TELL ME MORE: PARENT-CHILD SEXUAL TALK AND YOUNG ADULT SEXUAL COMMUNICATION SATISFACTION WITH ROMANTIC PARTNERS

by

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Young adults (18-30) tend to show insufficient levels of communication about sex with their romantic partners, despite the many benefits of sexual communication to relationships for this age group. Often, learned sexual shame and guilt play a role in inhibiting sexual communication with partners. Early messages about sex from parents that stem from narrow cultural boundaries of communication may play a role in fostering sexual shame and guilt from a young age, potentially influencing sexual communication patterns with partners later on. This study seeks to identify whether a significant relationship exists between participants' past parent-child sexual communication growing up and sexual communication satisfaction, relational satisfaction, and sexual satisfaction with current partners. ANOVA analyses revealed greater reported sex guilt among males and highly religious participants. Correlation and regression analyses yielded significant, positive relationships between former parent-child communication quality and current young adult sexual satisfaction with partner. A surprising result was a positive relationship between parent-child communication quality and sex guilt which warrants further research. Clinical implications and research directions are discussed for increasing open parent-child sex communication.

Keywords: sexual communication, parent-child sex talk, sexual satisfaction, sex guilt

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Young adult romantic relationships play a foundational role in their development, health, and lifelong relationship patterns (Landor & Winter, 2019). Because communication between partners plays a dominant role in the quality of romantic relationships (Vazhappily & Reyes, 2018), a continual look at young adult romantic communication is needed to increase the health and satisfaction in emerging adults. In particular, healthy communication about sex can help romantic partners achieve physical and emotional safety (Chatterjee, 2008; Denes, 2020; Faulkner & Lannutti, 2010), as well as deeper and more satisfying feelings of connection (Jones, 2016; Landor & Winter, 2019). Because young adulthood involves increased sexual decision-making, including some sexual debuts, the way in which they communicate about sexual topics may be especially important in negotiating new relationships and avoiding health risks such as STI's (Faulkner & Lannutti, 2010; Landor & Winter, 2019).

Early messages about sexuality from parents and caregivers heavily influence sexual scripts and attitudes in children (Ballard & Senn, 2019), and may go on to impact long-term views of sexuality (Powers, 2017). In particular, negativity and silence around sexual topics from parents can breed shame and discomfort in offspring (Day, 2019; Goldfarb et al., 2019), resulting in the continuance of negative cycles and a culture of shame (Lim, 2019). Internalization of such shame may serve as a barrier to the ability of these children to later communicate about sexual topics with romantic partners (Day, 2019; Faulkner & Lannutti, 2010; Lim, 2019), thus impacting the long-term quality of important relationships (Montesi et al., 2010). Symbolic interaction theory proposes that social interactions create and reinforce meaning beginning from a young age, which can then go on to influence how one understands certain symbols and topics across the life course (Rose, 1962; Yeager, 2016). Additionally, Arnett's broad and narrow

theory of socialization emphasizes the constraints a culture may place on the acceptability of certain topics (such as sexuality) and emphasizes that these barriers are passed down through families (Arnett, 1995). Understanding the connection between parental messages to children about sex and later comfort in sexual communication with partners may provide insight into pivotal points of intervention to combat sexual shame and increase quality and strength of young adult relationships, ultimately laying a foundation for more positive relationship trajectories long term.

Need for Present Study

Young adulthood has often been defined in previous research as the period between ages 18 and 30—a stage that often includes normative transitions from adolescence into adulthood such as attending college, marrying, and beginning full time jobs (Lee et al., 2018). The young adult population occupies a unique and critical place in the developmental trajectory, as they must balance the transition to adulthood with conflicting needs of autonomy and connection while all the same time experiencing social pressures on how to accomplish this (Watkins & Beckmeyer, 2020). Because many in this age range are just beginning to have more committed, intimate, and dyadic relationships compared with their experience as adolescents (Meier & Allen, 2009), they are at a pivotal point for learning healthy patterns within relationships. Additionally, strong romantic relationships in young adults contribute to overall life satisfaction and thriving in this age group (Xia et al., 2018).

Given the importance of young adult romantic relationships in shaping their individual and relational development (Landor & Winter, 2010; Watkins & Beckmeyer, 2020), increased knowledge on what may contribute to healthy romantic partnerships among young adults will offer benefits to those who work with this population. Researchers widely agree that young

adults are not communicating meaningfully with romantic partners to the degree needed, particularly in regard to sexual topics (Faulkner & Lannutti, 2010). Such a pattern may take a toll on both the depth that can be achieved in these foundational relationships as well as continue to promote messages that talk of sex is taboo (Faulkner & Lannutti, 2010; Jones, 2016).

Because of the strengths that can come to young adult relationships through increased sexual communication—including increased intimacy, closeness, knowledge, and safety (Faulkner & Lannutti, 2010; Jones, 2016; Landor & Winter, 2019; Montesi et al., 2010)—young adults will likely benefit heavily from increased comfort to discuss these topics with romantic partners. Indeed, communication about vulnerable topics such as sex and intimacy is thought to be one of the most important contributors to strong relationships (Jones, 2016; Timm & Keiley, 2011). Due to their foundational nature, stronger young adult relationships will in turn result in long-term benefits toward society such as greater stability of social structures, lowered divorce and violence, and higher quality parenting for the next generation (Xia et al., 2018).

Conversely, if sex communication does not improve among emerging adults, taboos may be further propelled in modern culture, increasing the distance between pressures to perform to high sexual standards and realistic ability to do so. Furthermore, discomfort in sexual discussion among young adults may ultimately result in untapped potential for sexual and relational satisfaction (Davis et al., 2006; Jones, 2016). Relationships may deteriorate prematurely due to miscommunication or feelings of dissatisfaction that may otherwise be resolvable (Jones, 2016). Young adult expectations for relational communication may ultimately lower, setting the stage for limited satisfaction in future relationships (Landor & Winter, 2010). Finally, studies indicate that ineffective sexual communication in this population may result in higher rates of STI's and unwanted pregnancies in a population where such rates are already higher than that of the

general public (Landor & Winter, 2019). Therefore, an informed look at factors contributing to ease and effectiveness of sexual communication in emerging adults is called for.

An additional need for this study is the paucity in research surrounding any connection between parent-child comfort in discussing sex and those children's long-term comfort in discussing sexual matters with future partners. While one study has attempted to find such a relationship (Powers, 2017), limitations may have prevented an accurate view at possible connections, and thus further attempts at understanding these relationships are needed.

If indeed such a connection exists, it may add further incentive for parents to increase openness with children in sexual matters, as current research indicates that such openness is extremely rare and widely insufficient (Ballard & Senn, 2019; Pariera & Brody, 2017; Wilson et al., 2010). Research has already overwhelmingly supported that limited or shame-filled sexual communication from parents to children impacts the way these children engage in sexual decision-making (Abrego, 2011; Ballard & Senn, 2019; Powers, 2017). Additionally, negative parental attitudes surrounding sex and messages of shame and guilt can translate to internalized negativity and shame in children (Lim, 2019; Powers, 2017; Totonchi, 2015), as well as socializing their identity as sexual beings in a negative way (Ballard & Senn, 2019). Resulting sexual shame can then lead to riskier sexual behavior, distorted perceptions of sexual experiences, and lower engagement in sexual behaviors (Day, 2019; Totonchi, 2015). Moreover, parents' punitive or uncomfortable responses to sexual topics may ultimately propel messages of sexual shame and silence in future generations and reinforce the taboo culture (Jones, 2016; Totonchi, 2015).

Increasing openness in sexual dialogue between parents and children may have needed positive impacts on dispelling sexual shame and offering working models for having such

conversations with future partners (Jones, 2016). As the rising generation becomes the next generation's parents, a thorough understanding of the benefits of openness with romantic partners and future children may result in new cycles of openness and comfort.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

This study seeks to explore the consequences of high- and low-quality sexual communication between parents and children in predicting quality of romantic partner sexual communication, as well as connections with sexual and relational satisfaction.

Research questions include:

1) From whom do young adults report receiving the most information about sexuality? Does source of sexual knowledge show an association with increased or decreased partner sexual communication satisfaction?
2) Is parent-child sex communication significantly associated with later romantic partner sexual communication satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, and relational satisfaction? Does sex guilt show a significant association with parent-child sex communication or romantic partner sexual communication satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, or relational satisfaction?
3) Do parent-child sex communication patterns or sex guilt differ by gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, or religiosity?

Hypotheses:

1) Based on low reported rates of parent-child sex communication (Wilson et al., 2010) and culturally narrow constraints surrounding sexual openness (Ballard & Senn, 2019), we anticipate young adults will report receiving the most information about sexuality from media and internet usage. We predict that participants who have received sexual

knowledge predominantly from parents, friends, or partners will report the highest levels of sexual communication satisfaction.

2) Based on the idea of early messages' influence emphasized in socialization and symbolic interaction theories (Arnett, 1995; Yeager, 2016), we hypothesize that higher quality of parent-child sexual communication will predict higher satisfaction with romantic partner sex communication later in life. Based on previous connections between sexual communication with relational and sexual satisfaction (Cupach & Comstock, 1990; Davis et al., 2006; Jones, 2016; Timm & Keiley, 2011), we predict that parent-child sexual communication will also predict higher relational and sexual satisfaction. Finally, we predict that sex guilt will show a negative association with all other variables in the study based on previous findings that sex guilt negatively impacts sexual and relational aspects of life (Day, 2019) and on previous connections between absent or ineffective parent-child sex communication and sexual shame (Totonchi, 2015).
3) We predict that lower-quality parent-child sex communication will take place between parents in participants that are male (Goldfarb et al., 2018), non-heterosexual (Goldfarb et al., 2018), and high in religiosity (Day, 2019) based on past findings. We also predict that females, participants that are non-heterosexual, and participants reporting higher religiosity will report higher levels of sex guilt based on previous connections (Day, 2019; Goldfarb et al., 2018).

Conclusion

Communication about sex is critical to young adult relationships, and increased attention toward ways of enhancing such openness would be beneficial to young people specifically and to society as a whole (Xia et al., 2018). Early communication between parents and children may

have major impacts on later sexual openness (Ballard & Senn, 2019; Powers, 2017), indicating a need for understanding this link and potentially increasing early interventions with parents and children. Additionally, parental messages—along with media, religious, and societal messages—can foster guilt and shame surrounding the discussion of sex which may also play a role in young adult sex communication in relationships (Lim, 2019; Powers, 2017; Totonchi, 2015). Therefore, a study is needed that reviews the literature on parent-child sex communication, young adult sexual communication with romantic partners, and the role of sexual shame and guilt in communication on these topics; examines the relationship between these factors; and considers other factors such as sex education received, geographic location, religion, and gender.

The following chapter will present a thorough review of existing research regarding the definition and role of sexual communication in romantic relationships, the role of sex guilt and shame in sexual communication patterns, current prevalence of parent-child sex communications, and young adult patterns of sexual communication. A subsequent chapter will outline the methods of the proposed study, complete with a comprehensive description of proposed measures and data analysis plans.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

A lasting and satisfying romantic relationship is a central goal for most people and one of the greatest contributors to personal happiness (Schmidt et al., 2015; Vazhappily & Reyes, 2018). Healthy and effective communication between romantic partners is known to enhance feelings of satisfaction, and thus marks an important focus for increasing potential for increased relationship satisfaction (Jones, 2016). While there is some debate over whether effective communication leads to or results from healthy relationships, current research suggests that elements of both may be true (Lavner et al., 2016). Therefore, romantic partners' level of satisfaction with their relationship both influences and is influenced by the way in which they communicate.

When communication is effective between partners, they enjoy benefits such as feelings of security, trust, respect, a sense of being understood, and deepened love (Vazhappily & Reyes, 2018). Positive and effective communication may include elements such as warmth, solutions to problems, affection, humor, listener responsiveness, and lack of contempt or hostility (Lavner et al., 2016). Conversely, when communication between partners is ineffective, couples often suffer from disconnection and feel much less satisfied with their relationship (Schmidt et al., 2015; Vazhappily & Reyes, 2018). Indeed, problems with communication are one of the most common issues reported among distressed couples (Schmidt et al., 2015). Taken together, this information suggests that effective communication in romantic relationships is one of the most important factors in couple happiness.

Among the most important topics for couples to communicate about is their sexuality and sexual experiences with one another. The way in which couples communicate about these topics is often influenced by the presence of sexual guilt and shame, tolerance for anxiety, level of

comfort with vulnerability, cultural norms, and early messages about sexual topics from parents and peers (Ballard & Senn, 2019; Davis et al., 2006; Jones, 2016; Powers, 2017; Totonchi, 2015). Furthermore, Powers (2017) found a connection between past communication about sexual topics with parents and current sexual communication with partners. A review of recent findings on each of these topics outlines a more in-depth view on these factors.

Theoretical Foundation

Together, two theories guide the present study—Arnett's Broad and Narrow Socialization Theory and Symbolic Interaction Theory. Both emphasize the role of early experiences in shaping meaning and acceptability of behaviors through social interactions, and thus serve as appropriate guides to understanding connections between parent-child messages about sexuality and later comfortability discussing this topic.

According to Arnett's broad and narrow theory of socialization (1995), the culture in which one is raised often promotes boundaries of normalcy and acceptability within which individuals can navigate individual choices. These limits are often set forth not only by verbal rules, but also by perceived expectations from others from a young age and can be either broad or narrow in their allowance for certain behaviors or attitudes. For example, a culture with broad socialization of sexual openness may include wider limits of what topics can be discussed and with whom, while those with narrow limits may discourage open discussion of sex and focus solely on abstinence (Ballard & Senn, 2019).

