

HOPING SHE WILL RIGHT MY WRONG:
AN EXPLORATION OF WHAT MOTHERS SAY TO THEIR
ADOLESCENT AGE DAUGHTERS
ABOUT THEIR OWN EXPERIENCES WITH SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT

by

JESSICA P. ANDERSON

(Under the Direction of David W. Wright)

ABSTRACT

The dynamics of communication within the mother-daughter relationship are uniquely reflected through a cycle of influence that passes from one generation to the next (Rastogi and Wampler, 1999). This cycle can be observed among all racial groups and at various ages and stages of development. Adolescence is especially notable as the onset of puberty often initiates mother-daughter communication about sexual development (Feldman and Rosenthal, 2001). While scholars have studied various aspects of this dialogue, no research has been noted to explore what mothers say to their daughters about their own experiences. Through one time, semi-structured, interviews with five African American mothers of adolescent age daughters, analyzed using the Guide to Listening, this study demonstrates that factors such as how the mother describes her daughter, herself and her own experiences with sexual development influence four

themes representing what and how mother's choose to share their own experiences with their daughters.

INDEX WORDS: Mother-adolescent daughter relationship, Sexual development, Communication, Intergenerational messages, African American women

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DEDICATION

To all of the mothers

Who have ever looked into their daughter's eyes
and imagined a future full of unlimited happiness and success,
Who sacrifice their own for their daughters,
Who see themselves and fear similar sorrow and failures, but
Who realize that their past is the light for their daughter's future.

To all of the daughters

Who are maturing to understand why their mothers are who they are,
and realize that with time, they are reassuringly just the same,
Who embrace those similarities and hold them dearest,
Who find strength in knowing our mother's stories.

To my mother.

You are my light.

You are my strength.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This study will explore how mothers' past experiences with sexual development may filter the messages about sexual development that they share with their adolescent age daughters. Most specifically this study will ask what do mothers say to their daughters about their own experiences with sexual development and what are the factors influencing why or why not this communication takes place.

For the purposes of this study, mothers' past experiences with sexual development refers to mothers' experiences with sexuality related development as an adolescent and teenage female, messages received from the mothers' mother during this time frame and how the mothers felt and continue to feel about these experiences. Messages refer to advice, suggestions and comments about the daughters' sexual development and the mothers' own experiences that are shared from mother to daughter. Sexual development refers to internal and external physical and emotional changes related to menstruation, breast development and hormones, as well as interactions with the opposite sex such as dating and sexual intercourse. The rationale for this study is as follows.

Purpose of the Study

The mother-daughter relationship is a unique dyad that has been shown to be very influential on the development of an adolescent age female (Rastogi and Wampler, 1999). Through the often complex dynamics of verbal and nonverbal communication, mothers socialize their daughters toward a set of values, beliefs and actions related to various

aspects of development including self-esteem, academic success and relationships with others (Kerpelman, Shoffner and Ross-Griffin, 2002).

Mothers also socialize their daughters toward a set of values related to various aspects of the daughters' developing sexuality. Particularly during the developmental period of adolescence, mother-daughter communication about sexuality has been found to be influential on daughters' approaches to sexuality and sexual related changes and behaviors including menstruation, physical development, dating and sexual intercourse (O'Sullivan, Meyer-Bahlburg and Watkins, 2001).

Personal views on sexuality, such as expectations and meanings given to past and current experiences, have been found to have a range of very positive to very negative influences on how adult women report recollections of their sexual development as an adolescent age female (Brock and Jennings, 1993). Studies reveal that these recollections often carry over into adulthood and may subsequently have positive or negative influences on mothers' views of their daughter's as well as their own sexual development (Longmore, 1998). Realizing this cycle of influence, this study will consider the possibility that when women become mothers to daughters and attempt to socialize their daughters on the topic of sexual development, the mother's own earlier experiences will not only influence the mothers' views, but also what the mother chooses to say to her adolescent age daughter about her own experiences.

One racially distinct view is that of African American mother-adolescent daughter communication about sexual development. While many scholars have explored the connection between mothers and daughters (Boyd, 1989; Goldberg, 1995 and Beaumont, 2000), few studies have focused specifically on the distinct aspects of African American

maternal sexual socialization and the characteristics that may be unique to communication about sexuality between African American mothers and their adolescent age daughters (Penington, 2002).

African American mothers have been shown to relay important messages about sexual development to their daughters, yet research reveals that these messages tend to come in the form of very selective and often limited discussions. For example, research reveals that African American mothers tend to emphasize biological and negative consequences of sexual activity as opposed to emotional and physical aspects (Miller, et al., 1998) and focus on hygiene during menstruation as opposed to what is happening to the female body (Wyatt, 1997).

Scholars attempting to understand mother-daughter communication about sexual development have noted the need for research that assesses the content and context of parental messages as opposed to simply asking mothers to respond yes or no to whether they talk to their daughters about sexuality (O'Sullivan, Meyer-Bahlburg and Watkins, 2001). Most empirical investigations of communication about sexuality between mothers and their adolescent age daughters have collected quantitative data from both mothers and their daughters, asking questions about whether communication takes place or not, but few have inquired into what exactly is being said by the mothers to their daughters. More so, no studies are noted within the reviewed literature to have explored exactly what mothers may or may not say to their daughters about their own past experiences with sexuality.

With consideration of the need for more detailed research that explores the role of mothers in the developing sexual identities of their adolescent age daughters, this

qualitative study will seek answers to the research questions of what do mothers say to their daughters about their own experiences with sexual development and what are the factors influencing why or why not this communication takes place?

Understanding that there are multiple reasons for why a mother would share certain information and recollections of personal past experiences with her daughter, this study solicited answers to these research questions by asking participating mothers, what information was shared with the mothers during their adolescence, how the mothers felt about their own sexual development, how they feel now about their adolescent age daughter's sexual development and what information and personal experiences they choose to share with their daughters.

In-depth interviews with five mothers of adolescent age daughters revealed a voice of memories, thoughts and concerns that have influenced and continue to influence the mothers' communication about sexual development with their adolescent age daughters. The mothers' experiences and decisions to share or not share them with their adolescent age daughters sheds light on and guidance to future research on mother-daughter communication, the development of adolescent age females' sexual identity and how this communication may relate to daughters' decision making. Such insights may be applicable to programs that work with adolescent age females and their mothers on the topics of sexual development and identity, teen pregnancy and motherhood. Future research may be applicable to counseling programs designed to help women understand sources of influence on their sexual identities.

Theoretical Framework

Theoretically, the potential influence of mothers' past experiences with sexual development on the messages communicated to their adolescent age daughter about sexuality can be understood through the framework of Symbolic Interactionism. Through the lens of Symbolic Interactionism social scientists in the fields of human development and family studies have asserted that social behavior can be best understood when the researcher has first understood the meanings that people assign to situations and actions (Charon, 2001, White and Kline, 2002).

As such, the current study builds on the available literature by exploring mother-daughter communication about sexual development through an understanding of the meanings, that mothers have assigned to their past experiences with sexual development.

Symbols are a key component of communication. Symbols can represent multiple messages and may vary by meaning according to who is sending and who is receiving the message. As related to sexual development, events such as puberty, menarche and sexual intercourse are symbols that have meanings that are uniquely defined not only by mothers and their adolescent age daughters but also by the culture at large.

Symbolic Interactionism asserts that for communication to take place symbols must be shared or commonly agreed upon (Stryker, 1969). As meanings are derived through the processes of social interaction, interactions with other people serve to define human messages, "how we think about ourselves, how we relate to others and how others think and relate to us" (Longmore, 1998). Suggesting that, for example, the meanings that a mother assigns to the onset of her puberty will be defined by how the mother thinks of herself and how she relates to others such as her mother. These relationships are

frequently verbally expressed and as “language has such a prominent place in the conceptual scheme of Symbolic Interactionism” researchers note that “language expresses attitudes as well as conveys meanings” (Longmore, 1998, p.52), the words reflect the interactions and are found to influence perceptions of the experience.

The current study is designed to acknowledge the influence of a mother’s interactions with her mother when she was an adolescent age female on how each mother will assign meanings to her past, and subsequently to her adolescent age daughter’s, experiences with sexual development. Through the lens of Symbolic Interactionism, this study will seek to reveal the factors that potentially influence the messages that mothers’ share about sexual development to their adolescent age daughters. More on the historical foundation of Symbolic Interactionism and the application of this framework to the current study are presented later, following a review of the available literature.

This literature review will serve to reveal what is known and not known and what may be beneficial to know about mother-daughter communication about sexual development. The literature review defines the path towards how the findings from prior research can be integrated with the current study and begin to answer the present research questions of what do mothers say to their adolescent age daughters about their own experiences with sexual development and what factors influence the reasons why or why not this communication takes place?

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter reviews research relevant to the study of communication about sexual development between mothers and their adolescent age daughters. The following paragraphs will describe in greater detail empirical investigations of the three key concepts of this study: 1) mother-daughter relationships, 2) communication about sexual development between mothers and daughters, and the more specific focus on 3) communication about sexual development among African American mothers and their adolescent age daughters. The relevance of the Symbolic Interactionism framework will be revisited at this chapter's end as the theory serves to connect the available literature with the goals of the current study.

The three key concepts of this study have been presented in various ways throughout the available literature. These concepts are very general but at the same have had the tendency to take on very specific meanings. For example, variations are notable between studies as scholars have examined specific stages of mother-daughter relationships from infancy into adulthood, sexual development in the context of the onset of puberty and/or physical interactions such as intercourse and communication from the perspective of a who and how messages are given and received. Among these variations, one consistent theme appears to be the assertion that mother-daughter relationships are extremely unique at all ages and communication about sexual development involves both

verbal and non-verbal messages that are often challenging for both mothers and daughters, and even more specifically adolescent age daughters, to give and receive.

A wealth of the literature that has explored mother-daughter relationships and communication about sexuality is dated as far back as the 1980s. Greer Litton Fox and Judith Inazu (1980) are two authors whose research forms a foundation in this area. The findings from such older studies must be cautiously applied to present day interpretations. However, as time has passed, scholars have continuously suggested the relevance of these dated studies to current attempts to offer more in-depth understanding of the relationship between mothers, daughters and sexual development, a relationship that has intrigued scholars for years.

This chapter will seek to provide a foundation that will best support the need for the current study and the goal of contributing to the most recent and detailed insights into the relationship between mother-daughter relationships and communication about sexual development. This literature review has been divided by the three main concepts of the current study, beginning with a discussion of the literature focusing specifically on mother-daughter relationships, followed by discussion of the studies on communication about sexual development between mothers and daughters. Then, the third concept will be explored through the literature that has considered the unique aspects of mother-daughter relationships and communication about sexual development among African American women.

Mother-Daughter Relationships

The mother-daughter relationship is full of amazing complexities that seem to intrigue scholars from various fields of study. Past research has considered a range of aspects of the mother-daughter relationship including different developmental age groups of mothers and of daughters, dynamics of interactions, influences and outcomes. Carol Boyd offers a detailed review of the varying foci of research on mother-daughter relationships in her 1989 article “Mothers and Daughters: A Discussion of Theory and Research” where she reflects on theoretical frameworks, self-concept and identification, sex-role behaviors and attitudes, conflict and the influence of culture on the study of mother-daughter relationships. So that, be it through the lens of Symbolic Interactionism, Social Learning or Psychoanalytic theories, or the topics of socialization of values or educational attainment, the past and current research tells us that we have learned a lot about mothers and daughters and that there is still a lot more to explore.

As the following paragraphs highlight what has been learned through research on mother-daughter relationships, the strengths and limitations of the reviewed research will be noted as they apply to the goals of the current study. Sample characteristics such as the ages of participating daughters and the research methods employed in each study are specifically highlighted in the attempt to suggest that the limited inclusion of samples of younger age daughters and the application of a variety of research methods has created gaps in what we can interpret and apply from the available literature.

Common Themes

Common themes that have been identified throughout the available literature are those of a strong attachment between mothers and their daughters and how daughters

often view their mothers as the primary role model of womanhood. Collins (1987) points out that, “while boys learn maleness by rejecting femaleness via separating themselves from their mothers, girls establish feminine identities by embracing the femaleness of their mothers” (p.6). Furthermore, the available literatures consistently exemplify how this sense of attachment between mothers and their daughters is characterized by increasing conflict as daughters’ age and begin to define themselves as a daughter and as an adult woman.

Another dated, yet mentionable, work by Bassoff (1987) notes how during a daughter’s adolescent years, mothers must learn to relinquish some of the power that they held over their daughter throughout earlier, more involved stages of mothering such as infancy, because adolescence is a time of increasing autonomy and independence. Bassoff (1987) also elaborates on how mothering adolescent age daughters can be an emotionally painful struggle simply because of the close identification that mothers and daughters have with each other as sexually identified females. This sense of “sameness” is emphasized by Bassoff (1987) and more recent work by Goldberg (1995) who notes “mother-daughter relationships have the crucial role of serving as a model for future relationships as well as for the development of a core self” (p.37).

As conflict between mothers and daughters has been found to be particularly high during adolescence (Cauce, et al., 1996), the attraction to studying the mother-daughter relationship becomes the aspect of the cycle of influence, be it positive or negative, which impacts the relationship and can be traced from birth through the common conflicts of adolescence and into adulthood. Goldberg’s 1995 study of the process of reciprocity between mothers and daughters, which is encouraged by daughters’ developing sense of

self-adjustment and self-esteem as she transitions out of adolescence into adulthood, revealed that daughters' views of the influence of their relationships with their mothers were increasingly positive as the daughters aged. Mothers in the study were noted to compliment the daughters' comments with reports of an increasing ability to trust their aging daughters and still offer advice without being authoritarian.

