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**FIGURING IT OUT: SEXUAL KNOWLEDGE BUILDING DURING
CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE OF LATINO MALES**

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by

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Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

the University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Texas at Austin

December 2006

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Deborah Kappes and Scott White.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to all my friends and fellow students who supported me through this ordeal. I would especially like to thank Sally Partridge, Christopher Lepard, Clemente Luna, Kelly Welsh, and Kelly Stone. Thank you to my family for your never-ending support: Mom, Daddy, Joyce, Terry, Jeremy, Heather, Amber, Ron, and Leslie. I would like to extend my greatest gratitude to my committee members, especially Elizabeth Edmundson, for your help and guidance. Thank you, Dr. Fred Peterson for being my mentor, advisor, counselor, and friend. You are an amazing person and I could not have done this without your help and support. Finally, thank you David, you are my best friend, my lover, my travel companion, and my greatest pillar of strength.

**FIGURING IT OUT: SEXUAL KNOWLEDGE BUILDING DURING
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Publication No. _____

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2006

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For Latinas, teen birthrates are disproportionately high in relation to the population when compared to other races/ethnicities; early, unintended pregnancy has been shown to have negative effects on the future academic and emotional success as well as the physical and mental health of young women. It is important that research and prevention focus on reducing the rates of teen birth to these young women and girls. Traditionally, research on pregnancy prevention has focused on females rather than males; this project focused on Latino males in order to include them in the discussion and research of teen pregnancy prevention. The purpose of this exploratory study was to qualitatively investigate the ways in which undergraduate, Latino males learned about sex and sexuality during childhood and adolescence. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model of

Growth and Development was used as a framework for understanding how individuals acquire information about sexuality while a socio-constructivist approach to learning was used to theoretically explain sexual learning. In addition, a process of self-reflection was utilized to minimize research bias. Thirteen self-identified Latino males, who were born in Texas, spoke English fluently, and were enrolled as undergraduate students, participated in two in-depth interviews. During these interviews, participants were asked to recount their experiences learning about sex and sexuality during childhood and adolescence. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded; nine participants then returned to provide feedback on the analytical process. A number of themes emerged from these interview transcripts that describe how the participants interacted with sources of information (parents, teachers, peers, media) within various environments (school, neighborhood, home, media) and the process they used to create meaning from this information, some of which was accurate and some of which was inaccurate and at times contradictory. Utilizing a complex process, these men constructed an understanding of sexuality; using these fragmented pieces of information, they had to “figure it out” and make sense out of a confusing and often frightening sexual world. This active construction of sexual knowledge, or sexual knowledge building, is described, and the implications for practical use and further research are discussed.

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Chapter 1

Understanding Sexual Learning

Introduction

When I was about eleven or twelve, my father dragged me to the local chapter of Planned Parenthood where I was to learn how boys become men and how babies are made. In the small, dark room, we sat in silence with several other young boys with whom I assume were their fathers; meanwhile, a young man, who had greeted each of us as we arrived, was busy setting up a projector and a movie screen. While the dads all attempted to make small talk, we, the unwilling participants in this exercise of humiliation, stared down at the floor or, as in my case, pretended to tie our shoes repeatedly as though we were suffering from a severe case of obsessive-compulsive disorder. After what seemed like an eternity, the young sex educator announced that we were going to get started by watching a short film about puberty. I do not remember the specific details of the film or if there were other activities in which we engaged, but I do remember that we learned about erections, wet dreams/ejaculations, changing voices, and growing hair in new places. Mostly, I remember wishing that the film would get caught in the projector starting a small fire that would result in the buildings sprinklers activating or that I would experience some type of sudden death syndrome and be put out of my misery.

None of the material presented in the session was particularly shocking or surprising to me, since I had already begun to experience many of those changes.

Needless to say, it was little late for me and dad to be having “the talk”; although, I am sure that my dad was doing what he thought was the right thing to do because it was what he was instructed to do by some magazine, book, or, more likely, my mother or stepmother. As far as learning anything I would have considered useful about sex, I recall a fairly medical explanation of heterosexual intercourse accompanied by some very scientific drawings of reproductive organs, but I do not remember my dad or the sex educator addressing any of the things that I really wanted to learn, such as how do people actually have sex or how one gets a date. In addition, I wanted to know if it was possible for two men to have sex and find out if something was wrong with me because I had crushes on other boys.

By the time we visited Planned Parenthood, my real sex education had already begun many years before. I had learned about porn and masturbation from the other boys in the neighborhood. I lived with two older stepsisters, so I had an idea about tampons, pads, and getting a period, although I was not really sure what it meant. I once heard a crude term for masturbation used in a joke on the playground, and not knowing what the term meant, I had to ask an older kid in the neighborhood to explain it to me. Doing so didn’t get me very many “cool” points, either, and I needed as much help in that area as possible.

I learned much of what I knew about sexuality, at the time, from watching television. By the early eighties, around the time of the infamous trip to Planned Parenthood, we had gotten Home Box Office and The Movie Channel at the house, and there were plenty of movies about teen sex to ensure that I was more confused than ever.

Later, when I was in high school and still confused, there was a health class where we spent a week talking about sex, heterosexual only, and methods of contraception. Again, I do not remember much of what was taught, but I do remember that the diaphragms the health teacher/coach passed around had holes in them, assumedly so we would not steal them and try to use them ourselves. Finally, I learned the most about sex from my own personal experiences, for which I was initially ill-prepared despite my dad's and the coach's attempts, and unknowingly placed myself at risk for disease and infection.

Most people have stories about how they learned about sex and sexuality when they were growing up. Some people may remember talks from their parents, although they may not always have been accurate. Others possibly recall educational videos and books that were shown to them, while others may remember seeing pornography. Most people will probably remember learning some things from their peers, sometimes not even really understanding what they were being told. For others, there may have been physical experiences, either alone or with others, during which they learned that something was pleasurable without understanding or realizing that it was sexual. At some point in time, every person learns about sex. Our bodies demand it; our environment demands it.

The ways in which individuals learn about sexuality are numerous and various. For the purposes of this study, some learning experiences are categorized as formal sexuality education, i.e, instances that occurred at school or at a clinic or doctor's office presumably delivered by a trained professional. Many other learning experiences that were spontaneous and casual are categorized as informal experiences; these include

sexual experimentation, viewing television shows or movies, and hearing a “dirty” joke on the playground, as well as countless other types of experiences. In any case, children and adolescents must somehow make sense of the many, often conflicting and confusing, messages they receive from various sources; this can be difficult, especially when there is little previous knowledge and experience to help accomplish this understanding. All of these experiences, interpreted within the framework of their cultural and religious beliefs, are responsible for the ways that individuals understand and experience sexuality. With current trends of sexuality education in schools providing very little, and sometimes false, information, this process must be even more difficult.

Judith Levine (2002) has painted a rather grim picture of the current state of sexuality education and the cultural and political environment surrounding the issue of child and adolescent sexuality. She asserts that our desire to protect children from sex is actually causing more harm than good. The result of this desire to protect is an intense and emotional debate about sexuality education that has resulted in an ongoing battle over what should be taught in schools and who should teach it. Should we teach children and adolescents to remain abstinent until marriage? Or should we adopt a more comprehensive approach that teaches the benefits of waiting to become sexually active but includes teaching about condoms and other forms of contraceptives? Current federal legislation advocates the former and abstinence-only education receives substantially more federal funding than comprehensive sexuality education (United States House of Representatives Committee for Government Reform, 2004). However, the evidence against “abstinence-only” education continues to mount (Hauser, 2004; Goodson, Pruitt,

Buhi, et al. 2004; United States House of Representatives Committee for Government Reform, 2004).

While some research has shown that abstinence-only education can increase knowledge and change values and attitudes to favor abstinence on a short-term basis (Olsen, Weed, Ritz & Jensen, 1991; Kirby, 1997, 2001), other research has shown that these effects diminish over time (Kirby, Korpl, Barth, & Cagampang, 1997). Other studies have shown that these programs do not have a consistent nor significant impact on the age of initiation of sex, delaying the onset of intercourse, or increasing condom or other contraceptive use (Kirby, et al., 1997). More recent evaluations of abstinence-only programs have found no significant long-term or short-term changes in attitudes or behaviors (Hauser, 2004).

The content of these programs has also been called into question with the release of the U.S. House of Representatives report on abstinence-only education that was requested by Representative Henry Waxman in December 2004. Many of the abstinence-only programs that are currently being used in schools contained not only incorrect information, but information that was harmful (United States House of Representatives Committee for Government Reform, 2004). More recently, the Texas State Board of Education adopted abstinence-only health textbooks; meanwhile, researchers at Texas A&M University reported that abstinence-only programs being used in Texas were not effective in reducing negative sexual risk behaviors and were falling short of expectations (Goodson, Pruitt, Buhi, et al. 2004). Not only does scientific evidence reject the effectiveness of abstinence-only messages in sexuality education, parents do not support

it either. William Yarber and colleagues found that upwards of 80% of parents want comprehensive sexuality education in schools instead of abstinence-only programs (Yarber, 2004). The evidence against abstinence-only education is so strong and consistent that former Surgeon General, David Satcher, M.D., has urged more comprehensive sexuality education in The Surgeon General's Call To Action To Promote Sexual Health and Responsible Sexual Behavior (2001). Despite scientific evidence and recommendations from public health officials, the current administration budgeted \$167.5 million for abstinence-only education in 2005 alone (SIECUS, 2005) and increased that amount to \$206 million for 2006 (White House, 2006).

Meanwhile, children and adolescents continue to learn about sexuality from a variety of different sources. The research studies concerning sources of sexuality education have been inconsistent, few, and provided minimal detail about actual experiences. The Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States, or SIECUS, reports that a Kaiser Family Foundation study found 45% of adolescents between the ages of 13 and 15 learned the "most" about sexuality from their parents (SIECUS, 2002). According to another report, adolescents rank the media second only to school as a leading source of information about sexuality (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2001).

The nature of the process in which children and adolescents learn about the world around them is not static and didactic; it is a dynamic exchange between the individual and the environment. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological approach to understanding growth and development has been applied to describe the processes individuals undergo

when learning about sexuality (Dreisbach, 2000; Somers & Surmann, 2005). With respect to sexuality education, the ecological model allows the researcher to take into consideration all of the different sources from which the individual receives information and illustrates the ways in which the individual interacts with these sources. In addition, individuals must create meanings about the world in which they live, including creating meanings about the world of sex. Individuals use their prior knowledge and experiences and their cultural and religious background to help make meaning from a new piece of information or experience (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Prawat & Floden, 1994).

John Gagnon (1968) wrote that what children learn about sex is important, but the context in which they learned was more important. Winn, Roker, and Coleman (1998) give four reasons for understanding the sexual knowledge of adolescents. First, they state that knowledge is crucial for normal psychological adjustment during this time, knowing what is going to happen makes adjusting to what is happening easier. Second, they say that knowledge is a prerequisite for safe behaviors; if you do not know how to protect yourself, you cannot protect yourself. Third, they assert that in order to develop appropriate and efficient curricula one must ascertain what is already known. Finally, they state that knowledge of the reality of teenage sex helps young people act appropriately, e.g., if individuals are aware of accurate social norms rather than exaggerations among their peers for engaging in sexual intercourse, young people will feel less pressure to have sex. While I agree with these reasons for understanding the sexual knowledge of young people, I feel that it is more important, as Gagnon stated, to understand the context in which they obtained this knowledge. By studying the context

in which learning occurred, we begin to understand how and why children and adolescents choose to accept information as “truth”, reject it, and/or incorporate it into a repertoire of behaviors.

The majority of research concerning childhood and adolescent sexuality has focused on problems, such as sexual abuse, unwanted teen pregnancy, and teen sexually transmitted infections, especially HIV/AIDS (Keller, et al., 2005; Lefkowitz, et al., 2003; O’Sullivan, et al., 2005). In addition, much of the research has focused on girls and young women (Brown, Halpern, & L’Engle, 2005; Fox & Inazu 1980; O’Sullivan, et al., 2001; O’Sullivan & Brooks-Gunn, 2005). Because males are often not held responsible for their sexual behaviors or the results of those behaviors, women and girls often had to face the financial and societal consequences alone and, as a result, more research money and time has focused on female sexual experiences. This double standard for males and females has resulted in a large amount of research and prevention efforts that have not included men and boys. In addition, disproportionate numbers of teen births are to Latina girls in the state of Texas, where this study was conducted. According to the Texas Department of State Health Services, Division of Vital Statistics, there were 19, 237 births to mothers 17 years of age or younger in 2003 with 3,807 (19.7%) being born to white mothers, 2,862 (14.8%) to black mothers, and 12,568 (65.3%) to Latina mothers (Texas Department of State Health Services, 2006); the ethnic/racial breakdown in Texas is 53.1% white, 11.6% black, 32.0% Latino/a, and 3.2% other (Texas Department of State Health Services, 2006). Because of this imbalance in the current research literature and the disproportionate number of Latina/os affected by teen births, I studied only

adolescent, Latino males. The results of this study will allow boys and men to become a greater part of the discourse about sexuality and responsibility than is the case, currently.

For this study, I interviewed thirteen (N=13) undergraduate, Latino males. Ideally, I would have interviewed children and adolescents at various stages of development; however, the ethical and logistical concerns were too great to be addressed within the time frame and resources of this study. Each male participated in two in-depth interviews in order to explore the contexts in which they learned about sex and sexuality. For the interview, I used techniques of naturalistic inquiry in a semi-structured interview process as described by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Each interview was transcribed and coded using the grounded theory methods described by Strauss and Corbin (1998).

In order to maximize the validity of the analysis process, participants were asked to return and provide feedback on the emerging themes during the analytic process. I also utilized a process of self-reflection throughout the interview and analysis processes in order to identify and discuss potential bias. In order to do so, I kept a field notebook in which procedural notes, thoughts, and reflections were recorded in the form of memos. These types of procedures for recording the research process, reasoning during the analytic process, and the researchers feelings and personal experiences are a common and recommended practice in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of learning about sex and sexuality during childhood and adolescence among undergraduate, Latino males.

Through the use of qualitative interviewing techniques, the study went beyond identifying the sources of information that were available or that were used for the purposes of learning about sex. In this study, I attempted to understand the underlying processes that children and adolescents used in determining what sources were reliable, how information was verified, and how they chose to accept and adopt the information into their behaviors and knowledge base.

Research Questions

1. What were the sources of sex/sexuality information during childhood and adolescence among adolescent, Latino males?
2. How do adolescent, Latino males create meaning from new information and experiences about sex and sexuality?
3. How are the processes of explicit learning versus implicit learning different?
4. What are the processes utilized to adopt information into a repertoire of behaviors or to a knowledge base?
5. If accepted information was ever rejected at a later time, what were the processes that individuals experienced that caused their beliefs to be changed?

Definition of Terms

sex/sexuality

anything that is related to reproduction or the erotic

formal sex education

sexuality education that takes place in an organized setting such as a school, clinic, or church, usually taught by trained professionals and following a curriculum

informal sex education

sexuality education that takes place outside of an organized setting such as at home, in the neighborhood, or on the playground, and is delivered by parents, peers, or the media

childhood

the period of growth and development from infancy to adolescence, for this study birth to 12 years of age

adolescence

the transitional period between childhood and adulthood starting with puberty and characterized by a time of great physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual growth and change, for this study from 13 to 19 years of age

<i>ecological model</i>	a method for investigating and understanding growth and development that examines the dynamic relationships between an individual and his environment
<i>socio-constructivism</i>	a theory of learning that emphasizes the importance of individuals creating meaning according to prior knowledge and experiences and social and cultural influences
<i>abstinence-only education</i>	a type of formal sexuality education in which remaining abstinent from sexual activity until marriage is stressed and any discussion of condoms or contraceptives is in terms of failure rates
<i>comprehensive sexuality education</i>	a type of formal sexuality education that stresses the benefits of refraining from sexual activity but includes discussions of condoms and other forms of contraceptives in medically and scientifically accurate terms
<i>sexual learning</i>	the process through which individuals gain knowledge about sex and sexuality

<i>sexual knowledge</i>	the current intellectual bank of information an individual has concerning sex and sexuality: this knowledge may be correct or incorrect
<i>explicit learning</i>	instances of learning during which the learner is aware that something is being learned/taught, e.g., lecture, reading materials
<i>implicit learning</i>	instances of learning during which the learner is not aware at the time that something is being learned/taught, e.g., observations, experiences

Delimitations

This study took place at a large southwestern university. All participants were male, self-identify as Latino, and enrolled as undergraduates. All participants were native-born United States citizens and spoke English fluently.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. First, the study took place in a university setting, so participants are more educated and may have higher intelligence than the general population. Secondly, there is a high probability that most of the participants came from more affluent and highly educated parents. Third, the geographic location of the university may have played a role in cultural and social influences that

may be different from other areas of the United States. Finally, since all participants of this study were male, the results of the study only apply to males.

Significance

In order to develop effective sexuality education programming, especially for programming that does not take place in a classroom setting, it is important to understand the processes through which adolescents learn about sex and sexuality. It is important to go beyond only identifying the sources that provide information to describing how sources are chosen, which sources are deemed as reliable and why, how adolescents verify information, and ultimately how they choose to adopt information into their repertoire of behaviors and knowledge. In addition, the male perspective on sex and sexuality and in programming for teen pregnancy prevention programs has often been neglected. The results of this study will allow boys and men to become a greater part of the discussion about sexuality education and teen pregnancy prevention; in addition, health and sexuality educators can use the findings to develop educational and training programs that more appropriately present information to ensure that adolescents are receiving accurate information and developing healthy attitudes with regard to sex and sexuality

Summary

Children and adolescents receive enormous amounts of information about sex and sexuality from a variety of sources. In order to make sense of this information, they must somehow navigate their way through a sea of information that often contains conflicting and confusing messages. An ecological model that takes into consideration the dynamic

relationships between individuals and their environments is an appropriate model for explaining and attempting to understand how young people learn about sex and sexuality. Traditional research on childhood and adolescent sexuality has focused on negative medical and social outcomes of sexual behavior and has primarily centered on the experiences of females. This study used qualitative methods to investigate the sexual learning experiences of undergraduate, Latino males during childhood and adolescence.

