THE IMPACT OF RELIGIOSITY ON THE SEXUAL SOCIALIZATION OF EMERGING

ADULTS

by

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The influence of religion within the socialization process as it pertains to sexuality was examined among 20 emerging adults aged 21-24, using qualitative research methods. Overall, participants fell into two categories: *religion was present but no significant influence* and *religion significantly influenced my sexuality*. Results indicated that individuals within the *religion was present but no significant influence* category lacked internalization of religious beliefs and often perceived that sexual messages from intersecting influences were inconsistent. On the contrary, respondents who fell within the *religion significantly influenced my sexuality* group expressed that religious beliefs had become part of their personal belief structure and were an intrinsic motivator that guided behavior. Within this category there was diversity concerning the way religion influenced sexuality. In particular, participants fell into four categories: abstinent, delayed sexual debut, regret and desire to change, and acceptance of all lifestyles. Although religiosity was related to different outcomes among the *religion significantly influenced my sexuality* group, internalization and the consistency of messages among influencing sources were recurrent themes. Results reflect the idea that emerging adulthood is a time characterized by exploration and change and that there are various influences that intersect to impact the sexual socialization of emerging adults.

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ADULTS

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Several studies have concluded that religiosity is negatively correlated with the sexual behaviors and attitudes (Burris, Smith, & Carlson, 2009, Paul, Fitzjohn, Eberhart-Phillips, Herbison, & Dickson, 2000; Mahoney, 1980; Lefkowitz, Gillen, Shearer, & Boone, 2004; Murray-Swank, Pargament, & Mahoney, 2005; Zaleski & Schiaffino, 2000). In other words, the more religious individuals are the less likely they are to engage in sexual intercourse. In addition, these individuals are also more likely to have restrictive attitudes regarding sexuality. These findings suggest that religiosity is an important factor in the socialization process. Therefore, attempts should be made to determine how religion influences an individual's ideas and attitudes concerning sexuality as the socialization process changes across developmental periods.

As individuals transition out of the adolescent period, the nature of the socialization process changes (Arnett, 2007). This shift in the socialization process has only recently been acknowledged within the literature concerning emerging adulthood. Therefore, little research has been conducted as it relates to the socialization in emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2007). In order to capture the full picture, research needs to be conducted that examines the particular forces (e.g. friends, school, media, and religious beliefs) that are influential in the socialization process of emerging adults.

The focus of this study is to examine the factors that influence the sexual socialization of emerging adults. Specifically, the purpose of this study is to explore the impact of religiosity on the sexual attitudes, behaviors, and the personal decision making process of persons aged 18 to 24 at a large southeastern university. In addition, this study will examine whether the inverse

relationship between religiosity and sexual behaviors and attitudes found in the literature is invariant across gender.

Most current research on sexuality and religion is with adolescents and not emerging adults and the research mostly consists of quantitative data. The use of qualitative research may provide valuable insights into the relationship between religiosity and sexual socialization that previous quantitative research has overlooked. Therefore, the rationale for this study is to contribute to filling the gap in the current literature.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this literature review, three theoretical frameworks will be provided, through which the influence of religion on the sexual socialization can be viewed. Particularly, the theories presented below are the theory of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000; 2006), the broad and narrow socialization theory (Arnett, 1995), and the human ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1989). In addition, the research concerning religiosity among emerging adults, the influence of religiosity as it relates to sexual attitudes, sexual behaviors, the sexual decision making process of emerging adults, and the gender differences as it pertains to religion and sexuality will be explored. The research that has contributed to the current literature will be presented to examine the common themes and findings that have been established. The literature will be scrutinized to develop a sense of what the current literature is lacking so that an attempt can be made to fill this gap.

Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework is an important component of the research process. Theories provide a lens in which to view and understand a particular phenomenon (Boss, Doherty, LaRossa, Schumm, & Steinmetz, 1993). A conceptual framework provides a basis in which to interpret research findings and formulate new ideas. In addition, conducting research within the bounds of a conceptual framework also promotes theory development (Boss et al., 1993). The theories presented below were utilized to guide the research regarding religiosity and the sexual socialization of emerging adults.

Theory of Emerging Adulthood

In recent decades, a new stage of life has transpired. This new developmental stage is now known as emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000). Emerging adulthood refers to the

developmental period between ages 18 and 25. Recent research has indicated that the period of emerging adulthood has come to light as the demographics have continued to shift throughout the last half century. Such changes include the decisions to delay marriage and parenthood as well as to continue education (Arnett, 2004). The particular term *emerging* captures the essence of this newfound phase of life. Once seen as young adults or adolescents, the term *emerging* differentiates the individuals within this period from the stages that both precede and follow it (Arnett, 2007). Individuals now classified as emerging adults are no longer adolescents, but lack the maturity to be considered adults (Arnett, 2007). Therefore, they are seen as in between the two stages. Throughout emerging adulthood, individuals are making life altering decisions and preparing themselves for adulthood by laying the foundation for their future (Arnett, 2007).

Pertinent to the construction of the framework for their adult lives is exploration. Exploration provides a basis in which to discover who and what they desire to be in their future, particularly as it pertains to love, work, and worldviews (Arnett 2000; 2006). Exploration has previously been seen as a developmental task that characterizes adolescence (Arnett, 2006; 2007). In his developmental theory, Erik Erikson (1968) suggested that adolescents faced the crisis between identity and role confusion during the period now known as adolescence. However, Erikson (1968) later proposed that there was an extended period of time, labeled as *prolonged adolescence*, in which young adults explore the many possibilities available to them to find their place in society. Consequently, the idea of a prolonged adolescent period provides evidence to support the notion that identity exploration is significant developmental task that is resolved during emerging adulthood rather than adolescence. Through exploration in the areas mentioned above, emerging adults will make lasting decisions that will determine the course of their future (Arnett, 2006).

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Since many emerging adults are exploring the various possibilities available to them, emerging adulthood is also a time of instability. Frequent changes occur in relationships, residential status, jobs, education, and perspectives about the world, values and beliefs (Arnett, 2000; 2006). Therefore, it can be concluded that emerging adulthood is a time of change and exploration to determine all various possibilities that the future embraces.

The focus of emerging adulthood is self-development and becoming an independent person, "capable of making choices and decisions independently from among a wide range of possibilities" (Arnett, 2006, p. 4). As part of the exploration process, emerging adults find it important to reexamine the values and beliefs that were instilled throughout their youth and reconstruct them based on their own evaluations to create a unique set of personalized beliefs (Arnett & Jensen, 2002; Hoge, Johnson, & Luidens, 1993). Occasionally, upon reexamining previously held beliefs, some individuals may abandon such beliefs without anything more convincing, or suited to their personal beliefs to replace that which was rejected (Arnett & Jensen, 2002).

 James Marcia (1966) also provided insight into the identity exploration that adolescents undergo. Although the classic work involves younger adolescence (13-17), the findings are related to the stage and developmental tasks that comprise the period of emerging adulthood. More specifically, Marcia (1966) identified four statues: identity achieved, identity diffused, identity moratorium, and identity foreclosed. Individuals who may be classified as identity achieved have reevaluated their beliefs, or faced a crisis, and in turn have become committed to a certain set of beliefs or ideology (Marcia, 1966). Those individuals who are grouped under identity diffused may or may not have encountered a crisis but are not concerned and thus lack commitment to any particular belief system. Emerging adults who are in a state of moratorium

are currently undergoing a crisis, struggling to commit, yet the commitments made are rather

vague. The last identity status mentioned is that of identity foreclosure. Individuals who are

classified within this group have not experienced a crisis, but yet have made commitments. In

other words, these individuals are shaping themselves to become what others expect from them

(Marcia, 1966).

Arnett's (2000) theory on emerging adulthood together with Marcia's ideas about identity

exploration can be utilized to help explain the changes in religious practices and beliefs that

occur within the period as well as the sexual attitudes and behaviors. More specifically, the

theory of emerging adulthood can be used as a lens, in which to view the specific sexual

behaviors that individuals engage in and the attitudes and perceptions that they hold regarding

religion and sexuality.

Broad and Narrow Socialization Theory

Rostosky, Wilcox, Wright, and Randall (2004) pointed out that religion should be viewed

in context with other socializing forces. The socializing forces indicated by Rostosky et al.

(2004) include the characteristics of the individual (i.e. genetic makeup of the developing

person), family factors, influences that are present outside the family environment (e.g. school,

peers), and macrolevel influences (e.g. cultural values). Religion intersects with the other

socializing forces, such as family and friends to influence the developing individual. Therefore,

it can be said that religion is influential at any or all of the levels defined by Rostosky et al.

(2004). For example religion influences socialization at the individual level through the personal

religious beliefs of the person. The developing person is also influenced by the religious beliefs

and practices of the family (e.g. familial level). At the extrafamilial level, peers may influence

socialization through their support or intolerance of particular religious beliefs. Religion may

influence socialization and behavior at the broader level by the values and standards that are set forth in the culture. For instance, some forces at the macrolevel may have intolerance for certain religious beliefs or practices. It is obvious that this would impact the socialization and behavior of an individual because they are limited to what they can believe and how they can practice. Two specific theories apply this concept, the broad and narrow socialization theory (Arnett, 1995) and the human ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1989). Both theories acknowledge that the individual is influenced by multiple socialization forces and this in turn impacts their development and behavior.

In developing the theory of broad and narrow socialization, Arnett (1995) focused on different cultures and the effects of their practices and beliefs on socialization. More specifically, the theory focused on differences between cultures that are classified as broad or narrow. Broad cultures place emphasis on individuality and self-expression (Arnett, 1995). On the contrary, narrow socialization promotes conformity and strict obedience to cultural norms and expectations (Arnett, 1995). This theory proposes that broad cultures that embrace individuality promote various developmental pathways through the socialization practices because they encourage autonomy and self-expression. On the other hand, narrow cultures that are characterized by strict conformity are more likely to have a limited range of developmental pathways (Arnett, 1995). Arnett (1995) defined socialization as the "process by which people acquire the behaviors and beliefs of the social world- that is, the culture- in which they live" (p. 618). Arnett (1995) pointed out that the family as well as other sources of socialization influence cultures characterized by both broad and narrow socialization. The theory identified seven such sources; family, peers, school/work, community, the media, the legal system, and the cultural belief system.