A Cycle of Influence

As daughters continue to age and mature into adult womanhood the natural processes of continued physical and emotional changes take place. With time there is an increased likelihood of the daughter moving out of her mother's residence, entering into more sexually active relationships and possibly giving birth to her own child(ren). Subsequently, the influence of the mother's response to her daughter's beginning stages of developmental changes into womanhood is notable and sometimes problematic. As many mothers remain an example of womanhood for their adult age daughters, mothers and daughters have both been found to express a sense of need for each other and desire to stay connected during these developmental transitions.

One example that mothers may set for their daughters is of a woman's sexuality. Daughters may decide how to address their own developing sexuality by observing how the mother carries herself and knowing how the mother has responded to her own development. Even more so, how the mother responds to the daughter's developing sexuality.

A study by Rastogi and Wampler (1999) is an example of the impact that the cycle of influence, which continues into a daughter's adulthood, can have on the dynamics of the mother-daughter relationship. This study compared European American,

Asian American, Indian American and Mexican American adult age daughters' perceptions of relationships with their mothers in terms of closeness, connection and intimacy, reliability and collectivism. Using the Mother Adult Daughter and Adult Attachment Scale questionnaires, cross-cultural differences were found to influence the definitions and degrees of closeness, reliability and collectivism for each daughter.

Rastogi and Wampler (1999) and each of the other above mentioned studies (Cauce, et al., 1996; Goldberg, 1995; Boyd, 1989; Bassoff, 1987; Collins, 1987) demonstrate how research results may vary based not only on the age of the daughters involved, but may also be influenced by cultural and/or ethnic identity. These studies also represent a continuum over time from 1987 to 1999 where the mother-daughter relationship has been continuously explored. At the same, 1999 is somewhat far removed from the present and representative of the need for more recent explorations.

As we now turn to the second major concept of the current study, communication about sexual development between mothers and daughters, again findings can be noted to be unique to certain age and cultural and/or ethnic groups. It is important to make note of these as they relate to the current research goal of understanding African American mother-daughter communication about sexual development. While findings that are most specific to African American mothers and daughters will be considered in the third and final section, the following section will review the literature that helps us to understand some of the dynamics involved with mother-daughter communication about sexual development.

Mother-Daughter Communication about Sexual Development

Throughout the available literature reference to sexual development has been presented through very general definitions and appears to have been defined differently by the samples of mothers and daughters being studied. The majority of the available literature specific to adolescent age females' sexuality tends to reference studies looking only at sexual intercourse and the potential outcome of pregnancy. Now, even more so than in the past, the transmission of life-altering and life-threatening sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) ranks number one with the outcome of pregnancy on the list of reasons why adolescent age sexuality is so frequently viewed in a negative light (Hutchinson and Cooney, 1998). While current statistics of adolescent age pregnancy and diagnosis with STDs are alarming and very much deserving of further research (Marx, 2005) scholars have appeared to neglect the need to also explore other aspects of sexuality such as menstruation, physical and emotional changes, and dating, that are related to adolescent age females' sexual development.

The dominance of literature that focuses only on sexual intercourse among adolescent age females is even more interesting to note when compared to how some studies examining mother-daughter communication about sexual development have supported the fact that intercourse has been noted to be one of the furthest removed topics of conversation between mothers and daughters. Where the topics of menstruation and dating are being discussed more than topics most closely related to actual intercourse (Hutchinson and Cooney, 1998). Furthermore, many studies have not considered how mothers of adolescent age daughters approach any communication about sexual development with their daughters, such as variations in ways that mothers communicate

with their daughters and the difference between communication about the mothers' own sexuality compared to the daughters' sexuality.

Sexuality can be a very sensitive topic for mothers and daughters to discuss and communicate with each other about. One of the major issues posed by the literature that has considered mother-daughter communication about sexual development is that because of this sensitivity, there may not be enough communication taking place about this very important and real topic. Yet, one must bear in mind a potential difference in how one defines 'enough'. Sometimes years of verbal and nonverbal communication related to sexuality may take place between a mother and daughter, but these years may or may not be filled with the candid communication and level of detailed information that the daughter or the mother would prefer and possibly have benefited from.

For example, one study (Brock and Jennings, 1993) examined how women in their 30's felt when reflecting on conversations about sexuality with their mothers that took place during their adolescence. No studies prior to this one had asked women what kind of sexuality education they would have liked to have received from their mothers. Therefore, the authors asked two open ended questions of "what education do you remember receiving from your mom" and "what do you wish your mom would have told you when you were younger?"

Results from this study revealed that the adult women recalled that sexuality education from their mothers was extremely limited in discussion and full of strong negative nonverbal messages and the frequent use of warnings and rules. The adult women recalled having feelings of regret, sadness and disappointment in response to this communication. Adult daughters wished that their mothers had been more comfortable

and open for conversations and discussions about their sexuality related feelings and choices. Many of the women interviewed expressed a desire to provide “better sexuality education” for their children. In response to these findings, the question could then become whether these mothers, as they expressed a desire for more open communication with their mothers, would have wanted to know specifics about their mothers’ own experiences and if they themselves wanted to share their experiences with their children.

While results from this study by Brock and Jennings (1993) are influenced by the makeup of the sample which was of women born between the years of 1951-1960, majority Caucasian and married residents of Texas, and only half of the participating women were mothers of their own daughters, these findings may be applied to other samples of women. This study is an example of the potential cycle of regret, sadness and disappointment that can carry over from adolescence into adulthood if mothers are not cognizant of how their past influences their present approach to discussing sexual development with their daughters. There may be a strong need for daughters and mothers, when daughters are younger as opposed to older, to identify and attempt to address the content, pros and cons of their communication.

A Possible Shift in Time

Standards of what may be considered acceptable approaches to communication between mothers and daughters about sexual development can be said to have shifted throughout American history. Subsequently, mothers of the mothers being studied, the daughters’ grandmothers, may have held values that differ from what the current mother is hoping to instill in her daughter. So that while modern day society may advocate some aspects of communication about sexual development and treat others as taboo, these

aspects may not be the same as those considered taboo during the grandmothers' adolescent years. Depending on the age of the current mother, her experiences with communication about sexuality with her mother may have been even more limited by the perceptions of earlier generations of women who may have felt that it was not appropriate for mothers to talk to their daughters about sexuality.

This point is another example of why it may be important for future research to further identify if perceptions of sexuality are the same for mothers across generations. For now, the current study will bear in mind the potential for these intergenerational differences and the influence passed on from grandmothers to mothers to daughters. As we continue to build on what we know about mother-daughter relationships and communication about sexuality, studies that lend insight on styles of communication, what mothers communicate to their daughters about their daughter's sexual development and then about their own experiences are reviewed.

Acknowledging the Influence of Research Methods and Intentions

Before moving forward, it is important to point out that while there are several studies throughout the available literature that have attempted to explore communication about sexuality between parents and their children, an analysis of the research methods employed in the majority of these studies reveals the consistent use of quantitative approaches. Several studies base their results on participants' responses on surveys such as the Parent Adolescent Communication Scale and the Revealed Differences Questionnaire, as opposed to qualitative approaches such as in depth interviews and focus groups which may reveal a deeper understanding of the complexities of communication about sexuality. Feldman and Rosenthal (2000) notes how surveys that simply ask

participants whether communication about sexuality is taking place or not (with the option to select only yes or no) are “of dubious validity and reliability” (p.121).

Additionally, scholars may need to reconsider the political and activist agendas behind the years of research on sexuality among adolescent age females. Goals of preventing pregnancy and not really understanding sexuality plus years of viewing adolescent age sexuality and sexual behaviors as deviant as opposed to developmental (Tolman, 1996) are laced throughout the literature. Ways in which these agendas have been consistently applied to research that is specific to African American females’ sexuality are explored further below.

The current study will focus on the messages attempting to be communicated directly from mother to adolescent age daughter. Reviewed below is the literature that has considered the process of this communication, factors influencing effectiveness and aspects of communication style that are unique to mothers. The findings of these studies lend further understanding to support the current research focus.

Processes and Effectiveness of Communication

While it has been understood that parents have varying degrees of influence on the sexual values of their adolescent age children, the process of this influence was not initially clear. In response to this gap in the literature, Fitzharris and Werner-Wilson (2004) examined the differences in perception of amount and content of communication about sexuality such as points of convergence and divergence between parents and their adolescent age children. Results of focus groups with parents and their 15-16 year old children suggest that the two parties do differ in their perception of the amount of communication as participating parents reported more frequent and satisfactory

communication versus their adolescents' reports of infrequent and limited communication.

Jaccard, et al., found similar results in a 1998 study where 72% parents compared to 45% adolescents reported that they "strongly agreed that parent or adolescent had talked with each other about sexuality." Based on the findings of these two studies, it is reasonable to conclude that communication is a two-way process involving both parties sending and receiving messages. These messages can be said to be, as the theory of Symbolic Interactionism suggests, symbols that are subject to varying meanings and interpretations by and effects on both mothers and their adolescent age daughters.

In the year 2000, scholars Feldman and Rosenthal administered surveys to 10th graders and their parents assessing global evaluation of parents as sex educators, frequency of communication on twenty different sex-related topics and perceived quality of conversations. This study found a gap between perceptions of communication effectiveness in that the adolescents evaluated their mothers more positively than fathers and parents evaluated themselves more positively than their adolescents. Mothers' responses were found to be influenced by self-definitions of mother as a sex educator based on the frequency of communication about sexuality with the adolescent. The authors suggest that parents may benefit from receiving assistance with improving their general communication skills and definitions of what constitutes a discussion in order to be more effective sex educators.

The previously mentioned Fitzharris and Werner-Wilson (2004) study also identified how parents' discomfort in discussing personal and moral issues may be why discussions of sexual development revolve around biological rather than personal issues.

One parent participant in this study shared how if, for example, parents cannot even talk with their spouses about their own sexuality then of course they will experience discomfort in talking to their children. The majority of parents in this study expressed a concern that open communication about sexuality could send mixed messages to adolescents, such as the parent saying, “don’t have sex” but then “if you do, use protection”. Parents wanted to make sure that their children were aware of the consequences of their behaviors and were able to be responsible, aware of peer pressure and the importance of timing in their decision making.

On the other hand, results from Fitzharris and Werner-Wilson (2004) also demonstrate how parents may think, after one or few efforts, that enough has been said about sexuality to their adolescent. This assumption may pose a barrier to any potential future communication related to sexual development. Again, adolescents in this study reported sexuality communication with their parents as minimal, not occurring frequently and not including enough information to prepare them for adult decision making. Parents were not bringing up the topic of sexuality to their adolescents and this was uncomfortable for the adolescent. This silence was said to be followed by thoughts of parents as not being educated enough to talk about sex and coincided with parents waiting until after the adolescent is older.

Again, the definition of “older” can be seen as ambiguous as “enough” for mothers will vary in their personal values and comfort levels. Older may represent a certain maturity level or a specific age. Either way, it is important to recognize the possible outcomes of communication efforts when the definitions of older and enough are different between mother and daughter.

As such, these findings can be representative of the mother daughter relationship and the need for mothers to explain the meanings behind their communication, or lack thereof, with their adolescent age daughters. This current study takes steps toward addressing this need.

Mothers' Style of Communication

Mothers will vary in their individual styles of communicating about sexuality to their adolescent age daughters. One consensus among most mothers appears to be that the majority of them tend to focus on biological issues more than emotional aspects of sexuality because they are more comfortable with the factual (Fitzharris and Werner-Wilson, 2004). This focus on the factual is reasonably understood by the reality that emotions, such as mood swings, can be more complex as an unseen, where factual aspects such as breast development may be more visible and easier to explain.

While Fitzharris and Werner-Wilson (2004) studied 15 and 16 year olds, a study by Beaumont (2000) studied a group of middle class white Canadian women; twelve of who were mothers to 8-10 year olds and twelve were mothers to 14-16 year olds. Using the Revealed Differences Questionnaire, Beaumont (2000) found a difference between how mothers converse about interpersonal values and problems with their daughters compared to how mothers converse with their friends about the same topics. Mothers were found to use a "high considerateness style with low rates of overlap and simultaneous speech and a slower pace" with their daughters, but with friends, mothers used a "high involvement with high rates of overlap and simultaneous speech". Mothers clashed in conversational styles that their adolescent age daughters used, which were defined as a high involvement conversational style.

Beaumont (2000) notes how the results of this study can only be generalized to conversations in which mothers and daughters have differing opinions, for example conversations on the topic of sexual development and sexual-related values and behaviors. Mothers may be very likely to have differing opinions than their daughters on what is appropriate for their daughters to do or say. Identifying and sharing these differing opinions with each other may help mothers, daughters and the scientists who study them, understand how mothers communicate with daughters about their daughters' and their own sexual development.

Research explaining the general styles of communication about sexuality used by parents has been identified, now we will turn to the literature that explains the specific styles and factors influencing mothers' communication about their daughters' sexual development.

According to the available literature, most mothers steer away from conversation about the positive aspects of their daughters' sexual development and tend to focus on the negative with hope of deterring their daughters' interest in the potential pleasures of sexuality. Messages about the negative aspects of sexuality have included the potential outcomes associated with intercourse such as pregnancy, AIDS and STDs. Mothers have also reported sharing messages about the more impersonal aspects such as the biology of reproduction and an avoidance of more personal messages about masturbation, contraceptives, and psychological or experiential aspects of sexuality such as orgasms and sexual decision making (Feldman and Rosenthal, 2000).

