

Parental Communications and Young Women's Struggle for Sexual Agency

by

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Abstract:

This qualitative study examined how 14 young women's sexual desire and agency was influenced by the messages communicated from their parents and the quality of the parent-child relationship. Previous research results were supported, such as: parents do not communicate about sex frequently, or only about limited topics; mothers communicate more frequently than fathers, and peers communicate more sexual information. Utilizing a postmodern, feminist position, themes of parental transmission of patriarchal social controls were found, such as: fear of being viewed as a slut, gender roles that demand female passivity, sex is scary, and young women are not to have sex, or only in the context of committed relationships. Implications for parenting practices and the importance of developing sexual agency are discussed.

Dedication and Acknowledgements

Before anyone else I must thank my parents, Philip and Peggy Averett, to whom I owe EVERYTHING. I am who I am, and I am where I am because of them. Without their unconditional love and never ending support I would have never believed I was capable of writing a dissertation. Many of the following chapters were written in their homes (who says you can't get work done at the beach?), and despite being interrupted by them 1,000 times. They are my "enlightened observers" and ever-faithful cheerleaders. They taught me to believe in myself, and gave me the freedom to explore the world around me with complete abandon, secure in the risks I took, knowing that no matter what - they always had my back. I dedicate this dissertation to them.

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I say it all the time but I want it recorded here and now: Women, especially the women I know, are the most brilliant, loving, creative, amazing, supportive, giving, fun and powerful force in this world.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

"I begin with a different assumption: ...I consider the possibility that teenage girls' sexual desire is important and life sustaining; that girls' desire provides crucial information about the relational world in which they live; that the societal obstacles to girls' and women's ability to feel and act on their own desire should come under scrutiny rather than simply be feared; that girls and women are entitled to have sexual subjectivity, rather than simply to be sexual objects."

-Deborah Tolman from *Dilemmas of Desire*

Adolescent sexuality is pathologized in research (Chilman, 1990). Some have even charged sections of the research community with an "exclusive problem-behavior focus" (Capaldi, Crosby, & Stoolmiller, 1996, p. 357). Risky sexual behaviors, teenage pregnancy, lack of contraceptive use and the resulting STIs, early sexual debut and the host of problems this can cause, are the main areas on which sexuality researcher's focus (see Cooper, Wood, Orcutt & Albino, 2003; Lanctot & Smith, 2001; Little & Rankin, 2001). A great deal of this is due to the legitimate concerns of researchers and policy makers for the health and wellbeing of adolescents. However, a large reason for the emphasis on the problems of sexuality stems from subtle and insidious cultural factors such as patriarchy, and America's historically Judeo-Christian ethics that stigmatizes sexual activity outside of the marriage bed. Thus from the outset, to consider adolescent sex is to think in ways that make it suspect and problematic.

Even greater attention is given in the research to the problem of the adolescent *female's* sexuality (see Bachanas et al, 2002; Hockaday, Crase, Shelley & Stockdale, 2000; Pittman & Chase-Lansdale, 2001; Franklin, 1987; Moore & Chase-Lansdale, 2001; Stevens, 2001). Society continues the double standard of the young male's sexual behavior as typical and expected, an innate healthy desire that must be expressed. However, young women's sex is viewed as inherently more dangerous, more suspect and thus must be controlled (Hartley & Drew, 2001). While the problem of adolescent female sexuality is studied a great deal, very little research is

explicitly representative of the personal experiences and interpretations of some young women (for exceptions see Felton & Bartoces, 2002; Weekes, 2002). What is not often heard is the belief of some adolescents' that pregnancy and other sexual experiences are not problems but rather strengths, and opportunity for growth, life lessons and empowerment (Lamanna, 1999).

Society, policy makers, and researchers often ignore the importance of healthy adolescent female sexual functioning from a broad framework that includes elements of subjectivity and agency. Often the "default" framework equates healthy adolescent sexuality with *no* sex or traditionally scripted sex. Policy and society continues to push ideas of abstinence and a huge responsibility on women and men to experience sex within the limitations of their gender roles.

Despite the pervasive goals to stop adolescents from engaging in sex, adolescence is *the* time for key sexual developments with behavior being the expressions of those biological and psychological developments. Adolescent sexual expression sets the foundation for future sexual functioning. In particular, sexual expression affects a woman's ability to act in the world and to feel like she can will things and make them happen (Martin, 1996). One perspective on adolescent sexuality argues against promoting abstinence due to the biological imperative of sexual expression, and abstinence is viewed as an unhealthy suppression of the body's physical need (Money, 1997).

In 1995 the National Commission on Adolescent Sexual Health drafted a useful definition of healthy sexual functioning. This document endorsed by the American Medical Association among many other prominent associations, sets out a new standard for healthy sexual functioning. In their consensus statement, the Commission relates being a sexually healthy adult to developmental tasks of adolescence. Sexual health is also defined beyond the typical pathology focus of preventing pregnancy and STIs, to include "meaningful interpersonal

relationships" and the ability to express love "in ways consistent with one's own values" (p. 4). Sexual health is also described in terms of behavior that is "consensual, *nonexploitative* [italics added], honest, pleasurable" (p.4). For researchers, like myself, that take a positive approach to sexuality, these statements encourage sexuality researchers towards a representation of adolescent sexuality that is no longer satisfied with hypothesis that only explore how to stop, postpone or limit sexual behavior.

There is a growing belief that the only true way to prevent HIV, STIs and unwanted pregnancies is not through merely telling girls to say no to sex, or to have only a few partners but rather through raising women with sexual agency and subjectivity that allows them to make these decisions for themselves (Tolman & Szalacha, 1999). For a growing minority of researchers, it is believed that until girls see themselves as sexual actors with desires, needs, and priorities of their own, and not merely as the objects of men to be desired, they will never be capable of true sexual health.

This growing minority of researchers who are fighting for a new view of women's sexual health, typically label themselves as feminists with postmodern and social constructivist orientations (Tolman, 2001). The postmodernist Michel Foucault (1978) is an influential force upon these feminist researchers (Kolmar & Bartkowski, 2000). His theory is rooted in the notion that sexuality is socially constructed rather than merely innate or natural. According to Foucault, cultural norms based on such things as religious proscriptions, historical processes and the use of language (among other things) are co-created in a society and taught as sexual standards, labeled as Truths. These ideas of Truth are then the ruler by which everyone is measured. Foucault approached these truths as discourses that disempower people through their social control.

Feminists, while appreciative of Foucault's "outing" of society and the sexual discourses that disempower people, critique his limitations in speaking to the experiences of power in gender. As Perez (1993) succinctly stated, "Foucault, like Freud and Lacan, speaks to men, about men, and for men in male languages" (p. 492). Building upon Foucault's ideas, feminists then add gender to the equation. Feminist theory of sexuality is positioned within the broader theory of gender inequality. According to Mackinnon (1989) it is a theory that "treats sexuality as a social construct of male power: defined by men, forced on women, and constitutive in the meaning of gender" (p. 438). Kristeva (1981) a feminist, that wrote on female subjectivity, built on Lacan (1977) but not only deconstructing cultural discourses but also gender roles.

As a result, many feminists have attempted to change the definitions of female sexuality. At an later point in the Second Wave of feminism, sexual liberation was often touted as the goal (hooks, 1984). Women were encouraged to be sexually "free". Although there were advances in women having the agency and power to initiate, to enjoy sex, to experiment and have a sense of self in sexual behaviors, the new found freedoms "did not, however, deconstruct the power relations between men and women in the sexual sphere" (p. 149). The type of freedom women were experiencing was mostly patterned after a male model. This type of sexuality was viewed as "disgusting and necessarily exploitative of women" (p. 149).

Thus what Third Wave Feminism now seeks are women (and men) who can and will envision new sexual paradigms. Feminists are no longer content with the traditional choices. Long dissatisfied with the limitations of stereotypical female role of object, and more recently aware of the oppression in taking on the stereotypical male role, feminist seek a third option.

Current research is attempting to find it. Feminists deconstruct the traditional gender roles that hold power over the lives of women and men. Since sexuality is a large means by which

gender roles oppress individuals, and adolescence is the time of sexual developments and expressions, then adolescent sexuality is gaining attention from feminist researchers. There is a small but growing number of studies that take a feminist approach and consider the role of culture and patriarchy in the shaping of adolescent women's sexual selves. These studies have examined the ways in which schools (Fine, 1988), the media (Carpenter, 1998), socialization (Lee, 1994) and the socio-political environment (Tolman, 2002) have influenced the sexual development of girls. Yet very few have looked explicitly at the role parents play in developing sexually healthy women from the normative perspective.

When the role of parents in adolescent sexual functioning has been researched, it is in ways that focus on the role of parents in preventing and minimizing sexual behaviors. Parents are undoubtedly important influences in their adolescent children's sexual behavior. Numerous studies have shown how parents have an impact on their daughter's sexual development and functioning. Parental communication (indirect and direct) (Brock & Jennings, 1993; Davis & Friel, 2001), relationship attributes (Longmore, Manning & Giordano, 2001) and attitudes (Goodson, Evans & Edmundson, 1997) all have been shown to influence a teen's sexual decision making and resulting behaviors. Studies that examine the impact of parenting practices on adolescent early sexual debut, numbers of partners and contraceptive use are also abundant (for a recent review see Mescke, Bartholomae & Zentall, 2002). However, there are few studies that examine the intersection of how parenting influences a daughter's sexual desire and healthy functioning in terms of agency and subjectivity.

My dissertation will be an attempt to minimize the existing hole in the literature. In order to get as complete a picture as possible, it is important to consider not only the macrosystems (culture) and their level of influence upon an individual, but also other systems such as the

microsystem (family) and the mesosystem or intersection of those systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Besides adding a different level of interpretation to the existing literature, it is also my desire to add to those voices that attempt to promote empowerment and agency in adolescent female's sexual experiences. This project entailed research with and for young women about their perception of the impact parenting had on their sexual desire and functioning. I sought what parenting practices create sexual agency and subjectivity in young women and what practices encourage the creation of women who see themselves as passive sexual objects. Utilizing narrative inquiry, interviews and social justice elements, this study focused on the need for the new view of healthy sexual functioning in adolescent women and the role that parents play.

How do young women frame their sexual experiences, specifically the issue of desire? And what role do parents have in those experiences? What messages and attitudes do young women receive from their parents about the role of desire in sexual experiences? What parenting practices do young women feel allow or disempower their development of sexual agency and subjectivity? How do young women manage the tensions of the dichotomous gender roles - is sexual predator or passive gatekeeper the only options in sexual identity? These are the questions that drive my study.

Chapter 2

Personal Narrative

"She had thought of something, something about the body, about the passions which it was unfitting for her as a woman to say. Men, her reason told her, would be shocked....Telling the truth about my own experiences as a body, I do not think I solved. I doubt that any woman has solved it yet. The obstacles against her are still immensely powerful – and yet they are very difficult to define."

-Virginia Woolf, from *Professions for Women*

Why Include my Personal Narrative?

Many researchers do not position themselves in their research for several good reasons. One reason being the attempt of scientific objectivity, a noble goal but in my opinion, impossible. Another reason is professionalism. Many researchers, in an attempt to separate qualitative research from other traditions such as journalism or non-fiction writing create boundaries that include exclusion of the personal voice. For some researchers it is fear of exposure, and I respect that.

However, for other researchers the inclusion of the self is a priority in research. I am such a researcher. My reasons include my commitment to transparency. For me transparency replaces objectivity and gives qualitative research more credibility. In my humble opinion, transparency on the part of the researcher is a more realistic, honest and more authentic goal. Also, it is a longstanding moral standard of mine. As a therapist, social worker, case manager, teacher, and now researcher I have never asked a client to give of themselves, that which I would not be willing to give. In this instance I am asking my participants to share a written narrative of their sexual development and the impact of their family upon it. Thus I feel compelled as a researcher attempting transparency to do the same.

I feel that it is imperative that I write a narrative in order to set the foundation for a project that incorporate issues of social justice. Each of my participants will be given opportunity to read and comment on my narrative as part of the research process. While not flattening the research hierarchy between researcher/participant, it is in my view, a step towards power and influence for participants. It also paves the way for the co-creation of knowledge.

To tell my story I must first tell how I came to my topic. The role of desire, female subjectivity and agency as a research topic came to me from an innate sense when looking at the research that something was not quite right. Sex, in the literature, when considered in sweeping strokes, came across as this awful, harmful, terrible thing that teenagers did. I could not help but wonder if any of the researchers remembered what it was to be 16 and passionate. I also wondered what was missing. The research covered every area: parents, peers, SES, race but yet, lots of girls were and are still getting pregnant, were contracting STIs and HIV, many girls are still at risk. Then I found Catherine Chilman (1990) and Deborah Tolman (1994; 2001; 2002) who offered research to back up my intuition. "Just Say No" was not working because so many young women are not healthy in their sexual choices. This was not *just* because their peers were having unprotected sex and their parents were not talking to them, but *also* because the whole patriarchal cultural system is ingrained with ideas and beliefs that deny girls sexual agency and subjectivity.

This resonates with me as I remember being 11, tall for my age, blonde haired, blue eyed and pretty. I had a man in a car follow me almost to my doorstep as I rode my bicycle home. At the tender age of 11, I knew he wanted me sexually. I could see the desire in his eyes, his face, his gestures to me. For the first time I was aware of being nothing more than a sexual object to a man and I have yet to lose that feeling.

I knew he had no idea who I really was, like even how old I was. He did not know that I loved to read, was good at all sports but really a natural at competitive swimming, and that I had just had my first kiss. Or that I had a tendency to be very selfish, cried easily and was really spoiled. I recognized that all he saw were these body parts that created an attractive physical presence and for no other reason he was willing to follow me for miles. Although a little frightened, because I knew he was a man – thus bigger and stronger – capable of hurting me, I was also struck with a sense of power. In that experience I had my first realization of what it was to be a sexual object and a gatekeeper. I had something “they” wanted and I could decide (although the knowledge of their strength and power to take what they wanted was always in the back of my mind) when, where and who to give myself to sexually.

My Story

It is very important to know that I was raised in a Southern, conservative, Baptist home, in a traditional family with two parents. We were upper middle class. My father was a successful business executive with an income that made it possible for my mother to be home whenever I was. We had a large home, in a nice neighborhood, in a top-notch school district.

As far as siblings go, I joke that using the sibling birth order theory, I am the worst of all worlds. I am the baby of the family and at the same time could be considered an only child. The six years separating me from older brother made it possible for me to still have memories of being “the baby” with a big brother, but also I have as many memories of being the only child in the home. I have the residual effects of being both roles: the baby of the family, eternally coddled, infantilized, protected and the center of attention, and, as an only child dotted upon and held up as the crowning glory, not used to having to share or taking turns.

My parents are white, college educated, communicative and caring. My father worked a lot and their marriage was shaky at times but among everyone I knew, my family, my house was admired and the place to be. I had a curfew that was considered pretty strict although not unreasonable. My mother always knew my whereabouts and had to meet all my friends and boyfriends. When I began dating at age 14, it was done in the context of hanging around my house or a boy's house when our parents were home to supervise. An ironic detail is that at age 15 I lost my virginity to my boyfriend, on the first occasion our parents allowed us to be alone. The funny part of the story is that my mother called in the middle of it to check up on us. I breathlessly answered the phone to hear my Southern belle of a mom, say in her sweet and sassy voice "This is your conscious calling".

My mother did an excellent job of talking to me about puberty, sex and relationships. She talked to me at a young age, mostly in response to my starting menstruation at a very early age. She was very comfortable with the topic and well informed. She covered a wide range of topics and communicated frequently from that time on. I knew I could go to her with anything.

My parents have a mix of varying sexual attitudes. Being raised in the Baptist church I was taught by pastors and youth ministers to believe that sex was for marriage and masturbation a sin. My parents vaguely reinforced these ideas. They are very moral people and yet, it has never been a damnation type of morality. I have always known that although my parents may not agree with a behavior, they will still love the person no matter what.

Yet, another highly important influence upon me was my extended family. My aunts, uncles, great aunts and uncles, grandmother, great-grandparents, cousins and assorted "adopted" (not legal but emotional) family members, are that not so unusual breed of Southern, that combines strong Christian values with down home redneck realities. Out of marriage pregnancies, shot gun

weddings, abortions, high school marriages, divorces, multiple marriages, extra-marital affairs, an "alienation of affection" lawsuit, use of prostitutes, heavy drinking, gambling, family members with not quite incestuous but questionable boundaries, and physical abuse are all a part of the family story. What I didn't witness with my own eyes, I was privy to in a well preserved oral tradition that included sitting around my grandmother's kitchen "havin' a snort" and story telling. Somewhere along the way, I also picked up and seemed to inherit one family legacy or myth, that "I come from a long line of highly sexed women". As far as the men in my family, well of course, that went without saying. So although very traditional and conservative attitudes were spoken as the expectation, I grew up knowing that very different behaviors were what actually occurred.

Another element that I see as an important cultural influence upon my sexuality is that although my entire family is Southern born and bred, I was born and raised till age 15 in Northern Delaware. I am the Yankee in the family and to this day it is considered the reason I think and act "different" from the rest of my family. Wilmington is a metropolitan city with easy access to other even larger and more Northern cities, such as D.C., Philadelphia, Baltimore and New York. As such, even though I came home to sweet tea, fried chicken, and praying at dinnertime; I also spent all day, many afternoons and every weekend with tough talking, tough walking, independent girls that wore keys around their necks to let themselves in their homes after school. I learned about freedom from them and I wanted it.

I credit my highly dichotomous nature in part to the contradictory messages my mom and dad gave me about who I should be. On the one hand I was supposed to be a demure Southern girl, who said "Yes Ma'am" and "No Sir", who cooked for church suppers, never cussed in public and that "speaks only when spoken to". This I knew because of the look of embarrassment

that crossed my mother's face whenever I took the Lord's name in vain. My dad still loves to tell how I refused to touch chicken flesh and they thought I would never learn to cook. However, they also showed and told me things that contradicted all of that and said "but *really* don't do it, don't be a stereotypical little woman". My mother insists I was just hell bound and determined to do what I wanted. And I believe her. All that know me, know my stubborn streak.

However I have other memories...at the same time I remember it being drilled into my head by my parents that I Was A Leader (which is *not* how sweet little Southern girls behave) and yet how wonderful I was for being so. Both parents praised me more for being smart, than being pretty (although I was told I was pretty often). I was told "I could do ANYTHING I set my mind to" and they said it so often that I believe it with all my being.

There were also more subtle messages that taught me that submissive wives get no respect while men who went off and did "real" work got to be waited on hand and foot at the end of the day. The men decided how the money was spent. They had the final say in almost everything. They, the men, were the Kings of the Earth and really there were very few Queens. Mostly all I saw were a lot of handmaidens.

