense of humor about what she perceived as her mother's embarrassment:

If I have a question I'll ask her but. And she'll ask me, she'll tell me openly, but we just don't really talk about it. It's not something we like talking about or I don't think she likes talking about it. . . . 'Cause she gets embarrassed [laughs] . . . 'Cause she's just like, "Aye! Go to your room. Shut up! [laughs] Why are you asking me those things?" . . . I was like, "Mom, did it hurt you your first time?" And she's like, "That's none of your business, shut up!" I'm really open with my mom.

Although Melissa could laugh about the situation, she never got an answer from her mother.

Sandy, too, shared stories about laughing with her mother about sex and then feeling uncomfortable about her mother's suspicions. First she shared an example of laughter:

Sometimes she tries to talk in codes because of my [younger] sister . . . She was talking about chile last time, you know, pretending to talk about the guys . . . pretending that was the word . . . You know how the chile's shaped? So yeah, and she was like, "Este va a picar [It's going to hurt.]" And I was like, "Yeah, okay, Mom, whatever," and we were just laughing. And my sister's like, "Oh, oh yeah, it does, pica [it's hot]." And my mom was like, "How do you know?" And she's like, "Because a chile pica [is hot]" [laughs]. And we started laughing because we were actually talking about something else and she literally thought we were talking about the chile.

Then Sandy shared an example of feeling discomfort:

The way sometimes she looks at me, it makes me uncomfortable and she just makes me shy. And when she's just talking to me or those looks they have as parents. Those weird looks when they're like, "Hmm, what did you do now?" Kinda like that, you know? Like that's what makes it uncomfortable. . . . If I get really interested about it, you start questioning. And then she'll be like, "Why do you wanna know for?" . . . I'm just like, "Oh, it's just a question, just to know." And then she goes "Ahh," and then she just tells me.

For Sandy, talking to her mother could be a double-edged sword, but she put up with the unfavorable aspects because of the positive ones.

Luisa expressed more frustration than humor with her mother's incomplete responses to her questions. At 17, she had the least amount of sexual information for her age of all the girls in the study. She tried to explain how her mother responded: "I ask her for questions. She doesn't give me the whole thing. She just gives me what she thinks and that's it." The following I-poem illustrates this dynamic:

I started out with chocolate first
I wanted something
I wanted it
Then she asked me, "Are you dating?"
I said, "No"
I said, "Have you ever had a kiss, Mom?"
She said, "Yeah, my first time, it was pretty good"
I was like "So, when am I going to get mine?"
She says, "Eventually you'll get yours"
I was like, "Okay"
I just finished eating
I was like, "Okay"
I guess

The interaction above that Luisa had with her mother seem to depict a girl still caught in the transition from childhood to womanhood: she wanted to be a child who can grab candy from her mother's bag but also wanted to be a young adult who could get answers from her mother about sexuality. When she did not get the information she wanted, she just ate her chocolate, that is, she remained in a child-like state.

Diana, whose mother rejected her sexual identity as gay, said that her mother was willing to answer sexuality questions as long as it was related to her religious teachings:

If it has to do with God and I ask her questions, she'll answer it and be very open about it, but she wouldn't be able to um answer questions if, if she doesn't feel comfortable I guess. Well, she, like when I talk about gays, she would get angry, and she would be very, very upset.

Maria's tone was sad when she spoke about not getting answers from her mother:

Being a teen and coming to your mother, it's, I don't know. We don't have that connection that where it's comfortable enough for me to talk about it. We can talk about it, but it's not into super detail because she'd be like, "Oh, you're too young for that, you can't hear that." But if no one ever tells me, when am I gonna know? Or what should I know if you're not gonna tell me? So I don't know. There's always, there's this boundary line she puts on us and I can't go into details even though I'm curious about something and I really wanna know. She would stop when it goes too far, you know?

Maria often went to her older sister to get answers but that resource was not always satisfying:

Sometimes I wish I could talk to [my mother] about it because it's not always something I wanna talk to about with my older sister . . . My mom thinks that, "Hey you need to know this and this and this and that's it," but if I have other questions that result that aren't so just basic, it feels uncomfortable . . . Like "Hey Mom, if a guy . . . wants to, you know, do this, what is a girl supposed to do?" Or

what happens? Or go into details about how long is it supposed to last [laughs] . . .
 I wish I had that closer connection to my mom to where I'd feel comfortable talking to her about it.

These girls revealed a natural curiosity about sexuality and a strong impulse to ask their mother questions that they considered intimate and sensitive. Their stories showed an inner tension they felt from the perceived boundaries their mothers set that they did not know how to cross, a tension from the perceived reluctance of their mothers, often for reasons the girls did not fully understand, to have a sustained conversation about sexuality in which they answered their daughters' questions. For these girls, lack of open sexual communication with their mother inhibited their ability to get sexual knowledge that could strengthen their sexual agency.

Perceived lack of trust. Some girls felt distressed by a sense that their mothers did not trust them to handle sexual information or situations. They complained of a constant suspicion their mother cast over them. Diana shared an example of her mother's suspicious behavior:

We were talking about um sex, and I was like, "Hey mom, what if I got pregnant?" She's all, "You better not get pregnant." I was like, "I didn't say I was going to," but she-- She just thinks that if I ask her a question that I will do it. So then she just yells at me for it.

A common story the girls told was withholding details about their own sexual knowledge and experience from their mother because they believed that, by telling her, it might change their mother's view of them. They not only held their mother in high regard, they wanted their mother to sustain a high regard for them too. Nicki, who had

personally committed to abstinence until marriage, said she was afraid to ask her mother questions because she would be suspected of having sex: "I'm afraid that if I tell her, she's going to think that I'm doing something." She gave an example of her mother's past suspicions:

I was about to go to my boyfriend's house because it was his birthday, and we were in the car and out of nowhere she just tells me, she's like, "If you're going to do something, just tell me so I can put you on pills, because I'm not going to take responsibility." And I was like, "What? Okay. Thanks, Mom" . . . She probably thinks I'm-- Like that's the first thing that came to my mind. I thought that she thought that I was doing something.

Nicki talked about how bad she felt about her mother's suspicions: "I felt embarrassed, and like humiliated because she would think that I would do something like that." She tried to reassure her mother: "I just told her that I was going to obey her and like I wouldn't disrespect myself like that. And she just stayed quiet." Nicki concluded the story by saying, "I don't know why she doesn't trust me."

Like Nicki, Tina also felt under constant suspicion by her mother. Tina's sister became pregnant at 17, and Tina believed that her mother worried the same thing would happen to her:

I have a feeling that she thinks I'm like sexually active. Like she thinks, "Oh," 'cause I have a boyfriend, she thinks I'm gonna do something. I was like, "Mom, I am careful. And besides," I was like, "I'm always there with his mom." She's like, "Well, you never know. That's what happened with your sister." I was like,

“Mom you need to.” Like she trusts me, but she just has that little doubt that I might end up doing something that she won’t like.

In fact, the year before, Tina and her boyfriend decided to become sexually active with each other, and they were using contraception responsibly, but Tina never told her mother because she felt it would compromise her mother’s trust in her.

Shelly also concealed information from her mother so she could retain her mother’s trust. She shared a time when she told her mother that some of her friends were having sex but that “I wasn’t influenced by them to have sex.” She said: “I didn’t wanna tell her which friends were having sex but I think she was surprised that I had friends who were, ‘cause I don’t think she thinks that I would hang out with someone who would do that.” Shelly could not say why she thought her mother was surprised: “I just think that’s how she feels.” In the following I-poem, she explained why she and her mother rarely talked about sex now:

I talk to her about like liking boys, but it’s not like I talk to her

I just, she would ask too many questions

I feel

If I were to talk to her about making out with someone

I also think it’s like she doesn’t have to know every part of my life

Like she might not trust me anymore

I think she might just be more nervous for me to hang out with boys alone

It makes sense

But I don’t know

I think she can trust me to handle the situation

Shelly showed a degree of autonomy when she said her mother did not need to know every part of her life. At the same time, she seemed anxious about how sexual communication might cause her mother to change her perception of her and perhaps put more restrictions on her behavior. Shelly clearly valued her mother's trust and the freedom it afforded her, and believed herself capable of handling sexual situations, but she had doubts about whether her mother believed she could. Therefore, she felt the need to present a persona to her mother that was not fully reflective of whom she was a person.

For some girls at least, the fear of losing their mother's trust or having their freedom restricted was well-founded. Sixteen-year-old Dakota shared an example of how sharing information with her mother backfired on her.

I do wish we had a close relationship, but I have tried telling her stuff before, not about sex but like about relationships, or a certain guy or things like that for advice, but she just gets mad. So I'd rather not. . . . There was this guy I liked . . . he would always give me rides home. He was a lot older than me. Not a lot a lot, but he was 19. And my mom, my mom knew he would always give me rides home when like, when we'd go out as a group . . . We like started liking each other after a while, but we never went out. But once my mom found out that I liked him, she wouldn't let me hang out with him no more.

Dakota said "it made me mad because, well, there wasn't a thing with me and him, we were just friends. . . . I wasn't gonna do anything. Like she knows she could've trusted me." The belief that their mothers did not trust them, at least to some degree, was a constant theme for many of the girls. In terms of how it affected their sexual agency, not feeling trusted likely limited the amount of information the girls disclosed to their

mothers and the ways in which they felt they could turn to their mothers as a resource in their sexual decision-making.

There are a number of reasons why talking with their mothers about sexuality may have felt uncomfortable to the girls. The majority of girls in the study were not yet sexually active, and hearing repeated messages about abstinence and the dangers of sex, a topic about which they had little knowledge or first-hand experience, may have been overwhelming to them. In addition, for girls whose mothers had not established open dialogue about sexuality when they were children, hearing their mothers' warnings about the risks and dangers of sex as adolescents, when the risks had become much more real to them, may have felt awkward. Another reason may be that the girls felt frustrated at having to hear repeated messages about abstinence and the dangers of sexuality, even when they assured their mothers that they would not have sex. Yet another reason may be related to the Latina/o cultural value of *respeto*, which refers to being obedient and not disagreeing or arguing with one's elders. Girls who were curious about sexuality or eager to explore sexual activity, but believed that their mothers disapproved of their curiosity and exploration, might have experienced an inner conflict between wanting some degree of sexual autonomy and wanting to honor their mothers' wishes. This conflict may have translated into feelings of discomfort talking about sexuality with their mothers.

Mothers' Protective Influence

The girls who received the most comprehensive sex education from their mothers were also the ones whose mothers consistently monitored their activities outside the home. In addition, these girls were still virgins. They acknowledged that their mothers'

supervision was a way of keeping them sexually safe. For example, Shelly said that mother queried her extensively about her dates:

She like knows the people that I've gone on actual dates with. And then, yea, she just like asks me how they went and then she was like, "Did you kiss them?" And I was like, "No." I don't know, she just like checks to make sure nothing happened and how like if I felt safe when I was on the date and stuff.

Teresa said her mother supervised her dates until she was in 8th grade:

She wouldn't let me go by myself with him or anything. The first time she let me go by myself to the movies, and she even dropped us off because he couldn't drive, was in eighth grade. It was, and she was still kind of against it, but she had to be somewhere at the time, so she let me go to the movies by myself with my boyfriend. And that was the first time I was actually alone.

Andrea told how her mother's "feelings" led her to take Andrea home early from a social event:

Sometimes she tells me, "Oh I just didn't feel comfortable you being there" . . . There was one time where she said that. It was at um my friend's house and . . . it was like um like five girls and like three guys, and we were just there and her parents were home and everything, but my mom's like, "I just had this feeling where I didn't feel you being safe there" . . . At the time I was kinda sad 'cause I was like, and angry, 'cause I was like, "How are you getting a feeling? Like we weren't doing anything, her parents were home, like nothing bad was happening." But she always tells me, like a mother is always right and she knows what's best.

So after a while I was like, okay, well, maybe something coulda happened that we woulda have gotten in trouble for or something. So I was like, she's right about it.

Andrea clearly struggled with her mother's seemingly irrational reason for disrupting her social life, but ultimately she accepted it as part of her mother's overall wisdom about protecting her.

Pati said she was glad her mother set strict rules because, in her observation, lack of supervision was what led to sex:

My mom is not the type that lets me go out at night and stuff, and I think that's good because if my parents weren't so strict, I think I would be like other girls . . . At parties and when you're alone is when things happen. That's my observation. 'Cause if you're at home, if you have a boyfriend and he's at his house, there is no way that nothing can happen. If you go to the movies and you have friends around, there's no way that nothing can happen. But if you're by yourself, no one is around, no one's looking, things can happen.

Pati's assessment seemed to be true for three of the girls in the study who had the least supervision. These girls were also among the ones who were sexually active and who had the poorest sexual communication with their mothers. For instance, Ashley did not talk to her mother about sexuality because "my mom is known for freaking out about everything." Ashley had her first sexual intercourse with a boy she knew from childhood who asked her to come to his house when no one was at home. He started kissing her and she just went along because she did not know how to stop. She said he asked her to have sex and she said no "a couple of times," but "I ended up doing it with him . . . because

um, I don't know . . . I thought he was my first love, you know? So yea he kinda, 'Oh, let's do it' and I was like, 'Okay.'"

Melissa, who became sexually active with her second boyfriend against her mother's wishes, recalled that when she started dating her first boyfriend, the only thing her mother told her was not to have sex:

She was like, "And don't have sex!" "Okay!" [laughs] I said, "I'm not gonna go have sex, Mom" [laughs] . . . She would always tell me that, like every time we would go out. "Don't have sex. Use a condom." "I'm not gonna go have sex, Mom."

In Sandy's case, she had unprotected first sex with her boyfriend in her own house, when her mother left them alone late in the evening. Sandy knew they should have gone to the store to get a condom, and this I-poem reveals how she wanted the moment to be spontaneous:

It was just an impulsive feeling
 I don't know
 I was sure I wanted to be with him
 It was going to be planned
 It just happened
 It was just a feeling that came
 I don't know
 I don't know
 I know that you're supposed to think that way
 I didn't want to in that moment

I didn't

I just wanted to be with him

I've actually told him that I wanted him

I don't know

I don't know how to explain it

I know I was supposed to stop and get protected

But I didn't

I didn't want to I guess

Sandy admitted feeling “a shame on myself” for not using a condom, and she partly blamed the poor sexual communication with her mother. She shared a scenario that she and her cousin imagined together of how they would talk to and protect their own daughters – by providing them with condoms:

“If you want to have sex, just tell me. Condoms are going to be on that drawer, okay? Just get them when you need them, alright? I'm not going to count them, they're there.” ‘Cause sometimes, I'm a dumb teen, and sometimes teens are embarrassed to what their parents are going to say if it comes to protecting themselves.

In what seemed the most frightening incident due to lack of supervision was the attempted sexual assault on Veronica while she slept over at her cousin's house. It was 2 in the morning, and her cousin and her boyfriend were in the bedroom, along with a boy Veronica had recently started going out with. She had been laying down when the boy jumped on top of her.

I was going to lose my virginity there

I was like freaking out

I was like, “No!”

I didn’t want to

I was like yelling

I said, “No!”

I pushed him

I didn’t lose my virginity to him

I didn’t want to

I thought he was just playing around

I didn’t say, “Keep going”

I just said, “Stop”

I yelled and I pushed him

I was upset and like mad

I didn’t want to lose my virginity to him

I thought that wasn’t, that wasn’t worth my time

The boy only stopped pulling down Veronica’s jeans when her cousin finally intervened and told him to get off of her. It was unclear whether Veronica’s mother ever learned about the incident. Even more striking was that Veronica seemed more upset that the boy broke up with her for not having sex with him than for assaulting her. This story exemplifies how lack of sexual information and communication with their mothers can inhibit girls’ sexual agency. Veronica’s mother rarely talked to her about sexuality, and Veronica did not seem to realize the potential danger of being alone at 2 a.m. in a room with two boys and her cousin.

Besides strict rules and frequent monitoring, one of the interesting ways mothers protected their daughters was through the mother's voice being internalized by her daughter. For example, Maria explained how she heard her mother's warnings about risk-taking in her head:

My mom would always be like, "Don't do this, don't do that" when it comes to bad things. . . When you get older you kinda think about those things when you see your friends do things and you wanna try it too . . . but when I was really little I would block it out completely just so I wouldn't think about it 'cause my mom is always in the back of my head, like my conscience like, "Maria, don't touch that" or "If you do that you're gonna get in a lot of trouble."

Andrea also spoke about being guided by her mother's voice:

Every time I call my mom, every time she like drops me off anywhere, she's like, "Make good choices." Like it's something . . . that's in your mind. And you see something and you're like, "Oh, my mom said make good choices. I don't wanna disappoint her. I don't wanna see her suffering."

Diana shared an example of how her mother's lessons helped her to resist smoking:

My mom said like, "No, it's bad, don't do it [smoke]," and since I don't want her to, you know, be really disappointed in me, I would say, you know, my mom taught me this and I know it's the right thing to do so I'm gonna walk away.

Nicki said her mother taught her to pray to resist peer pressure:

She just tells me to pray to God for strength, and the ability to say *no* . . . like just ask God for strength and He'll help you get through like everything. Like that when you say *no*, your *no* means *no* and your *yes* means *yes*.

This advice worked for Nicki when friends “were trying to pressure me into doing coke . . . For a second I thought about it, but then I prayed and then everything was okay.” In these examples, the girls connected risky behavior with disappointing their mothers, and to keep themselves in their mothers’ good favor, they recalled their mothers’ messages to resist temptation.

Sexuality Messages at School and from Peers

To understand further the mother-daughter context of sexual socialization, and how the mother-daughter relationship influenced girls’ sexual agency, it is important to take into account two primary contexts outside the home in which girls said they were learning about sexuality – school and peers. For most girls, even those whose mothers openly educated them about sexuality at home, their mothers were not their first or primary source of sexuality education. The majority of what they first learned about sexuality (i.e., puberty, sexual anatomy, reproduction, and protection against pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections [STIs]) occurred in a sex education class at school. They also learned about sexuality, although usually with less accuracy, from regular exposure to peer talk and behavior.

These girls frequently spoke about feeling unprepared for or disturbed by what they were learning at school and from peers. Their reactions were in large part due to the consistent fear-based messages presented by their school sex education classes (e.g., dangers of kissing as well as intercourse), as well as the sexual risk-taking and negative

sexual health outcomes that they witnessed among their peers (e.g., multiple sex partners, unwanted pregnancy, and STIs). At the same time, as noted in the previous section, many girls indicated that they did not feel they could turn to their mother as a resource to handle this discomfort. They said it was difficult to talk to their mothers about sexuality, even though some of them wished they could. Even for those girls whose mothers had talked to them about sex before they learned about it at school, only some felt prepared and comfortable to learn about sexuality at school and from peers.

Learning about Sexuality at School

Based on the girls' reports, the following represents a typical sequence of how they were taught sex education at school: In elementary school, they took a one-day single class, typically on puberty but also about sexual anatomy; in this class, the boys were usually separated from the girls. In middle school, they took a week-long class in which they were taught about sexual anatomy and reproduction, abstinence, the risks of sexual activity, and pregnancy and STI prevention. In high school, they took a half or full semester-long health class that included a section on sexuality with similar but more detailed aspects of what they learned in middle school. Six girls received additional sexuality education apart from the typical offerings at school. Of these girls, four (Ashley, Melissa, Lilly, and Nicki) had opted to take an elective, semester-long comprehensive sex education class at their school. Each of these girls attended a charter school, whose governing board made decisions regarding sexuality education independently of the school district in which it was located. One girl (Andrea) attended a summer sex education class with a disease-prevention focus offered by a local

community program, and another girl (Pati) attended an eight-week sex education class with an abstinence-only focus offered by her church.