Chapter 2

Creating a Conceptual Context

Introduction

Instead of a traditional review of the literature, as is often the case with quantitative, empirical research, Chapter 2 provides a conceptual framework for the proposed study as suggested by Maxwell (2005) in his book *Qualitative Research Design: an interactive approach*. This framework comprises the existing research, theories, expectations, assumptions, and personal beliefs that are part of the research design. It provides a model for the study and a tentative theory of the phenomenon being studied, in this case sexual learning during childhood and adolescence.

In this chapter, the ecological approach to understanding growth and development is explained and used as the theoretical framework from which the structure of the dissertation is derived. The existing literature is then reviewed to explain the constructs of the theoretical model and to situate the proposed project in the current body of research. Next, a description of the ontology and etymology of socio-constructivism is provided in order to explain the assumptions that are being made and to provide a rationale for the research design and methodological approaches proposed. An overview of a theoretical model of sexual learning and the processes used to develop the model are then provided. Finally, an overview of my personal background and experience is provided to explain my personal interest in the proposed study, discuss potential biases, and establish my credibility.

An Ecological Approach

When developing a model of growth and development that included external factors rather than only psychological processes, Bronfenbrenner (1979) described the ecological environment as a set of nested structures, much like the Russian dolls. The innermost level, or *microsystem*, represents the individual and the immediate environments in which the individual exists. The next level, the *mesosystem*, is the ways in which these environments interact with one another. Outside of this level is the *exosystem* where there are environments that influence the relationships in the microsystem and mesosystem but in which the individual has no direct contact or interaction. Finally, there is the larger culture or subculture with its overarching social institutions, customs, norms, religious ideals, and ideologies that forms the *macrosystem*.

Bronfenbrenner explains that within a macrosystem, the other levels of the model are strikingly similar from one person to another and truly only differ from one culture to the next; he describes it as though there were a cultural blueprint for each culture to which all settings and environments seem to adhere. He also suggests that one of the most important elements of this model is that it is the way in which the environments and the resulting interactions are perceived and experienced by the individual that really matter to the individual, rather than as they may exist in some “objective” reality. The issue of objectivity is further discussed in the section of this chapter on Socio-Constructivism. Bronfenbrenner also believed that there was a dynamic relationship between the individual and all of the settings and that each could influence and change the others.

The ecological model has only recently been applied to understanding sexual learning and behavior (Dreisbach, 2000; Somers & Surmann, 2005); although, it has been applied to understanding other health behaviors and issues of health promotion such as child abuse (Belsky, 1980), healthy, life-style choices (Winett et al., 1985), and health promotion (McLeroy, Bibeau, Steckler, and Glanz, 1988). Because it takes into consideration multiple realms of influence as well as the interactive nature of development, the ecological model approach to understanding human growth and development is appropriate for studying sexual learning and development during childhood and adolescence. Figure 2.1 illustrates the model and the constructs that were abstracted from the current literature concerning childhood and adolescent sexuality.

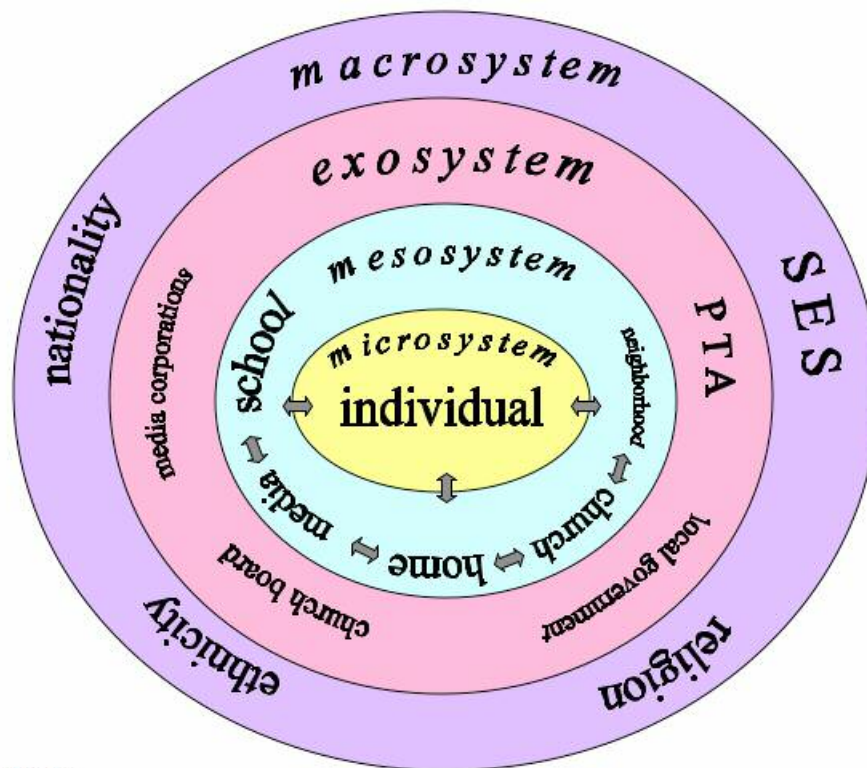


Figure 2.1

While all levels of the model impact learning and development, the proposed study is mainly concerned with the interactions of the individual and his/her immediate settings, or the *mesosystem*, as shown at the center of the figure above. The participants are represented as the individual at the microsystem level, and the stories told by the participants are the perceived experiences and interactions that occurred during childhood and adolescence within the various settings. A review of the literature has shown that sexual learning, as well as most other learning, occurs in the five environments shown in Figure 2.1.: neighborhood, church, home, media, school. Finally, because this study focuses on the experience of Latino males, a brief overview of the literature concerning Latino/as and teen sexual behaviors.

Sexual Learning

John Gagnon (1968), while writing some of the earlier works about sexual learning during childhood, acknowledges that it is the context in which sexual information is provided that is of importance more than, or at least as much as, what is learned. He describes a theoretical system of information exchange that is transactional in nature and that is affected by the experiences of children with respect to their parents, peers, and others. In this pioneering article, he acknowledges that some sexual learning may be explicit and some may be implicit and that often children may not have the linguistic capability to discuss sexuality.

In another ground breaking publication, *Children's Sexual Thinking*, Goldman and Goldman (1982) detail one of the first, large-scale studies to examine children's sexual knowledge and sexual understanding at various ages, and the processes of thought

children use to explain biological functions including their own growth and development. They found that sexual learning follows Piagetian cognitive development stages, that children will create their own explanations of biological and sexual functioning in the absence of adequate information sources, and that the home is the most cited source of information about sexuality.

While some studies have found that children and adolescents identify the parents or home as the most common source of sexuality information (SIECUS, 2002), others have found varying results. One study found that parents were never reported as the primary source of information and that peers and teachers were more often the primary source (Ansuini & Fiddler Woite, 1996). Another study on information about dating found that friends and sex-education teachers were the most common sources, adults the most reliable, and friends having the greatest influence (Wood, Senn, Desmarais, Park, & Verberg, 2002). Finally, one study found that college students were able to recall a variety of sources of sexuality information during childhood and adolescence, and friends were an important and useful source of information (Kallen, Stephenson, & Doughty, 1983).

Parents

A greater quantity of research and literature concerning sexuality information, sexual behaviors, and sexual attitudes and how they relate to communication in the home with parents and/or siblings exists than about any other possible source of information. In one study, the data did not support the idea that adolescents in families with greater communication were less likely to have premarital sex or more likely to use birth control

(Fisher, 1988). Other studies found that family communication did have an impact on sexual and contraceptive behaviors and that mothers were more apt to provide more information but that fathers who had healthy family communication were more involved in sexuality education (Baldwin & Baranoski, 1990; Pick & Palos, 1995). In a study focused on parental discipline, researchers found that the sharing of discipline responsibilities by both parents was more conducive to healthy sexual learning but that variation in the fathers' roles had greater import for daughters than sons (Bennett, 1984). In one study, having reservations about certain topics was more predictive of communication about sexuality than other family-related variables such as communication and relationships (Jaccard, Dittus, & Gordon, 2000). However, another study found that relationship and attitudinal variables were linked to sexual discussions with both parents (Rafaelli, Bogenschneider, & Flood, 1998). With respect to peers and parents, researchers found that peer norms were strongly moderated by parental influence and that teens named parents as the best source for sexuality information (Whitaker & Miller, 2000). When looking at race and ethnicity with respect to parents, black and Hispanic adolescents report parents as the primary sources of sexuality information (Miller, et al., 1998).

A great deal of research has focused on mother-teen communication concerning sexuality and much less on father-teen communication. One study found that mothers tended to underestimate their teens sexual behavior and that teens tend to underestimate their mother's disapproval of their engaging in sexual behaviors (Jaccard, Dittus, & Gordon, 1998). In a study of urban mother-daughter interactions about sexuality,

researchers found that the dyads tended to agree on the age at which topics were discussed and the frequency of discussions but differed on identifying the person who initiated the discussion, the comfort level, and whether more discussion was wanted (Fox & Inazu, 1980). One recent study found that daughters may actually benefit from receiving sex education from other close sources besides their mothers because daughters' antagonistic attitudes towards their mothers and daughters sexual advancement pre-empted discussions about sexuality (O'Sullivan, Meyer-Bahlburg, & Watkins, 2001). Whereas, another study found that in situations where mothers discussed sex with their teens the mothers tended to be older, less religious, and more educated (Lefkowitz, et al., 2003). In a study concerning gender differences in mother-teen communication about sex, researchers found that in mother-son conversations one person usually took on the role of questioner, and there was a mutuality of positive emotions in mother-daughter dyads (Lefkowitz, et al., 2002). When it comes to communication about HIV risk, researchers found that mothers living with HIV reported being more comfortable discussing topics related to sex and drugs than non-infected mothers (O'Sullivan, et al., 2005).

Much less research has focused on communication about sexuality between fathers and their children. However, one study found that male teens were more likely to discuss sex with their fathers than females but both were more likely to discuss sex with their friends than with their fathers (DiIorio, Kelley, & Hockenberry-Eaton, 1999). Finally, one study that looked at father-son communication found that the son's pubertal development, father's sex-based values, father's education, and father's communication

with his father accounted for 20% of the variance in father-son communications about sexuality (Lehr, et al., 2005).

Peers

Although several studies have shown that teens tend to cite peers as the number one source for sexuality information (Ansuini & Fiddler Woite, 1996; Kallen, Stephenson, & Doughty, 1983; Wood, Senn, Desmarais, Park, & Verberg, 2002), much less research has focused on this area. In a study about communication with parents and friends, researchers found that teens reported they were less likely to talk to friends than their mothers about sex but more likely to talk to friends than their fathers (DiIorio, Kelley, & Hockenberry-Eaton, 1999). Another study about communication between best friends about sex-related topics showed that conversations were more frequent between female best friends and with religious youth. The study also found that sexually active youth discussed topics more frequently, while abstinent youth were more likely to discuss abstinence with their best friends (Lefkowitz, Boone, & Shearer, 2004). Finally, a study about teenage partners' communication about sex found that a greater frequency of these types of conversations were associated with parent-teen communication and resulted in greater condom usage (Whitaker, Miller, May, & Levin, 1999).

Media

With a general increase in the amount of available media, and specifically the rise in popularity of the internet, the potential of the media as a main source of information about sexuality has grown, and the interactive ability of the internet makes seeking information more relevant to individuals. The American Academy of Pediatrics (2001)

has identified the media as playing a significant role in the onset of early sexual activity and state that teens rate the media second only to parents as the main source of sexual information; they write that sexual messages have become more explicit and that these messages contain misleading and inaccurate information. Jane Brown (2002) writes that available studies suggest the media has an impact on sexual behavior and that the media keep sexual behavior on public and personal agendas, reinforce a consistent set of sexual and relationship norms, and rarely depict sexually healthy and responsible role models. In a review of the current literature concerning media and youth, researchers found that only 12 out of 2522 documents addressed effects of the media on youth and report that little research has been done on other types of media besides television (Escobar-Chaves, et al., 2005).

One study on television viewing found that increased viewing of sexual stereotypes resulted in an increase in support of those stereotypes (Ward, 2002). Likewise, another study found that watching sex on television may hasten adolescent sexual initiation (Collins, et al., 2004). One group of researchers labeled the media as a kind of “super peer” when it came to sexual messages; this was especially true when it came to early developing girls (Brown, Halpern, & L’Engle, 2005). Another study that investigated television viewing found exposure to sexually oriented material was related to males’ expectations of a variety of sexual activities and females’ expectations of earlier sex in relationships (Aubrey, et al., 2003).

Magazines are another form of media that are popular with teens and young adults. Girls who frequently read teen-focused magazines tend to have a stronger

endorsement of male sexual stereotypes as do women and girls who read magazines for sexual advice; however, reading adult-focused women's magazines was associated with less support for male sexual stereotypes (Kim & Ward, 2004). With respect to males, one study found that lad magazines, which are sexually-oriented magazines geared towards young men such as Maxim in the U.S., often contain articles that are oriented towards sexual variety while the normative relational context of sex is usually depicted as within serious dating relationships (Taylor, 2005).

Surprisingly little research has focused on the internet as a source of sexuality information for children and adolescents. Most studies were more concerned with how to create effective health and sexuality education web sites as was the case with an article that suggested that health educators need to focus more on safer sex negotiation and improve interactive design features (Keller, La Belle, Karimi, & Gupta, 2004).

Schools

The majority of research concerning sexuality information in schools pertains to effective sexuality education; however, there are other factors associated with school and sexual behavior. Studies indicate that there has been an increase in the reports of adolescents receiving sexuality education at school (Lindberg, Ku, & Sonenstein, 2000). Kirby (2002) reported that school involvement and attachment were related to less sexual risk-taking and lower pregnancy rates, that schools with manifestations of poverty and that were disorganized were related to increased sexual risk-taking, and that school programs designed to increase school involvement and attachment have decreased sexual risk-taking and lowered teen pregnancy rates. A study that examined children's sexual

behaviors in school found sexual behaviors of a communicative nature to be the most common, followed by touching of breasts, buttocks, and genitals (Kaeser, DiSalvo, & Moglia, 2000).

Religion

The body of research concerning child and adolescent sexual behavior and sexual learning is greatly lacking in studies that have addressed religion and religiosity. Most studies of parents and peers do not report measurements of religiosity; however there are those that do find that it is associated with communication about sexually oriented topics. For example, one study found that religious parents were less likely to discuss sex and sexuality with their adolescents (Lefkowitz, et al., 2003). Another study found that religious youth were less likely to discuss sexual issues with their best friends (Lefkowitz, Boone, & Shearer, 2004). Regnerus (2005) found that parental public religiosity curbed the frequency of conversations about sex and birth control, as does parental religious salience.

Conflicting results have been reported on the relationship between religiosity and sexual attitudes and behaviors during adolescence. For example, a recent article described African-American, female adolescents who report higher religiosity were more likely to communicate with their peers, wait until they were older to initiate sexual behaviors, and were more likely to use a condom when they did become sexually active (McCree, et al., 2003). In contrast, an earlier study found greater religiosity was associated with less sexual activity and less frequent condom use for adolescents transitioning to college (Zaleski & Schiaffino, 2000). It is possible that the conflicting findings between these

studies are the result of gender or ethnicity factors, but this is not possible to determine from the published articles. When considering causal effect in relation to religiosity and sexuality during adolescence, traditional assumptions led the belief that more frequent church attendance and greater religiosity results in less permissive sexual attitudes and fewer sexual experiences; Thornton and Camburn (1989) argued and provided empirical evidence that the relationship is bidirectional: sexual behaviors and attitudes also effect church attendance and religiosity of adolescents.

Latino Culture

Latino culture may play an important role in the sexual learning experiences of children and adolescents. For Latinos who are second or third generation Americans, the degree to which they have acculturated into “mainstream” American society has been shown to increase their sexual risk-taking behaviors (Anshenesel, et al., 1998; Flores, et al., 1998). Marin, et al., (1993) has described acculturation as the degree to which individuals adopt the language, traditions, and values of their non-native environment. His research suggested that individuals who are further along in the acculturation process are more likely to take risks with drugs, gambling, sex, and other behaviors. Another study found that Latinos who spoke English and lived in neighborhoods that were less homogenous express increased risk behaviors (Upchurch, et al., 2001). In addition, there are certain cultural and religious beliefs, attitudes, and social norms that put Latina girls at high risk for pregnancy. These include religious beliefs against contraceptive use, a history and tradition of young mothers, and the process of acculturating to American culture (Baumeister, Flores, Marin, 1995; Brewster, 1994;

Flores, Eyre, & Millstein, 1998; Upchurch, et al., 2001). Another element of Latino culture that has an effect on behaviors and decision-making processes of Latina girls is “machismo.” Hispanic women often feel that they lack power in their relationships and are unable to negotiate with their partners concerning reducing sexual risk (Harvey, et al., 2002).

A Socio-Constructive Perspective

Socio-constructivist theory provides both a paradigm for the methodology of the research project and a framework for understanding how learning takes place. Egon Guba (1990), one of the more prominent figures in socio-constructivist writing, defines paradigm as “a basic set of beliefs that guides action, whether of the everyday garden variety or action taken in connection with a disciplined inquiry.” In contrasting constructivist theories with positivism, which assumes there is a “true” nature of things that can be measured objectively, Guba explains that the ontology, or the nature of what is able to be known, of constructivist theory is one in which “reality” is created and exists through multiple constructions, cultural and mental, that are experientially and socially built and have local and specific meanings. He also explains that the epistemology, or ways in which we attempt to learn about “reality”, are interactive in nature and that the researcher and participant interact with one another such that the findings of the research are “created” through processes that are dialectic in nature and result from a collaborative effort to interpret and explain meanings.