Pretty quickly I picked up the idea that being feminine was not the way to go. Yeah, as a girlie girl you got the door opened for you but at what price? Sure you could get your way now and again – but by all these feminine wile ways, backdoor, subtle manipulations and passive aggressions. The men said what they wanted – straight out and plain. Yes or No and it was done. Wow! *That* was the way to go! Maybe it spoke to the laziness in me? It was too much work and effort to be feminine, to be a typical female. But wait, I was very female! I had the vagina to prove it! Why did being female have to mean being passive and sweet? Why couldn't I, a woman, say what I wanted and get my way? I tried it and it worked. Being assertive, confident,

even demanding, nice (but never sweet), intelligent and straightforward has worked out well for me.

What does all this have to do with sex? For me, everything. Although I was and am still often confused by the demands of society on me as a woman to submit to stereotypes of what a woman wants and how a woman behaves, I believed that being male was better. I watched and learned from society and home that men got respect and women did not. It was everywhere: in business, in the home, on TV, the radio, in marriage. It was true of sex too.

At age 16 I was acutely aware of the double standard for boys' sexual behavior and girls' sexual behavior. I didn't buy into it for a minute. It made no sense to me. I knew that girls wanted sex and could enjoy sex as much if not more than boys. I had multiple orgasms, one right after the other. I had never seen a guy do that. Yet they got to have lots of sex, with lots of people, for no other reason that it felt good and we girls weren't supposed to? Bullshit! We could be just like them. So it seems that I made a conscious decision that I would not be molded into the feminine sex role, but rather adopted the masculine sex role.

However, like so many people I couldn't escape the voices in my head that sometimes told me I am wrong, weird or going against everything normal. Messages like: only sluts sleep around, that women don't masturbate, women don't initiate and women tolerate or sometimes enjoy sex but don't really desire it for the pleasure alone. As a result of these cultural and familial messages I have tried to fit the feminine sex role during certain phases.

The course of my sexual life from virginity loss to the present has been a constant veering between the two roles. I have a tendency towards extremism. I spent ages 15 - 21 being stereotypically masculine: a sexual predator. I felt very powerful in my sexual experiences and I enjoyed them physically a great deal. But they were empty and void of any higher meaning.

There was little emotional connection. I found sexual pleasure was great but so fleeting in the grander scheme, and it made me wonder what I was missing, because something was. Yet I turned to easy answers. I was *supposed* to settle down, get married, and have kids. According to cultural standards of normal I was supposed to have only one partner for the rest of my life.

Monogamy worked for everyone else, shouldn't it work for me?

So then ages 21 - 29 I spent trying out that feminine role I had rejected in my youth and was the verbal hope of my parents. Sex was only in the context of a loving relationship and I became a gatekeeper, trading sex for commitment. Yet I lost all sense of agency in my sexual experiences. I still had power, but of a different kind. Instead of boldly and confidently declaring my desires and making them happen I counted on those subtle and manipulative tactics to get what I wanted. I didn't initiate. I did not have sex often. I felt guilt when I masturbated. I missed sex. I missed being honest and direct. I missed me.

Thirty brought me out of my marriage and an immediate return to my old wild ways. Men were still at it – and even more so. The stereotypical sexual predator was alive and well. Lots of sex, lots of partners, lots of experimental behaviors. It was everywhere. And so why couldn't I? It was too easy to fall right back into being a sexual predator. Although I found the physical pleasure sustaining, I quickly realized that I was replicating the mistakes of some past feminists. Free sex did not equate to sexual liberation. Now not only was I a sexual object, but I was objectifying men! Although this evened the scales, it also lowered the bar! I was culpable in creating inferior standards for male/female gender roles and sexual expression! I had to wonder if there was not a better way. Was traditional female gatekeeper or traditional male predator my only options?

Sadly, I can not say I have the answer - yet. I am full of hope. Struggling with the dichotomous tensions of my sexual identity formed by culture, my parents and personality I search for a better way. This study is one way I search. I truly believe that adolescent sexual health is dependent on new and better gender roles and on ways of being that allow sexual agency and subjectivity to develop at young ages.

Limitations and Bias

Another reason it is important for me to include this narrative in this study and to be as transparent as possible is so that my limitations and biases as a researcher can be revealed. Obviously a cursory examination of my narrative can reveal a whole host of biases just through my own use of identifiers: White, Baptist, upper middle class, educated, female, Northern, Southern, redneck, are labels that all have meaning and influence over my worldview. In defense of these I can say that I have spent my life trying to "rise above" or look out from behind these narrow life experiences. Travel, intentionality in the variety of life experiences I have, commitment to multiculturalism, higher education with a focus on critical thinking and investment in self awareness have all offered me ways to have a life that is much broader than those identifiers. Yet as my narrative reveals, the "voices" of my culture and my family still speak loudly to me at various times.

Certain philosophies that are clearly articulated in my introduction and in the narrative are beliefs I do not seek to rise above but rather feel I have risen to. Postmodernism and Feminism guide my thinking. While I unabashedly proclaim these doctrines as my guiding principles, I recognize that they too are flawed and limited. Postmodernism and its often touted declaration that there is no Truth - is a Truth statement. This is a huge conundrum.

Another limitation of my narrative is my inability to disclose *everything*. There are many stories, avenues, and experiences in my sexual development that I did not touch upon in this narrative. Many of these experiences I chose not to cover simply to keep my story focused on the topics pertinent to the study. However, there is one experience in particular that is relevant and even crucial to my study. Yet I am unable to share it for reasons of confidentiality and respect of the privacy of a family member. I am aware that this may also be the case with my participants.

It is my plan to address the limitations and biases that I have outlined here through journal writing and peer debriefing throughout the research process. An avid journal writer, I believe in the power of reflection and the brutal honesty that arises when sitting alone with one's thoughts, writing what you know and feel. Also, colleagues/friends are the most inspiring and wonderful sources of feedback. The insight, wisdom, clarity, challenge, confrontation and love that I receive from people about my work adds layers and layers of meaning and understanding.

This research is an attempt to learn, to grow both personally and professionally. It is also an attempt to raise consciousness and awareness in participants and readers. What I offer is not Truth. What I hope to offer are the various ways women sexually think, feel, live and ARE; that are so often far removed from the research and policy community.

Chapter 3

Research Methods

“We know things with our lives and we live that knowledge,
beyond what any theory has yet theorized”

-Catharine MacKinnon

Paradigms

There has been a small but growing call in the world of adolescent sexuality research for more studies on young women's sexual desire (Chilman, 1990; Capaldi, Crosby, & Stoolmiller, 1996; Tolman, 2002). Slowly, adolescent female sexual desire is becoming understood as a legitimate and necessary area of study. Feminist researchers extend these ideas of studying female desire by asking the adolescents themselves for their beliefs and personal experiences (Tolman, 2002). It is believed that qualitative research can best answer this research call through interviews and personal narratives (Tolman, 2002). The thick, rich detail of personal accounts allows opportunity for an often silenced group to be represented.

Utilizing a postmodern paradigm allows for deconstruction of the existing research that often replicates patriarchal assumptions about women's sexuality. And a postmodern orientation creates space for the multiple realities of the participants/researchers.

Narrative research is thought to be well matched to feminist thinking in regards to philosophical orientation (Brown & Gilligan, 1992). As such, postmodern approaches to narrative research are an increasing trend (Hatch, 2002). Written and oral narrative research is the "living and telling, reliving and retelling the stories of experiences that make up people's lives" (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 19). It is a way of understanding experience and is based on the notion that people make sense of their lives through story (Hatch, 2002). Thus narrative inquiry is suited for research that seeks to empower and enlighten both readers and participants. Empowerment can occur through the participants telling of their story. As Witherell & Nodding

(1991) share, "Stories invite us to come to know the world and our place in it. Whether narratives or history or imagination, stories call us to consider what we know, how we know, and what and whom we are about" (pg. 3). Written narratives not only allow opportunity for participant reflection, but also commitment to their story.

Oral narratives or interviewing is a major source of qualitative data collection, with one-on-one interviewing method as the most common (Merriam, 1998). Interviewing aids in understanding the meaning that participants have constructed about their experiences. According to Patton (1990):

We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe...We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions. We cannot observe behaviors that took place at some previous point in time...We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meaning they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things. The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective. Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit (p. 196).

As such, interviewing is an important tool in meaning making and critical to having an intimate awareness of what women experience.

Thus, coming from a postmodern and feminist orientation I completed a qualitative study using retrospective written and oral narratives (interviews). In the study, I sought not Truth but insight into the complexity that is adolescent female sexuality. I believe that this work is an attempt to move to a deeper understanding, by immersing myself in the complexity of what women know from their own experiences, while not abandoning what I know about myself (Brown & Gilligan, 1992).

Methods

Inspired by Beausang's (2000) data collection methods I sought out participants through the Spring 2004 Human Sexuality classes at a large, Southeastern university. I spoke to all the instructors of the course and was granted permission by instructors of two sections to seek participants, through the use of written narratives. The written narrative method was chosen because it suited my research questions. According to Riessman (1993), "Because the approach gives prominence to human agency and imagination, it is well suited to studies of subjectivity and identity" (p. 5).

For the first wave of data collection, a written narrative exercise was included on the class syllabi as either an assignment option, or an extra credit option for all students (see Appendix B for narrative assignment). In order to minimize the work this incurred for the instructors I took responsibility for all class management tasks associated with the assignment.

I presented the assignment to the classes at the end of a one hour fifteen minute lecture on gender and sex roles, sexual agency and subjectivity. During the lecture I also read a section of my personal narrative (Chapter 2). Besides giving students who were completing the assignment a broad framework of what to include in the assignment, this created a sense of my openness and a starting point for relationship and trust building needed for an interview process. It was also an attempt on my part to flatten the power hierarchy in the researcher/participant relationship from the very beginning.

After offering the assignment to all the students in the class, I then presented my research project and asked the women in the class to consider allowing the assignment to become part of my research and taking part in the follow up interviews.

My sampling method was a mixture of convenience sampling and homogeneous sampling. Although convenience sampling is a common method, it is the least desirable (Patton, 1990). However, the reality of being a poor and time constrained doctoral student with formidable Institutional Review Board considerations forced me to make sampling decisions based on convenience. Yet, a strength of my sampling method was that by seeking out female, Southeastern university students I was able to gather a homogeneous group in respect to socio-economic status and educational level. Homogenous sampling allows for the in depth description of a particular subgroup (Patton, 1990) and aids in transferability (see Appendix D). In this case, since minorities and low SES adolescents are often the focus in the "problem of adolescent sexuality", my research presents the experience of women that are typically underrepresented in sexuality research.

I originally had 17 women respond to my call for participants and was able to complete 15 interviews. The interviews occurred in a neutral and private location. The interviews lasted from 45 minutes to over 2 hours. The average interview was around one hour long. After completing 15 interviews, I found that the quality of one interview recording was so poor that it was unable to be transcribed. Ultimately I used the narratives and interviews of 14 young women for my data source.

The 14 women were all aged 18 - 22. Nine of the women labeled themselves as Caucasian, one was African American, one stated she was Italian American, two stated they were Bi-racial (one stated she was Hispanic/Caucasian and one woman identified herself as Jewish/ Caucasian) and one was Asian American (Japanese ethnicity). All stated they were of middle to upper middle socio-economic status. All but one, are from intact families (parent's were still married to one another). See Appendix D for a fuller picture of the participants of this study.

Utilizing the narrative inquiry method, my participants wrote retrospective narratives of their sexual experiences attending to the specifics of desire, agency, and subjectivity. In the written narratives they shared their impressions of how their parents influenced their sexual development and behavior. Analysis of the written narratives included reading the narratives in their entirety purely for grading purposes and to get a feel for the overall sense of how student's responded to the assignment directives. Then for my research participants I went back and re-read each narrative, underlining key words and phrases, making notations of questions to ask during the interviews based on missing information or the need for greater detail. Then within 2 hours prior to each interview, I would read for the third time the narrative for the upcoming interview, underlining words and phrases (in a different color pen), if something else stood out to me, that I missed in my second read. As well, at that time I made notes on the narrative about my ideas of the participant, their sexual agency and my views on their sexual experiences.

Follow up semi-structured interviews (see Appendix C for interview guide) with participants allowed me to clarify and seek further information regarding their written narratives. On several occasions the interviews added much more information than the written narratives provided. It also gave participants an opportunity to reflect, refute and add layers of meaning to my analysis and resulting themes. This form of a member check enhanced the credibility of the data.

The interviews were tape-recorded. I took field notes after the completion of each interview about the experience, my observations of the participants and ideas created through the interview experience. At the end of each interview I gave each participant the opportunity to read in full my narrative and to ask me questions regarding my research, my sexual experiences and my beliefs.

The interviews were then transcribed by a paid transcriber, another doctoral student within my department. The transcribed interviews were then analyzed in several waves. I read through each of the transcribed interviews to get an overall sense of the data. I then re-read each transcript on three separate occasions. Each time I coded the interviews based on how the information responded to my research questions. Coding included underlining quotes and grouping them by both a color coding system and number system. Starting out with many themes, the themes were then collapsed under major overarching themes that are discussed in the results section (Chapter 4).

To obtain another level of credibility I had the same colleague, who transcribed my data and who is also a human sexuality expert, independently code the transcribed interviews. She used Atlas.ti, a qualitative analysis software, to code the data. We then discussed our resulting codes and found that we had agreement in our results. The written narratives were also read a fourth time and coded in the same manner as the transcribed interviews (underlining and using a color and number coding system) to add to the strength of the data.

As a proponent of qualitative research who has a commitment to advancing the acceptance of qualitative research within the research community, I did all I believe I was capable of doing to enhance the credibility of my research methods and analysis. The various methods I employed and how they add to the dependability of my research is explicitly explained via a chart that follows Guba and Lincoln's (1982) example (Appendix F).

Role of Researcher

The idea of power in relationships and especially in research is an ongoing dialogue and struggle for me. Having social constructivist leanings I believe in the idea of being co-constructors of knowledge with my participants. I would like to believe we could interact and

learn as equals. However, the power of ultimate authority and responsibility for a dissertation placed me in a position of higher power, not to mention my education, age and experiential background. However, I always want to be mindful, sensitive and respectful of that authority. As such I saw my role as one of negotiator and facilitator. In my search to give voice to oppressed populations such as adolescents, minorities, women, I *strove* to make my research a negotiated process.

As it has been made known to me on numerous occasions my energy, presence, personality and personal power are such that I should always address my personal perspective and reflections upon my research. I am clearly approaching my research from my philosophical and theoretical orientations of being a postmodernist and a feminist. Obviously these frameworks are lenses through which I view the world and affect my interpretations and understandings of research. Thus I feel it is imperative to acknowledge that my voice is inescapably in the research and to present it formally (Chapter 5). This also allows opportunity for not only my opinions to be expressed but also to discuss of the limitations that my philosophies create.

My commitment to including the personal voice of the researcher stems from my belief that objectivity in research is impossible and transparency is better than the ruse of objectivity. In addition to my participating by writing my own retrospective narrative (see Chapter 2), I kept a research journal and reflected on the research process, and how I, as the instrument, affected the research (Chapter 5). According to Rodgers and Cowles (1993), the self-awareness of the researcher throughout the process of research is as important as the methods employed in data collection and analysis.

Thus my research entailed a qualitative study utilizing retrospective written and oral narratives with undergraduate women. Situating myself as a postmodernist and feminist, the

research includes elucidating, analyzing and critiquing my orientations. As well, this study engaged methods that are the hallmarks of quality research: credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability (Appendix F).

Chapter 4

Results

"...I think if I told my mom I had sexual desire she'd be like "What? No you don't!".

- Kelli

Some Things Old and Some Things New

One strength of this study was that resulting themes confirmed several adolescent sexuality research trends. For example, according to my participants, their parents typically talk very little or only about limited topics, when communicating about sexuality with their children, supports a re-occurring theme in sexuality research (Jaccard & Dittus, 1993). See Appendix A for a full review of these trends. These traditional themes I will cover briefly.

New themes were also discovered, such as the role of parents in empowering women to have sexual desire, or not (as exhibited in the above quote). One resulting theme in particular, *the fear of being viewed as a slut*, is not often found in the sexuality research literature. This and other new themes will be discussed at length.

This chapter presents the themes, old and new, that came out of the analysis process. As well as including these themes with quotes and explanation in the following pages, I have also created a results table (Table E) that lists the themes and exactly which participants spoke about and to each of the themes.

The role of parents in their adolescent's sexuality is typically considered in two ways: the effects of the parent-child relationship and the messages that parents communicate. Although the "parent-child" relationship is discussed in the literature, a closer examination reveals that in actuality the mother-child interaction is often the true focus of most research (Mescke,

Bartholomae & Zentall, 2002). I specifically attempted, through the interview process, to draw out the role of fathers as well.

Parent's Have Influence in the Sexual Lives of their Daughters

As Brooke stated when asked if her parents had an influence on her sexual decision making,

Well and not even necessarily sexuality, like just with all aspects.

Parents play an important role in shaping the lives of their daughters. For several women like Brooke and Marla, this was not just through direct transmission of sexual values but also through the general parent-child relationship.

I think that they did it in the best way, putting like not only emphasis on the sexual part but also like being confident and stuff like that. - Marla

In several instances the women viewed their relationship with their parents as the main factor in their decision when and if to have sex.

The messages I have received from my parents have definitely affected who I am sexually today, my family's focus on personal success through education and money are what I am currently pursuing, those are the two things I want most at this point in my life and I don't care to worry about sex. - Julia

When questioned if she thought her parents were the number one influence over her sexual decisions, Crystal replied: "Yeah, definitely!"

Parental Relationships Offer Support

Often the parent child relationship was viewed as ultimately supportive and helpful despite whatever sexual decisions they made:

I know that if I would go to them for help, they definitely would. - Brooke

Yeah, she's really against the whole premarital sex and stuff like that, but I think if anything bad did happen I would tell her she'd be completely supportive. - Jessica

Yet for many the desire to please their parents and to defer to their judgment was more often the motivating factor in sexual decision making:

That's (parents) probably one of the main reasons why I chose to wait to have sex because I know that they won't ban me from the family. Like it's not that big of an issue. But I know that they want good things for me and they've raised...me really well and given me the opportunities to go out and do what I wanted to do... - Crystal

Parental Relationships Based On Fear

However, the motivating force in the relationship was not always a perspective of support or a desire to please loving parents, but rather decisions were made out of a fear of their parents.