Arnett (1995) also discussed that the role of family in socialization, while central, is heavily impacted by the culture in which it sits as well as the narrow or broad constraints. In this case, a culture with narrow limits on sexual openness may result in parents' feelings of awkwardness, discomfort, or unsurety in approaching these topics with children. Children who

receive such messages early in life may learn these limits and go on to mirror such responses with their future children, further promoting the boundaries of the culture. Given the understanding that early messages from family and culture often impact young people's later attitudes and behaviors (Arnett, 1995; Ballard & Senn, 2019; Powers, 2017), such restraint in family openness may result in inhibited freedom to discuss these specific topics with romantic partners later on, resulting in a cultural cycle.

Symbolic interaction theory promotes the idea that meaning is created through shared experience with others and is passed on through symbols in social interactions (Yeager, 2016). The self is seen as predominantly social and is a product of interactions with others. Yeager (2016) explains three premises of symbolic interaction theory: 1) that objects hold certain meaning for people; 2) that this meaning is produced through interaction with others; and 3) that interpretation and meaning change on a continual basis through ongoing interactions with others.

Shame is seen as particularly powerful in humans within this theory due to their social nature (Yeager, 2016). Because the self is social, the goal of interaction is to protect one's own self-concept and be accepted, and thus threats of rejection may have particularly powerful influence on behaviors, thoughts, and feelings. Scheff (2003) called shame the "master emotion" which can act as a signal that one's bond to others is threatened. Based on this premise, we hypothesize that shame and guilt play a significant role in the way messages are internalized from a young age and later go on to influence behaviors and thoughts—in this case regarding communication about sex.

Sexual Communication

Sexual communication consists of the quality, frequency, and content of self-disclosure which may include sexual preferences, level of desire, attitudes, and values (Mallory et al.,

2019). The way couples communicate about sex heavily impacts both sexual and relationship satisfaction levels (Cupach & Comstock, 1990; Jones, 2016; Timm & Keiley, 2011). Numerous studies have shown a relationship between sexual communication and overall relationship satisfaction (Montesi et al., 2010). Conversely, hindered sexual communication is often associated with physical sexual dissatisfaction (Davis et al., 2006), sexual problems (Cupach & Comstock, 1990), relationship difficulties (Jones, 2016), insecure attachment styles (Davis et al., 2016; Timm & Keiley, 2011), and sexual problems (Mallory et al., 2019).

Types of Sexual Communication

Sexual communication is composed both of content (i.e., which sexual topics are discussed) and process (i.e., in what manner does communication occur). While both of these ultimately impact a couple relationship, one study showed greater influence of content than process on relational and sexual satisfaction (Jones, 2016). Specific topics reported by highly satisfied and/or passionate couples included asking for (or having a partner ask for) desired behaviors in the bedroom, offering praise or feedback on sexual behaviors, or communicating lighthearted sexual messages throughout the day via phone call or email (Frederick et al., 2017). Other topics often considered in sexual communication between couples include disclosure of fears, fantasies, and specific desires (Montesi et al., 2010). Less common is communication about sexual difficulties within the relationship, such as erectile dysfunction and lack of orgasm (Mallory et al., 2019).

Sexual Communication and Sexual Satisfaction

Timm and Keiley (2011) reported a “positive and substantial” association between sexual communication and both sexual and relational satisfaction. Communication about sexual topics appears to be one of the key factors in maintaining passion and satisfaction in long-term

relationships, particularly among married and cohabiting couples (Frederick et al., 2017; Montesi et al., 2010).

Two suggested mechanisms for the relationship between communication and sexual satisfaction are a) the idea that sexual communication allows a couple to disclose and respond to changing sexual preferences and desires, resulting in more preferred activities; and b) the idea that the act of speaking of vulnerable topics with a partner increases intimacy and trust, which then increases sexual satisfaction (Mallory et al., 2019). Because there is support for each of these pathways, both likely contribute to associations between communication and satisfaction.

Examples of support for the first pathway include the finding that constructive communication (which relates to sexual preferences) increases sexual satisfaction (Frederick et al., 2017). Montesi et al. (2010) pointed out that communication between partners about sex can increase sexual knowledge in general, which contributes to satisfaction. Arguably related is the finding that communication about sex enhances sexual function in general, including domains of desire, arousal, erection, lubrication, and absence of pain (Mallory et al., 2019). For example, communication with one's partner about sex plays a role in increasing orgasm attainment for women and lowering erectile dysfunction and premature ejaculation in men (Mallory et al., 2019).

Support for the second pathway, that of increased intimacy and trust enhancing the relationship between sexual communication and sexual satisfaction, is particularly seen in women. Women express higher satisfaction stemming from receiving loving and complimentary words leading up to, during, or after sex (Frederick et al., 2017). Sexual communication has also been found to be one of the most influential factors in diminishing desire discrepancy in couples, which often plays a huge role in relationship strain (Mallory et al., 2019). Talking about sexual

topics can align partners who experience different levels of desire, particularly in long-term relationships, as desire levels in one or both partners may change with age (Jones, 2016). Furthermore, because women may be more prone to show responsive sexual desire as opposed to spontaneous desire, emotional closeness that results from communication plays a heavy role in increasing desire that may have been absent beforehand (Mallory et al., 2019). Sexual communication can also aid in promoting feelings of closeness and acceptance which directly contributes to arousal in many females; women who experience sexual difficulty are particularly helped in reaching orgasm by open sexual communication with partners (Mallory et al., 2019).

Montesi and colleagues (2010) found interesting connections in terms of gender and length of relationship. First, they discovered a stronger connection between sexual communication and sexual satisfaction in males compared to females. However, they also noted that the connection in males was stronger when married for less than a year, while the influence on females went up in longer-term relationships (Montesi et al., 2010). This may indicate differences in the mechanism of the association for each gender. If a higher importance of building feelings of closeness is found in women as stated above, sexual communication may be more important in longer-term relationships where feelings of trust and connection are more easily deepened.

Bidirectional Relationship

Research suggests a bidirectional association between sexual communication and outcomes such as sexual and relationship satisfaction (Jones, 2016). This means that while healthy sexual communication may lead to greater sexual and relationship satisfaction, the same may be true of the opposite direction. Experiencing higher sexual and relationship satisfaction may lead to healthier sexual communication in couples. For example, greater relationship

satisfaction often allows for increased trust and security which facilitates sharing of vulnerable topics, while relationship difficulties may decrease trust and ultimately inhibit intimate sharing (Davis et al., 2006).

On the reverse side, the closeness, acceptance, and unity achieved through healthy sex communication can contribute to relationship and sexual satisfaction (Mallory et al., 2019). Jones (2016) noted that higher frequency of positive sexual communication increases intimacy in relationships, resulting in higher satisfaction. In addition to communication before or about sex, positive communication about vulnerable topics directly following sex (sometimes referred to as "pillow talk") has shown to increase feelings of trust, closeness, and ultimately relationship satisfaction (Denes, 2012).

Barriers to Sexual Communication

Obstacles that may impede open sexual expression with one's partner include high anxiety surrounding one's sexual performance or sexual topics, learned expectation of rejection, relationship problems, lack of trust, and an avoidant attachment style (Davis et al., 2006). Timm and Keiley (2011) discussed that low tolerance for anxiety resulting from insecure attachment often plays a significant role in low sexual communication, and that communication is more a reflection of such tolerance than a learned technique. Additionally, past experiences of rejection and attachment injuries may lead individuals lower in attachment security to self-disclose less than secure individuals (Davis et al., 2006). In general, feelings of embarrassment, discomfort, and fear of humiliation have also been shown to contribute to sexual talk avoidance (Montesi et al., 2010).

Another barrier to sexual communication is cultural meaning or norms regarding sexuality. Viewing sexual topics as taboo inhibits many in individualistic and collectivistic

cultures alike (Jones, 2016). However, sexual communication is often less accepted in collectivistic than individualistic cultures. In connection with this, a recent meta-analysis showed greater positive effects of sexual communication on overall sexual function among collectivistic countries than individualistic ones, perhaps because such communication was rarer and further outside the norm (Mallory et al., 2019). In collectivistic and individualistic cultures alike, sexual shame promoted by cultural messages is thought to play a key role in increasing sexual silence (Day, 2019). Socialized gender messages may impact comfort or norms regarding sexual talk; for example, men may feel inhibited from speaking of emotionality in sexual contexts, while women may refrain from communicating about sexual topics in general due to internalized blame from gendered messages (Jones, 2016).

Finally, the presence of sexual problems has also shown a bidirectional relationship with inhibited sexual communication, meaning that while the presence of sexual problems can lead to inhibited sexual communication (particularly due to resulting shame, embarrassment, or insecurity), the opposite may also be true (inhibited sexual communication can contribute to or exacerbate sexual problems; Mallory et al., 2019). This may result in a negative cycle being created in which sexual problems increase and communication decreases, ultimately resulting in an ever-growing barrier to healthy sexual communication.

Responding to Barriers

Overcoming barriers and increasing sexual communication may involve education and practice. Jones (2016) submitted that both content and process of sexual communication can be improved by individuals and couples. In general, increasing security of attachment may play a role in facilitating sexual communication with one's partner (Davis et al., 2006). Interventions that focus on increasing tolerance for anxiety and fear through experiential interventions may be

more effective in increasing vulnerable communication than simply teaching communication techniques, as participants can receive support and build a sense of security while exploring anxiety-invoking themes (Timm & Keiley, 2011).

Sex Guilt and Shame

When examining sexual communication and functioning, two important and related constructs are sex guilt and shame (Day, 2019; Jones, 2017; Totonchi, 2015). The experience of shame or guilt surrounding sex or sexuality often contributes to inhibited sexual communication mentioned in the previous section. Due to the related nature of shame and guilt, both will be discussed throughout this review of literature. Existing research indicates that both shame and guilt may play a role in the achievement or lack of healthy sexual communication (Day, 2019; Jones, 2016) and therefore we find it important to include both in this review. Concepts of sexual shame and sex guilt will not be strictly differentiated throughout this review due to their similar definitions and roles in negative self-evaluation regarding sexuality.

Shame is associated with painful emotions that stem from one's evaluation of the self as negative or less than worthy (Day, 2019). Sexual shame relates particularly to the evaluation of oneself as defective, negative, or unworthy when in the context of sexual topics, behavior, or thoughts (Lim, 2019). Relatedly, sex guilt involves negativity surrounding one's own behaviors or thoughts about sex (Day, 2019). To elaborate, when one thinks or behaves in a way that goes against internalized principles of conduct, common responses include negativity, self-punishment, or remorse—all encompassed by the construct of guilt (Totonchi, 2015). One proposed distinction between shame and guilt is that shame often involves negativity surrounding oneself as a person, while guilt is generally more about the behavior itself (Day, 2019; Lim, 2019). An additional distinction may be that shame often stems from the evaluation

or perceived evaluation of others, while guilt predominantly stems from having deviated from an internalized standard or norm (Lim, 2019).

Effects of Sex Guilt and Shame

The negative emotions resulting from shame can have far-reaching effects into self-view and relationships. Sexual shame is often associated with sexual dissatisfaction, low sex drive, and emotional challenges resulting in limited sexual enjoyment (Day, 2019). Furthermore, sexual shame may result in feelings of defectiveness and lack of acceptance, impacting both relationships and self-esteem (Lim, 2019). For example, sexual shame invokes feelings of repression, isolation, and even self-hate, leading to negativity regarding oneself; additionally, secrecy and avoidance stemming from sexual shame often inhibit sexual and relational satisfaction and intimacy. Warped perceptions of sexual experiences with a partner may result from internalized shame which may skew perceptions of the experience as less positive, resulting in lowered sexual satisfaction (Day, 2019).

The internalization of shame surrounding sexuality may be widespread and sometimes hidden. Lanciano and colleagues (2016) discussed two terms—erotophobic and erotophilic—that refer to two extremes on a bipolar spectrum of positivity (erotophilic) versus negativity (erotophobic) surrounding sexual topics. In their 2016 study, these researchers divided 25 Italian women into groups of erotophilic and erotophobic based on sexual attitude measures and used both explicit (self-report) and implicit measures (speed in matching BDSM depictions to “dirty” or “clean” categories) to identify level of consistency between reported and implicit attitudes. Interestingly, while erotophilic women reported high levels of sex positivity and openness—particularly surrounding sexual acts including dominance/submission and bondage—they showed similar implicit connections between sexual topics and dirtiness or negativity to those of

erotophobic women (Lanciano et al., 2016). This may indicate that internalized sexual shame goes deeper than many realize, even in those who profess a lack thereof.

Development of Sex Guilt and Shame

Sexual shame often begins from a young age as children develop their gender identity and may be bred from a multitude of surrounding influences (Ballard & Senn, 2019). Parents' perceived evaluation can play a heavy role in sowing high levels of internalized shame (Lim, 2019). Messages from parents such as "don't touch that" or negative reactions to questions about sexual anatomy or feelings results in learned negativity surrounding sexuality (Totonchi, 2015). A connection between religious affiliation and sex guilt may stem from messages of the sinful nature of sex (Day, 2019; Totonchi, 2015).

Culture often plays a heavy role in breeding sexual shame, particularly as social messages and expectations are internalized into one's sexual identity (Lim, 2019). Even in cultures where media is highly sexualized and sexuality in general is viewed as more permissible (i.e. Westernized cultures), dominant messages often promote discomfort and negativity in deep or meaningful talk of sexuality (Day, 2019). Additionally, sexualization and objectification of women can result in internalization of messages which lead to women's satisfaction being dependent on appeasing or satisfying a partner (Day, 2019).

The experience of sexual shame often differs by gender as well. Men may experience impacts to satisfaction and self-view through fears of performance failure or repressed expression of emotion, while women may suffer from pressure to achieve socialized standards of beauty as well as effects of oppression, objectification, and abuse (Day, 2019). Women high in sex guilt tend to engage in less sexual intercourse, masturbation, pornography consumption, and oral and anal sex (Totonchi, 2015). Interestingly, high sex guilt is also associated with lower use

of contraceptives (including IUD, birth control pills, etc.) and lower likelihood of visiting a gynecologist (Lanciano et al., 2016; Totonchi, 2015). Ironically, one study showed women high in sex guilt tending to show more negative views towards abortion, but higher rates of having abortions (Totonchi, 2015).