In developing a research design based upon socio-constructivist theories, an alternative methodological approach, known as naturalistic inquiry, is used that utilizes

an interactive and interpretive approach. Naturalistic inquiry is a qualitative method that is organic in nature, meaning that the process of inquiry that takes place between one researcher and one participant will be a unique experience. This type of inquiry is inherently subjective in nature and is influenced by the context in which the research is taking place. Naturalistic inquiry, in contrast with positivist methodologies, is not value-free and is interpretative in nature (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Because the guiding paradigm for this research project is socio-constructivist theory, the design of the project is qualitative, subjective, and interpretive and is focused on the interaction between the researcher and the participant.

In addition to guiding the research design, socio-constructivist theory is also the underlying theoretical framework for understanding the process and context of sexual learning. Prawat and Floden (1994) write that constructivist-learning theory is now a widely accepted theory of learning in which knowledge is actively constructed by the learner. They write that with this theory there exists a core set of assumptions that state that knowledge evolves through negotiation and is influenced by cultural and historical factors. They cite the work of John Dewey (1981) who theorized that the process of learning is both contextual and transactional, meaning that, as John Gagnon (1968) stated about sexual learning, the context in which learning occurs is of most importance, and the negotiation of information takes places between two or more people. Language plays a major role in this transactional process. Linguists such as James Wertsch (1991) have written about social language and how there are certain “socially shared cognitions,” which he defines as mental functioning that is socially situated; thus when studying these

processes researchers cannot attempt to remove the participants from their social and contextual settings. Likewise, Bruner (1987) writes that language and the rules of language play an important role in the ways in which individuals create meaning and “make sense” of the world around them. The proposed research project makes the same core assumptions about learning and the ways that individuals create meaning and the qualitative, interactive, and interpretive design of the project allows for the researcher to work with the participant to understand the processes of sexual learning.

Developing a Theoretical Model

The diagram shown in figure 2.2 represents a theoretical model of sexual learning that uses both an ecological approach to understanding growth and development and a socio-constructivist perspective. This model was developed using the principles of these theoretical frameworks and by using techniques of concept mapping and thought experiments. Concept mapping is a learning process that involves creating a visual representation of ideas and their relationships to one another. It allows learners to take complex ideas and break them down into simpler, easier to understand concepts and relationships (Novak & Gowin, 1984).

A thought experiment is a method of thinking through what might happen in specific situations when certain factors are involved. In performing a thought experiment, the researcher must take into consideration prior knowledge and experiences and their understanding of how processes occur and apply them to a certain situation or idea (Maxwell, 2005). In this situation, I considered previous experiences of hearing about individual’s experiences of sexual learning and took into consideration the ideas of

the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and socio-constructivist theory (Guba, 1990; Prawat & Floden, 1994). In addition, I took into consideration psycholinguistic theories concerning the ways that children learn the names of things (Bloom, 2002), and the role that language plays in thinking and learning (Bloom & Keil, 2001). By doing so, I was able to create the model that is represented in the diagram below (figure 2.2).

In this model, there are two main pathways of learning that occur, explicit learning and implicit learning. Explicit learning is a type of learning in which the information being conveyed is done so in a linguistic fashion, either written or verbally, and the learner is aware of the transactional process. Implicit learning, on the other hand, occurs through an experiential process in which the learner is not cognitively aware that knowledge is being accumulated (Alexander, Schallert, & Hare, 1991). Regardless of the pathway through which information is transmitted, the individual must then undergo cognitive processes through which that person creates meanings that are influenced by their cultural, religious beliefs and their experiences and prior knowledge (Guba, 1990; Prawat & Floden, 1994). In addition, each individual must undergo a process that involves rejecting or accepting this new information and can involve attempts to verify the information.

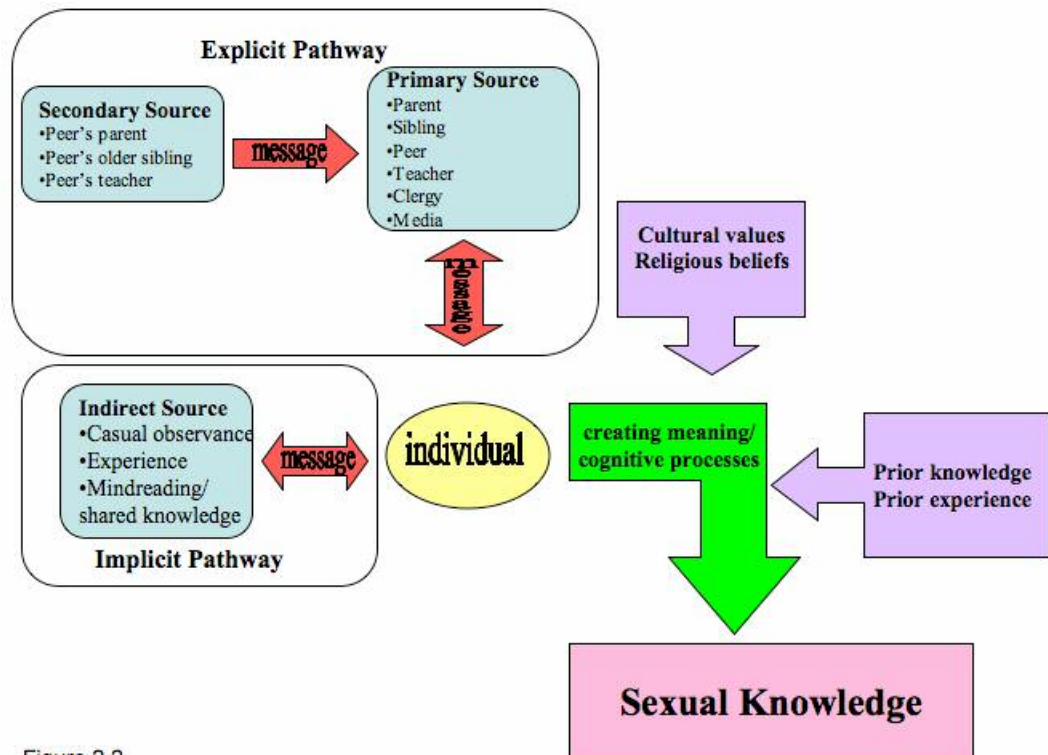


Figure 2.2

It is important to note that although a theoretical model has been provided for sexual learning, according to the theoretical framework supporting the methodology, the findings are emergent. This means that I will not attempt to make the findings “fit” into the model of sexual learning. Rather, I used the findings to develop a model that emerges from the research process, one that is created by the interactions between the participants and myself. The purpose of providing a theoretical model of sexual learning is to illustrate my prior knowledge and experiences going into the project.

Self-Reflection

In the discussion of socio-constructivist theory, I explained that using this paradigm means approaching the research from an acknowledged subjective point of view and that “true” objectivity does not exist. However, it is a standard tenet of scientific inquiry to reduce investigator bias as much as possible; moreover, a discussion concerning from whose subjective point of view the inquiry is being done is essential as is documentation about the personal and emotional experiences that can and will have an impact on the research study and findings. In *The Ethnographic Self*, Amanda Coffey (1999) writes, “fieldwork is personal, emotional, identity work.” The researcher has personal, emotional, and political reasons for doing the research and that writing about these reasons is important for both the researcher and for those who read about the research. In addition, Foley (2002) writes that using a reflexive and more narrative style of “ordinary writing” and storytelling will make the writing more engaging and hence more useful by making it more accessible. The research techniques being used in this project require that the researcher engage in writing “memos” about the research process as it is happening, including the thought processes that occur and the emotional experiences (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Therefore, it is necessary that I provide an overview of my own experiences and engage in writing that is self-reflexive throughout the dissertation.

I have been working in the field of sexuality education and research for twelve years. I began my career in the field of sexuality as a sexual health peer instructor as an undergraduate at the University of Texas at Austin. My own lack of sexual knowledge

and the experiences of teaching about sexuality to my peers ignited a passion for teaching about sexuality that continues to burn strong today. After completing my Bachelor of Science in Zoology, which provided me a strong biological foundation and research background rooted in traditional, empirical methodologies, I pursued a Master of Arts in Health Studies specializing in Sexuality Education at New York University. During this time, I worked at the HIV Center for Clinical and Behavioral studies at Columbia University. Both of these experiences contributed to my growing knowledge of sexuality and culture and introduced me to constructivist perspectives.

As a doctoral student at the University of Texas at Austin, I have taken numerous courses on qualitative methods, including a course on sexuality research and qualitative methods, in which I worked on projects similar to the one proposed here. During this time, I have learned and practiced interviewing techniques that are useful in sexuality research. Over the summer of 2003, I attended the Summer Institute on Sexuality and Culture at the University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands, where I was able to work closely with international scholars in the field of sexuality. From this experience, I was able to develop a more global perspective of sexuality and more fully understand the ways in which cultural influences affect societal and individual views of sexuality. As part of the Summer Institute, students were afforded the opportunity to work with one another and leading scholars to critique and brainstorm ideas for our individual research projects. I was able to gain valuable input on what was then only an idea for a research project from which I was better able to frame the current study into a constructivist perspective.

While pursuing my doctoral degree, I was a teaching assistant and assistant instructor for Child and Adolescent health courses, in which human sexuality was a large component, and for Human Sexuality courses. Through these teaching experiences, I learned a great deal about the sexual learning experiences of young people through discussions with my students and through their personal reflections in their assignments. In addition, I became a source of information for my students who came to me for information regarding sexual health in general and for advice about their personal sexuality.

On a more personal and political note, I was the result of an unwanted teen pregnancy and was raised in a town in which teen pregnancy rates are much higher than the national average. In addition, I identify as a gay man and this identity has impacted the ways in which I view the world and influenced my decision to study sexuality. I came of age during a time of crisis with the HIV/AIDS epidemic and experienced, firsthand, the results of this devastating disease on friends and lovers. I am a fierce proponent of comprehensive sexuality education and opponent of abstinence-only education; however, I support the philosophy of encouraging teens to delay sexual activity. My strong commitment to comprehensive sexuality education, the effectiveness of which has been consistently supported by research and evaluation, comes from a strong belief that individuals are best equipped to make appropriate and healthy decisions when they are provided all of the necessary information and problem-solving skills to do so.

Because of these experiences, I have developed a strong belief in a particular philosophy about sexuality education. I believe that sexuality education is a lifelong process that should be approached from a holistic perspective that focuses on the whole mind, body, and spirit rather than the more genitally-focused, medical, disease-prevention model currently used by most sexuality educators. I feel that it is important to focus on the positive aspects of sexuality, such as desire, intimacy, pleasure, as well as the potential consequences and responsibilities of being sexually active, i.e., commitment, pregnancy, disease, emotional involvement, etc. During the course of this study, I engaged in a constant struggle to keep my personal beliefs and philosophies about sexuality education from interfering with the research process, analysis, and interpretations of the results. At times, I found myself searching for “what was wrong” in the lives of these successful young men rather than searching for what made them succeed. It has only been by constant personal reflection and by the input and observation of friends, professors, and colleagues that I have been able to refocus on studying the lives of these young men without losing my personal vision and beliefs about sexuality education.

Summary

Rather than a traditional literature review, this chapter has provided a conceptual context from which the research design and philosophy has emerged. An overview of the ecological model provided a framework for the dissertation and explained how this model provides a framework for understanding how individuals interact in various environments. In addition, a review of the current research about sexual learning and

knowledge provide a context for this project in the sexuality research literature. From there, an explanation of socio-constructivist theory and how it relates to sexual learning was provided. This theory was used to provide a paradigm for the methodology and to provide a theoretical framework for understanding how sexual learning occurs. Using these theories and my own experiences researching sexual learning, I explained how a theoretical model was derived and provided an overview of the model itself; however, the methodology employed for this project is emergent in nature, meaning that the findings were used to develop a model rather than attempt to fit them into a theoretical model. Finally, a section on the ethnographic self allowed me to explore my own reasons for doing this work and explain how self-reflection will play a role in this dissertation.

Chapter 3

Gathering Stories of Sexual Learning

Introduction

The study consisted of in-depth, qualitative interviews with thirteen undergraduate, Latino males who were attending a large southwestern university. The decision to interview only males for this study was based on extensive reviews of the current literature. Most of the research on adolescent sexual issues has focused on the reproductive health issues of females; relatively little attention has been paid to males. The focus on girls and women is due to the financial and societal consequences of unwanted pregnancy that disproportionately effect women, which is supported by a culture that often does not hold males responsible for the consequence of their sexual actions. The double standard between males and females produced research and prevention efforts which sadly omit the experiences and needs of young men. In addition, births to mothers aged 17 and younger are disproportionately to Latina girls when compared to black and white girls. Because of this imbalance, I have chosen to study the childhood and adolescent sexual learning experiences of undergraduate, Latino males. This research project will add a unique perspective to the body of literature that will allow boys and men to be included in pregnancy prevention and adolescent sexuality education programs in the future.

Participants were self-selected volunteers recruited through human sexuality courses; course pertaining to Latino culture; student groups with large Latino

populations, and word of mouth. Each individual participated in two interviews, the first approx 2 hours in length, second about 1 hour in length, and the majority returned for a third to provide feedback on the data analysis. Participants received minimal gift certificates worth approximately \$50 (\$5 for the first interview, \$20 for the second, and \$25 for the third) to local businesses as incentive to participate in the study (see Appendix H – IRB Approval Letter).

Participants

Inclusion criteria for the study were as follow: self-identified as Latino; male; undergraduate; English-speaking; and native-born United States citizens. Ideally, one would study children and adolescents in order to understand the experiences and processes of learning of this age group; however, due to research restrictions as well as the sensitive nature of this topic, I chose to study individuals over the age of 18.

Recruitment and Screening

After the study was approved by the University of Texas at Austin Institutional Review Board, flyers (see Appendix C – Research Study Flyer) were distributed around campus and distributed to Latino interest groups listed with the University. I also sent announcements to courses and email lists related to sexuality and gender. In addition, I visited human sexuality classes and classes with a focus on Latino culture. During these visits, I provided an overview of the study and explained the time required for participation. In some of the classes, I passed around a sign-up sheet asking for names, email addresses, and phone numbers. I did not receive any phone calls from the posted flyers, nor did I have any students contact me after I visited their classes. All of the

participants for the study either responded to a mass email or were contacted because they had signed up during a class visit. I used the telephone script during the initial interview to screen participants (see Appendix D – Telephone Script; see Appendix F – Participant Information Sheet and Screener). In addition, it was explained that the interviews must be audio-recorded for purposes of transcription and that refusal to allow the interviews to be audio-recorded will make them ineligible for the study.

Informed Consent

When the participant arrived for the initial interview, the study was again explained in greater detail, and the participants signed consent forms (see Appendix A – Informed Consent). The interviews were audio recorded with the permission of the participants (see Appendix B – Permission for Audio Recording of Interview). The audio recordings were used for transcription purposes; for educational presentations at conferences and in the classroom; and for the dissertation defense.

All information obtained during the interviews was de-identified post-transcription. In the event that quotes are used, appropriate measures were taken to ensure that those individuals who were willing to have their voice used for such purposes have given explicit permission to do so. This was done by having the participants sign audio consent forms prior to the interview and after completion of the interview. Before the interview began, participants were asked to sign a consent form agreeing to be audio recorded for at the least the purposes of transcription (see Appendix B – Permission for Audio Recording of Interview). The first consent form only allows for the recording and not for the use of the recorded material. In addition, I explained that following the

interview the participants will be asked to agree or disagree to have their voice used for educational purposes. Once the final interview was completed, participants were asked to initial “Agree” or “Disagree” to the usage of the recorded material, as well as sign and date the form a second time. For participants who returned for a third interview during the analysis phase, this interview was not recorded.

Audio Recording

The initial and second interviews were audio recorded using a laptop computer. There were three reasons for choosing to audio-record these interviews. First, in order to focus on the dialogue that was taking place as part of the interview, it was important to minimize distractions due to note taking during the interview. The recording allowed me to direct my full attention to the participant and to the interview as it developed. Second, the recording ensured the accuracy of what the participant was said; the recordings were transcribed verbatim for coding and review purposes. Third, with the participants’ permission, I may choose to use snippets of the recording for purposes of presentation.

Confidentiality/Anonymity of Participants

It is important to note that these interviews were primarily concerned with the educational, both formal and informal, experiences of the participants with respect to their learning experiences concerning sex and sexuality. I did not ask questions about participants’ sexual experiences or behaviors; however, many experiences came up during the interview process either because this was the method in which the individual learned about some aspect of sexuality or because this was how that individual was able to confirm or refute some earlier learned bit of information.

In the event that the interview caused the participant to recall traumatic experiences, the interview would have been stopped in order to “check in” with the participant. At this point, I would have asked the participant if they are willing to continue. If so, the interview would have continued and I would have provided the list of available resources at the completion of the interview (see Appendix G – Debrief Form and Resource Information Sheet). If the participant had not wished to continue, I would have stopped the interview process and provided the participant with the list of available resources. Fortunately, it was not necessary to stop any of the interviews due to participant trauma or stress.

Participants who chose to allow their voice to be used for educational purposes were informed that, although their real names will not be used, they may be recognized by either their voices or descriptions of situations but that a reasonable effort to ensure confidentiality will be made, such as the removal of names of individuals and places. In addition, participants were asked to refrain from using full names of individuals when discussing previous experiences; if full names were used, they were edited in order to protect the confidentiality of the participant and anyone mentioned during the interview. Had any of the participants chosen not to allow their voice to be used or if I forgot to ask them whether or not their voice could be used, the audio recordings were destroyed following transcription. Following the completion of the second interview, participants were asked if they would like to return in three to six months to participate in the analysis portion of the research project. This was recorded on the original Personal Info Sheet and Screener (Appendix H), and those participants were contacted at a later date to schedule

that interview. Following the second interview, each participants was debriefed and a list of resources was provided (Appendix G – Debrief Form and Resource Information Sheet).

All transcripts, notebooks, audio recordings, and information sheets were kept in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office in Belmont Hall. For those who agreed to allow their voice and/or image to be used in presentations of the data, the recordings remain on CDs in a locked filing cabinet. If their voices are used for presentation purposes, efforts to conceal their identity will be made, e.g., de-identifying the data, such as editing to remove the names of people and places per University of Texas Institutional Review Board Policies. Any and all materials were and will continue only be accessible by the principal investigator and the faculty advisor. The original information sheets which linked participants to their interview data were destroyed.