It is important to note that the sources of socialization mentioned above are influenced by the overall cultural context. For instance, family practices are predisposed to values of the overarching cultural, in which they reside (Arnett, 1995). Parents do not create parenting practices on their own, but rather follow the role requirements that are embraced by any particular culture. In broad socialization parents have a greater ability to deviate from the cultural standard, whereas cultures characterized by narrow socialization do not provide much flexibility in the deviation from the cultural pattern (Arnett, 1995). The next source of socialization is that of peers.

According to Arnett (1995), in industrialized countries, such as the United States, children and adolescents spend much of their time with same-age peers. In broader cultures, individuals have the opportunity to determine the friends with whom they associate (Arnett, 1995). The narrower the socialization, the less freedom an individual has to decide his or her friends (Arnett, 1995). The environment of school or work is often influenced by other sources of socialization such as the family and community. The community, in which an individual lives also, plays a role in the socialization process (Arnett, 1995).

Another important socialization source is the media. L'Engle, Brown, and Kenneavy (2006) found that media is an important influence in the sexual socialization of individuals in comparison to other contexts such as family, peers, religion, and school. In particular, the media in which individuals' within a society are allowed to access is determined by the overall culture. Within broad cultures there is incredible diversity among the media available (Arnett, 1995). However, within the available media, there are campaigns that promote certain cultural beliefs. In cultures exemplified by narrow socialization, there may be much more governmental control as to the availability of certain media content (Arnett, 1995). The legal system is part of

socialization due to the fact that it restricts certain behaviors. The punishment for deviance from such limitations differs from culture to culture. In cultures that are distinguished as broad, there is more freedom for individuals to do as they please because there is not as strict of a punishment as there is in cultures characterized by narrow socialization (Arnett, 1995).

The overarching cultural belief system provides a significant influence over the other sources mentioned, due to the fact that within this system ideas concerning what is right and what is wrong are developed (Arnett, 1995). More specifically, the overarching culture determines the moral standards that are to be abided by. In the American culture, individuality and a focus of self fulfillment and self esteem are valued above the characteristics of self restraint and self denial, or any particular set of religious or political beliefs (Arnett, 1995).

Arnett (1995) presented three goals that stand at the center of the socialization process; "(a) impulse control, including the development of a conscience, (b) role preparation and performance, including occupational roles, gender roles, roles in institutions such as marriage and parenthood, and (c) the cultivation of sources of meaning" (p. 618). The last goal mentioned pertains to the development of a sense of what is to be valued by the individual. In other words, what has meaning and importance in life. Sources of meaning can often include specific religious beliefs. These beliefs are developed through several different sources of socialization. Sources of meaning derived from beliefs provide structure and purpose in the lives of individuals.

This theory is applicable to the understanding of the sexual socialization of emerging adults in the sense as Arnett (1995) pointed out, in broad cultures, such as the United States, there may not be strict cultural standards established concerning religiosity and sexuality. This allows for a greater range of variability in the particular beliefs regarding religion as well as

variability in the sexual behavior and attitudes among emerging adults. However, within the broader culture there are subcultures or cultures that reflect narrow socialization.

Human Ecological Theory

Bronfenbrenner (1989), the theorist most often identified with the human ecological theory, suggested that development occurs through the interactions between the organism and its environment. Central to the human ecological theory is the concept of an ecosystem. Hawley (1986) defined an ecosystem as "an arrangement of mutual dependencies in a population by which the whole operates as a unit and thereby maintains a viable environmental relationship" (p. 26). According to Hawley (1986), an ecosystem is a subset of the larger environment. Emerging adults are embedded within their own separate ecosystem, operating in the context of the larger environment or society. For example, an individual's ecosystem may consist of family, friends, school, religious groups, and so forth. Bronfenbrenner (1989) identified four systems, in which individuals were entrenched, particularly, the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. Bronfenbrenner 's (1989) theory takes into account the entire environment of the developing person, but places particular emphasis on the interactions between the micro- and meso-system, which he believed had the greatest direct influence on the person. These systems will be discussed in the following sections.

Microsystem. In Bronfenbrenner's (1979) work titled *Ecology of Human Development*, it was proposed that a microsystem encompasses the different interpersonal relationships and roles that a person experiences in any particular environment. However, later after revisiting and critically reviewing his conceptual model Bronfenbrenner noted the importance of acknowledging that within the microsystem there are other persons " with distinctive characteristics of temperament, personality, and systems of belief" (Bronfenbrenner, 1989, p.

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227). Examples of settings that exist within the microsystem are the home, school, peer group, or the workplace of the individual. This addition to the original definition highlights the impact others within the immediate context of the individual have on development.

Mesosystem. This particular level can be seen as a system of Microsystems. More specifically, as stated by Bronfenbrenner (1989), the mesosystem contains the interactions between two or more settings that affect or influence the developing individual. Another way to view the mesosystem, is a system made of microsystems. An example of the mesosystem would be the interaction or relationship between the developing person's home and peer group (Bronfenbrenner, 1989).

Exosystem. The exosystem consists of the relationships between two settings. In contrast to the mesosystem, one of the settings does not normally contain the developing individual. Although, the individual is not directly involved in some particular settings, events take place that affect processes that occur within the immediate context of the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1989). For instance, a parent may attend a religious institution, in which the child is not involved. While the child does not necessarily interact with the institution itself, events that occur or rules or attitudes that are set forth by the church influence the processes and interactions within the home.

Macrosystem. The macrosystem can be identified as the broadest system within the ecological model. More specifically, Bronfenbrenner (1989) referred to the macrosystem as the overarching culture or subculture, in which a person is raised. He also compared the idea of a macrosystem with that of a blueprint; a blueprint in which societal patterns and characteristics are developed. A macrosystem encompasses all other systems included in the ecological model (i.e. micro-, meso-, exo-systems). Each system is characteristic of the broader environment, in

which it is encompassed. The development of an individual is affected by such a system because an individual's personal characteristics are heavily dependent on the particular options available within a given culture at a given point in time (Bronfenbrenner, 1989). Religious groups can be seen as a type of subculture, in which the belief systems available to an individual are influenced by the broader context. The different systems are affected as well because the overarching culture shapes the attitudes and beliefs of the significant others in the developing person's environment.

Chronosystem. The most important enhancement Bronfenbrenner (1989; 2005) made to his ecological framework is to include the element of time as a central part of the theory. With acknowledging time as an important component, Bronfenbrenner's ecological model can now be applied throughout the life course of the developing individual. The chronosystem provides a significant piece of explaining the processes of development. The chronosystem encompasses the developmental history, or the experiences encountered by the individual and how these events affect the process of development across the life course.

In addition to the two theories previously addresses, the human ecological model, as set forth by Urie Bronfenbrenner was used to guide the research concerning religion and its influence on sexual attitudes. This lens can be utilized in contributing to the understanding of religion and the influence it has on the developing individual as they develop attitudes concerning sex because it acknowledges that the developing individual is impacted by the interactions of genes and the surrounding environment.

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Religiosity and Emerging Adults

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Several research studies have indicated that religious attendance and participation declines during the transition to adulthood (Arnett & Jensen, 2002; Koenig, McGue, & Iacono,

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2008; Lefkowitz et al., 2004; Hoge et al., 1993; Uecker, Regnerus, & Vaaler, 2007). However, other studies have suggested that although there may be a decrease in overall religious participation, an individual's religious commitment becomes more intrinsic during emerging adulthood (De Haan & Shulenberg, 1997, et al., 2008, Stolzenberg, Blair-Loy, & Waite, 1995). Over time, internal religious beliefs become more important than the outward expression of such beliefs (Arnett & Jensen, 2002). Emerging adulthood is a period in life, in which the individual is focused on self development and independence (Arnett, 2000); therefore, it seems appropriate that emerging adults' religious beliefs reflect this idea. In their qualitative research study, Arnett and Jensen (2002) found that emerging adults' religious beliefs are extremely diverse and individualized. In particular, participants expressed the importance of thinking for themselves and designing a unique set of religious beliefs that were tailored to their personal needs rather than adopting preexisting beliefs associated with established religious institutions. Individuals often mentioned beliefs and concepts from several religions that were utilized in forming their unique and personal set of beliefs.

Despite the decline in religious attendance and participation, emerging adults' expressed the importance and value of religion in their lives (Arnett & Jensen, 2002; Uecker et al., 2007). Koenig et al. (2008) specified that although individuals reduce the frequency of religious participation, their particular religious views do not change. In an examination of religious participation over time, Putnam (2000) noted similar findings. The historical information suggests a decline in participation in religious worship, but stability in the importance of religion (Putnam, 2000). Interestingly, Arnett and Jensen (2002) concluded that the religious beliefs of emerging adults' are not influenced by childhood religious socialization. The pattern established by their data pointed out that most emerging adults attended religious services throughout

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childhood, but ceased attendance once parental influence concerning attendance lessened, which is usually during emerging adulthood. On the contrary, previous research regarding the transmission of religious beliefs indicate that there is a positive correlation between parental religious beliefs and parental religious attendance and children's religious beliefs and religious attendance (Milevsky, Szuchman, & Milevsky, 2008; Thornton & Camburn, 1989). In other words, the higher the level of parental religiosity and parental attendance at religious services, the more likely their children are to have a high level of religiosity as well as attend religious services.

Pertaining to gender differences, research studies consistently indicate that females attend religious services more often, more frequently participate in religious youth groups, and report being more religious overall, compared to their male counterparts (Burris et al., 2009; Miller & Hoffman 1995; Murray-Swank et al., 2005; Rostosky, Regnerus, & Wright, 2003). In comparison to men, women more frequently report that attendance at such services is important and indicate the salience of religious faith in their everyday lives (Arnett & Jensen, 2002).

Sex and Emerging Adults

The following sections will discuss the literature as it pertains to the sexuality of heterosexual emerging adults. Specifically, emerging adults' attitudes regarding sexuality, the sexual decision making process, and the sexual behaviors, in which emerging adults engage. In addition, each section will indicate the role of religion as found in the literature in each of these domains of sexuality.