Unprepared for school sex education. The girls shared a range of reactions to learning about sexuality at school. Twelve of the girls felt initially unprepared to learn about this information. Seven of them could not overcome their discomfort or embarrassment and talked about tuning out the lessons. Particularly unsettling was learning about male anatomy. Of her 7th grade class, Victoria said:

It was kind of weird [to hear about a penis] . . . To be honest I didn't know what to think . . . I was so confused that like the human body could do things like that. It was I guess really shocking . . . I think I kinda just tried to blow it off. I just, I didn't know what to think.

Sally also recalled ignoring her middle school sex education lesson about the penis:

“I didn't wanna pay attention too, 'cause I thought it was gross. I didn't want to learn about the male reproductive system yet. . . . It's ugly, it's ugly [laughs] . . . I don't find it interesting or something pretty to look at. Nothing interesting, just something connected to their bodies. And it's just something coming out.

Ashley also found male anatomy unappealing, “I thought it was nasty. Like I don't know, it just seemed nasty . . . having sex . . . I always thought that the guy's penis looks weird . . . it just seemed weird like looking.”

Some of the girls expressed disgust at learning about STIs. In Tina's 6th grade class, she recalled:

We had a teacher come in and show us what certain things are, what consequences can become into having any sexual contacts or anything . . . Like you can get pregnant, STD, HIV, and any disease, but caused by like sex, or not, unprotected sex . . . I was kind of grossed out . . . I was like, “Wow” . . . They showed how ugly it gets and what you can do to a person without any protection or knowing that person well.

Shelly was also disturbed by her 9th grade class on STIs:

Learning about sexually transmitted diseases was really gross. ‘Cause I didn’t know there were so many, and like it was also kinda frightening just to know that I could be susceptible to that if I were to have sex . . . If I were to be like raped, that would be scary if someone had a sexually transmitted disease.³

When Luisa saw graphic images of AIDS in 8th grade, she shut herself down:

Like they show images, like graphic stuff, like how you know, and I just seem to close myself and I don’t listen. I just put my ear phones on, so I don’t listen to none of that stuff. . . . It’s kind of disgusting just seeing the pictures. So I close myself.

Luisa also expressed profound disappointment about how sexuality was being taught:

I thought it was going to be fun like to learn about that stuff. And I saw it and I was like, “Uhh, I don’t think I want to be here.” So I would take off to the library.

³Shelly’s comment was especially startling because she seemed more anxious about getting a sexual disease than being raped. The normalizing of sexual violence, or the placing of its importance in a subordinate position to other concerns, such as STIs or a boy’s breaking up with her because she would not have sex with him (as was mentioned in Veronica’s case in the previous section), was found in several other interviews.

I saw like AIDS, like all these diseases that, and the things that you get, like behind your tongue or something. It's like *ew*.

Melissa's discomfort came from feeling embarrassed in her 7th grade abstinence class about the prospect of having to undress during sexual intercourse: "I knew it was something normal, but I was just, I don't think I'm gonna do this soon [laughs] . . . I just felt like embarrassed. I would feel embarrassed to take off my clothes in front of somebody." Melissa also explained another reason for her discomfort with school sex education: "I think because I kinda never knew about it and like other people that I don't know showing me about it." When asked how she would like to learn it, she said "I think my mom would be good." Like Melissa, a number of girls recalled that the people who taught their sex education class were not their regular teachers or faculty members of their school. Being taught about sexuality by strangers made the experience that much more uncomfortable for them. However, not all of the girls said they would like to learn about sex from their mothers.

Five girls (Maria, Diana, Teresa, Nicki, and Tina) were able to rebound from their initial discomfort and appreciate the lessons. Maria said about her 8th grade sex education class:

I thought, "Well, better to know about this now and not do something that I regret." Like let's say they never taught us about safe sex, all right? Let's say I would have sex with a boy and not use a condom. That would result in maybe getting pregnant or something like that. And I didn't want that to happen so I was grateful that there was someone there to tell me about it, that um they would prepare me for maybe what could happen.

Teresa also accepted the initial strangeness of learning about sexual anatomy and conception in 5th grade: “It was kind of weird to me, but I just thought, we’re learning about it, so it wasn’t bad or anything.” She said even her mother was surprised by the content:

She was actually kind of surprised that we were being taught that at-- It wasn’t really that young, but like I guess she just didn’t expect them to teach us like that. . . she had already talked to me about those kind of things before so . . . it wasn’t like she was mad or anything.

Taking sex education in stride. Although most of the girls were unprepared for their first sex education class at school, five girls (Mary, Carol, Pati, Sandy, and Dakota) appeared to cope more calmly with it. Mary said matter-of-factly about her 6th grade sex education class:

I don’t know where [the teachers] came from, but they came and gave us classes about like what like risk you take if you’re sexually active or being abstinent . . . They just talk and like they’ll let you ask questions if you have any . . . how things would happen . . . To me, it was just another lesson.

Dakota seemed to understand why she was taught about menstruation in 5th grade:

They were just preparing us for our junior high. Like they didn’t want us to like start our period and not know what we’re doing, like not know what’s going on. They just told us like the changes that’s gonna happen. Well, they didn’t really explain it explain it, but they said like at a certain age that, that we’re gonna start a period and they taught us about the pads and just stuff like that.

Apparently, the lesson was not officially part of a class:

I didn't have a class about sexuality. It was just the nurse . . . 'cause there was this girl who started her period in 5th grade and she didn't know what was going on. So the nurses wanted to get all the girls and just explain to them that there was gonna be changes.

For Pati, learning about sexuality at school was an incremental process:

The most that I've learned in health was actually last semester [junior year].

That's when they actually talked about like disease and the parts of the penis and what guys had and what girls had. And like the ovaries and how you get pregnant and stuff . . . I learned little by little.

Three of the girls (Andrea, Sabrina, and Lilly) whose mothers taught them about sexuality at home expressed positive reactions to taking a sex education class. Sabrina's mother started talking to her when she was about 10, and Sabrina liked her sex education class: "I thought it was a good learning. There's some stuff, well, I already knew most of the stuff, but . . . there's some stuff, like the little wire thing [IUD]. I didn't know about it." The fact that Andrea's mother started teaching her when she was about 10 gave Andrea a sense of confidence when she took a sex education class in 6th grade:

I thought it was pretty interesting because I heard some from my mom, but like hearing it from some other people, it's like, oh, I already heard this, I know about this like. It made me feel good.

Although Andrea felt prepared by her mother for her sex education class, she still felt fear about what she was learning:

They would actually um show us pictures of like how the cervix would look when it has cervical cancer and all this. So looking at that I would be like, “Oh, this is scary, like I don’t want this to happen to me.” Or I remember some people being like, “Oh, but that doesn’t happen to everyone,” and I remember thinking like, “Oh, it doesn’t happen to everyone, but what if there’s that one chance, what if that one chance is me?” Like the same thing with pregnancy. They’re like, “Oh, not everyone gets pregnant,” but I’m like, I wouldn’t even try it because it would be kinda like you never know if you’re that one person.

Lilly, a girl who discovered she was bisexual at 10 and subsequently educated herself about sexuality, also enjoyed a heightened awareness in her 6th grade sex education class:

“Do you know what a penis is and a vagina?” I’d be like, “Yes.” And I felt it kinda weird ‘cause I was the only one that said, “Yes, I know what these are.” And they would look at me like, “Whoa, you weird freak.” And they would start talking about diseases and that would open my eyes a lot more, like “Wow, you can’t just be having fun.” And they talked about . . . sexual highs and like stuff like that and I was like “Wow.” I enjoyed . . . my sex education class ‘cause it made me feel more aware of, made me feel more comfortable with the idea of sex.⁴

Lilly revealed a sense of pride at having more sexual knowledge than her peers; she also saw her class as positively influencing how she viewed sex. Overall, the stories

⁴ Lilly is one of only two girls who seemed to remember any content from their sex education class that talked about sexual pleasure (e.g., “sexual highs”). She is also one of only two girls who said they had experienced orgasm.

of these three girls indicate that having sexual knowledge prior to learning about sexuality at school, either from one's mother or from self-education, can enhance a girl's sense of sexual agency, in that it gives her an advantage over her peers and confidence in her ability to handle her sexuality. Conversely, fear-based messages seemed to compromise girls' sexual agency in that they developed an aversion toward sexuality and they closed themselves off to learning anything about the topic.

Learning about Sexuality from Peers

Another primary context in which girls learned about sexuality was their peers, starting in middle school through exposure to peers' sexual talk, behavior, and pressure. The girls' experiences and reactions to learning about sexuality in this way seemed to be more complicated than their reactions to learning about it in school sex education classes, most likely because of the nature of the exposure. Girls described sexual exposure from peers as ubiquitous and therefore unavoidable – they witnessed it in the halls, sitting at their desks right before class, in the lunchrooms, and on the bus. In addition, they said that much of the exposure was unwanted because of how and what their peers talked about, and because of unwanted touching. Most of the girls portrayed themselves as bystanders, listening and observing, although a few girls indicated that they tolerated the exposure because their peers often provided the only opportunity for them to get sexuality-related information. In these situations, some girls talked about taking on the role of “innocent” to avoid being drawn into conversations, or “advisor” to admonish their friends against sexual risk-taking. Although most of the girls' narratives seemed to suggest that they did not participate at all in sex talk with their peers, three girls' narratives revealed the ways in which some girls tested the boundaries of participating,

through flirting with boys or sharing details about sexuality with peers. Overall, with few exceptions, the girls said they did not even talk with their close friends about sex.

Ubiquitous exposure, often unwanted and sometimes appreciated. Teresa had been well-educated by her mother about safe sex and the important role of creating intimacy when engaging in sexual relations. Revealing a deep maturity and thoughtfulness about sexuality, she spoke about being vulnerable to sexual comments and images in school hallways, and being especially bothered by her peers' frivolous treatment of sexuality:

Even if you don't wanna go look [at the cell phone], they'll just be like, "Here!" And you look because, I don't know, it's just in front of you. . . . I was more weirded out because they were actually looking up stuff like that, and they were guys too, so it was awkward because they were looking at female parts and I just felt very um, like I didn't want to be there . . . because like they don't take it seriously.

Nicki, who had little sexual knowledge or experience, and whose mother rarely provided information to her, had a similar reaction as Teresa to being shown pictures on a cell phone:

We were with some friends and they were like, "Look!" And I was like-- You know how like friends sort of like are more experienced? Yea, I don't know, but I've never seen anything and they showed me this thing on their phone . . . A picture of a dick . . . I was disturbed . . . That's something personal. You shouldn't just go around and like showing everybody what it was. Like I wish I wouldn't have seen it. I really wish I wouldn't.

Yet Nicki acknowledged that hearing about sex from her friends is unavoidable.

I have like a lot of guy friends, and they always tell me what they do with their girlfriends . . . girlfriends also tell me what they've done with their boyfriends. They're crazy . . . One of my friends said that um there was like four of them, two girls and two guys, and they all joined in. I don't know how but they did it, and then she just got into detail . . . It's crazy . . . it's nasty what people do for pleasure.

Other girls spoke about hearing gossip that spread quickly throughout the school.

Dakota heard the following about a boy:

I know a guy. I don't know, he has um, I'm not sure if it's AIDS . . . He got kicked out of that school . . . I don't even talk to the guy. But I have a friend in my first class, and well, he, well, I guess he just told a friend and when that friend went to a bunch of people, and well, this girl, she wasn't friends with him either, she found out by other people. Once you tell someone something, it just spreads on.

Diana was uncomfortable with how public and casual her peers' sex talk was:

They can be um doing that, I guess you could say the word, the "s" word, sex or whatever. But I wouldn't want to be um informed about what they're doing 'cause it's their private life . . . It's just weird knowing what they've been up to. I mean, they could tell me how they've been doing and how's school but if it's something more personal, then I would want to get ready to understand what they're trying to talk about, if they want to talk about it on a deeper level.

Victoria was also troubled by the public nature of the sexual comments.

I hear a lot of people openly talk about their sexual experiences at school, which I . . . don't agree with. I don't think everyone needs to know . . . I guess I've learned stuff from that, like what they talk about. . . . I'll look at people and I'm like, "Why are you saying this out loud?" . . . It's shocking to me how-- I feel like I'm an old soul, I feel like an old woman talking right now.

Victoria's reference to being an old soul seems to indicate that she felt limited in her ability to relate to her peers' sexual behavior and attitudes.

Sandy, who was almost 18 and a junior in high school, put a humorous spin on inappropriate public comments by attributing them to younger peers:

When I go pick up my sister at [her elementary school], like there's this girl and she's just, like talks weird, like she's all like, "Oh, yea, my pussy's sweating." Okay, why would you say that? That's like so kiddish for me. Like, okay. And then the guys just like follow her, "Oh, yea, my balls are sweaty too." You know, like what the heck? Is that how you guys talk now? And they're freshmen and sophomores. I'm like, "Okay." At high school like if you hear someone talk like that, then you're like, "What grade you in?" They're like, "Freshman." You're like, "Okay, no wonder." It's just like that, I don't know. Why would you want to say that to the public? You know, like I don't care if it is. It's not my problem.

Unwanted sexual exposure from peers also came in the form of unwanted touching. Luisa, for example, a petite girl with very little sexual knowledge and no sexual experience, spoke of her distress about being touched in uncomfortable ways by both girls and guys.

In high school there's so many girls now that don't really like guys. They like girls in general for sex stuff, you know. And they just go like, they'll try to find a way to you know be friends with you. And then they'll start grabbing you, and being like . . . "I don't like you, I'm a girl." You know? But I don't know if they're doing it intentionally . . . I don't know if they're doing it on purpose to be my friend to touch me or something. 'Cause I get along, very along with the girls, like hugging or just saying, "Hey, what's up?" You know like that. But not from here down [below the waist]. . . There's this kid named Jacob. Um, I would tell him like, "We're friends, okay, we're friends, get that straight, we're just friends, okay, um nothing from here down." But it's like he would do it on purpose. Like he has this hand that would just go right there, you know, grab right here and feel lower. And then it kind of got to it, and called it attention. And I said, "Back off. If you're not looking for friendship, I'm not looking for you either."

Luisa talked about not knowing what her peers' intentions were, whether they were purposefully trying to initiate sexual touching or just give a friendly hug. She struggled to navigate this confusion, and often her only recourse was to go on the defensive.

Pati, too, spoke about being bothered by peers' unclear and casual touching:

Like when they hug me and they go too low and they touch my butt or something. Or like they say that I have big boobs and they're always talking about my boobs . . . they're really perverted . . . Like you're not going out, but they still want to kiss you and stuff. Like you're not their girlfriend, but like when they see you, they can kiss you and hold you and hold your hands and stuff. But after that one moment, there's nothing else. Like they can be talking to other girls and it's not

technically cheating practically . . . I've never been like attracted to any of that . . .
 My friends are like, "Oh yea I'm gonna have sex this weekend or I like this guy".
 . . It's so casual to them, so like just nothing.

What bothered Pati more than the casual touching was the lack of commitment to a relationship when touching was involved. She herself pledged to be a virgin until marriage, so she adopted a cautious strategy to deal with her peers' behavior:

I have a lot of friends that are so open about their sexual lives and like I've seen, like I've heard of a lot of stuff. And I'm not scared, but I'm just like cautious about it. I'm not the type of girl that likes to do that kind of stuff. I like to keep myself to myself.

Despite the discomfort with sexual exposure from peers, not all of it was unwanted. Some girls relied on getting their sexual information from peers. Mary, who was one of the more sheltered girls in the study, in that she was not allowed either to date or go out with her friends without supervision, revealed that most of her sexual knowledge came from listening to peers at school. For that reason, Mary did not complain about it; instead, her comment shows that peer exposure allowed her to develop insight into gender differences in sex talk:

Sometimes it's just like when you're standing in crowds . . . like they'll just be saying like what they did with someone . . . They'll just be like, "Oh, yeah, we did this and that [e.g., oral sex]" . . . Mostly it's the guys that are talking about it. Sometimes where the girls, they might think it should be a little more private.

Veronica, like Mary, used her friends as a resource for sexual information. She recalled starting to hear sexual comments at about 13, when she first started menstruating, “It was probably like right when I got my period, probably or later or after.”⁵ She talked about pretending to understand what her friends were talking about:

Yea, I hear it all the time, almost all the time from my friends . . . Like I heard stuff about it, but then I was like, I don’t know, and then later I started understanding it . . . Like they say, “Have you banged yet?” . . . They say a lot of different stuff that I don’t even pay attention to . . . They thought I knew already. I was like, “Okay.” Just going with the flow [laughs] . . . Like at first they were like, “Did you bang yet?” I was like, “N-no.” I just, I was like, “No.” And then they’re like, “Do you even know what it means?” I was like, “No.” And that’s when they told me.

Despite being embarrassed by her lack of knowledge, Veronica regularly asked her friends questions about sexuality: “My friend told me that she lost her virginity and I was like, just kept asking her questions like, ‘Did it hurt? Did you like it? What did he do? Did you bleed?’ Stuff like that.” At the same time, using her friends as a resource was a double-edged sword: Veronica found herself often pressured into having sex. Veronica was one of two girls who used prayer to resist such peer pressure. She said:

My friends have said like, “She’s too safe, just have sex.” And I’m like, “No, I’m not ready.” So I just like pray to her [La Virgen de Guadalupe], to tell them to like leave me alone, that I’m not ready and stuff like that.

⁵ Menstruation might be a marker for when girls become more conscious of sexuality-related conversations in their environment. This topic needs further investigation.

The roles of “innocent” and “advisor.” The girls had several strategies to manage the sexual exposure and pressure from their peers. Four girls adopted the role of “innocent” as a way of warding off pressure. For example, 15-year-old Nicki said that her friends refer to her as “a little virgin,” and she did not dissuade them of this idea, even though she had been in a romantic relationship for five months. In a similar way, 15-year-old Maria, whose tiny, still undeveloped body concealed a sensitive mind with surprising depth about sexuality, used her diminutive stature to hide her savvy.

I’ve had crushes and such, but since I can’t date it’s kept secret . . . from everybody ‘cause everybody knows I’m the innocent one and, “Oh look, she’s little, maybe she doesn’t know about that, little virgin ears. Don’t say any cuss words, don’t say anything related to sex, or anything like that, or anything about drugs and stuff” . . . I can talk to my close friends about it, but if it comes to people I’m not really close to, it’s very like awkward.

While she preferred being labeled “innocent” for now because it minimized unwanted peer exposure to sex, Maria recognized the potential future repercussions from friends when she might experiment with sexuality later on:

I don’t wanna always be labeled innocent because there’s a point that we’re not innocent anymore. You’re gonna grow up and um you’re gonna think different things . . . You’re gonna eventually wanna have sex, let’s say, or maybe you’re gonna wanna try a drug or try doing something bad or drinking alcohol, and they’re gonna be like, “Oh my god, Maria is drinking alcohol. I can’t believe she just did that,” ‘cause they label me innocent.

At 17 Luisa is still perceived by her peers as “a little girl,” and this perception is in large part due to Luisa’s own lack of knowledge about sexuality and the lack of communication about sexuality from her mother.