Initial Interview

The interview consisted of a dialogue between the researcher and the participant. The process was based upon the techniques known as natural inquiry during which the interviewer guides the dialogue in a semi-structured interview (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). An interview guide was used to ensure that necessary topics were covered (see Appendix E – Interview Guide). In addition, I conducted the interview from a socio-constructivist perspective in which the participant was asked to explain all terms, phrases, and experiences. Using this perspective reduces researcher bias by decreasing the interpretations and inferences made by the researcher during analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

In order to facilitate remembering of experiences, a number of recall devices were used to help trigger memories of the participants such as naming childhood friends, describing childhood experiences, naming significant teachers, etc. One criticism of this type of memory recall research is that participants may have biased memories or interpretations of certain events; however, because the interviews were conducted from a socio-constructive perspective, it is these interpretations that are of primary interest.

At the conclusion of the interview, a second interview was scheduled that was at least one week and no more than two weeks after the initial interview. The purpose of this was to allow enough time for reflection but not so much time that emerging memories are lost. During the interval, participants were given small notebooks and asked to write down any experiences that were remembered. They were asked to return the notebook when they returned for the second interview.

Second Interview

During the interval between the first and second interviews, the first interviews were transcribed and the transcriptions were reviewed and/or the recording of the first interview was reviewed. During the first part of the second interview, I asked the participants if there was any additional information they wanted to provide. Next, I asked the participant to recount some of the previous stories about their experiences as a validity measure. Finally, I allowed the participant to describe any recalled memories that may have arisen during the intervening time, and, in case notes were taken in the notebook, the participant was given the chance to describe those recalled experiences. During this part of the second interview, the researcher and the participant went through

the notebook that was given to the participant during the first interview together. This notebook served as an aid for the participant in recalling past experiences; however, most of the participants did not write anything down in the notebook or did not bring the notebook with them.

Initial Interviews

The first 2 – 4 interviews were immediately reviewed to determine any difficulties that were experienced were noted, either concerning the interview process or about technical problems that occurred. This allowed me to make changes in the interview protocol or make technological adjustments. Prior to the implementation of any of these changes, they were evaluated and discussed with my advisor. Had any of the changes been determined to result in significant change in the protocol, they would have been forwarded to the IRB as amendments. However, the changes made were minor and mostly dealt with technological issues, so submitting amendments to the IRB was not necessary. The interview data generated from these participants was included in the final data.

Data Analysis

The transcribed interviews were carefully scrutinized and analyzed using methods as described in Grounded Theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). This process begins with a line-by-line analysis; as categories emerged they were labeled and defined. Similar categories were collapsed under larger overarching, common themes in the interviews.

Once categories were created, a more focused process of directed analysis was undertaken during which recurring themes were sought out and analyzed in the

transcriptions. If new themes emerged during the subsequent interviews, new categories were developed using the same process. After each interview was coded, the participants were asked to return, and we went through the transcription for each individual's interview to allow them to provide feedback on the codes assigned to different portions of their interview. The feedback was taken into consideration and the categories were adjusted accordingly.

Validity Measures

1. How did I ensure that I recruited a diverse sample and enough participants?

Volunteers were recruited via flyers and word of mouth not via a random sampling procedure; therefore, the sample was not necessarily diverse or representative. However, the convenience sample was made up of self-identified Latino males who were English-speaking, American students who share a common macrosystem, which Bronfenbrenner describes as very similar from person to person within that macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). I interviewed individuals until the data reached a saturation point, in this case thirteen participants, when no new information was being presented.

2. How do I know what the participants say in the interview is true? First, by using socio-constructivism as the framework for this dissertation, it is the meanings and interpretations of the participants' experiences that are of importance. In addition, the researcher and participant work together to create the data by making meaning through dialogue (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Second, the participants were asked to keep a notebook of thoughts and memories for 1-2 weeks following the first interview and were

asked to return to provide follow-up and make additions and changes. Third, I asked the participants to repeat stories about their experiences to ensure as a validity check.

3. How do I know that I did not bias the results during the analyses? By asking the participants to return and comment on the emerging themes and categories, I allowed the participant to be part of the analysis process. In theory, any biases that I bring into the analysis were identified by the participant at this time and corrected. By asking the subjects to participate in the data analysis process, the participant and I were again creating meaning through our joint interpretation of the data. In addition, I engaged in the practice of self-reflection to identify and minimize any potential biases on my part; this is further discussed in the Results section. I utilized journaling and discussions with my advisor and colleagues to reflect on the research process. I discovered that it was a constant struggle to retain as much of an unbiased point of view as possible while continuing to be aware that my involvement of the study and interpretation of the results was a collaborative and subjective process between me and the participant. Through the use of these self-reflecting techniques, I realized that I was often attempting to look for what was wrong as opposed to analyzing the data from an unbiased perspective; this allowed me to refocus my analysis and interpretations on the successes of the young men in this study.

Retention

In order to ensure that participants were willing to remain in the study for the duration, I explained to them prior to the start of the initial interview that I was asking for

a commitment to participate in at least two and possibly three interviews and the time commitment necessary for participation. They were told that if they feel they will not be able to make this commitment then they should consider not participating in the research project. In addition, I provided gift certificates equaling approximately \$50 for all three interviews to local businesses as an incentive for each interview, including the time spent providing input during the data analysis.

In the one case where a participant was not able to return for a second interview, my advisor and I decided to request a telephone interview. By interviewing this participant over the phone, I was able to interview all thirteen participants at least twice. Nine of the thirteen participants returned to provide feedback during the analysis portion of the project.

Summary

The procedures and methods detailed in this section of the proposal met the goals of the project while ensuring that the confidentiality was maintained. Participants either responded to mass emails or signed up for the study during one of the class visits I made when seeking participants for this study. Informed consent was obtained prior to participation in the study as well as permission audio recording and permission was asked to use the recordings in presentations of the data. I interviewed all thirteen participants during the data collection phase and interviewed nine during the data analysis process. I worked to ensure the validity of the research by asking participants to keep a notebook between interviews, to repeat stories during the second interview, and asking for their feedback during the analysis.

Adopting a socio-constructivist framework allowed the participant and me to engage in a dialogue through which we created meaning out of their various and numerous experiences of sexual learning; it is these interpretations and meanings that emerged as the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Techniques and methods of Grounded Theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) were used to search for themes and eventually create categories for the data. These categories were used to tell a story of Latino males sexual learning during childhood and adolescence that is the resulting product of this research project.

Chapter 4

Describing the Sexual Learning Experiences

Introduction

A former student, who had taken my human sexuality class the previous semester, was the first person to respond to my request for volunteers and the first person interviewed for this study. The existence of a prior relationship with the participant for this first interview proved to be a positive experience for me for a number of reasons. First, I was acutely aware that I had to conduct the interview in a manner that allowed the participant to relay his experiences as he remembered them, not as he wanted me to hear them. Second, because I had some knowledge of his experiences from class, I had to ensure that the interview process facilitated the complete telling of his stories rather than a partial account for which I would be left to “fill in” any incomplete information. Third, my comfort level with this particular individual allowed me to deal with the technical issues that arose during the interview and allowed me to make changes and adjustments for the following interviews.

At the time of the interview, David H. was twenty-one years old and a junior in college. When I questioned him about his interest as a participant in the study, he told me that he enjoyed my class and wanted to help me out, but more importantly that he was concerned about the high rates of teen pregnancy in the Hispanic population of Texas. He explained how he felt there was a lack of education among young Latinos and Latinas who were not being provided the information they needed to make good, healthy decisions about their sexual behavior. David H. was worried that many young people in

his home community were not being given the opportunity to live up to their full potential, academically and financially, because they were having children at very early ages forcing them to drop out of high school for work in order to support their family rather than attending college.

During the next ninety minutes, David H. and I worked together to reconstruct his experiences learning about sex and sexuality during his childhood and adolescence. He began by describing his hometown in the Rio Grande Valley, an area in South Texas that comprises small and medium sized towns along the Texas-Mexico border close to the Rio Grande delta in the Gulf of Mexico. He painted a picture of a small town with a large immigrant population, where Spanish and English are spoken interchangeably, in a conservative area of the state that is heavily influenced by the Catholic Church and is a place where everyone knows everyone else. He told me about his family, his friends, and his experiences in school. David H. described how he navigated a complex and confusing sexual world and how he created an understanding of sexuality that was personally meaningful out of the confusing and often contradictory messages about sexuality he received from a variety of sources. It was this active construction of sexual knowledge, through which David H. was able to make decisions about his personal sexual health, that made him successful in terms of avoiding unplanned pregnancies and achieving academic success.

Over the next four months, I heard similar stories of sexual knowledge building from twelve additional men – all of whom were undergraduates, self-identified as Latino, and were born in Texas. The participants and I engaged in a concerted effort to

reconstruct their memories of sexual learning into detailed and cohesive stories. I found myself remaining in a constant state of alertness during the interviews in an attempt to tease out the full explanations of their experiences while simultaneously and consciously limiting the influences of my experiences in filtering the stories of the participants. At the same time, my own personal experiences and the sequence in which I learned about sexuality as a child informed the interview process in a way that gave me a structured approach. I allowed my experiences to inform the direction of the interview without allowing my experiences to interpret the words of the men in the study. I was able to accomplish this by repeatedly asking the participants to provide as much detail in their recollections and define their own words and phrases as much as possible. I also recorded my thoughts and reflections throughout the interview process in order to retain an appropriate perspective while reconstructing their stories.

Through this process, the participants and I were able to weave together their memories and experiences into stories of their sexual learning experiences. In order to make sense out of a multitude of hours of dialogue, the interviews were transcribed and coded, resulting in approximately 1000 typed interview transcript pages and an initial list of hundreds of codes. The codes were systematically organized and collapsed into common experiences and restructured into a common story. In this chapter, I will describe the participants, narrate the typical sexual knowledge learning experience, illustrate the sexual knowledge building process, and discuss the participants' reactions to questions about current rates of teen pregnancies, prevention efforts, and this research project.

Description of Sample

Thirteen young men, between the ages of 19 and 24, participated in two in-depth interviews. All of these men self-identified as Latino, spoke fluent English, and were born in Texas. Twelve of the men identified as Mexican or Mexican-American, and one identified as Nicaraguan. In retrospect, I would have limited participation in the study to individuals who identified as Mexican or Mexican-American. Because the inclusion criteria stated that participants must identify as Latino, I felt that I could not exclude this man from the study; interestingly, his learning experiences were not notably different or unusual when compared to the other participants. In addition, all of the participants were enrolled as undergraduates at the University of Texas; all had excelled academically in high school and were involved in extracurricular activities.

The majority of the men identified English as their primary language; however, two learned Spanish prior to learning English. Even if they did not consider themselves bilingual, they lived in households and communities where Spanish and English were both spoken. The participants hailed from across the state from a variety of rural and urban settings; most identified their town, city, or community as being majority Hispanic. The participants came from a variety of different family settings, including living with both biological parents and siblings, living in blended families with stepparents and step and half siblings, and living in extended families with grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins living under the same roof. All except one of the men who participated in the study described some religious influence, Christian and mostly Catholic, on their household and lives, generally meaning anything within the range of sporadic to regular church attendance to having a member of the clergy in their family. The one exception

claimed to have had no religious influence at his home, but he did state that his grandparents were very religious.

Sexual Learning Experiences

The typical experience of sexual learning during childhood and adolescence for the men who participated in this study was a continuous, ongoing, and complex process in which they had to piece together a great deal of information, often conflicting, from a variety of sources, some less trustworthy than others. Over the course of their childhood and adolescent years, the men in this study were able to make enough sense from this information and their personal experiences to construct a body of sexual knowledge that allowed them to make decisions about their sexual behaviors during their childhood and adolescent years. From an outcome perspective, all of the young men who participated in this study can be considered success stories, meaning that they avoided unwanted pregnancies, prevented sexually transmitted infections, transitioned to becoming sexually active adults, and achieved academic success to the point of pursuing a college education. The following section is a general description of the sexual learning experiences of these men in a chronological and developmental order.

During early childhood, the home and the family was the most common and consistent source of sexuality information. Casual nudity in the home and/or showering with parents or siblings was often the first memory recalled during the interviews. Jeff D., 21, told me about his experiences showering with other family members.

Well you know, well like I would, up to I guess—I don't know how old I was—my mom would bathe me, or she'd take me in the shower and bath me. But I don't know how old I was by then. I was probably like, I don't know, three or four, something like that. But other than that, I mean me

and my sister being bathed together, there wasn't really any—I was at the point where I got—when I was older and like I'd walk around you know just wearing boxers on. I was in better shape then. I don't do that now.

As young boys, the men remembered the use of pet names or baby talk for male and female anatomy; although, mothers were remembered as the primary source of information at this age. They recalled learning more words for male anatomy (their own anatomy) than for female anatomy.

The men recalled parents, usually mothers, as being the providers of explanations and clarifications of misunderstandings at an early age. David. H. remembered an experience from when he was about eight years old during which he and his mother had a conversation about menstruation and childbirth. He and his mother were in the car and she was complaining about having cramps. David did not understand what she meant, so he asked for an explanation. He described how his mother told him that for a few days every month she gets pains and then she starts to bleed. He then remembered her asking if he knew where babies came from and he told her that they came out of the butt. She then told him that they did not come from the butt instead they came out of the place where the woman pees. David asked if he came out of that place and his mother explained that he did not because they had to cut open her belly to get him out but that most babies came out where the woman pees.

At other times, parents were remembered as giving false information or giving mythological explanations. These were often confusing and frightening for the participants. These explanations ranged from the expected and typical, such as when Super A., 21, asked his mother “where babies come from”, and she responded by telling

him, “the bird brings the baby” to the more uncommon such as 22 year-old Ryan H.’s story of how his mother told him that if he had sex when he was too young that his penis would fall off.

In addition to memories of instances in which parents spoke to the men about sexuality, they all recalled experiences surrounding their parents’ sexual behaviors. Several of the men recalled hearing his parents or other family members engaging in sexual intercourse. Gonzo F., 22, remembered family gatherings at which the number of people staying in one household was large enough that he and other young family members slept on the floor in the same room where adults, who had been drinking alcohol on these occasions, slept in a bed. He described how the children in the room would often hear “noises” coming from the bed and that they knew that these were noises associated with sexual behavior; he recalled that he and the other children did not understand what sex entailed but knew the noises were sexually-related. Some of the other men, those whose parents were divorced or who were raised in single-parent households, recalled times when a parent would go out on dates; they expressed that they understood that these dates were of a sexual nature, even if they were not completely sure what that meant.

Several men in the study reported engaging in sex play during early childhood, the preschool through the early elementary school years. They often described this as playing house, playing doctor, or engaging in a game of “show me yours, I’ll show you mine.” In one telling of sex play, one young man related his experience reenacting what he and a female friend had seen on television.

Mark M., 23, told me a story about his babysitter's daughter who would often accompany the babysitter when his mother went out. While she was over, Mark M., who was around five at the time, and this young girl, who happened to be a few years older than him, would read books, play, and watch television. One night, they happened to be watching *Godzilla* in which there was a scene where a man and a woman kissed passionately. Mark M. remembered the girl asking him if he wanted to try kissing so they imitated what they had seen on the television. They made it clear to each other that no one was to know about what they had done; years later when they were reunited as adolescents at a restaurant they recalled the experience together.

Throughout their childhood and teen years, the men remembered learning about sexuality from watching television and movies with their families in their homes. Many times, their experiences watching television helped them understand some things they did not before. Danny R., 20, recalled times when his parents wanted him to sit down and watch shows with them.

Danny R.: ...Discovery Channel, how they'll show like the process of a baby, like starting from a cell all the way. Like they would sit down, "Oh, let's watch this." I mean I guess they kinda knew, they just told me what they could know, but then I guess they wanted me to learn it but maybe they wanted me to learn it. 'Cause like my parents are conservative but at the same time they're like, they understand how things change, like how I said before.

One common experience for the participants was to have movies and television shows censored by one of their parents, most often their mothers. While recalling his

first experience learning about ejaculation, Beau J., 24, described an experience when he and his parents were watching a movie:

Beau J.: Probably through some sort of movie I saw. I'm trying to think of when I first heard of it or saw it. And yeah, I think it was in some movie. It was some movie we were watching. It was through video and we were watching it with my mom and my dad, or my mom. When we were watching a movie and they were having sex or something, we knew to cover our eyes. It just got to the point where we'd cover our eyes.

Chris: At some point did she tell you to cover your eyes?

Beau J.: All the time. She would tell us to cover our eyes or turn away. Even now, if we're watching a movie and there is a sex scene, I just kind of feel weird. I don't exactly know what I should do. I remember it was a movie. My uncle has this video store going, so it was some movie we wanted to see. We would get movies for free so we'd get like three or four every week. I know it was rated R and I remember seeing that, but I don't remember what movie. I don't even remember if my brother and sister were in the room or not.

As they got older, the men remembered learning that what they saw on television and in the movies was not always a true depiction of the real world. For some, such as Ryan H., 22, this was a difficult lesson, especially when it came to dating and meeting girls. Ryan H. recalled spending a great deal of time watching movies with his mother, and, although she told him that life was not like the movies, he developed an unrealistic view of dating and had to learn through experience that life was very different than the movies and television.

On an interesting note, four participants remembered similar experiences of sexual learning while watching *Look Who's Talking*, a movie in which an adult actor narrates the “thoughts” of an infant character. This specific experience is very likely

generation specific but it is quite possible that other movies and television shows have and will have a similar influence on other generations.

Other family members played a role in their sexual learning experiences, either within the participant's own home or on visits to the homes of family members. Sometimes this was an older sibling or cousin who was more sexually experienced. In one exchange, Al J., 19, recalled an experience during which his older sister explained what a condom was.

Chris: What other kinds of stuff did she tell you? Do you remember?

Al J: I can't remember exact things. Well you know I remember me being like I'd go into her room and just look around and stuff. I saw a condom wrapper. It was a little silver wrapper.

Chris: How old were you?