Sexual Attitudes

The research studies that have examined sexual attitudes and the impact of religiosity have found that religiosity is associated with more conventional attitudes regarding sexual

activity (Lefkowitz et al., 2004; Murray, Ciarrocchi, & Murray-Swank, 2007; Thornton & Camburn, 1989) as well as more negative perceptions of condom use (Lefkowitz et al., 2004). In addition, Reed and Meyers (1991) found that extrinsic religiosity (e.g. church attendance) was correlated with more sexual promiscuous attitudes toward sexual activity, whereas intrinsic religiosity was associated with conservative attitudes as it relates to sexuality. This lends support to the notion that when religion becomes more personal or intrinsically motivated, as it does in emerging adulthood; it has more impact on behavior (Barnett, Jackson, Smith, & Gibson, 2010). Based on a review of 38 quantitative studies examining religiosity and extramarital sexual activity, Koenig (2001) found that 90 percent of the findings indicated that more religious individuals reported more negative attitudes concerning nonmarital sex than less religious participants.

However, Cochran and Beeghley (1991) argued that these findings should not be generalized to all religious denominations. In their study, grounded in reference group theory, it was found that attitudes regarding sexuality were influenced by particular religious denominational tolerance to premarital sexuality. In other words, attitudes toward premarital sexual permissiveness are less likely to be influenced by religiosity when individuals are members of a faith that have tolerant official stands on the issue; the less tolerant the faith, the stronger the influence of religiosity on permissive premarital sexual attitudes. Exploration is a major developmental task related to the period of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000), and as such individuals will explore and develop their personal attitudes regarding sexuality throughout these particular years. Therefore, it is important to consider the implication of the influence religiosity has on the sexual attitudes of emerging adults.

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Sexual Decision Making

There is limited research pertaining to the impact of religion on the specific decision making process of emerging adults to engage in or abstain from sexual behaviors. The research available has found that religion can be a motivating factor in the decision making process. Findings from the longitudinal study conducted by Paul et al. (2000) indicated that religious beliefs are a significant factor in making decisions to abstain from sex past age 20, especially for men. In a study conducted by Gold et al. (2010) over half of the participants (52%) indicated that religion had "somewhat" impacted their decision to engage in sexual intercourse. In another study, McCabe and Killackey (2004) examined the factors that contributed to the decisions surrounding sexual behavior. Their findings indicate that the influence of religion did indeed play a role in their intentions to engage in sexual behavior. However, the results indicated that women's beliefs regarding the appropriateness of engaging in sexual behavior assisted in shaping their intentions to participate in sexual activity. Although, religion, per se did not contribute to their intentions to have sex, it may have played a role in their beliefs regarding whether or not it was appropriate to engage in premarital sex. Results stemming from this study must be interpreted in light of the fact that the sample only consisted of women. Therefore, further research is needed to explore the gender differences as it relates to the influence of religiosity in the sexual decision making process.

Sexual Behavior

The Center for Disease Control (CDC, 2010) provides daunting statistics regarding the sexual behavior of adolescents. Although the statistics obtained are specifically targeted toward describing the sexual behavior of high school students, the information provided is useful in understanding sexuality among emerging adults. In 2009, within the United States, 46% of high

school students indicated that they had engaged in sexual intercourse and 14% reported having at least four lifetime sexual partners. Of those that were sexually active, 34% reported not using a condom. In 2002, a report measuring participation in oral and anal sex among males and females aged 15 to 19, concluded that 11% of males and females had engaged in anal sex with someone of the opposite sex and 55% of males and 54% of females had participated in oral sex (CDC, 2010). With the high rates of engagement in sexual behaviors, it would be helpful to understand the role of religion in influencing the decision to engage in such behaviors.

Emerging adulthood is a time of change, this change often includes increased freedom from parents' grasp. Entering the college scene often includes less parental supervision and monitoring, which provides an opportunity for many persons to experiment with their identity by exploring their sexuality, which may result in engagement in more sexually risky behaviors. Sexual behaviors can be classified as risky when an individual participates in behaviors that would prove to be harmful to themselves or others (Robertson, 2010). Such behaviors may include, but are not limited to, having sex without a condom (Arnett, 2000), engaging in intercourse with a partner that has been exposed to a sexually transmitted disease, having multiple partners (Trepka et al., 2008), or casual sex (Arnett, 1996). Arnett (2000) proposed that several types of risk behavior, including risky sexual behaviors, peaks during emerging adulthood.

Research (Barkan, 2006; Lefkowitz et al., 2004; Zaleski & Schiaffino, 2000) has indicated that sexual behaviors, including high- risk behaviors, have been influenced by religious beliefs and values. The literature indicates a link between religiousness and less frequent engagement in overall sexual activity (Zaleski & Schiaffino, 2000). Specifically, religiosity has been tied to higher age at first engagement in sexual intercourse (Paul et al., 2000; Rostosky et

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al., 2003), less engagement in sexual intercourse (Sheeran, Abrams, Abraham, & Spears, 1993), fewer lifetime partners (Barkan, 2006; Lefkowitz et al., 2004; Koenig, 2001; Mahoney, 1980; Murray-Swank et al., 2005), lower total involvement in others sexual behaviors, such as petting (Mahoney, 1980; Murray-Swank et al., 2005), and less frequent engagement in high-risk sexual practices (Koenig, 2001; Lefkowitz et al., 2004; Zaleski & Schiaffino, 2000). The research has shown that religiosity may serve as a protective factor against sexual risk taking. However, it should also be noted that there are some inconsistencies throughout the literature concerning religious commitment and its affect on sexual behavior. For example, Bersamin, Walker, Waiters, Fisher, and Grube (2005) and Rosenbaum (2009) found that making a formal virginity pledge did not have any effect on sexual behavior.

In addition to the cross sectional studies that have contributed to the literature regarding religiosity and sexual behaviors, two longitudinal studies have provided evidence to sustain the belief that religiousness inhibits sexual activity among adolescents and emerging adults. Paul et al. (2000) followed 935 participants in New Zealand from age three to 21, with assessments every two years until age 15. After age 15, the respondents were assessed at 18 and 21 with particular focus on sexual behavior. Persistent engagement in religious activities was found to be crucial for sexual abstinence. The results indicated that the individuals who had remained abstinent were more consistently involved with religious activities at both 11 and 21 years. Similarly, in a classic study, conducted by Jessor and Jessor (1975), college students that transitioned from being a virgin to a nonvirgin over the course of the study, were less religious and attended church services less frequently than participants that remained virgins. Of particular interest is the consistent finding in the literature that indicates that highly religious individuals, whether intrinsically or extrinsically motivated, who are sexually active are more

likely to engage in sexual intercourse without using a condom (Lefkowitz et al., 2004; Zaleski & Schiaffino, 2000). In contrast to the majority of research concerning the impact of religion on sexual behaviors, sexual debut in particular, Lefkowitz et al. (2004) did not find that religiousness was correlated with age at first sex. This inconsistency may be credited to the difference in measures used to obtain information regarding religiosity and first sexual encounter.

Thornton and Camburn (1989) suggested that there may be a cause and effect relationship between religiosity and sexual behavior. In congruence with this notion, Lefkowitz et al. (2004) and Jessor and Jessor (1975) found that in comparison to sexually active participants, sexually abstinent individuals were more likely to attend religious services frequently, perceive that religion is a significant element within their daily lives, and were more likely to remain faithful to the teachings of their particular religion.

Gender Differences in Sexuality

Society seems to portray the idea that men and women differ significantly in relation to their participation in sexual behaviors and their attitudes regarding sexuality. With regard to gender differences, the research indicates that in general men hold more permissive attitudes regarding sexuality and engage in more sexual behavior than their female counterparts (Fischtein & Herold, 2007; Petersen & Hyde, 2010). However, it is important to note that the differences found, although statistically significant, were relatively small. In their metaanalytic review of research on gender differences in sexuality, Petersen and Hyde's (2010) most significant findings indicated that men were more likely than women to engage in sexually risky behavior such as, casual sex. Men were also more tolerant of the idea of participating in sexual intercourse when

only causally acquainted with an individual. Fischtein and Herold (2007) presented similar

findings in their research on the gender differences in Canadian adults.

The sociodemographic category of gender in relation to the inverse relationship between

religiosity and sexual behaviors and attitudes has not been widely studied (Barkan, 2006).

However, Barkan (2006) found that regardless of gender, religion was negatively correlated with

the number of sexual partners. The review of the current literature has indicated that there is a

gap within the research on religion and sexuality regarding emerging adults, specifically, the

significance of religion in the socialization process as it relates to sexuality, and the role of

gender within the relationship between religiosity and sexuality. Therefore, the current study

aims to explore these issues by utilizing two guiding questions:

1. How does religiosity impact the sexual socialization of emerging adults?

2. Is the relationship between religiosity and sexuality invariant across gender?

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

Sample and Procedure

This study included the analysis of existing data that were collected as part of a larger study on the sexual socialization of emerging adults. The researcher of this particular the study joined the research team during the data collection process. The researcher was involved in the transcription process of the data. A graduate student completed the initial transcription and the researcher then reviewed the transcriptions to increase accuracy for approximately two male interview transcriptions. Throughout the process the researcher was the primary transcriber for approximately five male interviews and two female interviews.

The aim of the current study was to examine how participants perceive their context, specifically as it pertains to religion, has influenced their sexual attitudes, behaviors, and personal decision making process. Participants were drawn from a convenience sample of students attending a large southeastern university. Potential participants were recruited through courses offered within the departments of Child Development and Family Relations and Criminal Justice. Students were told about the study and were asked to provide name, contact information, age, sex, major, and availability for the interview. Persons who were enrolled in a course taught by the principal investigator at the time the study was conducted as well as those that were advisees were excluded from the study. Participants were 10 males and 10 females aged 18 to 24. Recruitment efforts targeted individuals who ranged across a broad spectrum of ages, majors, religious, ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic backgrounds. This was done in order to maximize the diversity of the sample. Therefore, not all interested students from whom contact information was collected were selected for the study. IRB approval was obtained from the university's institutional review board prior to recruiting potential participants (Appendix A).

The interviews took place in a small, private, conference room located on campus. Interviews were conducted by two, trained graduate students, one male and one female. Male participants were interviewed by the male, and female interviews were conducted by the female. As part of the training, the interviewers participated in a pilot study, in which they each conducted one interview while the principal investigator observed. The participants of the pilot study also provided feedback regarding the interviews questions and the structure of the interview. Revisions were made according to the feedback provided. Information gathered for the purpose of the pilot study was not used in the analysis and was destroyed. Informed consent (Appendix B) was obtained prior to collecting data and respondents received a 20 dollar gift card to Target in exchange for their participation.