Parent-Child Sex Communication

Open channels of communication about sexuality have far-reaching impacts on children and adolescents, including being central to later and safer sexual experiences in adolescents (Ballard & Senn, 2019; Powers, 2017). Research has supported an association between openness of sexual communication and confidence in adolescents during sexual decision-making and communicating with peers about sex (Ballard & Senn, 2019). Much of the existing research on parent-child sex communication focuses explicitly on its relationship with lowering risk among adolescents and preteens (Abrego, 2011; Ballard & Senn, 2019; Powers, 2017; Wilson et al., 2010). Comparatively, little research exists connecting parent-child sex communication to children's comfort with inter-partner sexual communication in later years. One exception was a mixed methods study by Powers (2017) involving a quantitative study with 553 young adults and a qualitative study among 7 young adults observing possible connections between parent-child sexual communication, romantic partner communication, and relational satisfaction. She used a triangulation design to combine results and found no significant association in the quantitative study, but a weak positive correlation between parent-child sexual communication and partner communication in the qualitative study (Powers, 2017). This may suggest that while some young adults may perceive and report connections between the way they have been talked to about sex and their ability to communicate with partners, quantitative measures have not picked up this message. Perhaps different quantitative assessments are needed to adequately represent this

phenomenon, or sample limitations of the study impeded a fuller view of potential associations. Obvious sample size differences between the two groups may also play a major part in differing results. More research is needed to close this gap and further understand not only whether or not, but also in what way, parent messages towards offspring about sex impact their comfort and ability to achieve sexual openness with significant others later on in their lives.

Current Trends in Parent-Child Sex Communication

Reported current trends indicate very low incidences of open sexual communication between parents and children (Padilla-Walker et al., 2020; Pariera & Brody, 2017; Wilson et al., 2010). While a majority of parents in one study shared that they felt sexual communication was of great importance for the safety of their children, very few of them reported engaging in open sexual communication (Wilson et al., 2010). This may be due to several potential barriers parents often experience, including lack of experience in how to conduct such conversations, feelings of discomfort or shame, or assumptions that such conversations will come up later on their own. Adolescents and emerging adults report that silence from parents on sexual topics communicated a message of disapproval and negativity, but that they were left on their own to interpret the reasons for these reactions (Goldfarb et al., 2018).

Of those who do report engaging in parent-child conversations about sex, a majority only have one specific “talk” during children’s early adolescence with little to no ongoing discussion (Padilla-Walker et al., 2020). In addition, parents who do discuss sexual topics with kids more often discuss surface and safety themes, such as birth control, abstinence, condom use, or anatomy (Ballard & Senn, 2019; Powers, 2017; Wilson et al., 2010). Meanwhile, discussion of sexual intercourse as well as emotional, relational, and positive aspects of sex are rarely approached by parents (Ballard & Senn, 2019; Wilson et al., 2010). Indeed, teens and young

adults reported that their parents almost never addressed pleasurable and relationship-building aspects of sex, despite feeling the greatest need for guidance in these areas (Goldfarb et al., 2018).

In addition to the rarity of open discussion, much of reported sex communication between parents and offspring are reportedly negative, behavioral, and punitive. Sex among adolescents is often viewed as deviant, and therefore also elicits punitive reactions from parents (Ballard & Senn, 2019). Children learn messages from parents' punitive reactions to a sexual topic or sexual anatomy, which they often generalize to internalized negative attitudes about sexuality in general (Totonchi, 2015). Ballard and Senn (2019) discussed the "ongoing and informal" nature of sexual socialization from the time a child is born; vague or conflicting messages showed a tendency to push children to younger and riskier sexual behavior, perhaps due to increased curiosity or reliance on peers.

Finally, Goldfarb and colleagues (2018) noted in their study that parent-child sex communication happened much more often with daughters than sons, and that most sexual communication reported by young adults from their adolescence was initiated by mothers. Daughters generally received moralistic and harsh advice against sexual behavior, while sons were more likely to receive messages that were morally neutral (from mothers) or even encouraging (from fathers). Daughters reported disappointment in mothers' guidance in navigating sexuality as emerging adolescents and a wish for greater support (Goldfarb et al., 2018). While there are mixed results on whether sons talk to mothers or fathers more, reluctance for fathers to talk to daughters about sexual topics was seen across studies (Abrego, 2011; Goldfarb et al., 2018). Indeed, sexual talk between fathers and children was deemed rare and often only happened between fathers and heterosexual sons; meanwhile, gay and bisexual sons

tended to either discuss sexual topics with mothers or neither parent, and often suffered from feelings of shame and the need to hide sexuality from parents (Goldfarb et al., 2018). Taken together, the findings from this study indicated that gender and sexual orientation played a role in the way parents discussed sexual matters with children and point to a glaring need for improved communication for both sons and daughters in the future. In particular, stereotypical socialization, homophobia, and emotional avoidance may come into play in preventing some of these conversations (Lesch & Brooks, 2019), and must be overcome as a culture to promote open and uplifting dialogue between fathers and children. Additionally, double standards, gendered stereotypes, and harmful cultural messages should be acknowledged and overcome by parents in order to provide positive talk that does not shame girls, pressure boys, or suppress sexual minority children.

Increasing Quality of Parent-Child Sex Communication

Common barriers to open sexual communication between parents and children include lack of comfort, fear of embarrassment, sense of incompetence, and fear of encouraging sexual behavior in children (Abrego, 2011; Wilson et al., 2010). Low self-esteem in parents may result in decreased comfort in discussing sex openly and has shown a negative association with open sex communication (Abrego, 2011). Additional contributors to avoidance of sexual discussion include resistance to the idea of one’s children as sexual as well as an assumption among parents that children would ask questions if they needed to know (Wilson et al., 2010). Finally, many parents disclosed that their own parents failed to discuss sexual topics with them, thus leaving them without a role model or certainty in how to proceed in sexual discussion with children (Abrego, 2011; Wilson et al., 2010).

Factors that have been reported as helpful in overcoming these barriers and increasing parent-child sex communication include being purposeful in creating opportunities for discussion and increasing their own knowledge on sexual topics (Meyer, 2014; Wilson et al., 2010). Some parents have reported using movies or television to start conversations or asking explicitly about their sex ed classes, while others reported that reading educational resources about sexual topics increased their knowledge and feelings of competence in discussing sexual matters with children (Wilson et al., 2010). One intervention involved 51 pairs of Latinx and Black mothers and their adolescent children receiving texts from researchers at least once per week for six months about a sexual topic (Meyer, 2014). Researchers wanted to see whether receiving sexual education messages on a regular basis would increase comfort about sexual topics addressed between mothers and children. Examples of messages sent included: "Having sexual intercourse one time can give you STD's" and "Abstinence is defined as avoiding oral, vaginal, anal sex because these activities put you at risk for pregnancy and/or STDs" (p. 20). At the end of the study, adolescents and mothers reported higher levels of sexual communication and a great number of topics discussed (Meyer, 2014). This finding supports the idea that parents may feel limited due to lack of knowledge and/or low confidence about when to initiate discussion of sexual topics and indicates that simply being exposed to messages and education facilitates increased openness. Further opportunities for intervention might include similar modalities in which discomfort and lack of confidence among parents may be addressed through receiving education and knowing their children are receiving similar messages.

Additionally, the way parents go about sex communication with their children influences outcomes (Padilla-Walker et al., 2020; Pariera & Brody, 2017; Powers, 2017). Research suggests that parents who gradually increase autonomy of children and show proactive parenting

strategies also tended to show higher frequency in communication about sex (Padilla-Walker et al., 2020). Moreover, positive relationships and closeness between parents and children are associated with more open communication about sexual topics (Holman & Kellas, 2015; Powers, 2017; Wilson et al., 2010), as well as delayed sexual debut and safer sex behavior in general (Abrego, 2011). One study by Rogers et al. (2015) sampled 55 adolescents and their parents and found that harsher messages from parents against sexual engagement was associated with higher levels of sexual activity in adolescents, while high-quality sexual communication was connected with lower levels of risky sexual involvement. This suggests that adolescents may be resistant to harsh or negative delivery of sexual information and would benefit more from more thoughtful discussion. Such outcomes are consistent with findings that greater comfort and friendliness in talking about sex made a significant difference in adolescents' safe behavior and willingness to go to parents with questions (Abrego, 2011; Pariera & Brody, 2017; Wilson et al., 2010). Furthermore, receiving positive messages about sex from parents resulted in a higher likelihood of enjoying their first sexual intercourse experience (Pariera & Brody, 2017). Overall, parents who made conversations with their children about sexuality comfortable and open enjoyed the advantage of having their children come to them more frequently with sexual questions and also engage in safer sexual practices.

Because a cited theme of the research is discomfort in talking to children about sex stemming from a lack of role models from their own parents (Abrego, 2011; Ballard & Senn, 2019), we may hypothesize that the opposite is also true—children who receive open communication about sex from parents may develop healthy working models for sex communication in general, and thus will go on to display higher levels of open and comfortable sex communication with both future partners and their own children. A shift towards treating

adolescent sexuality as a normal and positive part of development may increase open and positive sexual communication between parents and children (Ballard & Senn, 2019) and impact the way those adolescents go on to communicate in healthy ways about sex long term.

Young People's Perceptions of Parent-Child Sex Talk

Past studies indicate that young people want communication from their parents about sex (Goldfarb et al., 2018; Pariera & Brody, 2017). Unique insight can be gained by looking at studies that interviewed young adults and adolescents about views on parent-child sex communication, as their experiences capture recent exposure to the receiving end of such talk (or lack thereof). A recent study by Goldfarb et al. (2018) asked 74 emerging adults in a northeastern university about messages received prior to first sexual experience and found dominant themes of difficulty, infrequency, and unsatisfying nature of sex communication from parents. In addition to reporting messages from parents of negativity surrounding sex, not wanting to know about their children's sexual lives, and emphases on abstinence and protection, participants reported wanting more guidance in sexual matters from parents, particularly in relational and emotional aspects of sexuality (Goldfarb et al., 2018).

Another study by Pariera and Brody (2017) involved delivering questionnaires to 441 young adult students at western and eastern universities in the US to assess their perceptions on how early and how often parents should discuss sexual topics with their children. Participants generally reported that most topics should be discussed by age 12-13, although many felt that sexual orientation should be openly discussed earlier (age 11) and pleasure somewhat later (age 16-17). Additionally, participants reported that they felt the most frequent topic that should be addressed by parents is that of dating and relationships (Pariera & Brody, 2017).

Finally, when interviewing 159 high school adolescents about their perceptions on parent-child sexual talk, Holman and Kellas (2015) found that adolescent perceptions of communication effectiveness, sincerity, and comfort from parents during sexual communication influenced their own attitudes of condoning sexual behaviors, indicating that adolescents both pick up on and are influenced by parent skill-level in communicating (Holman & Kellas, 2015).

Overall, young adult and adolescent perceptions of parent-child sexual talk support the general theme that it is insufficient, and that young people both notice and are influenced by the messages given by parents on these topics. It is interesting to note that in both qualitative studies, young people reported wanting to receive more open communication about navigating relationships and sexuality from parents. This potent finding once again highlights the great importance of increasing these conversations and overcoming perceived barriers from parents of discomfort, insecurity, or assumptions that adolescents will initiate conversations.

Sexual Communication in Young Adulthood

Open sexual communication is significantly linked to healthier sexual behavior in young adults (Alvarez et al., 2014), as well as a variety of benefits. Studies indicate that both relationship quality and overall sexual health in young adults can be improved by effective sex communication (Chatterjee, 2008; Landor & Winter, 2019). Additionally, greater comfort talking about sex among young adults is associated with later sexual debut, greater likelihood of using contraceptives, and less risky sex in general (Landor & Winter, 2019). Research also shows that young adult conversations about sex lower rates of STI's, HIV, and unwanted pregnancies (Chatterjee, 2008; Faulkner & Lannutti, 2010; Landor & Winter, 2019). Because about half of new STI's each year occur among young adults, as well as disproportionate rates of unwanted pregnancies, this population is an important target for increasing these conversations (Landor &

Winter, 2019). Despite these benefits, many researchers agree that such conversations are not taking place at adequate rates among young adults (Faulkner & Lannutti, 2010).

Topics Discussed Among Young Adults

Sexual topics discussed among emerging adults may include sexual risk/health subjects, pleasure/preferences, or relational/meaning aspects (Denes, 2018; Faulkner & Lannutti, 2010; Landor & Winter, 2019). Studies suggest that young adults discuss topics such as whether or not to engage in sexual activity or ways to prevent sexual risks more than relational and meaning aspects of sex, despite the fact that the latter topics are deemed more satisfying by this population (Faulkner & Lannutti, 2010).

Much of the research on sexual communication among young adults focuses on talk about sexual safety (Chatterjee, 2008; Landor & Winter, 2019). Topics of safer sex conversations may include STI's, number of past partners, and method of birth control (Chatterjee, 2008). Despite emotional, relational, and health benefits of more open sexual safety talk (Chatterjee, 2008), researchers still rate young adult talk on sexual safety as inadequate (Faulkner & Lannutti, 2010).

Other sexual topics seen in young adult communication may include sexual pleasure, interest, and desire. In a sample of 220 young adult Latinos, researchers found one focus of sexual communication is verbal and nonverbal messages of sexual pleasure (Alvarez & Villarruel, 2015). The common practice of sexting (sending sexual content via text or messaging) among young adults may act as a form of sexual communication, often used for purposes of flirting, arousing, maintaining relationships (especially long-distance), or initiating sexual activity (Burkett, 2015). The widespread use of sexting among this population may indicate higher levels of comfort in communicating about sexual topics via technology, as well as a

potential proneness to focus on more pleasurable and flirty aspects of sex than on safety and meaning aspects.