Al J: And I went in and took it. I was probably about I'd say 9 or 10. And I went in and took and I was like "What's this?" She said ____, she's like, she put me back and was like "Don't be going through my stuff." I was like "Sorry I just want to know what it was." She was like "This is what a guy puts on his thing when they're gonna do it." And then she explained to me what it was and I was like "Well why do you got it then?"

Chris: So what else did she explain to you about it? What did she say it was –

Al J: Whenever it gets up they're gonna get ready to do it he puts it on. She didn't tell me exactly what it was meant for but she just told me it was just to put it on.

Cousins, specifically cousins similar in age, played a major role in the lives of many of the participants when it came to the sharing of information about sexuality.

Viewed as someone between a family member and a peer, cousins were often the ones

who introduced the participants to sources of information, such as pornography, told sexual jokes, and engaged in information sharing with the participants. John M., 21, told me about his experiences with his cousins when they gave him alcohol for the first time and one cousin showed him pornography on the internet. In another example of how cousins were significant, John J., 21, related to me a story about sharing information with a female cousin of his.

John J.:

The girl cousin I was close to. I think because we spent so much time in the summer we would definitely talk about sex because her mom wasn't very forthcoming with all the sex conversation. I don't remember how we got started talking about sex, but once we did she'd ask random questions and I would answer what I knew. I think a lot of her friends - my friends weren't anywhere near sexually active like I'm talking making out or just that kind of things like that and I think some of her friends were. So, I would provide the data and she would provide actual examples of stories from her friends. That's when - every summer we'd get together and we'd kind of talk about whatever or during Christmas we'd get together and during Thanksgiving we'd get together -

Outside of the home and in informal settings such as the playground, neighborhood, and the school bus, the men remembered exchanges they had with peers; in some instances they would be the ones to provide information while at other times the peers would be the providers. Peers were not usually regarded as the most reliable sources of information and at times were judged as dishonest when relaying stories of their own sexual experiences. The men recounted stories they were told by peers about sexual activity, gossip about others' sexual activity, jokes of a sexual nature, or being the object of name-calling. Much of the time, they reported not really understanding what was being said and that their peers often used slang terms for anatomy, masturbation, and

sexual activities that he had not heard before. Because they could not risk being singled out as naïve, they would pretend to understand what was being said and laugh along with the group.

David H., 21, relates the following story on how he felt his peers were not always the most reliable source of information.

For the most part, they all claimed to have had sex. I know now that they weren't having sex. Just, I guess trying to be the bigger guy. Just trying to tell the sex story. I mean, knowing probably something they had either got from either watching porn or seeing like magazines or something, like that but, um, it was just like this talk like he was with this girl or something like that. Like when you think back it was obviously something made up 'cause I mean he had his parents' car and he took her out on a date. We were in like fifth grade. Come on.

Peers were also the most likely to tell sexual jokes or to make fun of the participants or other individuals. The jokes they told were often about masturbation or sexual activity; however, the guys often remembered not understanding what the joke was about or not understanding certain terms or words. In fact, it was not uncommon for the participants to have retold the joke to their parents or other adults, not understanding the joke was of a sexual nature, and being admonished for telling the joke. The negative reaction from the adults caused them to realize the sexual nature of the joke often prodding them to seek an explanation from an older sibling or peer.

Several of the men recalled experiences in which their peers made fun of them because they did not understand these sexual jokes or discussions. They also remembered being ridiculed for their lack of sexual experience, and some recalled ridiculing peers who knew less or were less experienced than they were.

As they reached puberty and began to experience the physical changes associated with the transition from childhood to adulthood, they recalled experiences during which their parents, usually their fathers this time, had another version of “the talk” with them.

When I asked Gonzo F., 23, to tell me about his first memories of learning about sex, he told me a story about how his father and mother both gave him different versions of “the talk.” When talking about his father, Gonzo F. said,

And I just remember my dad having a talk with me... I think he walked in on me while I was peeing, or I don't remember. I think he walked in on me and he saw that I had pubic hair and it was just like oh wow. He was like shit. I just remember him being, not shocked, more like damn it, I have to do something now.

And I remember him a couple of weeks later it was like here, he sat me down and he was like, and I don't know why he used this but he busted out a condom and a Playboy magazine and he's like this is where this goes and this is a woman. I could tell he was shaky on a lot of stuff but he was like you need to know this he said because you're old enough. He's like apparently you're going through puberty and this is what's going to happen and I don't want you to bring home somebody pregnant, you need to finish school.

Gonzo F. immediately followed this with a story about his mother's version of “the talk”, which had a similar overall message but told in a different way. Gonzo F. said,

And then I guess he told my mom because the very next day my mom had the opposite kind of talk where it's like okay, this is what women think of men, this is what, she had this horrible, her version of it. And, of course, they're divorced at the time. She had her version of this is what you need to do and this is how it is. But she was also kind of shaky on it. She was just saying you better never bring anybody home pregnant, that's all I want to tell you. She's like you better finish school and that's all there is to it.

The participants appreciated their parents' attempts at preparing them for puberty and adulthood but often felt these talks came too late. The majority of the men recalled

learning about ejaculation either after experiencing a wet dream or during a masturbation session, which was often discovered accidentally. David H., 21, told me this story about showering, masturbation, and his first ejaculatory experience:

I remember my father always told me whenever I showered to make sure I cleaned myself, to make sure I cleaned my penis pretty much. So, one day I was just cleaning my penis I guess, and it eventually felt good. And I guess, um, it wasn't my first erection but it was definitely one of the first times I had an erection in the shower. One of the first times when I was cleaning myself and I got an erection. It was definitely one of the first times I was cleaning myself and got an erection and, um, I remember just continuing to clean myself. I had soap and everything. Eventually, it was feeling really good and just I guess and just finishing and um...I ejaculated and I remember freaking out because I had never seen anything that color come out. And, um, not sure what to do. I didn't want to go my parents and tell them. I had never been to my parents, actually, and, um, I didn't do it for a couple of...actually, I waited like a week or so and I didn't do it. I figured if I got sick or anything I'd tell my parents. I remember waiting awhile and thinking if anything, if I start to feel weird in anyway then I'll tell my dad. um, a week went by and I felt great. I figured that it wasn't hurtful, so I did it again.

In addition to reporting instances in which they felt unprepared and at times frightened by some of the physical changes occurring within their own bodies, they also remembered not being prepared for the changes their female peers and classmates were experiencing. Most of the participants reported learning about menstruation because a girl at school or in the neighborhood had started her period and he had seen or heard about blood on her clothing. Even those who were told about menstruation from a parent or teacher were perplexed by the explanation that women bleed once a month. Because they associated bleeding with cuts and pain, they were only able to understand the experience of menstruation as an injury that happened to girls and women.

In late middle school or early high school, the men remembered being exposed to pornography for the first time. This experience often occurred in a group setting with peers or same-sex cousins. Usually, one member of the group would have access to a cable channel, such as Cinemax or Playboy, or an x-rated pornography video belonging to his father or older brother. In some instances, the other boys would engage in masturbation while watching the pornographic material while the young man was there. Perhaps not surprisingly, they recalled gaining a considerable amount of “real world” sexual knowledge such as what it really meant to “have sex”, different types of sexual activity (oral, anal, vaginal), and the names of sexual positions.

Super A., 21, recounted a story where he was with a group of his friends in his neighborhood in Mexico; he was usually the youngest with this group of friends. They showed him pornographic shows on television and pornographic magazines. Gonzo F., 23, told me about how he and his friends kept porno magazines hidden in public places and would meet to look at them together.

Gonzo F: Of course every typical kid’s or every boy’s thing was one of your friends had magazines so you would find a special little hiding place or for them or we all meet and just like flip through magazines and check out what was in there.

I think the little location we had was a couple of blocks down. It was kind of an old, beat up baseball field and it was underneath one of the benches. One of my friends had a big old stash of magazines that we would go to those. My dad never held back his little collection, he had a monster Playboy collection and it was just right there in the restroom. So I remember going through that too.

Although other forms of media were not mentioned as often as television and movies for learning about sexuality, several participants recalled having access to instructional media from which they felt they learned some aspect of sexuality. David H., 21, talked about an experience he had when he found an instructional video his sister had hidden in her closet. He said that he learned about sexual techniques and positions from this video. Others turned to find books such as the *Kama Sutra* or *The Joy of Sex*, usually found hidden somewhere in their parents' bedroom. Most of the participants did not report using the internet to search for things they did not understand or wanted to learn more about; however, several said that since they had come to college they use the internet a great deal more for seeking information.

Around the same time they remembered being exposed to various forms of pornography and other sources of information, the participants recalled some type of formal sexuality education at school. For the most part, the class was part of a larger class such as a health class or biology class. The information they were given was in very technical and medical terms that many of the guys found useless and often considered a joke by his peers. Many of the guys reported that they felt the classes used scare tactics to make them afraid of having sex, including showing pictures of diseased genitalia. Condoms and other forms of contraception were rarely discussed. In one of the rare cases where condoms were not only shown but a demonstration was given, Al J., 19, told a story about two health educators, one male and one female, who came to his school to give a sex education course. Below is our exchange.

Al J.: And they had like a class like in 7th grade that they'd take us out of gym class and we'd have to go to like sex ed somewhat.

- Chris:* What did they tell you about that?
- Al J.:* The main things I remember about it was that they had like big wooden penises and we'd have to open the condom up and put the condom over it. The motivation for us to do it right is they'd give us like a Snickers bar. I was like okay I'll go now, open it.
- Chris:* So they taught you how to do it. So you actually had to like open the condom up and put it on there? How did that make you feel?
- Al J.:* Embarrassed kind of because were in the front of the class. Everyone had to go but still when you do it they'd be laughing at you.

The person who taught the class could vary from a science teacher, to a coach, or even someone from an outside agency as in the case described above. Some of the guys found the person who taught the class to be a very supportive and influential person, especially if they gave the students permission to ask about things. Ryan H., 22, described a teacher to whom he became very close because this teacher allowed him and the other boys in his all-boys, private school ask any question they wanted about sexuality. Later, while in college, Ryan H. returned to his hometown to talk with this teacher when he and his girlfriend had a pregnancy scare.

In high school, when the men began dating girls, they recalled getting a second version of "the talk" about sexual activity, usually from his father. John M., 21, and Beau J., 24, recalled being told to "use a condom" or "use protection". Gonzo F., 23, David H., 21, remember being told that they should wait until they were married to have sex. However, most of the guys reported hearing one message when they were younger, usually about waiting, and another when they were older, "use a condom."

Around this time, parents were remembered as providing contradictory and judgmental information. This experience often left these young men feeling confused, especially in situations where they felt they were behaving in a responsible manner. Twenty-three year-old Mark M. told me how his mother often threatened him with the punishment of being kicked out of the home if he were to engage in sexual intercourse. Eventually, Mark M. had a pregnancy scare with a high school girlfriend and his mother responded with anger and contempt that left a rift in their relationship that had yet to fully heal.

In another story, Danny R., 20, related an incident in which his mother burst into his room, screaming at the top of her lungs, waking him up early on a Saturday morning. Once he gained full consciousness, he was able to understand what was wrong; she had found a package of condoms in his jeans while doing laundry. While Danny R. felt as though he was doing the right thing by having condoms and using them, his mother responded by becoming upset and asking him how he could be so irresponsible. These types of confusing messages often left the participants trying to understand what “responsible” behavior entailed.

Participants also remembered many instances in which they received mixed messages from their parents. This could come in the form of one parent providing an inadequate or incomplete explanation. For example, in the story above with Danny R. and the condoms in the jeans pocket, his mother responded by yelling and making accusations of being irresponsible. Danny told me that later that day his father came to talk to him

and told him he was proud because he was becoming a man. His father told him to use condoms every time he had sex.

All of the men except for one, reported experiences learning about sexuality from church or getting religious messages from their parents. Generally speaking, the messages they received were about waiting to have sex until they were married, that homosexuality was sinful, and that abortion was a sin. They reported having a change in beliefs as they grew older and became sexually active themselves. They also changed their views on issues such as homosexuality and abortion as they and their peers had experiences with both of these issues.

As they got older, the men reported that they often considered their parents to be the trust worthiest, and they felt that their parents provided honest information that was in their best interest. Some of the men remembered their parents giving permission to them to ask about things related to sexuality. Mark E., 21, told me about a time when his father told him that he if ever wanted to have sex before marriage that he should be careful and to come to him if he had any questions, needed condoms, or ever needed help.

Perhaps not by coincidence, the men recalled having their first sexual experiences around the same point in time that their parents began talking to them about sexual responsibility. Several of the guys reported attempts to prepare themselves for their first sexual experiences by practicing with condoms and talking with their girlfriends about becoming sexually active. Deuce D., 20, told me about the time he decided he wanted to try putting on a condom. He went to a corner store close to his house after school and purchased a box of condoms, which he had to ask for at the counter. He was nervous

about buying the condoms because he lived in a small town and people tended to talk; he was also worried about getting caught with the condoms by his parents and having to explain. When he got home, he opened the package, took out a condom, and rolled it down his penis; when I asked how he knew how to do this, he said that it was intuitive.

In another case of condom practicing, Danny R., 20, recalled a story about how he purchased condoms from the store, off the rack because the machines in the restrooms at gas stations seemed dirty. He, too, was concerned about getting caught with the condoms by his parents, so he flushed the condom and wrapper down the toilet after he had practiced putting it on so his mother would not find it in the trash. This is what he told me, the day he decided to try on the condom, what it was like for him:

I was scared, like to do it first. I was just like, “Wow, this is a big thing.” Like putting on a condom, and then like I did it. I remember planning it out throughout the day, like I’m gonna go home and figure this out for myself. And then as the time got closer I was real nervous, I was like, “I don’t wanna do it now.” So I did it and then afterwards I just felt like I know how to do it.

Although these young men were generally successful at avoiding unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections, they did recall instances in which they had pregnancy scares with their girlfriends. Even if they did not experience a scare themselves, they often had female friends, siblings, or cousins who did. In either case, they remembered learning about abortion, hormonal birth control, and emergency contraception during clinic visits with friends and girlfriends.

The men reported that they were able to continue to develop their understanding of sexuality as they continued to get older and became more experienced. As they entered college, they found that they were learning more about sexuality through their

personal experiences and felt that they would now seek out information from various sources, including partners, as they continued to learn about sexuality in general and their own sexuality, specifically.

Reflections and Observations

As part of the interview process, I engaged in a process of self-reflection and observation; following each interview, I would take notes about my thoughts and observations that arose during the interview process. In addition, I would write down my ideas, concerns, revelations, and other thoughts that occurred to me during my daily routine with respect to the interview process and the research project in general. My initial entries were about the interview procedure and the participants. I was careful to note problems that I encountered, technical and procedural, as well as noting instances when I felt that the interview itself could have developed in a different, possibly more productive manner. Using these notes, I was able to make adjustments and, as a result, learn to be a more effective and efficient interviewer in the process.

A major internal struggle I had to overcome was allowing myself greater flexibility with the interview protocol and allow the interview to unfold in a natural way. Although I had spent a considerable amount of time and energy thinking and writing about naturalistic inquiry and the construction of the interview as a dynamic process between the researcher and the participant involving the construction of memories and stories, I found myself wanting to stick to a very rigid interview guide; I would often attempt to squeeze information out of the participants rather than allowing the natural flow of conversation to evolve. As I mentioned earlier, I used the timeline of my

personal sexual learning experiences as a template for developing the interview guide. In many ways, this was useful in establishing a general pattern for the research interviews; however, in instances when the interview was developing in a different direction, it was difficult for me to release myself from the original template. Once I began to create awareness about this rigidity and give myself permission to let the discussion guide the interview, I was able to get richer stories and more details than when I forced it.

Early in the interview process, I began to note that there were striking similarities in the experiences of the men in this study. I was surprised to learn how similar these young men's experiences were when compared to my own experiences; this observation caused me to become astutely aware of the possibility of attaching my personal meanings to experiences and definitions to words and phrases. I found that it was necessary to become even more rigorous in my interview techniques by ensuring that I asked the men to give full explanations and provide their own definitions.

In observing that these men had very similar experiences with respect to sexual learning, I noted that they all seemed to engage in a similar process for creating meaning out of the information they received from their environment. Based on the socio-constructivist concept of building or constructing knowledge, I have labeled this process as sexual knowledge building. In the following section, I will describe this process using the experiences of the men who participated in the study.

Sexual Knowledge Building

From all of his experiences, each young man began to build an understanding of sex and sexuality from the information provided to him from his parents, family

members, peers, the media, school, and his personal experiences. Perhaps a useful metaphor for explaining this process is that of a murder mystery, in which the detective is given clues, some which are in plain view and others which must be sought out. Over the course of time, the detective must put the pieces of the puzzle together in order to solve the “mystery” and create meaning from the outcome process. For the men in this study, they were given the task to put together enough of the clues in order to find a solution that worked for them at any given point in time; it was not necessary for them to have a complete understanding of sexuality in order to function successfully.

Starting from an early age, the men recalled engaging in actively constructing knowledge about sexuality using their prior knowledge or experiences, making comparisons, and creating explanations. At times they were able to conceive ideas about sexuality that were basically accurate and other times their explanations were creative, although they may have been far out in leftfield with regards to accuracy. Regardless of the accuracy of their conceptions, they managed to create some understanding of sexuality and sexual behavior that worked for them at that moment in time. When they discovered they were wrong, they subsequently constructed a different understanding as more (quantity) or better (accuracy) information was presented to them later in their lives. Throughout this process of creating explanations and making meanings about sexuality, they reported a series of “aha” moments during which they felt they achieved a sense of clarity and understanding. They most commonly described these instances as being times when things “just clicked” or they were able to “put two and two together” or they “figured it out.”

In their earliest memories, the men reported making up explanations for things they did not understand based on their observations and by making comparisons. For example, it was not uncommon for the men to report creating an explanation to understand reproduction and childbirth. They observed that prior to the arrival of a new baby in their family the mother's stomach grew. They associated the stomach with eating and digestion. Because of this association, they made the assumption that a baby must come out of the mother's "bottom" or "butt." The men also recalled using this same method for explaining a biological process in late elementary school or middle school when they first encountered a female peer who had begun menstruating. They associated blood with a cut or injury, so they assumed that girls who were menstruating had been cut.