Measures

The study included an in depth, semi-structured interview and a questionnaire (Appendix C). The measures used in the current study were adapted from Shoveller, Johnson, Langille, and Mitchell (2004). The questionnaire was utilized to gather the demographic characteristics, and current sexual behavior relationships of participants. The interviews explored the different socializing agents that influence the sexuality of emerging adults. During the interview, participants were asked to reflect upon their experience with regards to the influence of their community, family, friends, religion, and the media on their sexual behavior. The following two questions were asked in the interview process and pertained specifically to religion and sexuality:

1. How would you describe your experiences with religion as it relates to sexuality?

2. How would you describe the way that the religious beliefs of others have affected your decisions about sexual behavior?

In addition to these two questions, responses to all questions addressed within the interview will be utilized in the analyses of the data, to further explore the relationship between religion and sexuality.

The interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes, were audio-recorded and later transcribed. Graduate and undergraduate research assistants transcribed the recorded interviews. Each interview was transcribed by at least two individuals to maximize accuracy of the statements provided.

<div align="center">

Data Analysis

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Following the transcription process, all interviews were entered into the Nvivo8 program to begin the coding process. The transcriptions were reviewed to identify particular themes that emerge from participant responses. Neuman (1997) identified the first pass through of raw data as open coding. Open coding involves the initial analysis of the data. Throughout this process, the researcher located themes and assigned initial codes (Neuman, 1997). The preliminary codes were identified by examining the two questions mentioned above that relate specifically to religion and sexuality. As Neuman (1997) suggested, these initial codes will be flexible and subject to change in subsequent analysis. Following open coding, the researcher engaged in axial coding. Axial coding refers to the second pass through of the data, in which the researcher examines the initial codes developed during open coding (Neuman, 1997). Throughout this process, the researcher sought to identify categories or concepts within the data that clustered together. Codes developed through the analysis of the two original questions were examined by reviewing the data from the remaining interview responses. The primary purpose of axial coding is to develop a sense of the connections between themes or concepts found within the data (Neuman, 1997). The final coding process is identified by Neuman (1997) as selective

coding. In this third pass through the data, specific cases were selected to illustrate well-developed themes.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The participants for this study were 20 male and female students enrolled at a large

southeastern university. Students ranged in ages from 18 to 24, with the average age being 20.35

years. The majority of the sample was Caucasian (n=12). Other ethnicities reported represented

a smaller portion of the sample, Hispanic/Latino (n=3), African American (n=4), Multi-racial

(n=1). Participants also represented 13 different educational majors, with the most common

areas of study being psychology (n=4) and criminal justice (n=4). Participants had completed a

mean of 15.2 years of education. The majority of the participants grew up in the suburbs (n=12).

Most of the respondents reported that they were either single or exclusively dating. The sexual

status of the sample was equally distributed between those in a sexual relationship at the time of

the interview and those that were not. It should also be noted that all of the participants indicated

that they were heterosexual. Most participants reported that their financial status while growing

up was either, average (n=10) or well off (n=8). *See Table 1*.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Pseudonym	Age	Major	Where you grew up	Ethnicity	Current Relationship Status	Currently Sexually Active	Financial Status
Alejandra	21	Child Life	Suburbs	Hispanic/Latino	Single	No	Average
Rachel	20	Nursing	Suburbs	Caucasian	Single	No	Well Off
Kate	18	Speech & Hearing Science	Suburbs	Caucasian	Casually Dating	No	Well Off
Alison	20	Communication	Suburbs	Caucasian	Single	No	Well Off
Shaylee	24	Psychology	Rural	Caucasian	Exclusively Dating & Cohabitating	Yes	Average
Jasmine	18	Interior Design	Suburbs	African American	Exclusively Dating	Yes	Average
Nicole	22	Communication	Urban	Caucasian	Casually Dating	Yes	Well Off
Ashley	18	Nutrition	Suburbs	Caucasian	Exclusively Dating	Yes	Well Off
Mallory	23	Psychology	Rural	Caucasian	Single	No	Average
Amanda	21	Elementary Education	Rural	Caucasian	Exclusively Dating	Yes	Well Off
Danta	19	Child Life	Suburbs	African American	Single	No	Average
Jamal	19	Social Work	Urban	African American	Single	No	Not very well off
Dustin	20	Exercise Physiology	Rural	Caucasian	Single	No	Not very well off
Jose	19	Psychology	Suburbs	Hispanic/Latino	Single	No	Average
Marcus	23	Marketing	Rural	African American	Exclusively Dating	Yes	Average
Martin	21	Psychology & Criminal Justice	Rural	Hispanic/Latino	Single	No	Average
Chris	18	Criminal Justice	Suburbs	Multi-Racial	Single	No	Average
Timothy	21	Criminal Justice	Suburbs	Caucasian	Exclusively Dating	Yes	Well Off
Shawn	23	Art	Suburbs	Caucasian	Cohabitating	Yes	Average
Jacob	19	Criminal Justice	Suburbs	Caucasian	Exclusively Dating	Yes	Well Off

The analysis of this study focused primarily on students' personal stories and perceptions regarding the impact of religion as it relates to sexuality. Two specific questions were used to guide the analysis: How does religion influence the sexual socialization of emerging adults and is the relationship between religion and sexuality invariant across gender? The analysis did not yield discernible patterns pertaining to gender differences surrounding the relationship between religious beliefs and sexuality; therefore, the article will focus on the first guiding question.

Overall, participants fell into two categories: *religion was present but no significant influence* and *religion significantly influenced my sexuality*. Further analysis discovered two patterns among the *religion was present but no significant influence* group: (a) lack of internalization of religious beliefs and (b) clashing messages. In addition, the analysis also revealed four different classification groups within the *religion significantly influenced my sexuality* category: abstinent, delayed sexual debut, regret and desire to change, and acceptance of all lifestyles. Across these three groups, two recurrent substantive themes were present: (a) internalization of religious teachings and (b) consistency of messages between influential sources (i.e. family, friends, and school). Each of these themes is described below.

First, the individuals' who felt that religion only played a small role in their personal decision making process regarding their sexuality will be discussed. The following section will address the *religion significantly influenced my* sexuality group and the evident patterns and themes that emerged. It should be noted that filler words such as "um" and "you know" were removed from the quotes in the following sections. Effort was made to preserve the original ideas and messages illustrated through respondent quotes. In addition, respondents were given pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality.

Religion Was Present but No Significant Influence

Over half of the sample (n=12) expressed that religious beliefs did not have a significant impact on their decisions regarding sexual behavior. Throughout the narratives of these individuals, it was often mentioned that religion was a present part of their life or had been in the past. However, participants within this group perceived that religion was not a significant source of influence regarding sexual decisions. The analysis of this category generated two distinct themes: (a) lack of Internalization of religious beliefs and (b) clashing messages.

Lack of Internalization of Religious Beliefs

As mentioned previously, many respondents indicated that religion had been part of their life at one point in time. Although religion was present, it was not a salient source of influence regarding the sexual decision making process. The narratives of the participants indicated that their personal beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviors were not consistent with religious teachings. This finding may be related to the internalized nature of the religious beliefs among these individuals. In other words, these respondents had been instilled with a particular set of beliefs during childhood and adolescence, but did not incorporate the specific values and attitudes taught by the religious organization, to which they belonged, into their personal belief structure. Respondents classified within this category illustrated that their commitment to religion was more of an outward expression rather than an intrinsic or internal belief. For example Alison, a 20-year old female, said:

> I don't think that religion has played a big role in my experiences…I mean, being Catholic, it's not sex without marriage. But, I haven't really followed that, so …it hasn't really played the big role in my experiences.

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Jacob, a 19-year old male, echoed these attitudes pertaining to religious beliefs and sexuality:

> I'm not really practicing Catholic or anything… I mean religion doesn't play much into how I view sex but, I can see how if we were a stronger Catholic family it would definitely be absolutely nothing before marriage… To me, they're [Catholic beliefs about sexuality] not really that important 'cause I don't really see the need to have absolutely no sex if you're going to be safe about it.

Shawn, a 23-year old male exemplified a lack of internalization of religious beliefs and values:

> Well, my mom is Christian and my dad not so much, so I grew up going to church with my mom and my dad wouldn't come. Lately, I mean I would describe myself as Christian, but I don't go to church. I guess I would hesitate to describe myself as Christian at this point because I don't really agree with the conservative slant that has been lately…you always hear, "you can't have sex before marriage". That's what you're told and they when you're in middle school and high school, that's like, alright well you want to find out what's going on basically. So I grew up saying that was discouraged, but also just getting what you see in reality, you realize that's just basically not always the case, just curiosity and whatnot. I didn't really feel the need to wait for marriage… I think that when the bible says "don't have sex before marriage", that's a good thing to teach in that context because you don't want people just whoring around or just doing all of these awful degrading things to themselves that's not positive. But if you're in a committed relationship I don't feel like it necessarily makes sex good or bad just because you're married. I don't feel like that. I feel like it's more about the innocence and what's going on between the two people and how they're approaching it rather than marriage.

In response to a question concerning the impact of religious beliefs on sexual behavior, Ashley, an 18-year old female, and Mallory, a 23-year old female, also stated that religion was not a big factor in the decision making process:

> It's not really had too much on an impact as far as, it was good or bad…Cause I know for sure, I don't think it's had an impact on sexual behavior at all.

> It definitely hasn't been followed, to what the bible says or how the Christian faith practices it. It definitely, it didn't really influence me. Not like it did some people.