When I have questions, you know, friends, they come up with the weirdest things sometimes . . . ‘Cause they look at me like a little girl. You know? Because they just, the way I am when they say things, I’m like, “*Ew, ew, ew*. Shut up. Be quiet. I don’t want to hear it. No!” But they start saying, “Well, you’re going to learn about it one of these days.” And they start mentioning some things as a joke . . . I don’t know what it is, but um I never got it, um, uh. How do you say like, “Let me stick my limousine in your garage”? And I was like um well, I’m glad I don’t get that ‘cause if it was disgusting, ugh, I wouldn’t want to be friends with them anymore.

Luisa believed that her friends liked to talk but were almost as uninformed as she was.

She said:

About that limousine stuff. Until now, I don’t know where the teachers started explaining what it was. It’s like sticking your, the man’s thing inside a girl’s . . . I was like, oh, so that’s what it meant. . . [My friends] walk around going like this, “Let me stick my limousine in your garage.” They start pretending like they really want it, you know, but they don’t know. They don’t really know what’s, what goes there. I don’t know. I know they don’t know so. Because um if you ask them a question, they’ll be like, “Um, okay, shut up.” Just like okay, exactly. Don’t be telling me these things. And they just walk off like, and they’ll come back and talk to me and yeah [laughs].

Sally, who planned to wait until marriage to have sexual relations, was one of the few girls who openly acknowledged a curiosity about trying out what her peers were doing. What most inhibited her was the fear of the consequences of risk-taking. She said:

I've been wanting to explore many things, but I know I shouldn't . . . I have friends that have done drugs and they say it feels good, but I'm scared. I don't wanna die, and I don't wanna get sick. I don't wanna get addicted so I haven't tried it.

Sally also provided insight into the deceptive aspect of the "innocent" persona in her comment about Jamie Lynn Spears, a famous young actress who became a teen mother.

She looked like an innocent girl, like she would never do something bad, and she ended up getting pregnant and having a baby . . . I don't want that life. Even though I'm not famous, but I don't want that life. I don't wanna look like an innocent girl and then going and getting pregnant.

Another way that the girls managed the constant sexual exposure from peers was to provide advice to their friends. Five girls said they took on this advisory role, usually because their friends asked them questions rather than the other way around. Melissa shared the detailed steps she outlined to a friend to wean herself from a boyfriend who was using her for sex:

I try to like um, to like help them out and tell them like what to, what they could do or what they should do or stuff. . . . My best friend, she had been with a guy for um, for-- This was her second guy, but she was like all in love with him so like she didn't, like they weren't going out or anything, but like she would still go

to his house and stuff. And like the guy like just called her like whenever he wanted to like, wouldn't answer her texts or her calls or anything. So it kinda just like seemed like that's like all um the guy wanted her for. 'Cause like he would call her and be like, "Come to my house," and they would like have sex and stuff. So I told her to let it go little by little. . . . "I know it's hard, but like try not to go every time he tells you to, 'cause he like, he probably like, it seems like he just wants you for sex" . . . I think like she said, "Yeah you're probably right" . . . It was still hard for her. She said like, "It's hard though 'cause I love him."

Andrea also tried to step in and give advice when she learned her cousin and her friends were planning to have sex with their boyfriends.

I remember like um my cousin telling me like, "Oh my boyfriend, through the night he wanted to have sex" . . . I remember like just looking at her and telling her like, "Don't do it. Like did you know you can get pregnant like even if it's your first time?" And she would be like, "Oh but I, we're gonna use condoms." . . . I wanted to explain to her like, "No, no, no." Then my friends coming back and they would be like, "Oh last night me and my boyfriend um we were at his house alone" . . . The only thing I could think of was like, "You guys are too young." I feel like it's this age, it's like not to be doing that, it's to be like focus into school and having fun with your friends. Like you can have a relationship, but not like have a relationship with a boyfriend or whatnot, but you can't, like I don't think it's right to go all the way and have sex.

Andrea explained what she thought was the right age to have sex based on her understanding of developmental readiness:

I think the right age is, would be after 18, like not before that. I think you're just not ready for it . . . From high school and middle school, they already taught you what's gonna happen, so you can't be like, "Oh I didn't know" because you know what's gonna happen so. And I would say at this age we're still learning, but from 18 we already know what's going to happen, what can happen.

At least among sexually active girls, the girls did not seem to judge each other if sometimes their advice was not taken. Dakota said:

I'm not the one that really asks them questions. They're the ones that ask me questions. My friend, she was gonna go to her boyfriend's house and she said, well, she's not a virgin no more, but she told me, she was like, "I don't know if I should, I should lose it to him or not." And well I told her not to. And she went and did it anyways . . . I don't know how to say it. I wasn't disappointed in her. 'Cause everyone makes mistakes. Like it happened, oh well.

Tina's experience was similar to Dakota's in that she and her friends did not make judgments about being sexually active. Instead, they advised each other to act responsibly: "They always tell me, 'Use protection if you have sex. If you don't wanna do it, don't. Don't get pressured into it or like get manipulated into it.'" When Tina told her close girlfriend about her experience of first intercourse, her friend was supportive but cautionary:

She's like, "Well, as long as you use protection, but be careful. You can never know what can happen." I understood why, 'cause she cares about me. And like if she was in that situation, I would say the same thing. I would be, "Be careful, don't be dumb about it. Be smart."

Among non-sexually active girls, there seemed to be more disapproval about sexual behavior. Shelly and her friends were not sexually active yet, and Shelly thought they rarely talked about sex because they were afraid of being judged:

We don't really talk about it . . . Like my close friends, they won't have sex, and so we will have like friends in common who do. And then they will like talk about it. But it's just, we don't really talk about it. It's like awkward and we distance it . . . I don't know, we just don't really feel comfortable sharing our feelings towards it . . . [It might be more comfortable] if we all had the same experiences and we all felt like safe and like felt, like we couldn't, like we wouldn't be judged if we had something to say.

In all of the sexual exposure from peers, parents were rarely mentioned. Lilly made the one comment in which parents were discussed, and the crux of the comment was that her friends' advice was to prevent parents from knowing what you were doing:

"It's okay to lose your virginity as long as your parents don't know." Which is kinda like "Wow." As long as your parents aren't trying to figure out if you're a virgin every month or so, then it's okay to lose it, and just to tell them later on in life, "Oh look, I lost it" . . . Some of them are like, "I know. Don't even think about losing your virginity. It's painful, don't do it" . . . Other friends are like, "Oh well, it's the same person so it's okay to lose your virginity. Just don't tell your parents." So most of it is coming from "It's okay to lose it, just don't tell the parents or anyone related to adulthood."

Testing the boundaries of participating. Although most of the girls indicated that they did not participate in public sex talk and behavior, three girls shared details

about how they flirted with boys or talked about sexuality with their friends. Pati talked about setting boundaries with flirtatious conversations. She described herself as “really friendly” and worried that her intentions would be misunderstood: “I don’t like them to take things the wrong way and most of the time they do. So yeah, but I have boundaries and I know how far I can go and stuff.” She gave an example of curtailing a “dirty” conversation:

When I had my phone and . . . they would like mostly text me at night and be like, “Oh, what are you wearing” and stuff. I’m like, “That’s for me to know. You don’t need to know that.” And then like I just, like I don’t know. When it comes to that, I’m kind of rude about it ‘cause I’m like, “Dude, I’m not even like that. Like stop talking to me like that.” Like I don’t let them talk to me like that ‘cause I feel like they’re disrespecting me.

Ashley relayed the following conversation she had with a friend, in which she tried to avoid telling him she was on birth control:

The other day my friend was all like “um” ‘cause I left school to get my shot, and he’s all like, “Where are you going?” I was like, “To the clinic.” “Why?” “Cause I need to go do something.” “What are you doing?” And then I finally told him that I was going to go get on birth control. “I need to go get my other shot of birth control,” I told him. And then, he’s all like, “Oh, you’re nasty!” And I’m all like, “Shut up!”

Ashley seemed to mind less that the boy knew she was on birth control than that he judged her for being sexually active, because she knew she was taking birth control not for sexual reasons but to regulate her menstrual cycle.

Sandy found humor in her awareness that some of her friends were very casual about sex:

Many people are just taking advantage of it [sex]. They just use it as a whatever. Like my friend. We say, I make fun of him so I tell him he has a friendly friend, as in his penis [laughs]. 'Cause I told him he was a whore. And he started laughing. He's all, "Why can't you just say my friend is very friendly." So we say, "His friend is very friendly." So there's girls out there that are very friendly too, you know?

Surviving high school without having sex. For most girls in the study, navigating sexuality messages at school and among peers was often treacherous. The words of two girls seem to sum the challenges these girls were facing. Luisa talked about simply trying to survive:

High school is trying to survive, you know. Like making it through those years with um like a high school diploma or something and not come out with pregnancy. Have your diploma and then go wherever you want to go. I want to go clean. I came clean into [my high school], and I want to come out of [my high school] clean, you know, but with a diploma in my hand.

In Sally's I-poem, she spoke about her fears:

I just wanna stay calm and take care of my schoolwork
 I'm scared of becoming pregnant or disappointing my mom
 I'm scared of her then being disappointed at me and not being happy for the choices I have made

For the mistakes I have made

I'm scared of not becoming something greater in life than I have planned for me

What seems to underlie these comments is the feeling among almost all the girls in the study that, when it came to navigating sexuality, they were often walking a tightrope.

Other Contexts of Sexual Learning

Although the primary contexts of sexual socialization for girls in this study were the mother-daughter relationship, school sex education classes, and exposure to peer sexual talk and behavior, it is worth mentioning two other contexts in which girls talked of learning about sexuality, although to a lesser degree: fathers and media.

Regarding fathers, most girls said they did not talk at all to their fathers about sexuality. Two girls (Ashley and Luisa) said both parents sat them down one time to have their first “sex talk,” which primarily consisted of telling them not to have sex. The few girls whose fathers did talk to them about sex provided fear-based messages. For example, Luisa said her Dad warned her against guys:

He says that guys are like sharks, and if you throw like a piece of fish or food or something into the ocean, obviously they're all going to run to it, you know. If you tell the world or something that you're a virgin, they're obviously going to say, “Oh well, I like you” or “Oh my god, I love you so much”. . . If he keeps insisting, you keep saying no. Well, they're just going to take it by force what they want . . . A guy would do whatever it takes to take what he wants.

Her father's message scared Luisa, and she shared many examples of how she kept herself on guard against boys' sexual desire.

Pati's father also warned her to "stay away from guys." She explained: "He's like, 'You don't know how guys think' . . . [He thinks] that guys are like pigs . . . they're just looking for that and if you give it to them, they're going to take the opportunity." Pati seemed less alarmed than Luisa by her father's message and more reflective about boys' sexuality. She said:

I think it's like because since [boys are] so visual. It's not them getting pregnant. I mean, they're getting the pleasure and nothing is gonna happen to them unless the girl has like a disease or something. But they don't think about it. They just think about the moment.

Even though she could reflect on her father's comment in a more nuanced way, Pati frequently mentioned that knowing about sexuality made her more cautious in her behavior.

Regarding media, girls who talked about learning about sexuality from media were most influenced by sexual messages from television, such as reality shows about teen pregnancy and telenovelas. A number of girls were also exposed to sexting, and two girls talked about sexting themselves (i.e., sexual comments only) with their male friends. Most girls did not use the Internet regularly, and when they did use it, it was primarily for schoolwork, although a few girls participated on social networking sites such as MySpace. The messages from media were similar in many ways to the fear-based messages from school and peers. For example, Ashley talked about being "stalked" by a boy on MySpace and closing her account. Melissa talked about different gendered experiences of violence from watching TV: "I think it's kinda unfair that we girls can't defend ourselves like as much as guys can." Victoria spoke about being upset by how

girls were portrayed in the media: “I feel like the things you see on TV and the way you see like girls my age dress and stuff . . . it’s degrading. I feel like women these days and young girls should have more respect for themselves.” As entertainment, the girls enjoyed watching TV and movies, but in terms of sexuality, many girls viewed media as a potential threat.

Summary

To summarize the primary contexts of sexual socialization, girls learned about sexuality from three main contexts: mothers, school sex education classes, and exposure to peer sexual talk and behavior. Girls whose mothers provided open and comprehensive sexual communication, and who frequently monitored their whereabouts, seemed to have the most sexual agency for keeping themselves safe in sexual situations and for managing sexuality messages that they learned at school and from peers. Girls who had infrequent and content-limited mother-daughter sexual communication, and who were monitored less frequently, felt less agentic in navigating sexual situations and sexuality messages.

CHAPTER 5

DYNAMICS OF MOTHER-DAUGHTER SEXUAL COMMUNICATION

In this chapter, I examine the dynamics of the mother-daughter relationships in more depth to enhance understanding of why mother-daughter sexual communication seemed so challenging to the girls, and how that challenge influenced their sexual agency. Specifically, I wanted to know: How did the mothers' and daughters' personal characteristics, degree of sexual knowledge, and perceptions of each other facilitate or inhibit their sexual communication? To answer this question, I drew upon the interviews of four girls and separate interviews with their mothers, comparing the responses to reciprocal questions I asked each of them about sexuality. For example, each daughter and each mother was asked, "What's it like to be a teenager learning about sexuality from your mother?" (for the mother, "What's it like to be a mother of a teenage daughter teaching her about sexuality?") and "When is the last time you and your mother (you and your daughter) talked about sexuality?" The comparison of mother and daughter responses to questions about sexual communication was conducted in three ways:

1. First, I examined the concordance, or consistency, between mothers' and daughters' narratives about conversations they had about sexuality. Questions I examined included: Did mothers and daughters' stories agree in terms of how often they talked about sexuality and what topics they discussed? Did their stories agree regarding the challenges of sexual communication? In what areas did their stories reveal that communication was less difficult? When their stories did not agree, what were the reasons for the discordance?

2. Second, I examined the ways in which the daughter internalized the mother's message, reproducing it so that she followed her mothers' message closely, or transformed it in ways that revealed independence from her mother. Questions I examined included: How much agency did the girl feel she had to make her own sexual decisions if they diverged from her mother's expectations?
3. Third, I analyzed the intergenerational transmission of sexuality messages, examining the degree to which there were similarities or differences in how the mother was taught by her mother, what she taught her daughter, and what the daughter said her mother taught her. Questions I examined included: Did the mother feel able to foster greater sexual agency in her daughter than her own mother did, and what were the reasons for this ability?

In this chapter I present four mini-case studies of mother-daughter pairs that focus on salient themes presented in Chapter 4: the importance of virginity, the commitment to abstinence, the fear of pregnancy, and the actualization of sexual agency. These themes comprised the bulk of what mothers conveyed to their daughters about sexuality, and were present to varying degrees throughout all of the mothers' and daughters' interviews. In each of the four case studies I present, mothers' and daughters' narratives revealed both concordance and discordance around these themes. Concordant narratives revealed the ways in which daughters internalized and reproduced her mothers' sexuality messages. Discordant narratives often revealed important areas of misunderstanding or miscommunication between mothers and daughters, as well as how daughters were exerting sexual autonomy.

Vanessa (Mother) and Victoria (Daughter):**The Importance of Virginity**

Victoria was a 16-year-old, third generation Mexican-origin girl who lived with her mother Vanessa and her older brother. She also had an older stepsister who did not live with the family. A junior in high school, Victoria was focused on attending college. She was independent and ambitious, and considered herself a tomboy. Neither she nor her mother considered herself religious.

Her mother Vanessa had been divorced twice, the first time from Victoria's father when Victoria was one and a half years old. Vanessa was currently single and not dating. The oldest of six children, Vanessa grew up on a ranch in the southwestern part of the United States. Vanessa was deeply affected by her parents' experience of marriage. She said that her mother left home at 15 with her father and became pregnant with Vanessa shortly afterward. Vanessa said that her parents assumed that she too would get married young, quickly become pregnant, and have children, so they had no expectation for her to attend college. Vanessa, however, wanted something very different for herself. Against her parents' wishes, after she graduated from high school and turned 18, Vanessa left home, got a job, and found independence. She said that her mother "didn't talk to me for almost two years because I moved out of the house. But I didn't wanna get married . . . If I wasn't going to school, I was at least gonna learn to have an apartment and do this. It was the best time of my life, and that's what I want for my kids." Although Vanessa was disappointed that she never went to college, she worked hard as a full-time housekeeper so that Victoria could have that opportunity. Victoria and Vanessa had a close relationship, and Victoria saw her mother as a role model: "She's always been a hard

working woman, and that I admire. She's always carried herself with self-respect . . . She's done everything she can for the people she cares about, and I find that something to look forward to, like look up to."

Despite the closeness of their relationship, great tension existed between Victoria and Vanessa regarding Victoria's sexual behavior. Vanessa placed great importance on the value of virginity, that is, the status of not yet being sexually active. She wanted her children to honor the virginity message so strongly that she offered them a financial reward as incentive: "I talked to my kids when they were really young and I told them, 'If you stay virgins throughout high school I'll pay you.'" One reason Vanessa placed great importance on the value of virginity was because of her own decision to remain a virgin until high school graduation because she did not want what her parents had – early pregnancy and what she considered lost opportunities in life. Another reason was because of her concern about what other people thought of her. She recalled observing, during high school, both peers and adults laughing behind the back of a girl who was considered "easy," and she said, "I didn't want that to be me." Because of her strong desire for Victoria to remain a virgin, when Victoria had sexual intercourse at 14 with a boy she barely knew, Vanessa felt devastated. She said:

I was shocked, I was mad, but because I always told myself it's gonna be different with me and my daughter, because I didn't have that with my mom, I was very controlled in my feelings. I didn't want to be so mad that she wouldn't open up, and inside . . . part of me was dying because I thought this wasn't going to be my daughter.

The circumstances around the incident were not clear, as Victoria refused to discuss it during the interview, and Vanessa's description of it was sketchy. The main point is that Victoria's virginity loss was a source of ongoing unspoken tension between them.

It seems that this incident affected Victoria's sense of sexual agency in that it instilled in her a sense of shame about her behavior, which was revealed in her unwillingness to discuss the incident during the interview and her deep anxiety about disappointing her mother. She attributed her anxiety to watching her mother's reactions with two older siblings. She said: "I can tell what things disappoint her and not." Even though her mother had always "told me I could talk to her about anything . . . it's just in my mind the fact that I don't want to disappoint my mom," so Victoria ended up not telling her much about sexuality. Yet her belief that "my mom will always support me in anything that happens . . . whether it's disappointing to her or not" is a testament to the strength of their relationship.

The deep tension between Vanessa and Victoria may explain why they had discordant stories about why Victoria was on birth control. Since Victoria became sexually active, Vanessa no longer entirely trusted her. She said she put Victoria on birth control pills in case she ever made the mistake of having sex again. Victoria, on the other hand, said she was on the pill not because she was sexually active but because it helped with menstrual symptoms. Below are comments from their separate interviews:

Vanessa: I put her on the pill, and I told her it's not a license to go sleep with every boy . . . I tell her, "Victoria, there's certain things" and she tells me she gets it, but it just scares me because these girls nowadays. I think they feel like oral sex isn't sex and it is, and that's what scares

me, that she might be putting herself in certain situ-- that she doesn't know.

Victoria: I'm actually on birth control but . . . it wasn't for sexual reasons . . . I was getting menstrual related migraines and so I got put on birth control to see if that helped, and it did.

One area in which Vanessa's and Victoria's narratives were concordant was regarding Vanessa's attitudes about promiscuity. For example, Vanessa's lessons on this topic made Victoria very aware of how others viewed her:

Q: Has she taught you what type of friends to have?

Vanessa: I always tell my daughter, you know, you hang with certain people, they're gonna think that you're like that. And they could be the greatest people in the world but, you know, first impressions.

Victoria: My mom loves to bring that up, is the people I hang out with is how I'm gonna be looked at . . . "Be careful who you hang out with or else you'll look like that."