Motivations for Sexual Communication

While sexual talk is deemed inadequate among many researchers, studies indicate that it does happen to some degree. One study by Chatterjee (2008) interviewed 405 young adults at a large Midwestern university on how and when they discuss sexual safety topics with romantic partners. A majority of participants reported having discussed sexual safety with partners prior to sexual activity, while other participants reported not discussing these topics until after multiple sexual experiences. Only 15 reported never having discussed safer sex with a partner, indicating that conversations about sexual safety do happen among many young adults (Chatterjee, 2008). However, these conversations may be more common at the beginning of relationships while assessing safety in new partners, while these rates may decrease in long-term relationships after physical risk declines. A study by Landor and Winter (2019) examined connections between relationship quality and comfort communicating with partners about sex in 339 young adult women and found that only half reported comfort discussing sexual topics with current partners (Landor & Winter, 2019).

Young adults may also be motivated to communicate about sexual topics in order to gauge compatibility before committing to a partner (Faulkner & Lannutti, 2010). Indeed, young adults appear to talk more of sexual topics during the first few months of a romantic relationship and less later on, indicating that a primary motivation may be to initially understand one another's pasts, patterns, and expectations (Faulkner & Lannutti, 2010). Additionally, young adults may have higher motivation to share on sexual topics when they perceive reciprocity in interest or a desire to maintain the relationship (Faulkner & Lannutti, 2010).

Additional influencers of whether and when to talk of sexual topics may include personal factors and setting. Chatterjee (2008) discussed that higher self-efficacy in young adults leads to more talk about safe sex. A study by Faulkner and Lannutti (2010) found that a majority of satisfying conversations between young adult partners about sex took place in bed in one of the partners' residences, while unsatisfying conversations often took place in cars or other locations. Denes (2020) noted that young adults who orgasm during sex are more likely to share positive thoughts with partners immediately afterwards, often serving to nurture or maintain the relationship. The rise in oxytocin levels is thought to contribute to a desire to bond with a partner and fortify positive aspects of the relationship. Such positive disclosures post-sex promote relationship satisfaction for these individuals (Denes, 2020).

Level of satisfaction with various sexual topics may also impact motivation to engage in sexual discussions. Faulkner and Lannutti (2010) interviewed young adults on satisfying and unsatisfying aspects of sexual communication, and participants reported feeling less satisfied after talking to a partner about sexual acts with past partners, sexual risks, pregnancy worries, and preventative health care such as condoms. Conversations that were categorized as satisfying included discussing when to engage in sex, pleasure, desire, preferred techniques, meaning of sex for each partner, messages of love and respect in connection with sex, and integrating personal faith and sexuality (Faulkner & Lannutti, 2010). Interestingly, some of the conversations classified as most satisfying (including meaning and relational aspects) are the same ones deemed as rare topics by other researchers (Day, 2019). This might point to the risk and vulnerability involved in approaching meaningful and delicate topics in sexual contexts, despite the potential satisfying and connecting benefits. Indeed, young adults would very likely benefit from learning to discuss these satisfying topics with greater regularity, given the reported

positive sexual and relational outcomes of engaging in satisfying sexual communication, including benefits of increased understanding, decreased discomfort, and heightened intimacy (Faulkner & Lannutti, 2010).

Barriers to Young Adult Sexual Communication

Young adults often feel a lack of confidence in discussing sexual topics, which may be due to feelings of incompetence, lack of experience, perception of privacy, limited sexual education, or risk of rejection from partners (Chatterjee, 2008; Faulkner & Lannutti, 2010). Additionally, the stress and cognitive conflict surrounding sexual topics (particularly sexual safety) may deter young adults from initiating sexual talk (Faulkner & Lannutti, 2010). Research suggests that sexual communication in young adults may be most common in the form of jokes, silence, or evasiveness in order to reduce threatening aspect of vulnerable topics (Faulkner & Lannutti, 2010). Receiving messages about sex in these forms from peers and media may further inhibit young adults from daring to engage in vulnerable and honest sexual communication with partners and peers.

Young Adult Sexual Talk and Gender

While some studies described young adult women as lacking comfort discussing sexual topics with partners (Landors &Winter, 2019), others claimed that young women show doubly high rates of initiating safer sex talk than men (Chatterjee, 2008). This may indicate that women show higher concern for safe sex in order to avoid consequences such as pregnancy, but that once in a relationship, may show greater hesitancy to bring up sexual topics (perhaps due to social scripts or gendered messages). However, young women show almost double the rate as young men of sending sexting messages (Burkett, 2015). Furthermore, Denes (2018) outlined that young women who orgasm during sex are more likely to disclose positive thoughts to a

partner directly afterward, often as a way to nurture or maintain the relationship. Alvarez and Villarruel (2015) found that young adult Latino women who perceived more power in their relationships and more positive attitudes toward sexual pleasure communication engaged in more sexual discussion with partners. Taken together, this may suggest that young adult women are motivated to communicate about sex to either avoid health or pregnancy risk or foster relationships but that their comfort and ability to do so may be impacted by intersecting factors of conflicting social messages, circumstances, and personal attitudes.

Current Study

Communication between parents and adolescent children on sexual topics is thought to be connected with later openness with peers and romantic partners (Key, 2016). While most research has examined parent-child sexual communication and romantic partner sexual communication separately, one quantitative study by Powers (2017) explored the link between the two. Little evidence was found linking parent-child sex communication and later partner communication. This may be due to the fact that most young adults in the study reported little to no sexual communication from parents while growing up. However, their qualitive study examining a sample of 7 participants revealed a significant link between low parent-child sexual communication and low comfort in sexual talk with partners (Powers, 2017).

Additionally, Powers (2017) identified a relationship between sexual attitudes and romantic partner sexual communication; because previous research supports a connection between early messages of sexuality and later sexual attitudes (Ballard & Senn, 2019; Powers, 2017), this finding may support a less direct connection between the role of parental influences on their children's later romantic relationships. Given that there appears to be limited research linking early parent-child sexual communication and later sexual communication with partners, a

study is needed that more comprehensively examines factors associated with this link and considers impacts on romantic relationship functioning (e.g., satisfaction).

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Participants

Data for this study were obtained via Qualtrics surveys given to young adults between the ages of 18-30 (Lee et al., 2018). Participants were recruited using a link shared on social media and disseminated by professors to students inviting young adults to participate in a study about communication in romantic relationships. Participants who completed the survey were placed in a raffle for a $25 gift card to Amazon. To qualify for the study, participants needed to be between the ages of 18-30 and in a committed, romantic relationship. Questions at the beginning of the survey verified age and relational status. A total of 281 survey responses were recorded, of which 233 were retained for analysis. Those who were disqualified and subsequently removed included participants who reported not being in a current romantic relationship, those under the age of 18 or over the age of 30, and those who did not complete at least 60% of the survey.

Procedures

Upon receiving Institutional Review Board approval, researchers disseminated a 76-item questionnaire designed to measure constructs of interest for the current study. Participants completed informed consent documentation before taking the survey, which included demographic information and relevant questions, including age, gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, religiosity, relationship status (married, cohabiting, current committed romantic relationship, or not in a current committed romantic relationship), length of relationship with partner, and whether or not self and partner are sexually active. Participants were also asked from which source they received the majority of their sexual knowledge. The remainder of the survey consisted of existing reliable and valid measures including the Revised Mosher Sex Guilt Inventory (Janda & Bazemore, 2011), the Sexual Communication Satisfaction Scale (Wheeless

et al., 1984), the shortened 4-item Couple Satisfaction Index (Funk & Rogge, 2007), and the Family Sex Communication Questionnaire (Warren, 2000).

Measures

Contributors to Sexual Knowledge

One survey item instructed participants to select where they received the majority of their current sexual knowledge. Participants were asked to select one of the following: "talking with a parent," "talking with friends," "talking with a romantic partner," "school-based curriculum", "TV, movies, or other media," "searching online," "church/religion," or "other."

Sexual Communication Satisfaction

Satisfaction with communication about sexual topics with partners was measured using the 22-item Sexual Communication Satisfaction Scale (Wheeless et al., 1984). The scale includes questions such as "I tell my partner when I am sexually satisfied" and "I am satisfied with my ability to communicate about sexual matters with my partner" and is rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). Certain items were reverse scored to cross-check validity. Greater scores suggest increased reported satisfaction. This scale has shown internal reliability of .94 in previous studies (Wheeless et al., 1984) and currently demonstrated good reliability ($\alpha = .82$) among our sample.

Relationship Satisfaction

Participants were given all four questions from the shortened Couples Satisfaction Index (Funk et al., 2007), which captures romantic relationship satisfaction. Of the four questions, two were scored on a scale ranging from 0 ("not at all true") to 5 ("completely true"). This measure has shown strong convergent validity and construct validity with other reliable scales measuring relationship satisfaction (Funk et al., 2007). A sample item reads "I have a warm and

comfortable relationship with my partner." The other two were scored on a scale from 0 ("extremely unhappy") to 6 ("perfect"), and a sample item is "Please indicate the degree of happiness, all things considered, of your relationship." Higher scores indicate greater satisfaction in one's romantic relationship. Reliability was strong in this study (α = .92).

Sexual Satisfaction

Sexual satisfaction between partners was measured using the New Sexual Satisfaction Scale-Short, a 12-item version adapted from the original 20-item version (Štulhofer et al., 2010). For all items, participants were given the instructions, "thinking about your sex life during the last six months, please rate your satisfaction with the following aspects" with possible responses on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("not at all satisfied") to 5 ("extremely satisfied"). Items on the short form included "the way I sexually react to my partner," "the frequency of my sexual activity," and "the pleasure I provide to my partner." Higher scores convey greater sexual satisfaction. Reliability of this scale was excellent (α = .93).

Parent-Child Sex Communication

Communication between participants and their parents about sex when they were children or adolescents was measured using the Family Sex Communication Quotient, an 18-item scale developed by Clay Warren (2006). This scale measures three dimensions of parent-child sex communication, including comfort, information, and value. A 5-point Likert scale offers responses from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). Items included "I feel free to ask my parents questions about sex," "the home should be a primary place for learning about sex" and "I feel better informed about sex if I talk with my parents." Items were translated into the past tense and participants were asked to answer according to their experience during early adolescence and before. Specified items were reverse scored to prevent user bias. Greater scores

convey a parent-child pattern with higher comfort and value in communication about sex. The modified version of this scale demonstrated good reliability (α = .89).

Sexual Guilt

Sexual guilt in each participant was measured using the Revised Mosher Sex Guilt Inventory, a ten-item version of the original Mosher Sex Guilt Inventory (Janda & Bazemore, 2011). Sample questions include "When I have sexual desires, I enjoy them like all healthy human beings" and "Sex relations before marriage should not be recommended." All questions were presented on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 7 (strongly agree"). Certain items were reverse scored to cross-check scale validity. Higher scores indicated greater sexual guilt in participants. This measure has been found to be reliable by past researchers (Janda & Bazemore, 2011) and showed good reliability (α = .71) in the present sample.

Data Analysis

Univariate, bivariate, and multivariate analyses were conducted to answer our research questions. Univariate analyses (e.g., frequencies, means, standard deviations, range) were initially conducted to summarize and observe patterns in the data. Group differences across variables were then examined utilizing ANOVA procedures, including differences by gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and religion. Next, bivariate analyses included correlations between all study variables and are presented in a correlation table. Significant bivariate associations informed variables for inclusion in multivariate analyses. Finally, multivariate analyses (i.e., multiple regression) were conducted using SPSS software to examine links between constructs of interest.

For our first research question, we examined frequencies of sources of sexual information. We then examined group differences by audience on sexual communication satisfaction with current romantic partner utilizing ANOVA procedures. To determine whether parent-child sex communication is significantly associated with later romantic partner sexual communication satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, and relational satisfaction, we conducted bivariate correlations and regression analyses. Finally, ANOVA analyses were utilized to determine whether parent-child sex communication patterns or sex guilt differed by gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, or religiosity of participant to answer our third research question.

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CHAPTER 5: TELL ME MORE: PARENT-CHILD SEXUAL TALK AND YOUNG ADULT SEXUAL COMMUNICATION SATISFACTION WITH ROMANTIC PARTNERS

Young adult romantic relationships play a foundational role in their development, health, and lifelong relationship patterns (Landor & Winter, 2019), and are therefore an important target for study. Research suggests that both relationship quality and overall sexual health in young adults can be improved by effective sex communication with partners (Chatterjee, 2008; Landor & Winter, 2019). Indeed, communication about vulnerable topics such as sex and intimacy is thought to be one of the most important contributors to strong relationships (Jones, 2016; Timm & Keiley, 2011). However, researchers agree that such communication is not happening to the degree needed among this population (Faulkner & Lannutti, 2010), potentially limiting relational depth and promoting ideas of sexual talk as taboo (Faulkner & Lannutti, 2010; Jones, 2016). Learned shame and guilt surrounding sexual topics may be a significant contributor to this deficiency, inhibiting young adults from having intimate conversations with partners that are needed for strong and lasting relationships (Abrego, 2011; Powers, 2017).

Early messages about sexuality from parents and caregivers heavily influence sexual scripts and attitudes in children (Ballard & Senn, 2019), and may go on to impact long-term views of sexuality (Powers, 2017). Because negativity and silence around sexual topics from parents can breed shame and discomfort in offspring (Day, 2019; Goldfarb et al., 2019), they may also conversely play a role in later comfort in discussing sexual topics with romantic partners (Powers, 2017). A closer look at this connection is needed to determine possible points of intervention.

Arnett has typically defined young adulthood as “a period from the late teens through the twenties, with a focus on 18-25” (Arnett, 2000, pp. 469). However, many have defined this period as the ages between 18-30 (Lee et al., 2018) and we find it valuable to include this wider age range for a broader look at those in the earlier stage of adulthood. Previous research suggests that this period occupies a critical place in the developmental trajectory, as individuals balance conflicting needs of autonomy and connection amid social pressures (Watkins & Beckmeyer, 2020). Strong romantic relationships contribute to thriving and overall life satisfaction in young adults (Xia et al., 2018). Their tendency to have more committed, intimate, and dyadic relationships compared with their experience as adolescents marks a pivotal point for learning healthy patterns within relationships (Meier & Allen, 2009).