The Feldman and Rosenthal (2000) study reports that mothers may feel inadequate, embarrassed, and have difficulty finding a time they feel is suitable to

converse with their daughters about sexual development. While it may be that the best suitable time has to be created, the authors help us to consider that mothers are communicating messages to their daughters at all times. Though everyday interactions such as watching television or going to the grocery store, which may promote conversation about an aspect of sexual development, may be underestimated, they can not be ignored. There may be benefits to mothers clarifying their messages, whenever they are delivered, and to explain how their own personal experiences relate to these messages.

Feldman and Rosenthal (2000) also remind us how communication about sexuality between parents and children has been found to be typically one-dimensional and unidirectional from the parent as the expert to the child as the novice. This one-perspective, one-way communication can be especially apparent in the transmission of messages from mothers to their early adolescent age daughters. Mothers may feel like their daughters are not informed and that it is their job, as the experienced adult woman, to teach the daughter from the stand point of an “expert” or “general” making commands about what is right and wrong. Where arguably, it may be more beneficial for mothers to communicate with their daughters as a person and a woman who has had experiences, be they good or bad.

One may ask, what is the difference between the voice of communication about sexual development between an expert and a mom with experiences? It can be suggested that there is one important difference. For while an expert may claim to know everything about everything, a mom with experiences may realize what her experiences have taught

her, what she may still not know and how her daughter's experience with sexual development may be different from her own.

Tolman (1996) is an example of one of few studies using a diverse, purposive sample of teenage females to understand girls' experiences with their sexual desire and to intentionally highlight the differences between urban and suburban girls experiences. Participating females shared in their interviews how "no adult woman had ever talked directly or in such depth to them before about their sexual desire and pleasure and more than half had never spoke with anyone about it" (p.259). Comments from the urban girls reflected how "research unrelated to pregnancy was a novelty" and for the suburban girls, "acknowledgment of their sexuality in any form was new."

Tolman (1996) is an example of how the lack of exploration of potentially positive and developmentally related aspects of sexuality, topics that are real and emotions that are experienced, has been neglected for so long or possibly has not been included among the available literature.

This study is also an example of the need for academically based explorations of the potential differences between the experiences with sexual development between urban and suburban dwelling adolescents. As urban adolescents have been most frequently referred to in the literature as 'at-risk' the findings of such research becomes challenging to interpret. This is an issue commonly seen among research specific to African American female adolescents. This issue will be discussed in the upcoming section on communication about sexual development between African American mothers and daughters.

Emphasis on Age of Daughter

The extensive work of Greer Litton Fox has spearheaded the majority of the research that is available on younger samples of adolescent females. Her collaborative works with Judith K. Inazu, such as “Mother-Daughter Communication about Sex” and “Patterns and Outcomes of Mother-Daughter Communication About Sexuality” (1980), are continuously referenced throughout past and more recent literature. Fox and Inazu’s work exploring early adolescent age female sexuality has served as a strong foundation of some articles such as the above-mentioned studies because few other scholars have published, if conducted, similar investigations considering the unique differences between age and adolescent females’ experiences with sexual development.

Yowell (1997) is another one of few studies involving early adolescent age daughters, defined in this study as 11-13 years of age, and their mothers’ experiences with communication about sexuality-related topics. This study was designed to explore the social context of early adolescent age girls’ sexual development by comparing mother-daughter communication to daughter-best friend communication about sexuality. The analysis of mother-daughter communication, mothers’ style of communication and role in creating more favorable interactions revealed that mothers’ sexuality-related communication with their daughters was “dominated by feelings of conflict between the desire for open and honest communication and the fear that such communication may alienate daughters or condone sexual behavior.”

The majority of the daughters in Yowell’s (1997) study described a desire to avoid sexuality-related discussions with their mothers because of a desire for privacy from their mothers and therefore a greater willingness to turn to best friends for sexuality

related information. Yowell (1997) suggests that this desire for privacy could be related to a fear felt by both the daughter and mother where the mothers' fear of condoning sexual activity and the daughters' fear of the consequences of backlash in disclosing their everyday experiences may intersect and lead to avoidance of discussions related to sexual development.

In response to these findings, a possible question now becomes is this fear representing a difference in the type of sexuality related messages that mothers and daughters communicate to each other or does it represent the differences in the style of communication? In other words, is it the message or the communication style? Maybe it is both. Research tells us that depending on age and maturity level of the daughter, conflict between mothers and daughters has been found to be more likely to occur during early adolescence. We know that during early adolescence, daughters' communication patterns are still developing and communication with peers may be easier and more welcomed than with parents. The peer groups are more likely to share similar communication styles and to encourage adolescents' thoughts while parents are more likely to discourage or have differing suggestions (Yowell, 1997).

Self-Help Books

"Sex is not a four-letter word: Talking sex with your children made easier," is a book written in 1994 by Patricia Miller that offers some support of why it is important for mothers, despite the challenges of communication, to talk with their daughters about sexuality at an early age. While the contents of this book are different from an empirical study published in a journal, Miller's work is well cited with reference to other empirical studies. This book serves as an example of the plethora of "self-help" books that are

available and often referenced by parents attempting to identify how to best communicate with their children (Fitzharris and Werner-Wilson, 2004).

Reflecting on the theoretical foundation of Symbolic Interactionism, the varying suggestions found within self-help books on the topic of communication about sexual development, such as this one, can be said to represent how “social norms and meanings [about sexual development and communication about sexuality between mothers and daughters] are somewhat ambiguous” (White and Klein, 2002, p.83). The ambiguity of social norms and meanings on this topic merits further exploration and clarity.

“Sex is not a four letter word” (Miller, 1994) was written by a self-identified Caucasian American female who very clearly communicates her foundation of Christian values throughout the book. The sexual and religious based beliefs of the author are two factors that influence the contents of, as well as who may feel comfortable or interested in reading, this book. Some of Miller’s (1994) suggestions are very applicable to this review of literature and support efforts to accomplish the goal of the current study.

For example, within chapters such as “Are You Comfortable with Your Own Sexuality,” “Ages and Stages of Psychosexual Development” and “Do as You Say,” Miller (1994) breaks down her insights and suggestions by age group and provides examples of situations that may occur between mothers and their children, as early as infancy. Chapter sections on human development and the shift from internal to increasingly external developmental changes were particularly relevant to the goals of the current study as Miller (1994) advocates that all topics such as vaginal lubrication, emotional mood swings and sexual organs should be openly and carefully discussed as facts of development, not taboo subjects.

During teenage years, when youth are increasingly interested in sexuality related aspects of development, Miller encourages parents that it can be “reassuring and helpful if they relate stories of their own confused feelings and difficult episodes during puberty” (Miller, 1994, p.55). Parents are reminded that there are benefits to discussing the interrelatedness of menstruation, intercourse and pregnancy in the same fashion that they attempt to discuss with and prepare their adolescents for academic success. In this case, “success” can mean the adolescent understanding and being able to comfortably respond with ease and knowledge of their developing sexuality.

Furthermore, Miller (1994) reminds parents that they are always sending messages about sexuality to their children. It is suggested that the importance of mothers being aware of those messages and identifying sources of discomfort are equally connected to the cycle of avoidance that occurs when mothers do not take the time to really think about how they feel about their own nor their daughter’s sexual development. Unfortunately, many mothers never work out any unresolved aspects of their sexual past and the influence carries over into the mother’s interactions with her daughter, leaving open the possibility for the daughter to misinterpret her mother’s unease.

To help reduce the possibility of such misinterpretations, Miller (1994) includes a copy of Dr. Evonne Hedgepeth’s “Sexuality Comfort Inventory,” as a resource for mothers to use to help assess their views of sexuality and how these views relate to their daughters’ sexual development. Miller (1994) emphasizes to her readers how aspects of a mother’s unresolved sexual background might be directly assumed for the daughter’s developing sexuality. For example, mothers who found their own developing sexuality bad, dirty or disgusting may think the same of their daughter’s. Or mothers, who wish

their own sexual experiences had been different, may persist in re-creating her experiences through the daughter by asking intimate details about her daughter's experiences. This behavior can be uncomfortable, undesirable and even inappropriate.

Yet, these are all aspects representing the potential for varying influences and thus the need for the current study to ask mothers about these influences. A woman's past experiences will influence who they are as adult women and mothers to their own daughters. Regardless of experience, the past plays a role in the present and the future for both mother and daughter.

The Past Influencing the Present

No studies throughout the reviewed literature note any attempt to understand the influence that a mothers' past has on her present communication with her daughter. Furthermore, no studies have been noted to explore what mothers communicate to their daughters about their own sexual development. We have learned from studies that have explored what mothers say to their daughters about their daughter's sexual development. Now, it may be beneficial to also consider the mother's interpretations of her own experiences with sexuality, as they may be a possible source of influence on how mothers feel about their daughters' sexual development.

The theory of Symbolic Interactionism supports the need to examine how mothers' interpretations of her own experiences with sexual development will influence what she communicates to her own daughter. For example, this exploration could reveal a meaningful difference between a mother telling her adolescent age daughter that she started her menstrual cycle at 'x' age versus a mother sharing with her daughter the

experience of beginning her cycle, positive and negative emotions felt and how it shapes the woman that she has become.

It is important to note that there is also a difference between a mother telling or suggesting a behavior to her daughter and the mother telling the daughter about her own past choices and experiences. Yet, mothers sharing of their own experiences may be deterred by the mother's fear of encouraging the same experiences for her daughter. For example, mothers who have made personally unfavorable decisions regarding their sexual development may fear that sharing these decisions may cause her daughter to make the same. Or, mothers who interpret their experiences with sexuality as positive may falsely conclude that there is no need to talk about other possible experiences with sexual development to their daughters (Wyatt, 1997).

Hutchinson and Cooney (1998) is another example of a study that offers support of exploring the untapped benefits of more research focus on younger samples of daughters and the implications of mothers, if at all, openly discussing sexual development when their daughters are younger in age. This study asked a statewide racially mixed sample of 19-20 year old women born in 1976, "How much information did your mother share with you about human sexuality" and "are there any sexual issues or topics that you wish your parents had discussed with you but did not?"

These questions are similar to those posed to the sample of older women from the above mentioned Brock and Jennings 1993 study who were born between 1951-1960 and aged in their 30's. Both studies found that young adult and adult women recall low to moderate levels of parent-teen sexual communication as 97% of the women sampled by Hutchinson and Cooney (1998) identified at least one topic that they desired more

information about from their mothers. These desired topics were not mentioned, but those that were discussed between mothers and their daughters included sexual risk, contraception and birth control.

It is interesting to note that the African American women in Hutchinson and Cooney's sample, representing 76 out of 173 participants, reported higher percentages of information received on all sexuality related topics including discussing the mother's past dating or sexual experiences, as well as "significantly higher levels of parental sexual risk communication" than the Caucasian women in the sample. This difference between these African American and Caucasian women exemplifies a set of unique racial based characteristics that may contribute to the reasons why some mothers communicate the way that they do with their daughters. These characteristics transition us to a review of the literature on the third and final concept, communication about sexuality among African American mothers and daughters.

African American Mother-Daughter Communication about Sexual Development

Research on mother-daughter relationships and communication about sexuality, either with the two concepts together or separate, has attempted to bring more specific focus to the unique characteristics of African American mother-daughter relationships. While still very limited and somewhat absent in comparison to the wealth of information available (Cauce, et al., 1996), just as noted in the previous section, these studies do provide a foundation to support the need for further research.

A review of the available literature highlights a significant lack of research that stems away from the limiting and overwhelming focus on African Americans solely from the perspective of what researchers have defined as low-income and at-risk families, such

as urban dwelling, low-income and single-mother headed households. Therefore, in order to paint a more inclusive picture there is a need for research that gives due respect and consideration to the diverse backgrounds and experiences of African American women (Wyche, 1993). More on the persisting focus on at-risk African American mothers and adolescent age daughters, what this focus reveals, while at the same time conceals, is explored in the following section Understanding the African American Context of At-Risk.

The unique relationship between mothers and daughters is recognized and respected within most African American communities (Cauce, et al., 1996). The popular proverb “Mothers raise their daughters and love their sons” can be adequately applied to what we, as scholars, understand about mothering and the distinctive socialization that has been noted to take place specifically between African American mothers and their daughters. This proverb may be interpreted to represent the unique challenges faced as many African American mothers’ of the past and present strive to provide the life skills that are deemed necessary for their daughters’ survival. Another interpretation is found when one considers the unique challenges faced by African American women when they attempt to communicate about sexual development with their adolescent age daughters.

These unique challenges are explored below as the following overview of the available literature provides an important context from which the current research findings are analyzed and interpreted.

Understanding the African American Context of At-Risk

O’Sullivan, et al., (2001) is one more recent study that explores parent-child communication as a source of information about sexuality for a mixed sample of African

American and Latina adolescents. Through focus group sessions, O'Sullivan, et al. (2001) found that among the participating mother-daughter dyads communication about sexuality is influenced by "antagonistic positions adopted by daughters and mothers as daughters advance sexually" (p.287). The sample was half (72 out of 144 participants) African American mothers of daughters ranging in age from 6-13 years old and all identified as living in urban dwellings characterized by poverty and crime. Findings from this study suggest the need to not only assess content and context of messages delivered, but also areas of conversational cues and timing. Yet, the concluding suggestions about content, context and timing of communication between mothers and daughters about issues related to sexual development are done so within the limited context of the families being at-risk.

Two of three main themes O'Sullivan, et al., (2001) identified were mothers communicating dire consequences associated with sexual participation and mothers emphasizing girls' responsibility in avoiding or controlling sexual encounters. Mothers were found to offer little communication about romantic, interpersonal or arousal aspects of sexuality as the African American mothers in the sample were found to be more likely to communicate to their daughters that "sexual involvement, and hence pregnancy, is associated with the loss of important resources, such as money, time and educational opportunities as well as the future capacity to attract other men interested in a relationship" (p.282).