In addition, they both viewed almost any romantic interaction as promiscuous.

Vanessa: To me being easy means she must sleep around, or she does stuff with boys that she shouldn't be doing.

Victoria: Not even just sleeping with other people like fooling around with multiple people . . . I guess anything further than like a kiss is promiscuous to me.

Although Victoria accepted her mother's views about promiscuity, she did express resentment that her mother judged her choice in non-romantic friends, most of whom were boys. She said:

Victoria: My friends are pretty much all guys and a lot of time it's only like me and like another girl. And so my mom, she doesn't like that I hang out with a bunch of guys and I'm like the only girl or something. 'Cause she feels like I'll be looked at, you know, like that girl, the one who gets around or something, just 'cause I'm friends with guys. And that irritates me, it makes me so mad.

Interestingly, when Vanessa was in high school, she said she hung out mostly with guys too, but Vanessa did not make this connection about her similarity with Victoria in her interview.

In other areas, Victoria's interpretation of her mother's messages seemed to be more pronounced than her mother's own views. For example, Vanessa talked about independence as having a choice of whom you want to be with. Victoria talked about independence as being "hard-headed" and not having to listen to others' opinions:

Vanessa: I kinda broke the cycle . . . I tell my girls, "I want you guys to be able to take care of yourselves. It's nice to be with somebody 'cause you wanna be with them, not because you have to be." And I've always been very independent.

Victoria: A woman is someone who is hard-headed and independent. Likes things their way. I don't know, doesn't really, doesn't really listen to what other people have to say. Just does things their own way.

Similarly, while Vanessa talked about the importance of putting one's own needs before a man's, Victoria talked about "kicking" a man "to the curve" if he tried to stop her from fulfilling her dreams:

Vanessa: When I was married I thought, well as long as my husband gets his needs and he's happy . . . I didn't think my needs were as important. And that what's been different and that's what I wanna teach my daughter, that she needs to put her needs first, not the man's.

Victoria: If you are in a relationship you have to meet someone at a half-way or else it's just not going to work . . . not letting other people affect your uh, the big decisions you make in life. Like if you want to go for something you've dreamt about your whole life, and there's someone trying to stop you, kick 'em to the curve.

It appears that Victoria felt agentic regarding becoming an independent woman, but was less sure of herself regarding sexual behavior. She had adopted a narrow interpretation of sexual propriety and was hypervigilant about not disappointing her mother; at the same time she felt angry about having to be so vigilant, for example, having to worry about which friends she hung out with. Vanessa, on the other hand, did not express awareness in her interview of how her disappointment in Victoria had affected her daughter. She was proud that she was teaching her daughter about sexuality in very different ways from her mother, and she did not reveal an awareness of how the tension in her relationship with Victoria about sexual behavior appeared to be inhibiting Victoria's sense of sexual agency.

Jessica (Mother) and Nicki (Daughter):**The Commitment to Abstinence**

Fifteen-year-old Nicki was born in Mexico but had lived in the United States since she was one year old. Her parents had been married for 22 years, and she had one older brother and a younger brother born a year ago. Nicki considered her family very religious, and endorsed her parents' and church's message of abstinence until marriage. She felt close to her family, and worried about getting older because "you're not like mom's or dad's little girl anymore . . . It makes me feel scared." At the same time, she said she wanted some of the benefits of growing up: "I feel like I'm not an adult, but I want to be one so I can like do things I want, but I also want to be a little girl, because it was better there . . . things were easier I guess." Jessica was the third of seven children, and had been raised by her birth parents who set strict rules for dating, taught virginity until marriage, and rarely talked about sexuality. Yet Jessica recalled that her mother "started to prepare me around 10" by teaching her about menstruation. About 15 years ago, Jessica and her husband converted to Evangelical Christianity and became very involved in church activities. As a result of their religious conversion, Jessica said that she and her husband did not participate much in worldly affairs anymore.

For Nicki, her biggest challenge in her relationship with her mother was not feeling trusted to remain abstinent until marriage. Abstinence refers here to an active choice by a girl to delay becoming sexually active, either because of her parents' or religion's expectations or because of her own sense of developmental readiness. Although Nicki told her mother that she had made a personal commitment to abstinence, she felt that her mother did not believe she would keep the commitment. This tension

may be the reason why, in many areas, Nicki and Jessica's narratives were discordant with each other. For example, when I asked each of them separately, "When is the last time you talked about sex?" Nicki said "never," and her mother said "regularly."

Nicki: My mom never really talked about it with me like ever. . . . She just tells me to wait, that's pretty much it. And that um God's not going to bless my family or bless me if I do something now. And that's pretty much all we talked about.

Jessica: Regularly. You could say once a week there are comments, and I take advantage of it to talk to her . . . The challenge for me has been to be able to sit with her and tell her that sexuality, that abstinence, it's good, sexuality is good and it's beautiful but in due time.

Jessica's impression that they talked frequently may have been technically more accurate than Nicki's because, later in her interview, Jessica mentioned that she and Nicki talked a lot about what Nicki was learning in her sex education class at school:

Jessica: She's taking that class and she talks to me when she comes home. She tells me, "Today we saw this," and that's when I take the opportunity to tell her things. And she really likes the class. She's very interested in that class. And she says, "Look, mom, I didn't know this but they told me this and that."

In Nicki's interview, she talked about taking a sex education class and referred to conversations with her mother about it. For example, she mentioned she brought condoms home from class and gave them to her older brother, and her mother got mad

and said, “Don’t be giving your brother that! Don’t encourage him!” However, Nicki did not connect this type of exchange with her mother as a conversation about sexuality.

Another example of discordance in their narratives is that Nicki described sexual communication with her mother as “closed,” while Jessica described it as “open.” For instance, when asked how it felt not to talk about sexuality with her mother, Nicki said, “It just feels that I have to like go other places to find my answers. So I guess we’re like sort of closed.” Nicki said she did not try to ask her mother questions because “I’m too scared. ‘Cause like I’m afraid that if I tell her, she’s going to think that I’m doing something.” Jessica, on the other hand, said, “I feel proud because I can teach it [sexuality] to her . . . I can talk openly with her of what . . . I believe.” In this case, Nicki’s impression that sexual communication was closed may have been technically more accurate than her mother’s because, later in her interview, Jessica talked about doubting whether Nicki could stay abstinent.

Jessica: I don’t know if she actually follows through with it outside of the house. But up to now she has told me, “Mama, they tell me the same thing in school.” We hope she actually follows through with it.

Jessica’s comment about doubting Nicki seemed consistent with Nicki’s perception that her mother suspected her of having sex with her boyfriend. Nicki gave an example:

Nicki: Out of nowhere, she just tells me, she’s like, “If you’re going to do something, just tell me so I can put you on pills, because I’m not going to take responsibility.” And I was like, “What? Okay. Thanks, Mom” . . . The first thing that came to my mind. I thought that she thought that I was doing something . . . I felt embarrassed, and like humiliated

because she would think that I would do something like that. . . . I just told her that I was going to obey her and like I wouldn't disrespect myself like that. And she just stayed quiet.

Jessica did not mention this conversation in her interview, nor did she indicate an awareness that that the way she expressed her doubts to her daughter might have had the effect of humiliating her. Instead, she shared her belief that Nicki agreed with the abstinence message:

Jessica: She hangs out with many friends that maybe have sex or are sexually active. In particular, they make it like normal and she agrees with me and says, "Mommy, my friend does this or that but I tell her to wait because of what you have told me." Well, I see that she comprehends. Yes, that she understands. . . . from her facial expression. It says, "Okay, mommy. It's what they have told me, that it is the best thing to do."

The comments by Jessica and Nicki reveal that they both want the same thing – for Nicki to remain abstinent until marriage – yet Nicki's perception is that her mother does not trust her to keep that commitment.

For Jessica, abstinence until marriage was not only important for religious reasons, but it was also the message that her own mother taught her. Jessica said her mother raised her not to let a boy touch you, and she tried to impart these messages to Nicki, although how she taught Nicki differed somewhat from her mother's explanations. For instance, Jessica's mother's advice to protect herself against sexual harassment was focused on the potential danger from others: "[She said] that you should run, or if they

started to pass your boundaries, you should yell. To be very careful with where we went.”

Jessica provided Nicki with more nuanced instruction that included information about potential danger from herself:

Jessica: I've always told her, “You have to think, connect your parts with your mind. And to immediately say *no* because if you let people start touching you, you may not be able to control yourself, so it's better to leave the situation, to say *no*.”

Although Nicki did not recall this particular advice in her interview, she did remember her mother teaching her how to say *no*. She talked about her mother telling her to pray to find the confidence within herself to set clear boundaries with others: “She just tells me to pray to God for strength, and the ability to say *no* . . . that when you say *no*, your *no* means *no* and your *yes* means *yes*.”

Concern about living up to her mother's expectations about abstinence may explain a startling story that Nicki shared midway through the interview. I had been asking her about her sexual experiences, and she suddenly said, “Like I was about to do it, but when he was going in, it started hurting, so we just stopped.” I was surprised because she had already told me she had only kissed her current boyfriend and that she was personally committed to abstinence until marriage. It turned out she was talking about someone else. She explained:

Nicki: I was like 14 and um the guy was 18, and I was in Mexico visiting my cousin, and um we went to the movies, but she went with her boyfriend and I went with him . . . We were in his car and things just happened . .

. We just started like macking [kissing intensively] I guess and that's when everything came."

Unsure what to make of the story, I asked her what she thought about the experience. She said:

Nicki: It wasn't what I thought it would be . . . I thought it was going to be like all cute . . . I thought it wasn't going to hurt, but like when he was like about to go in, it was like "No!"

The boy listened to her and stopped. Nicki then said, "I forgot about that day."

What struck me most about Nicki's story was that she had truly not remembered the incident until my questions jogged her memory. She may have blocked out the incident as a coping mechanism to deal with the cognitive dissonance it caused. Cognitive dissonance is a discomfort from trying to hold simultaneously two conflicting ideas or thoughts; when such dissonance occurs, people are motivated to reduce or eliminate the discomfort (Festinger, 1957). In Nicki's case, perhaps she could not handle the contradiction between her commitment to abstinence and finding herself in a situation where she almost lost her virginity to a man she barely knew, so she blocked it out of her mind. Her mother Jessica showed no indication that she knew about Nicki's encounter in Mexico, and in all likelihood Nicki did not tell her mother. Yet Nicki was able to draw upon her mother's lessons and say an effective *no*, showing that her mother's lessons did have an impact to some degree on her sexual agency.

In the relationship between Nicki and Jessica, it seems that the mother and daughter agreed about abstinence, but disagreed to some extent about how abstinence messages were communicated. Jessica was not able to convey adequately to her daughter

that she trusted her, and Nicki felt unable to convince her mother adequately that she would obey her. Nicki's perception that her mother did not trust her led Nicki to seek sexual information elsewhere, and this situation may undermine Jessica's ability to act as a sexual resource for her daughter.

Angelica (Mother) and Tina (Daughter):

The Fear of Pregnancy

Tina, a 17-year-old, second-generation Mexican-origin girl, was the third of four siblings and lived with her birth parents. A junior in high school, she was active in sports and planned to go to college. Tina's older sister became pregnant at 17 and dropped out of school to have her child; this situation was the driving force for the constant scrutiny and warnings about sex from her parents, especially her mother. Throughout the interview, whenever she mentioned her sister's pregnancy, Tina would start to cry because she believed her parents did not trust her to be "smarter" than her sister was, although she thought she was. For a year and a half, Tina and her boyfriend had been having sexual intercourse, using contraception effectively, but Tina had not told her mother. Her goal was to prove to her parents that a girl could be sexually active and achieve an education.

Angelica, Tina's mother, came from what she described as a traditional Mexican family in that it was "an obligation to have sexual relations [with one's husband], without knowing, without feeling, just because it's like your job." Angelica was one of many mothers who did not know about protecting themselves against pregnancy. Due to her lack of knowledge, the first time she had sex at 17 before she was married, she got pregnant. Her mother's sharp criticism for getting pregnant made her feel ashamed and

embarrassed. When Angelica's unwed daughter became pregnant at 17, that same sense of shame emerged. When she told her mother, her mother said, "So you can pay for what you did." Angelica was mortified, saying, "How do you think I felt in that moment?" After 10 years of marriage to a "chauvinist" man, Angelica started working in a small company and heard new ideas about relationships from listening to her coworkers. She said she brought these ideas into her marriage and slowly started challenging assumptions about her sexual life. She also said her children began to open her eyes to new ideas of right and wrong about sexuality, telling her she had a lot to learn. She began to understand that what she and her husband did in the bedroom stayed in the bedroom, and it was okay to explore new things sexually as long as she felt comfortable doing so. Angelica, however, had not conveyed her growing openness to Tina.

At the core of the tension between Tina and Angelica seemed to be poor sexual communication. Tina perceived a constant suspicion from her mother that she would get pregnant; Angelica perceived that her daughter thought she constantly suspected her of getting pregnant. Yet at the time of the interviews, neither of them had been able to talk openly with the other about the situation. Poor communication is likely one explanation for why Angelica and Tina's stories about when they last talked about sex were discordant. The following are responses from their separate interviews:

Angelica: We have been doing it for a while because-- She does tell me because she has had problems with her period.

Tina: We never have. Oh, wait, I think we have but it was a long time ago. Similar to other mother-daughter pairs, it is likely that Angelica and Tina differed on what constitutes sex talk. For Angelica, talking about menstruation was a sexual topic.

Tina acknowledged that she talked with her mother about her menstrual cycle, but she did not connect it with sexuality. In Tina's interview, she shared that the most important thing she thought her mother should know about her and her sexuality was that she was having safe sex and fulfilling her education goals; it is therefore likely that being able to confide such information to her mother would constitute a sex talk more than a specific topic about sexuality. Another explanation for inconsistent recall about sexual communication is that, as Angelica admitted in her interview, sex talk did not happen often in her family. Angelica said that she learned little from her parents about sexuality, and Tina's comments were concordant with this point:

Angelica: "A Hispanic hardly says anything." That is something that you learn on your own. You start on your own, but in reality the parents still don't say anything . . . I, well, learned after I was married and after I was here, started working, that I socialized with the people, that's how you learn. But like within the family, they don't tell you anything.

Tina: You can't really learn something that they don't talk to you about. They're not really open about it. . . It kinda has a good side, but then it has a bad side. 'Cause the good side is like you don't wanna tell them. Like you wanna be you, but like when you need help on something or like if you have questions, you can't go to them.

Tina's comment highlights the problem with silence about sexuality in the family – the children cannot go to their parents as a resource when they really need them.

Tina was also frustrated by her parents' constant "be careful" messages, mostly because she felt that the messages were vague, instilled fear, and showed doubt in her

ability to take care of herself. Angelica confessed to not knowing how to instruct her daughter about sexuality without making her defensive. In this way, their comments are concordant:

Angelica: It comes out, I tell her, “Be very careful, Tina. Behave, don’t do bad stuff.” That’s all that we know to tell them and like they sometimes get defensive. And one doesn’t know how.

Tina: She only always tells me to be careful. “The devil’s always around, see, like to suck you in into bad things.” Or she’s like, “You know. You know what the choices you’re doing, which choices are good or bad” . . . She never says, “You shouldn’t” She like says it somewhat, somewhat, somewhat different like you don’t understand her. Like she doesn’t even say, “Don’t have sex.” She just says, “Be careful, you never know what might happen. Look what happened with your sister. She got pregnant.” And I was like, “I know, Mom.” And like I . . . understand that they, she’s trying to avoid me doing that.

In many ways, Tina’s and her mother’s stories were concordant in that both mother and daughter realized there were many misunderstandings between them. For example, Angelica said in her interview that she thought Tina did not trust her to confide in her because Tina feared that she would place restrictions on her. Likewise, in her interview, Tina said that she felt her mother did not trust her and that if she confided in her mother, her mother would place restrictions on her.

Angelica: She doesn’t trust us If I want to tell her something, right away she tells me, “Who told you? Why are you telling me?” Like she doesn’t

think it's coming from me. . . . For example, when she got her boyfriend, she didn't want to tell us. Like she was scared that we'd tell her no or something like that, and she only told one of her aunts.

Tina: I don't wanna disrespect her, like saying like I want to do that [have sex]. It's like I want like her to be open about it. Like her to be okay about it. But I understand her being protected, that she doesn't want me to. . . . I know if I would ask her . . . She'll take it probably the wrong way. She'll probably say, "Are you?" Or like she'll prob-- I think she'll, how can I explain it? She'll prevent me from going out more.

In her explanation, Tina talked about not wanting to disrespect her mother, which is why she did not tell her she wanted to have sex because she believed her mother would disapprove. Tina's fear of negative repercussions if she told her mother the truth may not be real because Tina admitted there was no history of her mother placing restrictions on her. However, Tina and Angelica both said in their interviews that Tina rarely went out because her time was consumed with playing sports. It was unclear whether Angelica would place more restrictions on Tina if Tina did go out more or told her about wanting to have sex.

Angelica: The thing is that she doesn't really go out because she plays in softball. So then most of the time she is playing or it is rare that she goes out. But I let her go out because I know that she doesn't go out, but I don't, don't give her rules, no.

Tina: I don't really party. I just go out like to movies, but "party" party, no. Like my sister, she partied a lot. And that was like really fun, but it's

not me. 'Cause I had, I played sports, and she never did. She never had something to have her mind set for her to practice or do something else. She always had her free time.

As a result of perceiving her parents' constant anxiety that she might get pregnant, Tina had not told them how serious her relationship with her boyfriend was or that they were having sex. Yet Tina wanted her parents to trust her.

Tina: Like she thinks, "Oh" 'cause I have a boyfriend, she thinks I'm gonna do something. . . . And I was like, "Mom, I am careful. And besides," I was like, "I'm always there with his mom." She's like, "Well, you never know. That's what happened with your sister." I was like, "Mom you need to." Like she trusts me, but she just has that little doubt that I might end up doing something that she won't like.

Angelica recalled a conversation in which Tina asked for her trust, and her own difficulty in giving it.

Angelica: Right now she barely has a boyfriend and she, she told her dad once to have trust in her, that she wasn't going to do the same as her sister because like she gets more-- You want to like overprotect her, but we don't even know how [sic].

In their interviews, both confirmed the sense of mistrust in their relationship, but it appears that they never talked about it directly with each other.

A salient example of their miscommunication was when, in a recent conversation that they both recalled in separate interviews, Angelica told Tina that she was fat. In her mind, Angelica said she recognized that increased body weight could be a symptom of

the birth control pills Tina was taking to regulate her period. According to Tina, Angelica never verbally acknowledged that possibility. Instead, Tina felt accused of being pregnant because she remembered that the first sign of her sister's pregnancy was that she was getting fat.

Angelica: Yesterday I told her that she was very chubby. I told her, "Tina, you're really fat." And then she tells me, "What are you thinking now, Mom?" she tells me. And no, no, it wasn't that way, because they gave her some pills and I think that maybe they're making her fat. Like she thinks, or I don't know if she thinks bad things, that I'm on her case, because I tell her, because she's playing sports I tell her, "Tina, you're really fat or you're using your clothes too baggy or what's going on." And well she quickly gets mad.

Tina: She started saying that, 'cause when my sister, she found out she was having sex, my sister started like getting bigger. Like getting fatter. She's like . . . "Why are you getting bigger, what're you doing?" I was like, "Nothing." She's like, "Well, that's not your normal size, like your pants don't fit" . . . I was like, "Mom, I'm playing. And besides, I come home eating every time, so I lose the weight, but I gain it when I come back . . . 'cause I'm hungry after sch-- , after I'm done practicing." She's all, "Well, I don't think that's right, you're getting fat. What're you doing?" I was like, "I'm not doing anything." Like she gives me that like guilt, "You are doing something, why don't you tell me?"