Research indicates that limited or shame-filled sexual communication from parents to children impacts the way these children engage in sexual decision-making (Abrego, 2011; Ballard & Senn, 2019; Powers, 2017). Negative parental attitudes surrounding sex and messages of shame and guilt can translate to internalized negativity and shame in children (Lim, 2019; Powers, 2017; Totonchi, 2015), as well as socializing their identity as sexual beings in a negative way (Ballard & Senn, 2019). Resulting sexual shame can then lead to riskier sexual behavior, distorted perceptions of sexual experiences, and lower engagement in sexual behaviors (Day, 2019; Totonchi, 2015). Moreover, parents’ punitive or uncomfortable responses to sexual topics may ultimately propel messages of sexual shame and silence in future generations and reinforce the taboo culture (Jones, 2016; Totonchi, 2015).

Theoretical Foundations Emphasizing Socialized Creation of Meaning

Together, two theories guide the present study—Arnett’s (1995) Broad and Narrow Socialization Theory and Symbolic Interaction Theory (Rose, 1962). Both emphasize the role of

early experiences in shaping meaning and acceptability of behaviors through social interactions, and thus serve as appropriate guides to this study.

According to Arnett's broad and narrow theory of socialization (1995), the culture in which one is raised often promotes boundaries of normalcy and acceptability within which individuals can navigate personal choices. For example, a culture with broad socialization of sexual openness may include wider limits of what topics can be discussed and with whom, while those with narrow limits may discourage open discussion of sex and focus solely on abstinence (Ballard & Senn, 2019). The role of family in socialization, while central, is heavily impacted by its surrounding culture, and therefore a culture with narrow limits on sexual openness may result in parents' feelings of awkwardness, discomfort, or unsurety in approaching these topics with children, teaching early messages of shame that may result in inhibited freedom to discuss these specific topics with romantic partners later on, resulting in a cultural cycle.

Symbolic interaction theory promotes the idea that meaning is created through shared experience with others and is passed on through symbols in social interactions (Rose, 1962; Yeager, 2016). Shame is seen as particularly powerful in humans within this theory due to their social nature, and threats of rejection may have particularly powerful influence on behaviors, thoughts, and feelings. Scheff (2003) called shame the "master emotion" which can act as a signal that one's bond to others is threatened. Based on this premise, we predict that shame and guilt play a significant role in the way messages are internalized from a young age and later go on to influence behaviors and thoughts—in this case regarding communication about sex. In short, the emphasis of socialization by family and culture from Arnett's theory and the significance of social interaction in influencing meaning in symbolic interaction theory aptly

combine to create a sound theoretical foundation from which we constructed our research questions and design.

Sexual Communication

Sexual communication consists of the quality, frequency, and content of self-disclosure which may include sexual preferences, level of desire, attitudes, and values (Mallory et al., 2019). The way couples communicate about sex heavily impacts both sexual and relationship satisfaction levels (Cupach & Comstock, 1990; Jones, 2016; Timm & Keiley, 2011). Moreover, hindered sexual communication can result in sexual dissatisfaction (Davis et al., 2006), sexual problems (Cupach & Comstock, 1990), relationship difficulties (Jones, 2016), insecure attachment styles (Davis et al., 2016; Timm & Keiley, 2011), and sexual problems (Mallory et al., 2019).

Young Adult Sexual Communication

Open sexual communication is significantly linked to healthier sexual behavior in young adults (Alvarez et al., 2014), as well as a variety of benefits. Studies indicate that both relationship quality and overall sexual health in young adults can be improved by effective sex communication (Chatterjee, 2008; Landor & Winter, 2019). Additionally, greater comfort talking about sex among young adults is associated with later sexual debut, greater likelihood of using contraceptives, and less risky sex in general (Landor & Winter, 2019). Research also shows that young adult conversations about sex are linked with lower rates of STI’s, HIV, and unwanted pregnancies (Chatterjee, 2008; Faulkner & Lannutti, 2010; Landor & Winter, 2019). Because about half of new STI’s each year occur among young adults, as well as disproportionate rates of unwanted pregnancies, this population is an important target for increasing these conversations (Landor & Winter, 2019). Despite these benefits, many researchers agree that such conversations

are not taking place at adequate rates among young adults (Faulkner & Lannutti, 2010). For example, a study by Landor and Winter (2019) examined connections between relationship quality and comfort communicating with partners about sex in 339 young adult women and found that only half reported comfort discussing sexual topics with current partners (Landor & Winter, 2019).

Studies suggest that young adults discuss topics such as whether or not to engage in sexual activity or ways to prevent sexual risks more than relational and meaning aspects of sex, despite the fact that the latter topics are deemed more satisfying by this population (Faulkner & Lannutti, 2010). Other sexual topics observed in young adult communication include sexual pleasure, interest, and desire, and may include technology-centered communication such as sexting (Alvarez & Villarruel, 2015; Burkett, 2015).

Faulkner and Lannutti (2010) interviewed 132 young adults regarding satisfying and unsatisfying aspects of sexual communication, and participants reported feeling less satisfied after talking to a partner about sexual acts with past partners, sexual risks, pregnancy worries, and preventative health care such as condoms. Conversations that were categorized as satisfying included discussing when to engage in sex, pleasure, desire, preferred techniques, meaning of sex for each partner, messages of love and respect in connection with sex, and integrating personal faith and sexuality (Faulkner & Lannutti, 2010). Interestingly, some of the conversations classified as most satisfying (including meaning and relational aspects) are the same topics deemed by other researchers as rarely discussed by partners (Day, 2019). This may point to the risk and vulnerability involved in approaching meaningful and delicate topics in sexual contexts, despite the potential satisfying and connecting benefits. Indeed, young adults would very likely benefit from learning to discuss these satisfying topics with greater regularity,

given the reported positive sexual and relational outcomes of engaging in satisfying sexual communication, including benefits of increased understanding, decreased discomfort, and heightened intimacy (Faulkner & Lannutti, 2010).

Barriers to Sexual Communication: Shame and Guilt

Sexual communication may be inhibited by high anxiety surrounding one's sexual performance or sexual topics, learned expectation of rejection, relationship problems, lack of trust, and an avoidant attachment style (Davis et al., 2006). Past experiences of rejection and attachment injuries may lead individuals lower in attachment security to self-disclose less than secure individuals (Davis et al., 2006), supporting the significant role early experiences may play in sexual communication. Cultural norms, including the view that sexual topics are taboo, inhibit many in individualistic and collectivistic cultures alike, and socialized gendered messages may hinder men from feeling free to speak of emotionality in sexual contexts and lead women to internalize blame, shame, and objectification that lead them to refrain from the subject altogether (Jones, 2016). Finally, sexual problems in the relationship may increase shame and lead couples to avoid sexual communication, leading to more sexual challenges and creating a negative cycle of increased sexual problems and decreased communication (Mallory et al., 2019).

Therefore, the experience of both shame and guilt surrounding sex or sexuality may often be at the root of inhibited sexual communication (Day, 2019; Jones, 2017; Totonchi, 2019). Shame is associated with painful emotions that stem from one's evaluation of the self as negative or less than worthy (Day, 2019). Sexual shame relates particularly to the evaluation of oneself as defective, negative, or unworthy when in the context of sexual topics, behavior, or thoughts (Lim, 2019). Relatedly, sex guilt involves negativity surrounding one's own behaviors or thoughts about sex (Day, 2019). Perhaps due to changing values across time and among cultures,

sex guilt has sometimes been difficult to define. One definition marks sex guilt as "negative affective component, comprised of self-imposed punishment, for either actually violating or expecting to violate 'proper' sexual conduct" (Hackathorn et al., 2015, p. 157).

Sexual shame and guilt often begin from a young age as children develop their gender identity and may be bred from a multitude of surrounding influences (Ballard & Senn, 2019). Parents' perceived evaluation can play a heavy role in sowing high levels of internalized shame (Lim, 2019). Messages from parents such as "don't touch that" or negative reactions to questions about sexual anatomy or feelings results in learned negativity surrounding sexuality (Totonchi, 2015).

A connection between religious affiliation and sex guilt may stem from messages of the sinful nature of sex (Day, 2019; Totonchi, 2015). Previous studies suggest that religious individuals tend to report higher levels of sex guilt; while this pattern emerges particularly among those who are unmarried (potentially due to constraints regarding sex outside of marriage), religious married individuals have also shown higher levels of sexual anxiety and guilt than their nonreligious counterparts, suggesting that perhaps some religions play a role in restricting sexual enjoyment by discouraging pleasurable aspects of sex and emphasizing only procreation (Leonhardt et al., 2020). One study by Hackathorn and colleagues (2016) used a questionnaire among 258 participants and found that sex guilt mediated the relationship between religiosity and sexual satisfaction among unmarried participants. Their results suggest that those who internalize religious teachings to a greater degree show less sexual satisfaction and higher sex guilt (Hackathorn et al., 2016). Such findings indicate that we may expect those raised in more religious households will show higher levels of sex guilt which may negatively impact both sexual communication and satisfaction.

Parent-Child Sex Communication

Early communication from caregivers about sexual topics may reduce or enlarge messages of shame surrounding these topics in children, thereby playing a significant role in their later sexual experiences (Totonchi, 2015). Reported current trends indicate very low incidences of open sexual communication between parents and children (Padilla-Walker et al., 2020; Pariera & Brody, 2017; Wilson et al., 2010). While a majority of parents in one study shared that they felt sexual communication was of great importance for the safety of their children, very few of them reported engaging in open sexual communication (Wilson et al., 2010). This may be due to several potential barriers parents often experience, including lack of experience in how to conduct such conversations, feelings of discomfort or shame, or assumptions that such conversations will occur naturally at a later point. Adolescents and emerging adults report that silence from parents on sexual topics communicated a message of disapproval and negativity, but that they were left on their own to interpret the reasons for these reactions (Goldfarb et al., 2018). Ironically, vague or conflicting messages surrounding sex have been found to be associated with younger and riskier sexual behaviors (Ballard & Senn, 2019).

Of those who do report engaging in parent-child conversations about sex, a majority only have one specific "talk" during children's early adolescence with little to no ongoing discussion (Padilla-Walker et al., 2020), and often limit discussions to safety themes such as birth control, abstinence, condom use, or anatomy (Powers, 2017; Wilson et al., 2010), but neglecting emotional, relational, and positive aspects of sex (Ballard & Senn, 2019). Furthermore, much of reported sex communication between parents and offspring are reportedly negative, behavioral, and punitive, viewing adolescent sexuality as deviant (Ballard & Senn, 2019). Children learn

messages from either parents' punitive reactions or silence regarding sexual topics, which they often generalize to internalized negative attitudes about sexuality in general (Totonchi, 2015).

Conversely, open channels of communication about sexuality have far-reaching impacts on children and adolescents, including being central to later and safer sexual experiences in adolescents (Ballard & Senn, 2019; Powers, 2017). Positive relationships and closeness between parents and children are associated with more open communication about sexual topics (Holman & Kellas, 2015; Powers, 2017; Wilson et al., 2010), as well as delayed sexual debut and safer sex behavior in general (Abrego, 2011). One study by Rogers et al. (2015) sampled 55 adolescents and their parents and found that harsher messages from parents against sexual engagement was associated with higher levels of sexual activity in adolescents, while high-quality sexual communication was connected with lower levels of risky sexual involvement. This suggests that adolescents may be resistant to harsh or negative delivery of sexual information and would benefit more from more thoughtful discussion. Such outcomes are consistent with findings that greater comfort and friendliness in talking about sex made a significant difference in adolescents' safe behavior and willingness to go to parents with questions (Abrego, 2011; Pariera & Brody, 2017; Wilson et al., 2010). Furthermore, receiving positive messages about sex from parents resulted in a higher likelihood of enjoying their first sexual intercourse experience (Pariera & Brody, 2017). Overall, parents who made conversations with their children about sexuality comfortable and open enjoyed the advantage of having their children come to them more frequently with sexual questions and also engage in safer sexual practices.

Finally, past studies indicate that young people themselves report wanting more communication from their parents about sex, particularly regarding relational aspects (Goldfarb et al., 2018; Pariera & Brody, 2017). A recent study by Goldfarb et al. (2018) asked 74 emerging

adults in a northeastern university about messages received prior to first sexual experience and found dominant themes of difficulty, infrequency, and unsatisfying nature of sex communication from parents. In addition to reporting messages from parents of negativity surrounding sex, not wanting to know about their children's sexual lives, and emphases on abstinence and protection, participants reported wanting more guidance in sexual matters from parents in relational and emotional aspects of sexuality (Goldfarb et al., 2018). In a sample of 441 young adults in another study, participants reported beliefs that parents should discuss most topics with children by age 12-13 and that the most frequent topic addressed by parents should be that of dating and relationships (Pariera & Broady, 2017).

Because a cited theme of the research is discomfort in talking to children about sex stemming from a lack of role models from their own parents (Abrego, 2011; Ballard & Senn, 2019), we may hypothesize that the opposite is also true—children who receive open communication about sex from parents may develop healthy working models for sex communication in general, and thus will go on to display higher levels of open and comfortable sex communication with both future partners and their own children. A shift towards treating adolescent sexuality as a normal and positive part of development may increase open and positive sexual communication between parents and children (Ballard & Senn, 2019) and impact the way those adolescents go on to communicate in healthy ways about sex long term.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

Communication between parents and adolescent children on sexual topics is thought to be connected with later openness with peers and romantic partners (Key, 2016). While most research has examined parent-child sexual communication and romantic partner sexual communication separately, one quantitative study by Powers (2017) explored the link between

the two. Little evidence was found linking parent-child sex communication and later partner communication. This may be due to the fact that most young adults in the study reported little to no sexual communication from parents while growing up. However, their qualitive study examining a sample of 7 participants discovered a significant link between low parent-child sexual communication and low comfort in sexual talk with partners (Powers, 2017).