I was also scared of my parents finding out, and I did always have that thought in the back of my mind. -Kelli

When Allison was talking about this fear of her parent's reaction, she also included her relationship with her younger sister and her focus on wanting to provide for her sister that supportive relationship that her parents did not:

I've been there and you know I've told her if she ever got into trouble she could come to me and I would help her if she didn't want to tell mom. I know how that feeling is and I try to help her through it so she doesn't have it like I did: that fear of mom finding out.

Often the fear of the parent relationship resulted in rebellion, rather than submission. And as these quotes (and others to follow) show, often times for these women the perception of others, whether fitting or not, becomes truth. As Baylynn shared:

I think they kind of pushed me into the subjective end or whatever end. That was because I was, like when I was younger I'd do almost anything to prove to my dad and prove to my parents. I had this want of being accepted or like knowing they were proud of me and then when I got into high school and I kinda realized that we, just never gonna meet their expectations. And that kind of pushed me to the other end. So I was like oh, ok I'll do what I want now.

and Brittany said:

In a backwards way I guess because, like every day was questioning where have you been, what have you been doing with him, where are you going out, and it just got old and I was like well if they already think I am then why not.

So it was clear that in whatever form it took: love and support, guilt and fear, or lack of trust leading to rebellion, these young women were impacted during adolescence by the qualities of the relationship they had with their parents.

Parental Communication about Sex

Parents Communicate None at all

The way parents communicate with their children about sexuality topics has been shown in previous research to have an impact on sexual behaviors and decision making (Meyer-Bahlburg & Watkins, 2001; Ward & Wyatt, 1994). Similar to other research, I too found that several of my participants had been given very little or only limited information from their parents about sex. Many said there was no specific talk.

I don't remember a talk. - Lily

Sex was never really talked about. -Crystal

We do not discuss topics related to sex. - Julia

Parents Communicate About Sex Only When They Had To, and About as Few as Things as Possible

However, a few had received the basic talk.

Just kinda like they covered all the basics. - Jessica

When I was thirteen my mom gave me like 'the talk' you know. -Kyle

As the women further explained, "the talk" was a one time, covering of the basics: how pregnancy occurs, the role of menstruation, the basics of intercourse, the resulting consequences of STDs and AIDs. Sometimes there were other follow up "talks". Typically both "the talk" or follow up conversations about sex were a response to dating or specific questions asked:

She didn't really try to initiate unless I asked. -Brittany

She like, when she thought there might be a serious chance that we were. -Lily

She waited until things happened and then she responded and was open about it. She wasn't going to initiate things until she saw...I mean she always, she's always like "Okay when you start doing stuff you tell me." -Summer

I specifically wanted to know the types of topics covered because from a postmodern perspective I believe that non-communication also communicates. What the women shared was that even with parents who communicated the basics, typically only topics of health & safety were covered.

She said that 'you know STDs can be transmitted through oral sex if someone has a cut in their mouth, like HIV can too', she always told me about that stuff, the safety of sex. When I was younger she taught me about safe sex too. - Emily

And it was just like all, like basically everything involved with like sex and menstruation and everything like that and STDs. - Jessica

As Jessica alluded to, when parents did discuss sex as an act, typically only intercourse was covered.

She never really talked about anything, like other sexual things that you could do. -Kelli

They could have talked a little bit more about like sexual drive and because a lot of parents just focus on sex, and they don't like - more the emotions and what things lead to sex instead of just the actual act. -Lily

Talking about things like orgasm and masturbation, I had to find those things out through friends and magazines. -Brittany

The limited topics covered brought up several other themes, the role of peers and the school in sex education, as well as the ongoing message that sex is scary. Both of these topics will be discussed in detail later in the chapter.

Father's Role in Sexual Communication

What?..Say the S word?

My results showed, as has been found in much previous research, that when it comes to sexual communication mother's talk to their daughters much more than fathers (Mescke,

Bartholomae & Zentall, 2002). Naturally and automatically the young women talked about what their "mother's" shared or did not share. Even when discussing what their "parents" had shared, I found as I probed deeper that "parents" often actually meant mom. As mentioned earlier, I specifically asked for the role of father's in sexual communication and was regularly informed:

My dad never talked to me about anything, even now he can't say anything about it (sex)
... - Jessica

I really, to be honest with you, I can't remember my dad saying, like I can't picture him saying the words "sex". - Crystal

Boys are Only After One Thing

An interesting theme that did result was that when father's shared sexuality messages with their daughters, it was often to warn them about men.

My dad wouldn't say much, I mean he would just make little comments like, "Be careful with those boys, I know what they're after", that kind of thing, but nothing other than that. - Allison

He always said to me "I was a guy once and I know how guys think. You know most of them will tell you anything to have sex with you, anything. You know they'll tell you they love you, they'll buy stuff, they'll tell you they'll want to marry you, they'll tell you anything just to have sex". And he's always like "You can't fall for every guy that says that. You have to trust the person. You have to know that they're telling the truth." And I feel like because he said that to me I'm more like suspicious of guys than like the normal person I guess. - Kyle

Stick with Dad - It's a Safe, Non Sexual Relationship

Other times the message from fathers continued with the idea that boys only wanted one thing and they included the idea that they should not be involved with boys because no boy would treat them as well as they, the father's would.

Looking back I'll always remember little times where my dad was like "No man's ever gonna ever treat you as well as I will" and little things like that. - Emily

Cause my dad always, he's like "You don't have to date until you get married and you can date me until you're married". And I'm like "Alright Dad, cool". -Summer

These messages are interesting because from a feminist perspective I view them, as other researchers have, as being laden with issues of the primacy of the male sex drive and the idea of men as sexual predators (Kirkman, Rosenthal & Feldman, 2002). At the same time what this suggests and reinforces, is that women are not sexual. Women cannot trust men and must recognize that men are first and foremost sexual beings who will use them. They cannot be trusted. I see this message even in the lack of communication from fathers. Fathers, as men cannot talk to their daughters, young women, about sex. Thus paternal communication (or lack thereof) suggests that men want and have sex, while women do not and should not.

Just Say No

This idea was also represented in the general communication from parents that their daughters should totally abstain from sex. As Julia said, it was

Abstinence from sex, drugs, anything. It was all just say no.

My parents never talked to me about “the birds and the bees”...She would always say, “No sex before marriage”. - Crystal

Again, young women are not to want or have sex. Yet it was interesting to find that while the women were often told as adolescents not to have sex, there were several who were taken to gynecologist and put on birth control. Often times this came from the parents with the strongest abstinence message.

She helped me get on birth control when I was in high school because she had an inclination that I was having sex, like she didn't want to think I was having sex, but just to be on the safe side, she said “Let's regulate your period”. -Brittany

She was like, “I'm taking you to the gynecologist, I thought you knew that”. And she kinda said that it was because when I was on my period I had really bad cramps and she claims that was the reason for it, but I was like. “Ok Mom, just out of the blue you wanna give me birth control”. So it was kind of, that shocked me too, it shocked all my friend when I told them. -Kelli

This suggests that some parents say that their daughters should not have sex but then also recognize that they might and if they do that there should be controls in place to minimize the risks. As well, these parents did not want to know the truth of whether their daughters were having sex. They framed the trips to the gynecologist as a response to menstrual issues. However, all the women saw this as a sham. Even in the context of taking their daughters to gynecologists and the perfect opportunity this brings about to discuss sexuality in an open and honest dialogue, the parents did not take advantage of the opportunity. They continued the message that sex is not discussed and that sex is not occurring.

Peers and School Fill in What Parents Do Not

Ultimately my participants shared that more times than not, their peers and their schools taught them the most about sex, rather than their parents. As when I asked specifically, from whom they learned about sex, the reply was often the same:

I'd say like school and my friends, probably. -Allison

I'm gonna say my friends, definitely my friends. I learned a lot from them. - Brittany

Sex education in the school I would say. Or hearing stuff from friends... - Crystal

Yet interestingly, very few said that the peer influence was ultimately greater than the parent influence. Despite the lack of direct communication from parents about all the topics that sexuality encompasses, these young women saw the primary influence upon the decisions they made regarding sexual behaviors as being their parents.

Turning now from the general ideas of who and what communicates to and influences adolescent female sexuality, I want to share the resulting themes of how these messages and influences affected female desire and agency. Specifically I want to focus on what messages and influences parents had on desire and agency.

Sexual Desire and Agency

Sex Is Scary

An ongoing and ever present message from parents to their daughters was the idea that sex is scary. Whether it was a communication focus on primarily the health consequences of sex (STDS, HIV, pregnancy) or the inability to trust men because they are all sexual predators (both results presented earlier) - parents provided an ongoing discourse of the consequences of sex. As a result many women had and have a large fear of sex.

Even though I was, I was terrified of it, I'm still terrified of it. - Allison

I think it's back to being scared about it and ...but the thing is that I liked other things but I was scared of sex. - Brooke

I think I was nervous about sex, like I think I thought about it a little too much. - Lily

It's too much of a risk for me. Like I know it's pleasure and all that stuff and it brings you close and all that stuff but it's just not worth it, like right now it's just not worth it. - Crystal

I don't know, the whole idea of like doing that (sex) just totally freaked me out... - Baylynn

Experiences of Sex

Because Sex Is Scary

Sadly there were also two women out of the fourteen who did experience what many women in our society have experienced: sexual violence. Thus it should be recognized that parent's share the consequences and fears of sex, out of a reality base. Allison's first experience of intercourse was a rape by her then boyfriend.

He was very, he was very forceful, like he didn't wanna, he didn't wanna say anything. And during the whole act, cause it hurt, I was screaming. I got to where I was screaming and I wanted to stop and I was pushing on his chest saying no stop, he wouldn't.

For Kyle, violence was perpetrated upon her by an older man when she was 11 years old.

My parents actually asked me if he had done anything and I was too embarrassed to admit to them so I said no. Then he got arrested and he had done it to other girls so they pressed charges. And my parents were asking me if he had done it to me and I was like NO! cause I was too embarrassed to tell them.

Sex is scary because women are frequently the victims of sexual assault in our society. Sexual coercion and issues of power and control in sexuality also occur in other ways. For two women, there was the experience of being in controlling and manipulative sexual relationships that they viewed as abusive.

Emotionally, never physically. But I was afraid it would get physical...And he just, became extremely jealous....and just had all these rules. - Jessica

Looking back it wasn't a healthy relationship. Now that I think about it you know cause, well he was like 'I don't want you to go and hang out with your friends cause you're just gonna go out and drink with them. - Summer

For other women their sexual relationships and experiences were not ones of obvious violence but yet involved experiences of pressure and feelings of victimization. Women can experience sexual coercion in many forms throughout their lives.

I had a string of really bad boyfriends...But he like, pressured me into writing like these little notes to him, like, you know how kids pass around ones in school or whatever. But he wanted them to be like more sexual and stuff like that and I was being a little naive girl, I was like ok. -Jessica

But you know it was never up to me in that he was just, and it was always about him. He never really was worried about if it was any good for me. And it wasn't. I remember dreading it, like "What can I do to make this end?" and then I'd go along with it anyway and knew he told his friends. - Allison

Yet There is Still Pleasure

Despite these negative messages and difficult experiences many women still had a variety of positive things to say in regards to their sexual experiences. Several women experienced the pleasure that can occur in sex.

Actually we didn't wait very long either which is strange to me because I guess that once I was just like, I wanted it so bad and I just liked him so much and he was just amazing and you know he, I could tell he was really genuine. -Allison

Oh, yeah it was awesome. I mean we definitely waited for the first, like for the perfect time. I think he was still a virgin too and I don't know. It was awesome. - Brooke

Reassuring myself that this is my body and it feels good, and I'm gonna do what feels good. - Brittany

So in spite of the realities of fear and consequences, and the negative experiences, some women are able to view sex as ultimately a good experience. Even though their parents were often communicating messages that encouraged fear, abstinence and asexuality, women often realize through other sources (peers and men invested in their pleasure) that sex is not all bad. As Brittany said,

I think it's just that every day you're around your parents and you're going to school and you're with your friends. So it was that even though I was being told the bad things about it, I was still being told the good things about it.

The Role of Sexual Agency

These parental messages and personal experiences of violence, victimization, consequences and fear of sexual experiences all have the power to deny women agency in their sexuality. However, the impact of supportive parental relationships, the nitty gritty details that peers provide, and the positive experiences with partners aid in the establishment of sexual agency. As a result, what I often found was that young women typically experience sexual subjectivity and agency as more of a continuum of which they slide up and down. As Brittany alluded to, it is not an all or nothing experience. Rather sexuality for most of these women is an ongoing struggle to try to balance the messages, experiences and tensions that attempt to suppress women's sexual voice with the real experience of desire, the feelings of confidence and understanding of personal power that comes through their sexuality.

The Continuum of Sexual Agency

I specifically asked women their opinion of whether they saw themselves as having sexual agency. An interesting outcome of asking about sexual agency was finding that despite listening to a 1 hour lecture on the topic just a month prior, and having written a narrative that discussed whether or not they had it, all but one of the women could not remember the basic definition of sexual agency. In every interview, but one, I had to redefine and discuss what sexual subjectivity and agency means. This made it clear that sexual agency and subjectivity are not common topics in our society.

After defining sexual agency with my participants, I directly asked if they felt they had it, and was for the most part told yes.

Yes, I do. Because, like for how much like all the boyfriends I went through and like I think I wasn't directly pressured, but it could have been very subtle. I think I've always been in control of it. - Jessica

Yeah, I would say definitely yes. - Marla

I would say that yes I do. Because, I would say I have sexual subjectivity because I, I know exactly what I, you know like I know what I want from I guess relationships and then like, like you said, like I know what pleases me and I know what doesn't and I know when it would and wouldn't. -Kelli

From the responses of these women there was a sense that they felt comfortable with their sexuality. They stated their opinions of their agency with confidence. Yet for many the "Yes I do" was tempered with ideas of having struggled for it or finally achieving it, or still striving for it. As well, often the same women who would say "Yes", would then turn around and also share ideas that seemed to discredit their original answer.

I would say I have 75% because I'm still that shy person. - Allison

I would say so, like I still question whether I want or need it. Like I just, I just don't know....I think it's somewhere in the middle. - Baylynn

I think I've come a long way. I'm not there completely but maybe almost. - Brooke

Yes, I do. But I definitely had to develop it. - Jessica

For most of the women, sexual agency was something they were working on. It was ongoing and often unclear. Confidences wavered, but yet it was something they saw within their grasp and something they wanted.

Sexual Agency Through Their Behaviors

Desire, Masturbation and Getting What They Want

Besides my direct questioning of their sexual agency I also attempted to flesh out agency via the experience of sexual desire, masturbation, the role of fantasy and the ability to clearly articulate their sexual needs and desires or lack thereof, with confidence. Many women articulated the presence of sexual desire in their life at an early age:

I guess in the eighth grade I did. Like I definitely didn't have a boyfriend or anything yet but just because of my friends talking about it I was kinda like "Huh? What's that?" You know? And I thought about sex. I mean it was very apparent that I wanted to know about it in the eighth grade like I was interested in sex. - Brittany

Honestly, I always thought it was so uncommon that I wanted to have sex and that I wanted to play boyfriend and girlfriend a lot. I was always so scared that I would never start my period because I had too much sexual desire. I thought it was odd that I had sexual fantasies at such a young age, however I soon realized my friends did too. - Brooke

It is interesting to note that Brooke, even at a young age (prior to menstruation), already had a fear of desire. Wanting sex was already associated with negative outcomes. In response to the repeated experience of women sharing their "unusual" experience of feeling desire at a young age, I found myself telling many of the women about the role of adrenarche and the onset of sexual hormones that first occurs around age 10 (Herdt & McClintock, 2000). They were often pleasantly surprised and quite pleased to hear that their memories of so called "early" sexual

interest was due to a hormonal influx. Several women actually looked physically relieved, like a burden had been lifted.

Because desire typically manifests itself in behavior I asked the question that women are often most shy to answer. To the direct question of whether they had masturbated many affirmed they had.

I just have my vibrator and I masturbate. I'm not scared to do it. My roommates and I talk about it. - Brittany

As well as sharing that they masturbated, there were also several who felt they could articulate their sexual desires, or act on them in sexual behaviors.

After the first time there was, I was horny, I wanted to have sex all the time. I mean we would have sex all the time: every day, sometimes in a week. So I mean sure it was desirable and I wanted to have sex after the first time. - Brittany

I went through this thing in the fall when it was just not emotion related and there were a couple of guys that I slept with just cause I wanted to have sex. - Jessica

Through their experiences of feeling desire, recognizing the desire and having the ability to act on it through masturbation or seeking out partners, several women showed elements of sexual agency. Their subjective experiences of desire led them to create outlets of expression for themselves.

Sexual Agency Also Means Saying No

However, it is important to recognize that sexual agency is expressed not only in the ability to be desirous and act upon it through coupling or in masturbation. Sexual agency also occurs when women have the confidence and ability to assert that they are not ready, or are not currently interested in sex.

We were very comfortable and we didn't have sex. If I don't want to have sex I'll just say no. I've never done anything I didn't want to do. - Emily

I'll tell you no if I don't want to. - Baylynn

If I don't like somebody or something that someone's doing I'm not gonna be like "alright keep doing that". Not that I don't want to hurt their feelings, but at the same time I don't wanna have to keep having horrible sex. And I think it's more like because my best friends a guy. I think more like a guy. So I would be like, you know saying something about it. Most girls I think would just not want to hurt their boyfriend's feelings and not say something. -Kyle

It is important to note a distinction between the "just say no" mentality and the ability to verbalize disinterest in sexual behavior as a response to an individual's inner subjectivity. The above quotes speak to the confidence of women to assert themselves in what they desire (or not), rather than reacting to a sexual script that commodifies sex. Later I will specifically address the issue of gatekeeping, which is the female use of denying sex in order to trade it for commitment or respect, and not out of a lack of real interest. To have elements of sexual agency women must feel like they can clearly set out what they want, when they want it, as Madison articulates below:

Having power over myself and telling people no and being very confident with myself. My parents had a lot to do with that. Making me confident, telling people what I want and stuff like that.

Passivity

Yet Madison was the exception, rather than the rule in my sample. A bit more often I heard ideas of women who were conflicted, as Kyle expressed:

I feel like there's certain times where I'm just like, "Alright go ahead and do whatever you want". But then there's certain times where I'm like, like most girls if they don't like it they won't say anything and I'm more likely to be like, "What are you doing?" and say something about it. Not in a mean way but kinda just like so that it's a better experience for both of us.

However, most of the women shared messages of passivity, like Brooke:

You know even with my boyfriend who I've been with for like three years. I'm just very shy. I'll never initiate.