Clashing Messages

In addition to the lack of internalization of religious beliefs and values, the narratives of the respondents within the *religion was present but no significant influence* group revealed that the messages received from various influences were inconsistent. These other influencing

sources such as the family, media, and peers were often conflicted in the messages being

conveyed to the developing individual. The majority of participants within this group classified

these various socializing agents (i.e. family, media, and peers) as significant sources of influence

when it came to making decisions about sexuality. Marcus, a 23-year old male shared his

experience with the inconsistent messages being received from intersecting influences:

> My experiences with it [religion], ever since I was a child I was raised in church. I
> attended all my life. It's always been taught to abstain, abstain, abstain; wait 'til you are
> married. As a kid I always got that, but as I grew up and got older things… I just feel
> like, you practice this religion, they say abstain, abstain, abstain, but it's so hard when sex
> is being thrown at you constantly from watching TV…your hormones are going crazy
> and these girls are just showing off their bodies…It's like they say to abstain, but yet I
> would be at church and I would know of people at church who were having sex and older
> adults who weren't married having children…You see people on one end saying "oh I'm
> going this, we're abstaining, wait 'til marriage"… but, on the other hand you see there are
> people outside of church hooking up and people start having babies out of wedlock, so
> it's like, well it doesn't matter… Sex is a natural thing. It is something that you want to
> experience and then you have your friends around you telling you, "ah man, I had sex, it
> was great!" It's talked up so much… It's [religion] telling you one things but then again
> society is telling you, "it's ok, explore your sexual side".

Many respondents indicated that parents understood that in today's society, children are going to

have sex. Therefore, family rules were targeted at practicing safe sex rather than abstaining from

sex until marriage. For example, Jacob shared his mother's beliefs that influenced family rules

regarding sexual behavior:

> She understands that this day and age, you can't really expect kids to have not sex at all
> until they're 20, 24, whenever they get married. So she didn't really follow that belief of
> Catholicism.

Danta, a 19-year old male, stated his mother's saying regarding the use of condoms:

> Before you go in a storm, make sure you have a rain coat.

In response to a question concerning the family rules and norms about sexual behavior, Jamal, a

19-year old male, indicated that the family rules were aimed at practicing safe sex rather than

delaying sexual intercourse until marriage:

> You can, you just don't need to do it right now…As you get older and learn more about it
> and stuff you can, but you still have to be safe…you're going to respect my house and not
> have sex in here until you are an appropriate age.

Within regards to media, several individuals indicated that the messages stemming from the

media often were inconsistent with religious teachings. In response to how concerning the

messages of the media and their influence of sexuality, Alison explained:

> It [media] made me more curious and I made it, you always make it seem like it's ok to
> engage in sexual behavior at a young age. I mean it makes is seem more normal. There's
> a show today to talk about teenage pregnancy, and teen mom. All that kind of stud
> makes it seem more acceptable now.

Marcus also shared his idea that the media portrays that you need to have sex to be cool:

> I kind of felt like, if I don't have sex then you're not going to be the cool guy, you're
> going to be the nerd on every sitcom. The one with the glasses and the suspenders, like
> Steve Urchel, something like that.

In addition to messages received from parents and the media, the analysis revealed that the

majority of individuals perceived that their peers were a significant source of influence regarding

sexual decisions and behavior. However, oft times these peer groups were sending messages that

that collided with the messages received through religious organizations. Shawn described how

his peers viewed sexuality:

> I feel like most of my friends, I mean, I've only had sex with girls that were my girlfriend
> at the time and that isn't necessarily the case with a good many of my friends. It's not a
> value thing for me. I guess I'm just not a promiscuous person.

Jamal discussed the different values and beliefs concerning sexuality among his friends:

> Some have had more sexual partners that I have, I guess you would call them the little
> slut bags or whatever. Because they brag about it like "I'm going to go to this party and
> hook up with this girl". Some people just have different views and values I guess. Some

were like "I've done it, experienced it, I'm just going to wait until I'm married" or "I'm going to wait until I get older and get to know the girl, or whatever. I'm not just going to go to a party and sleep with her".

Religion Significantly Influenced My Sexuality

Eight respondents indicated that religion was a substantial influence concerning their decisions about sexuality. During the analysis, four categories were identified pertaining to the significant role religion played in the sexual decision making process: abstinent, delayed, regret and desire to change, and acceptance of all lifestyles. Religious beliefs were an important factor in decisions to remain abstinent until marriage or delay sexual debut. In addition, religious beliefs also contributed to individuals' feelings of regret and/or an expression of desire to return to religious teachings and again remain faithful until marriage or at least until in a significant relationship.

Three participants (2 females, 1 male) explicitly stated that they had remained true to religious teaching and had not engaged in sexual intercourse at the time of the interview. Alejandra, a 21-year old female, shared:

> For me, it was like, it was a sin if you had sex before marriage, because you have to remain pure 'til you are married with that person God has for you. So I kind of followed what my parents expected of me.

Kate, an 18-year old female, concurred:

> I was a good kid so I followed the rule, you know. Wait until you are married. Wait for the right guy.

Rachel, a 20-year old female, expressed that she had tried to remain faithful to church teachings to abstain from sexual intercourse until marriage.

> I was abstinent 'til I was 20-years old, this past year. And I think a big thing came from that teaching that, you know, you should wait until you marry.

Both Nicole, a 22-year old female, and Amanda, a 21-year old female, conveyed that religion

had influenced their feelings of regret following participation in sexual intercourse.

> I know for me, it [religion] played a large role, because I have always seen myself
> waiting because of my religion. That does not end up happening, but I dated my first
> boyfriend, who I actually ended up losing my virginity to. He was the same way I was,
> don't have sex until marriage, and that is what actually ended up breaking us up. It's just
> we both kind of gave into it… I think we were just really disappointed in ourselves and
> maybe almost resented each other a little bit for it.

> Probably as I've matured, but really opposite of my friends, I think it's [sex] has become
> more and more of a special act to me from when I was younger, whereas with them
> [peers] it's just whatever. But, I definitely, and I regret a little bit of my past now looking
> back. I wish I could have waited a little longer. ….. It [religion] kept me from falling into
> that path that, like I said, my friends in college have fallen into. Just because although I
> engaged in it, I still know it's wrong….Still, I wish, oh my gosh, I wish I hadn't done you
> know and I saved that or whatever. But, that's something that I can't take back and I can
> just ask to be forgiven and rely on my faith.

Chris, an 18-year old respondent who had previously engaged in a promiscuous lifestyle prior to

finding God, voiced his desire to change and live his life in accordance with church teachings.

> Right now my decision is flat out not until marriage, sorry and not with a non-Christian.
> After my encounter with God last semester and dealing with the relationship with God
> and Jesus, flat out not anymore."… Before it was as long as I was in a relationship,
> whether it would be for a few days, week, or month, hey, I'm in a relationship with this
> person. I've made some kind of commitment, it's all good. But now it's like not even if
> I got in a relationship with somebody, not until marriage

The Brazilian religion practiced by Jose, a 19-year old male, though not a mainstream religion,

influenced his views regarding sexuality. The belief of accepting other was internalized and

incorporated into his views on sexuality:

> I go to church. I am from Brazil; it's like a Brazilian religion. The religion is very open
> to sexual orientation stuff. So, in that religion, I've become very open to meeting people
> who are gay or lesbians. And I know that if I wanna go that path, it wouldn't be a
> problem with my religion.

> Despite the differing levels of religious influence among these categories, two major

themes emerged regarding the role of religion in the sexual socialization among these emerging

adults: (a) Internalization of religious teachings and (b) Consistency of messages between influencing sources (i.e. friends, family, and school). In other words, regardless of which category those who had been influenced by religion were in (abstinent, delayed, regret and change, or acceptance of all lifestyles), the two themes of internalization and consistent messages were evident.

Internalization of Religious Beliefs

Further analysis of those who were influenced by religion revealed that regardless of sexual activity status, respondents had internalized the religious beliefs into personal beliefs that influenced their decisions about sexual activity. In other words, as an individual begins to develop a set of personal beliefs they draw on previous knowledge and beliefs. As an individual comes to understand the specific beliefs or norms that have been established by a religious organization, they begin to make sense of such beliefs and discover their value and adapt them into their personal belief system. Overall, these students had incorporated specific religious beliefs and practices, which had previously been more external messages, into personal values and beliefs that were used to guide their attitudes and decisions regarding sexual behavior. In response to questions about how religious beliefs affected their decisions about sexual behavior, these students expressed an internalization of religious beliefs. For example, Dustin, an 18-year old male, specified how he internalized his childhood religious beliefs and accepted them as his own:

> At a young age, sex was something that you just didn't do. Like, it was wrong to do. I didn't understand why, or what the reason for that was. I just knew that it was wrong, so I was raised. Then, I got a little bit older and really understood what religion was about and my opinions on it, and God, my faith in God. I kind of realized that sex isn't bad at all, 'cause as long as it was within the confines of marriage than that's honorable, it's good, it's clean, but outside of marriage is impure, it's kind of hurtful in many ways .

Alejandra echoed this sentiment of adapting childhood beliefs into a personal belief structure to govern behavior:

> I care what I think about myself. Because the way I was raised, I was raised to know that I am valuable and my body is a temple of holy spirits and it's something sacred that I can't just do what I want with it.

Chris depicted his experience with religious beliefs and vividly describes how these particular beliefs did not influence him until they were adapted into his personal belief structure:

> The religious beliefs I grew up with didn't quite affect me, until I stated to develop having religious beliefs of my own. Last semester I joined campus ministries. I found God. After that I did what the Bible said I should do because it's God's word and it dives so much deeper into how sin affects my life and sin affects my relationship with God. It has completely changed my life and the way I perceive things.

Rachel indicated her beliefs surrounding the issue of religious observance and sexual behavior:

> I feel like that if you are actively participating in your church, then you are less likely to engage in sexual relations before you are married. And that was the case for me…I feel like sex is such a big thing, it' showing that you love someone. I feel like it's not so much an action but so much more of a feeling. You shouldn't just have sex with like, you know, some hot guy or whatever… I think that it's the morals and values that keeps me from whoring myself out.

Consistency of Messages between Influencing Sources

A recurring theme discovered during the analysis was the idea that the majority of the individuals influenced by religion also had other influencing sources, such as family, friends, and sexual education through the school system that reinforced the church teachings regarding sexuality. In other words, these students received messages across these various influences that were in accordance with the different beliefs of their religious practices. Students who perceived that religion had played a role in their decisions surrounding sexuality often pointed out that parental expectations were in line with religious teachings. Sometimes these expectations were explicitly stated and clearly understood. For example, Alejandra and Rachel indicated how their parents expressed specific desires and expectations regarding sexual decisions:

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The way they [parents] raised me, it was like you have to remain pure and virgin, 'til you get married… I remember they used to tell me, "You have to remain pure, because that's something that you have to do".