Participating mothers also shared how they intentionally exaggerated pains associated with initial sexual intercourse and then childbirth in the attempt to deter their daughters' thoughts or participation in sexual related behaviors. The mothers shared a

goal of maintaining their daughters sexual abstinence “indefinitely” and very rarely acknowledged rewarding aspects of sexual activity. African American mothers were most focused on preventing their adolescent age daughters from becoming pregnant and contracting diseases and therefore were noted to actively seek information from their daughters about their daughters’ personal experiences with sexuality.

It cannot be assumed that this emphasis on the loss of resources would be different between African American mothers that are identified as at-risk and those that are not, but the majority have only explored those that are identified as at-risk.

Research samples composed of all African Americans include a study by Handler (1990) that explored initiation of early sexual activity among a group of African American urban female adolescents who were “considered at-risk by virtue of their residence in poor urban communities with high rates of infant mortality and adolescent pregnancy.” This particular study found three important correlates with the initiation of early sexual intercourse among a group of young African American urban female adolescents to be the females’ mothers’ education level, the mother having been a teen mom and the school attended by the adolescent age female.

What we can learn from this and similar studies is that there is a need for research outside of low-income at risk environments and that mothers play a role in adolescent age females’ sexuality related development. While the current study will not limit focus by socio economic status or level of at-risk, it will realize that there may be differences among the African American women based on these geographical characteristics.

Results similar to O’Sullivan, et al., (2001) were found in an earlier qualitative study conducted by Miller, et al., (1998) where again, for a racially mixed sample of

African American and Hispanic parents and their adolescents aged 14-16 years old, discussion of HIV/AIDS and STDs, protection and reproduction was more frequent than discussions of masturbation, physical and sexual development. However, the authors point out that as “sizable proportions of [the] sample had not discussed many of the sexual topics examined” there is a need for programs designed to help facilitate general communication about sexuality between parents and adolescents. Miller, et al., (1998) correlates parents’ failure to elaborate on specific aspects of sexuality with their adolescents increased risk for the negative outcomes that the parents are trying to prevent.

The Uniqueness of African American Experiences

An earlier study by Collins (1987), while dated, offers a reminder of how the specifications of the female role with which past and current generations of women may vary. So that, the role that African American mothers may identify with, may be notably different than the role that is or was modeled by the middle class Caucasian mothers. This poses challenges to interpretations because Caucasian mothers have been the main/sole subjects of most past studies on mother-daughter relationships and communication about sexuality. It may be imperative to be reminded that, with time, research on mother-daughter dyads may have considered new perspectives on sexuality, and the influence is continuously intergenerational, as values and perspectives on sexuality have been passed on through generations of African American as well as Caucasian and other racial and ethnic groups of women. So that, in addition to the stigmas that may be held by society at large, there are stigmas that are specific to racial and ethnic groups and ones that are even more specific to the generations of women within an individual family.

Racial specific stigmas that have been considered in the literature about African American mother-daughter relationships and communication about adolescent age females' sexuality are notable. Furthermore, how those stigmas have then influenced African American mothers' expectations for their daughter's sexual-related behaviors and how mothers' have communicated such expectations and values over generations of women are another example of the cycle of influence.

External and internal pressures of sexism are also explored in this study as mothers attempted to protect their daughters from sexist views of women. It has been shown that images of beauty and the ideal feminine physique are different for Caucasian and African American women and negative images of African American women as over-sexed, video girls demonstrates a train of thought that African American women are unattractive and undesirable by American standards (Cauce, et al., 1996).

Cauce, et al., (1996) reflects on the context of motherhood within the African American community. Findings from Cauce, et al., (1996) were based on the analysis of a group of mother-daughter dyads' self-reports on the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment scale and a videotaped structured family interaction task. Participating daughters' average age was 13 years old, which represents the youngest group of all African American adolescent age daughters identified as a research sample. Cauce, et al., (1996) applied a research design that was focused on studying a normative sample of African Americans. While a set definition of normal was not mentioned in the article, the sample was described as majority working to lower-middle class and this is different from earlier studies in that the term "at-risk" was not used to describe this sample. This study can serve an example of researchers trying to shift the focus away from trying to

identify what is wrong with African Americans to the strengths of this racially identified community.

While communities of African Americans have been noted to identify African American motherhood as a source of strength, when this pride in strength is compared to the samples of mothers and daughters selected for past research, being from the same communities, but have not been defined as strong, but rather at-risk. A number of African American adolescent age females are not socialized in the same “protected developmental period that may be a reality more so for whites than blacks” (Cauce, et al., 1996) and occurrences of such experiences have been lumped together and labeled as representing “at-risk”. For some, at-risk can be seen as defined by adolescents being exposed to the need to make adult decisions and to deal with adult dangers that may be related to an early age responsibility for the daughters to help their mothers maintain the family.

With a strong background on African American women, race and gender development and the concepts of Afrocentrism (collectivist values) compared to Eurocentrism (individualistic values), Cauce, et al., (1996) identifies the unique characteristics of African American motherhood as a source of power and respect that internally and externally affects the dynamics of communication about sexuality with daughters. In 1996, Cauce, et al., published findings from her study that examined the source of arguments between African American mothers and their daughters and found that most disagreements were about cleaning and homework rather than sex and drugs.

African American daughters pulling away from their mothers in order to establish their unique identities, while mothers were reaching out to protect their daughters from

what they identified as hostile environments, was a source of conflict. Mothers were found to be very protective of their daughters while at the same time encouraging a healthy sense of autonomy and competence.

Mothers in this sample elaborated on the need to counteract these negative images and exert control over their daughters' sexual identities. Mothers expressed a desire to give their daughters more freedom but were afraid that "even one small slip could ruin her life." Subsequently, African American mothers monitored their daughters' sexuality-related behaviors such as when the daughter could start dating. It is interesting to compare this monitoring to the fact that daughters were permitted to self-monitor and have more control over other personal decisions such as hairstyles and clothing.

Based on these findings, it could be asserted that, as sexuality is an aspect of human development and mothers are monitoring and attempting to make these important decisions for the daughter, such protective attempts are based on a fear of the consequences of the daughter making the wrong decision. This fear could be handicapping daughters from learning how to address their developing sexuality as an adolescent and therefore they may not know or understand how to best address it into adulthood. So that an important question for future research becomes "by the use of what specific messages are mothers attempting to control and monitor their daughters' sexuality?"

African American Mothers Expectations for their Daughters' Behaviors

African American mothers are frequently described in the research and throughout their communities as strong disciplinarians who are overly protective in their attempts to raise daughters who are self-reliant and assertive (Collins, 1987). Self-

reliance and assertiveness are common expectations that African American mothers have for their daughters. Kerpelman, Shoffner and Ross-Griffen (2002), while not a direct study of sexuality related communication, exemplifies African American mothers' emphasis on discipline, respect and these expectations of self-reliance. Where it appears that these aspects of development and life preparation have taken priority over or even more so are not drawing the connections with communication about sexuality.

Kerpelman, et al., (2002) is an example of the unique connection between African American mothers and daughters, particularly in regards to mothers' communication about and expectations related to the daughters' current and future behaviors. The sample of African American mothers and their adolescent age daughters were found to expect their daughters to become "college educated, employed, responsible and independent yet socially connected" with many of the mothers expressing a desire for their daughters to "not need a man to support them."

These expectations, as expressed by the participating mothers, are an example of how daughters' relationships with males, in comparison to education and career, are not as openly communicated about as an important aspect of development. As such, mothers' in-directly expressed that expectations for any type of encounters and relationships with males may contradict or pose a possible barrier to the accomplishment of academic, career or other long-term goals. Mothers who stress encouragement of academics and careers may discourage or not directly communicate sexuality related behaviors.

Overall, the findings from this study suggest that African American mothers appear to prioritize wanting their daughters to be "a responsible person who is emotionally and financially independent" (Kerpelman, et al., 2002, p.293), supporting a

common theme of career first, marriage second. This theme was identified among the mothers as they expressed a concern for their daughters to pursue education and career success in order to establish self-sufficiency, before marriage. Similar findings have been previously noted in the literature, so in realizing that the family system may be an integral setting where adolescents receive messages about who they can and cannot become in terms of education and career (Kerpelman, et al., 2002) a question to ponder is how do maternal messages about education and career relate to or influence maternal messages about sexuality?

If it is evident that daughters' connections with their mothers are highly influential on daughters' development, then it may be beneficial to understand the specific influence on the daughters developing sexuality.

African American Mothers Communication Styles and Common Messages

Communication styles are again as important to understand as the messages that are being delivered. African American mothers have been found to communicate with their adolescent age daughters by yelling, punishing and pressuring for and against sexuality related values and behaviors (Wyatt, 1997). Some may ask in response to this finding, why are African American mothers so tough on their daughters? A review of the available literature suggests possible reasons to consider.

Maybe African American mothers are tough on their daughters because they fear the reality of their daughters being sexual beings, or African American mothers are tough because of a racially identified and internalized history of struggle for African American people, so that these mothers feel a need to encourage their daughters to overcome an abundant presence of negative sexually based stereotypes about womanhood.

Penington (2004) compared in depth interviews and taped interactions of middle class African American families of adolescents age 13-17 years old to those of European American families. This study examined the strategies used to manage connection as well as autonomy and to determine if communication styles differed by ethnicity. Where African American mothers were found to favor “a greater degree of closeness” in comparison to European American mothers’ emphasis on autonomy. Bearing in mind the more general cultural and racial based identity of African Americans as more collectivist, meaning putting others needs before their own, and the more general identity of European American as individualistic, meaning emphasizing personal needs before others, Penington (2004) interprets this finding by suggesting that African American mothers’ may have a need for both closeness as well as autonomy. Where the relationship between parent and adolescent may be one in which both can be seen to confide in each other, but can also be found to conflict.

African American mothers in this study had established strict rules related to their daughters’ early sexual activity, particularly those that may lead to sexual intercourse. These mothers directly told their daughters what they should do and expected immediate obedience. The communication style employed was described by the mothers as often being “so blunt that it was intended to scare the daughter into following the mothers’ instructions” (Penington, 2004, p.28).

In the attempt to not only understand why African American mothers are found to apply such “iron-fist” approaches to communication about sexuality with their adolescent age daughters, but also to also continue on the path toward accomplishing the research

goals of the current study, more detail on the theoretical framework of Symbolic Interactionism is offered for more guidance and structure.

Theoretical Framework Revisited

The above review of the available literature supports the need for further research. While there are many theoretical foundations from which one could explore the topic of African American mother-daughter communication about sexuality, the current study will do so through the lens of Symbolic Interactionism. To expand on the initially brief introduction of Symbolic Interactionism, a review of the history of this framework and the application of its' concepts are provided here to support the transition of the literature review to a discussion of the methodology employed for the current study.

Developments over time have continued to expand our understanding of Symbolic Interactionism, but the foundation of this theory remains rooted in the earlier influences of research by a number of prominent scholars. George Herbert Mead is the scholar noted as the paternal figurehead for Symbolic Interactionism. While the notable work by Mead surfaced around 1934, Charles Cooley's looking glass self (1902), John Dewey's concept of mind (1930) and William James' notion of self in relation to the environment (1975) have each been embraced as influential components of what we now define as the major concepts of Symbolic Interactionism.

Some of the frequently applied concepts of Symbolic Interactionism are self and mind, socialization, role rules and role clarity, and definition of the situation (Stryker, 1969 and Longmore, 1998). Applying these key concepts to the present topic of research, they can be elaborated as:

- *Self and Mind*: How sexual development is interpreted by the mother and adolescent age daughter,
- *Socialization*: The acquisition of sexuality-related values, beliefs and attitudes,
- *Role Rules and Role Clarity*: Mothers' expectations for self and for daughter's sexual development, sexual behaviors and how these expectations are communicated,
- *Definition of the Situation*: How mother perceives and defines what has happened, is happening and may happen regarding her own and her daughter's sexual development.

It is important to note that these concepts, in comparison to those of other theories, have been said to be very difficult to operationalize (Longmore, 1998). When deciding to apply the theory of Symbolic Interactionism to any study, scholars must carefully frame their argument. For this study, the decision to apply this theory is best framed by the scholars that have already successfully incorporated Symbolic Interactionism as a lens through which to explore and understand sexuality related research.

Symbolic Interactionism and the Study of Sexual Development

While the current study is believed to be the first to explore the actual messages that mothers share about their own experiences with sexual development with their adolescent age daughters, there are studies that have examined other aspects of sexual development specifically through the lens of Symbolic Interactionism.

The previously cited article by Longmore (1998) titled "Symbolic Interactionism and the Study of Sexuality" offers several examples of these past studies. Within her

discussion, beginning with the statement that “sexual behavior, like all human behavior is symbolic” we see mention of Thomas (1907) who is recorded as one of the earliest to conduct research about the social psychology of sex from the perspective of Symbolic Interactionism.

Three more recent studies demonstrate the continued application of this theoretical framework. One, a study by Fitzharris and Werner-Wilson (2004) applied a framework similar to Symbolic Interaction, the Rashoman Effect, to an understanding of communication about sexuality between parents and their adolescent age children. The Rashoman Effect is a social-psychological construct that suggests that interpretation of events is an inherently subjective experience. Perceptions of multiple realities may explain why African American mothers of adolescent age daughters approach communication about sexuality in the ways that the available literature demonstrates.

Such as in the work of Penington (2004) where Symbolic Interactionism was identified as one of the best theoretical foundations because when applied in racially diverse qualitative research, it allows African American participants to describe their experiences in their own words. This form of voice empowerment allows scholars to expand on the limited research perspectives of the past and truly hear how African Americans construct meanings to their experiences.