I think I'm insecure and shy. And society doesn't really like bolster me to feel like I should be forceful in that area. You know what I mean? - Lily

Sexual passivity is the opposite of sexual agency and the re-occurring theme with most of the women I interviewed. The women longed for more confidence, to the point that a couple of women asked my advice on how to increase it. Yet most of them could not imagine being confident in their sexual relationships or clearly articulating their desires, let alone actively pursuing them.

The Role of Sexual Desire

Average Female Sexual Desire = No Sexual Behavior

When asked specifically about their perceived level of sexual desire all of the women said that they believed they had either average (or middle) to above average (or high) desire. Yet many of those same women shared that they do not masturbate.

No, actually, and I promise I'm being honest. I think I'm too afraid of it. I'm like it grosses me out. - Allison

I never, I never, no. - Emily

This was utterly fascinating to me to consider that every single one of these women also claimed to have average or above average sexual desire. Yet several of them were virgins, or were not currently in sexual relationships, and they did not masturbate. Typically desire is discussed in ways that have some element of resulting behavior (Levine, 2003; 1987). Yet not for this subset of women. Thus from my feminist perspective this raised the issue of how is normal sexual desire defined for females in our society? Because for these women, the idea that for women to be utterly non-sexual and yet to have "average" sexual desire was typical. Although they may have not connected it themselves, several of them basically equated low sexual activity and disinterest, with being in a state of average sexual desire.

Dissonance In Desire

Although many women shared that they did indeed masturbate, the majority expressed some level of discomfort with the act.

I think it's just that in high school you, I mean you talked about sex with your friends but they don't talk about masturbation. They don't talk about pleasing yourself. They just talk about getting somebody else to please you. - Brittany

I didn't masturbate I would say until college and it was just like, I didn't really have a desire to, it was just like what does this feel like. That was what it was. - Crystal

At first it was kinda weird just because like it's accepted with guys. My guy friends will talk about it quite openly in front of girls and it's just like not a big deal. I can only talk about it with like one or two of my girlfriends, and the rest of them they just don't talk about it. And so you can't tell if they do it and they're embarrassed or if they don't and they think it's like absolutely horrible. With girls it's just weird. - Jessica

They acknowledged this discomfort as being influenced from two main sources: one, the absence of masturbation as a topic in the sex talk with their parents, and two, the peer group: Those same girls my participants could count on to tell them about oral sex and the loss of virginity did not talk about masturbation. According to the majority of the participants, teenage girls do not talk about masturbation or admit to other girls that they engage in it. In fact several commented how it was only now in college that they could sometimes, with certain friends, admit to masturbating.

As almost a result of the secrecy of masturbating and the obviousness of "no sex", women in this study admitted to ignoring or suppressing their sexual desires when they felt them.

I would say so but I think that I was better at, you know, dismissing it (desire) than I was me wanting, like I guess me being open with my boyfriend about it. -Allison

I would never had said that (being horny). Because that was a little bit too, like that sounds dirty and it sounds a little, like I could see that every once in a while I get a little like arousal I think but I couldn't really, just kind of like conservative. I don't say it like that. - Lily

As a result I found myself wondering out loud and asking the women directly what they did when they had desire, since they claimed to have it, and how they dealt with the suppression of it since they did not act on it.

I'd more dismiss it than I would be open about it. I didn't do anything I mean. - Allison

I guess nothing. - Julia

One woman spoke directly to the difference between her desires and her behaviors. Yet she was the only one to recognize that what she wanted was different than how she felt she could act.

To this day, in my mind, my sexual fantasies portray me as much more assertive and sexual than I see myself now in my sexual relationships. I always wished I could be as fun in real life experiences than just in my dreams. - Brooke

For me, as the study evolved, the goal became to understand what factors, especially parenting factors led to these women who struggled with their sexual desire, subjectivity and agency. I sought to understand how parents transmit ideas to their daughters that lead them to view sex as something only to be feared and not to be experienced. The messages were: they should not have sex and masturbation is a secret at best. How do parents teach young women that their sexual desire should be suppressed? Is that is normal? Why do parents do it?

Traditional Gender Roles

Women Wear Dresses and Keep Their Legs Closed

Women talked decisively in ways that set out a standard of very traditional gender roles as imparted to them from their families. As both Brooke and Jessica alluded to in above quotes, there is most obviously a difference in the expectations of male vs. female sexual expression. Resulting themes that I have discussed earlier, such as the experience of being passive in their sexual experiences, being viewed as objects, and experiencing sex as something done to them or against their will are references throughout many of the quotes used previously.

As well, many women spoke specifically to the issue of gender roles and the idea of women as passive.

I feel like that's kind of like how guys are, really competitive. And I feel like girls are more passive. They let guys control them. But I'm not like that. - Kyle

I hear my parents say is about etiquette, that you should let the guy open the door for you or something like that is what I always hear them say. -Julia

For many the passive woman also equated to the qualities of femininity.

Girls are supposed to wear dresses and that girls shouldn't really try to run things or be competitive. They should be supportive and to the side, like the person that helps the relationship person out with. - Lily

Very pristine. I had to stand up straight. I think I owned more dresses than any other girl I've know in my whole entire life. Legs crossed, pantyhose, high heels, you know very, very girly stuff. - Allison

Allison also elaborated further by stating:

A lady would never be sexual or want sex.

And this passive, feminine view was most definitely imparted to them from their parents.

Well as far as my father goes, he was definitely strict on like, I don't know, like he didn't even like me being in the house alone with a boy. So it was real like, close your legs, be ladylike. - Crystal

I was raised to be the feminine way. I would say to be polite, act like a lady, that kind of stuff. They sheltered me a lot and I say that I was not a sexual person at all." - Emily

So the expectation for these women, from their parents, was that they should be proper, be pristine and be a lady and that entailed being non-sexual. To be a lady you do not have sex.

The Old Double Standard

In respect to gender roles, the problem of a double standard for sexuality was also discussed by many of the women. Women could recall times where the parents had one set of rules for the sons and another set of rules for the daughters.

They don't really talk much about it (sex), but I do think they're more concerned about me because of the fact that a girl can get pregnant. I mean I don't know that they've ever sat down with my brother and said don't go out and have sex with girls because that's bad and you can get them pregnant. I mean it's really focused on what I shouldn't do. - Brittany

Yeah definitely. They did not. (treat her the same as her brother) I bet if you asked my parents that they'd look back and say 'No, we always treated you guys the same' but at the same time, I remember being little and when my brother was younger a girl could call and was allowed to talk on the phone. I was never allowed to call boys. - Emily

I think that they did come across as having a double standard. Just cause my mom did always be like, whenever I would talk to a boy or when we would talk about boys she'd always say "Don't have sex" or she'd always assume that the guy would want to have sex more than the girl. - Kelli

So even if parents were not striving for daughters that were ladies, just being female was reason enough not to have or want sex. For boys it was fine and expected, for girls it was not.

Sex for Love

One of the ways in which women are socially controlled and dis-empowered in their sexuality, is through the commodifying of sex. As many fathers communicated to their daughters in some of the quotes already used, their sexuality was often discussed as the one thing men want them for and thus it is the one thing not to be given until an exchange can occur.

Gatekeeping is a term often used for the role women take whereby they trade sex for love and commitment (Ward & Wyatt, 1994). While not using the term explicitly or even framing the experience as necessarily a negative one, almost all the women talked about sex as happening in the context of a relationship only - when they received love, could trust and get commitment from their male partners. This was specifically a message they received directly from their parents.

The first thing my mom would tell me whenever sex was discussed was "You shouldn't have sex until you're married". -Brittany

From my parents it was, "No sex before marriage' period". - Crystal

It was always a special thing that you won't have until you're married and like when you're in love and it was just something you don't do until that time. - Emily

Sex is what two people that love each other do when they're married. -Julia

And while this idea of sex in the context of love or marriage is of course not purely a negative one, it is often imposed as a female role. As the double standard discussed above shows, it is the female's job to not want nor have sex and thus only do so when they receive something in return, that something not being pleasure. This is in contrast to the message parents seem to be imparting about men. They are more naturally sexually than women and, they do not and will not wait for love to have sex. Thus in effect these parents are telling their daughters to not give men sex, until they first receive love or marriage. As such women are further made emotionally and physically responsible for the delay or denial of sex.

Be An Object...

Yet at the same time, they are often put in the role of sexual object. Added to the pile of tensions and dichotomies that occur in the sexual lives of young women is the struggle with being often viewed as an object that is primarily for the man's sexual pleasure. Many women shared their experiences of being objectified and feeling like sex was the only thing that men wanted from them.

I feel like a sexual object all the time. I guess there are times when I felt like I was an object or I felt used. I try not to put myself in a situation where I feel like that either. I don't like feeling like that either. -Brittany

I didn't just want to be a sexual object or something. I wanted to be a lot more. - Kelli

Sometimes objectification was discussed in abstract terms. Women would share experiences and struggles with body image that resonated with ideas of needing to be perfect bodies to be worshipped and wanted.

I have a nice body with clothes on, but clothes off I'm still very much like, it's mainly just like my boobs. I don't want them to be seen because they're smaller proportion to the rest of my body. And I cannot, I can't get over it. - Allison

Well I didn't really have a date or, see what happened was I was really heavy in the 8th grade and then I lost a bunch of weight in the 10th grade. And in the 10th grade was when the guys starting noticing me. - Brittany

But Do Not Be An Object!

Yet at the same time the women were very clear that while they needed to be viewed as attractive and felt a pressure to look good, you could not look too good. Their parent's very clearly presented messages that limited clothing options out of fear of having daughters that presented "the wrong idea".

She'd (mom) would be like "Please don't wear that in front of your grandparents or in my office", cause nothing, that's like nothing that would hint "Hey look at me". - Allison

No like, you know, there was no wearing belly shirts. And this was based on the idea that there was not supposed to be the impression of being trashy or slutty. And so that was kinda the idea, that girls that wore little tiny clothes or things like that were trashy or slutty. - Jessica

Fear of Being Viewed as a Slut

As Jessica brings out in the above quote in our society there is a concern that women must not appear to be sluts or else lose admiration. There is a sense that women who want and have sex are not respected. Many of the women in my sample spoke of this idea.

The whole sleeping around thing is probably pretty negative cause I didn't wanna, before I was totally this little innocent person and I see myself as other people did and I didn't want them to think I was a slut or anything. You know, I didn't want to be seen as somebody who sleeps around a lot. - Baylynn

Yeah, like in high school everybody looked down on the girls who were like giving blow jobs or being with too many guys or sleeping around or something like that. Cause you could just sleep with one guy and your reputation would just be going around that you were sleeping with the whole football team. And I just didn't want that reputation. - Jessica

Just I guess to like really make sure I don't become something they (parents) don't want me to become. I guess a slut, provocative, a hootchie. - Emily

What I heard many of the women saying was that ultimately they could not be truly sexual or have agency in a complete sense, because in their mind there was always the fear of being viewed as a slut. Being seen as a slut was the worst thing that could happen to you.

Even when violence was perpetrated against a woman and she was a sexual assault victim, still the worst after effect that could happen was that it be known and her reputation be ruined.

I feel scared about it because I had some weird thing that people would know what happened and think I was dirty and not, they wouldn't wanna date me or whatever. So I was scared or whatever. I guess that's why I waited so long for sex because I was like "They're gonna be able to tell. They're gonna think I'm dirty". - Kyle

Kyle had the idea that being sexual at an early age (even sex that was against her will) would result in loss of respect and loss of the ability to get dates. She understands on some level, having a reputation or being viewed as a slut, she would not be able to commodify her sex in trade for a stable commitment. And it returns back to the messages of her childhood. Remember that Kyle was filled with shame and unable to tell her parents about the incident, even though she feels close to and supported by her parents.

As a result of the many messages from their parents: to be feminine, to be proper, to be gatekeepers, and to be responsible not only for themselves but to take on the responsibility of every male sexual predator that would like to sully them, young women are not allowed to explore or express their sexuality with confidence or without great limitations. So many of these women are not sure who they are and what they want sexually because as hard as they have worked since adolescence to move up that sexual agency continuum, ultimately they are pulled back down.

How Safe Is It Having the Fear of Being Viewed as a Slut?

The women in this sample struggled with sexual agency even to the point they did not feel confident to seek out birth control. Birth control being one of the ways parents very clearly communicated they should keep themselves safe.

I was at the clinic. I was with people and I was thinking they're looking at me and they're thinking "Oh my God, She's a Slut". - Allison

Allison's fear is that by being viewed as a slut, her identity becomes a slut, and she is ruined. For other's to think she is sexual at all, means she is bad. Her sexual agency in this experience is so low that she struggled with what should be an easy decision. She is not confident enough to make a decision in the best interest of her health: to protect herself from one of those very legitimate fears of sexual behavior, pregnancy. The Fear of Being Viewed as a Slut. It is a powerful message.

Chapter 5

Self of the Researcher

Interviews done! Kourtney is transcribing. I had a panic attack while trying to fall asleep....What is my point? What the fuck do I have to say? That white rich girls don't have sex very often? Nicole and I walked the Huckleberry, and talked, and I expressed all my fears. I wish I could have tape-recorded it. I don't know how to say what I think without betraying my participants on some level. OR I feel I am proving the Right's position. They are socially controlled and look its a good thing - see ma NO SEX! I keep saying what am I supposed to do with all these VIRGINS? It is interesting in terms of considering who offers to participate in research. It ultimately led to my first big theme....sluts don't offer to talk. Then talking in a bar with fellow grad students about the limitations in research I realized it WAS a theme. Thus far, MANY of my participants used the SLUT word and their fear of it or pride in NOT being one. It needs development but it is definitely something that came out and was tied to parenting. I also thought about my experiences with the slut word. I even used the word in my narrative. It got me thinking... - Early Entry in my Research Journal

Qualitative research often posits that the researcher is *the* instrument (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). As a qualitative researcher I wholeheartedly agree with this notion. As a result I feel an imperative to disclose many things about the research process, myself and my perspectives in order to provide the reader with the tools needed to best understand, dissect, analyze and think critically about the research completed in this study.

My research journal provided an audit trail for which I could give the specific details of the research process, from beginning to end, which adds dependability to the study. It allowed me to state with confidence the methods I employed. As well, the research journal also provided me with a means to practice reflexivity, which adds confirmability to the study. Ultimately, transparency is the goal of this chapter, which adds credibility to the study. See Appendix F for a chart that explains the qualitative methods employed and how they bolster the research process.

Many times the process of doing the research found me at a point where I felt the need to stop and question what I was doing and why I was doing it (for example the above quotation from my journal). And yet ultimately I often found that what I was doing was right on target with my

point. And it is undeniable that I have a point and had a point or perspective from the very beginning.

I am a feminist and at heart I believe that social controls exist that oppress women and keep them in a position of being treated as inferior to men. I approached my research from this perspective and as would be expected, I found elements of these controls in the young women's experiences. As I shared in the above section of my journal, I saw and struggled with the positives of the traditional voices - good girls who listened to parents that told them sex is for love only, and has lots of consequences and so in the end don't have much sex. But as I found, the dis-empowerment in those messages oppress women to the point that they become objects, fearful of their own sexuality and passive about such things as victimization and getting birth control.

An ongoing struggle for me was my fear of betraying my participants. I regretted the time and financial constraints that could not allow this project to be participatory. As a former social worker and as a feminist I have a high regard for social justice. It was natural that I found myself often wondering: What will my participants think of my discussion chapter? And, What about my use of quotes? Would they recognize themselves? Would they see and agree with the context?

I recognized through this process of questioning perspectives, truth, and the process of being a researcher interpreting participant's words, how similar and dis-similar I am in comparison to my participants. On the surface we had both mid to high socio-economic status and college educated as similarities. Although I am, of course, more educated. Yet I could relate to where they were at that moment in their lives, because of the near past experience of being a young co-ed from an economically successful family that provided me the luxury of not worrying about

finances as I pursued an education. As well, the majority of participants were white and from two parent families. And although it may sound bold, I should be honest and also state that like myself, my participants were attractive. Every woman I interviewed was definitely more towards the "pretty" side of attractiveness.

After the research interview was over, one of my participants even commented on the obvious similarities between us. We both were tall, white, blonde, attractive, intelligent, athletic, from well-to-do, supportive parents with whom we had strong ties to, and we both had received very dichotomous messages from our parents about sex and our roles as women. Yet, she wanted to know...Why was I so much more confident, both personally and sexually? She could not figure out how we were so similar and yet so very different in that area.

Of course I could not then, and cannot now say with surety, exactly why. However, I have my opinions. In our conversation I told her that I think that we cannot ignore nature. I am biologically and genetically very similar to my father. Our bodies are an almost exact replication. In personality he is a stubborn, opinionated and confident man (also intelligent and loving), as am I. My mother says I came out of the womb rebellious. So it would seem I had a biological leaning towards my father's personality traits. I was naturally independent and confident. I was a rebel, so when I heard messages that conflicted I had a tendency to go against those that did not speak to my nature.

When my parents told me to be a good submissive southern girl and then turned around and bragged to everyone that would listen, about how smart and strong I was, a natural leader - I listened to the leader messages because it suited me better. I discarded the submissive girl messages (as much as possible given how repetitive they were!) because it was like a fish trying to ride a bicycle. As I talked about in Chapter 2, I also saw the privileges of "being male" or

having male traits. As I watched the world and specifically the gender's interact, I figured out that women got the short end of the stick. So between my nature and the conflicting messages of my nurture, and my ability to perceive how to get along best in this world, I became more confident and self-assured. I was unwilling to be nonsexual, or *anything* for that matter, just because society and my parents would have wished it for me.

Besides my rebellious nature that made me both a feminist and having a well-developed critical perspective by the age of 15, there were other differences between the participants and myself. I also was a good 10 - 15 years older than my participants. I had not only survived adolescence as they had, but I had also finished college, obtained a Master's degree, worked in the inner city of St. Louis for 3 years, been married and divorced, lost 3 pregnancies, traveled to 7 different countries and completed most of a PhD. I had also been through more romantic and/or sexual relationships than they could probably fathom. My life experiences are vast in comparison to theirs. And these experiences have only strengthened my confidence, surety, sexuality, and feminist voice.

Although I did not have further access to my participants to get another level of their feedback via appraisal of my discussions and another member check regarding the appropriation of their voices, I did seek constant peer feedback and from a variety of sources which added dependability to my study. My mother was one source. My psychology students at Guilford College were another. Mindy, my very insightful best friend, who is knowledgeable about qualitative methods and is also more conservative, less sexual and much more similar to my participants than I, was a continual source of feedback.