My parents, you know, they never …sat down and said, "Alright, this is what happens". But, they, there was just something that was I don't know if it ever came across, it was just kind of stated, don't have sex.

Other times parental expectations were implied rather than directly stated. Although, there were not specific conversations between parents and respondents regarding sexually behavior, it seemed that respondents clearly understood what was expected of them. Kate stated:

Sex wasn't really talked about. No it wasn't. No, it was just understood, you don't have sex until you are married.

Dustin echoed this statement about implied parental expectations:

I don't ever remember the conversations with my parents about having or not having sex, I guess. It was more or less implied.

Although the religion practiced preached acceptance of all lifestyles and was not as concerned with saving sexual intercourse until marriage, it did have a profound influence on Jose, a 19-year old male, and his views on sexuality. In addition, his parents provided expectations that were consistent with church teachings:

My parents taught me not to be close-minded, but they also reinforced accepting people, knowing that I'll be accepted in my group.

Parental expectations were also understood and enforced through specific family rules and parental monitoring. Respondents mainly discussed rules surrounding the topics of media allowance, dating, and girlfriends and boyfriends in the house. Regarding parental rules surrounding media, Dustin and Rachel shared how their parents monitored the media to which they were exposed:

My parents did try to avoid shows that did talk about sex and stuff. They try to keep it out of the house, I guess, so, more of a sheltered life.

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My dad was very strict with this [media], as far as what we could or couldn't do on like the internet or TV. The internet always had like a filter on it and it was password protected. And with TV, there were stations that were blocked. Or after a certain time, it would be blocked. So, I think that I was sheltered a lot as far as like things I wasn't, you know.

Rachel, Nicole, and Amanda discussed an overarching family rule to keep the bedroom door open at all times when with the opposite sex:

Our rule was you had to keep your door open. Like, if, I had a boyfriend that was upstairs with me, my dad would say as soon as we go up the stairs, "make sure you keep the door open".

When I got older and would have guys over, I had to leave the door open, especially 16 and 17, no guys allowed in my bedroom. We had to be in a common area or whatnot.

In addition to family, peers were often mentioned as a very influential source pertaining to decisions made about sexual activity. Most of the respondents that perceived religion as having a significant role throughout the decision making process also noted that their friends held similar beliefs and often had the same values. Dustin expressed his friends' views concerning sex before marriage:

Within my group of friends and people I interact with often, we have the same common beliefs as far as sex should not be before marriage. That's just simply to honor God instead, put God first in our lives.

Chris illustrated how his friends, who are associated with his religion, have helped him to understand the importance of remaining faithful to the religious teaching to remain virtuous until marriage:

When I joined Campus Ministries, people were a lot different. They were accepting me, but they knew what way was right and their lives were so much happier than mine, just happier people. So it was like, hey, maybe if I start living this way then maybe I will be the happy person. And surprisingly enough, getting rid of a lot of sinful crap that lowers the stress of life, worry of life, problems, by living the Word of God is surprisingly, though is hard to do, makes life so much less complicated... Just being around those background people showed me a group of people that I hadn't seen before. I didn't think this could be done. I was like wow!

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In regard to her peers, Nicole shared:

> I was in a group of friends that were all very straight-edged.

In incidences, in which an individual had friends that did not hold the same values, they were able to remain faithful to the teachings because they had internalized the belief and accepted it into their personal belief system. Because of the internalized nature of the teachings these individuals were able to use their personal belief as a guiding principle to withstand peer pressure. For example, Alejandra expressed how she makes her decisions based on her beliefs rather than peer pressure:

> Well, most of my friends are Christians, and now that I moved here [North Carolina], most of my friends are Christians, and they think the same way. I'm not going to say all of them follow, but we believe. And if they don't, I mean, that's their decision. But I'll stick to my decision. I won't be sexually active because they do it. I will remain pure because I want to and it's my decision.

In addition, a few individuals expressed that they learned from their friends sexual experiences although they didn't necessarily share the same values. Although Kate expressed that her friends are all sexually active, she described that their experiences influenced her, because her friends are making decisions similar to those she would make if she were sexually active. For example:

> All of my friends are sexually active, and I'm not. But, I see decisions that I would make. (i.e. choose to have sex, but not often, in a committed relationship).

Rachel also illustrated how she utilized her friends' experiences to guide her personal decisions about sexuality:

> I hear stories from my friends, sometimes good ones, sometimes bad ones. And I think because there was a mix of bad ones in there, it was, ok, I really don't wanna go there yet.

A pattern also discovered through the analysis is that the 50% of the individuals influenced by religion were also taught abstinence in sexual education courses conducted by the

school system. This message reinforces religious teachings to save sexual intercourse until marriage.

Overall, the analysis yielded two substantive themes: *religion was present but no significant influence* and *religion significantly influenced my sexuality.* Individuals who perceived no significant influence did not internalize religious beliefs and often received inconsistent messages among intersecting influences. Participants who felt that religion had played a role in their decisions about sexuality conveyed that they had internalized religious beliefs. In addition, the messages among different socializing forces were consistent. The findings will be discussed in the following section.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

A qualitative analysis was conducted of 20 college students' personal stories about the role of religion in relation to their sexuality and sexual decision making. Two substantive themes emerged: *religion was present but no significant influence* and *religion influenced my sexuality*. The analysis revealed specific experiences of individuals as it pertained to religious beliefs and their impact on sexuality.

Within the first group, individuals indicated that religion did not play a significant role in their decisions regarding sexuality. These individuals acknowledged the beliefs of the religious organization to which they belonged, but stated that they did not follow these specific guidelines; there was a discrepancy between overarching beliefs and behavior. In such cases, individuals reflected on experiences and often noted other factors as the source of influence on behavior. Therefore, these participants perceived that religion did not significantly influence their decisions regarding sexuality. Two patterns were evident among this group: (a) lack of internalization of religious beliefs and (b) clashing messages among sources of influence. Although these individuals had grown up with religion in the background, they had not incorporated these beliefs into their personal belief system. Therefore, these beliefs were not used an influence to guide sexual decisions and behavior. In addition, other socializing sources, such as family, friends, and the media were not consistent in the messages conveyed, but rather providing confusing and clashing messages.

In the second group, *religion significantly influenced my sexuality*, four major classifications among participants emerged: abstinent, delayed sexual debut, regret and desire to change, and acceptance of all lifestyles. Across these four groups, two distinct themes were generated: (a) internalization and (b) consistency of messages between influencing sources.

Religiosity and Sexuality among Emerging Adults

The themes that emerged during the analysis concerning more religious individuals'

decisions to remain abstinent, delay sexual debut, or regret behavior and desire to change may be

interpreted in light of the recent literature that suggests that highly religious individuals are less

likely to engage in sexual intercourse or delay sexual debut (Paul, Fitzjohn, Eberhart-Phillips,

and Dickson, 2000; Rostosky et al., 2003; Zaleski & Schiaffino, 2000). In their research

concerning motivators for remaining abstinent, Abbott and Dalla (2008) found that many

abstinent participants attributed their decision to remain sexually inactive to religious values.

Paul et al. (2000) concluded that religious values and beliefs were a significant factor in the

decision to delay sexual debut beyond the age of 20. Emerging adulthood is characterized by

change and identity exploration (Arnett, 2000; 2006), which may influence individuals' sexual

decision making. In particular, those participants who delayed sexual activity or who

experienced regret about past sexual activity might have been in the identity exploration stage

described by Arnett (2000). However, the exploration and change, as well as the reevaluation of

beliefs, which occurs during emerging adulthood, allowed these participants to reflect on past

decisions with regret and determine to recommit their lives to remain faithful to religious beliefs.

In addition religions that preach acceptance of all lifestyles provide the opportunity for emerging

adults to explore the options available to them without feelings restricted by intolerant religious

organizations.

Internalization of Religious Beliefs

The narratives of several (n=12) individuals in the study indicated that they had grown up

with religious beliefs, but such beliefs had not become incorporated into their personal belief

structure. On the other hand, eight respondents conveyed that they had taken the religious

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beliefs of the overall religious organization, which they had adapted them into their personal belief system. The external messages (e.g., abstinence until marriage and acceptance of all lifestyles), taken from religious organizations were evaluated and had become more of an intrinsic motivator. These qualitative data provided new insight into how religion may influence decisions regarding sexuality among emerging adults.

The individuals within the *religion significantly influenced my sexuality* group, in particular, expressed that they had come to understand the value and importance of following religious teachings. Arnett (2000; 2006) has classified emerging adulthood as a time of exploration and change. Throughout the exploration process, in this particular phase of life, individuals reexamine previously held beliefs and alter them to fit within their personal belief system (Arnett & Jensen, 2002; Hoge et al., 1993). The individuals who perceived religion to have a significant influence on their sexuality described experiences with internalizing and adapting religious views instilled in them throughout childhood. Individuals within this group can be classified as identity achieved (Marcia, 1966) because they indicated a crisis in which they examined beliefs and committed themselves to a belief system, which was used to guide sexual decisions and behavior.

Individuals who expressed that religion was present in their lives but was not a significant influence on their sexuality also experienced a period of reexamination, in which their beliefs and perceptions about sexuality changed. The individuals within the *religion was present but no significant influence* group had not come to understand the value of the teachings of any particular religious organization. For these participants, as Arnett and Jensen (2002) discussed, previously held beliefs were discarded with nothing more convincing with which to replace them. In other words, these individuals are in a state of identity diffusion, in which they have not

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committed to childhood beliefs, but have not yet committed to another belief structure, and are not much concerned with the fact (Marcia, 1966). The childhood beliefs were not internal motivators used to direct decisions and these respondents were more likely to engage in sexual activity than those classified within the *religion significantly influenced my sexuality* group. This is consistent with the findings of Barnett, Jackson, Smith, and Gibson (2010) who found that as religion becomes more intrinsically motivated, rather than just an outward expression, it has more influence over behavior.