Additionally, Powers (2017) identified a relationship between sexual attitudes and romantic partner sexual communication. Because previous research supports a connection between early messages of sexuality and later sexual attitudes (Ballard & Senn, 2019; Powers, 2017), this finding may support an indirect association between the role of parental influences on their children's later romantic relationships. Given that there appears to be limited research linking early parent-child sexual communication and later sexual communication with partners, a study is needed that more comprehensively examines factors associated with this link and considers impacts on romantic relationship functioning (e.g., relationship and sexual satisfaction). Consequently, we present the following research questions and hypotheses as we seek to gain a more thorough understanding of these constructs of interest.

This study seeks to explore the consequences of high- and low-quality sexual communication between parents and children in predicting quality of romantic partner sexual communication, as well as connections with sexual and relational satisfaction.

Research questions include:

1) From whom do young adults report receiving the most information about sexuality? Does source of sexual knowledge show an association with increased or decreased partner sexual communication satisfaction?

2) Is parent-child sex communication significantly associated with later romantic partner sexual communication satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, and relational satisfaction? Does sex guilt show a significant association with parent-child sex communication or romantic partner sexual communication satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, or relational satisfaction?
3) Do parent-child sex communication patterns or sex guilt differ by gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, or religiosity?

Hypotheses:

1) Based on low reported rates of parent-child sex communication (Wilson et al., 2010) and culturally narrow constraints surrounding sexual openness (Ballard & Senn, 2019), we anticipate young adults will report receiving the most information about sexuality from media and internet usage. However, we predict that participants who have received sexual knowledge predominantly from parents, friends, or partners will report the highest levels of sexual communication satisfaction.
2) Based on the importance of early messages impacting later development and relationships, which is emphasized in socialization and symbolic interaction theories (Arnett, 1995; Yeager, 2016), we hypothesize that higher quality of parent-child sexual communication will predict higher satisfaction with romantic partner sex communication later in life. Based on previous connections between sexual communication with relational and sexual satisfaction (Cupach & Comstock, 1990; Davis et al., 2006; Jones, 2016; Timm & Keiley, 2011), we predict that parent-child sexual communication will also predict higher relational and sexual satisfaction. Finally, we predict that sex guilt will show a negative association with all other

variables in the study based on previous findings that sex guilt negatively impacts sexual and relational aspects of life (Day, 2019) and based on previous connections between absent or ineffective parent-child sex communication and sexual shame (Totonchi, 2015).

3) Based on existing literature, we predict that lower-quality parent-child sex communication will take place between parents and participants that are male (Goldfarb et al., 2018), non-heterosexual (Goldfarb et al., 2018), and high in religiosity (Day, 2019). We also predict that females, participants that are non-heterosexual, and participants reporting higher religiosity will report higher levels of sex guilt based on previous connections (Day, 2019; Goldfarb et al., 2018).

METHODOLOGY

Participants

Data for this study were obtained via Qualtrics surveys given to young adults between the ages of 18-30 (Lee et al., 2018). Participants were recruited using a link shared on social media and disseminated by professors to students inviting young adults to participate in a study about communication in romantic relationships. Participants who completed the survey were placed in a raffle for a $25 gift card to Amazon. To qualify for the study, participants needed to be between the ages of 18-30 and in a committed, romantic relationship. Questions at the beginning of the survey verified age and relational status.

A total of 281 survey responses were recorded, of which 233 were retained for analysis. Those who were disqualified and subsequently removed included participants who reported not being in a current romantic relationship, those under the age of 18 or over the age of 30, and those who did not complete at least 60% of the survey.

Procedures

Upon receiving Institutional Review Board approval, researchers disseminated a 76-item questionnaire designed to measure constructs of interest for the current study. Participants completed informed consent documentation before taking the survey, which included demographic information and relevant questions, including age, gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, religiosity, relationship status (married, cohabiting, current committed romantic relationship, or not in a current committed romantic relationship), length of relationship with partner, and whether or not self and partner are sexually active. Participants were also asked from which source they received the majority of their sexual knowledge. The remainder of the survey consisted of existing reliable and valid measures including the Revised Mosher Sex Guilt Inventory (Janda & Bazemore, 2011), the Sexual Communication Satisfaction Scale (Wheeless et al., 1984), the shortened 4-item Couple Satisfaction Index (Funk & Rogge, 2007), and the Family Sex Communication Questionnaire (Warren, 2000).

Measures

Contributors to Sexual Knowledge

One survey item instructed participants to select where they received the majority of their current sexual knowledge. Participants were asked to select one of the following: "talking with a parent," "talking with friends," "talking with a romantic partner," "school-based curriculum", "TV, movies, or other media," "searching online," "church/religion," or "other."

Sexual Communication Satisfaction

Satisfaction with communication about sexual topics with partners was measured using the 22-item Sexual Communication Satisfaction Scale (Wheeless et al., 1984). The scale includes questions such as "I tell my partner when I am sexually satisfied" and "I am satisfied with my

ability to communicate about sexual matters with my partner" and is rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). Certain items were reverse scored to cross-check validity. Greater scores suggest increased reported satisfaction. This scale has shown internal reliability of .94 in previous studies (Wheeless et al., 1984) and currently demonstrated good reliability (α = .82) among our sample.

Relationship Satisfaction

Participants were given all four questions from the shortened Couples Satisfaction Index (Funk et al., 2007), which captures romantic relationship satisfaction. Of the four questions, two were scored on a scale ranging from 0 ("not at all true") to 5 ("completely true"). This measure has shown strong convergent validity and construct validity with other reliable scales measuring relationship satisfaction (Funk et al., 2007). A sample item reads "I have a warm and comfortable relationship with my partner." The other two were scored on a scale from 0 ("extremely unhappy") to 6 ("perfect"), and a sample item is "Please indicate the degree of happiness, all things considered, of your relationship." Higher scores indicate greater satisfaction in one's romantic relationship. Reliability was strong in this study (α = .92).

Sexual Satisfaction

Sexual satisfaction between partners was measured using the New Sexual Satisfaction Scale-Short, a 12-item version adapted from the original 20-item version (Štulhofer et al., 2010). For all items, participants were given the instructions, "thinking about your sex life during the last six months, please rate your satisfaction with the following aspects" with possible responses on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("not at all satisfied") to 5 ("extremely satisfied"). Items on the short form included "the way I sexually react to my partner," "the frequency of my sexual

activity," and "the pleasure I provide to my partner." Higher scores convey greater sexual satisfaction. Reliability of this scale was excellent (α = .93).

Parent-Child Sex Communication

Communication between participants and their parents about sex when they were children or adolescents was measured using the Family Sex Communication Quotient, an 18-item scale developed by Clay Warren (2006). This scale measures three dimensions of parent-child sex communication, including comfort, information, and value. A 5-point Likert scale offers responses from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). Items included "I feel free to ask my parents questions about sex," "the home should be a primary place for learning about sex" and "I feel better informed about sex if I talk with my parents." Items were translated into the past tense and participants were asked to answer according to their experience during early adolescence and before. Specified items were reverse scored to prevent user bias. Greater scores convey a parent-child pattern with higher comfort and value in communication about sex. The modified version of this scale demonstrated good reliability (α = .89).

Sexual Guilt

Sexual guilt in each participant was measured using the Revised Mosher Sex Guilt Inventory, a ten-item version of the original Mosher Sex Guilt Inventory (Janda & Bazemore, 2011). Sample questions include "When I have sexual desires, I enjoy them like all healthy human beings" and "Sex relations before marriage should not be recommended." All questions were presented on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 7 (strongly agree"). Certain items were reverse scored to cross-check scale validity. Higher scores indicated greater sexual guilt in participants. This measure has been found to be reliable by past

researchers (Janda & Bazemore, 2011) and showed good reliability ($\alpha = .71$) in the present sample.

Data Analysis

Univariate, bivariate, and multivariate analyses were conducted to answer our research questions. Univariate analyses (e.g., frequencies, means, standard deviations, range) were initially conducted to summarize and observe patterns in the data. Group differences across variables were then examined utilizing ANOVA procedures, including differences by gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and religion. Next, bivariate analyses included correlations between all study variables and are presented in a correlation table. Significant bivariate associations informed variables for inclusion in multivariate analyses. Finally, multivariate analyses (i.e., multiple regression) were conducted using SPSS software to examine links between constructs of interest.

For our first research question, we examined frequencies of sources of sexual information. We then examined group differences by audience on sexual communication satisfaction with current romantic partner utilizing ANOVA procedures. To determine whether parent-child sex communication is significantly associated with later romantic partner sexual communication satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, and relational satisfaction, we conducted bivariate correlations followed by hierarchical regression analyses. Finally, we conducted ANOVA analyses to determine whether parent-child sex communication patterns or sex guilt differ by gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, or religiosity of the child.

RESULTS

Research questions for this study examined 1) whether there is a significant link between source of sexual knowledge and sexual communication satisfaction; 2) whether or not significant

associations exist among parent-child sex communication, sex guilt, sexual communication satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, and relational satisfaction; and 3) whether or not parent-child sex communication or sex guilt differ by demographic group. To answer research questions, we examined demographic difference frequencies, ANOVA group differences for sex guilt and parent-child communication, and regression analyses for multivariate considerations.

Initial variable frequencies were run to observe demographic breakdowns of the sample. A complete list of results can be seen in Table 1. Frequency tests revealed 134 participants identifying as females (57.5%), 97 identifying as male (41.6%), and only 2 identifying as nonbinary or third gender (.9%). A majority of participants reported being heterosexual (n = 207; 88.8%), with 16 identifying as bisexual (6.9%), 3 identifying as gay or lesbian (1.3%), 3 as pansexual (1.3%), and 3 reporting "other or prefer not to say" (1.3%). The breakdown of race/ethnicity was as follows: 171 White (73.4%), 17 Black or African American (7.7%), 17 Hispanic or Latino (7.3%), 14 Asian (6.0%), 9 American Indian (3.9%), and 4 Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (1.7%). More participants reported a major role of religiosity in upbringing (n = 47; 20.2%) than those reporting an insignificant role of religiosity in upbringing (n = 30; 12.9%).

Table 1.

Demographic Difference Frequencies for Study Variables. (N = *233*)

Variable	n	%
Gender		
Male	97	41.6
Female	134	57.5
Nonbinary/Third Gender	2	.9
Sexual Orientation		
Heterosexual	207	88.8
Gay/Lesbian	3	1.3
Bisexual	16	6.9
Pansexual	3	1.3
Other/Prefer Not to Say	3	1.3

Relationship Status		
Married	80	34.5
Cohabiting	47	20.3
Not married or cohabiting	105	45.3
Sexually Active		
Yes	222	96.9
No	7	3.1
Race/Ethnicity		
American Indian or Alaska Native	9	3.9
Asian	14	6.0
Black or African American	18	7.7
Hispanic or Latino	17	7.3
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	4	1.7
White	171	73.4
Religiosity		
Strongly Disagree	30	12.9
Disagree	31	13.3
Neither Agree nor Disagree	59	25.3
Agree	64	27.5
Strongly Agree	47	20.2

Descriptive statistics and correlational analyses were next examined (see Table 2). The sample showed a mean score of 78.18 for sexual communication satisfaction with a standard deviation of 10.97. This is a moderate to high score, indicating that on average, participants in this sample were fairly satisfied with their sexual communication. Relational satisfaction showed a mean of 19.42 and standard deviation of 4.37, indicating generally high relational satisfaction among this sample. Sexual satisfaction had a mean of 45.23 and standard deviation of 8.73. Parent-child communication quality yielded a mean of 51.46 with a standard deviation of 12.51, which falls in the moderate range of parent-child communication quality. Sex guilt scores showed a mean of 3.41 and standard deviation of .85.

Correlational analyses revealed a significant positive association between sexual communication satisfaction and relational satisfaction ($r = .68$, $p < .01$) as well as sexual satisfaction ($r = .65$, $p < .01$), as expected and supported by previous studies. Relational satisfaction and sexual satisfaction were also significantly and positively correlated with one

another ($r = .63$, $p < .01$). Analyses also revealed a significant, positive relationship between age of participant and sex guilt ($r = .33$, $p < .01$). Length of relationship was significantly and positively correlated with relational satisfaction ($r = .26$, $p < .01$) and negatively correlated with parent-child communication ($r = -.19$, $p < .01$). Sex guilt showed a significant negative correlation with sexual communication satisfaction ($r = -.40$, $p < .01$), relational satisfaction ($r = -.33$, $p < .01$), and sexual satisfaction ($r = -.23$, $p < .01$). Parent-child communication quality was significantly and positively association with sexual satisfaction ($r = .15$, $p < .05$). Meanwhile, sex guilt was positively associated with parent-child communication quality, ($r = .19$, $p < .01$).

Table 2.
*Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations for study variables. (*N*=233).*

Variables	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.
1. Age	-						
2. Relationship length	.11	-					
3. Sexual Communication Satisfaction	-.12†	.10	-				
4. Relational Satisfaction	-.09	.26**	.68**	-			
5. Sexual Satisfaction	-.08	.06	.65**	.63**	-		
6. Parent-Child Communication	.10	-.19**	.09	-.04	.15*	-	
7. Sex Guilt	.33**	-.06	-.40**	-.33**	-.23**	.19**	-
M	23.51	20.14	78.18	19.42	45.23	51.46	3.41
SD	3.37	24.24	10.97	4.37	8.73	12.51	.85
Range	18-30	1-120	42-102	7-25	12-60	22-89	1.2-5.6

Note. *M* = Mean; *SD* = Standard Deviation
†p<.10; *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$.

To answer our first research question, we examined responses regarding the source from which participants received the majority of their current sexual knowledge. The most frequently cited source was participants' romantic partners (27.5%) followed by friends (25.8%), online searches (17.6%), talking with a parent (10.7%), school-based curriculum (9.0%),

TV/movies/entertainment (6.4%), other (2.6%), and finally church/religion (.4%). Next, to examine whether these sources were associated with sexual communication satisfaction with current partner, we conducted one-way ANOVAS for sexual communication satisfaction by source of sexual knowledge. Resulting means showed no significant differences in mean score on sexual communication satisfaction by group, suggesting that in this sample, source of sexual knowledge shows no impact on sexual communication satisfaction.