As well, in my corner is my friend Hannah, an artist and writer. She has told me over and over, specifically, that she trusts me to speak for her and to appropriate her voice. During the

course of our friendship we have had on-going interactions of co-journals and letter writing that regularly results in me then turning around and sharing her experiences, words and wisdom with others. I do this because I strongly feel the world is missing out by not hearing Hannah's voice and so it has become my privilege to speak for her. Most lovingly, Hannah gives me on going permission to do this, although her introvert tendencies lean towards secrecy and privacy, because she has complete faith in my ability to speak for her thoughtfully and truthfully. Despite my fears that maybe *some* of the girls *might* dislike what I have to say, deep down I trust myself, because if I speak well for Hannah, then I can speak well for others.

To test this I read my results to Mindy, over the phone. I wanted her ever-intuitive perspective and her rational ability to speak for "traditional" women. As well, Mindy will be the first to say she struggles daily, on almost every level, with the dichotomous tensions that often come with being a woman. Mindy, to my complete surprise, spoke of the generalizability she saw in the study. She said she heard the voice of every woman she has ever known, in the voices of those 14 women. While I know this cannot be said of *all* women, because the small sample is mainly white, rich and educated, I did understand what she was saying. I too heard the voices of all my friends. And on some level there was the general experience of being a woman in our society, in the themes. We all have dealt with objectification. We all have notions of not wanting to be seen as a slut. We all care what our parents and others think of us.

However, as Mindy pointed out, ultimately *my* voice is the strongest. I told her that I had cried as I finished writing Chapter 4 and she said, "Of course. You have poured your soul in to this." As always she was right. This work is mine. The reader cannot ignore that I am the researcher and I have a perspective, life experiences and beliefs that influence my writing and my interpretations.

This reminds me of my developmental psychology class at Guilford College. I have spent the majority of the semester teaching the 25 students traditional developmental theory (Freud, Erikson, Piaget, Maslow, etc.). We also critique each theorist and theory. Over the course of the semester they have found their voices and have grown in their ability to say what they, a “lowly” freshman or sophomore, do not like or what they think is missing in the well established theories of the “giants”. I recently assigned Gilligan's (1982) *In A Different Voice* for a book critique assignment. I was pleased to find that while many of the student's loved Gilligan for providing the female perspective, and for critiquing the male centric view of all the traditional theorists, they also found bias in her perspective as well. I began the semester asking the students if objectivity is humanly possible. Many thought so in August. Now in November they are not so sure.

So yes, I am NOT objective. And I was never striving for it. What I provide is not objectivity. Rather as Gilligan did, and as Tolman does; I throw a wrench in the works to stop and make us consider some of the less obvious ways that women are socially controlled, and denied the ability to think critically and decide for themselves what is in their best interest. This chapter is my way of giving you, dear reader, your own freedom to think critically, to analyze what I say knowing who I am and how as a real, live, woman, I am constrained by how I think and what I have lived.

Chapter 6

Discussion

"I couldn't believe that I hadn't done it (masturbate) before! Thinking back on all those years before it seems like I always assumed guys were masturbating and it was OK and expected of them, but that it wasn't ok for girls to masturbate. Nor was it expected of us. It makes me sad and a little angry that this was the message from society and public or popular culture that I got, and that this is the message that girls today continue to get." - a Student's Sexuality Journal Entry

Although many women in my sample would be considered sexually healthy in all the traditionally defined ways: delayed sexual onset, sex in the context of relationships, limited partners, virgins, and moral concern for their sexual behaviors, I would say that ultimately they are not complete in their sexual health. Taking a feminist approach, it is evident that these women had to fight for every bit of sexual agency they have. Their sexual subjectivity was overwhelmed at many turns of their development. Patriarchal standards that dominate society define female sexuality as one of passivity, full of negative consequences, dangerous and improper. Parents transmit these cultural messages through their conversations and well-intentioned expectations for their daughters.

As I found in my interviews, young women struggle a great deal with the dichotomous roles and messages that parents give. While many women were told, "be confident", and given much love and support about their abilities to succeed; they were also given opposing messages that said but when it comes to sex, do not want it, do not do it, or only do it so nobody knows and if you get something in return.

Parental Communication and Lack Thereof

In my sample, there was variety of levels to the parent to daughter sexual communication. One participant had a mother who was a nurse and began at an early age teaching her about

human sexuality. On the other end of the continuum I had several participants who never heard a word from their parents about sexuality or received specific conversations about *their* developing sexuality. As well there was every level of sexuality communication in between.

As I discussed in my results (Chapter 4) however the overarching theme was that parents talked about limited topics and typically only when they had to: in response to questions or dating. Typically in the research community when the lack of parental communication about sexuality is discussed, it is done so in terms of how this leaves teenagers uneducated, uninformed and seeking out often unreliable information from their peers or at the mercy of the school system (Grunseit, Kippax, Aggleton, Baldo & Slutkin, 1997). While this research discourse has meaning, it is limited. I also see this lack or limited parental communication as resulting in women who feel their sexuality in particular is supposed to be secretive, scary or non-existent. The non-communication or focus of communication also communicates.

As discussed in research on the heteronormative bias inherent and assumed in parenting (Hyde & Jaffee, 2000; Lee, 1994) there is also a non-desirous and non-sexual bias inherent and assumed in the parenting of young women. In our society, women are seen as less sexual and not inherently sexual in comparison to men. While there is research that has explored and suggested the variety of reasons for this, including biological and social (Baumeister, 2000), there has been little focus on how parents specifically re-create this self-fulfilling prophecy through their communications and interactions with their daughters.

Continuum in Agency

What I found was the young women had a range of sexual agency. This range was not just in terms of some had it and some did not, but rather that almost all seem to vary, day to day, relationship to relationship, experience to experience, in their ability to know and articulate their

sexual desires. It was evident that many felt a sense of agency and that could be seen as coming from feelings of being ultimately loved and supported by their parents. They expressed faith in their parent's, that no matter what they did do sexually, even if they ended up pregnant, they would be cared for. So this gave them moments of freedom and a sense of being able to figure out their sexual needs. As well, parents often gave them direct but general messages that they were as good, if not better, than any man or that they should be confident in themselves and their abilities. These messages were never about sexuality but yet had general impact on the young women, and created a sense of wanting that same confidence specifically in terms of their sexuality.

Yet they also struggled with the concrete sexually oriented messages they received from their parent's that undermined sexual agency. On the day-to-day basis, more present and immediate in their recall were these specific messages and ideas. Repeatedly they were told that they could not be viewed as a slut, lest they embarrass the family, or that their job was to wait for love and marriage, and then give themselves only in return for it.

This sexual agency continuum presented itself in their behaviors and experiences, not just their attitudes. Participants also engaged in a spectrum of sexual activities. Three were virgins, two who had never masturbated and the other who had tried it once "just to see what all the fuss was about". As well I had two women share experiences of taking some sexual liberties: one who unabashedly masturbated and had a string of lovers with whom she had no emotional attachment. The other also admitted to several lovers whom she saw only in the context of sexual "hooks up". Yet, even those two women, like the majority of the sample, had delayed the onset of sexual activity and for the most part engaged in sex only in the context of a relationship. Thus those at the more active side of the continuum did not firmly hold to that end.

The participants also expressed an ongoing slide up and down a continuum in their passivity and initiative taking, or ability to vocalize their needs in the context of their sexual relationships. Some women were more definitively passive, but most had moments or relationships where they took a very passive role, and others where they asserted themselves. One woman's virginity was taken in an act of rape by her boyfriend, and yet she continued to date him. Another had several boyfriends who took advantage of her and pressured her into sexual actions she was not ready for. Yet, even those women also had moments where their voices were clear and they firmly presented their sexual needs or dislikes. Most of the women struggled with the passive/initiator dichotomy in most relationships. Several felt confident in every area but sex. The women regularly moved towards agency and then away from it, only to return to agency and then revert to passivity.

Continuum in Roles

While the women rarely made a direct connection between their struggles for agency and the roles that they played, several did. Almost all of the women were very clear that there was strong emphasis by their parents on the need to be the gatekeeper in the sexual relationship and to avoid looking like a slut, and to most decidedly be a feminine young lady.

Throughout my interviews, issues of gatekeeping was the most prevalent and on going role discourse transmitted from parent to daughter, and also the one the young women did not ever discuss in terms of being problematic. Cultural norms about sex in our society include the tradition of sex as occurring between two people and in the context of a committed relationship (Kelly, 2001). This discourse is so engrained in our society that it is rarely questioned in legitimacy.

While I am not advocating for the return to "free love" associated with the 60's and early 70's, I would like to suggest that not only the "sex inside of a relationship" discourse but the gatekeeping role are full of social controls that dis-empower young women. This occurs through the use of double standards for male vs. female sexual expression.

Sex in the context of a loving relationship only is not the ongoing discourse for men. As well, gatekeeping behaviors are never expected of men. Men are considered innately sexual. This was transmitted through the messages from fathers to their daughters about all those bad boys out there. As well, it was transmitted through the girls' experiences of having their parents tell them one thing, but allowing another for their brothers.

Socially there are great differences in the ways women are supposed to be sexual versus the ways men are allowed to be sexual. Discourses abound. Men masturbate. Women do not. Men as a result of being men, want lots of sex with as many women as possible. Women only want it for love or security. Men are free of responsibility. Women are not. The women shared with me messages that were full of these ideas in obvious and less obvious ways.

The gatekeeper role specifically dis-empowers women in their sexuality because not only does it give women less freedom and more responsibility than men, it also teaches women to commodify their sex. Sex is rarely viewed as for their pleasure, alone or at all. The women never experienced parents discussing with them the pleasures and enjoyments to be found in sex. Instead the messages were replete with ideas that sex is something to trade in a relationship. Women often hold back sex not out of a lack of desire but out of a fear of not being respected and not getting what they are supposed to want, i.e. commitment. How are women ever to gain sexual subjectivity if they cannot even frame sex as something desirable and pleasurable in and of itself? How can a woman know her desires and needs if she is not supposed to have them?

Again I am not advocating that women go out and become sexual at any moment with anyone just for the pleasure. However, what I am suggesting is that the limited and narrow framework of sex only in a committed relationship keeps women from ever feeling the freedom to explore their likes and dislikes. Desire and pleasure are put so low on the list of priorities, with the context of relationship being engrained as the top priority, that desire and pleasure is practically ignored.

The fear of being seen as a slut was another pivotal message that parents regularly transmitted to their daughters. Through clothing choices and sexual behaviors women were supposed to constantly be on guard against giving the wrong appearance.

The young women were very conscious of the concern for pleasing their parents and respecting their wishes, and thus could not engage in sex sometimes simply out of the fear of it being known and being viewed negatively. Several talked in terms where having sex frequently equated to having no respect for yourself. Even in the context of a relationship, several women sheepishly admitted that they were "too sexual" with a boyfriend. Through the ongoing messages of don't be viewed as a slut, they had gained the idea that sex was dirty and being sexual meant being unclean.

A couple of the women made the connection of sexual activity to the result of being labeled a slut; not only did people talk about you but you also lost your ability to get a boyfriend. The ability to capitalize on the gatekeeper role would be lost. There was no way to trade sex for love if you were thought to give sex for free. Sluts cannot commodify their bodies.

However, the majority of the women did not connect these ideas. Most of the participants, instead of seeing being labeled a slut as an unfair consequence, instead had incorporated the idea into their personal discourses. Not only were these women fearful of having the slut label attached to them, they often discussed their not being viewed as a slut with pride. When asked to

look back upon their sexual development and discuss the negative and positive aspects, this pride in not being viewed as a slut came up. They did not see the fear and/or pride as problematic or dis-empowering in their lives. Whereas they saw and struggled with the double standard discourses of men being allowed to masturbate or brothers being allowed to have sex, when they were not; when it came to the discourse of fearing the image of being a slut, they had not critically examined the power in that discourse.

However, as an older woman and a feminist I have. Fear of being viewed as a slut is a highly oppressive social control that keeps women in a constant state of checking themselves and their sexual desires, so as to avoid the appearance of slutty ways. As one participant alluded to, even one sexual act in high school could make you the slut and forever ruin you. Society's need to keep women's sexuality under control is so large that teenage girls and young women can not discuss masturbation with one another, or be sexual with one man for fear of being labeled a slut. Yet the same cannot be said of men.

Wanted: Different Continuums

What are needed are new continuums. Their needs to be ongoing dialogues that balance the discussions of sexual consequences (pregnancy, STDs and HIV) with discussions that share the realities of sexual desire and pleasure. Their needs to be ongoing dialogues that balance the discourse of sex in relationships only with the ability to responsibly explore sexual behaviors. Their needs to be discussions where parents encourage confidence, not only in careers and social interactions, but in sexuality as well. Their needs to be dialogues that explore why sons can masturbate and daughters cannot, why sons can initiate sex and daughters cannot.

Implications for Parenting

I am reminded of Erikson's (1959) psychosocial stages of development and how in each stage of development the goal is a balance between the modalities. To succeed in the world, infants need to develop a sense of trust in their caretakers and yet at the same time a level of mistrust is necessary or else the trusting, naive soul is taken advantage of. Each of the stages psychosocial modalities need harmony and balance in order for the individual to develop optimally. Why is this not true in parenting for sexuality as well?

I believe there are implications for parenting practices as a result of this research. Parents seeking the development of complete sexual health in their daughters cannot rely on traditional gender roles, stereotyping sexuality and engendering passivity. They cannot fear their daughter's sexuality so much that they cannot talk to them, only talk to them in conversations that promote fear and passivity, and without specific attempts to promote subjectivity and agency.

Subjectivity is the starting block for creating women with agency. According to Kristeva (1981) women's subjectivity, although grounded in intuition is not merely that, and in fact, is problematic if left only to fall back on intuition. Kristeva (1981) believes women must understand their uniqueness and difference "in the framework of social, cultural and professional realization, in order to try, by seeing their position therein, either to fulfil [sic] their own experience to a maximum or...to go further and call into question the very apparatus itself." (p. 23). Kristeva is speaking to the importance of women's self -knowledge, self-determinism, power, and understanding of the world around them. Building on this, parents who develop daughters with sexual subjectivity and agency could be surprised to find that they have what they were ultimately hoping for: confident, self assured, aware and reflective women who know what is in their best interest and are able to make it happen.

Implications for Heterosexual Relationships

An interesting outcome of processing this study and seeking feedback from a variety of sources was the resounding and clear message that I received from men about the importance of this study in their lives. Female feminists are not alone, many men hope that parents create greater agency in their daughter's as well.

In every class where I have lectured on sexual agency and gender roles in sexual behavior, heterosexual men have been in the class. My lectures are not designed solely for women, they are created to encourage men and women to reflect on their roles, the agency or lack thereof, and the definition of sexual health. At the very beginning of each class, before I even begin my lecture, I always ask both the men and women to share what they are seeking from a sexual partner and I list their responses on the chalkboard. In *every* class I have ever taught, the men share the desire for female partners that are more assertive, more expressive, more confident and more honest in their sexuality. Men long for women with sexual agency.

Sex in the context of relationships and those used for pleasure alone, can be enhanced through the creation of greater sexual agency in women. Not only will women benefit, men will too. Men and women ask for it, without even know what they are asking for.

Implications for Research and Cultural Discourse Shifts

At one time, in the not too distant past, parents who communicated with their children about sexuality at all, were in the minority. With the advent of AIDS, a rise in teen pregnancy and the response of the research community, awareness about the importance of parental communications regarding sexuality came to the forefront of our culture. Parents can find books, videotapes, take classes, and find support groups that teach them how to discuss sexuality with their child. The discourse of "Just Say No" was once non-existent in our culture, but is now it is highly prevalent.

I suggest that the development of sexual subjectivity and sexual agency is another discourse that needs promotion in our society. As I mentioned in Chapter 4, all but one of my participants was not familiar with the term "sexual agency", even though they had sat through a one hour lecture on the topic. As well, I have found through being questioned by lay people on the topic of this study for over a year, that not a single soul I have met outside of academia ever knows what sexual agency is.

However, often people talk about sexual agency without knowing what they discuss or ever specifically mentioning it. Sexual agency takes many forms. In my research I have discussed forms that include initiative taking, awareness of desire, and the individual's confidence and freedom to express their sexuality in behaviors. As well, I have discussed how sexual agency also is expressed through having the confidence and freedom to not engage in behaviors. However, the distinction must be made that "Just Say No" is not a reflection of subjectivity or agency. Yet sexual agency is found in the woman who reflects on a particular situation and decides to say no because it is not in her best interest, a true reflection of her desires or a pleasurable experience. Abstinence from sex can be a form of sexual agency. However, the motives that lead to abstinence are what determine if it is the individual has sexual agency in their decision making.

Another form of sexual agency is the use of condoms. Women and men who chose to protect themselves from risk show sexual agency. There have been many studies that focus on women's self protection and promotion through the demand of condom use. These studies often focus on minority women (see Salaza, et al, 2004; Hutchinson, 2003 for recent examples), or high risk women such as prostitutes (see Bucardo et al., 2004), or women in developing countries where the HIV/AIDS rate is growing (see Ladner, et al., 2003). Even research that does not fall in these

specific research focuses, typically takes a health promotion focus (see Sholes, et al., 2003), as that is the prevailing sexuality research discourse. And health promotion is a noble cause.

However, some studies do take a focus on women's self esteem and power in their relationships (see Kaler, 2004; Harvey, 2002). Yet even these studies do not discuss the role of sexual agency and how the development of subjectivity, empowerment and critical thinking play a role in condom use. It is my belief that if a sexual agency discourse was promoted in research and in our culture, not only could sexual risks be minimized, but they could be done so through the use of empowerment, not via social controls and patriarchal standards.

Limitations - How Postmodern Am I?

Many times the "limitations of the research" section of a dissertation or article is a detailed accounting of all the possible ways in which, everything that was done could be interpreted as lacking. I take issue with that, as on some level I see it as disrespectful and not crediting readers with critical thinking. On another level I also see it as unnecessary because if you give me a method, I can give you a weakness in it. Even the experimental design has flaws. I hope that others in the research community are educated in methods well enough to do the same.

However, I can hear the voice of my qualitative guru, Dr. Fred Piercy, reminding me that it is simply tradition and I, as a student, still have to prove myself before I can take on the traditions of research. As well, he would kindly remind me that it is also important proof for the reader, that *I* the researcher, understand the limits of my research.

And I do. What I have taken on here is research that begs to be critiqued. I did that intentionally, as a rebel, a postmodernist, a feminist and a post-positivist researcher. If you haven't gotten it by now let me make it clear: I thrive on disrupting norms and critiquing the

status quo. So for Fred and for myself, I must acknowledge on how many levels the critics can come at me.

In many circles, just my use of qualitative methods is a perceived weakness. I have been told so many times by quantitative colleagues that what I am doing is soft science, I wonder if we are truly in a postmodern era. Yet I say with utter faith that soon qualitative research will have its day!