At other times, their lack of a vocabulary made it impossible for them to place a name onto an experience and vice versa. I asked all of the men to recall their first experience with ejaculation, which turned out to be either through a wet dream or masturbation. For all of the men, the experience was remembered as being shocking, frightening, and embarrassing; however, it was much less frightening for those who had a name for the experience. The men who did not have a word or phrase to describe the experience reported being able to label the experience sometime later when they were provided a vocabulary to do so. In some instances, the men recalled hearing a word or phrase for which they did not have a behavior to attach. In one example, a participant remembered being asked if he was a virgin. His only experience with the word virgin was in reference to the Virgin Mary; assuming that only women could be virgins, he

answered that he was not a virgin. It was not until later in his experiences that he learned that a virgin was someone who had not engaged in sexual intercourse.

In lacking a sexual vocabulary, the men recalled engaging in some behaviors without having a word or phrase with which to label it. It was not uncommon for them to report engaging in masturbation and not labeling it as masturbation, “jacking off”, “jerking off”, or any of the other euphemisms for this behavior. Frequently, they remembered hearing their peers ridicule other boys about “jacking off” and having an “aha” moment about their own behavior. Again, they may have heard certain words and phrases without having a behavior to which it could be attached. Several of the men reported learning to associate some words and phrases to behaviors while watching pornography or even non-pornographic television shows and movies. At other times, they reported having a partial understanding of a behavior but not having a complete understanding until they saw or heard something that filled in the missing information. For example, several of the men recalled being told that sex involved the placement of a penis in a vagina but did not understand the mechanical process until witnessing it in a pornographic movie.

As the men got older and became more sophisticated in their sexual vocabulary and comprehension, they reported seeking out additional information on an “as needed” basis, i.e., they sought out information when it became relevant to their lives and experiences. An oft-repeated experience involved engaging in condom practice prior to using a condom as a contraceptive during sexual intercourse. The men who practiced using a condom were contemplating sexual intercourse, either because it had been

discussed with their partner or because they were engaging in hopeful (wishful) thinking. At the time of the condom practice experience, they recalled being told that they should “use a condom” or “use protection” if they were going to have sex, but they had never seen a condom. When I asked them how they knew how to use a condom, they responded by telling me that they had followed the directions on the box. In other examples of seeking out information when it was needed, some of the men recalled experiences when they accompanied girlfriends, female friends, cousins, and sisters to family planning clinics for emergency contraception, birth control, and abortions.

During the discussions about information seeking, I observed two common experiences reported by the men. When asked what the experience was like or how it made them feel, they reported engaging in behaviors that were shrouded in secrecy; they described feeling ashamed and fearful of being discovered. In some cases, they reported hiding in their rooms or positioning themselves at a computer from which they could see the front door, in case a parent or sibling came home. In contrast, a few of the men told me about adults or older peers who had given them permission to ask them questions about sexuality. In these cases, the men may have reported feeling embarrassed at having to ask, but they felt comfortable asking questions. They told me that they considered these individuals as trustworthy sources of information who would provide accurate information and give them “real” answers to their questions; they also felt comfortable in approaching these individuals because they felt they would protect their confidentiality.

All of the men interviewed for this study reported experiencing changes in their attitudes and beliefs as they gained experience and constructed a personal understanding

of sexuality. Generally speaking, these changes in attitude usually referred to changes in their moral or religious beliefs, such as attitudes about sex prior to marriage, homosexuality, and abortion. They told me that they believed their views about sexuality would continue to change as they had more experiences and developed a greater understanding of their own sexuality. In response to their acknowledgement that they were continuing to grow and develop, I asked the men how they seek information at this point in time in their lives. They told me that most of the information they gathered was from talking with their sexual partners and their friends. They also stated that they would ask medical professionals or turn to the internet to seek information.

Final Questions and Responses

At the end of the first interview, I asked the participants three questions that I felt would better help me understand the current situation with respect to Latinas, teen births, and the role of males. I asked them why they thought that the teen birth rates for Latinas were so much higher than for their white and black counterparts. I also asked them what they felt should be done. Most of the guys responded by saying that they felt that most of the problem was due to a lack of education on the part of the youth; by this, they meant that not only was there not enough information about how to keep from getting pregnant but there was not enough information about how not getting pregnant could improve your future.

They also felt that part of the problem was due to the difference in the ways that boys and girls were treated in Latino culture. They described what they considered to be a double standard of expectations for sexual behaviors based on gender– that boys were

expected to be sexually active while girls were to remain chaste. These opposing expectations contributed to a type of seemingly careless approach to sexual activity among both boys and girls, particularly in relation to having sex without condoms or other forms of contraception. They sincerely believed that whites had greater access to contraception and abortions than Latinas, financially and culturally. That is, they perceived that Latinas did not have the financial resources to afford contraception and abortion compared to their white counterparts; moreover, they felt that white culture, especially outside of Catholicism, is more accepting of these things than in Latino culture. My perception was that these men were buying into cultural stereotypes that they had heard from various sources, possibly including their own communities and families; throughout our discussions they described a multitude of other factors that they observed as playing a role in unplanned pregnancies, i.e., lack of information, lack of expectations, etc.

In response to what should be done to reduce the number of unintended pregnancies for teens, they stated a need for a greater focus on placing higher expectations on young Latino/as. There should be a greater emphasis on graduating from high school, going to college, and becoming financially stable before having children. They also felt that parents could benefit by having communication skills and a vocabulary with which to discuss sex and sexuality with their children.

Finally, I asked the participants what their thoughts were about a white, male graduate student doing this type of work. Overwhelmingly, they supported the work that I am doing and viewed me as an ally. They believe that the young people in their

communities need help “making it” regardless of the helpers’ race or ethnicity. They also said that they would like to see more Latino/as attending graduate school and doing this type of work within their communities.

Final Observations and Reflections of the Interview Process

Interviewing these young men was an fascinating, elucidating, and exhausting experience. Through the experience, I believe that I have matured as a researcher and educator and will be able to approach my future research and teaching with a new perspective with respect to the experiences of others. I was surprised at the common experiences they had with one another and how similar those experiences were to my own, having grown up in a small town in West Texas. I was not surprised that they felt they were often not given adequate information and that they had to put the pieces together themselves and “figure it out” on their own.

Initially, I was surprised by the lack of discussion about the influence of the church or religious teachings with respect to their memories of learning about sex and sexuality. After reflecting on my initial response and continuing to ask the men about religion and their experiences, I began to realize that I was working under a biased and prejudiced set of assumptions about what it means to grow up Latino in the Southern United States. First, I was making the stereotypical assumption that Latino sexuality was greatly influenced by the Catholic Church – being taught that there should be no sex until marriage and no contraceptive use after marriage. Although several of the men mentioned hearing this message when they were younger, they did not seem to recall it having the same importance and relevance when they were older. Second, I was

assuming that all of these men would report receiving a strong religious message about abstinence because of my own prejudices about religion and the influence of religion over sexuality education, particularly in Texas.

As I continued to prod and probe for more information about the impact of religion on their sexual learning and continued to be met with what I interpreted as a lack of interest in discussing the topic, I finally came to the realization that while religion was one aspect of their sexual learning, and an important one, it was not the most important message. Creating a meaningful understanding of sexuality at any particular point in their lives with respect to their experiences was much more important than what they were taught at church or in school – where the message was often not relevant to their experience at that point in time.

Chapter 5

Constructing an Understanding of Sexual Knowledge Building

Introduction

Through the twenty-six interviews, a layered, textured, and rich tapestry was woven that represents these men's varied and intricate experiences of learning about sex and sexuality during childhood and adolescence. From these complex stories, I was faced with the task of sifting, sorting, and teasing out the most relevant and important elements, to create a more general and simpler story that would convey these men's personal experiences without minimizing or diluting their personalities and complexities of these experiences. I found myself continually wanting to steer away from the sexual learning process and delve into their individual experiences or focus on specific topics (puberty, masturbation, first sexual experience, etc.). In order to remain focused on the purpose of the research study, which was to understand the sexual learning process of Latino males during childhood and adolescence, I regularly had to reset my internal navigational instruments by revisiting the originally proposed five research questions.

Over the course of time, I discovered that I focused for quite sometime on what went wrong in these men's learning experiences as opposed to trying to understand what worked for them. The men who participated in this study had successfully navigated their young sexual lives. They had completed high school without getting a girl pregnant or contracting a sexually transmitted infections, at least according to the information they provided in these interviews. They had transitioned from prepubescent children into

sexually mature, young adults who were attending college. I believe that my personal politics, preconceived ideas about sexual learning, and philosophies about sexuality education blurred my vision with respect to accurately portraying the experiences of these young men by not focusing on why and how they were successes. After much reflection and discussion with faculty and peers, I returned to the interviews and my analysis and realized that these men were able to construct an understanding of sexuality that was viable and useful for them at various points in their lives.

In the first section of Chapter 5, I return to my original research questions. Following this discussion, I revisit my original theories introduced in Chapter 2: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model of Growth and Development and Socio-Constructivist Theories on Learning. Then I introduce a new model that I believe is more dynamic and more accurately explains the process of constructing sexual knowledge. Following this, I revisit the literature and attempt to place the results of this study within the context of the existing body of literature. Lastly, I discuss the implications of these results for practitioners as well as researchers.

Revisiting the Research Questions

1. What were the sources of sex/sexuality information during childhood and adolescence?

On the surface, this question was one of the simpler questions to answer and could probably have been achieved by using quantitative measures such as a survey or having the participants make lists. By asking about the sources within the context of a qualitative investigation, I was able to more fully understand what meanings were

associated with those sources and the dynamics underlying the knowledge acquisition process. By this, I mean that I was able to identify not only the types of sources but the value of these sources and how reliable and trustworthy the information obtained was perceived.

As expected, all of the participants identified a multitude of sources of sexuality information. Although the experiences were sometimes described as “I was told” or “I was shown”, the more common experience involved complex exchanges rather than simple, didactic discourse; very much resembling the type of experience that is described by Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Model of Growth and Development. The men identified a number of individuals, places, and things with whom and which they had a relationship of some type; these relationships often mediated the information exchange and played a role in how the information was received and processed.

For these young men, the first, most common, most frequent, and perceived most reliable source of information was their parents. Mother and Father often filled different roles during these exchanges, at times contradicting one another with the information and expectations they provided. Many of the participants described a gender difference in the ways in which this information was provided and how it was provided for them, as boys, versus their sisters or other female relatives and peers. They described how the tenets of Latino culture and *machismo* shaped these incidences of information exchange and how it helped form their identities and the identities of the boys and girls in their communities. For example, boys and men were expected to have sexual prowess (but not get a girl pregnant) while girls and women were expected to play the role of “gatekeeper”

and take the moral high ground of abstinence. These paradoxical ideals and expectations lead one to question with whom the boys were expected to be sexually active? In addition to messages about morality and sexuality, these men often learned about puberty from their parents and often received vague messages to “be careful” or “use protection” if you are going to be sexually active. Interestingly, they did not tell as many stories of their parents telling them to wait until they were married to have sex, especially when they were older and becoming sexually active, than I had expected to hear. When they did receive this message it was often delivered from the church rather than their parents.

Close behind their parents as frequent and common sources of information, the men described other family members, usually siblings or cousins, and peers as major sources of sexuality information, particularly as they went through puberty and matured into sexually active adults. The information the participants gained from these sources was usually from either talk of their own sexual experiences, jokes of sexual nature including making fun of others, or gossip. These sources usually presented information in the form of slang terms and phrases for anatomy and various sexual acts. The participants reported that they often did not understand what was being said but would laugh at the jokes and pretend to understand the stories.

Almost all of the participants reported having a sex education class as part of their general education; these classes were often delivered as a section of a health or biology course. The teachers, who ranged from being science teachers to coaches, were considered reliable sources of information; however, these instructors often made assumptions about what the boys knew and didn’t know, such as assuming they

understood what sexual intercourse was without ever explaining it to them. Most of the information provided by teachers was interpreted as too technical, scientific, and medical and rarely truly useful information. A few of the men reported having teachers who were willing to answer their questions; these teachers were perceived as being more reliable, trustworthy, and genuinely interested in the well-being of their students. The men recalled being able to approach some teachers when they required information or needed some direction. In any case where they were given permission to ask whether it was by a parent, sibling, peer, or teacher, the men felt that these individuals were one of the more important sources of information and regarded them as highly trustworthy.

The media played a very large role in providing information to these young men, mostly through television and movies. They quickly learned that sexuality was something secret and dirty while watching these shows and movies with their parents; they were often told to “cover their eyes” when something sexual in nature (or even just kissing or nudity) was on the screen. The effect of certain mainstream, blockbuster movies and their influence on youth became apparent when four participants, who did not know each other or even necessarily live in the same part of the state, mentioned the movie *Look Who’s Talking*. In addition to viewing mainstream television with their families, these men were often introduced to “adult programming” on premium cable channels such as Cinemax (affectionately referred to as “Skinemax” by the participants) by their peers or peer-aged family members. In addition to softcore porn, these same groups of individuals later introduced them to hardcore pornography in the form of videos. In both situations, these were group experiences in which the study participant

and several other individuals watched the “movie.” Some of the men remembered their peers or cousins engaging in masturbation while watching these videos, which may have also played a role in implicit learning.

Other forms of media were mentioned less frequently; however, they were usually cited as a source when the participant was actively seeking information. When confusion or inconsistencies emerged, they would turn to dictionaries, encyclopedias, the internet, and instructional books and tapes to learn more. The fear of “getting caught” was pervasive during these information-seeking sessions.

Church and religious institutions were not often mentioned as sources of information about sexuality. When probed about the role of the church during the interview, they would dismissively mention that they were told to wait until marriage to have sex; I got the impression that this was not a very weighty message for these participants because the message did not serve a useful purpose for them at the time it was given.

The men considered their personal and sexual experiences as some of the most important ways of learning. They described many situations where they had “learned” about something from a parent, peer, or teacher and did not fully understand what this meant until they had the actual experience. It is also important to note that their experiences often conflicted with what they had been told about sex and sexuality or what they believed they understood about sex and sexuality, and this conflict often resulted in a shift in their personal, and sometimes religious, beliefs.

2. How do individuals create meaning from new information and experiences about sex and sexuality?

As was mentioned in Chapter 4, new information and experiences often resulted in confusion and cognitive dissonance that resulted in individuals changing their beliefs thus creating new meanings about sex and sexuality. During childhood and adolescence, the participants were constantly bombarded with new information while simultaneously experiencing life. Their learning experiences could be described as being given a ten thousand-piece jigsaw puzzle and only being shown bits and pieces of the overall image at a time. In a process of what I described as sexual knowledge building, these men had to engage in a type of detective work in which they were given clues concerning sexuality, only some of which were true, and had to put these pieces together to create an overall understanding of sexuality and to create personal meanings. The most common phrases I heard from these men during the interviews were “it just clicked”, “I figured it out”, “I put two and two together”, and other phrases inferring that they had to actively create meaning from the bits and pieces available to them. This process of “knowledge building” has been examined and described by the socio-constructivists Chan, Burtis, and Berieter (1997) and is discussed in greater detail in the section of this chapter titled “Revisiting the Theoretical Bases”.

3. How are the experiences of explicit learning versus implicit learning different?

The nature of this study made it difficult to truly distinguish between explicit and implicit learning. Since the participants were asked to recount their experiences learning

about sexuality, they were, by definition, describing experiences during which explicit learning was taking place, i.e., they were consciously aware of the learning as it was happening. However, much of the learning they described was experiential in nature, so it is possible that those experiences are viewed as explicit from a distance perspective when implicit learning was actually the process in which they were engaging at the time. By examining these experiences as implicit learning events, I can determine that they engaged in a similar knowledge building process described above. It also appears that the men may not have had or even currently have the linguistic capability to describe their experiences as implicit or explicit. During the process of sexual knowledge building, the men often recalled having an “aha” experience; these experiences may represent the moments in time when something that has been implicitly learned through experience or observation becomes explicit information, meaning that they become aware that they “know” something.

Generally speaking, the men reported an awareness of different aspects of sexuality when they became relevant to their lives. It is possible, and likely, that a much larger amount of information was being presented to these men from a variety of sources without their being conscious of this happening. It was not until they experienced something in their lives that the information became meaningful resulting in the “aha” moments so often recalled. The difficulty in understanding whether or not they were implicitly learning about sexuality is that the men did not have the awareness nor the linguistic ability that learning was occurring, which is essentially what implicit learning means.

4. What are the processes utilized to adopt information into a repertoire of behaviors or to a knowledge base?

Prior to interviewing these men and analyzing their interviews, I believed that this question was a very different question than research question 2. After undergoing a process of learning myself, I view these questions as very similar, if not identical. In order to avoid repetition, I will refer the reader to the answer to research question 2 and to the following section entitled “Revisiting the Theoretical Bases.”

5. If accepted information was ever rejected at a later time, what were the processes that individuals experienced that caused their beliefs to be changed?

The process of creating meaning and building knowledge did not always involve rejecting some prior information or belief; rather, it was a process of using that “wrong” piece of information as a building block to create new meanings. In actuality, it was rare that the young men reported learning something that was incorrect, except in the cases where they were given a mythological reason for some occurrence or behavior. It was much more common for them to experience confusion or cognitive dissonance either through contradictory messages or because of personal experiences. In these instances, they would engage in information seeking to resolve the conflict by asking a trusted adult, referring to a trusted source such as a dictionary or encyclopedia, or reflecting on the experience in contrast to what they already knew. Because they existed in dynamic environments where exchanges were constantly taking place while they were growing

and developing, the men engaged in this process of creating meaning when something became relevant to their lives. Again, this process of reevaluation is part of the knowledge building process that is discussed in the next section.