To answer our second research question, we conducted regression analyses, controlling for length of romantic relationship, to observe relationships among the variables of interest (see Table 3). Significant bivariate correlations, along with examining the factors included in our researcher questions, informed construction of the regression analyses. Results revealed greater parent-child communication about sex during adolescence and childhood was significantly, positively associated with greater sexual satisfaction with partner in young adulthood, controlling for length of romantic relationship ($\beta = .12$, $p < .05$).

Additional regression analyses revealed a moderately significant, positive relationship between parent-child communication about sex during adolescence and childhood and romantic partner communication satisfaction in young adulthood, controlling for romantic relationship length ($\beta = .10$, $p < .10$). However, regression analyses revealed no significant relationship between parent-child communication about sex during adolescence and childhood and romantic relationship satisfaction in young adulthood.

Finally, an unexpected result from regression analyses revealed that greater parent-child communication about sex during adolescence and childhood was significantly, positively associated with greater sex guilt in young adulthood, controlling for length of the relationship ($\beta = .01$, $p < .05$).

Table 3.
*Summary of regression analyses linking parent-child communication about sex with romantic partner communication satisfaction, overall relationship satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, and sexual guilt in young adulthood, controlling for romantic relationship length (*N*= 233)*

	Comm Satisfaction		Rel Satisfaction		Sexual Satisfaction		Sexual Guilt	
Variable	*B*	*SE B*	*B*	*SE B*	*B*	*SE B*	*B*	*SE B*
Constant	71.88	3.42	18.13	1.32	38.20	2.70	2.81	.27
Rel Length	.06†	.03	.05	.01	.04	.03	-.00	.00
Parent-Child Sex Comm	.10†	.06	.01	.02	.12*	.05	.01*	.01
R^2		.024†		.08		.04*		.04*
F for change in R^2		2.78†		.06		6.20*		6.53*

Note. Comm = Communication; Rel = Relationship
B = Unstandardized Coefficient; *SE B* = Standard error of the unstandardized beta coefficient.
Romantic relationship length is in months.
†p < .10; *p < .05

Finally, we conducted additional ANOVA analyses to identify group differences in parent-child communication quality and sex guilt to answer our third research question. Parent-child communication scores showed means of 52.5 for males, 50.4 for females, and 64.5 for non-binary/third gender, revealing a higher mean for non-binary/third gender; however, none of these differences were significant in this sample. Serious caution should also be given for any results related to the non-binary/third gender participants given the very small sample size. Additionally, ANOVA results revealed no significant group differences in parent-child communication quality by race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, or religiosity.

When examining differences in sex guilt by groups of religiosity, we found a statistically significant difference between groups as determined by one-way ANOVA ($F(4,212) = 3.803$, p = .005). Tukey's post-hoc analyses revealed that those who considered religion a significant part of their upbringing (*M* = 3.72) were significantly more likely than those who did not at all consider religion a factor in their upbringing (M = 3.08) to experience higher levels of sex guilt (*p* = .022).

One-way ANOVA analyses also produced a significant difference in sex guilt by gender ($F(2,216) = 12.018$; $p < .001$), with Tukey's post hoc probing unexpectedly revealing that males ($M = 3.71$) showed higher levels of sex guilt than females ($M = 3.19$). Because only two people reported a third/nonbinary gender, significant differences could not be identified between this group and other groups. A larger sample would be needed to identify whether these differences are significant. No significant differences were found in sex guilt means by either race/ethnicity or sexual orientation.

DISCUSSION

Previous research indicates that quality sexual communication is an important contributor to young adults' relationships and sexual satisfaction (Chatterjee, 2008; Landor & Winter, 2019), and that such communication is often deficient in young relationships (Faulkner & Lannutti, 2010). Additionally, experiencing high amounts of sex guilt—which may be learned or exacerbated by parental messages and cultural upbringing (Ballard & Senn, 2019; Lim, 2019)—may play a role in inhibiting sexual communication and limiting sexual and relational satisfaction (Day, 2019). Indeed, symbolic interaction theory suggests that interactions with others—particularly parents—play a heavy role in shaping and reinforcing meaning (Yeager, 2016), suggesting that negative or inhibited attitudes about sex from parents could influence later perception of sex, as well as ability to communicate effectively about sexual topics. Thus, understanding the link between parental messages and attitudes about sex and young adult sexual communication patterns marks an important area for study.

The purpose of this study was to examine relationships between young adults' former sex communication patterns with their parents and measures of current satisfaction with sexual, relational, and sexual communication aspects in their current romantic relationship. We also

sought to observe whether sex guilt showed a relationship with either former parent-child communication patterns or current relational, sexual, or sexual communication satisfaction with current partner. We additionally wanted to know whether the source of sexual knowledge had an influence on young adult sexual communication satisfaction. Although no significant relationship emerged between parent-child communication quality and sexual communication satisfaction in this sample, several significant findings did emerge which warrant further exploration, including a significant, positive association between the parent-child communication quality participants reported receiving as children/adolescents and current sexual satisfaction. We also found an unexpected significant association between parent-child communication quality and sex guilt.

Source of Sexual Knowledge

We sought to find out whether an association existed between source of sexual knowledge and level of sexual communication satisfaction in young adults. While our results revealed no significant group differences in participants' satisfaction with their sexual communication between groups of reported sexual knowledge source, it may be that participants saw the wording of "*current* sexual knowledge" and rated most recent or relevant source rather than the most important source of cumulative knowledge. It may be interesting to see whether a relationship emerges between communication satisfaction and knowledge source with different wording, such as asking participants to rate where they received the most sexual knowledge while growing up.

Group Differences in Sex Guilt

Because both symbolic interaction theory and Arnett's broad and narrow theory of socialization suggest social and environmental contributors to meaning (Arnett, 1995; Yeager,

2016), we expected to discover some difference in participants' level of sex guilt according to family of origin environment and social locations. As expected, we found that those who reported growing up in more religious settings reported significantly higher levels of sex guilt than those who reported religion playing an insignificant role in their upbringing. There may be several explanations contributing to this finding. First, many religions teach a sinful nature of sex (particularly unmarried sex), and thus those brought up in religious environments may well have internalized that sexual thoughts, behaviors, and desires are dirty or sinful, increasing guilt when thinking about or performing such acts (Day, 2019; Hackathorn et al., 2016; Leonhardt et al., 2020). Alternatively, participants who consider religion an important factor in their life may attach a specific meaning to sex—i.e., as something precious, godly, or sacred—and thus experience higher levels of guilt when varying from internalized norms or values. Finally, the Revised Mosher Sex Guilt Inventory used to measure sex guilt in this study includes questions such as "sex relations before marriage should not be recommended" and "sex relations before marriage help people adjust" (Janda & Bazemore, 2011)—items which may also measure values about premarital sex connected to religious beliefs, and thus may make it more likely that highly religious people score higher on this scale simply by nature of values held. Further research on this connection may help to identify the mechanism by which religiosity may increase tendencies to experience sex guilt, as well as the impact of religiosity on ability to experience healthy sexual communication and sexual satisfaction with partners.

An unexpected finding in our study showed males reporting higher sex guilt scores than females, which was contrary to our hypothesis and previous findings. This result was surprising given what has been reported in the literature about male and female socialization regarding sexuality (Goldfarb et al., 2018). While previous research has often tied women to sexual shame

(Jones, 2016), this finding may point to several potential explanations. First, there may be a difference in the way men and women related to items measuring sex guilt in this study based on their differing experiences by social location. Previous research has found differences in the way sexual guilt and shame are often experienced between men and women, finding that men tend to attach such shame to repressed emotional expression, pressure to perform, and fear of failure, while women may suffer from pressure to achieve socialized standards of beauty as well as effects of oppression, objectification, and abuse (Day, 2019). It may be that in this study, sex guilt items measured more of the former manifestations of sex guilt, as questions did include some action- and performance-based items such as those regarding masturbation and unusual sex practices. Indeed, some previous research does indicate that males' and females' attitudes towards masturbation and premarital sex tend to differ (Totonchi, 2015), and thus a closer look at such differences may help shed light on this finding.

Alternatively, the high numbers of participants who reported high religious influence in their upbringing may play a role in the gender difference in sex guilt found in this study. It may be that religiosity and gender interact in predicting sex guilt, and that males are taught to feel guilty about sexual desires and acts in some religious contexts. More research on the experience of sexual guilt among males—particularly in religious contexts—may further illuminate this connection.

Parent-Child Communication and Sexual Satisfaction

An important finding of the study was the significant, positive relationship between the reported parent-child communication openness participants had received during childhood/adolescence and sexual satisfaction with current romantic partner. In other words, young adults in this sample who perceived that communication patterns about sex had been more

open and frequent during their childhood and/or adolescence reported higher sexual satisfaction in their current committed relationship. This meaningful link points to many potential benefits for adolescents as they enter young adulthood.

Because young adulthood marks a crucial time for laying a strong foundation for a lifelong relationship trajectory, satisfying sexual experiences with committed romantic partners are important to strengthening relationships, increasing quality of life, and making it more likely young adults will communicate openly with partners about sex, which can pave the way for further increasing sexual and relational satisfaction (Jones, 2016; Landor & Winter, 2019; Powers, 2017). The present finding offers a powerful connection with the potential to benefit future young adult relationships and quality of life by way of parental openness about sexual topics now.

Several possibilities may help to explain this association. It may be that increased openness about sex from parents during childhood or adolescence increases feelings of confidence, competence, or security with regards to sexuality as individuals enter young adulthood, allowing for greater satisfaction to be experienced in their sexual lives. Open and positive communication about sex from parents is thought to have a significant impact on children's perceptions and comfort regarding sexual topics (Pariera & Brody, 2017), and therefore it would make sense that more positive attitudes and greater comfort about sexual topics would allow for greater experienced sexual satisfaction.

This finding aligns well with previous research, which may also shed light on the association. A former study found that positive messages about sex from parents resulted in a higher likelihood of enjoying first sexual intercourse (Pariera & Brody, 2017). This finding aligns with the association that emerged in the present study and provides compelling support for

the idea that those who internalize more positive messages about sexuality from a younger age may continue to enjoy more satisfying sexual experiences during adulthood.

Another potential explanation may be connected to sexual behavior by participants. Previous research suggests that positive and open communication about sexual topics between parents and children is associated with lower levels of sexual activity during adolescence and less risky sexual behavior overall (Rogers et al., 2015). Perhaps young adults who have engaged in less risky behavior experience fewer negative consequences that may impede satisfaction (such as STI's, previous traumatic abortions, etc.) and thus may more easily enjoy greater satisfaction in sexual experiences.

In short, this finding points to the importance of parent-child communication in influencing important aspects of young people's sexual lives. By increasing openness and quality of sexual communication with their children, parents can seemingly make a significant impact on the way their children are able to experience satisfying intimate experiences with romantic partners later on, very likely contributing positively to their development and well-being.

Parent-Child Communication and Sex Guilt

Contrary to our hypotheses and previous findings, we found a significant and positive association between parent-child sexual communication quality and sex guilt. We expected to see the opposite trend based on previous research that has supported positive effects of open parent-child communication about sex on adolescents and children (Abrego, 2011; Pariera & Brody, 2017). A variety of potential explanations for this connection may be at work here. Perhaps both parent-child communication quality and sex guilt are related to a third variable. Some items in the Mosher Sex Guilt Inventory assessed participant attitudes about "unusual sex practices," which might be thought to refer to BDSM, kinky, or other practices outside what

some may consider standard. As previously mentioned, a high number of participants in this study reported high significance of religiosity in their upbringing, and it is possible that more religious people are more purposeful in discussing sex with children, and that religious people tend to show higher levels of sex guilt as measured in this study due to values regarding premarital sex, masturbation, and "unusual" sex practices.

It also may be that those who reported high comfort and openness with parents regarding sexual topics felt more comfortable being open with parents about sex because of shared sexual values. For example, participants whose parents believe that masturbation, atypical sex practices, or premarital sex are wrong may take care to communicate these values to their children who may then choose to adopt them. By nature of their aligned ideas about sexual morality, they may enjoy increased openness and comfort discussing these topics given their shared understanding, but that may also be associated with increased guilt if and when standards are violated.

There may also be a limitation in the design of the study wherein the original Family Sex Communication Quotient from which we drew the parent-child communication measure shows a present-tense format meant for adolescents and children. We adapted the measure to use past-tense language and ask young adults to reflect back on their childhood/adolescence in answering questions. While the scale proved a reliable measure for our sample, it may be that participants' perceptions of parent-child openness were impacted by passage of time and now-adult perspective and do not accurately reflect parent-child communication patterns at the time. Finally, participants high in sex guilt may be more prone to answer positively to questions that reflect on their parents. It may be that those who experience higher levels of guilt about sex respond with greater social desirability bias and thus show higher scores of former parent-child sex communication.

In examining the items included on the Mosher Sex Guilt Inventory, we noticed a majority of items assessing values regarding sex, rather than feelings of guilt connected to sexual topics or activities. While this measure has been previously validated as a reliable and valid scale, our study's findings indicate that it may be measuring a different construct than sex guilt. Indeed, it may be more appropriate to label this variable as "sexual values" in place of "sex guilt" to more accurately represent the construct measured by the Mosher items. Because the original version of this scale was developed over 50 years ago (Janda & Bazemore, 2010), it may be that the idea of sex guilt has progressed over time and no longer represents what it once was thought to capture. Indeed, our findings may signify a need to take a closer look at this measure and particularly its label.