Even in positivist qualitative circles, my methods could be criticized. The convenience sampling, the retrospective aspect, and my discussing parents without interviewing parents are all areas where I could have strengthened my research methods. However, as I have shared I am a lowly doctoral student and I had great time and monetary limits. I did everything thing I could given the boundaries of my situation. As well, all of the methods I employed that can be critiqued have also been discussed in research circles as having usefulness as well (Anfara., Brown, & Mangione, 2002).

For some, the intensity of my voice and lack of objectivity can create a reaction of wanting to discount all that I say. For conservatives, the first time I wrote I was a feminist; they were turned off to all else. Sexuality, in and of itself, is a controversial topic. Funding, respect and support is hard to find for sexuality research that is not focused on how to stop sexual behavior, especially adolescent sexual behavior. For this alone I face an ongoing career struggle of fighting for legitimacy.

I have attempted along the way to circumvent some of these critiques, through methods that utilized qualitative standards of excellence (Appendix F). As well I have positioned myself as not providing Truth but rather a way of viewing sexuality that provides the opportunity for growth, development and change in a society that seems to want that. Also, I have asked that the

reader take this study and see it for what worth they find in it. Although as a human with an ego, I hope that most readers love my work and wholeheartedly agree with me. Yet, at the same time I must admit, I really do not. As I shared in Chapter 5, I leave it to the reader to think critically, the best they can, about what I present and how I present it. I have given the tools. It is the reader's job to use them for themselves. All I ask is that you not throw the baby out with the bath water. There are nuggets of truth in everything.

Future Research Needs

Feminist research has often taken a broad look at patriarchal society and has provided us with the larger discourses and historical perspectives that have resulted in general controls upon women (Tolman, 1994). In terms of adolescent sexuality this was needed to even begin the discussion of how we define female desire, and to gain a more complete picture of adolescent sexual health. Recently feminists have begun seeking out the specific means by which women's sexuality is socially controlled. Carpenter's (1998) study of media messages and Fine's (1988) groundbreaking work on the role of schools, as well as Hartley and Drew's (2001) even more specific study of the sex education films used in health classes, have all sought to critically consider how young women's sexual desires, pleasure and initiative taking are suppressed. It is my contention that parents do this as well. And, that in a field bursting at the seams, in terms of the sheer amount of parent adolescent sexual communication studies that have occurred, there is a massive void. Further studies are needed on the ways parents approach their teenage daughter's sexuality, what discourse they use in communications, and how this impacts women's ability for desire, pleasure and overall sexual agency.

Conclusion

I see the IRB "benefits" happening in my RPs during interviews. They are getting empowered. I see "aha" moments where something clicks and connects for them. They get an insight, reach an

awareness. I also see them searching for greater understanding of themselves through seeking me out. Lily and I talked for one and a half hours after the interview was over, her pounding me with questions and wanting to get inspired by me to be more confident. Marla emailed me later with more questions. I feel I teach, even though I have no class. Emily and I chatted too. And I saw her seeking to understand how we could have so many similarities yet be so different. God I love talking to these women. Women are so amazing! so strong, so smart, so aware ~ everyone is so unique. It is fabulous. I love stories. -entry in my research journal

Sexual subjectivity and agency is too important for sexual health and functioning to be ignored in research. It is also too important to be ignored in society. Parents, as the transmitters of knowledge, creators of norms, and models of healthy functioning, are important in shaping the sexual lives of their daughters. The ways, means, and content of messages that they communicate about sexuality have impact and influence. If we want sexually healthy adolescents, then the communications about *all* that it entails must begin with the primary relationship of the parent to child.

I found through the process of my research, just communicating openly, clearly and confidently with the 14 women had meaning. As I wrote in the above excerpt from my research journal, the impact of giving women the freedom to talk openly about their sexual selves was empowering. Imagine what would happen if they could do that with someone who truly matters, someone they love and trust, someone who loves and trusts them. Parents have the power, responsibility and relationship needed to create daughters who understand their own wants, their own needs, and their own likes and dislikes in a way that allows them to know themselves and to develop into women that can decide for themselves what is in their best interest. Women must be given all the information and skills needed, and then allowed to decide and speak for themselves.

Appendix A:

Literature Review

A Broader View of Adolescent Sexuality

There is an enormous body of research literature that focuses on the issues of adolescent sexuality. For the purposes of this dissertation I will take a broad view of the literature while concentrating on several key areas pertinent to my research topic. In this chapter I will review the literature related to the sexual initiation trends of adolescents, the problems associated with adolescent sexual behaviors, the factors that encourage or deter teenagers in becoming sexually active, giving special attention to the role of parents, and the role of desire in adolescent sexual behavior.

Sexual Initiation Trends in Adolescence

By the age of eighteen, 45.6% of teenagers that participated in a national survey, reported that they had sexual intercourse (Center for Disease Control & Prevention, 2001). The typical age when teens have their first sexual experience typically varies by gender and race (Day, 1992; Goodson, Evans & Edmundson, 1997; Lauritsen, 1994). National Youth Survey data (Lauritsen, 1994) indicates that 73% of males and 60% of females are sexually active by age 19. The trend for males to enter into sexual activity earlier than females has been replicated in the majority of studies on adolescent sexual experiences (Lauritsen, 1994; McBride, Paikof & Hombeck, 2003; Schuster, Bell & Kanouse, 1996; Miller & Benson, 1999; Seidman & Rieder, 1994). Oliver and Hyde (1993) completed a meta-analysis of 177 usable sources on sexual attitudes or behaviors. Their results stated that males reported more permissive attitudes and greater incidences of behaviors than the female participants on 19 of the 21 measures.

The empirical literature also demonstrates that Black males have the lowest age of first intercourse (Day, 1992; Lauritsen, 1994; Ramirez-Valles, Zimmerman & Juarez, 2002; Schuster, Bell et al., 1996). Black females, White males and then White females respectively debut sexually (Laumann, Gagnon, Michael & Michaels, 1994; Miller & Benson, 1999). Over half of Black males have had sex by the age of 15, while White males do not reach this average until age 17. Forty-five percent of Black females have reached sexual debut by age 16 compared to White females who are not at the same rate until age 17 (Perkins, Luster, Villarruel & Small, 1998).

As adolescents get older the likelihood of sexual activity increases. Adolescents aged 18 to 21 are twice as likely to be have engaged in intercourse as those aged 14 to 15 (Meschke, Bartholomae & Aentall, 2002). A review by Seidman and Rieder (1994) suggests that most adolescents sexually debut during mid or late adolescence. In their findings only 10% have had sex by age 13, with nearly all having done so by age 18. They also found that of those aged 18-24 the majority have "multiple, serial sex partners" (p. 330). However, at all age groups' males lead in terms of experience and number of partners. Miller and Benson (1999) states "The proportion of males at each year who report having sex is roughly equal to the number of sexually experienced females who are one year older" (p. 108).

Negative Consequences of Adolescent Sexual Behavior

However, it is the young *female* who is most likely to bear the consequences of being sexually active (Lauritsen, 1994). And there are many life altering and health related problems associated with being sexually active. Pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS are direct outcomes associated with adolescent female sexual behavior. Indirect outcomes include lower educational attainment, decreased employment opportunities and income loss.

Early sexual debut increases the opportunity for adolescent pregnancy. In the classic study by Laumann and colleagues (1994), the National Health and Social Life Survey findings suggested that sexual activity as a teenager is related to having a child at a relatively young age. According to recent data from the CDC (2001) almost five percent of adolescents under the age of 18 have already had one pregnancy. Another statistic is that about one million American adolescents become pregnant each year (Steinberg, 1999). It is important to note that the teen birth rate has been declining since 1991 (Meschke, et al. 2002). However, Grunseit, Kippax, Aggleton, Baldo and Slutkin (1997) found through a detailed sub-analysis that when comparing the U.S. with Canada, England and Wales, Sweden, the Netherlands and France (all developed countries with economies less than our own), the U.S. had the highest rates of adolescent pregnancy, birth and abortion.

Besides the consequences of pregnancy, young women are also at greater risk through their sexual behaviors to contract a sexually transmitted infection (STI). Both young men and women are at risk for STIs, but women in general are at two times a greater risk due to differences in genitalia (Laumann et al. 1994). Despite the fact that the rate of STIs has decreased among the general population, the decrease among adolescents has not been as large (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1996). It is estimated that 2.5 million adolescents contract a STD each year (Luster & Small, 1994), and that one in four will have an STI by age 18 (Miller, Norton, Fan, & Christopherson, 1998).

As with STIs adolescent women are also at greater risk to contract HIV than their male counterparts (Steinberg, 1999). Also similar to STIs and pregnancy, the risk of acquiring HIV/AIDS increases with the number of sexual partners a person has, and early sexual debut is a predictor of an increased number of partners (Laumann et al. 1994). The full impact of HIV upon

adolescents can not be directly seen. The number of adolescents that test positive for HIV each year is not alarming compared to other groups that engage in high risk behaviors. In fact, *young adults* have the highest rate of HIV infection (Miller et al., 1998). However, the ten year incubation period indicates that possibly many adolescents are asymptomatic carriers of the virus that then presents itself in young adulthood (Steinberg, 1999).

Problem Behavior Syndrome and Adolescent Sexual Behavior

Another dubious outcome of adolescent sexual activity is emotional problems. The research on this topic is limited (for an exception see Tubman, Windle & Windle, 1996) and not often cited in the literature. It is difficult to disentangle the behaviors from the outcomes. Researchers often do not know which came first. Often more questions are raised than answered in the research; such as did emotional problems lead to early and frequent sexual activity? Or did early sex and multiple partners cause emotional instability? For example, Capaldi, Crosby and Stoolmiller (1996) question the role of alcohol and drugs in sexuality activity. They claim that although the theory of the disinhibiting effects of drugs on behavior is often espoused, it is lacking in empirical evidence. These researchers instead view drugs as social cues for intercourse and suggest that the "desire to engage in sexual activity may, therefore motivate substance use" (p. 356). It is a fairly small portion of adolescents that are using alcohol or drugs as a precursor to sex. Of the 16,398 high school students surveyed by the CDC (2001) only 11.4% admitted to using a substance prior to having sex at last intercourse.

Due to the ongoing debate, the literature on adolescent sexuality focuses on what is often referred to as "problem behaviors". In the discussion of problem behaviors early sexual activity is routinely clustered with other risky behaviors such as alcohol, drug use, cigarette smoking, low GPA, depression, and delinquency (Goodson et al., 1997). Luster and Small (1994) found in

their study of 2,567 rural teenagers that both females and males categorized in a high risk sexual behaviors group were more likely than the two comparison groups to consume more alcohol, have low GPAs, and more frequent incidences of suicidal ideation. In another study they found in 2,168 urban teens that alcohol use and GPA were among the strongest predictors for sexual activity (Small & Luster, 1994). And yet another study found that fighting at school had the highest correlation of all the tested variables with early age of sexual debut among males, and school behavior problems and being suspended were also associated with a younger age at first sex (Miller et al., 1997).

Costa, Jessor, Donovan and Fortenberry (1995) framed the problem behavior syndrome as "psychosocial unconventionality". Their hypothesis is that not only do adolescent's engage in a cluster of risky behaviors (lower academic achievement, drinking and drugs) but also have certain personality characteristics and attitudes. These attitudes include a higher value on independence and less value on societal norms. In their study of 1,330 White, Hispanic and Black students they found that White and Hispanic youth that had an early sexual debut were found to be psychosocially unconventional. However, this theory did not hold true for the Black students.

These results are not atypical. The problem behavior syndrome and its effect on sexuality becomes quite convoluted when race enters the discussion. Perkins and colleagues (2003) state that the co-occurrence of sexual activity with other problem behaviors is most often seen in White adolescents and not consistently found in Black adolescents. Case in point, when Lauritsen (1994) examined the potential relationship between sex and ten variables she found that only one of those predictors (age) could be associated to sexual behavior in Black males, and in contrast five of the ten variables were found to be significant for White males. Yet, there are

studies where problem behaviors found in Blacks are strongly associated with sexual behavior (Schuster et al., 1996). Thus, how race intersects with problem behaviors and sexual behaviors is not clear and further research is needed.

Perrino, Gonzalez-Soldevilla, Pantin and Szapocznik (2000) have another perspective on the problem behavior syndrome. In their recent review of HIV prevention for adolescents they state that "adolescents displaying risky sexual behaviors in conjunction with drug use and delinquency are qualitatively different from adolescents engaging in risky sexual behaviors alone" (p. 82). This highlights an important element in research. The adolescents in the multi-problem group require very different (quantitative and qualitative) interventions than the sexual risk only group. Although researchers and practitioners often want to situate adolescent sexual debut in a problem only context, it cannot be forgotten that sexual behavior is also a biological imperative. This imperative which become physically possible in puberty is a primary developmental task of adolescence. This should not be ignored. To a certain degree adolescent's sexual debut is biologically driven and not just situated in a context of problem behaviors or environmental influences. How much puberty drives sexual debut is an important question to consider.

Puberty and Adolescent Sexual Behavior

Halpern, Udry and Suchindran (1997) in their study on the effect of the pubertal rise of testosterone, found that testosterone increases were significantly related to increases in female sexual interest and activity. Other research has found that early puberty predicted early sexual debut (Capaldi et al., 1996; Murray, 1994).

A more recently posited theory on the role of hormones in sexual behavior is that of adrenarche. The traditional theory on the role of hormones is the process of gonadarche, which is known to occur in puberty. However, Herdt and McClintock (2000) offer that adrenarche, the

maturation of the adrenal glands, which then produce testosterone, and estradiol, occurs at age ten. They believe that this explains why many subjects typically report their first sexual fantasies occurring around age ten. Hyde and Jaffee (2000) when considering Herdt and McClintock's research, argue that if adrenarche and the resulting hormones at age ten do not push the majority of preteens into sexual behavior then adrenarche does not adequately explain why the majority of teens are sexually active.

An absolute focus on the biological imperative seems reductionistic given gender differences in masturbation. If rises in androgen or testosterone were the main impetus to seeking sexual stimulation and gratification then we would not expect to find a large gender disparity in rates of masturbation. However, in a retrospectively focused survey of 280 university students almost double the number of males as females reported engaging in masturbation (Leitenberg, Detzer & Srebnik, 1993). Of those who masturbated, the males reported masturbating three times more often than females. If hormones held considerable influence over the drive towards sexual expression then this disparity would not be as great. Obviously cultural messages and their resulting gender roles have considerable influence over the sexual behaviors of adolescents.

McBride et al. (2003) came to this same conclusion in their study of 198 Black families. One hypothesis was that the rate of earlier sexual debut in Black adolescents was based on early physical maturation (when compared to other race groups). However, they did not find support for the effect of pubertal development alone but did find an interaction of pubertal timing with difficult family situations resulting in earlier debut. Thus, they concluded that it is important to place physical maturation in the social context. In another study that combined pubertal timing with other factors, it was found that pubertal timing had less of an effect on sexual behavior than other factors (Miller et al., 1998). One of the more related factors was dating frequently.

Dating and Adolescent Sexual Behavior

Although not often considered as a factor in the research literature, sexual debut is related to early, frequent and consistent dating. In Goodson and colleagues review (1997) the three studies that utilized it as a variable, found that early dating was positively associated with sexual behaviors. Small et al. (1994) replicated earlier findings from studies in the 80s that demonstrated that adolescent involvement in a committed relationship correlates to greater sexual activity. More recent findings suggest that adolescent sex most often occurs in the context of steady, long standing relationships (Taris & Semin, 1997; 1998). Elo, King and Furstenberg (1999) concur. They report that three fourths of their sample (taken from a national survey) stated that their first sexual partner occurred in the context of a steady relationship.

Since early, frequent and consistent dating has been associated with sexual behavior it would then stand to reason that qualities of dating relationships also play a role in sexual behaviors. It is important to note that there are studies that focus on why adolescents engage in sex, *and then* there are studies that look at adolescent relationships. Very rarely do the two issues intersect. However, there are a few studies that have asked adolescents what relationship factors lead to sex. Trust, communication and caring are relationship traits that young adolescent women offer as important for a context of sexual behavior (Fraley & Davis, 1997; Lamanna, 1999).

Eyre and Millstein (1999) completed one of the few recent studies that focused specifically on preferred partner qualities and reasons to have sex. Using a survey that had open and closed ended questions, they gathered data from 83 sexually active Black and White, males and females on both the positive and negative partner qualities that lead to or delayed sex. For Black males “the person is physically attractive” was the most often given reason for having sex, with “the time is right” and love/care for the person as the next most often cited reasons. For White males

drinking and “you love the person” were tied for the most often given reasons for having sex. For Black females, love/care for the person and being in a long term relationship were the most often given responses. White females shared that loving the person, both people being ready for sex and being in a relationship were the main reasons to have sex. All race and gender groups discussed physical appearance of the partner and specific attributes such as intelligence, sense of humor, and ease in communicating as antecedents to sex. Also, the theme of “the time is right” emerged in all the sub-samples.

Adolescent Sexual Behavior and Socio-Economic Status

Interestingly, in Lamanna’s (1999) qualitative study that involved interviews with 63 adolescent women and 225 focus group participants, one of the emergent themes was also proper timing. Lamanna described this group of young women as using a “developmental discourse” (p. 196) in their descriptions of their sexual behavior. These adolescents sought out sex because they viewed it as age appropriate and crucial to their psychological development. In contrast to those in relationships, these participants made a very unemotional decision to have sex. “Sex was a rational activity, as women plan their sexual self-development...Deciding that it is time to get some experience, they set out to do so, not in the context of love or passion but with reason” (p.202). It is crucial to recognize that this discourse was found in the descriptions of middle class girls only.

This is crucial because sexual debut and behaviors are viewed as imbedded in socio-economic level. The majority of studies that use socio-economic status (SES) as a variable have found a positive association between family income level and the sexual debut of children (Miller et al., 1997; Murray, 1994; Upchurch, Aneshensel, Sucoff & Levy-Storms, 1999). In a recent review

article, all the studies considering SES found that teens living in families of low SES, sexually debut earlier than teens living at a higher SES level (Mescke et al., 2002).

According to Murray (1994) there are numerous reasons for these findings. Neighborhoods that have a concentrate of low SES are thought to tolerate early sexual activity. It is believed that teens in low SES environments have lower goals, aspirations and expectations that in turn do not motivate them to delay sex. Perceived powerlessness is another potential reason that lower SES adolescents engage in early sex. Another possibility is that low socioeconomic status is associated with poor parenting skills, especially coercive and inconsistent discipline and poor monitoring which are all factors associated with early sexual debut (Capaldi, Crosby & Stoolmiller, 1996).