In 1996, author Shirley A. Hill published a book that reflects her three-year study of gender socialization in African American families; how roles and ideologies are constructed and conveyed to children. Hill’s qualitative research is grounded in her belief that qualitative data “is consistent with the long tradition of Symbolic Interactionism.” As social class and race are especially likely to “shape the construction of reality for racial-

ethnic minorities, African American experiences and perceptions are often found to be different than the majority group” (p. 163). Therefore, Hill sought to collect data that focused on parents of children ages 10-12 years old, the youngest all African American parent-child sample identified in the available literature.

Though the findings of Hill’s study were not mother-daughter specific, five questions on the quantitative-based survey instrument used were directly related to sexuality and are noted here as an example of how sexuality has been attempted to be explored among African Americans through the lens of Symbolic Interactionism. These questions included options to check yes or no for:

1. Have you discussed sexuality with your child?
2. Are you teaching (or will you teach) your child that it is important to get married before having sex?
3. It is important to get married before having children?
4. At what age do you think parents should have a discussion with their children about sex? With options to mark clusters of age groups for either 5-8, 9-12 and 13-17 years of age (p.170-171).

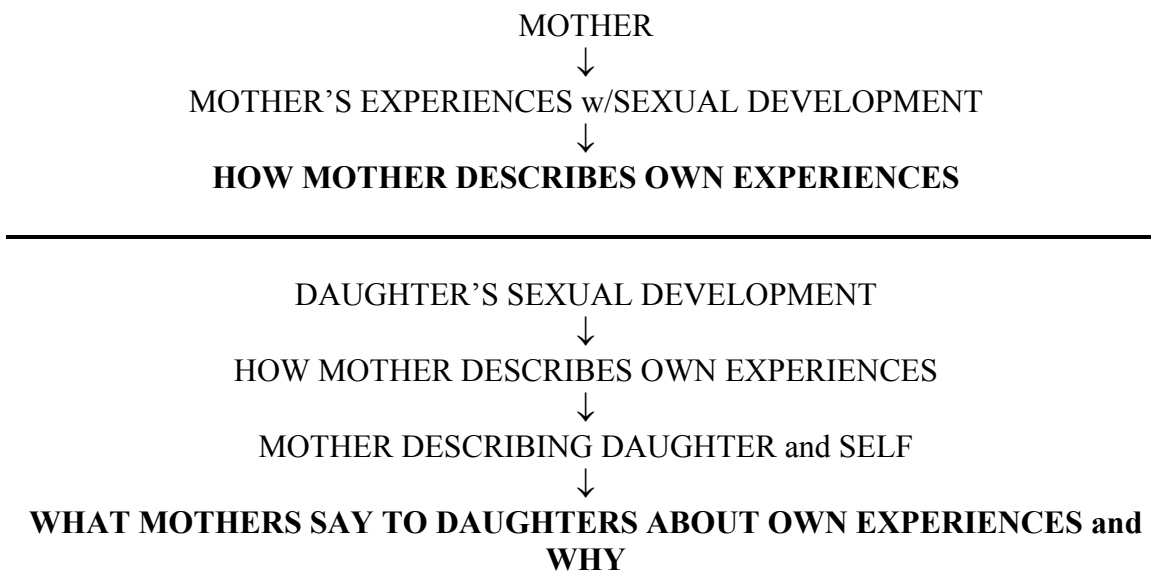
The wording, format and options for only yes or no responses to these questions may permit larger sample size of data collection but sets limitations to interpreting and applying the parents’ responses. These questions reflect some of the stereotypes around communication about sexuality related topics between many parents and their children. For example, the question regarding age of “a discussion” is posed as if communication about sexuality is a one-time action, or that communication needs to take place only at a certain age.

In this study (Hill, 1996), survey questions were complimented by interviews with some of the participating parents. The interview guide included topics from child-rearing strategies to racial socialization and intergenerational transmission of values. Questions about sexuality were posed as “some people say that parents and children have much more liberal sexual views today than in the past...what is your opinion on this issue? What is your view of sex before marriage? And, what is your view of having children before marriage?”

Hill’s work is a key reference in support of determining how to best approach accomplishing the goal of the current study. Her methodological focus on African American families and application of Symbolic Interactionism suggest a framework that may compliment other scholars’ approaches toward understanding mother-daughter communication about sexuality.

One assumption of Symbolic Interactionism is that the human mind acquires, integrates and processes information (Charon, 2001, White and Klein, 2002). This assumption is a key aspect of understanding mother-adolescent age daughter communication about sexual development. The capability and capacity of both mother and daughter to receive messages about sexuality and integrate them into their personal experiences is reflected as each mothers’ past filters the mothers’ communication about sexuality with her daughter. It is critical to recognize that just as the interviewed mother may process communication about sexual development one way, her mother may have done so similarly or completely differently. The cycle of communication, or lack thereof, may be the same or very different depending on the individual.

It is possible that the meanings that a mother assigns to her past experiences with her developing sexuality will create a lens through which she views and responds to her daughter's developing sexuality. This relationship can be visually depicted as:



The theoretical framework of Symbolic Interactionism encourages the combination of cultural meanings assigned to sexuality with the mother's experiences with sexual development during adolescence. For example, the potential for intergenerational differences in meanings of sexual development where, for the mother's mother, communication about sexual development may have been seen as something that was not appropriate let alone necessary to take place between mothers and daughters. From a symbolic perspective, "what is important is that communication about sexual messages takes place within a cultural or societal context that is continuously changing" (Longmore, 1998 p.50). Just as intergenerational differences and similarities are possible, American cultural and society is continuously revolving in approved approaches to sexuality among adolescent age females.

Summary

This review of the literature available on communication about sexuality between African American mothers and daughters and Symbolic Interactionism provides the final transition to the next chapter where the methodology of the current study is presented.

In summary, the available literature allows us to know that the African American mother-daughter relationship can be composed of characteristics that distinguish it from other racially identified groups. Among these characteristics we see high levels of respect and collectivism that represent a strong sense of responsibility that African Americans mothers have been found to feel for their daughters' sexual development. This strong sense of responsibility influences the content and delivery of messages about sexuality between African American mothers and their adolescent age daughters.

While we know of this influence and potential outcomes, we still do not know how factors, such as mothers' past experiences with sexual development, relate to this strong sense of responsibility and how it is communicated. As such, we can conclude that it may be beneficial to seek answers to the present research questions of what do mothers say to their adolescent age daughters about their own experiences with sexual development and what are the factors that influence the reasons why or why not this communication takes place?

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The available literature and methodologies previously applied to the study of communication about sexual development and African American mother-adolescent age daughter relationships has been thoroughly reviewed. With this foundational understanding, the current study was designed, executed and analyzed through the lens of Symbolic Interactionism to best solicit answers related to the research questions of what do mothers say to their adolescent age daughters about their own experiences with sexual development and what are the factors that influence the reasons why or why not this communication takes place?

Some scholars have approached similar questions about communication between mothers and daughters using qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods for their studies. Here, a qualitative method that captures the voice of the participating mothers is employed as it serves to offer an in-depth exploration of not only what mothers say, but also the reasons behind the words that they share with their adolescent age daughters.

Sample and Procedures

The participants in this study were five mothers of adolescent age daughters. As the following table (Table 3.1) depicts the characteristics of this sample, we see that all mothers, as required, self-identified as African American. Mothers ranged in age from 35 to 50 years old and their adolescent age daughters were 10, 12, 12, 14 and 15 years old.

Four of the five daughters had begun their menstrual cycles with the one showing signs of puberty.

Mothers all had at least some college education and identified their family income as middle-class. All mothers were married, with the exception of one mother who was widowed. All referenced daughters were either the only or oldest daughter except for one mother who had a college age daughter.

The age when each mother started her menstrual cycle and had her first experience with sexual intercourse are noted. The age range for beginning their cycles was 11-13 with one mother not recalling her exact age but sharing memories from an experience during eighth grade. The ages vary for when the mothers had their first experience with sexual intercourse with the youngest age being 14 and the oldest 20.

TABLE 3.1 SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS' 1 = Pseudonyms Have Been Used					
	Joann	Josephine	Natasha	Karen	Shawn
Mother Ethnicity	African American	African American	African American	African American	African American
Mother Age	50	39	38	35	42
Mother Age Menstrual Cycle Start	11	12	8 th grade	13	13
Mother Age 1st Sexual Intercourse	15	14	15	20	18
Mother Highest Education	Some College	College Graduate	College Graduate	College Graduate	Some College
Mother Current Marital Status	Married	Married	Married	Married	Widow
Daughter Age	12	12	14	10	15
Daughter Age Menstrual Cycle Start	11	10	12	Not yet	13
Family Income	Middle	Middle	Middle	Middle	Middle
Other Children	1 Older Daughter	1 Older Son	1 Younger Son	1 Older Son	2 Younger Daughters

Recruitment Procedure

Participating mothers were recruited using flyers, electronic mail lists and personal contact. While the flyers (Appendix A) were posted throughout Athens-Clarke County in shopping areas and libraries, distributing the flyer electronically and personal contacts appeared to solicit the most responses.

The flyer asked all prospective participants to contact the primary investigator via phone or e-mail. Initial contact with four out of the five mothers was via e-mail. This e-mail was then followed by a telephone conversation where the primary investigator asked each mother, prior to attempting to schedule an interview, if she:

1. Self-identified African-American,
2. Was the biological mother of an adolescent age daughter who has entered puberty and lived in the same residence as the mother, and
3. Lived with her biological mother during adolescence.

Efforts were made to keep the sample as homogenous as possible. Yet, in response to time constraints and limited replies from prospective mothers, interviews were conducted with the first five mothers that were interested and available. Therefore, this convenience sample was homogenous on some characteristics but not as much as initially desired, yet with further consideration, all differences were found to bring diversity and unique strengths to the analysis.

For example, it was initially planned to recruit mothers of daughters' age 9-12 years old. Two prospective mothers' daughters were older, so IRB approval was sought and granted to extend the age range of the daughters to 9-15 years. With the resulting sample being mothers of daughters age 10, 12, 12, 14 and 15; we were able to hear how

the mothers' experience of communication about their sexual development may have varied in respect to the daughters' ages. It was also initially planned to require that all daughters had entered puberty before the interview. All daughters except one had begun their menstrual cycle but she was showing signs of puberty and to the benefit of the study, represented the youngest age of the daughters.

Mothers were also preferred to have lived with their biological mother during adolescence. All mothers initially said that they grew up with their mothers, but during the interviews two disclosed that their biological mothers did not raise them as one mother was adopted by an outside family and the other by her aunt. Neither mother felt that their adopted mothers were any different than a biological mother.

An additional intention was to interview mothers about their first-born daughter. This goal was met except for with one mother who during the interview referenced an older, college age daughter. Strength in the differences that may result from having an older daughter was noted and is further explored in the following analysis.

Interview Procedure

Audiotape recorded interviews were conducted one-on-one between the participating mother and the primary investigator. The average interview length was one hour. Date, time and location of each interview were mutually agreed upon. Locations included the University of Georgia campus, the local library, a sandwich shop and the places of employment and residence of two mothers.

The goals of the study and procedures were reviewed with each mother prior to beginning the interview. All mothers signed an informed consent form (Appendix B) and were made aware of the researchers planned reference to an interview protocol

(Appendix C) that concluded with asking each mother for a pseudonym to be used in place of her real name.

The interview questions were designed to lead up to the central inquiry of what do you say to your daughter about your own experiences? In order to set the stage for this question, all mothers were first asked to share words that they felt described themselves and their daughters as sexual beings. Then, mothers were asked about their earlier experiences as a developing adolescent female, their own mothers' response to this development, emotions felt about these experiences, their daughters' sexual development and how they have responded.

The participating mothers each determined the flow of the interview. While the interview protocol provided a semi-structured format, all mothers were very personable and expressive and the researcher responded by engaging each mother's willing openness into what was more of an informal interview about the topic of communication about sexual development. This informal semi-structured response appears to have resulted in a deep, rich set of information about each mother's experiences.

Analytical Approach

The five audio tapings were transcribed as each interview was completed. Once all interviews were transcribed, the transcription texts were reviewed and analyzed using the qualitative based approach of Brown and Gilligan's (1991) Guide to Listening.

The Guide to Listening is an interpretative analysis that focuses on the subjects' voice and the layered meanings "that are inherent in any story of lived experience" (Brown and Gilligan, 1991); a story of lived experience such as a mother's recollections of her experiences with sexual development and how she chooses to communicate these

experiences to her daughter. The Guide to Listening is “responsive to the symbolic nature not only of what is said but also of what is not said” (p.44).

The approach used in previous studies employing the Guide to Listening asks the researcher to read each narrative at least four different times, each time underlining particular voices or points of view. First, the narrative is read listening for the overall tone of voice (the who, what, when, where and why), then, it is read for a second time noting all “I” statements representing how the subject speaks of herself. The third reading reflects on all statements about the subject or person being discussed and the fourth and final reading identifies key feelings shared in response to the subject or person. This original approach of these four readings was attempted, but then slightly modified in order to better reflect the goals of the study.

For the current study, the interview text was read five times. The first reading still identified overall tone and the second reading served to distinguish the mother’s voice as she described what she said to her daughter about her own experiences with sexual development. Then, to reveal a deeper context for each mother’s voice, a third and fourth reading was done to listen for the mother’s voice when she describes herself and her daughter. The fifth and final reading served to identify the mother’s voice when she describes how her own mother responded to her earlier sexual development. Multiple color highlighters were used to mark the various voices and to document their orchestration.

Demonstrating a “practice of relationship, rather than a profession of the truth” (Brown and Gilligan, 1991, p.43), the multiple readings allow the researcher to listen for

different voices of self-telling different narratives of relationship with the subject and topic being discussed.