Angelica said she sensed that Tina “quickly gets mad” when she felt suspected of doing something bad, but Angelica did not express awareness of how her own comments might be contributing to Tina’s anger. She described being unable to convey what she really meant to Tina, and Tina described being unable to overcome her defensiveness.

To avoid dealing with her parents’ suspicions, Tina said she turned to her sister when she had questions about sex. Yet Angelica believed that Tina did not keep anything from her.

Tina: I know they’d take it the wrong way . . . what happened to my sister. They think if she’s done it, probably she’s gonna end up doing it. . . . So instead of going to my parents, I go to my sister.

Angelica: I tell her, “Daughter, I’m not thinking what you’re thinking.” I tell her. “I don’t think that you might be pregnant. I’m just telling you because I know you.” Because she tells me everything. If she would have been some other girl, she wouldn’t tell me what’s going on or anything, and she always tells me “Mom, I haven’t gotten my period.” And since she had never had a boyfriend, I can think that, right? But I don’t, I don’t think of, because she’s telling me for a reason and when they have something to hide they don’t say it.

Angelica thought she knew her daughter well and believed that Tina told her “everything,” but based on what Tina said she disclosed to her mother, there is a lot that Angelica did not know about her daughter. The poor sexual communication between Angelica and Tina may have inhibited Tina’s sexual agency in that Tina found it difficult to share important information with her mother, thus limiting her mother’s ability to be

there as a resource about sexuality. Even without her mother's support, however, Tina still demonstrated sexual agency to have protected sex and maintain her grades at school. Tina's situation raises the question about what resources girls need to develop sexual agency; if their mothers are unavailable to them but they have other sources of support, it appears that, for some girls at least, they can act agentially in sexual situations.

Emma (Mother) and Shelly (Daughter):

The Actualization of Sexual Agency

Shelly, a 17-year-old, third-generation Mexican-origin girl, was an only child who lived with her birth parents. Her family was financially well off, and her parents were highly educated and not very religious. Shelly's mother Emma began teaching her about sexuality when she was 10, at the time when Shelly had her first sex education class at school. Emma had bought a book on puberty for girls, and Shelly and her mother spent many evenings reading and talking about the contents together. Most likely as a result of this regular sex education at home, of all the girls in the study, Shelly seemed to have the most comprehensive understanding of sexuality and the strongest sense of sexual agency. For example, she talked about feeling comfortable with her sexual feelings, having positive experiences removing herself from potentially dangerous sexual situations, and having a sophisticated understanding of the emotional and relational aspects of sexuality.

Emma was a professional who worked as a school counselor. She considered herself happily married to a "very special man" who provided for his family and cared deeply about them. Emma grew up in a family where women had a lot of decision-making power, although there was little sexual communication at home. Besides messages focused on abstinence, Emma's mother never talked to her about sexuality, and

she always had a chaperone when she went on dates. In contrast to her mother, Emma considered herself very open-minded about sexuality, an openness that came from her personality and education. She had developed a view that sexual development, including sexual desire and exploration, was a natural part of life. She explained, “People are sexually active and you might as well accept it.” She herself first had sexual intercourse in high school. She learned about oral sex in college, started masturbating in her thirties, and believed masturbation was necessary and important for people to do.

Shelly and Emma had a close relationship, and Emma seemed to provide Shelly with a healthy balance of freedom and supervision. As a result, Shelly felt comfortable to explore various interests even if they differed from her mother’s. For example, she knew that her mother was a non-practicing Catholic who disagreed with most church dogma. Yet about two years ago, Shelly became interested in Catholicism and often talked with her aunts about God and the rituals, and her mother supported this exploration. At the same time, as a result of Emma’s influence on Shelly’s ideas about sexuality, Shelly was able to assert a divergent opinion from the Catholic teachings. For instance, when her aunts told her “that it’s sinful to have sex before marriage,” Shelly disagreed with them. She said, “I feel like if you’re in love with someone, it’s okay to have sex. I don’t really consider it a sin.”

Another concordant view that Shelly’s and Emma’s separate narratives revealed was the idea that sex should occur within an intimate relationship.

Emma: Intimacy . . . means being close to someone. It means sharing, sharing a part of you that is a physical response in how you feel about this person – fun, enjoyment, pleasure. It’s a good thing.

Shelly: I feel like there's a lot more emotions that go into having sex . . . I think you have to really know someone to have--. Well, you don't have to, but that's how I would deal with the situation. Like I would have to know someone really well to share my body with them.

The mother and daughter also shared similar views on privacy:

Emma: I've given her a lot of messages all of her life that she can ask me anything and that I'm willing to talk about everything, and that there's times when I'm going to say, "That's private and personal, and I'm not going to tell you that."

Shelly: My mother doesn't need to know everything about me.

Despite their closeness and similar views on some aspects of sexuality, one area in which their interviews revealed discordance was in the different interpretations Emma and Shelly had of Shelly's sexual conservatism. For instance, a turning point in Shelly's sexual development occurred when she was 15, during the summer when she did volunteer work in another country. While there, she became frightened by the father of her host family. He often drank, and one night he opened the door to the room where she and some other girls were sleeping. She was awake, and although he did not do anything, she felt him stare at them for a long time. His presence made her feel unsafe, so the next day she asked her supervisor to be removed from the home and placed elsewhere. Her ability to take timely action and talk to her supervisor showed a high level of sexual agency to keep herself safe. At the same time, that experience changed her, and she described becoming more "reserved" around boys when she returned to the United States.

It was unclear how much Emma knew about Shelly's experience in the other country, but Emma did not seem to recognize its impact on her daughter. For example, both agreed that Shelly was more sexually reserved than her mother, but their reasons for that difference were discordant. In her interview Emma attributed it to her own warnings about high school boys' sexual motives:

Emma: I started talking to her like young. And I tell her, since before she went to high school, that most high school boys, they want girlfriends so they can have sex. That's what they really want. They want to have sex. And I think I've kind of made her hypervigilant about boy behavior. . . . Boys will celebrate their conquests and talk about it and it becomes a big rumor . . . She's very aware of kids boasting and talking about sex and about girls' sexual behavior with boys, being flirtatious or talking about sleeping with this guy or that guy. So I think it's made her more conservative in her behavior.

In her interview Shelly shared her mother's opinions about boys' motives:

Shelly: I feel like boys have like sex on their minds like a lot more than girls do . . . I have like heard boys talk about how all they really wanna do is have sex with the girl that they're talking to and that's like their main goal. So they might not even like them, they just wanna have sex with them. Where I think that girls are like more interested in like feelings, and like really liking someone for who they are to have sex with them.

At the same time, Shelly's reason for behaving conservatively had to do with her fearful experience in another country:

Shelly: I feel like before I went to [that other country] like I could, I was like open, like I could flirt with people and like not be afraid of them. But then like from my experience that I had, I feel like I'm really reserved and like it's harder for me to talk to boys now. 'Cause I'm not trustworthy of anyone. So it's, I just like feel like now it's a lot more difficult to talk to them about it that way.

Similarly, Emma's and Shelly's expectations for Shelly's sexual initiation were discordant. Emma said she told her friends that she expected her daughter to have sex by the time she was 16 and was proactive about taking Shelly to a gynecologist so she could get accurate contraception info.

Emma: With my friends, you know, I said, "Yea, I expect that my daughter's going to be sexually active by the time that she's 16. You know, and I'm going to make sure that she has information and what she needs to prevent a pregnancy" . . . I took her to my gynecologist and had her have her first private conversation so that she . . . had someone to talk to and who she could go to if she did become sexually active, because I do believe that kids are going to be active.

Shelly said she visited the gynecologist but seemed to view the visit more as an educational opportunity rather than a chance to have a private conversation about becoming sexually active:

Shelly: I think that she took me to like have me briefed on different kinds of birth control if I ever needed it. . . . She took me there 'cause I might've had questions. [I learned about] the different forms of birth control and

then like the effects that they can have on like messing with your hormones and affecting your body.

Also, Shelly did not indicate in her interview that she knew about her mother's expectations about when she would have sex. Rather, she said she thought her mother would disapprove of her if she became sexually active:

Shelly: I didn't wanna tell her which friends were having sex but I think she was surprised that I had friends who were. . . . 'cause I don't think she thinks that I would hang out with someone who would do that. . . . I just think that's how she feels. . . . I think I have friends who do certain things that she wouldn't approve of just 'cause she doesn't want me to be like in a situation where I might get in trouble because of my friends.

Another area in which their narratives revealed discordance was in their preference of sexual style. Emma seemed wistful that her daughter was not more sexually sophisticated and even jokingly referred to her as "Miss Conservative":

Emma: There's just still an innocence there. Even though she has a lot of information, sometimes she's, she doesn't expect certain behaviors, I don't know . . . my daughter is Miss Conservative, you know? She's not doing any of the things that I'm afraid she's going to do.

Shelly seemed to sense this attitude in her mother, and talked about her discomfort with her mother's efforts to increase her sophistication, such as teaching her how to flirt:

Shelly: I feel like my mom kinda like pushes me to flirt with people, or like says that it's okay to, 'cause it's not gonna, like in those cases it won't . . . result in anything dangerous. . . . I've talked to her about how I like

people, but they will never know that I like them 'cause I don't let them know that. And so she's just like, "Well you should flirt with them." And then she's like, "Okay, let's practice." And she'll like ask me to flirt with the waiter but I'm really bad at it so I just don't.

Their narratives also showed concordance in that they both said Shelly dressed more conservatively than Emma.

Emma: I think that she's more conservative than I am in how she dresses . . . She always wears an undershirt, especially if it's, you know, with straps. She always-- I never told her that, I never told her that you have to do that. But you know, she'll often say, "Does, does this look good? Do I have to wear a shirt?" I'll say no, but she still will, you know. She's more protected. She's very conservative that way. And it probably has to do with all the things I always tell her, and then now she's taken it to this extent.

Shelly: She like shows off her boobs and stuff a lot more than I would . . . I feel that a lot of the times. Like I didn't wanna wear this shirt because it's like kinda revealing, but she like told me to wear it just 'cause she thought I like could pull it off. I don't know. I feel like clothes can sometimes make more men attracted to you but I don't wanna be seen that way, like I don't like being stared at, and so I just wear different clothes so that I'm not like.

In this example, like the earlier one, Emma seemed to blame her own earlier warnings about boys on Shelly's conservatism. Shelly, on the other hand, attributed it to real experiences she had had with male attraction.

Another example of discordance is that Emma believed she was more lenient with allowing Shelly to date than Shelly perceived her mother to be. Emma did admit to feeling cautious about letting Shelly spend time alone with boys, and part of that caution came from her own parents' frequent warnings about being alone with a boy. She explained:

Emma: I just remember being informed about what rape was, and you know, to not encounter yourself in a situation where you would be alone where a man could take advantage of you. . . . If you had a boyfriend, you know, to not allow him to touch you inappropriately.

Yet Emma said she was able to let go of her anxiety and give Shelly freedom:

Emma: I think we've always been very supportive of whatever friends she has, and certainly, the first time she was going with her friends to sleep over at her gay friend's house, I had a lot of trepidation, you know. But then I just decided to let it go and just to let it be and you know, it's a common event that all these kids gather at this guy's house. . . . I just have to let it go, and I just trust her.

Shelly's perception of her mother, however, was that she was nervous and overprotective.

Shelly: I think she might just be more nervous for me to hang out with boys [all] alone. Like she's always been kinda nervous like precautionary about me going to like hang out with a boy alone. It's like she doesn't

feel comfortable unless she really knows who they are. . . . It's like she trusts me but she doesn't trust other people. . . . It makes sense. But I don't know. I think she can trust me to handle the situation.

On one level, Emma had prepared her daughter well to be sexually agentic in many areas, including sexual safety, sexual feelings, and relational intimacy. Yet there were instances in which Emma's and Shelly's narratives revealed misunderstanding between them that might have inhibited Shelly's sexual agency. For example, Emma did not seem to be aware of how Shelly's experience of being frightened by male attraction two years before had affected Shelly's sexual attitudes. This lack of awareness may be a barrier to Emma's helping Shelly deal with the fear; that is, instead of supporting her daughter's need to be reserved in her sexual behavior, Emma tried to encourage her to be more flirtatious. In addition, Shelly did not seem to be aware that her mother was open to her becoming sexually active; instead, she believed that her mother would disapprove of her if she were to have sexual intercourse at this time in her life. For this reason, Shelly did not disclose sexual information about herself or her friends to her mother, thus limiting her mother's ability to be a sexual resource to her.

Overall Findings

Examining the dynamics of the mother-daughter relationships in more depth revealed that differences in mothers' and daughters' perceptions about their sexual communication derived from two phenomena: (1) different perceptions of what constitutes a sexual talk and (2) different developmental needs. In terms of different perceptions of sexual talk, I found two patterns, first, that mothers and daughters disagreed on how frequently sex was talked about and, second, that mothers and

daughters disagreed on the content of a sex talk. First, mothers were under the impression that they talked more frequently about sex than their daughters did. Comments from both mothers' and daughters' narratives revealed that mothers' perceptions were technically accurate: girls' stories did indicate that their mothers talked to them about sexual topics such as abstinence, birth control, and menstruation more than girls acknowledged directly. Second, girls had different criteria from their mother about what constitutes a sex talk. For girls, a sexual conversation included being able to express their curiosity about various sexual topics and not feeling judged about what they talked about. Mothers thought that sexual communication consisted of talking about topics such as menstruation and abstinence. Comments from both mothers' and daughters' narratives revealed that girls' perceptions were technically more accurate: mothers' stories revealed that they did not talk frequently about the kinds of things girls said they wanted to talk about.

A related point is that it seemed that, for mothers, the idea that their daughters would come to them as a sexual resource was a *fait accompli* because of the strong relationship they had with their daughters. In contrast, many girls said their desire not to disappoint their mothers often inhibited them from disclosing sexual questions and concerns. For example, Angelica believed her daughter Tina told her everything, including any sexual issues she had; however, Tina said that she did not share important sexual information with her mother because she believed her mother would suspect her of having sex. Victoria refrained from sharing sexual information with her mother so as not to disappoint her, and Nicki did not ask her mother questions to avoid her mothers' suspicions. Teresa, too, felt uncomfortable sharing sexual information with her mother about her friends because she believed her mother would disapprove of them.

Regarding different developmental needs, mothers and daughters had opposing goals. Mothers were concerned about their daughters' safety and delaying sexual activity. They sought to maintain control over their daughters' sexuality to the degree that they could protect them from negative sexual outcomes and ensure they received an education. For example, they consistently expressed concern or anxiety to their daughters about the potential dangers of becoming sexually active. On the other hand, girls wanted to feel trusted by their mothers. They sought sexual autonomy by asking sexual questions, asserting their opinions, or engaging in sexual activity against their parents' wishes. They often interpreted their mother's worry as lack of trust in them to keep a personal commitment to abstinence or to handle sexual situations. The subsequent tension between mothers and daughters often resulted in girls choosing not to disclose sexual questions or concerns to their mothers or to seek out people other than their mothers as a sexual resource. In addition, girls' efforts to be sexually autonomous sometimes led them to feel a sense of shame, fear, and hurt, as in the case of Victoria, Nicki, and Tina. The one girl whose mother had established open sexual communication with her when she was young, Shelly, demonstrated the greatest degree of sexual agency. Even though she and her mother differed in some of their perceptions about sexual communication, Shelly's narrative did not reveal any shame in her relationship with her mother; rather, she revealed a sense of self-assurance to handle challenging sexual situations, as well as actual experiences in which she successfully did so.

The daughters showed evidence of internalizing and reproducing their mothers' sexuality messages, in that they accepted abstinence and avoiding promiscuity as reasonable goals to pursue. However, some daughters transformed their mothers'

messages, showing a degree of sexual agency seemingly independent of their mothers' influence. For example, against her parents' wishes, Tina made the decision to become sexually active and wanted to show her parents she could protect herself effectively while getting an education. To her mother's surprise, Shelly chose to be more sexually conservative in her behavior and dress. Even though her choice was partly influenced by a personal experience of danger, it also reflected her own sexual preferences and her self confidence, based on how her mother taught her, to make independent decisions.

Mothers showed evidence that they were trying to communicate with their daughters more than their own mothers did with them. They said that their mothers hardly talked to them about sexuality, and they provided examples of how they tried to be different. Vanessa talked about teaching her daughter to be independent and make sure her own needs, not just her husband's, were met. Jessica talked about being proud to teach her daughter about abstinence and the beauty of sex in marriage. Emma talked about buying a book on puberty and educating her daughter thoroughly about it.

The effectiveness of their attempts varied. In the case of Emma and Shelly, intergenerational differences in sexual communication were more common than differences; however, for the other three mother-daughter pairs, there more similarities than differences. Mothers advocated for their daughters' abstinence and their daughters did not perceive their mothers as open and a resource for them about sexuality. Of note is that, of the four mothers, Emma had the highest level of education and the most diverse sexual experience.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

There is a critical need to study girls' sexual agency, especially in ways that account for the distinct cultural and ecological niches in which they live. In this study, the focus was on how Mexican-origin mothers' socialized their teenage daughters in ways that promoted or inhibited their sexual agency. Sexual agency was defined as one's ability to experience and regulate sexual feelings and assert one's needs for safety and fulfillment in one's sexual relationships. Mexican-origin mothers are the primary socializing agents of sexuality in the family, and they transmit important cultural values regarding gender roles and sexual behavior to their daughters. I sought to provide insights with respect to the following questions: How are Mexican-origin adolescent girls socialized regarding gender and sexuality in the context of the mother-daughter relationship? What aspects of this socialization process contribute to or inhibit these girls' sexual agency? To what extent do girls internalize, reproduce, or transform gender and sexuality messages from their mothers? These questions were developed out of an interest in shedding light on one aspect of Mexican-origin girls' sexual development, that is, sexual agency, which has been largely unexplored, despite its importance for the promotion of sexual health.

From a theoretical grounding in feminist thought, family ecological frameworks, and perspectives on Latina/o cultural values relevant in gender and sexual socialization processes, I explored how 20 girls learned about and managed sexuality messages from their mothers and families, their lived experiences, and the way they constructed sexual agency and knowledge. The girls' stories revealed some positive and many challenging

aspects of sexual communication with their mothers. They spoke about the predominant abstinence and fear-based messages about sexuality they received from their mothers and school sex education programs, and the ubiquitous exposure to sexual talk and behavior from peers. They shared how their mothers were often an anchor in the process of navigating these sexuality messages, but also could be barriers to managing their own growing curiosity about sexuality and awareness of sexual feelings. Many girls struggled with how to explore their sexuality while honoring their mothers' expectations for their sexual behavior. To understand more deeply the challenges that girls experienced in sexual communication with their mothers, I then explored four sets of mother-daughter relationship dynamics. This exploration revealed that challenges in mother-daughter sexual communication often derived from different perceptions of what constitutes a sexual talk and different developmental needs. Girls considered their ability to disclose important questions and concerns to their mother as part of sexual communication, while mothers considered the transmission of messages about abstinence, the dangers of sex, and topics such as menstruation as part of sexual communication. These different perceptions often led to discordance in their stories about when and how frequently sexual conversations occurred and what was discussed. In addition, girls sought greater sexual autonomy while mothers sought to protect their daughters by restricting their sexual exploration.