However, not all studies have found that SES is directly associated with the sexual behaviors of teenagers. In one study that considered gender differences in the first intercourse of low SES teens, only males were found to be significantly influenced by the level of poverty in their neighborhood (Ramierz-Valles et al., 2002). Miller, Forehand and Kotchick (2003) recently looked at a variety of family variables and their role in adolescent sex, and found that SES was not a significant predictor. They also cite several other studies that have found similar results.

East (2003) provided an interesting commentary on the impact of SES in her study on racial and ethnic differences of girls' sexual behavior. She administered a survey to 574 girls that were Hispanic, Southeast Asian and Black. East's' results show great variation racially and ethnically in the girls' sexual behaviors, independent of the socioeconomic background. East believes that these results suggest that "girls of different races and ethnicities are likely exposed to and evidently react to different socialized expectations of the timing of events associated with the transition to adulthood. Moreover, these cultural norms apparently exist independent of the

varying social and economic circumstances in which girls of different racial and ethnic backgrounds live” (p. 159). The Southeast Asian girls in her sample had the lowest mean family income (50% were AFDC recipients), yet had the same school and job aspirations as the White girls and had the highest intended age of first intercourse. Thus SES does not consistently predict sexual debut. Other factors must be considered.

The Peer Group and Adolescent Sexual Behavior

One of those factors is the adolescent peer group. According to human development theory adolescence is a time of forming identity (Erikson, 1968). The values of childhood are tested, questioned and often discarded. In the search for identity teens often move away from their parents and towards their peer group. Following the traditional human development line of thought, it would seem that the peer group should hold a large influence over the sexual decisions and behaviors in adolescence. The research literature clearly proves this notion (Mescke et al., 2002; Moore & Davidson, 1999).

First and foremost it must be said that teens talk about sex with their friends. In a survey of 249 female adolescents, 65% reported having discussed reproduction with their girlfriends (Young Pistella & Bonati, 1998). Adolescents most often cite their peers as their primary source of sexuality information but believe that parents should be the source instead (Whitaker & Miller, 2000). What teens are discussing with one another is not always beneficial to their sexual decision making. In a study that examined the effect of peers, parents and teachers as sexuality information sources, peers had the most negative effect on the sexual decisions of the young women (Moore & Davidson, 1999).

One account of why Black adolescent females are frequently sexually active at an early age is the normalizing of early sexual debut in the peer group (Lamanna, 1999). As one interviewee

stated in Lamanna's qualitative study "a lot of my friends have babies" (p. 199). According to Lamanna, "African American women, regardless of class, are typically in close contact with relatives or friends who gave birth as teenagers or nonmaritally. Whereas the White girls in this focus group categorically condemned teen pregnancy (as imprudent rather than immoral), never-pregnant Black women were loyal and uncritical of their family member and friends." (p. 199). Thus Black women's (and it could be argued, men's) exposure to early pregnancy (and thus early sex) through their friendships creates a normalization of sexual behaviors at an early age.

Adolescent's sexual decisions are affected by both their peer's actual behaviors and perceived behaviors. In Whitaker and Miller's (2000) study of 907 adolescents they found that when teens perceived their peers to sexually debut early, then they are likely to sexually debut at a younger age as well. Also, teens with a greater percentage of sexually active friends are more likely to be sexually active and to have a larger number of partners. This has been replicated in other studies (see Goodson et al., 1997 and Meschke et al., 2002 for reviews of these studies). However, it is important to note that the Whitaker and Miller (2000) study also found that parental communication negated the effects of peer norms. In the same vein, Small's et al. (1994) study involving 2,168 adolescent teens found that their sample did not conform to peer standards regarding sexual behavior. Instead a significant predictor of those adolescent's sexual behavior was parental factors, including permissive sexual values.

Parental Attitudes and Adolescent Sexual Behavior

Parent's permissive attitudes towards teens, like many other parental factors, have been often paired with adolescent sexual behaviors. Goodson and colleagues (1997) review found several articles that concluded that parental condoning of premarital sex or other similar permissive attitudes, including generally liberal attitudes, were positively related with early sexual debut in

adolescent children. Mescke and colleagues (2002) subsequent review found similar results. They found that parental disapproval of sex delayed onset, resulted in fewer partners and a decrease in sexual behaviors and pregnancy. However, Davis and Friel (2001) in their national school based study with 12,367 adolescents found that the maternal sexual attitudes have no impact upon adolescent sexual behaviors beyond the decision to sexually debut. Yet, in another study, the sexual behaviors of daughters, but not sons, was strongly associated with sexually permissive attitudes of mothers (Whitbeck, Simons & Kao, 1994). However, the breadth of the research literature shows that typical results report permissive *maternal* attitudes as positively related to not only sexual debut but the number of partners and frequency of intercourse (Miller, Forehand & Kotchick, 1999).

Maternal vs. Paternal Communication and Adolescent Sexual Behavior

These studies reflect what is typical when looking at parent child relations - a focus on the mother-child relationship. Very few studies look at the father-child relationship when examining influences on adolescent sexual behavior. In their review, Mescke et al. (2002) found only one study that considered the role of fathers. This study found that when father's disapproved of adolescent sex, onset was delayed and this was independent of mothers' approval.

Possibly the lack of focus on the role in fathers in adolescent sexual behavior has been influenced by parent child communication studies. Parent child communication has received a great deal of research time, energy and effort (Perrino et al., 2000). Specifically parent child communication about sexual matters has been greatly researched. Jaccard and Dittus' (1993) review of studies on parent-adolescent communication about premarital pregnancy found that between 30% and 60% of adolescents have some communication about sex with at least one parent. The majority of the studies have found that primarily mothers as opposed to fathers, take

responsibility for sexual education talks and communication with both daughters and sons (Lefkowitz, Boone, Sigman & Au, 2002; Mescke et al., 2002; Moore & Davidson, 1999).

However, there *are* a few studies that look at the roles of fathers in the sexual education of children. DiIorio, Kelley and Hockenberry-Eaton (1999) found that both male and female teens talk about sex with their mothers more frequently than their fathers, although the adolescent males were more comfortable talking with their fathers rather than their mothers. As would be expected, adolescent sons were more likely than daughters to talk to their father's about sex. Interestingly, the fathers were not included as study participants. Only mothers and adolescent children were interviewed.

Kirkman, Rosenthal and Feldman (2002) *did* interview fathers, and mothers and the adolescent children. The themes of this qualitative study were, that fathers and teenagers both saw a disruption of their once close relationships at puberty. Although fathers and mothers agreed that they had equal responsibility for sexual education of their children, mothers ultimately took action. Elements of gender role discourse were evident, such as women as better communicators and "owners of intimacy" (p. 72). Males in general were considered by all family members to be sexual predators and the idea of the primacy of the male sex drive made mothers rather than fathers, the safer choice for communicators about sexuality. In one study, fathers were reported as having never discussed 75% of sexual topics with their children (Rosenthal and Feldman, 1999).

In Bowling and Werner-Wilson's (2000) study, focus groups with college aged women were utilized to examine women's relationships with their fathers and to discover what parenting led to responsible sexual behaviors. Specifically looking at the communication issue, the women

labeled as sexually responsible reported positive communication from their fathers about topics such as dating, sex and marriage.

Werner-Wilson and Fitzharris (2001) completed another focus group study, this time talking with adolescents and both parents. Results suggested that parents are not communicating as frequently about sexuality as adolescent's desire. This sample displayed a large disconnect between what adolescent's wish to learn about sexuality, and what parents are comfortable and willing to discuss. This disconnect was also found in a retrospective study completed with women in their 30s. In Brock and Jennings' (1993) study, adult daughters were interviewed about the sex education they received from their mothers. These women recalled primarily negative nonverbal messages, and limited verbal conversations that were cautionary and rule oriented. They shared that what they had desired from their mother's were open and direct discussion of feelings and choices.

Ward and Wyatt (1994) also studied the content of childhood sexual messages in a study of 248 Black and White women. In this sample, both ethnic groups remembered verbal messages as mostly negative and nonverbal messages as mostly positive.

When parents verbally discuss sexuality with their children and adolescents, what topics are they covering? Rosenthal and Feldman (1999) found four primary domains in parent child sex education: Developmental and Societal Concerns, Sexual Safety, Experiencing Sex and Solitary Sexual Activity. In their survey of high school students, it was found that parents do not cover the four domains equally. Sexual Safety, which includes issues such as safe sex, STIs, HIV/AIDS and contraception, was the most frequently discussed domain. Experiencing Sex, which includes such things as sexual desire, sexual satisfaction, different types of sexual practices and choice of partner, was the domain least likely to be discussed by parents. This

study also found, like the studies reviewed earlier, that mother's were more likely than fathers to discuss any of the domains, and typically discussions occurred more often with their daughters than with their sons.

Style of communication is another aspect that researchers focus on when examining parent child sexual communication. Several qualitative studies have explored how mothers and daughters approach sexual communication. Yowell (1997) separately interviewed 12 pairs of mothers and daughters and found 3 categories of communication and engagement dyads. These 3 dyads include 1) a power-assertive communication and passive engagement dyad 2) a conflicted communication and avoidant engagement dyad and 3) a collaborative communication and active engagement dyad. The first dyad is representative of a "unilateral transmission of information from mother to daughter" (p. 188). The second dyad is indicative of both mother and daughter's unwillingness to engage in discussions about sexuality. The third dyad is characteristic of mutual trust and shared knowledge. Yowell used a social constructionist framework in her study and thus argued that the third dyad style was most beneficial for adolescent women.

Rosenthal, Feldman and Edwards (1998) study on the style of mother-child sexuality interaction found five communication styles: Avoidant, Reactive, Opportunistic, Child-Initiated and Mutually Interactive. Mother-teenagers that were the Avoidant style were described as non-initiators of conversations, passive communicators, not responsive, very low in comfort level, very infrequent in communication and typically only discussed the dangers of sex and issues of reproduction. Reactive pairs were characterized by the mother as the initiator and predominant communicator, the teen dismissive, low comfort level, high need for a catalyst (typically resulting from the teenagers behavior), very infrequent communication and typically only discussed the dangers of sex and issues of reproduction. Opportunistic pairs were characterized

by the mother as the initiator and predominant communicator, the teen uninterested, moderate comfort level, high need for a catalyst (typically external in nature), infrequent and discussed dangers, reproduction and psychological issues. Child-initiated pairs were characterized by teen initiation, mom and teen as equal communicators, mom responsive but with reservations, high comfort level and discussion of all topics. Mutually interactive pairs were characterized by both initiating, communicating, responsive, high comfort level, no need for catalyst, frequent conversations and all topics discussed.

Both Yowell (1997) and Rosenthal et al. (1998) studies found that some adolescents do not want to discuss sexuality with their parents and do so only under pressure. O'Sullivan, Meyer-Bahlburg and Watkins (2001) found the same resistance. They studied 72 minority mothers and 72 daughters to look at styles and timing of communication. Typically the daughters in their study withheld information and avoided conversations about sex when it was expected. One possible explanation of this was that difficulty in parent-child communication was a result of relationship tension due to the developmentally appropriate striving for independence in adolescence. It was also noted in the O'Sullivan (et al.) study, that for most participants the first communication about sex did not occur until adolescence. The widely held view is that delaying sexual communication until late adolescence is not beneficial for effecting adolescent sexual behaviors (Perrino et al., 2000). However, parent's tendency to initiate sexual communication in late adolescence has been replicated in several studies.

Lefkowitz et al. (2002) found that mother's talk more often about sex with their older children than with younger children. Lefkowitz, Romo, Corona, Au and Sigman (2000) reported that older adolescents felt less family openness and less satisfaction with the family. Older adolescent's talked about personal topics with people other than their mothers. Mother's were

also found to act more negatively towards older adolescents than towards younger adolescents. Yet Treboux and Busch-Rossnagel (1995) found that young adolescents as opposed to older adolescents are more interested and effected by sexual communication with their mothers. However, as Young Pistella and Bonati (1998) found, parents do not cover with their young adolescents most sex education topics.

Thus far in my review of the literature on parent-child sexual communication, I have outlined the different aspects that research focuses on, but have not discussed the research results on how that communication impact's behavior. This is because findings are not consistent. Jaccard and Dittus (1993) state in their review, that, "The overall picture that emerges from the studies reviewed is somewhat pessimistic regarding parent-teen communication as a means of preventing unintended premarital pregnancy. Many of the studies observed no relationship between parent-teen communication and sexual and contraceptive behavior" (p. 335). However, Perrino's et al. (2000) review is as optimistic as Jaccard and Dittus was pessimistic. They state:

In a very general sense, the practice of positive and open parent-adolescent communication about broad-ranging topics has been found to protect youth from sexual risk behaviors...More commonly, parent-adolescent communication specifically about sexual behavior has been linked to reduced sexual risk-taking among adolescents, with greater amounts of communication about sexuality associated with delayed and safer sexual behaviors...These communication findings illustrate the power of protective influences in the family microsystem...(p. 85).

Some of the difference can be accounted for, by the quality of the studies reviewed. Jaccard and Dittus clearly critique the studies they examined as being too general, overly simplified and using crude measures. Hopefully the more recent review reflects an improvement on the quality

of studies being completed. However, another viable explanation for the incongruity in these reviews is that parent-child communication can not be considered alone. Communication occurs in the context of a relationship and as such should be studied in that context.

Parent-Child Relationship Quality and Adolescent Sexual Behavior

Somers and Paulson (2000) found significant correlations between parental communication and parental closeness. This finding has been replicated in other studies. A study mentioned earlier, Lefkowitz et al. (2000) found the parent-teen relationship has influence over the quality and impact of sexual communication. Also discussed earlier, Bowling and Werner-Wilson (2000) who studied father-daughter relationships and found that positive communication about dating, sex and marriage resulted in responsible sexual behavior, *also* found that this communication typically occurred in the context of involved parenting and close relationships.

In a study that combined quantitative and qualitative methods, Toon and Semin (1998) examined maternal parenting styles and their effect on children's sexual experiences. Their results were similar in nature to some of the communication studies that found a difference in effects on younger versus older teens. Toon et al. conclude that parental relationships have more influence over the sexual experiences of younger teens, as opposed to older teens.

High level of family connectedness and close parent-child relationships have been associated with delaying sexual debut (Resnick et al., 1997). Low levels of maternal warmth, and fathers being psychologically controlling have been associated with greater sexual risk taking in adolescent women (Inazu & Fox, 1980; Rodgers, 1999).

Family Structure and Adolescent Sexual Behavior

The quality of parent child relationships is not only affected by style of parenting but also by the proximity of the parents. Disruption of the parent-child relationship occurs through divorce

and changes in family structure (Young Pistella & Bonati, 1998). In turn, adolescents of divorced and separated parents typically have an earlier sexual debut (Murray, 1994).

Similar to the focus in parent child communication studies on mothers, studies on the effects of divorce, separation and dating, mostly focus on the role of the mother. Whitbeck et al. (1994) found that mother's dating behaviors effected the sexual behaviors of their adolescent sons and daughters. Davis and Friel (2001) found that when looking at single parent, step-, cohabitating or lesbian families, that only single parent families were viewed as a context for risky sexual behaviors in adolescent children. The single parent families were exclusively mother headed households.

Parental Monitoring and Adolescent Sexual Behavior

Mescke et al. (2002) noted in their review that a possible explanation for the consistent literature on the negative sexual effects of single parent headed households is possibly due to the decreased number of parents available to monitor. Other researchers have also posited this theory (Murray, 1994). Perrino's et al. (2000) review found two studies where simply having a caregiver available decreased adolescent sexual risk behaviors and the greater the number of caregivers available, the lower the risk. Wilder and Watt (2002) results highlighted the importance of the traditional two-parent family. Using a national survey of 19,000 adolescent's they found that paternal supervision discouraged sexual activity in sons and maternal supervision discouraged sexual activity in daughters. Yet the reverse was not true. Maternal supervision did not impact sons and paternal impact did not impact daughters.

In general, parental monitoring is consistently found in the literature to impact adolescent sexual behaviors (Goodson et al., 1997). Most research results show that higher monitoring delays sexual debut, lowers the number of partners and increases contraception use (Mescke, et

al., 2002). Rodgers (1999) found that in already sexually active adolescent girls, increased parental monitoring decreased their likelihood of engaging in sexually risky behaviors. Longmore, Manning and Giordano's (2001) study found that *early* monitoring was the strongest predictor of delayed sexual debut.

However, a recent, well designed study by Wu and Thompson (2001) had very different results than those typically reported. Using a national longitudinal sample of over 19,000 adolescents Wu and Thompson did not find support for the hypothesis that mother headed households decrease daughter's age of sexual debut. Wu and Thompson's findings instead suggested that family turbulence (numerous family transitions over time) resulted in the highest rates of sexual behavior in White women. For Black women, parental control was the most important factor for limiting sexual activity.

Thus, parental attitudes, style and frequency of communication, quality of relationship, monitoring and family structure all have complex effects upon the sexual behavior of adolescents. This can also be said of *all* the previously reviewed literature. How pubertal timing, dating relationships, peer relationships, other high risk behaviors, race and socio-economic status all intersect to influence a teenagers sexual decision making is complicated. Easy answers to the "problem of teen sex" are elusive.

The past 20 pages of this chapter have proven the large focus of current research on the who and why, of adolescent sexual behavior. Many researchers concentrate on the who: which teens are having sex, and the why: as a result of what influences, because they seek to delay sexual debut, decrease the number of sexual partners and decrease sexually risky behaviors in society. Yet an often ignored aspect of "the why" is the role of desire.

The Role of Sexual Desire in Adolescent Sexual Behavior

On a very basic level, adolescents, like adults, engage in sex because it is wanted and because it feels good, or it is supposed to (Pinkerton, Cecil, Bogart & Abramson, 2003). However, very little empirical research concerns itself with the role of desire in adolescent sexual behavior. This is partly due to the complex nature of desire.

Often research and clinicians look at behaviors when considering desire, specifically the frequency of sexual behaviors (Heiman, 2001). Behavior is important because it typically entails consequences. Purely on a health level, STIs and pregnancy make sexual behavior important. However, desire is not that easy to capture. People engage in sexual behaviors for reasons other than desire; money, intimacy and fear also motivate sex. As well, desire does not necessarily result in behavior; lack of partner, opportunity, moral and social proscriptions, and existing sexual disorders such as erectile dysfunction, can stop sexual desire from its expression.