Revisiting the Theoretical Bases

Approximately halfway through the process of interviewing these men, I experienced an epiphany that caused me to rethink my understanding of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model of Growth and Development (1979). Although I had described this as a dynamic and interactive exchange between the individual and their environments, I was somehow still thinking of these learning experiences as linear in nature. While the stories were usually related to me in a chronological manner, chronology does not necessarily imply linear. The best analogy I can use to describe this process is that of the internet. Most people go online when they are seeking information about a particular topic or issue, such as who starred in a particular movie, how do I get from my house to some destination, or what is the price of a plane ticket to an exotic land. As one begins their search for more information, they generally start by inputting a term or phrase into a search engine such as Yahoo or Google; they click the search button, and links to numerous and various websites appear. As many of us have experienced, we soon lose ourselves in a tangential forest of information often having to hit the back button on our browser to return to our original purpose.

I came to the conclusion that the dynamic exchange that Bronfenbrenner is describing is a very similar, nonlinear experience. The participants in this study would acquire a bit of new information or have a new experience that would lead them to

reevaluate their current knowledge or engage in a process of information seeking. Either way, they would describe experiences that were often tangential to the original bit of information or experience but was connected to what they were learning. In other words, they were navigating a complex web of information in their daily lives through which they had to determine the usefulness of large amounts of information. In a book concerning the ecology of human development, the chapter on individual development further explains how this model is contextual in nature and involves this idea of interaction within environments (Magnusson, 1995). The author writes that learning is not a series of single incidents, taken out of context, but rather “reciprocal interactions among psychological, biological, and environmental factors.” He writes how development is not simply a sum of outcomes from these interactions but a restructuring of knowledge and self. This is a great illustration of how these young men created meaning about sexuality from their learning experiences. They did not simply have a multitude of experiences that added up to their current understanding of sexuality; rather, they engaged in restructuring their knowledge and beliefs with each interaction.

In the section of this chapter devoted to answering the research questions, I referred to the process described by Chan, Burtis, and Bereiter (1997) as knowledge building. This socio-constructivist theory of learning illustrates how individuals construct knowledge by viewing new information as a problem that needs to be solved. In their study that examined how students process scientific information that is contradictory to what they previously believed, they found that the students’ active construction of knowledge was an important element of learning.

In Chapter 2, I described a process through which individuals use their previous knowledge and experiences, as well as, cultural and religious beliefs to create meaning. This basic tenet of socio-constructivist theories of learning holds true for the men in this study. When I was attempting to integrate the stories I had heard from all of the participants about “figuring it out”, I found myself hitting a road block in finding a way to make this “deductive reasoning” process fit into the socio-constructivists’ theories of learning. I turned to Diane Schallert, a professor of Psycholinguistics in the Department of Educational Psychology, whose classes I had taken as a doctoral student. Dr. Schallert pointed out that the label of “deductive reasoning” aptly describes how my participants were creating meaning from new information; however, she also pointed out that this was a classic example of knowledge building and referred me to the article by Chan, Burtis, and Bereiter (1997). The experience I labeled as “deductive reasoning” is more accurately explained by the idea of building sexual knowledge by using their previous knowledge, experiences, and beliefs to construct new meanings that are relevant to them at any specific time. This process shows that individuals do not simply accept or reject information when it is presented to them; rather, they actively engage in a process of building knowledge and constructing meaning out of this new information through the process of scaffolding, using previous knowledge to build new understandings.

A New Model for Sexual Knowledge Building

Following an analysis of the process of sexual knowledge building and creating my own awareness about the nonlinearity of this process, I found it necessary to revisit

the original models on which this study based. Figure 5.1 illustrates the ongoing, dynamic process described by the men in this study.

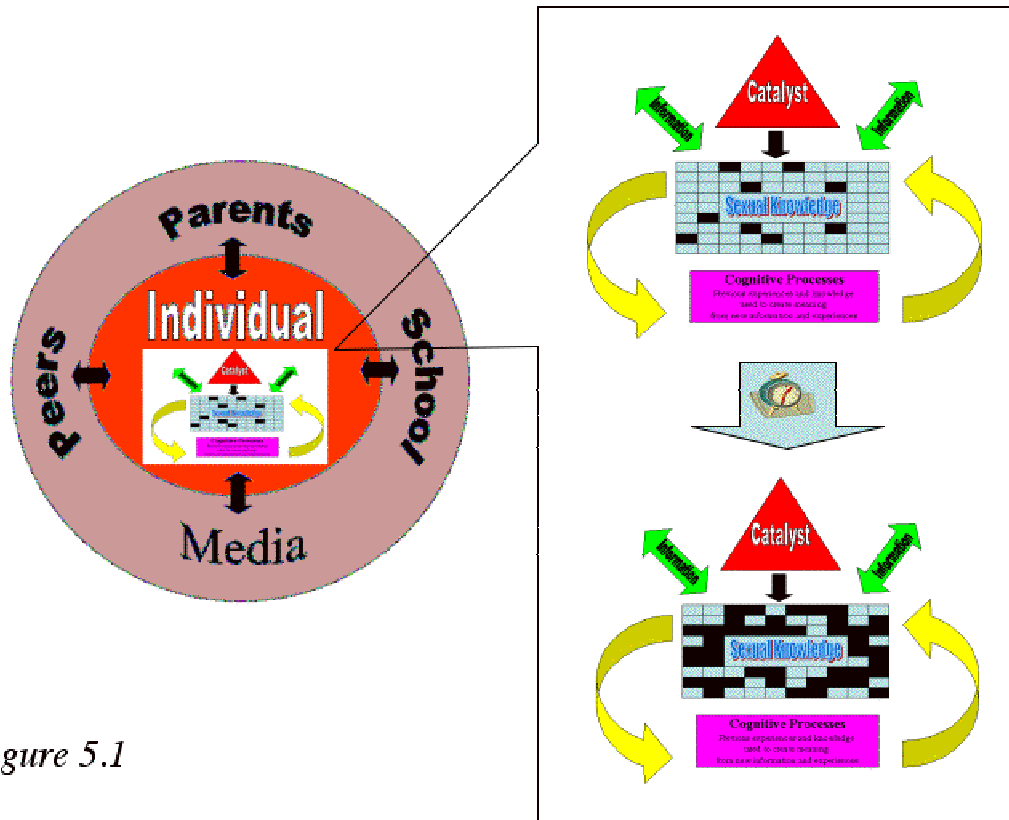


Figure 5.1

The model depicts the individual interacting with others within his immediate environment and the interactions that occur between these groups and individuals, much like the mesosystem described by Bronfenbrenner in his model of ecological growth and development. In addition, I modified my original model of sexual knowledge building to more accurately demonstrate the dynamic nature of this process as well as its nonlinearity. This model was placed within the context of the individual's immediate environment. In addition, the model illustrates how the body of sexual knowledge changes over time, as the individual developed and the need for new information became

relevant at different points throughout his childhood and adolescence. Figure 5.2 illustrates the process of constructing knowledge.

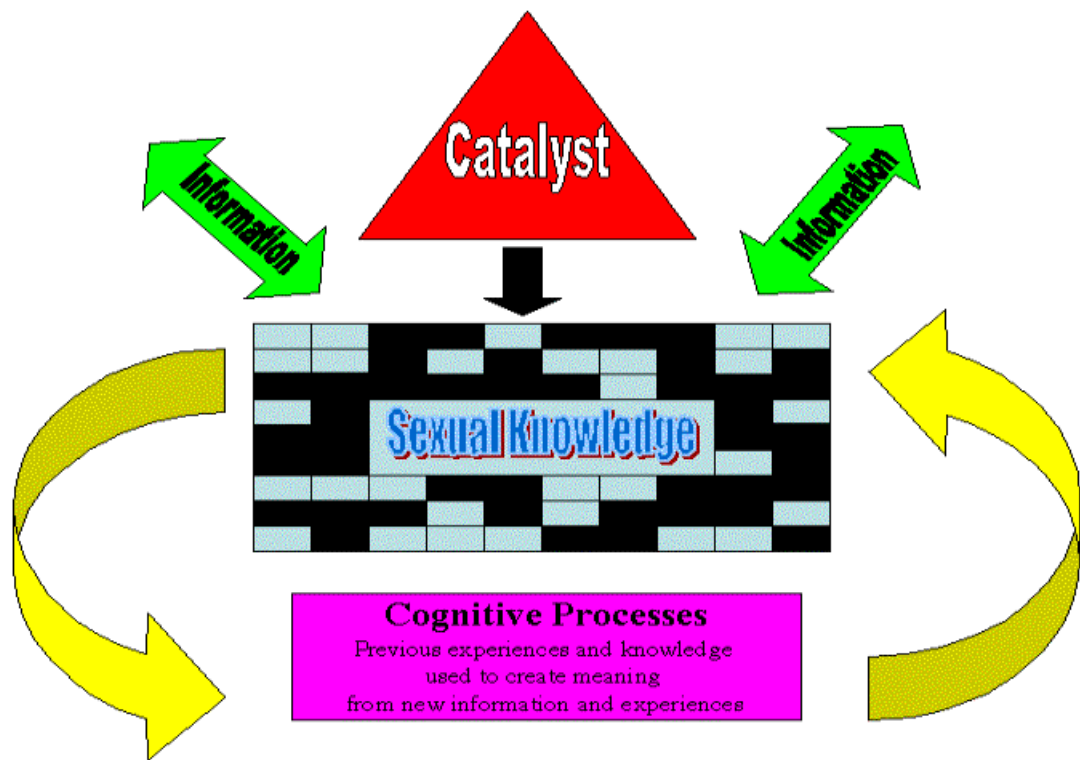


Figure 5.2

In addition, the model demonstrates the presence of the revelatory moments in the men's lives during which they "figured it out," or they created meaning out of the information and experiences available. These moments were preceded by the introduction of some catalyst, such as a personal experience, the introduction of new information, or biological change, that facilitated the need for constructing something meaningful at that specific point in time, and, in the case of these men, allowing the

individual to respond in a manner that is appropriate for him in that situation and allows him to succeed.

Revisiting the Literature

While creating a conceptual context for this study in Chapter 2, I reviewed the current literature concerning sources of information and sexual learning. I began the section on sexual learning by discussing the writings of John Gagnon; it seems reasonable to start this discussion concerning the results of this study and its place in the current body of research with his writings. In the book *Sexual Conduct*, Drs. Gagnon and Simon (1973) wrote about sexual learning experiences of children. They described how although some parents attempt to provide sex education to their children, for the most part, they are reactive to what they perceive as the sexual interests and activities of their children. Adults usually engage in reacting to the child in a number of ways: telling the child it is something sexual and that it is wrong; labeling the behavior something that it is not; or not label the behavior by ignoring it or judging it by giving a nonspecific name. They wrote that the parent often believes that she has provided an adequate answer to the child in conventional moral terms; however, it is unlikely the child accepted or internalized the answer the parent thought she was giving. This reactive behavior to children's sexuality can have major consequences on the child's current and future values, attitudes, and behaviors. The men in this study describe similar experiences where they were admonished or punished for their sexual behaviors.

The men in this study often described incidents during which they engaged in "playing house" or "playing doctor". Gagnon and Simon (1973) write of the seminal

work of Alfred Kinsey who found that “sex play” was found to be more common than previously believed, this type of play is not intrinsically about sexual experience but is part of the process that leads to sexual experience. Parents often respond to “sex play” not in sexual terms but in moralistic ones such as “dirty”, “bad”, “good girls and boys don’t”, etc. Adults often perceive behaviors that they perceive as sexual and inappropriate, so they punish the child. The child does not understand the connection between the behavior and the punishment thus producing anxiety in the child. Floyd Martinson (1994), a protégé of Dr. Kinsey, writes common experiences of children engaging in “sex play” that was often met by punishment or admonishment and how these experiences help form the sexual attitudes and values of individuals. He also reflects on the desire of adults to protect children from all things sexual and the ways in which this actually harms children by denying them language concerning sexuality and pushing sexual behaviors and desires to seek sexual information into secrecy and shame.

In discussing peer-to-peer exchange of information, Gagnon and Simon (1973) describe an interaction that is subversive and clandestine. When observed by parents, it is admonished thus reinforcing the feelings of secrecy and adding guilt. Secrecy and guilt was a similar experience for the men in this study. These descriptions accurately reflect the experiences of the men in this study; when describing the feelings they associated with seeking information about sexuality, they commonly used the terms and phrases such as secrecy, privacy, fear, worries of getting caught, and feeling nervous. With respect to the various sources of information, this study was consistent with previous research in that parents and the home were identified as the most common

source of information (SIECUS, 2002), that mothers were more likely than fathers to be the providers of information (Baldwin & Baranoski, 1990; Pick & Palos, 1995), and that Latinos report parents as the primary source of information (Miller, et al., 1998). In their extensive study of sexual thinking during childhood, the Goldmans (1981) reported that the children in their study identified the home as the most common source of information, especially mothers. They listed home, school, and the media, in that order, as their major sources.

Although peers were not usually identified as the main source as in many studies (Ansuini & Fiddler-Woite, 1996; Kallen, Stephenson, & Dought, 1983; Wood, Senn, Desmarais, Park, & Verberg, 2002), the results were consistent in that teens were more likely to talk to their mothers than peers and more likely to talk to peers than their fathers (Lefkowitz, Boone, & Shearer, 2004). With respect to the media, Brown (2002) found that media had an impact on the sexual understanding and perceived social norms of youth. Despite multiple, thorough searches, I found no published investigations of how the media impacts sexual knowledge and learning.

The results were similar to other studies when it came to students reporting that they did receive some type of sex education at school (Lindberg, Ku, & Sonenstein, 2000). The men in this study frequently reported desiring more information than they received about sexuality from their parents and from school. This is similar to what the Goldmans (1981) reported in their study on sexual thinking in childhood. They wrote that children wish to receive sex education from their parents and during school. They reported that young children wanted to know about the origin of babies, conception,

pregnancy, child bearing, and childbirth. They also wrote that most children wanted to know about changes to their body associated with physical development. This is similar to what the men reported wanting to know more about at a young age.

The Goldmans (1981) also wrote how the girls strongly emphasized the need to be prepared for menstruation. The men in this study reported that they found menstruation confusing and frightening and associated it with pain (blood) suggesting that boys should also be more prepared for the onset of menstruation in their peers. Similarly, most of the men in this study reported being frightened when they first experience ejaculation and wet dreams; they all stated they wished they had been better prepared to handle these experiences. According to the Goldmans (1981), teens were interested in learning about sexual intercourse: what is it, how to do it, and how to behave. They were also interested in contraception. They report that teens expressed high levels of anxiety in response to not having adequate information in these areas. They were not interested in learning about “courting behavior”, venereal diseases, or childrearing. The men in this study similarly described a desire to know more about “how to” when it came to sexual activity and wished that they had been given more information about contraception.

Finally, the men described how they experienced the influence of Latino or Mexican-American culture on their experiences of sexual learning. For the most part, this came as a description of the differences in how their mothers vs. their fathers provided information. In addition, they described a double standard with respect to gender and the expectations of boys vs. girls. They often described how the message

they received was that boys and men were inherently more sexual by nature and expected to have multiple sexual partners and girlfriends. On the other hand, they described how their sisters and female peers were expected to be chaste and remain virginal. These experiences, in addition to the influences of religion described by the men, are similar to those previously described by researchers who have looked at the factors associated with the higher pregnancy-risk of Latinas (Baumeister, Flores, Marin, 1995; Brewster, 1994; Flores, Eyre, & Millstein, 1998; Upchurch, et al., 2001).

The influence of the Catholic church is often cited by those in the field of Public Health and by the general public as the main influence on whether or not Hispanic men and women use contraceptives. This idea of Catholic influence must be further studied and rethought. In her study of mothers' teachings about sexuality, specifically premarital virginity, Gloria González-López (2003) found that the moral ideas concerning virginity were only one factor influencing immigrant women's perceptions concerning premarital virginity. As they educate their daughters about sexuality, these mothers challenged the gender and sexual oppression they experienced by emphasizing protection from these oppressions. In a similar study with fathers, she found that while fathers' perceptions of virginity were shaped by expressions of patriarchy and masculinity, they were more concerned with protecting their daughters from a sexually dangerous society and improving their socioeconomic futures rather than preserving their virginity (González-López, 2004).

Practical Implications and Implications for Further Research

By having a better understanding of how children and adolescents actively construct knowledge about sex and sexuality from their experiences, educators and researchers can develop better, more effective methods for reducing the rate of unwanted teen pregnancy. The men in this study named a number of sources of sexuality information, all of which can be targets of education and public health programming. The goal of any programming for Latinos concerning sexuality education should be to assist them in actively building knowledge. This can be achieved by ensuring that sources of information provide accurate and useful information.

As the most common and most trusted source of information, a greater deal of programming needs to be directed to the parents of children and adolescents. Parents must be taught how and when to provide information to children and provided resources for finding information themselves. They must be taught how to teach children and adolescents about sexuality in a way that is truthful and useful in their lives. Since being given permission to ask about sexuality was such a pivotal experience for the men in this study, parents should be told of the importance of giving their children permission to come to them when they have questions about sex and sexuality. When children and adolescents engage in knowledge building and sexual learning, they will be able to turn to their parents who can assist them in finding the information sought without feeling worried about “getting caught”.

Teachers and schools must also be the focus of improving how sex and sexuality is taught. Training programs should include using trained professionals to teach sexuality education courses, presenting information in a manner that is useful to the students, and

being positive and nonjudgmental. The men in this study often reported wanting more information than was provided at school. Teachers should be taught that they need to go beyond the standard biological explanations and fear tactics of discussing sexually transmitted diseases and provide the information that the youth desire to learn. They should be trained to assess what the students desire to learn and present this information in a positive, useful manner. One method they can use to ascertain what their students would like to learn is by giving them the opportunity to ask questions, or give them permission to ask. As has been demonstrated, the opportunity to ask a trusted adult about sexuality is important in helping them actively construct an understanding of their own sexualities.