I turn now to revisit the research questions and reexamine what has been learned by the girls' and mothers' narratives. Throughout the comprehensive discussion of the findings that follow, I draw attention to the practical implications.

Contributions of the Methodological Approach

The eclecticism and methodological pluralism I used in data collection and analysis was highly effective for accomplishing the goals of the study. The narrative method, and scaffolded interviewing in particular, allowed participants' voices to be heard by facilitating open talk about sexuality with Mexican-origin adolescent girls. It also provided an effective way to support girls in constructing a coherent narrative about their sexual knowledge, perceptions, and experiences. Scaffolding the storytelling for the girls meant that they did not have to do it all by themselves. Many of the participants in my study would have had no idea where to start, given their overall inexperience talking about sexuality. How could they reveal safely to me that they had no idea what I meant by sexual pleasure and orgasm? When I asked about sexual feelings, and they gave me a blank look, the conversation would have ended had I not utilized my method of providing concrete examples. In this way, the answers emerged in dialogue with the girls and from the stories they told.

I cannot say enough about the importance of conducting pilot interviews to refine the script so it can become something the researcher can fully embrace and embody during the interview. The process of developing an interview script to talk about the sensitive topic of sexuality with Mexican-origin girls involved many critical components. As I began to synthesize the empirical research and my own ideas, I engaged in extensive daily writing in order to work out inconsistencies, contradictions, and potential pitfalls, and to avoid essentializing their sexuality. In addition, I reached out to scholars and colleagues to check my presentation of the material in both my writing and my interview style. My script underwent major philosophical and methodological transformations from

the first pilot interview I conducted until the last. The pilot interview process not only helped me hone my interviewing skills, but it clarified my thinking about the purpose of the study and what I, as a sexuality researcher, really wanted to know.

When I first started this journey, I knew I had the passion for the task at hand (conducting the interviews), the care and respect for the participants (Mexican-origin adolescent girls), and the requisite knowledge in the subject area (female adolescent sexuality). What I realized was missing was the confidence to ask these questions – the sense that these questions need to be asked because the answers can provide critical information that might benefit Latina teenagers and families in the future. Part of me questioned my right to ask these young women to reveal the most intimate details of their sexual experience. This lack of confidence only reinforced the silence from the young women I interviewed. Through conversation with several colleagues and my experience with the pilot interviews, I began to develop more self-assurance to talk with them. Through asking the young women my questions, many of them awakened to their right to speak about sensitive sexual topics. My receptivity to the narratives of these young women may offer the possibility of contributing to their sexual well-being and that of others like them in the future.

Further, the voice-based relational approach of the Listening Guide enabled me to both condense and contextualize the narratives, helping to establish the validity of my analysis. This multi-layered approach to knowing narrated subjects allowed me to reflect continually on my responses to the girls' narratives as I interpreted their stories on multiple levels, as well as to acknowledge alternative ways of thinking about them. In addition, the method I developed to compare mothers' and daughters' responses to

reciprocal questions about sexuality allowed for a more in-depth perspective on the dynamics of mother-daughter communication about sexuality. It facilitated analysis of concordance and discordance between mothers' and daughters' narratives that provided rich insight into several phenomena that might be inhibiting girls' sexual agency. In addition, it allowed for a glimpse into intergenerational difference, continuity, and change in how mothers teach their daughters about sexuality. Finally, this kind of comparison of concordance and discordance of qualitative interviews is fairly unique in research about female sexuality. I found one other study (Yalom, Estler, & Brewster, 1982) based on a similar idea, in which women who graduated college in 1954 (labeled "mothers") were compared to women who graduated in 1980 ("daughters") for changes in sexual attitudes across generations; the "mothers" and "daughters" were not matched, but the basic premise was the same.

Limitations

Because the goal of narrative inquiry is to engage in in-depth interviewing to illuminate the perspectives of people who are rarely given an opportunity to voice their opinions about sexuality, the method requires extensive time and resources in all aspects of the research process. As such, the number of participants who could be included in the study was limited. Data management of 50 interviews that were approximately one and a half to two hours in length was a time-consuming process requiring significant resources for translation, transcription, and data quality assurance. The multi-step analysis of lengthy transcripts also required a great deal of time.

Given the small sample size that comes with a narrative study, the question that remains on my mind is: To what degree do these girls reflect the broad Mexican-origin

population or the Latina population? When I recruited for the study, I was open to any girls and mothers who met the criteria for age and self-identity as Mexican-origin. Yet none of the girls who chose to participate were pregnant or teen mothers, and they were less sexually active than a more representative national sample. In addition, the majority of participants were first- or second-generation immigrants who lived in the southwest region of the United States close to the Mexican border. I wondered whether Mexican-origin girls who grew up closer to the border had different sexual experiences than Mexican-origin girls or other Latinas who lived further up the coast, in the Midwest, or the eastern part of the United States. It may be that girls who live in border towns are more exposed to the traditional aspects of Mexican culture regarding sexuality and are more likely to practice them.

Although findings from this study cannot be generalized to the Latina population or the larger adolescent population in the United States, much of what was learned about mother-daughter sexual communication, and the contexts in which adolescents are navigating sexuality messages, provide important insights into sexual agency, such as adolescents' need for skills to manage sexuality messages from diverse contexts. Given that some findings from the study are consistent with more nationally representative samples, that is, adolescents' primary sources of sexual information include school sex education, parents, peers, and media (Guttmacher Institute, 2012), future studies with more diverse samples may provide further insight into whether broader populations of adolescents are facing similar challenges managing sexuality messages.

Overview of Findings and Implications

In revisiting my first two research questions, how are girls socialized regarding gender and sexuality in the context of the mother-daughter relationship, and what aspects of this socialization process contribute to or inhibit these girls' sexual agency, it is necessary also to revisit several things I set out to accomplish.

Gender and Sexual Socialization

First, I wanted to verify the extent to which basic descriptions about adolescent female sexuality generally, and Latinas specifically, are validated in the life experiences of Mexican-origin adolescent girls and their mothers. Findings from the mothers' and daughters' interviews were consistent with previous research in the following ways: As in previous studies, my findings showed that mothers were the primary socializing agent of sexuality in the family context, that sexual communication between Mexican-origin mothers and daughters was limited, and that the content of their communication was focused on abstinence and virginity for girls until marriage (e.g., Davila, 2005; González-Lopez, 2003; McKee & Karasz, 2006; Moncloa, Wilkinson-Lee, & Russell, 2010; Raffaelli & Ontai, 2001).

However, findings did reveal that the reasons for emphasizing abstinence diverged in several important ways from historical cultural reasons that Mexican-origin mothers have given for abstinence, that is, virginity until marriage as a way of honoring the family and virginity as a moral virtue (Herrera, 2001). The majority of girls said that their mothers wanted them to remain abstinent for educational (i.e., graduate from high school or college) and health reasons (i.e., avoid pregnancy and STIs). Similar to the changes that González-Lopez (2003) found in her study, in which mothers saw virginity

until marriage as a way to protect their daughters from marital problems, this finding provides additional support that abstinence is being endorsed as a way to protect girls from negative sexual outcomes and promote their educational achievement more than as a way to uphold family honor or individual morality. Understanding the changing reasons for abstinence can be useful for policymakers and sex education practitioners in terms of school sex education curriculum. Rather than focus mainly on the dangers of sex, girls can be educated at school in ways that are both aligned with their mothers' expectations for them – that delaying sexual activity is a valued choice for their academic and health outcomes – and geared to providing skills and information to promote sexual agency. The benefit of this type of culturally relevant instruction has been seen in a collaborative project with Mexican American communities in the southwest United States (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992).

Second, I wanted to clarify what girls knew or did not know about sexuality, and the sources and contexts of their information. What I learned is that, while mothers may be the main provider of sexuality education in the family, most girls said their mothers were not their primary source of sexual information. The important role that mothers seemed to play in the girls' sexual socialization was in providing guidance about sexual behavior such as abstinence and being careful. However, girls acquired most of their sexual knowledge from school sex education classes and exposure from peers. School sex education typically included information about puberty, sexual anatomy, reproduction, disease, and safe sex, while exposure from peers provided information on sexual behavior and experiences.

Of note is that most girls in the study expressed difficulty in managing the sexuality messages they were learning at school and from peers. Their discomfort from school sex education came in part from not feeling prepared to learn about sexuality because classes usually began in 5th grade and they had not yet learned about the topic anywhere else. Their discomfort also came from the way sexuality was presented in the classroom: girls talked about how unexpected, disturbing, and fear-based the information about sexual anatomy and disease often was, as well as feeling uncomfortable with getting this information from unfamiliar teachers. While most girls acknowledged the need to learn sexual information at school, especially if they were not learning it at home, many girls wished they could get more information from their mothers. In other words, these girls saw their mothers as desirable sources of sexual information that were often not available to them. These findings have important implications for sex education curriculum and instruction, especially in elementary school. Ensuring that girls are familiar and comfortable with the content and teachers of sex education is critical for their comfort and openness to learning about the topic. In addition, finding ways to include parents, such as providing sexual communication activities for parents and children to engage in at home, could enhance girls' comfort level. Girls also found managing sexuality messages from their peers difficult because of the lack of respect and boundaries, and pressure to have sex, that they perceived in their peers' sexual talk and behavior. The fact that peer sexual exposure seemed present in all aspects of school life has important implications for school professionals. A positive school climate about sexuality can be fostered by providing awareness and training to students, teachers, and administrators about how to handle sexual comments and behaviors (AAUW, 2011).

Third, I wanted to understand how mothers' messages about sexuality either promoted or inhibited girls' sexual agency regarding sexual feelings, fulfillment, and protection. I discovered it was difficult to discern how mothers influenced their daughters' sexual agency in the areas of sexual feelings and fulfillment. One reason for the difficulty was that the majority of girls in the study were not sexually active. Compared to the national average among all high school girls (45.6%) and among Latina high school girls (43.9%; CDC, 2012), only 35.0% of the girls had ever had sexual intercourse, and only two girls were currently sexually active. Most likely because they had little sexual experience, many of the girls had limited awareness of and difficulty talking about sexual feelings. Another reason is that girls had limited recall of sexual communication with their mothers, and what they did recall revolved around the behavioral aspects of sexuality. For instance, all girls in the study received a strong message from their mothers to be abstinent, that is, to delay becoming sexual activity, and some girls indicated that they suppressed their sexual feelings in order to honor the abstinence message. Not one girl said that her mother talked to her about masturbation, sexual pleasure, or negotiating fulfillment in a relationship; the rare message about sexual feelings centered on the need to control the feelings or to walk away from the situation that was arousing them. A related point is that lack of communication about sexual feelings and pleasure, and an internalization of the abstinence message, may delay girls' awakening to their sexual feelings until they are older. The finding that girls could not recall learning about sexual feelings and fulfillment from their mothers reveals an important gap in girls' sexual knowledge that has important implications for their sexual agency. If girls are not learning about these topics from their mothers, or from school sex

education classes, their ability to access and regulate sexual feelings and to realize sexual fulfillment is limited, making these girls vulnerable to negative sexual health outcomes as much feminist-based research has demonstrated (e.g., Impett, Schooler, & Tolman, 2006; Thompson, 1990; Tolman, 2002)

The area in which mothers' messages about sexuality seemed most likely to promote their daughters' sexual agency was related to quality of sexual communication. Quality of sexual communication refers to the degree to which the daughter perceived both she and her mother could talk openly and comfortably about sexuality. Girls who said their mothers established open communication about sexuality before they reached puberty felt the most comfortable. These girls were also the most willing to disclose personal sexual information and questions to their mothers as adolescents. However, these girls represented a minority of the girls in the study. The majority said that their mothers rarely talked to them about sexuality, and they described sexual communication with their mothers as "awkward" and "closed."

One reason for the girls' discomfort with mother-daughter sexual communication was their perception that their mothers set boundaries around sexual conversations; girls said mothers provided only partial answers to questions, were only willing to answer certain types of questions, and repeatedly emphasized abstinence rather than talk about other possibilities for sexual behavior. Girls' discomfort also appeared to be related to the Latina/o cultural value of *respeto*, that is, holding one's parents in high regard and refraining from disagreeing with them (Calzada, Fernandez, & Cortes, 2010). Girls may have felt awkward talking to their mothers about sexuality because, as some girls expressed, it felt disrespectful to push the boundaries and insist that their mothers answer

their questions and talk openly with them. Especially if they perceived that their mother felt embarrassed talking about the topic, they may have refrained from pursuing that line of questioning. These findings suggest that parents and practitioners working with families can benefit from understanding how girls perceive sexual communication with their mothers, both the barriers and supports.

Fourth, I wanted to understand what gaps existed in girls' knowledge of sexuality that, if filled, could improve their ability to make informed sexual decisions. Related to earlier points, the girls' narratives revealed their understanding of why abstinence was important for academic and health outcomes, and many girls thought the message was reasonable. However, in order to be fully prepared for the future, they said they wanted more than an abstinence message from their mothers. They wanted real conversation with comprehensive and nuanced answers to worrisome questions. They wanted to know what it felt like to be kissed, whether sexual intercourse hurt, or how to handle a situation in which a boy became sexually aroused (i.e., erect) when she was with him. The kind of knowledge the girls were seeking involved not just the behavioral, but also the physiological, emotional, and relational aspects of sexuality.

For these reasons, many girls felt ambivalent about the abstinence message. The advantage of this message for some girls was that it made them feel safe: amid the confusing and disturbing messages about sexuality that they were exposed to at school and among peers, the abstinence message seemed like a moral compass to guide their sexual behavior. The disadvantage, however, was that the abstinence message also made them feel frustrated and vulnerable at times. Especially when abstinence was the primary message and no other option was discussed comprehensively, girls seemed to have

limited strategies to deal with the threats of sexuality: to say no to sex, to remind themselves of their mother's advice to make good choices, to present themselves as innocent, or to pray. Even when they used these strategies, girls experienced temptation and danger in unsupervised moments. Some girls with little sex education except abstinence knowledge ended up having unplanned and unprotected sex because it was hard for them to say no. The implication for sex education professionals and policymakers is that, for girls to feel fully equipped to negotiate safety in sexual situations, they need to understand the value of abstinence for positive academic and health outcomes as well as broader strategies for effective sexual decision-making.

Dynamics of the Mother-Daughter Relationship

I wanted to understand the extent to which girls internalized, reproduced, or transformed gender and sexuality messages from their mothers. I found that girls' both internalized and reproduced sexuality messages from their mothers, but also transformed them in ways that demonstrated sexual agency. The main message that most girls internalized and reproduced was the abstinence message: their intention was to delay sex for as long as possible, at least until high school graduation. By making a commitment to abstinence, these girls developed the ability to say no to sex, and in that way many of them were able to keep themselves safe in sexual situations. For the six girls who did not endorse abstinence, three girls seemed to transform their mothers' messages. They felt ready to be sexually active, were able to negotiate safe sex with their partners, and used contraception effectively. The degree of transformation was less clear in the experiences of the other three girls because their stories indicated that they engaged in unplanned and/or unprotected sex, revealing lower agency to negotiate safe sex.

Despite a commitment to abstinence, a majority of girls felt ambivalent about the abstinence message; although they may not have consciously questioned it, some of their comments indicated that they were frustrated by the limitations an abstinence message placed on their developing sexual autonomy. For example, some girls indicated an interest in understanding sexuality better or exploring sexual activity, but their fear of the consequences (e.g., disappointing their mother, STIs, pregnancy) made them refrain from taking any action. For some girls, the distress that resulted from (potentially) transgressing the abstinence message produced a cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) that caused them to block out the memory. Other girls expressed disappointment in how students were being taught, as one girl put it, “I thought it was going to be fun like to learn about that stuff.” One girl set out to prove to her parents that having sex and completing one’s education were not mutually exclusive concepts. These types of comments and experiences from the girls seemed to express their desire to be educated about making good sexual choices without being instilled with fear or the negative aspects of sexuality. In other words, although only a few girls transgressed their parents’ wishes for them to delay becoming sexually active, many girls questioned in subtle and unconscious ways how they were being taught about sexuality. These findings have important implication for health professionals working to promote girls’ sexual agency, in that abstinence-only education places limits on girls’ ability to explore their sexual curiosity and, in turn, assert their needs for sexual fulfillment. Even girls who choose to delay sexual activity need safe opportunities to talk about sexuality and get accurate answers to their questions.

I also wanted to examine the extent to which intergenerational difference, continuity, or change in mother-daughter sexual communication was occurring, and implications for girls' sexual agency. My examination of mother-daughter relationship dynamics in more depth revealed patterns of mother-daughter misunderstandings about sexual conversations and differences in developmental needs. Regarding patterns, mothers' and daughters' stories were discordant about what constitutes sex talk; as a result, they differed in their opinions about how frequently sex was discussed. The discordance was largely due to a misunderstanding about what talking about sex means. Girls wanted to ask intimate and sensitive questions about sexual feelings and experiences and to feel that their questions did not provoke their mothers' distrust in their commitment to abstinence. Regarding developmental needs, girls' desire for sexual autonomy, such as asking questions, challenging their mothers' opinions about sexuality, or engaging in sexual activity, was often inhibited by mothers' restrictions on what sexual topics could be discussed or what sexual behavior was allowed. The subsequent tension between mothers and daughters often resulted in girls choosing not to disclose sexual questions or concerns to their mothers, to seek out people other than their mothers as a sexual resource, or to become sexually active without their mothers' permission. This situation potentially undermined a mother's ability to protect her daughter because it was hard for her to provide advice or support when she did not know what her daughter was doing or thinking regarding sexuality. One implication is that mothers who effectively manage their own struggle with granting their daughters' some sexual freedom may be able to foster more trust with their daughter and, in turn, promote her sexual agency.

In terms of continuity and change across generations, mothers attempted to change the way sexuality was taught in the family. Compared to their own mothers, they brought up sexuality issues more frequently, even if only a little more. Intergenerational continuity, however, could be seen in the similar abstinence message that mothers transmitted to their daughters, even if the reasons for abstinence differed to a large degree from their mothers' reasons. In turn, their daughters felt, like their mothers once did, that mother-daughter sexual communication was limited and mothers could not be turned to as a sexual resource. One example of clear generational change could be seen in the relationship between a sexually experienced mother with a high level of education and her daughter. This mother's mother had little education and had never talked to her about sexuality. Yet this mother received a college education, took sex education classes, and explored her sexuality in her sexual relationships. As a result, she supported safe sex rather than abstinence-only for adolescents, and comprehensively taught her daughter about sexuality. In turn, her daughter's narrative revealed a higher level of sexual agency in terms of regulating sexual feelings and asserting needs for safety compared to other girls in the study. This finding is consistent with previous research that shows that parents with more sexuality education had more supportive attitudes regarding sexuality education for their children (Liu, Van Campen, Edwards, & Russell, 2011). Sex education professionals need to consider the ways in which the development of sexual agency may be confounded by education and social class, and how those elements need to be addressed in sex education classes.

Sexual Agency

Mother-daughter sexual communication matters to the promotion as well as inhibition of girls' sexual agency, at least for this population of Mexican-origin girls. Establishing open communication about sexuality before children begin puberty seems to have a positive impact on girls' willingness to disclose sexual concerns and questions to their mothers during adolescence. Such disclosure is important because a key way for parents' to keep track of their children's whereabouts and scaffold efficacy experiences in adolescence is if their children tell them what they are doing when they are not with them (Bandura, 2006). The implication for parents is to consider providing a foundation of sexual knowledge in core areas starting in kindergarten and gradually building on this knowledge based on developmental needs and capacities. Parents can refer to national guidelines on age-appropriate sex education that have been developed (Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States, 2004).