This process represents multiple encounters with the participant's voice. These encounters, through the application of Symbolic Interactionism, represent how "a critical aspect of defining a situation is establishing or constructing the relevant identities of the interactants," which in this study are the mothers and their daughters as defined by the mother's voice when describing both.

Developed from the recognition of the multi-layered voice of research participants, the Guide to Listening implores qualitative researchers to seek answers based on the in-depth context of what is being said. As such, this method of analysis encourages exploration beyond the surface level of responses from research participants.

This analytical approach compliments the theoretical lens of Symbolic Interactionism, especially the ability of one to define situations. It can be said that in the process of a mother defining her experiences with sexual development, the descriptive words that she chooses to use represent the personally assigned meanings that the mother gives to her experiences. As such, the Guide to Listening approach provides an analytical outline designed to capture the in-depth context from which to interpret the layered meanings of each mother's voice. Symbolic Interactionism then reminds us that these meanings are "modified through interpretation" (Longmore, 1998, p.51) so that what a mother chooses to say to her daughter is more than just a voice reciting factual events, but rather a voice that is filtered by how the mother interprets her experiences with sexual development.

In addition to Brown and Gilligan (1992) and Brown (1997), Tolman (1996) is an example of a study that previously applied the Guide to Listening method to analyze in-depth semi structured interviews with 28 girls about their sexuality. Following the procedures of reading each transcript several times, a visual mapping of the multiple aspects of the subjects' experience was then created.

This process sought to retain the context of the narrative, rather than breaking it apart to evaluate the frequency of themes. This visual map was used to create an interpretation of each subject's experience, which was then expressed through conceptually clustered matrices (Miles and Huberman, 1994). These matrices are a qualitative analytic technique for organizing and displaying data according to designated concepts and to identify patterns within and between the groups of participants.

For the current study, a similar process of visual mapping expressed in the form of a matrix was used to organize the layers of the five mothers' voices as identified through the Guide to Listening analysis. The matrices were clustered to reflect the listening for, 1st: What the mother says to the daughter about her own experiences, 2nd: how the mother describes her daughter, 3rd: how the mother describes herself, and 4th: How the describes her mothers response to her sexual development. (Appendix D).

Recognizing the Researcher: Participant Relationship

The decision to apply the Guide to Listening method of analysis to the current study is based on the gaps identified in the review of prior studies on communication about sexuality between African American mothers and daughters. The qualitative approaches applied to these past studies have at most simply transcribed and clustered their findings and may not have captured the entire voice of the participants. A key

benefit to using the Guide to Listening is that, in addition to the multiple readings mentioned above, the researcher is also asked to take a step further in acknowledging a personal influence on the analysis of the interview. In other words, the researcher is asked to acknowledge the inevitably underlying relationship that the researcher has with each participant.

It is an honor to be in the position to hear the voice of another's experiences with sexual development. As a researcher, it is an honor to not only hear this voice, but to then be privileged to further analyze and suggest research-based relationships among the voices. This process of exploration is one that cannot be taken lightly and involves the careful intersection of researcher and interviewer. Brown and Gilligan (1991) describe the necessity of this process as the Guide to Listening:

“Asks the listener to reflect on herself as a person who is in the privileged position of interpreting the life events of another and to consider the implications of this act. An awareness of the power to name and control meaning is critical.”

As such, the researcher, as a listener, is asked to recognize:

“Her initial thoughts and feelings about the narrator and the story. In what ways does she identify with or distance herself from the narrator? In what ways is she different or the same? Where is she confused or puzzled? Where is she certain? Is she pleased or upset by the story? And she is asked to consider how these thoughts and feelings may affect her understanding, her interpretation, her response” (p.46).

The common process of qualitative researchers identifying and labeling themes throughout an interview text, by use of words that the researcher(s) chooses to use, is not

without influence of who the researcher is based on their academic as well as personal background. The “themes” that stand out during an analysis will vary depending on the perspective of the researcher and will ultimately contradict a goal of any qualitative researcher being completely objective toward the participant(s).

In the attempt to broaden the understanding of communication about sexual development between mothers and their adolescent daughters, it was deemed imperative to employ an analysis that would be more in-depth while still complimentary of identifying and clustering themes. In order to truly begin to look through the lens of Symbolic Interactionism and examine how the self (mother) is defining her situation (communication with her adolescent age daughter); one has to find a way to hear the whole voice of the research participant. For this process, I, as the researcher had to recognize my voice that has guided my research interest and more importantly a desire for that deeper understanding.

Importance of Recognizing My Voice

The topic of female sexual development can be very personal and intimate for each woman. As a woman, who went through and will always be influenced by my experiences with sexual development, I have embraced this study for multiple reasons. As previously mentioned, one academic reason for this study is a goal to fill the gaps in the literature; another reason is my personal connection to this topic.

The Guide to Listening analytical approach lead me to acknowledge how my personal experiences with the very aspects of female sexual development that I am interviewing selected mothers about, influence my entire thought process from the focus of the literature review, structure of the interview protocol, where I probed the mothers

during the interview and most importantly, my interpretation of the findings. This influence represents answers to those questions posed by Brown and Gilligan (1991) as imperative for the researcher, as a listener, to recognize.

Toward the aspiration of offering an in-depth analysis of the mothers in this study, I had to ask myself, if I had a daughter, what would my answers be to the questions that I asked the participating mothers? For, even though I am yet to be a mother, I am a daughter. My personal experiences with sexual development have served to shape the biologically, personally, socially and academically sexual woman that I am. To this end, I sat down and interviewed myself.

During my personal interview I began to recognize even more so how passionate I am about the topic of mother-adolescent daughter communication about sexual development. As a 25-year-old African American female, I feel that my mother and I did not talk much about my, let alone her, earlier experiences with sexual development. I have increasingly pondered this lack of communication as I have matured from an adolescent into a woman. So that just as with previous studies, I see myself and how I, too, struggle to understand how my earlier experiences with sexual development have shaped the woman I am today. I can see how my underlying issues related to these experiences, if not addressed, would influence communication about sexual development with my own, if I were to have a, daughter.

Recognizing the influence of my past experiences is most notable when I think about how throughout my interviews with each of the five women there were multiple times when I felt myself disturbed, confused and sometimes extremely pleased in response to the mothers' voices of experience. For example, when one mother shared that

she did not recall the time when she first started her menstrual cycle, I found myself silently angry with her for not remembering. Yet, when I began to write down reflections on my past experiences, to my amazement, I found that I, too, do not recall when I started my menstrual cycle. Then, in response to two of the mothers who spoke about how open they are to sharing their personal experiences with their adolescent age daughters, I found myself pleasantly drawn to these women with thoughts of how I wished my own mother had been as revealing about herself.

These responses are related to specific aspects of my own experiences with sexual development and have inevitably and now more honestly, been reflected in my analysis of the voices of each of the five mothers. As the Guide to Listening reminds me that these emotions will influence my analysis of the interview texts, the next few paragraphs offer a brief background of my past experiences. For while all of my experiences are connected, I focus on those experiences and emotions that are most closely related to the thoughts and emotions that were triggered during my interviews with the five mothers.

My mother has shared with me that she was never married to my biological father. The two of us lived with my grandparents for about nine years after I was born, until she later married my stepfather. I have met my biological father one time, during my summer before entering eighth grade. I have no relationship with him besides gifts that arrived when I was much younger and that one summer together.

I do not recall my mother saying much about her relationship with my biological father. I have seen photographs of him and other men that she had dated. I have vague memories of my mother saying that he left with the military before I was born and that she had briefly considered an abortion, but felt more strongly about giving birth to me.

My mother has not shared with me any other aspects of her past relationships or any aspect of her sexual development, but I have always wondered about the stories behind the albums of photos.

Growing up and starting to go places with female and male friends, I remember my mother always saying to me that she would know if I lied to her about my whereabouts and that she had ‘spies’ who would report to her if I went somewhere I was not supposed to be. I recall always being what my friends would tease ‘overly honest’ with my mother about my activities because I always feared the repercussions of any thoughts of dishonesty. I never understood why my mother emphasized this honesty and practiced such strict supervision over my actions. I wonder now, what she was like as a young woman and if her experiences influenced the way she was raising me.

My mother never encouraged the idea of having boyfriends and for some time neither did I. When my interest in dating grew, I recall her emphasizing how bad boys were and how I should always make sure to keep my legs closed. Throughout middle and high school I ended up having two boyfriends, but I was never physical beyond kissing with either of them. I remember them and others asking when we would ‘do it’ and I always said no, whether it was because of the fear I had of my mother finding out, or of disappointing her by getting pregnant, I remember knowing that it was simply not something I should do.

My mother has shared with me the stresses she experienced giving birth to me when she was 20 years old. Being young and living with my grandparents, she decided to work several jobs in order to take care of us. I have been told that she was unable to remain in the military or initially pursue higher education, partially because of her efforts

to be a mother. While, I am hesitant to conclude that knowledge of my mother's struggles with early motherhood contributed to my fears of having sex, I have wondered if they have.

Even more so, I have wondered if years of witnessing my mother as a single parent influenced my years of fighting thoughts of having sex with my boyfriend, and how I recall always feeling very bad and worried about his feelings of opposition to my decision. I hated knowing that I was making my boyfriend mad and often doubted my decision to not have sex with him because of this. These feelings carried on into my more physical relationships during college, where I was away from my mother's direct supervision, and began to question the behaviors of sexual abstinence that she had always encouraged but never explained.

I found myself all throughout college, despite repeated failed attempts, wanting to try to see if I could control dating guys without being physical. I soon found throughout my college years that denial of the truth does not work. From the first time that I 'messed around' with a guy in his college dorm room to being intimate with men whom I knew did not care about me, I recall thinking and feeling very strongly that my actions were not right but I hated the opposition from the men. I found myself thinking; well if I already did it, I should at least try to make the best of my foolish decisions.

This internal conflict was even stronger when, during a holiday break at home, I remember my mother asking me if I was still a virgin. I was standing in the downstairs bathroom and she was in the living room facing me. I will never forget the disappointed reaction when I could not be anything but honest in telling her no. We argued after that and ever since I have always hated knowing that if my mother knew all of the details of

my decisions, she would not approve. Yet, I do not know because just as my mother has not talked to me about her experiences, I have not to her and, I wonder if I would to my own future daughter.

The process of recalling these personal experiences with my sexual development has revealed a web of thoughts and emotions, most of which I have grown from but many I have tucked away. In re-discovering my own voice, I find myself pleasantly unable to respond objectively, but rather passionately to the voices of the mothers in my study. Through acknowledgement of my tightly knit web of personal victories and defeats with sexual development, I must continue to explore the roots of how I define myself as a sexual being, just as am hoping through this research to encourage other mothers and daughters to do.

It is important to note that as I briefly disclosed these portions of my interview with myself, the words shared above represent a voice that I was able to filter as I typed it down. While I was able to edit my voice, the mothers participating in this study were not. What each mother said during the one-time interview is the sole reference, and realizing that the mothers may have edited their transcribed texts if given the opportunity is more of a reason for me, as a privileged researcher, to be cautious in summarizing and interpreting their voices.

As we prepare to move forward into the chapter on findings and discussion, I am careful not to assume that each mother's experience of participating in this study represents the same or even similar thoughts as mine. I proceed with caution, making sure that I am not imposing my experiences on what the mothers' experiences meant for them and subsequently what they choose to share with their adolescent age daughters. I am

aware of myself as a researcher and the power that is exuberated in simply being able to write about another woman's experiences with something as intimate and personal as sexual development.

CHAPTER 4

PROFILES OF PARTICIPATING MOTHERS

The purpose of this study was to explore what mothers say to their adolescent daughters about their own experiences with sexual development and the factors that influence the reasons why or why not this communication takes place. As such, five mothers were interviewed about their past personal experiences with sexual development. Listening to the words each mother used to describe her experiences, this ‘voice’ was captured as the mothers described what they choose to share about their sexual development with their adolescent age daughters.

Following the modified approach to the Guide to Listening, findings from the multiple readings of each interview text are presented below. An in-depth profile of each mother’s interview is offered first, followed by a discussion of the similarities and differences found within and between the mothers’ profiles.

For each of the followings profiles, the mother’s voice is summarized using exact quotes from the interview text. Applying the suggested multi-layered listening process, we can hear first, the mothers’ voice when describing what she chooses to say or not say to her adolescent age daughter about her own experiences. Then, we can listen to the mother’s voice as she describes her daughter, herself, and then how her own mother responded to her sexual development.

Each mother is presented in the same order that they were interviewed: Joann, Josephine, Natasha, Karen and then Shawn. First, we listen to Joann.

Joann

Joann is a 50-year-old mother of an adolescent age daughter who shortly before our interview turned 12 years old. Joann expresses a very frustrating lack of understanding about her daughter whom she feels is very attached to her mother and is overwhelmingly immature in responding to her personal development.

To Daughter about Own Experiences

When making attempts to communicate to her daughter about her own earlier experiences with sexual development, Joann says:

“If she doesn’t want to talk about it then we don’t talk about it...I haven’t really talked to my youngest one because I think that she may take it not in the way I want her to take it. She would take it like well you did it so why can’t I.”

Specifically, when it comes to sharing with her daughter about having had her first experience of sexual intercourse at 15 years old, Joann prefers to tell her daughter “don’t do that because its only going to end up being bad for you” as opposed to any specifics, as she feels, “its more of an emulation because I am [she is] so attached to my mom that I want to do things that she did and it is potentially, it could be harmful for her.”

When asked if there was anything about her past experiences with sexual development that she would not tell her daughter, Joann responds:

“I’m thinking and I don’t know if its because I was sexually active outside of marriage, I don’t know I may share that with her but it would probably be something that when she is 17...18 kind of thing. Not now because of that emulation.”