Intersecting Influences

Respondents who fell within the *religion was present but no significant influence* group, indicated that messages from the socializing forces, such as religion, family, media, and peers often conflicted with one another. On the contrary, individuals who perceived that religion impacted their sexual decision making process expressed a consistency of messages received from several sources, specifically, religion, family, friends, and school educational programs. These participants indicated that parental expectations and family rules were aligned with religious teachings. In addition, friends held the same religious beliefs pertaining to sexuality or had similar values. The majority of students' in this group also indicated that the "abstinence only" program was promoted in their sexual education courses offered through the school district.

Rostosky et al. (2004) acknowledged the fact that religion should be placed in the context of the socializing forces. In the *religion significantly influenced my sexuality* group, respondents described how other socializing forces impacted their decisions to remain faithful to the religious teachings in which they believed. The findings stemming from this analysis demonstrate the idea proposed by the human ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1989) that

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socialization is influenced on many levels. In particular, in this study, individuals' narratives described how religion influenced their sexual socialization through different socializing agents on several levels. Although the human ecological theory takes into account the multiple levels of influence, it places particular emphasis on the micro- and meso-systems, because these systems have the most direct influence on any individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1989).

In the *religion significantly influenced my sexuality* group, individuals depicted how their religion through their family, peers, and school system influenced their sexual decisions and behavior. In addition, participants who felt that religion did not play a major role in their sexual decisions were influenced in diverse ways through the lack of consistency among various influencing sources (i.e. family, media, peers, and religion). Although all of these socializing forces impact the individual directly, it seems that the interconnection between influences has the greatest impact as far as religion influencing sexuality among emerging adults. This interaction occurs within the mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1989). Bronfenbrenner (1989) identified the mesosystem as the interaction between two members existing within the microsystem. In other words, the relationship between parents and friends and the interaction among messages regarding sexuality received by the developing individual was found to be significant within this study.

The majority of individuals who identified religion as an influence on their sexual decision making received consistent messages across all three sources (i.e., family, peers and religion). Parents reinforced church teachings through setting parental expectations such as "don't have sex" and family rules that were consistent with beliefs, such as keeping the bedroom door open when with the opposite sex and parental monitoring of activities. Participants mainly expressed the monitoring of media content consumed through filters and password protection.

This is consistent with findings from Baier and Wampler's (2008) findings that parental monitoring through parental availability and expression of parental expectations regarding sexuality influenced decisions regarding sexual behaviors.

Although parenting styles were not measured in this study, findings seemed to suggest that there is a possible relationship between authoritative parenting and sexual decision making. Authoritative parenting is characterized by warm, responsive relationships, which foster autonomy and provide clear boundaries and expectations (Baumrind, 1991). Parental monitoring and assertiveness is a necessary part of establishing an authoritative parenting style (Baumrind, 1991). Participants classified within the *religion significantly influenced my sexuality* category expressed that there were clear expectations and boundaries set by their parents. In addition, several individuals declared that parents monitored their activities and behavior. Landor, Simons, Simons, Brody, and Gibbons (2011) found that individuals' with parents with higher levels of religiosity were more likely to demonstrate effective authoritative parenting strategies, which led to the child's association with less sexually permissive peers. This in turn decreased risky sexual behavior. This is consistent with the findings of this study that indicate that both parents and peers play a significant role in the sexual decision making process.

In this study, peers influenced sexuality through their personal religious beliefs and behaviors which had a direct impact on developing persons and their decisions to abstain, delay, or engage in sexual intercourse. Research has shown that religious individuals tend to associate with peers that have similar values and that discourage sexual permissiveness (Landor et al., 2011). This in turn influences individuals' decisions to refrain from engaging in sexually permissive behaviors. In addition, for respondents who perceived that religion was a salient influence throughout the decision making process also indicated that the school education

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programs aligned with parental expectations, familial rules, and peer beliefs, which provided consistency.

This significant intersection among socializing sources also fits within the bounds of the broad and narrow socialization theory, which suggests that there are several different sources of influence that work together throughout the socialization process to impact development (Arnett, 1995). The participants were individuals who had been brought up within a broad culture that allowed autonomy and self-development. Therefore, it can be noted that the broader cultural context may explain the varied range of developmental pathways taken by the individuals represented in the study. However, the religious subculture, which can be characterized as a *narrow culture* may indicate why individuals within the *religion influenced my sexuality group* were found to fit within four categories. Although varied, these individuals may have had more restrictiveness which limited the developmental outcomes.

Limitations

The findings of this analysis demonstrate how religion influences the sexual socialization of emerging adults through the internalization of religious beliefs and the consistency of messages between socializing forces. However, the findings are limited by several factors. First, the sample was a convenience sample of mostly middle class students, enrolled in public southeastern university. The sample size was also small, limiting the effects of the findings. The data collection process also poses several limitations. Although the participants were encouraged to provide meaningful and detailed information regarding their experiences, some provided only basic information that lacked specificity. This limitation may be the result of possible leading questions during the interview process, the lack of asking for further insight to specific responses, or simply students' unwillingness to share thoughtful experiences. Due to

limitations of an existing data set, the researcher was unable to create necessary questions and obtain needed information. With the use of self reporting instruments it is possible that individuals may have provided false information regarding their sexuality.

Despite the limitations, the qualitative data provide new insight into how religion and sexuality may be further explored in the future. Further investigation is required to determine how the socializing forces interact to impact emerging adults' decisions regarding sexuality. In addition, further research should be conducted to determine the process of internalization and how individuals come to examine and adapt these beliefs into a personal and unique belief structure.

Implications

This study has shed new light and understanding on the role of religion in the sexual socialization of emerging adults. The findings of this study have several implications for the field of family life education. These data reveal that although religious beliefs, parents, and peers influence the sexual decisions and behaviors of emerging adults, it is the intersection of these influences that create the greatest impact. The findings indicate that parents play a crucial role in the sexual development of their children. Parents have an important role to reinforce or negate the messages emerging adults receive from external sources. Parents need to take the initiative to monitor activities, provide opportunities for open communication, and know the friends with who their children may associate. Parents and peers are important sources in the internalization of religious messages. As such, parents' should strive to assist their children in understanding the values behind the messages received through religious beliefs. In essence, parents need to come to the understanding that their role as a parent is influential for their children as well as the peers with whom their children are acquainted.

Further research should examine the internalization process to determine how individuals come to internalize religious beliefs to further understand how this may impact sexual socialization. The findings suggest that parenting styles may indeed impact sexuality. Future research should further explore the relationship between authoritative parenting and the sexual decision making process. In addition, the results suggest that further research is needed to determine the importance of the consistency of messages received from the various influencing sources that play a role in the socialization process throughout emerging adulthood. Not only should research examine the consistency of messages among socializing forces, but how these influences are or are not working together to influence the acquisition of sexual knowledge as well as the sexual decision making process.

Conclusion

This study has provided great insight into the sexual socialization process of emerging adults. Specifically, the findings have indicated that religion, parents, and peers are major influencing sources when it comes to sexual decision making. In addition, the results suggest that these influencing sources may work together throughout the process. The consistency of sexuality messages from various influences was related to greater commitment to follow religious teachings. It is pertinent that research be continued to further the understanding of the dynamics between socializing forces and the sexual decision making process of emerging adults.

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APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL

EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY
University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board Office
1L-09 Brody Medical Sciences Building• 600 Moye Boulevard • Greenville, NC 27834
Office **252-744-2914** • Fax **252-744-2284** • www.ecu.edu/irb

TO: Sharon Ballard, PhD, Dept. of CDFR, ECU—134 Rivers Building

FROM: UMCIRB

DATE: September 8, 2011

RE: Expedited Continuing Review of a Research Study

TITLE: "A Qualitative Investigation of the Socio-Cultural Influences on Sexual Development"

UMCIRB #08-0618

The above referenced research study was initially reviewed and approved by expedited review on 10.29.08. This research study has undergone a subsequent continuing review using expedited review on 9.2.11. This research study is eligible for expedited review because it is on collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes. It is also a research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies. (NOTE: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) and (b)(3). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.)

The Chairperson (or designee) deemed this **Society for the Scientific Study of Sexuality** sponsored study **no more than minimal risk** requiring a continuing review in **12 months**. Changes to this approved research may not be initiated without UMCIRB review except when necessary to eliminate an apparent immediate hazard to the participant. All unanticipated problems involving risks to participants and others must be promptly reported to the UMCIRB. The investigator must submit a continuing review/closure application to the UMCIRB prior to the date of study expiration. The investigator must adhere to all reporting requirements for this study.

The above referenced research study has been given approval for the period of **9.2.11** to **9.1.12**. The approval includes the following items:

- Continuing Review Form (date 8.24.11)
- Protocol Summary
- Informed Consent (received 8.24.11)

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

The UMCIRB applies 45 CFR 46, Subparts A-D, to all research reviewed by the UMCIRB regardless of the funding source. 21 CFR 50 and 21 CFR 56 are applied to all research studies under the Food and Drug Administration regulation. The UMCIRB follows applicable International Conference on Harmonisation Good Clinical Practice guidelines.

IRB00000705 East Carolina U IRB #1 (Biomedical) IORG0000418
IRB00003781 East Carolina U IRB #2 (Behavioral/SS) IORG0000418
IRB00004973 East Carolina U IRB #4 (Behavioral/SS Summer) IORG0000418
Version 3-5-07

UMCIRB #08-0618
Page **1** of **1**

CONSENT DOCUMENT

Title of Research Study: Socio-cultural Influences on Young People's Sexual Development
Principal Investigators: Sharon M. Ballard, Kevin H. Gross, PhD
Institution: East Carolina University
Address: 150 Rivers Building
Telephone #: 252-328-1356

Exclusionary Information:
This informed consent can only be signed by persons who are 18 years of age or older and who are not cognitively impaired or who reside in an institutional form of housing (juvenile home, prison, residential facility for mental or physical care)

INTRODUCTION

You have been asked to participate in a research study being conducted by Dr. Sharon M. Ballard and Dr. Kevin H. Gross. This research study is designed to examine the ways in which context (e.g., family, school, community) affect sexual development. Participation in this study will involve a maximum of 2 hours.