Girls sought sexual autonomy by asking sexual questions and asserting their opinions with their mothers, and in some cases engaging in sexual activity. Yet most mothers restricted girls' sexual autonomy by placing limits on sexual communication and sexual behavior. In the U.S. adolescent development literature, the most effective way for parents to support their child's autonomy development is by adopting an authoritative parenting style, which involves providing an appropriate balance between restrictiveness and independence (Rueter & Conger, 1995b). Yet research on Mexican-origin families shows that mothers value obedience and respect from their children more than European American values such as independence, autonomy, and being assertive (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994; Gonzalez-Ramos, Zayas, & Cohen, 1998). Studies have also documented that

Latina girls struggle with respecting their own need for sexual and relational autonomy while honoring familial obligations and their parents' restrictions on dating and sexual experiences (Raffaelli & Ontai, 2001; Zayas, Lester, Cabassa, & Fortuna, 2005).

Practitioners working with families need to take cultural differences in parenting styles into account when facilitating mother-daughter sexual communication. At the same time, parents who recognize their daughter's need for sexual autonomy and provide her with some opportunities to explore her sexuality, for example, by engaging in more open and intimate communication, may be able to foster more trust with their daughter and, in turn, promote her sexual health. Without that trust, girls may experience resentment and withdraw from parents regarding sexuality issues, thus reducing the sexuality resources they have to promote their sexual well-being.

Mothers' influence on girls' sexual agency to keep themselves safe have important implications for adolescents, parents, sex educators, and practitioners working with youth and families. For practitioners, it is important to inform mothers who may not realize the benefits of establishing open sexual communication with their daughters before they begin puberty. Some mothers may place high importance on respect for one's elders, and may feel that talking about sexuality in the family is inappropriate. However, mothers need to know the impact of not talking about sexuality. Some mothers may think their daughters tell them everything, but many girls said they were unwilling to disclose sexual information to their mothers if they felt that their mother would judge them for the questions they asked or the information they wanted to know. The girls said they sought answers from other sources besides their mother, thus limiting their mothers' ability to support their daughters in providing sexual information and in their sexual decision-

making. Another point for educators and practitioners to consider is how hard it is for many girls to manage the school and peer contexts in which they are learning about and exposed to sexuality. Creating safe and comfortable sex education environments that are sensitive to the fact that many girls may learn about sexuality for the first time at school is a good first step in making sexual learning easier to manage.

Conclusions and Future Directions

This study provides important insights and new findings about the largest subgroup of the fastest growing population in the United States, Mexican-origin adolescents. Mexican-origin adolescent girls have some of the highest rates of unplanned teen pregnancy and births (Allen, Svetaz, Hardeman, & Resnick, 2008). Understanding how they are socialized to assert their needs for safety, precaution, and fulfillment in their sexual relationships is critical for promoting their sexual health. Given the role of the mother and family relationships as the central socialization unit about sexuality for this culture, it is important to understand in what ways mothers are promoting or inhibiting their daughters' sexual agency. As feminist scholars have pointed out, narrow prescriptions of sexual subjectivity for girls adversely affect their sexual well-being (Fine & McClelland, 2006; Impett et al., 2006; Hirschman, Impett, & Schooler, 2006; Horne & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2006). Increasing our understanding of what mothers consider important to teach their daughters about sexuality, and how mothers' values may have changed in the last 40 years as a result of historical sociocultural changes, has important implications for school sex education curriculum design; specifically, it can provide culturally relevant information for sex educators who work with Mexican-origin girls.

Knowledge about the dynamics of mother-daughter sexual communication also provides insight into the ways in which girls struggle with sexual autonomy in the family. Practitioners who work with families can help parents find ways to balance the need to restrict their daughters' sexual behavior while providing her with opportunities to engage in independent sexual decision-making. Finally, future research should take a longitudinal approach to understanding the impact of mother-daughter sexual communication on girls' sexual agency. Mothers' open and comprehensive sexual conversations before puberty appeared to facilitate girls' disclosure to their mothers during adolescence and girls' safe sex practices when they did become sexually active, suggesting that timing and quality of sexual communication are key components of sexual health promotion.

APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

For Girls

- What's it like to be a teenager learning about sexuality from your mother?
- What does sexuality mean to you? When was the first time you ever felt sexual?
- Have you had any sexual experiences? (e.g., kissing, touching, oral sex, intercourse)
- What do you know about giving yourself sexual pleasure?
- Tell me about a time when your mother talked to you about sexuality. For example, how old were you at the time, and what did she say?
- Besides your parents, how else have you learned about sexuality?
- What has your mother told you about how you "should" behave sexually? (e.g., about having sex, dating and going out, getting pregnant)
- What have you learned from your mother about how to protect yourself in sexual situations? (e.g., to say no, what type of clothes to wear, what type of friends to have, contraception)
- How do you feel about how sexuality is being taught in your family and your culture?
- If you were a mother, what would you like to teach your teenage daughter about how to protect herself in sexual situations – or anything about sexuality?
- What do you think your mother needs to know most about you and your sexuality?

Reciprocal and Additional Interview Questions for Mothers

- What is it like to be a mother of a teenage daughter teaching her about sexuality?
- What have you taught your daughter about how to protect herself in sexual situations? (e.g., to say no, what type of clothes to wear, what type of friends to have, contraception)

- What has changed between you and your mother about how you talk about sexuality?

Between what you teach your daughter about sexuality and what your mother taught you?

- What do you feel your daughter needs to know the most about sexuality?

APPENDIX B

FIELDNOTES

Interviewee:**Contact date:****Location:****Time Point:** 1st – Initial Meeting**Written by:****Initial impressions**

.....

Location:**Contact date:****Time Point:** 2nd - Interview**Written by:****Anything important about their physical appearance or mannerisms****Summarize info you got (or failed to get) on each target question for this contact****Anything else that struck you as salient, interesting, illuminating or important in this interview****What new hypotheses, speculations, or hunches were suggested by the interview?****What new (or remaining) questions do you have in considering the next interview?**

Interview 101 Victoria (16)

Date 1/21/12

General
Comments

Interview
Section

Content

1st sign agency

Bkgd
p3

Mom gave her choice to choose relig

M-D Rel
equal
pp3-4

awkward - fear of disapp M if does ^{or says} smthg
wrong - eg, tell parents had sex 1st time may
disapp them

de resp M

Conflict - fear of M
disapp v. confid M
will support

- says her mom didn't say she disapp her but somehow
she's concerned about doing so - b/c she saw her
M reacted to older siblings; knows what
disapp her
- but also believes M will always support her

Quince
pp5-6

says M didn't
share much re
Hoop cult

Didn't have one ^{- nor did Mom}, nor sweet 16 (had party)
- female prob; family lives in TX

Doesn't know much about, not educ re being Mex
thinks it's about woman grow up
Thinks fam want to have to get closer to her
Doesn't speak Spn, so hard to speak to fam

Woman
pp6-8

Strong sense of
being a w -
maturity
knowing self
plan for future

Defin = hard-headed, indep, likes things their way,
doesn't list to others
feels like a w - grew up faster, > mat, around
older ppl, for in sch; coll.

Know when truly know who u r, she's in
process - observes how she reacts to others,
"shoo" away those that "bring me down";
doesn't like "drama" or gossip
When start fig out what u r going to do w/
rest of life - she's off to colleg next yr

Sexuality
pp8-

Unsure of defin, first saup intercourse, then
gender

Interview 101 Victoria
1st Read Through, p. 2

General Comments

Interview Section

Content

shocked by sex ed,
what she learned
- hard to handle for
her (b/c of ignorance?).

Sex Ed
pp 8-9

1st = 7th, 1/2 sem, unsure if daily
- safe sex, M/F anat., repro
- shock "body could do things like that"
blew it off
- only one b/c
not @ trad sch,
@ charter

Very little ed
@ sch or home
- not clear how much
knows, or how
accur knowl is

Menstruation
pp 9-10

- p. 17 Had no idea how to
put a tampon on - first time she
ever touched herself
7th - didn't learn mean in ed, mom just
told her what to do
- start ask Qs to M, M said she was bec.
resp for act, grow up
- learned re pleg in halls via conversat
- refers to self as kid in past tense
"I was a curious kid"

Not clear how
she knows she's
informed or how
she feels about
consent - but
it's something to be
careful about (why?)
what conseq is she afraid of?
= nerve-wracking

Sex Feel
pp 11-16

Underst "arousal" - 1st time 9th, kiss
- she "could just tell" she was aroused
but couldn't expl how
- believes u shouldn't get caught up in
the moment - be careful about
whether u'll take it further
- she's "stopped" w/ someone when felt aroused,
got "nervous" but couldn't say why
- at skate boarding park, hanging out
w/ a friend, talking, it just happ (kiss)
- they kissed again. 10th/11th on 2 yrs, she
was uncomf that he saw other w/
had sex w/ what w, so broke it off, but
his reaction was "macho"

Says "I don't know" a lot here
stops her assertive intentions (Bandura, 2001
pp 6-8)

but down when
asked if ever had
interc - I got
nerv for her &
moved on - she
elms "closed" to
sex @ this time in
her life

also p 28 when asked re: protect
in sex sit
Sex Exper.
p 15-16

said she's "not
climated" about
orgasm

Interact # but ref to talk about it -
was w/ another person not already
mentioned
Thinks oral sex is gross
masturb is "weird" -
r high

General
Comments

Interview
Section

Content

Unsure how she came to think of pleasure as only w/ a partner

pleasure pp. 16-17

u have a partner to do that 4 u

- she seems to have self-knowl / agency only in certain areas (woman, educ) but not re: sexuality

Seems M knows her very well, picks up on nuances & small cues / changes in behav.

M talk re sex pp. 17-18

M didn't talk much re sex, but she sensed M knew she was d/w feel for boys but not sure how M knew - perhaps b/c has mostly guy friends & if acts diff w/ one guy by flirt or giggle more. M noticed

- unclear what / how much M talks re sex

- Dad warns her to tell boys he has shotgun she considers it "fatherly joke"

seems to like dad it no respect for is sex behav.

ex of parents pp 18-20

Seems M talk re STDs, safe sex, be careful re preg @ 2x / mo. - no bf till hs - Parents div - Dad not good ex, many gf. she believes 1 part, strong relat.

M remain but no work out, doesn't date - she feels she & bro didn't let her when young & now feels bad - b/c of dad's dating

has strong "fem" views about soc reat A/W - in relat, doesn't think u shld let others make big dec for u in life (agency for life dec - make)

Cult. / Soc pp 20-23

Sex is "degrading" to W - has a lot to say re TV depict of girls - believes W shld be "classy," not "trashy" - her ideal - med size, curves, an avg W on the street, multip ex

Ideal W p. 21

Her mom - hard work, self-resp, heavy but not down about it, pos, caring, big heart

TV stereotypes bother her - skinny blond w/ big boobs - For her Sexy = Classy

Interview 101 Victoria
1st Read Through, p. 4

General
Comments

Interview
Section

Content

Feels like an "old soul" when shocked at how explicitly descrip ppl @ Sh R
Re their sex exp.

Expresses uncertainty about what M says re when to have sex - seems like she's blocking something?
[in M interview, clear that she is]

M mess re sex
PP 23-24

Have strong feel for person u have sex w/
Rules for when to be home - feel M cares wants her to be safe
Re preg, M said if it happ she can come to her

Her belief re sex beh.
PP 24-26

Know person emot, don't rush
Be respon for ur behav, accept conseq for promise reb (kiss)

again, aware of gender unequal
- maybe why believes she needs to be strong w?

Guys have 7 ok to have sex w/ mult partners, girls called sluts = unfair less 7 accept than he homo, also disagrees thinks shld be = for both genders same-sex relat

M taught her to trust her gut

Protection
pp. 26-

If unconf, speak up, say no. Likes that her M cares what she wears

- seems to respect her M's judgment, in many ways (besides: doesn't want to be judged though for being a tomboy?

Some aspects of sexuality & gender

- but is less happy "that" her mom makes her consc of being judg for who she hang out w/, which is guys

- seems like she doesn't really know how to protect self except say no & dress conservatively

On B/c - gets menst migraines
Pill
Hasn't used condom

APPENDIX D
CONCEPTUAL CODES

<p>Mother-Daughter Relationship Quality <i>Description: What it is like to learn about sexuality from her mother, challenges and strengths, degree of closeness, nature of conversations. For mothers, what is it like to teach daughters about sexuality.</i></p>
<p>Sexual Knowledge <i>Description: Personal definition of sexuality, formal education regarding sexuality (e.g., sex education class), self knowledge about the basics of sexuality, first memories of knowing about sexuality.</i></p>
<p>Sexual Subjectivity <i>Description: Understanding and awareness of sexual feelings, experiences of sexual arousal, self-regulation of sexual feelings.</i></p>
<p>Sexual Experience <i>Description: History of sexual activity, including kissing, touching, oral sex, first intercourse; relationship status (romantic and/or sexual); age when sexual experience occurred; feelings about sexual experience.</i></p>
<p>Sexual Pleasure <i>Description: Experiences with, what she learned about, and how she feels about masturbation, orgasm, and pleasure. For mothers, what she has taught her daughter about sexual pleasure.</i></p>
<p>Sexual Learning <i>Description: What she has learned about sexuality from her mother, father, important others, peers, culture, media. For young women, her views about the messages and how sexuality is being taught. For mothers, what she has taught her daughter about sexuality.</i></p>
<p>Sexual Behavior <i>Description: What messages she has received from her mother about sexual behavior, including dating, pregnancy, sexual double standard, and what she thinks and feels about the messages. For mothers, what she has taught her daughter about sexual behavior.</i></p>
<p>Sexual Protection <i>Description: What she has learned from her mother about how to say no, how to dress, what friends to have, and contraception/birth control, and what she thinks and feels about these messages. For mothers, what she has taught her daughter about sexual protection.</i></p>

Sexual Agency

Description: Instances in which she describes exercising agency to assert her needs or to protect herself.

APPENDIX E

CONCEPTUALLY CLUSTERED MATRICES

Victoria

Descriptive background – Victoria is 16, a second-generation Mexican-origin young woman born in a southwestern city of the United States, who lives with her mother and brother. Her parents divorced when she was one and a half years old. Her father has dated many women since then; her mother remarried and then divorced again, and is not seeing anyone. Victoria does not consider herself religious, although her mother is Christian. She does not classify herself as Latina or Hispanic, and does not speak Spanish, making it “hard to communicate with my [extended] family.” Focused on education and attending college, she goes to an alternative high school that is allowing her to graduate early. She is independent and ambitious, considers herself a tomboy and hangs out with guys. She is tall, slim, and graceful and carries herself, as she puts it, in a “classy” way. She wore a flattering high-cut black sleeveless tank top, blue jeans, and high black Ugg boots. She has a long oval face with clear olive skin. Her hair is a distinguishing feature, long, blow-dried, straight dirty-brown with subtle blond highlights that she wears parted on the side with a long bang covering half her forehead. She considers herself heterosexual, and currently is casually dating a boy with whom she “recently started like talking a few weeks ago.”

MOTHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIP QUALITY Talking about sexuality with her mom is “awkward” and “uncomfortable” and she thinks it will always be that way “whether it’s like today or ten years from now I feel like it’s always going to be awkward talking to your parents about that stuff . . . I don’t exactly know why” Source of awkwardness is disappointing parents by saying or seeing things differently from them “If you say something wrong, your parents will be disappointed or something, and like the way you see things” Having sex for the first time is what she thinks will disappoint her parents “Like for instance if someone like has to tell their parents like that they had sex for the first time or something . . . I don’t think they’d want to because they’d feel like their parents would be disappointed in them. I think for reasons like that it’s uncomfortable.” Concern about disappointing mother is source of ambivalence “She’s always, uh, told me I could talk to her about anything but it’s just, I think it’s just in my mind the fact that I don’t want to disappoint my mom” Learned about disappointment through siblings: “I guess because having two older sibling . . . seeing how she reacts with them has helped me a lot like realize how she . . . reacts to things . . . I can tell what things disappoint her and not. So it would be like the same [for me].” Despite concern, she believes her mother will be there for her “Just knowing that my mom will always support me in anything that happens . . . she’ll always be there for me whether it’s disappointing to her or not . . . I guess that’s something that kinda helps a lot.”

SEXUAL KNOWLEDGE Defines sexuality as “intercourse” and gender “Like intercourse sexuality or like being a woman? ... When I think sexuality I think like gender ... I don’t really know ... I think that’s what a lot of people think at first [sexual intercourse] when they hear that word ... but I don’t know.” Had one sex education class in 7th grade “I was in 7th grade when we had it ... I think it was a quarter class ... like half a semester.” Unsure of course

content “to be honest I really don’t remember ... they taught like safe sex and uh, I don’t know like just basically like showing you the differences between like the male and female body ... using condoms and stuff ... I don’t remember ever hearing like about birth control. They probably mentioned it but I don’t know, just mainly like if you’re going to make sure to use a condom and make sure you know the proper way to use it” Attends nontraditional school that does not offer sex ed “I was going to have one . . . but since I’m not at a traditional high school anymore . . . I haven’t taken like my health class yet, so I haven’t really had one since then.” Impression of sex ed course was “weird” and “shocking” “It was kind of weird [to hear about a penis] ... To be honest I didn’t know what to think ... I was so confused that like the human body could do things like that. It was I guess really shocking ... I think I kinda just tried to blow it off. I just, I didn’t know what to think.” Self-knowledge about the penis “yea like I knew like what it was and everything I just, I wasn’t educated like about it. I just kinda knew about that it was you know the guy’s private part so ... I would imagine when I was a little kid and I used to take baths with my brother. I would have imagined I noticed” Hardly talked to mother about sex ed class “kind of ... but not like a lot, just kind of mentioned to her, ‘cause we had to have our parents sign if it was okay to take the course, but other than that not really.”