Since peers were often named as one of the major sources of information, more peer-led programs need to be developed. There are two types of peer education programs that would help children and adolescents with their sexual knowledge building. One type is the more traditional approach to peer education in which peer leaders are identified in the school and trained to deliver classes related to various issues, in this instance sexuality education. Another type of peer programming that could be developed would be to train youth to be the “correct” source of information. Rather than a peer-led class, these peers would represent the various different social groups at a school and serve as the person who is known to be an accurate source of information. With this type of programming, these peers can correct “wrong” information as it is presented through casual conversation and be the individual to whom his/her peers can turn when they desire more information about a specific topic without feeling embarrassed or fearing

ridicule. Although I am not familiar with any programs of this type, I can speak to my own personal experiences as a peer sexuality educator as an undergraduate. While I did lead courses across campus about condoms and contraceptives, I filled an even more important role of being the person to whom my peers felt comfortable turning when they were confused, had a question, or needed help.

With respect to the media, which was often cited as one of the top sources of sexuality information, one way of dealing with issue is for parents and educators to become more active and have greater influence over programming decisions with networks. However, since sex “sells”, it may be difficult to have much influence over network programming. An alternate method for addressing this issue is to provide media literacy training for children and adolescents in which they are taught critical thinking skills, rather than instructing the children to “cover their eyes” or “leave the room” for certain scenes. With these skills, parents and teachers could use television programs and movies as starting points to discuss different issues, not limited to sexuality. This method could be useful for teaching students about a variety of health and social issues such as drug and alcohol use, decision making with respect to relationships, etc.

Future research should involve developing and testing programs for parents, teachers, and peers. In addition, more research must be done to better understand the process of sexual knowledge building with this population and with other populations. An important question to address is whether or not the knowledge building processes are similar for different ethnicities, genders, and sexual orientations. Research should be encouraged with parents to understand their experiences providing information to their

children and adolescents with sexuality information. An interesting study would use similar qualitative methods to investigate when and why parents engage in providing sexuality information to their children.

Final Comments and Self-Reflection

As I mentioned at the start of this chapter, I found it necessary to reframe my view of the experiences told to me by the participants in this study. I was so set in my beliefs that these men must have had negative experiences learning about sexuality in the “wrong” way that I was unable to focus on what was of most importance in this study – How did these men successfully navigate their own sexuality? I assumed that they were only given bad information and were basically lucky to have steered their way through the stormy seas without getting anyone pregnant or contracting a sexually transmitted infection. In reality, these young men were able to create something meaningful from a huge amount of information and build a sexual knowledge that was relevant to their experience. By doing so, they were able to not only survive the occasional stormy seas of adolescence and puberty but were able to transition into healthy, successful, sexually maturing adults. The goal of health educators, parents, and teachers is to work to make that navigation and transition a positive and rewarding experience. In conclusion, I discuss a new approach to sexuality education that can promote lifelong sexual health.

I have long been a proponent of comprehensive sexuality education in opposition to abstinence-only education. I believe that the evidence overwhelmingly shows, that providing accurate scientific information in an age-appropriate manner is necessary to help all individuals (children, adolescents, and adults) make positive, healthy decisions

about their lives. However, I have come to the realization that just providing the scientific and medical information is not sufficient in assisting young people in developing positive, good sexual health. Many well-intending sexuality educators and health teachers present information about sexuality using a disease-prevention model. I believe that it is important to move away from this type of model and adopt a health-promoting one in its place.

A health-promoting model for sexuality education will start with teaching children from an early age about their bodies and how to love and care for them, not think of them as shameful and dirty. It will also focus on the positive aspects of sexuality such as pleasure and intimacy while being realistic about the responsibilities of being a sexually active person. The first step in implementing this type of model is helping adults deal with their own hang ups and issues about sex and sexuality; it is difficult to be an effective sexual health promoter when you are too focused on things being too embarrassing or shocking to discuss. This model will incorporate the physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual aspects of sexuality and turn away from a focus on genitals, disease, and unwanted pregnancy. It will focus on the mind/body connection, pleasure, intimacy, and happiness. In the current political climate, developing and adopting a self-affirming, positive approach to sexuality education seems difficult, if not impossible; however, I believe that the previous research and the stories of these men indicate that there is a much needed paradigm shift in the discourse about and approach to sexuality education from a disease-prevention model to a health-promoting, wellness model.

Appendices

Appendix A

Informed Consent to Participate in Research

IRB#_2004110062

IRB# 20041100622004110062

Informed Consent to Participate in Research

The University of Texas at Austin

You are being asked to participate in a research study. This page provides you with information about the study. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you can refuse to participate without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Title of Research Study:

A Qualitative Investigation of Male College Freshmen's Experiences of Learning About Sex/Sexuality during Childhood and Adolescence

Principal Investigator(s) (include faculty sponsor), UT affiliation, and Telephone Number(s):

Principal Investigator
Christopher White, M.A.
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Kinesiology and Health Education
512-232-5560

Funding source:

none

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this study is to investigate your experiences learning about sex and sexuality during childhood and adolescence. During the course of two interviews, we will go beyond identifying the sources of information that were available or that were used for the purposes of learning about sex. We will discuss the processes that you used in determining what sources were reliable, how information was verified, and how you chose to accept the information as valid.

What will be done if you take part in this research study?

You will engage in two in-depth interviews concerning your experiences learning about sex and sexuality during childhood and adolescence. These interviews will be conversational in nature. The first interview will last approximately 2-3 hours and will be audio recorded for the purpose of ensuring that everything you say is recorded as you said it, and it will be transcribed for the analysis of the interview. If you chose not to have your interview audio recorded, you will not be eligible for this interview. This will not effect your ability to participate in further research at the University. The interview will also be video recorded if you give your permission. The second interview will last approximately one hour and will include reviewing some of the information discussed during the first interview. At the end of the interview, you will be asked to give permission to use the recordings for purposes of educational presentations and/or as part of a digital dissertation. All attempts will be made to ensure the confidentiality of individuals who allow their recordings for these purposes, such as editing out any identifying information such as names of people and places. For those who refuse this permission following the interview, the audio and video tapes will be destroyed and anonymity will be ensured.

Some participants may be asked to return later in the year to participate in a third interview. During this interview, you would be asked to consider the analysis that has been done on the data and comment on whether or not you feel the results accurately represent your experiences. You will be asked to give feedback on a model that will be developed from the various interviews. These will be verbal comment that will not be audio or video recorded but the researcher will write notes. You will be asked at the end of the interview if you would like to be contacted to return for the analysis interview approximately 3-6 months later.

What are the possible discomforts and risks?

Due to the sensitivity of topic, some participants may feel embarrassed or uncomfortable answering questions related to sexuality knowledge, beliefs, and comfort in discussing sexuality. Following completion of the survey, participants will be given a list of resources about sexuality following the completion of the second interview. You do not have to answer any questions that you are not comfortable answering.

What are the possible benefits to you or to others?

One benefit of this study is to allow researchers, educators, and practitioners to better understand the ways in which individuals learn about sexuality. The information from this study will allow health educators to develop more effective sexuality education programs and ensure that they are targeted to the right audience. For your participation,

you will receive gift certificates in the amount of \$25 to local businesses such as the Alamo Drafthouse, Waterloo Records, Whole Foods, or Bookpeople. You will receive one \$25 gift certificate for each interview completed.

If you choose to take part in this study, will it cost you anything?

No.

Will you receive compensation for your participation in this study?

No financial compensation will be made for participation in this study.

What if you are injured because of the study?

If injuries occur as a result of study activity, eligible University students may be treated at the usual level of care with the usual cost for services at the Student Health Center, but no payment can be provided in the event of a medical problem, including any psychological problems the individual may encounter following participation in this research project.

If you do not want to take part in this study, what other options are available to you?

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You are free to refuse to be in the study, and your refusal will not influence current or future relationships with The University of Texas at Austin.

How can you withdraw from this research study and who should I call if I have questions?

If you wish to stop your participation in this research study for any reason, you should contact: Chris White, at (512) 232-5560. You are free to withdraw your consent and stop participation in this research study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits for which you may be entitled.

In addition, if you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Lisa Leiden, Ph.D., Chair, University of Texas at Austin Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, 512/471-8871

How will your privacy and the confidentiality of your research records be protected?

Authorized persons from The University of Texas at Austin and the Institutional Review Board have the legal right to review your research records and will protect the confidentiality of those records to the extent permitted by law. Otherwise, your research records will not be released without your consent unless required by law or a court order.

Individuals who do not give permission for either the audio or video recordings of the interviews will be ensured complete confidentiality and their names will in no way be connected to the data derived from this project.

A reasonable effort will be made to ensure the confidentiality of individuals who give permission for either their audio or video recordings to be used in presentation format. This will include not mentioning any identifiable pieces of information such as names of persons or places. However, complete confidentiality cannot be promised due to the possibility of individuals being identified via voice, image, or quote. A separate permission form will be signed before and after each interview to ensure that participants are willing to allow these recordings to be used in this manner.

Will the researchers benefit from your participation in this *study* [beyond publishing or presenting the results]?

No.

By signing below, you are agreeing to participate in this research project. This Consent Form does not give permission to the researcher to audio or video record any interviews. Participants will sign separate forms for each type of recording before and after each interview.

_____ I agree to participate in this research project.
(initial)

_____ I have received a copy of this consent form.
(initial)

Participant Name

Signature

Date

Consent obtained by ...

Signature

Date

Appendix B

Permission for Audio Recording of Interview

IRB # 2004110062
**A Qualitative Investigation of Male College Freshmen's Experiences of Learning About
Sex/Sexuality during Childhood and Adolescence**

Permission for Audio Recording of Interview

Prior to the Interview

In order to ensure the accuracy of this research project, the interview in which you are about to participate will be audio recorded. The main purpose of this recording is for the transcription of the interview so that it may be analyzed at a future date. Participation in this research project requires that you allow the interview to be recorded for this purpose. Following the interview, you will be asked to review this form again and to give or refuse permission for this recording to be used for the purposes of educational presentations in classrooms and at professional conferences or as part of a digital dissertation. With today's technology, a digital dissertation can include linked text that allows the reader to navigate through the dissertation, link directly to cited material or an index, or play multimedia formats. If you refuse this permission, the audio recording will be destroyed and no identifying information will be included in the final report.

By signing below, you are giving permission for this interview to be audio recorded. This signature does not give the researcher permission to use the recording for any other purposes other than transcribing the interview.

Print Name

Signature

Date

Following the Interview

Please initial one of the following statements and sign below.

_____ I **do not** give permission for my voice to be used in educational presentations and/or as part of a digital dissertation. The audio recording of this interview must be destroyed following the transcription of the interview.

_____ I **do** give permission for my voice to be used for educational presentations and/or as part of a digital dissertation. I understand the researcher will make a reasonable effort to protect my confidentiality by excluding any comments that are directly identifiable such as names of people and places; however, I understand that there is a possibility that someone could identify me by my voice or the context of a quote.

Print Name

Signature

Date

Appendix C
Research Study Flyer

TALK ABOUT SEX! GET FREE STUFF!



ARE YOU A COLLEGE FRESHMAN?
ARE YOU AN 18 OR 19 YEAR-OLD MALE?
GOT SOMETHING TO SHARE ABOUT SEX?
IF YES TO ALL OF THE ABOVE CALL!

I AM LOOKING FOR MALES, 18-19, WHO ARE COLLEGE FRESHMEN, TO INTERVIEW ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCES LEARNING ABOUT SEX AND SEXUALITY. EACH PERSON WILL BE INTERVIEWED 2-3 TIMES AND RECEIVE A \$25 GIFT CERTIFICATE FOR EACH INTERVIEW! IF YOU ARE INTERESTED, PLEASE GIVE ME A CALL AT

512-232-5560
ASK FOR CHRIS!*

Appendix D
Telephone Script

IRB # 2004110062

Telephone Script

*To be used when answering the phone with potential participants or when returning calls to individuals interested in participating in the study.

Hello. My name is Chris White, and I am a doctoral student in health education. I am calling you (or are you calling about) a sexuality research study for which you saw a flyer around campus? (If yes, continue. If no, say “Thank you, sorry to bother you.”)

Do you have a few minutes to learn a little more about the study and to answer a few questions? (if yes, continue. if no, ask when a better time will call and record on the Personal Information Sheet and Screener).

First, let me ask you a few questions to make sure that you are eligible to participate. (record answers on Personal Information Sheet and Screener)

Okay. This study involves participating in up to three interviews about your experiences learning about sex and sexuality related things while you were growing up. The first interview will last approximately 2-3 hours and will involve recalling memories as young as you can remember and continue up to the present day. At the end of the first interview, we will schedule a time about two weeks later for you to return for a second interview. You will be given a small notebook and asked to jot down anything you remembered during the two-week period. During the second interview, we will review what you told me during the first one and we will go through the notebook together to discuss things you remembered during that break. You will also be allowed to add anything that you remembered but did not jot down in the notebook. At the end of the second interview, you’ll be asked if you would like to return in 3-6 months to be asked to provide feedback on the analysis of the interview. This will involve telling me whether or not you agree with the ideas I’ve come up with and giving me suggestions on what you think really happens when kids learn about sex. For each interview you complete, I’ll give you a \$25 gift certificate to some place like Alamo Drafthouse, Whole Foods, Waterloo Records, or Bookpeople.

Does this sound like something you might be interested in doing? (if yes, continue. if no, say thanks and hang up).

Okay. I’d like to ask you a few questions and then we’ll see about setting up the first interview. (record this information on the Personal Information Sheet and Screener)

What is your name?

How old are you? (if younger than 18 or older than 19 say thanks but you are currently not eligible for this study. thank you and goodbye)

What is your birth date? (again, must be before that date 1987 and after that date 1985)

What is a phone number that is best to reach you at?

What is your email address?

Are you currently a student at this university?

What is your classification? (must be freshman)

Is this your first year at this university? (if no, they are ineligible for the study)

Can you provide proof of enrollment and age at the first interview?

Are you a native-born citizen of the United States? (if no, they are ineligible)

Okay. Let's set up the first interview date. (record it on the Personal Information Sheet)

I'll give you a call a day or two prior to the interview to remind you and make sure you are able to come. At this time, I will also tell you where to meet me for the interview. It will be a location on campus. Please feel free to call me at 232-5560 if you have any questions or need to cancel or change your interview appointment. Thanks. Goodbye.

Appendix E
Interview Guide

Interview Guide

The interview process being employed is a fairly non-structured interview technique that allows the dialogue between the participant and the interviewer guide the direction of the interview. This guideline is to be used to guide the interviewer through the process. It is not meant to be used as an interview script. The initial topics are to be used to ease the participant into the interview process and to assist with memory recall of events that happened during childhood and adolescence. The points under each topic may be used to probe the individual for more information.

Describe the community in which you were raised.

- Population
- Conservative or liberal
- Family
- People

Describe your family.

- Mother
- Father
- Siblings
- Grandparents
- Others

Describe school life.

- school itself
- academic interests
- friends
- extracurricular activities
- list teachers

Media – what access did you have at home and school?

- Newspapers
- Television
- Internet access (supervised or unsupervised)

Describe yourself.

- Age?
- Ethnicity/Race?
- Gender?
- What is your sexual orientation? (exclusively? Any same-sex or opposite-sex experiences?)

Sources of sex information

What was happening?

Why was the information presented?

Why did you seek the information?

What did you think about the information provided?

What did you do after you were told about this information?

If you sought out other information about this, tell me what you did.

Ask for details.

Tell me as if I have no prior knowledge to sexual vocabulary.

Describe experience as you were then, i.e., without any prior knowledge of sex.

Detail, detail, detail

Ask participants to describe as detailed above how and when they learned about these things:

body parts

toilet functions

puberty

wet dreams

menstruation

condoms

aids

birth control

doctor visits

reproduction/pregnancy – how did you learn where babies come from?

sex in movies, tv shows

slang words

profanity

pornography

sti's

masturbation

kissing

playing nurse/doctor

videos/movies/internet/magazines

Is there anything you'd like to add?

Appendix F
Personal Information Sheet

IRB # 2004110062
Participant Information Sheet and Screener

THIS SHEET IS TO BE DESTROYED FOLLOWING THE COMPLETION OF THIS RESEARCH PROJECT.

ID# _____

NAME: _____

PHONE NUMBER: _____

BIRTHDATE: _____

EMAIL: _____

DATE OF INITIAL CALL: _____

DATE OF CALLS RETURNED (after three phone messages, contact attempts ceased)

CALL #1: _____

CALL #2: _____

CALL #3: _____

Is individual interested in participating in study? Y N

Is individual male? Y N

Is individual 18 or 19 and willing to provide proof of age? Y N

Is individual a college freshman enrolled at UT? Y N

FIRST INTERVIEW DATE: _____

SHOW: Y N

SECOND INTERVIEW DATE: _____

SHOW: Y N

INTERVIEW CHECKLISTS:

First Interview

- ☐ Consent
- ☐ Audio Recording Pre
- ☐ Video Recording Pre
- ☐ Audio Recording Post
- ☐ Video Recording Post

Second Interview

- ☐ Audio Recording Pre
- ☐ Video Recording Pre
- ☐ Audio Recording Post
- ☐ Video Recording Post

Would individual be interested in participating in analysis interview? Y N
Analysis Interview Date: _____

Appendix G
Debrief and Resource List

IRB # 2004110062

Debrief and Resource List

Thank you for your participation in this research study. I hope that you found this to be an interesting experience. I understand that participating in a study like this may bring up some feelings, questions, and other concerns for people. Below you will find a list of resources along with a website address and/or phone number that you might find useful to address some of those feelings, questions, and concerns. In addition, if you would like to ask any questions about the research or have any comments or suggestions, you can call me, Chris White, at 512-232-5560. Have a great day.

UT Student Health Services www.utexas.edu/student/health
Phone: 471-4955

UT Health Promotions Office www.utexas.edu/student/health/promotion/index.html
Sexual Health www.utexas.edu/student/health/promotion/sexualhealth.html

UT Counseling and Mental Health <http://www.utexas.edu/student/cmhc/>
Phone: 471-3515

Planned Parenthood of Capitol of Texas Region www.plannedparenthood.org/pp2/tcr/

Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States www.siecus.org

Advocates for Youth www.advocatesforyouth.org for teen/young adult sexual issues

Teen Wire www.teenwire.com for teen/young adult sexual issues

Out Youth www.outyouth.org Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Questioning youth in Austin

Waterloo Counseling www.waterloocounseling.org counseling for sexual issues and HIV

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