Joann expresses a voice of concern about telling her daughter about one past experience as it relates to how her daughter's physical development may solicit unwanted responses from men:

“Probably eventually I probably will tell her about a situation that I encountered with one of my mother's friend's boyfriends when I was 13 and it was a slight molestation and because of how my 12 year old is developed. I don't want to scare her and she is very touchy feely and she wants to love everybody and she wants everybody to love her and it could be dangerous the way society and culture are now. It could be very dangerous for her.”

Describing Daughter

Joann started her menstrual cycle at age 11 and recalls being very mature in response to her sexual development. Joann's own sense of maturity as an adolescent female speaks volumes when more frustration and disappointments are apparent in her voice when describing how her daughter has responded to her own cycle that started at the same age as Joann's:

“She started when she was 11 and every month we have to tell her this is what you need to do and its like when is this going to kick in...her personality trait is like I'm [she's] perfectly resisting it. I don't want to deal with this. I want to go to school. I want to play. I don't want to deal with this aspect of my life.”

Joann expresses a voice of wanting to understand but not knowing why her daughter is extremely different from her and her older daughter who is now in college:

“She is to me very immature. My daughter that is in college she is like me, the mature one ready to tackle anything. She didn't feel like it [having her menstrual

cycle] was a hindrance to her. But the younger one she's very attached to me but in a baby kind of way and that is for lack of a better explanation. She is very immature and I don't know why that is."

Joann describes her daughter as maturing more physically than mentally. Joann says that her daughter appears to be pretty open about talking to her mother about some topics, yet Joann is not willing to tell her daughter too much, especially about her own experiences as a young woman because of a fear that her daughter will want to "be like mom and do what mom has done."

Describing Self

At the beginning of each interview, each mother was asked to share how she would describe herself as a sexual being. Joann replies, appearing to be very careful with her words "I feel as a woman presenting myself in a desirable way to my spouse." Joann then refers to her adolescent years as being "a very mature child" and having:

"Always been an outgoing person and I've always been the person I wouldn't say that pushed the envelope but been more open to certain types of things in the same time had certain limitations based on my religious upbringing."

Reflecting on her first experience with sexual intercourse, Joann's voice expresses how she felt that her responsibilities around the house and helping to take care of her siblings represented being grown up and able to assume responsibility for her actions. "I think my decision to do that it was more for me saying that in my mind I was ready to handle something like that...it was something that I really wanted to do." At the same, when Joann summarizes her past experiences with sexual development "when I think about

what I did it was clearly not right and I think about those things when I am dealing with her.”

Describing what was said to Mother

Joann uses terms such as outgoing, very tenacious and very strong willed to describe her mother as well as the woman that she feels that she has become. Having grown up in a household with her mother, younger sister, younger brother and stepfather frequently gone on military duty, Joann describes her mother as a single mom. She recalls her mother sitting both her and her younger sister down at the kitchen table when she was around 11 years old, her sister 6, and her mother telling them “the whole thing from ovulation to periods to sexual intercourse to having babies you know the whole thing right then and there.”

Joann recalls how the family was “tight knit” but because her mother’s relationship with her stepfather was “estranged because you are not really interacting with that person” her mother talked to her about how their life was. Joann’s mother discouraged any early sexual related behaviors by pointing out how they “have to deal with things and struggle with certain types of things and we don’t need to have extra...it takes a lot to take care of children.”

Josephine

Josephine is a 39-year-old mother to a 12-year-old adolescent age daughter. Josephine expresses a voice of growth, compassion and understanding of how her past connects to her daughter’s future when she speaks of her experiences with sexual development.

To Daughter about Own Experiences

Josephine's biological mother was murdered when she was around 4 years old. With the absence of her biological father, Josephine was raised by an aunt whom she identifies as her mother. While Josephine reveals that she has come to terms with the events of her past, her experiences as an adolescent female were very painful and confusing and thus significantly influence how she is raising her daughter:

"I wasn't handled properly and it's not anyone's fault, but because I was once her I've got to take care of her."

Josephine demonstrates this feeling of a need to take care of her daughter through her very open approach to discussing aspects of her past with her daughter. Most of what Josephine shares with her daughter is directly related to her experiences with sexual intercourse, for example:

"She knows that I had premarital sex. She knows that I was 14 having premarital sex. I told her who knew at 14 I would have a beautiful daughter. I didn't know I would have her back then and if I would have known..."

During a recent conversation about Josephine's marriage, her daughter asked if her husband had waited to have sex until they married. Josephine shares that she regretfully responded "no and mommy didn't wait for daddy." She tells her daughter how her decisions related to sex were different in the past and how she would have never thought, "that this day would come and I just let her know right then that I didn't have any information and I was looking for love."

As such, Josephine expresses a voice of resistance to her daughter's interest in dating as she recalls how as she was once just like her daughter who is now "so cool with

the guys” just as Josephine was as an adolescent. Josephine tries to discourage dating, even though her daughter sneaked and had a boyfriend. She shares “I also remember how crazy I was and how I was looking for so much but what I was looking for I could have gotten by just being a good friend to guys.”

Amidst Josephine’s open approach to discussing her past experiences, there are certain things that she feels she would have difficulty being as open with her daughter about the details of her sexual experiences. When asked if there was anything that she would not tell her daughter, Josephine responds after a long pause:

“I probably couldn’t tell her graphics. I couldn’t be as graphic with her. I’ve told her in general that by the time mommy and daddy married on our wedding night there was nothing new for us to do. I say that, but I say that very loosely, but I wouldn’t want her to know that there was nothing left for us to do because we had done everything sexually you can think that there was to do and we had married at 19. I’m not going to be graphic with her.”

She shares how even though there are aspects of her past that she would not want to tell her daughter; there is a part of her that speaks louder:

“I definitely wouldn’t let her know some of the places I’ve been, but if she were to ask I would tell her because I’ve made a vow to my children not to lie to them. So if she were to come out and ask me I would have to talk about it and it would hurt, but I wouldn’t want to talk about some of the people I have had sex with and one of the times I was out... I heard the word switch...they were trying to switch us out...it went from having sex to having a fight.”

Josephine expresses a connection between the details of some of her experiences and her daughter's age saying:

“She knows about everything else but I guess I probably wouldn't want to tell her that I've had sex in my mama's house because I'll probably tell her that when she gets older.”

When asked if there was anything that she would like to add to the interview, Josephine shares a sense of hope about her daughter knowing about her past and how she has learned from her experiences:

“I tell her mom did it wrong. Mom made a mistake. I hope that the meanings are positive. That they are going to produce positive results. That she will take my wrong and make it right.”

Describing Daughter

At the beginning of this interview, Josephine was asked to share what comes to mind when she thinks of her daughter as a sexual being. Josephine says with confidence and a strong pause between each word “precious, treasure, preserved, worthy of the best, not something to just be spilled, something worthy to be accepted by the proper person her husband.”

Josephine shares that her daughter began her menstrual cycle at age 10 and while she was showing signs of “bumps on her face and budding breasts” starting her cycle at this age seemed too young. Josephine found herself more emotional than her daughter, “I cried for 2-3 weeks...I was sad. I felt cheated by God not that God makes mistakes but I thought it was too early,” still, with her young age, her daughter has been “handling it like a pro.”

Josephine says, when reflecting back on her own past experiences, how her daughter is very mature in that “at 12 she is probably where I was at 24 with her confidence and her ability to work around situations.”

Describing Self

Before responding to what she thinks of her daughter as a sexual being, Josephine was also asked what words describes her as a sexual being. Josephine replies “sexually confident, pleasure...a role in my marriage and a responsibility that I enjoy now.” In comparison to how she felt as an adolescent with a developing sexuality, Josephine’s voice represents a transition from her past into the woman she is now. Josephine, shares that she had low self-esteem and with her mother being murdered followed by adoption by an aunt, she “never really had a good identity or understanding of who I was...I had insecurities, I didn’t have a visual of who I am.”

Josephine started her cycle at age 12 and began having sex at 14. Josephine describes herself as being “wild” and how at one time she saw sex as a “tool used to get a boyfriend’s attention and to keep him,” because “I always felt like I was below what was good...I was looking for love because I felt so empty. I was looking for someone to fill that space.”

Describing what was said to Mother

The day that Josephine started her cycle she remembers not understanding what was happening, being in the bathroom and noticing, “something was here” and then calling her mother (aunt) into the bathroom:

“When I told my mama I think I hurt myself I remember being embarrassed about bringing her in and she was like nooo {dragging out word}. I remember she was like so depressed you know and she was like I’m going to have to talk to you like I talk to your sisters. She told me this is your period and she gave me the whole spiel {drawing out/droned} this is your life” meaning “you got it for the rest of your life, its a responsibility. This is your life.”

Josephine remembers crying in response saying, “I don’t want this.” Her mother “never mentioned the whole sex thing and you could get pregnant or whatever...there was no voice given to it” besides the fact that “she used to say that all of the time, this is your life.”

As Josephine began having sex at 14, she recalls eventually finding out through her peers that she could get pregnant from her actions. Josephine shares that at that point:

“I never did say I’m not going to have sex anymore it was more of a I need to ask my mother to put me on the pill because I’ve gotta keep having sex because I’ve gotta keep this boyfriend. That was the period where my boyfriend quit me and it was because my mama would never give me an answer and she went months before she responded. I mean who wants to put a 14 year old on the pill but she ended up doing it.”

Natasha

Natasha is a 38-year-old mother to a daughter who shortly before the interview turned 14 years old. Within the most limited interview time frame, Natasha expresses a strong desire to not only see her daughter get married as a virgin but to also protect her

daughter from knowing much about her decisions related to her sexual development prior to meeting her husband.

To Daughter about own Experiences

Natasha appears to have what could be defined as a responsive approach to talking to her daughter about sexual development. She shares, in reply to questioning about her sexual development related behaviors as a young woman, “I have not told my daughter that I have been with someone else besides her dad. We talk about stuff if she ever just asks.”

Natasha appears to proudly speak about her marriage and the image she has created for her children:

“She never asked me whether I was a virgin when we got married, but she knows my husband and I dated from the time that I was 15. She never asked and I never offered the information to her. I think that she thinks I’m just like the angel sent from heaven {chuckles} that’s how my kids are like ‘she is so holy.’ I wonder if she thinks that mom could have ever possibly did that [not always been a virgin?]. She knows that I’ve done some things because I am always relaying information to them.”

For example, when speaking about a time when her and her daughter ran into a man of her past during a family trip back to her hometown, Natasha shares:

“We saw one of the little boys I dated and I wasn’t affectionate or intimate with him but he saw me and he said ‘this is my first love’ and he just teased me {smiling} and my daughter just thought ‘wow’ that there was somebody [before her father]. I was like he was so good looking when I went with him but look at

him now and stuff like that she thinks that's funny and she loves to hear stories like that."

When asked if there was anything about her past experiences with sexual development that she would not want her daughter to know, Natasha replies:

"No, just like I said, I haven't told her that I wasn't a virgin when I got married but there is nothing that I would keep from her. There is nothing that I have ever done that I wouldn't mind sharing with her. I don't know whether I would just up and say it just because she needs to know everything about me, but if it came up and I felt there was a reason, that this was just about to happen to her and it might help her to know my experiences, I would tell her."

Describing Daughter

When asked what words describe how she feels about her daughter as a sexual being, Natasha replies after a long pause "innocence {long pause} naïve {long pause} I don't know {pause} I guess I don't think about it." In respect to her daughter as a sexual being in the future, Natasha continues on, after another long pause, saying:

"I envision the day that she gets married as a virgin. I look forward to seeing her go through her years at college and being able to sustain her virginity, so I think about how I can talk to her and try to lead her in that way to actually understand that this is such a precious time with society today...how difficult it is to sustain until you get married...I guess now that is my biggest struggle with it...I just can't wait for the day to see her walking down the aisle and to know that she is still a virgin."

For now, Natasha appears worried that her daughter “has really low self-esteem...I don’t care how many times her dad tells her if he’s not the person she wants to tell her.” Yet, she realizes that her daughter “may know how beautiful she is more than I think.”

As a sort of closing thoughts, Natasha shares:

“She has not asked me but I have been pondering over whether I should share with her that I lost my virginity at her age. So that she will not think that what she may be feeling is abnormal, because I do believe that she wants a boyfriend and is maturing very fast. Even though I wish she could stay young, innocent and not be interested yet.”

Describing Self

When asked near the beginning of the interview how Natasha would describe herself as a sexual being now and in the past, she says somewhat conservatively:

“Times have changed but are not a whole lot different as far as its out there and everybody is doing it and you want to try it, so I tried it probably when I was 15...I was intimate with someone before I was with him [her husband] 1 {pause} 2 people, then him.”

Natasha continues in sharing about how her past response to her sexual development is different from today:

“I think now because of where I am I know that it’s different. Then, it had no relation with it the way that I do now. How it’s such a spiritual connection of souls. I mean it was just an act that I did and enjoyed it fleshly. It just did not affect me in any way...it was the thing to do and the opportunity, the moment was

there. I really can't even put my finger on like where-where kind of stuff.

Sometimes I don't have a whole lot of recollection of it."

Natasha speaks of her own feelings of self worth as an adolescent female, "I had very low self-esteem...I never thought I was beautiful or was good at anything nor ever felt that I had friends or that people liked me."

In the same breath Natasha's voice is absent as she does not remember her mother's reaction to her sexual development. When asked about the day she started her menstrual cycle, Natasha shares how she recalls being on her period in 8th grade, but that most likely she started sometime before then:

"I don't remember because since I don't make a big deal out of things and I'm thinking that my mom was the same way. I used to say that I never wanted to be like her but now I am and she didn't make a big deal about a whole lot of stuff."