SEXUAL SUBJECTIVITY Understands what sexual feelings mean “like I guess when you first start becoming like aroused by someone of the opposite sex” Unsure when she first felt sexual “I guess it was when like, when I first started high school I guess, like freshman year when I started like kissing boys or something ... Middle school like I’d give someone a peck you know but I never like made out with someone until like I started high school ... Like you could tell it was a lot more passionate than just like a little peck on the cheek or something” Sexual feelings located in stomach “I guess the way I felt ... like it felt like maybe like a heart stop or something like, it slowed down ... Yea, like you could just tell ... butterflies, I get those a lot, the butterflies . . . that’s like the main thing I know like, when something changes, is ‘cause I get butterflies like instantly . . . I guess I mainly feel it in my stomach every time something like that happens” Arousal can be uncomfortable and requires caution “I guess I felt weird ‘cause it had never happened before. I guess I didn’t know, like didn’t know what to think of it at the time ... When you have like that much passion for someone I think it’s a beautiful thing, but I don’t -- I feel like -- I don’t know, I should, I feel like you shouldn’t act upon your actions like right then and there” Arousal can be misinterpreted by others “‘Cause a lot of people, they take situations like that and they get like aroused and end up, you know fooling around with someone but, I don’t know, I just, I take it as just like an innocent passion towards another person [laughs] ... You don’t have to like stop kissing them, but I think you should like, I don’t know what I’m trying to say like, I guess, be careful about whether you take it further or not, like be more aware of how you look upon it after the fact and not get too caught up in the moment I guess” Example of arousal and caution “like you know I liked someone and we kissed and stuff so, I don’t know I felt, I guess that you could say I felt like aroused, I don’t know ... I got nervous I would say and just kind of stopped, just left it at that ... ‘cause we were like friends kind of at first and then just started like talking and hanging out and it just kind of happened . . . We were just kind of sitting at the skate park, so I guess public, but no one was really paying attention there ... I feel like I’d get nervous though even if it was just [anywhere], I don’t know ... I feel like it’s naturally nerve racking, I don’t know ... I guess to like be aroused around someone for like your first time or like someone you just met, I don’t know ... [he] made me feel uncomfortable ‘cause he would . . . have sex with multiple people and I didn’t want to be around that at all, so I played it safe and

walked away” Person who arouses her “I think of Mark Wahlberg with his shirt off sometimes ... Like every time I watch a movie with him, I’m like, ‘Hmm.’ I don’t know how to describe it ... [If he walked into the room] I would faint ... my heart would stop, and I would drop”

SEXUAL EXPERIENCE First passionate kiss in high school “My freshman year, pretty much like, well I don’t know, middle school like I’d give someone a peck you know but I never like made out with someone until like I started high school ... I liked someone and we kissed and stuff ... we were like friends kind of at first and then just started like talking and hanging out and it just kind of happened ... I think we were at the skate [board] park ... We were just kind of sitting at the skate park ... but no one was really paying attention there so [laughs]” Kissed him other times “kind of off and on for a little while, yea, but [laughs] didn’t work out too well ... we saw each other kind of like on and off for like two years or so, but he, he would kind of go off and do his thing with other people, and I wasn’t ... okay with that ... made me feel uncomfortable ‘cause he would ... have sex with multiple people and I didn’t want to be around that at all so, I played it safe and walked away” Wouldn’t talk about sexual intercourse experience “Yea. I have [had sexual intercourse] ... No [it wasn’t with this current person]. I’d rather not talk about it ... I was fourteen” Hasn’t engaged in foreplay and finds oral sex gross “I know people that like foreplay or whatever, or like oral sex and stuff. But no, I don’t ... I kind of find it gross ... Just that’s someone’s private parts. Why would you want that near your mouth? I don’t know. I guess I don’t know how else to put it other than that”

SEXUAL PLEASURE Never masturbated, first time touched self was menstruation “I guess when I started my period to understand like where to put a tampon and everything. I was, just kind of like, ‘Uhhh,’ I didn’t know what to do. I had to have my mom take the little instructions out of the box and I guess I had to figure that out” Not experienced orgasm “I’m really not even that educated on it. Like, I don’t know” No self-pleasure knowledge, feels weird about it, pleasure is for partners “Nothing really. Like, I know people use toys and stuff, I don’t know, I feel weirded out by it ... I feel you, you have like a partner to do that for you, not -- I guess. I just feel like it’s a two person kinda thing, not by yourself, I don’t know” Unsure how reached idea about needing partner “I honestly don’t know. I guess I just -- I don’t know. I just think of it that way”

SEXUAL LEARNING

(from parents) Mom first talked to her about boys in 8th grade “When I first starting like dating boys, around like my 8th grade years ... 13 and 14 so between there ... I don’t talk to her about like a lot back then ... she kinda talks to me more about it now, ‘cause now that I’m older ... I wouldn’t like say she talked to me about a lot when I was like 13 or 14 but I feel like she was-- What am I trying to say? ... I guess she just didn’t really think anything of it ‘cause I was so young and it was kind of just ... a little crush, nothing, no real big deal ... I remember relationships in like middle school and around there weren’t really a big deal” Mom seems to know when she’s sexually attracted to someone “I feel like maybe she was paying more attention to like how I’m around guys or something or ‘cause I feel like she was starting to realize that I was like growing up and starting to develop feelings for guys and stuff ... I’ve always been kind of more friends with guys than I have been with girls so ... I think she could realize like if I was more interested in one guy than another because I’ve had so many guys as like friends that I’m around. So, it’s like if I act slightly different around one of them, it’s like she automatically

knows . . . If I like someone I'll flirt with them, like you know giggles and smile at them and stuff" Accepts and thinks rules from parents about dating are natural "Well, both my parents you know, 'You can't have a boyfriend till you are in high school' or stuff like that but, I don't know, I'd have like little middle school boyfriends, you know nothing really happened or anything and like my parents wouldn't know. It would be kind of like 'Oh, I can't let my mom find out I have a boyfriend' and stuff. It was mainly my dad, I was like 'Oh! Dad can't find out' . . . Like the one [boy] that I'm kind of talking to right now, um, I know I've mentioned to my mom that I was talking to him but she kind of has a hard time, like putting names and faces together and stuff . . . He came to pick me up the other day and my mom is like 'I want to meet him' and I was like 'Oh, god, okay' so, my mom got to meet Michael . . . but . . . my parents feel uncomfortable -- like they have to meet the people I hang around with . . . I think it's just kind of a natural parental instinct" Mom's messages focus on safe sex "I guess she's told me like different things over time and like have safe sex, be careful for like STDs and you know like pregnancy happens and . . . just kind of stuff you hear about all the time . . . I guess I hear something about it . . . about two times a month or something around there" Father's messages about keeping her safe from boys "My dad still tells me, he's like 'You better let those boys know, I got a shot gun and I'll clean it' and I'm like 'Oh god, dad' . . . It's just like that joke around fatherly kind of thing like 'Better let them know to not come around my daughter' kind of thing but . . . I don't know, he tries to act a lot more tough than he is" Complex feelings about parents' divorce "My parents divorced when I was like a year and half . . . Never really saw my parents together . . . My dad was with a lot of other partners after my mom . . . I guess it angered me 'cause I feel like you should . . . find a certain person, like develop really strong feelings for them before you pursue anything, but I saw my dad with a lot of kind of sleazy women and it . . . irritated me . . . She [her mother] remarried once after my dad, but that didn't work out . . . she doesn't really date that much, 'cause when we were little we were-- . . . I feel bad 'cause we didn't really let my mom date when we were little, because of the stuff my dad was doing . . . me and my brother were kind of - - scared my mom's dates away, and now I look back at it and I'm like 'Dammit' . . . Now I look back at it and I'm like "Mom, you need to go out and date"

(from others) Sexual relations should be kept private "I hear a lot of people openly talk about their sexual experiences at school, which I . . . don't agree with. I don't think everyone needs to know, but . . . I guess I've learned stuff from that, like what they talk about" Feels different and wise beyond her years in her perspective "I'll look at people and I'm like 'Why are you saying this out loud?' . . . It's shocking to me how-- I feel like I'm an old soul, I feel like an old woman talking right now" Disturbed by societal portrayals of female sexuality "I feel like the things you see on TV and the way you see like girls my age dress and stuff . . . it's degrading. I feel like women these days and young girls should have more respect for themselves and carry themselves, like -- I don't know . . . Guys are supposedly more attracted to the skinny blond with big boobs and like you know the heavier brunette or something like it. I guess it goes back into like me saying how society builds some mold for some person"

SEXUAL BEHAVIOR Understands mom's rules about dating and sex "I know she doesn't want me to just, you know, go randomly have sex with someone. Like they have to be obviously someone you have strong feelings for . . . of course if I'm gonna go out somewhere and she'll be like, 'Okay you have to be home by this time' . . . even if it's just a friend . . . if I leave the house, she gives me a time to be home, then I have to be home at that time" Thinks mom's rules are fair, appreciates them "Even if I want to stay out later or whatever, I feel like it's a good rule

'cause it kinda shows that . . . my mom cares. She wants to know that I'm safe, and that, you know, she just wants to make sure that everything is a-okay" Knows she can go to mom if gets pregnant "She's talked to me about pregnancy and stuff and . . . she's always told me that if it does happen that I can like you know go to her . . . about it and you know we can talk about it and figure out what to do" Own standard of sexual behavior consists of building a relationship and being accountable for your actions "You should like find a certain person like develop really strong feelings for them before you pursue anything . . . I think you should actually get to know a person like emotionally and everything and get to know who they really are before . . . you rush into something like that. I feel like you should know someone on a different level than just the sexual level. You should know them on like an emotional level, mental level and everything before you pursue any . . . sexual activity . . . You should be accountable, responsible for your actions . . . if you're going to go out and be promiscuous or something, then just face the consequences. I'm not going to do that" Ideas about promiscuity "Not even just sleeping with other people like fooling around with multiple people, you know . . . I guess anything further than like a kiss is promiscuous to me"

SEXUAL PROTECTION Mom taught her assertiveness and trusting instincts "She kinda just told me like if you have that feeling that it's not right, if you know it's not right, then make sure you speak up . . . I guess she kinda says go with our gut feeling . . . if you feel like it's not right then just say no" Mom taught her how to dress "If I wore something that she thinks, like a shirt that's a little too low or something, she'll be like 'Victoria, like wear something under that' and I'm like "okay" It's nice, it's like I can double check my wardrobe with my mom" Mom has strong opinions about friends "She's like taught me that I shouldn't hang around like the ones who are like running around doing promiscuous things and everything because that's how I'll be looked upon . . . my mom loves to bring that up, is the people I hang out with is how I'm gonna be looked at . . . She definitely brings that up all the time: "Be careful who you hang out with or else you'll look like that . . . I mean it's nice that like she cares and stuff . . . but like I don't know, like I've said my friends are pretty much all guys and a lot of time it's only like me and like another girl and so my mom she doesn't like that I hang out with a bunch of guys and I'm like the only girl or something. 'Cause she feels like I'll be looked at, you know, like that girl the one who gets around or something just 'cause I'm friends with guys. And that irritates me, it makes me so mad . . . cause I feel like a girl should like be able to hang out with the guys just like anyone else, without being judged. I feel like if you're friends with guys, you're friends with guys, it shouldn't be made into a big deal" On birth control for menstrual reasons "I'm actually on birth control but it . . . wasn't for sexual reasons . . . It's 'cause I was getting menstrual related migraines and so I got put on birth control to see if that' helped, and it did" Condom training from TV "not in like real life. You see on TV, you know like the teacher holds the banana and like puts the condom on and stuff" Skipped the question about whether she ever needed to protect self in sexual situations, learned what she knows mostly "just being around people . . . and then like the sex-ed class I took"

(views about how sexuality is taught) What she wants more of at home is "I'd like to see my mom get a boyfriend" and wants less of "it being more acceptable for a guy like say my big brother than for me [to have sex]" Believes in gender equality "I feel like it should be equality treated" She would make sure her own daughter knew her perspective and the actual facts "I would make sure that she fully understood where I was coming from, like what I meant about protecting stuff. I'd make sure she fully understood the consequences and . . . how to react . . .

‘cause I wouldn’t want my kid to end up being the next girl on *Sixteen and Pregnant* . . . I’d wanna make sure that she carried herself well” What she wants her mom to know most “I think my mom should have more faith in me . . . I know she tells me and everything but I want my mom to realize that . . . I know how to protect myself more than she might think I do”

SEXUAL AGENCY Agency motivated by discomfort with emotions “I got nervous I would say and just kind of stopped [kissing], just left it at that” and with partner infidelity “we saw each other kind of like on and off for like two years or so, but he, he would kind of go off and do his thing with other people, and I wasn’t, I wasn’t okay with that” Characterizes her behavior as “playing it safe” “[he] made me feel uncomfortable ‘cause he would, he would like have sex with multiple people and I didn’t want to be around that at all so, I played it safe and walked away” When disagrees with mom, acts agentically when strongly believes something “my friends are pretty much all guys and a lot of time it’s only like me and like another girl and so my mom, she doesn’t like that I hang out with a bunch of guys and I’m like the only girl”

APPENDIX F

NARRATIVE SUMMARIES

Victoria

A. “Awkward” and “uncomfortable” conversations about sexuality with her mother, and they’ll always be that way because “if you say something wrong, your parents will be disappointed.” Knows from watching mother’s reactions with two older siblings, “I can tell what things disappoint her and not.” Even though her mother has always “told me I could talk to her about anything . . . it’s just in my mind the fact that I don’t want to disappoint my mom,” so Victoria ends up not telling her much. Yet believes “my mom will always support me in anything that happens . . . whether it’s disappointing to her or not.” For example, her mother has “always told me that if it [pregnancy] does happen that I can like you know go to her . . . about it and you know we can talk about it and figure out what to do.” Knowing mom supports her “kinda helps a lot.” Mom does talk to her once or twice a month “about different things over time and like have safe sex, be careful for like STDs and you know like pregnancy happens,” but knows about Victoria’s sexuality more from observation than conversation, “She was starting to realize that I was like growing up and starting to develop feelings for guys and stuff . . . like if I was more interested in one guy than another . . . if I act slightly different around one of them [by flirting], it’s like she automatically knows.” Thinks parents’ rules such as, “you can’t have a boyfriend till you are in high school” are “just kind of a natural parental instinct,” although transgressed them by secretly having harmless relationships with boys in middle school. Thinks her parents’ divorce when she was a year and half may contribute to awkwardness, “[I] never really saw my parents together.” Her mom “remarried once after my dad, but that didn’t work out,” and she hasn’t really seen her mother in a sexual or romantic context. She regrets that, because of anger at dad for dating multiple partners, she and her brother “didn’t really let my mom date when we were little . . . and now I look back at it and I’m like ‘Dammit’ . . . Mom, you need to go out and date.”

B. Sex ed class on puberty was confusing and shocking. She had only one sex education course for “half a semester” in 7th grade and is unsure of the content, “to be honest I really don’t remember.” It included safe sex, using condoms, and “just basically like showing you the differences between like the male and female body.” The content confused and shocked her, “It was kind of weird [to hear about a penis] ... To be honest I didn’t know what to think ... I was so confused that like the human body could do things like that. It was I guess really shocking.” To deal with the confusion, “I kinda just tried to blow it off. I just, I didn’t know what to think.” Did not talk to mom about class, “just kind of mentioned to her because we had to have our parents sign if it was okay to take the course, but other than that not really.”

C. Sexual feelings are beautiful but require caution. The first time she felt sexual was “when I first started high school I guess, like freshman year when I started like kissing boys or something.” These kisses were different from middle school kisses because “you could tell it was a lot more passionate than just like a little peck on the cheek.” The only embodied passion she could describe was “butterflies . . . in my stomach every time something like that happens.” Although at first it felt “weird ‘cause it had never happened before” and she “didn’t know what to think of it at the time,” she believes “that much passion for someone I think it’s a beautiful

thing.” However, an experience kissing a boy at a skate park reveals her caution about expressing sexual feelings, “You could say I felt like aroused, I don’t know” but “I got nervous I would say and just kind of stopped, just left it at that.” She stopped because feeling sexual was “naturally nerve racking,” but she also shared doubts about the integrity of the boy who “made me feel uncomfortable ‘cause he would . . . have sex with multiple people and I didn’t want to be around that at all, so I played it safe and walked away.” She believes you should “not get too caught up in the moment” and “develop really strong feelings for them [partners] before you pursue anything.”

D. Value sex within a relationship and avoid promiscuity. “I know she doesn’t want me to just, you know, go randomly have sex with someone. Like they have to be obviously someone you have strong feelings for . . . of course if I’m gonna go out somewhere.” Her own standard of sexual behavior is similar, “I think you should actually get to know a person like emotionally and everything and get to know who they really are before . . . you rush into something like that. I feel like you should know someone on a different level than just the sexual level. You should know them on like an emotional level, mental level and everything before you pursue any . . . sexual activity . . . You should be accountable, responsible for your actions . . . if you’re going to go out and be promiscuous or something, then just face the consequences. I’m not going to do that [be promiscuous].” Learned perils of promiscuity from mother, “She’s like taught me that I shouldn’t hang around like the ones who are like running around doing promiscuous things and everything because that’s how I’ll be looked upon . . . my mom loves to bring that up, is the people I hang out with is how I’m gonna be looked at . . . She definitely brings that up all the time: ‘Be careful who you hang out with or else you’ll look like that.’” Victoria has deeply internalized this message, “Not even just sleeping with other people like fooling around with multiple people . . . I guess anything further than like a kiss is promiscuous to me.” She elaborates, “I feel like we [women] should be more classy, and a lot of people my generation are a little more trashy than classy.” She’s uncomfortable that “a lot of people openly talk about their sexual experiences at school” because “I don’t think everyone needs to know.” She feels either conservative or wise beyond her years, “I’ll look at people and I’m like ‘Why are you saying this out loud?’ . . . It’s shocking to me how-- I feel like I’m an old soul, I feel like an old woman talking right now.” Yet she takes issue with the sexual double standard, “Guys get more of the okay to go do whatever they want like for what reason I do not now. But I feel like society is more okay with guys going around having multiple partners but if a girl does it, it’s like they’re automatically like a slut or something, get named called and ridiculed.” While she eschews promiscuity for herself, she argues for choice, “I feel like it’s unfair, I feel like, you know, women fought for their rights. I feel like that should be another right just like anyone else, to just be looked at the same in situations like that.” She disagrees with any sexual double standard, “I also noticed that . . . lesbians are more accepted than you know male homosexuals . . . Like guys think it’s attractive for a girl to kiss another girl and stuff like that but . . . I just feel like it’s another couple, just like anyone else . . . I feel like that’s their decision . . . I feel like society needs to stop like secluding certain people . . . That’s the way I see it . . . I feel like society makes a big deal about things that aren’t that big of a deal.”

E. Sexual experience taboo. She had sexual intercourse at age 14 with someone not discussed in the interview because “I’d rather not talk about it.” The other topic she refused to talk about was about ever needing to protect herself in a sexual situation, “I’ll skip that question.”

APPENDIX G

I-POEMS

Victoria

Description: In this section of the interview, Victoria was asked what she knew about and had experienced of sexual pleasure, masturbation, and orgasm.

Original Passage (combined text from questions and answers on the topic)

Yea. Uhm. Not really. Like, I know people that like foreplay or whatever, or like oral sex and stuff. But no, I don't. . . . No, I kind of find it gross. . . . I don't know. Just, that's someone's private parts. Why would you want that near your mouth? I don't know. I guess I don't know how else to put it other than that, so. . . . Yea. . . . Yea. . . . Um. Nothing really. Like, I know people use toys and stuff, I don't know, I feel weirded out by it. . . . Yeah. . . . No. . . . I'm really not even that educated on it. Like, I don't know. . . . No. . . . I guess when I started my period to understand like where to put a tampon and everything. I was, just kind of like, "Uhhh," I didn't know what to do. I had to have my mom take the little instructions out of the box and I guess I had to figure that out so. . . . Yea. . . . Umm, not really. . . . I don't know. I feel, I guess. I feel you, you have like a partner to do that for you, not-- I guess. I just feel like it's a two person kinda thing, not by yourself, I don't know. . . . Uh, I honestly don't know. I guess I just-- I don't know. I just think of it that way.

I-Poem about Sexual Pleasure

I know people use toys and stuff
 I don't know
 I feel weirded out by it
 I'm really not even that educated on it
 I guess when I started my period to understand like where to put a tampon and everything
 I don't know
 I feel, I guess
 I feel you have a partner to do that for you
 I guess
 I just feel like it's a two person kinda thing, not by yourself
 I don't know
 I honestly don't know
 I guess I just
 I don't know
 I just think of it that way

Comments: *She has little knowledge about sexual pleasure, as indicated by her frequent use of "I don't know," "I guess," and "I'm not really even that educated on it." She seems uncomfortable with the idea of self-pleasure, as suggested by feeling "weirded out" by using sex toys. She also conveyed a belief that pleasure involves two people, yet she was unsure how she arrived at that conclusion. The only time she ever explored her own body was when figuring out where to put a tampon when she started menstruation. The fact that she used the word "where" versus "how" to describe using a tampon indicates how little she knows about sexual anatomy.*

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