PLAN AND PROCEDURES

To participate in this study you will be asked to sign this document. You will then be asked to complete a brief demographic survey (5 minutes) and then you will be interviewed (1 – 2 hours). The information we collect through the brief survey will be used to describe the characteristics (e.g., age, education, current sexual activity level) of the overall group of study participants. Our interview is confidential. Names and contact information of study participants are kept confidential. Your consent form will be stored in a locked file cabinet. The tape will be transcribed in such a way that all identifying information will be deleted - so no one will be able to identify you or people you describe during the interview. Please be aware that if you tell me of any current abuse or risk of abuse of someone under the age of 18, the law requires that an official report of this be made. During the interview, you will be asked about your past experiences with sexual education at school and at home.. The interview also includes questions about your religion and your community's overall attitudes about the acceptability of sexual behavior among teenagers. Finally, you have a chance to reflect on the media, your family, and your friends in relation to sexual attitudes and behaviors.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There is minimal psychological risk associated with thinking about one's sexual development. You may think more about the topic under investigation and as a result experience behavioral, emotional, and/or cognitive discomfort. In the event that you should report or visibly demonstrate discomfort, the interviewer will ask if you wish to continue. A list of appropriate referrals for psychotherapy will be provided if you should need assistance. There are no foreseeable economic risks since you will not be asked to incur a travel expense and all materials necessary to completing the forms and instruments will be provided for you if requested (e.g., writing instruments). There is minimal social risk associated with reporting information about one's social context in general and as it relates specifically to sexual development. A social risk may include heightened awareness about one's sexuality and a subsequent sensitivity to and/or change in perceptions about the different effects that individuals and/or institutions have had on theirs and others sexual development. This awareness may lead to changes in one's social interactions. In the event that the study should result in immediate heightened awareness and sensitivity to social interactions with others, a list of appropriate referrals for psychotherapy will be provided should they need assistance. To the best of our knowledge there are no legal and dignitary risks associated with this study.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS

For you, a potential benefit of participating in this study is having opportunity to gain insight into your sexuality. For others, what is learned from these interviews will provide a more detailed examination of the connections between society, social context, and the everyday experiences of young people, leading to a more complete understanding of complex health-related behaviors. This, in turn, may suggest new directions that future policy and sexual health promotion programs could take to increase their effectiveness.

SUBJECT PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY OF RECORDS

All interviews will be conducted by the principal investigators and two graduate students who will serve as research assistants. Data will be collected via a digital recorder. These files will be stored on a memory stick or external hard drive in a locked filing cabinet in the research room in the Rivers building. Interviews will be transcribed by two undergraduate research assistants. The original data will only be accessible by the principal investigators, the two graduate student interviewers, and graduate and undergraduate research assistants who will be transcribing the data. Transcriptions of the interviews will be saved onto an external hard drive and this will be locked in the same filing cabinet in the same secure research room. Identifying information will be changed and pseudonyms will be created to protect the identity of the participants in any manuscripts that are written based on this study.

TERMINATION OF PARTICIPATION

There are no foreseeable circumstances under which your participation would be terminated by the investigator(s). However, you may terminate your participation at any time as indicated in the section marked "voluntary participation" below.

COSTS OF PARTICIPATION

There are no anticipated costs for participation in this study.

COMPENSATION AND TREATMENT FOR INJURY

A $20 honorarium in the form of a gift card will be given upon completion of the interview.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Participating in this study is voluntary. If you decide not to be in this study after it has already started, you may stop at any time without losing benefits that you should normally receive. You may stop at any time you choose without penalty, loss of benefits, or without causing a problem with your education at this institution.

PERSONS TO CONTACT WITH QUESTIONS

The investigator will be available to answer any questions concerning this research, now or in the future. You may contact Dr. Sharon Ballard at phone number 252-328-1356 (days). If you have questions about you rights as a research subject, you may call the Chair of the University and Medical Center Institutional Review Board at phone number 252-744-2914 (days).

Title of Research Study: Socio-cultural Influences on Young People's Sexual Development

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

I have read all of the above information, asked questions and have received satisfactory answers in areas I did not understand.

_____ _____

Participant's Name **(PRINT)**   **Signature**   **Date**
Time

WITNESS: I confirm that the contents of this consent document were orally presented, the participant indicates all questions have been answered to his or her satisfaction, and the participant has signed the document.

_____

Witness's Name **(PRINT)**   **Signature**   **Date**

PERSON ADMINISTERING CONSENT: I have conducted the consent process and orally reviewed the contents of the consent document. I believe the participant understands the research.

Principal Investigator's **(PRINT)**   **Signature**   **Date**

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE AND QUESTIONNAIRE

Interview Guide

**Socio-Cultural and Institutional Influences on
Sexual Development**

Review the informed consent and interview structure:

♦ This session will be audio taped and will last approximately one hour.
♦ We'll begin our interview by completing a brief questionnaire (5 mins). The information we collect through this brief survey will be used to describe the characteristics (e.g., age, education, relationship status) of the overall group of study participants. Our interview is confidential. Names and contact information of study participants are kept confidential. Your consent form will be stored in a locked file cabinet. The recording will be transcribed in such a way that all identifying information will be deleted - so no one will be able to identify you or people you describe during the interview.
♦ Please be aware that if you tell me of any current abuse or risk of abuse of someone under the age of 18 the law requires that I must make an official report of this.
♦ Thank them for completing the brief demographic survey.
♦ While we're talking, I'll ask you to tell me about your family, peers, the media and school sexuality education experiences so I can better understand how these factors have affected your decision making about sexual practices, protection, and prevention of STDs and unwanted pregnancies.
♦ The interview includes questions about how you think religion and your community's overall attitudes about sexuality has influenced or continues to influence your own attitudes about sexuality.
♦ Do you mind if I take notes during our interview?
♦ Do I have your permission to record the interview?
♦ Review options for referrals to counseling services.
♦ Any questions about how we're going to spend our time today?

Opening Discussion

Answer only what you feel comfortable answering. You can start wherever you like. Your comfort level is the most important thing to keep in mind as you answer these questions. I also want to remind you that your identity will be kept confidential and no names will be used in reporting the data. What I'm most interested in hearing about is your experiences and how those experiences relate to your sexual attitudes and beliefs.

Let's begin by talking about what it was like for you to grow up in your community. I'd like to hear about your experiences as a teenager growing up as well as your beliefs and opinions about the community in general, thinking beyond specific sexual health issues for a moment. The second question will ask you to provide more specific descriptions of your opinions related to sexual health issues in the community in which you grew up.

Community Level Norms

1. Overall, how would you describe the general attitude towards young people living in the community in which you grew up (where you spent most of your teenage years)?

2. How would you describe the general attitude in that community toward sexual activity among teenagers?

Religion

3. How would you describe your experiences with religion as it relates sexuality?

4. How would you describe the way that the religious beliefs of others have affected your decisions about sexual behavior?

Media Influences

5. Describe how you think popular media (TV, movies, magazine, Internet) influenced your sexual attitudes and/or behaviors when you were growing up.

6. How has this influence changed over time?

Education

7. Where did you get your information about sexuality as you were growing up?

8. In terms of sexual education and reproductive health issues, how would you describe the kinds of services and information available for young people living in your community?

Now, let's begin to talk about some of your experiences with sexual education at school.

9. Try to recall your experiences with sex education at school.

10. How do you think these early sexual education experiences affect your current approach to making decisions about sexual behaviour?

Influences of Friends

11. Describe the sexual discussions you had with your friends as you were growing up.

12. How have these conversations with friends changed over time?

13. How do you think that your friends' sexual experiences differ from your own?

Growing Up In Your Family

14. As you were growing up, what were the family rules or "norms" about sexual behavior?

15. Can you tell me about the kinds of discussions you have had with your family about sex? Who did or does most of the talking?

Personal Decision Making

16. How did you decide what was best for you when you were making decisions about sex as a teenager?

17. Tell me how you currently make decisions about sexual practices?

18. How has your decision making about sex changed since your early sexual relationships? *Alternative phrasing for non-sexually active participants: How has your decision making about sex changed since you were a teenager?*

19. How do you think your thoughts and opinions about sexuality have changed over time?

Closing Remarks

20. Now that we have talked about various influences on your sexual development, which do you think has had the most influential and why?

21. What are your thoughts about sexuality in our culture today?

22. Are there further thoughts, opinions or feelings you would like to share?

- Thank you very much for your time and thoughtful participation. The information that you have provided will be very useful in our work.

Interviewer Notes

To be completed by study participant:

1. Gender: _____ Male   _____Female

2. How old are you? _____yrs.

3. How many years of education have you completed? _____yrs.

4. What is your academic major or intended major here at ECU?
   _____

5. Which would best describe where you grew up (if more than one place please check the one where you spent most of you time as a teenager)?

   Urban
   Rural
   Suburbs

6. How would you best describe your ethnicity? For example, some people describe themselves as Asian American or as Caucasian.

   _____

7. Whom do you currently live with? Check all that apply.

   ❑ Partner/spouse
   ❑ Friends/roommates
   ❑ Mother
   ❑ Father
   ❑ Step-mother/step-father
   ❑ Foster parents
   ❑ Grandparents
   ❑ I live alone
   ❑ Other (please specify): _____

8. What is your current relationship status?

- ❑ Single
- ❑ Casually dating
- ❑ Exclusively dating
- ❑ Engaged
- ❑ Engaged and Cohabitating
- ❑ Cohabitating
- ❑ Married
- ❑ Other (please write) _____

9. Using the following options, put a check beside the one that best corresponds to your sexual orientation.

Exclusively Heterosexual
Predominantly heterosexual, only incidentally homosexual
Predominantly heterosexual, more than incidentally homosexual
Equally heterosexual and homosexual
Predominantly homosexual: more than incidentally heterosexual
Predominantly homosexual: only incidentally heterosexual
Exclusively homosexual

10. Are you currently involved in sexual relationships? (check all that apply)

- ❑ No, I am not involved in a sexual relationship at this time
- ❑ Yes, with a woman
- ❑ Yes, with more than one woman
- ❑ Yes, with a man
- ❑ Yes, with more than one man

11. When you were a teenager, how financially well off was your family?

- ❑ Not at all well off
- ❑ Not very well off
- ❑ Average
- ❑ Well off
- ❑ Very well off

12. When you were a teenager, with whom did you live? Check all that apply.

- ❑ Mother
- ❑ Father
- ❑ Step-mother/step-father
- ❑ Foster parents
- ❑ Grandparents
- ❑ Other (please specify): _____