Implications

Findings surrounding differences in reported sex guilt levels by gender and religiosity may reveal interesting implications for researchers and clinicians alike. Previous research mainly focuses on effects of sex guilt on women, including that women high in sex guilt tend to engage in less sexual intercourse, masturbation, pornography consumption, and oral and anal sex, and also show a lower likelihood of using contraceptives and/or visiting a gynecologist (Lanciano et al., 2015; Totonchi, 2015). Less research exists regarding impacts of high sex guilt on men, and it may be interesting to see if such findings translate to men high in sex guilt as well. If such is the case, this may mark an important area for intervention, education, and further research to lower potential health risks in both men and women who experience high levels of sex guilt. For example, males higher in sex guilt may benefit from increased support and education about STI prevention and treatment if indeed sex guilt inhibits their seeking appropriate medical care.

Additional research that explores potential mechanisms for this connection may help to shed further light on what contributes to sex guilt in men, along with negative impacts.

The association between reported former parent-child sex communication quality and current sexual satisfaction in young adult relationships points to a potential area for further study for researchers in understanding more about the mechanism for this relationship. Increased knowledge about this association may open the door for parents, educators, and clinicians to explore this as a potential point for intervention. Current research suggests that such sexual communication between parents and children not only lowers sexual risk-taking for children (Rogers et al., 2015), but also increases healthy sexual attitudes (Ballard & Senn, 2019) and heightened likelihood of enjoying first sexual experiences (Pariera & Brody, 2017). Thus, helping parents to increase openness, clarity, and positivity about sexual topics may result in future heightened quality of life and relationships for their offspring.

In previous studies, parents have reported barriers to initiating healthy sex talk with children and adolescents including feelings of incompetence, lack of comfort, and fear of encouraging sexual behavior (Abrego, 2011; Wilson et al., 2010). Many parents lacked modeling of how to conduct such conversations from their own parents, adding to discomfort and insecurity in how to initiate appropriate talk about sex with offspring (Abrego, 2011; Wilson et al., 2010). Parents have reported that increasing their own knowledge on sexual topics and creating opportunities to start sexual conversations (i.e. using movies, television, asking about their children's sexual education classes, etc.) was helpful in overcoming these barriers (Meyer, 2014; Wilson et al., 2010), and thus future interventions should focus on increasing knowledge and discussion opportunities.

Educators and clinicians have found success in such interventions in the past. Meyer (2014) sent educational text messages about sex to 51 pairs of Latinx and Black mothers and their adolescent children at least once per week for six months about a sexual topic, after which adolescents and mothers reported higher rates of sexual communication and more topics discussed. The Families Matter! Program offered curriculum-based interventions to parents and caregivers of 9-12 year old youth in Tanzania which resulted in increased parent-child sex education discussions and improved responsiveness about these topics in parents (Kamala et al., 2017). Such findings indicate existing support for effectiveness of educational interventions among parents and children.

Despite these benefits, a majority of such programs seem to be focused on decreasing teen pregnancy, STI's, and other sexual health risks for adolescents (Kamala, 2017; Newby et al., 2011; Sutton et al., 2014). While some may include aspects of promoting positive sexual health in their programs (Crocker et al., 2019), very few appear to have the motive of increasing quality of sexual satisfaction, communication, or relational health of adolescents as they emerge into young adulthood. The association between parent-child communication and later sexual satisfaction points to the importance of implementing programs and interventions that focus not only on educational material for physical benefits, but including emotional, relational, and attitudinal aspects to improve quality of sexual and relational lives long-term. Because adolescents themselves have reported desiring more guidance from parents in navigating relational and emotional areas of sexuality and relationships (Goldfarb et al., 2018), it is likely that such changes would be well-received and that many significant benefits would ensue from helping parents employ consistent, meaningful discussion on the positive aspects of sexuality.

Limitations

Although this study makes a meaningful contribution to what is known regarding parent-child sexual communication and adult romantic relationship functioning, several study limitations warrant attention. First, the sample was not as diverse as originally intended. The sample was predominantly heterosexual (88.8%) and white (73.4%) and may not be representative of the diverse population from which it was drawn. Consequently, caution should be used when generalizing these findings to all young adults. Furthermore, participants were recruited through social media, meaning that those who were exposed to the study tended to be connected to one another through social networking and thus may hail from similar groups, areas, religious organizations, etc. To correct both limitations in future studies, researchers may consider conducting random sampling that draws from various groups and organizations without bias. Along with increased diversity, a larger sample size would aid in strengthening support for findings and increasing accurate representation of the young adult population.

All measures were self-report and rely on perception, potentially impacting the impeccability of participant scores. In particular, the measure of childhood parent-child sex communication was retrospective, relied on reflecting back several years to answer and could be subject to recall bias. It would be interesting to measure sexual communication quality from parents to adolescents as reported in real time and observe long-term impacts on sexual communication and satisfaction using a longitudinal design. Additionally, measuring reported sexual communication from both adolescents and parents might strengthen accuracy of measurement as well as shed light on any perceived discrepancies between the two, illuminating the most appropriate path for intervention.

As previously mentioned, the measure we used to capture sex guilt, while previously validated, appears it may measure a different construct, such as sexual values. Future studies

may consider using another measure to represent this variable to capture sex guilt or sexual shame to more accurately represent its relationship with sexual communication and satisfaction. Such a shift would likely produce different results which may further add to the knowledge sought in this study.

While our measures did capture important constructs, there were a number of constructs we did not measure that may have added to the study's contributions. Because past research has indicated an influence of parent-child relationship closeness on openness about sexual topics (Holman & Kellas, 2015), it may serve to observe relationships between closeness and other variables to identify new directions for intervention. Additionally, quality and style of parenting practices may influence constructs in this study and would also merit future inclusion. One program succeeded at increasing both parenting practices and sexual communication quality together in participants (Kamala et al., 2017), indicating that there is some level of connection between these constructs. Future studies may include measures of parenting strategies and parent-child relationship quality to observe how these constructs may influence sex guilt, parent-child sex communication, and future satisfaction in relational aspects with partner.

Finally, results were primarily based on correlational data analysis strategies, which may limit findings. While regression and correlation analyses did reveal important findings, future work should more comprehensively examine the multivariate associations among these constructs through path modeling or structural equation modeling, which would allow for simultaneous examination of multiple dependent variables.

Future Directions and Conclusion

Healthy sexual communication between partners is critical to young adult romantic relationship development and satisfaction, and therefore warrants further attention from

researchers and clinicians. Positive and clear messages from parents about sexual topics can not only lower sexual risk-taking but may also invite healthy communication patterns about sex with romantic partners. This study offers significant links including a positive association between high quality parent-child sexual communication patterns and greater satisfying sexual experiences during young adulthood. Researchers and clinicians may continue to explore this relationship and encourage more open and positive parent-child conversations about sex through education and programs. Additionally, further research on impacts of sex guilt in males and religious individuals may help to clarify associations found in this study and prevent negative impacts. More clarification may be needed to understand the relationship between parent-child communication and sex guilt to explain conflicting findings found from previous studies. What is evident, however, is that early dialogue about sexual topics with parents seems to meaningfully impact individuals and their romantic partners into early adulthood and perhaps beyond.

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APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

Notification of Exempt Certification

From: Social/Behavioral IRB

To: Kelsi Wilson
CC: Jake Jensen
Date: 1/20/2021

Re: UMCIRB 20-003013
Parent-Child Sexual Communication and Romantic Partners Sexual Communication

I am pleased to inform you that your research submission has been certified as exempt on 1/20/2021. This study is eligible for Exempt Certification under category # 2ab.

It is your responsibility to ensure that this research is conducted in the manner reported in your application and/or protocol, as well as being consistent with the ethical principles of the Belmont Report and your profession.

This research study does not require any additional interaction with the UMCIRB unless there are proposed changes this study. Any change, prior to implementing that change, must be submitted to the UMCIRB for review and approval The UMCIRB will determine if the change impacts the eligibility of the research for exempt status. If more substantive review is required, you will be notified within five business days.

Document

Consent paragraph - exempt(0.01) IRB Certificate 1(0.01)
IRB Certificate 2(0.01)
IRB Completion Report 1(0.01) IRB Completion Report 2(0.01) Recruitment script(0.01)

Sexual Communication Survey(0.01) Thesis Proposal(0.01)

Consent Forms
Additional Items
Additional Items
Additional Items
Additional Items
Recruitment Documents/Scripts Surveys and Questionnaires
Study Protocol or Grant Application

For research studies where a waiver or alteration of HIPAA Authorization has been approved, the IRB states that each of the waiver criteria in 45 CFR 164.512(i)(1)(i)(A) and (2)(i) through (v) have been met. Additionally, the elements of PHI to be collected as described in items 1 and 2 of the Application for Waiver of Authorization have been determined to be the minimal necessary for the specified research.

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

APPENDIX B: COMPLETE SURVEY

1. Please list your age: ________
2. What is your current relationship status?
   a. Married, cohabiting, current committed romantic relationship (not married/cohabiting), not in a committed romantic relationship
3. How long in months have you and your partner been in a romantic relationship? ____
4. Are you and your partner sexually active? (Yes, no)
5. Has your partner already participated in this study? (Yes, no)
6. I identify as: male, female, non-binary/other, prefer not to say
7. Sexual orientation: heterosexual, gay/lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, other
8. Religion played a significant part in my upbringing
   a. Strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree
9. Race/ethnicity: American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, White
10. From which of the following did you receive most of your current sexual knowledge?
    a. Talking with a parent, talking with friends, talking with a boyfriend or girlfriend, school-based curriculum, TV/movies/other media, searching online, church/religion, or other.

On a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), rate your agreement with the following statements.

11. Masturbation helps one feel eased and relaxed.*
12. Sex relations before marriage are good, in my opinion.*
13. Unusual sex practices don’t interest me.

14. When I have sexual dreams, I try to forget them.

15. “Dirty” jokes in mixed company are in bad taste.

16. When I have sexual desires, I enjoy them like all healthy human beings.*

17. Unusual sex practices are dangerous to one’s health and mental condition.

18. Sex relations before marriage help people adjust.*

19. Sex relations before marriage should not be recommended.

20. Unusual sex practices are all right if both partners agree.*

21. Please indicate the degree of happiness, all things considered, of your relationship.

Extremely Unhappy	Fairly Unhappy	A Little Unhappy	Happy	Very Happy	Extremely Happy	Perfect
0	1	2	3	4	5	6

22. I have a warm and comfortable relationship with my partner

Not at all true	A little true	Somewhat true	Mostly true	Almost completely true	Completely true
0	1	2	3	4	5

23. How rewarding is your relationship with your partner?

Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Mostly	Almost Completely	Completely
0	1	2	3	4	5

24. In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?

Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Mostly	Almost Completely	Completely
0	1	2	3	4	5

Thinking about your sex life during the last six months, please rate your satisfaction with the following aspects:
(**Responses**: 1= not at all satisfied, 2 = a little satisfied, 3 = moderately satisfied, 4= very satisfied, 5 = extremely satisfied)

25. The quality of my orgasms

26. My “letting go” and surrender to sexual pleasure during sex

27. The way I sexually react to my partner

28. My body’s sexual functioning

29. My mood after sexual activity

30. The pleasure I provide to my partner

31. The balance between what I give and receive in sex

32. My partner’s emotional opening up during sex

33. My partner’s ability to orgasm

34. My partner’s sexual creativity

35. The variety of my sexual activities

36. The frequency of my sexual activity

Rate your agreement with the following on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree):

37. I tell my partner when I am especially sexually satisfied.

38. I am satisfied with my partner’s ability to communicate her/his sexual desires to me.

39. I do not let my partner know things that I find pleasing during sex.*

40. I am very satisfied with the quality of our sexual interactions.

41. I do not hesitate to let my partner know when I want to have sex with him/her.

42. I do not tell my partner whether or not I am sexually satisfied.*

43. I am dissatisfied over the degree to which my partner and I discuss our sexual relationship.*

44. I am not afraid to show my partner what kind of sexual behaviors I find satisfying.

45. I would not hesitate to show my partner what is a sexual turn-on for me.

46. My partner does not show me when she/he is sexually satisfied.*
47. I show my partner what pleases me during sex.
48. I am displeased with the manner in which my partner and I communicate with each other during sex.*
49. My partner does not show me things she/he finds pleasing during sex.
50. I show my partner when I am sexually satisfied.
51. My partner does not let me know whether sex has been satisfying or not.*
52. I do not show my partner when I am sexually satisfied.
53. I am satisfied concerning my ability to communicate about sexual matters with my partner.
54. My partner shows me by the way she/he touches me if he/she is satisfied.
55. I am dissatisfied with my partner's ability to communicate her/his sexual desires to me.*
56. I have no way of knowing when my partner is sexually satisfied.*
57. I am not satisfied in the majority of our sexual interactions.*
58. I am pleased with the manner in which my partner and I communicate with each other after sex.

Please select one of the five response categories that best describes your opinion (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree). Please answer the questions based on your experience as a child/adolescent in your home, regardless of whether you have ever talked about sex with your parents. Don't spend much time on any one question, make a choice and move on to the next.

59. Sex should be one of the most important topics for parents and children to discuss.
60. Growing up, I could talk to my parents about almost anything related to sex.
61. My parents knew what I thought about sex as a child/adolescent.

62. It was not necessary to talk to my parents about sex growing up.*
63. I could talk openly and honestly with my parents about sex while growing up.
64. As a child/adolescent, I knew what my parents thought about sex.
65. The home should be a primary place for learning about sex.
66. I felt comfortable discussing sex with my parents.
67. My parents gave me very little information about sex growing up.*
68. Sex is too personal a topic to discuss with my parents.*
69. My parents felt comfortable discussing sex with me.
70. Much of what I know about sex came from family discussions.
71. Sex should not be discussed in the family unless there is a problem to resolve.*
72. Sex was too hard a topic to discuss with my parents.*
73. I felt better informed about sex if I talked with my parents.
74. As a child/adolescent, I felt the least important thing to discuss with my parents was sex.*
75. I felt free to ask my parents questions about sex growing up.
76. When I wanted to know something about sex growing up, I generally asked my parents.