Yet, it is important that sexual desire be captured and understood in some manner. If for no other reason than diagnosis and treatment when there is dysfunction. Laumann, Paik and Rosen (1999) found using a national probability sample, that 43% of women and 31% of men report sexual dysfunction. Specifically looking at desire, they found that out of 1486 women, 469 lacked interest in sex and out of 1249 men, 183 lacked interest in sex. In Spector and Carey's (1990) review of sexual dysfunction research they found that desire disorders are increasing as the presenting problem in therapy. They concluded that female sexual arousal disorder is the least understood dysfunction and that prevalence rates were not available. However, Laumann (et al.) more recently found a 22% rate of arousal problems rate in women. It is important when considering these numbers to be aware that there is a tendency towards under-reporting sexual dysfunction (Read, 1995).

Despite the frequency of dysfunctions associated with desire, they are considered hard to diagnose and study because of the difficulty in operationalizing desire (Williams et al., 2002). Typically dysfunctions are not diagnosed by truly objective criteria but rather by clinical judgement (American Psychiatric Association, 1994) Yet objective definitions are attempted.

Typically the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV; American Psychiatric Association, 1994) is the standard for what constitutes a dysfunction. Dysfunction's typically associated with desire are Hypoactive Sexual Desire Disorder (HSD), which is the most prevalent female sexual complaint (Williams & Leiblum, 2002) and Female Sexual Arousal Disorder (FSAD). Yet for research purposes, pathology focused definitions are often not broad enough.

Levine (2003, 1987) offers that people use various synonyms to describe sexual desire: drive, horny, libido, lust, want, passion, need, instinct, impulse, ache and longing are but a few. Levine (1987) originally responded to these expressions with his definition: "Sexual desire is the psychobiologic energy that precedes and accompanies arousal and tends to produce sexual behavior" (p. 36). Recently, Levine (2003) offered a clinically focused definition: sexual desire..."is the sum of the forces that lean us toward and push us away from sexual behavior" (p. 280). He focuses on three forces: drive, motivation and wish. Drive is viewed as the biological component. Motivation is the psychological and wish is the cultural component of sexual desire. These three forces are used as frameworks for most of the existing literature on sexual desire. Some researchers focus on drive, others on wish. Few attempt to study all three.

Gender Differences in Desire

Research lines are also drawn over the issue of gender in sexual desire. Gender is an important factor in the study of sexual desire because research has historically and quite clearly

shown that male sexual desire and female sexual desire are different (Baumeister, Catanese & Vohs, 2001).

Men and women experience sexual desire differently, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Beck, Bozman and Qualtrough (1991) completed a study on the experience of sexual desire in college students and found that males reported feeling sexual desire more often than females. In their sample of 144 students, 91.1% of men reported feeling desire several times a week, while only 52.4% of women felt sexual desire at the same frequency. This has been replicated in other studies (see Baumeister et al. 2001 for a review). Baumeister's et al. review found most studies show that men want sex more often, desire a greater number of partners and masturbate more often than women. This includes heterosexual men, gay men, single men and married/partnered men. Baumeister (2000) also cites numerous studies that show that women think about sex less often, have fewer sexual fantasies, are interested in fewer sexual activities, initiate sex less often, refuse sex more often, have less extramarital affairs and enjoy sex less than men.

The gender differences in sexual desire have been found in other countries. Schmitt (et al. 2003) found in a cross cultural survey of 16,288 people from 52 nations, 6 continents and 13 islands, that men seek a larger number of sex partners and are more motivated by physical desire, whereas women are motivated more by relational qualities. This cross cultural universality was also true regardless of the participants relationship status or sexual orientation.

Turning from frequency to the causes of sexual desire, Regan and Berscheid (1995) found that male sexual desire is believed to stem from "intraindividual and erotic environmental factors" while female sexual desire is believed to arise from "interpersonal and romantic" factors (p.355). The beliefs of their sample, are seemingly replications of wider cultural beliefs on why men and women want sex, and are empirically backed. Several studies (see Baumeister 2000;

Baumeister et al., 2001 for reviews) have found that men primarily desire sex for the act itself, for pleasure, physical release and satisfaction, and as an innate experience, while women typically want sex for reasons of intimacy, affection, and emotional connection. Carroll, Volk and Hyde's (1985) study with college students found that the male participants were motivated to sex for pleasure, fun and physical reasons while female participants were motivated to sex for love, commitment, and emotion.

Specifically looking at adolescent gender differences, Hyde and Jaffe (2000) note that the motivation to debut sexually is different in girls and boys. They state that girls bring affection and boys bring curiosity. Diamond's (2003) model to distinguish romantic love and sexual desire, conceptualizes that adolescent females (and thus adult females) interpersonal relationships play a more primary role in subjective experiences of sexual desire than the adolescent males.

Desire from a Medical Perspective

There are several theories that try to explain the differences in the male and female sex drive. The role of biology is often researched due to ease. First there seems to be a desire for simple solutions, and focusing solely on the biology of desire gives rise to the medical management of it, which is arguably easier than the psychological management of it (Winton, 2001). The medicalization of sex tightens the grip of social control. And a biological model of desire makes for smoother science. Again counting hormone levels, looking at primary and secondary sex organ differences, and touting the role of evolution is in many ways neater than contemplating the complex and often uncapturable workings of the human emotion and will.

Evolutionary theory posits that women are less interested in sex because of pregnancy and the need for careful mate selection. While traditional evolutionary thinking conversely suggests that

men are driven to frequent sex and multiple partners in order to increase the odds of survival, not only for the species, but specifically their lineage.

An obvious biological theory for why men have greater sexual desire than women is simply that they can see their desire more easily. Two studies in Baumeister's review (2000) reported that men are typically more aware than women about their bodily states and as such Baumeister extends this to sexual states. Baumeister's argument for this is that it is a result of the ease in which men feel and view their erect penis' versus the difficulty women have in seeing and feeling changes in their vaginas'. Basson (2000) in her new model of female sexual response discusses various studies that demonstrate that while women do undergo various changes in muscle tension, heart rate, body heat, breast sensitivity, increased vaginal blood flow and uterus movement when sexually aroused, they often do not perceive these changes or connect them to sexual desire. Basson also discusses that vaginal lubrication is typically compared to male penile erection, as the genital marker of sexual desire, and it too is not easily perceived by women. She concludes that women's sexual desire is more typically a mental excitement as opposed to an awareness of physical excitement.

Another biological marker for evaluating sexual desire is hormones. Beck's (1995) review of hypoactive sexual desire disorder found that men's sexual desire is consistently dependent on the presence of androgens, mainly testosterone. However, in women, Beck does not find that the research consistently demonstrates how hormones relate to sexual desire. Traditionally though, women's comparably lower sexual desire has been attributed to comparably lower levels of testosterone (Tolman & Diamond, 2001). Newer research (Heiman, 2001) has shown that that androgens estrogen and testosterone, as well as the neuropeptide oxytocin have all been clearly related to sexual initiating and receptivity in women. As discussed earlier, research has shown

that early puberty which means an early influx of androgens is often significantly correlated with the onset of sexual behavior in young girls (Halpern et al., 1997).

Psychological View of Desire - The Role of the Family

However, *again*, to take a purely biological focus is reductionistic. An "essentialist" view is not satisfying and has not been for some time. Sigmund Freud (1905/1938) most famously challenged the notion of sexuality as purely biological. Instead Freud offered theories of childhood and early family relationships as the key to sexual identity and expression.

Little empirical research has been completed that directly examines the effects and influences of parenting on the experience of sexual desire. Scharff (1988) has theoretically applied an object relations approach to sexual desire. In this approach developmental and family interactions shape a child's view of self and others. Specifically, ideas of good and bad as messaged in the family, are believed to shape a child's feeling states - including sexual desire. In this model, sexual desire is considered a cognitive-emotional construct. Dushman and Clark (1984) also theoretically applied an Adlerian model to sexual dysfunction. They believe that childhood development of mistaken ideas about sex result in dysfunction and that the mistaken ideas come from the family context. However, empirical studies testing these theories has not occurred.

Rosenthal and Feldman (1999) did complete an empirical study about adolescent's perceptions of parental communication about sex. Their findings included the result that typically, sexual desire and satisfaction were rarely discussed between parents and teenagers. In an earlier study on mother-daughter communication about sex, Rosenthal et al. (1998) found the same results.

McCabe (1989) evaluated the effects of early childhood and adolescent attitudes and behaviors on sexual functioning. They found significant correlations between current sexual

desire and adolescent attitudes. However, she did not examine the role parents had in shaping the adolescent's attitudes.

One resulting theme in Thompson's (1990) phenomenological study on sexual initiation, was of girls with agency and subjectivity about their sexual desire and pleasure. Thompson called these girls, "pleasure narrators" and described them as having mothers that were "open", "forthcoming", and who "impart the adventure of sex" (p. 354). The pleasure narrators themselves "approach sexual initiation prepared by a knowledge of the pleasure their bodies hold in store and a sense of knowing their own minds. They are desirous..." (p. 355).

The Role of Culture in Desire

Similar to Thompson's study, there is a small but growing body of literature that concerns itself with the role of young women's sexual agency and subjectivity (Thompson, 1995; Tolman, 1994; 2001; Tolman & Diamond, 2001; Tolman & Szalacha, 1999; Weekes, 2002). While looking at issues of sexual pleasure and the forces that shape it, these studies do not directly connect family processes to the outcomes of women's desire. Instead these feminist studies examine generally, how culture and the role of patriarchy shapes women's sexual selves.

Hartley and Drew (2001) completed a content analysis of 28 sex education films and found that the majority of the films, intended to minimize adolescent sexual risk, also supported cultural norms of a sexual double standard. Typically male sexual agency was legitimized while female sexual desire was minimized. A prevalent theme was the notion that sex for women was danger. Hartley and Drew concluded that these messages propagate beliefs that repress female sexual desire, pleasure and agency.

Holland, Ramazongolu, Sharpe and Thomson (1992) believe that one important, yet ignored unsafe sexual practice for women is playing a subordinate sexual role. They call for the sexual

empowerment of women through the release of women from traditional sexual relationships. These authors believe that traditional sexual relationships entail women being defined as objects that meet the sexual need of men. They are of the opinion that for release and empowerment to occur, women must first be able to define sex as pleasurable for themselves. Their analysis of data from the Women, Risk and AIDS project found that it was atypical for young women to discuss sex in terms of their own pleasure. In another study, they concluded that "...the interviews can be read as implying complex interconnexions [sic] of power and resistance, in which young women experience social pressures to construct their bodies as passive and fragmented sexual objects" (Holland, Ramazongolu, Sharpe & Thomson, 1994, p. 25).

Some researchers (see Baumeister, 2000; Rothblum, 2000) interpret these results as not problematic for women, but rather as *what just is* - a difference in what is important to women in their sexual relationships. They see that relationships, intimacy and social interaction is a primary goal for women, thus the motivational factor. However, Tolman and Diamond (2001) and others (Holland et al., 1994) disagree, if for no other reason than the fact that sexual encounters are not merely relational interactions but are also very clearly bodily experiences. Tolman and Diamond (2001) state that is important to have "a modern reappraisal of gender and sexual desire" that considers both biological and cultural influences (p. 33). Tolman (1994) calls for a psychological analysis of girl's experiences of desire. She states, "...that this approach can keep distinct women's psychological responses to sexual oppression and also the sources of oppression. This distinction is necessary for avoiding the trap of blaming women for the ways our minds and bodies have become constrained" (p. 326).

Context of Current Study

Adolescent sexuality is complex. Achieving healthy sexual functioning is not an easy task, yet it is an important one. As the literature reviewed demonstrates, there is an abundance of knowledge about who, what and why teens are having sex. However, there are still missing connections that need to be explored. The importance of sexual desire has been downplayed in adolescent sexuality research. Yet, "sexual desire manifestation in adolescents forces teens to face their sexual selves and how they do, will likely set the pattern for their adult sexual selves" (Levine, 1987, p. 37). The importance of *female* sexual desire has been downplayed in society. As this review demonstrates, despite the large body of research literature that examines parent influences upon adolescent sexuality, the role of parents in creating adolescent sexual subjectivity is rarely explored. Although as Williams et al. (2002) states "Most women are raised in families and cultures that are, at best, ambivalent about female sexual expression" (p. 309) there is almost no empirical studies that consider the topic.

Building on the work of feminist research and looking at the complex interaction of the parent child relationship, this study combined two very important influences upon adolescent sexuality: patriarchal gender roles and the culture of the family.

Appendix B:

Personal Narrative Assignment

Write a 4 page minimum paper on your how you think your parents and family influenced your ideas of who you were to be sexually. Think about and discuss what messages, attitudes and behaviors were communicated to you from your parents about sexual desire and your role as a sexual person. Consider topics such as masturbation, initiation of sex, if it was normal to have sex, to want sex, to be sexual. Focus on issues in your childhood and adolescence. Finally, discuss how you think these messages, attitudes and behaviors on your parent's part, affect who you are sexually today.

Appendix C:

Interview Questions

Then in general we will discuss the primary elements of the narrative, that would involve such questions as,

- What aspects of your sexual development do you consider positive? Negative?
- What role do you think your parents had in your development?
- How do you think your parents communicated (verbal and non verbal) to you about sexual desire?
- How did this communication affect your sexual desire? your sexual agency? your sexual subjectivity?
- How do you think your parent's attitudes and or behaviors affect your sexual desire? sexual agency? sexual subjectivity?
- Regarding your parents communications, attitudes and behaviors..What was beneficial for your development? What was harmful? Why?
- What would you change about your parent's communication, behaviors and attitudes regarding sex?

Participants will read over their narratives and then I will ask questions such as,

- Now that you look back at the narrative, what things stand out to you?
- Would you change anything about the narrative?

Then participants will read my analysis of their narrative and I will ask questions such as,

- What stands out in my interpretations?
- What would you change?

Appendix D

Table of Participants Demographic Information

Participant	Age	Race	SES	Parent's Marital Status
Crystal	20	African American	Upper Middle	Married
Madison	21	Bi-Racial: Hispanic/Caucasian	Middle	Married
Brooke	20	Caucasian	Upper Middle	Married
Lily	21	Bi-Racial: Jewish/Caucasian	Middle	Married
Baylynn	18	Italian American	Upper Middle	Married
Marla	19	Caucasian	Upper Middle	Married
Emily	21	Caucasian	Upper Middle	Married
Allison	18	Caucasian	Upper Middle	Divorced
Kyle	18	Caucasian	Upper Middle	Married
Summer	19	Caucasian	Upper Middle	Married
Kelli	18	Caucasian	Upper Middle	Married
Brittany	19	Caucasian	Upper Middle	Married
Jessica	22	Caucasian	Upper Middle	Married
Julia	19	Asian American	Upper Middle	Married

Appendix E

Table of Themes and Participants

Themes	Participants That Are Connected To It
Parental Influence: <i>Support or Fear</i>	Allison, Baylynn, Brittany, Brooke, Crystal, Jessica, Julia, Kelli, Lily, Marla
Parental Communication: <i>No Talk or Only When They Had To</i>	Allison, Baylynn, Brittany, Brooke, Crystal, Emily, Jessica, Julia, Kelli, Kyle, Lily, Madison, Summer
Father's: <i>What? Say the S Word?</i>	Allison, Baylynn, Brittany, Crystal, Emily, Jessica, Julia, Kelli, Kyle, Lily, Summer,
Father's: <i>Boys Are Only After One Thing</i>	Allison, Emily, Kyle, Marla, Summer
Parental Communications: <i>Just Say NO</i>	Brittany, Crystal, Emily, Jessica, Julia, Kelli, Lily, Madison, Summer
Peers and School Fill in What Parents Do Not	Allison, Baylynn, Brooke, Brittany, Crystal, Emily, Jessica, Kyle, Lily, Madison, Marla, Summer
Sexual Desire and Agency: <i>Sex Is Scary</i>	Allison, Baylynn, Brittany, Brooke, Crystal, Emily, Jessica, Julia, Kelli, Lily, Marla
Experiences of Sex: <i>Because Sex Is Scary</i>	Allison, Emily, Jessica, Kyle, Summer
Experiences of Sex: <i>Yet There is Still Pleasure</i>	Allison, Brooke, Brittany, Emily, Jessica, Kelli, Lily, Madison
The Role of Sexual Agency: <i>Yes I have it</i>	Brittany, Crystal, Emily, Jessica, Julia, Kelli, Kyle, Marla, Summer
The Role of Sexual Agency: <i>Sometimes</i>	Allison, Baylynn, Brooke, Emily, Jessica, Kyle, Lily, Madison
Behaviors: <i>Desire, Masturbation and Getting What They Want</i>	Baylynn, Brittany, Brooke, Jessica, Lily, Madison
Behaviors: <i>Sexual Agency Also Means No</i>	Baylynn, Crystal, Emily, Julia, Kyle, Madison
Behaviors: <i>Passivity</i>	Baylynn, Brooke, Crystal, Emily, Jessica, Kyle, Lily, Summer
<i>Average Sexual Desire = No Sexual Behavior</i>	Allison, Baylynn, Crystal, Emily, Jessica, Julia, Kelli, Marla, Summer
<i>Dissonance in Desire</i>	Allison, Brittany, Brooke, Crystal, Jessica, Julia, Lily
Parental Communications: <i>Women Wear Dresses...</i>	Allison, Crystal, Emily, Julia, Kyle, Lily
Parental Communications: <i>The Old Double Standard</i>	Allison Brittany, Crystal, Emily, Jessica, Kelli
Parental Communications: <i>Sex For Love</i>	Allison, Baylynn, Brittany, Crystal, Emily, Julia, Jessica, Jessica, Kyle, Lily, Madison, Summer

<i>Be An Object</i>	Allison, Baylynn, Brittany, Jessica, Kelli, Kyle, Lily
Parental Communications: <i>But Do Not Be an Object</i>	Allison, Brittany, Emily, Jessica, Julia, Kelli, Kyle
Parental Communications: Fear of Being Viewed as a Slut	Allison, Baylynn, Brittany, Crystal, Emily, Jessica, Julia, Kyle, Kelli, Lily, Marla

Appendix F

Guba and Lincoln's (1982) Qualitative Criteria for Assessing Research Quality and Rigor

as applied to my research

Quantitative Term	Qualitative Term	Strategies Employed
Internal Validity	Credibility	Prolonged Engagement in the field Peer debriefing Triangulation of field notes, journal, transcribed interviews Member Checks Transparency on the part of the researcher
External Validity	Transferability	Thick Description Triangulation of field notes, journal, transcribed interviews Homogenous Sampling
Reliability	Dependability	Audit Trail Code-recode strategy Triangulation of field notes, journal, transcribed interviews Peer examination
Objectivity	Confirmability	Triangulation of field notes, journal, transcribed interviews Practice reflexivity through reporting researcher's biases, field notes, journal

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