Furthermore, when it comes to sharing her own experiences with beginning her menstrual cycle, Natasha shares that she has "never been able" to tell her daughter "because I have no idea. I don't remember." While Natasha does not recall when she began her cycle, she does remember her experiences being much easier than her daughters whom she describes as experiencing "headaches and stomach aches." Natasha expresses how she tries to sympathize with her daughter even though "I think she is very moody. I never did and so its hard for me to understand because I told her mine used to be three days, here, there, then gone, okay, let's move on."

In speaking about her past decisions, Natasha says, "the best thing that ever happened to me is that I married my boyfriend from college...a couple months before I was 16, he and I started dating so we've been together forever".

When asked what thoughts come to mind describing herself as a sexual being, Natasha shares that at first “it was just an act that I did and enjoyed it fleshly...it was the thing to do” and then “I think now because of where I am I know that its different, then it had no relation with it the way I do now how its such a spiritual connection of souls”

Describing what was said to Mother

Natasha’s voice when describing her past is one of limited recollection. While she suggests, with a chuckle, that “maybe my experience was so easy because I don’t remember anything...or either it was so horrible that I shut it out.”

Natasha’s voice is almost one of an uncertain wonder in the memories that she does recall about her mother’s response to her sexual development:

“My mom didn’t talk to me very much about sex. She never really ever told me what you know you better not do. It was kind of one of those unspoken things that you just better not do it.”

Natasha shares how when she did approach her mom about having sex:

“I don’t even remember her telling me or making a big deal about me having sex before marriage. I can remember when I wanted to have sex and I went to tell her, I remember her telling me to make sure to get some pills. But, when I decided to go to her for some pills she said, for what!”

Karen

Karen is a 35-year-old mother of a daughter who shortly before our interview turned 10-years-old. Karen appears to have very strong opinions and thoughts regarding her daughter’s sexual development. Though her daughter is still young and has not started her menstrual cycle, Karen expresses a desire to make sure her daughter is aware and

prepared for the different challenges that her daughter will face throughout her sexual development.

To Daughter about own Experiences

When it comes to telling her daughter about her own experiences, Karen shares that when she told her daughter about her first date and how both she and the date fell asleep at the movie theatre, “she thinks it was funny, but she is not thinking about boyfriends, but I am open to talking about it.” Karen also reflects on her decision to not have sex until she was 20 years old and how she hopes her daughter will wait:

“I just want her to, not because I did, because it was a good solid decision. I don’t feel like I lost anything by not having sex. I saw the issues...it wasn’t worth it. So, when she is in high school I want her to be carefree. I want her to realize that if a boy doesn’t want to be with her because she will not have sex then he wasn’t for you anyway. I didn’t care. They all work at the Hardees now or are in jail.”

At the same, Karen explains that what she shares with her daughter is not always the specifics of her own experiences:

“I have not talked to her about any of my sexual experiences. She knows that I have had two children...I did use to tell her about the stork, but thanks to her older brother and her friends, she knows. I don’t have a problem telling her about myself but it is difficult trying to explain but I do want to be honest with her.”

When asked if there was anything that Karen would not tell her daughter about her past experiences, she replies:

“Yeah, {looking around room seemingly very bothered, taking a drink from glass} yeah, there are some things I would never tell her and the reason is because

I think it would cause more harm than good. I would tell her reasons why certain things are not good, but I don't need to use my own examples. I don't have to tell her that I've been through it because sometimes your children don't need to know every little thing, but I will explain the reasons."

Still, Karen shares that in providing information to her daughter, "I am just going to be honest. As her mother I owe her that."

Describing Daughter

Karen's 10-year-old daughter has not begun menstruating but she is showing signs of puberty. When asked how she would describe her daughter as a sexual being, Karen replies, expressing discomfort with a long pause:

"Well, I think right now, for my daughter, I think my daughter is going to have a hard time embracing her sexuality because {pause} my daughter is really {pause} she's young for her age. She's very intelligent. She's in the gifted program at her school but she's a baby...Its really hard for me to think of her with any sexuality because she is such a baby."

Karen's attempts to talk to her daughter about her own experiences with sexual development are often limited by the daughter's apparent disinterest in hearing about her own development. In preparation for her daughter's menstrual cycle, Karen says, "I tried to talk to her about her cycle. The first time she cried. She was 9 years old and I had to take her shopping to get her to stop crying." And boyfriends, Karen has asked herself:

"Is my daughter thinking like that [like other little girls who are going on dates with boyfriends] and I discovered last night that my child is so far...she doesn't

even have a clue...I will be shocked if she comes to me one day talking about boyfriends.”

Describing Self

Karen describes herself as a sexual being who is now:

“Rather reserved. I’m really private about the whole thing...I’m just real private about it. I always have been...I think its because I try to keep the good image and I don’t necessarily want people saying anything about me...I am just a very private person about my sexual life.”

When she was an adolescent age female, Karen shares that she “didn’t have any feelings about myself being sexual or a woman,” but she did stand strong in certain feelings:

“I am not easily influenced because, the way that my mother left me, I could have been pregnant when I was 14 or 15 cause guys would say things, but I was just like this doesn’t sound right, this doesn’t even sound like anything I might even be interested in. I’m going to go the other way...it was just not even anything that I even wanted to do, not even remotely...I have different kinds of sexual feelings than other people because of some past issues...I would rather go shopping to be honest with you. Give me some shopping and a good book and you got me {pause} we can have sex or not, it doesn’t really matter.”

Karen reflects on how her school environment influenced her:

“I would see girls get pregnant and that one guy would have two or three girls and they would be fighting and so I was like if this is what sex is all about I would rather go shopping, read my book, anything except for having sex. So, my associations, I started hanging out with these really nerdy white boys because they

are not interested in having sex, black boys are interested in having sex and you know when you are shapely like I am, they're only interested in having sex."

Describing what was said to Mother

Karen found out a few years ago, in her adulthood, that she was adopted at a very early age. She has never met her biological mother who is now deceased, and did meet her biological father for the first time about three years ago. Karen feels and therefore refers to her adopted mother as her mother.

Having started her own cycle at 13 years of age, Karen recalls thinking that she had done something wrong and being embarrassed when things started happening to her because "it was like a stigma, nobody said anything, nobody told me this was coming." Karen shares that the response was "like okay, well we're going to take you to the store, we're going to buy you some pads and we're not going to talk about it."

Karen further elaborates:

"My mother never talked to us about that...all they ever told me was that I was a child. Nobody ever referred to me as a woman. When I was a child growing up it was like you were non-gendered. You were just a child...my mother never discussed with me the things that would happen to my body...so between my brother and my sisters and I she never made a big distinction. We were just children. There was no you do certain things because you're a girl...I was so uninformed by her."

Karen's mother was very vocal about her disapproval of interactions with the opposite sex once Karen started her cycle:

“My mother told me ‘stay away from boys or else I’ll get pregnant’ and I was so terrified because I went to school with boys everyday and I had no idea what she was talking about. I really didn’t know what pregnant meant.”

Her mother’s disapproval was so strong that Karen remembers when she found out that a 4th grade classmate was one of the first to start her cycle and Karen’s mother responded saying:

“Well you just better stay away from those little boys. She’s [the girl who started her cycle] so fast and if she wasn’t so fast this wouldn’t have happened to her...my mother wouldn’t let me play with her anymore. We were friends but my mother gave me all these reasons why I couldn’t go to her house.”

Then, later when a 7th grade friend got pregnant, Karen recalls,

“I just started crying and I don’t remember why. I didn’t know why I was crying. I just know it didn’t seem right...I didn’t want to call her stupid like that but she was stupider than me because she was pregnant.”

Shawn

Last, but not least, Shawn is a 42-year-old mother to a daughter who shortly before the interview turned 15-years of age, the oldest daughter represented in the sample.

To Daughter about own Experiences

Shawn’s open and proactive approach to talking to her daughter about her own experiences with sexual development is understood as she shares in one assertive breath, “I feel let me cut this at the pass; this is what happened to me.”

When asked if there is anything that she would not want to tell her daughter, Shawn responds:

“I have had some serious things happen, but I would tell her because I would want to keep her safe. Knowledge is key. I am not ashamed of anything that I have done. I would just tell her that I don’t want her to do it, so that if it happens to you, you don’t feel like you are the only one.”

In response to asking what Shawn wants to make sure that her daughter knows:

“I have not told her about the particular instance that I am thinking about. I am hoping that she does not come into the situation, that if she sees it she will cut it at the knees. My mother had a similar situation and she was date raped...she told me how it jumped from the date to the apartment and I remember wondering what were the tell tell signs”

Describing Daughter

Shawn describes her daughter as, “that naïve side of me when I was that age but without a dad. I had both of my parents...she is growing up without her father. He passed away when she was four years old.”

Shawn’s daughter started her menstrual cycle at age 13 and, being on the swim team, has taught herself how to use tampons. While she is physically mature, Shawn feels that her daughter is not emotionally mature. When asked to describe what she thinks of her daughter as a sexual being, Shawn recounts a recent instance with a boy flirting with her daughter and how her daughter’s response to the boy compares to how girls from her home state behave:

“I think of her as immature. Her 15 is definitely different than mine...I could see the body language and when I asked her she was completely oblivious...she doesn’t have the street savvy. 15 year olds [back home] have been sexually active since 12 or 13.”

Shawn feels that her daughter’s “self-esteem is very low” and in response to whether she thinks her daughter will wait to have sex until she is married, says

“I see it happening before she’s married...it happened to me. I know what I teach her. I know what I was taught but we always want to find out...so, can she wait until she’s married, I don’t know. It depends on how focused she is, how important it is to her.”

Describing Self

Shawn started her menstrual cycle at age 13 and first engaged in sexual intercourse at age 18. Shawn shares that she didn’t have the “problem” of having low self-esteem and since her daughter does have low self-esteem, she has “gone to counseling to help her with that in trying not to be combative...I have to learn how to teach her.”

When asked if her daughter has come to her with any questions about her past, Shawn says, “no, she has not asked me about that [mother’s first sexual experience]. I think probably once she gets into a relationship then she’ll be able to understand it a little more.”

When asked to share what comes to mind when she thinks of herself as a sexual being, Shawn shares: “the importance of waiting for someone who appreciates my individuality, my wants, my needs, that is physical and emotional.”

Describing what was said to Mother

Shawn recalls how when she was younger she remembers the family had “books with Greek statues and the table had nude statues for legs and I remember asking her what is that, pointing right at between the legs, and knowing that I didn’t have that.” And Shawn’s mother appeared open in explaining this and other aspects of sexual development:

“My mother was not one of those that was waiting for it to happen. She told me about menstruation when I was 6 or 7 years old. She started hers when she was 9, so she didn’t know when I would start. She told me what was going to happen and why.”

Shawn mentions how it was a benefit that she had both parents involved in her sexual development, “my mom was very open,” and “mom was not the scenario kind of person dad was the storyteller” like scenarios to help her think through things, and in response to Shawn’s avid interest in reading harlequin romances “she explained to me that I should not think that everything I was reading about was what I would get...everything does not happen that way.” So, the manner in which the two responded to Shawn’s sexual development exemplified to her “why it is important to have both parents because they balanced each other.”

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Reflecting on the profiles of the five participating mothers, Joann, Josephine, Natasha, Karen and Shawn, one can see how the “voices” of each woman are amazingly unique yet still very connected. Toward the current research goal, I, as the researcher, listened first to each mother’s voice of what she chooses to say to her adolescent age daughter about her own experiences with sexual development. Then, continuing through the Guide to Listening analytical approach, I listened to each mother’s voice as she described her daughter, herself, and then her own mother’s response to her sexual development. From these multiple readings I began to see how the voices orchestrate together to represent the in-depth context of each mother’s approach to sharing her personal experiences with her daughter.

Analysis of Profiles

With this foundation, the orchestration of voice found within and between the profiles of the five participating mothers was explored as meanings were established. Two levels of analysis shaped this exploration.

The first and main level of analysis entails identifying recurring themes, across the five profiles, of what mothers say to their daughters about their own experiences and the reasons that the mothers express for saying what they say. These themes are then analyzed a step further in search of potential relationships with the factors that may influence why mothers choose to share what they do with their adolescent age daughters.

This second level of analysis integrates the mothers' voices that represent these factors as they were heard throughout the other three readings of the Guide to Listening approach.

This chapter concludes with consideration of the researcher's personal reflections on the analysis and what these findings may suggest for future research.

Themes of What Mothers Say

There appeared to be four themes that were most prevalent in the voice of all five mothers as they spoke of the messages that they share with their adolescent age daughters about their experiences with sexual development. Those four themes are labeled as, 1) telling daughter that mother had sex before marriage, 2) telling daughter about mother dating, 3) telling daughter specific details about mother's experiences, and 4) mother's approach to telling daughter.

The following paragraphs will elaborate on those four themes as they demonstrate how, out of the five participating mothers, some have chosen, while others have not, to tell their daughters about their past experiences with sexual development. Some mothers speak about what they have shared, some, what they plan to share and others, what they will never share.

The goal of this first level analysis is to identify the orchestration of voices between what mothers say and their reasons for why or why not. The available literature will be incorporated into this analysis as the ages of each mother and daughter are noted alongside quotes from the interview text. Embracing the fact that there are several potential factors that could be influencing the mother's voices, the attribute of age becomes more distinguishable here because of the identified need for the inclusion of

younger age daughters in research on sexual development (Beaumont, 2000; Socha, 1999).

Though the influence of the factor of age is not scientifically measured in this context, a review of the literature suggests why it should at least be considered. Findings from previous studies suggest that sexuality related communication between mothers and their early adolescent age daughters is frequently “dominated by feelings of conflict between the desire for open and honest communication and the fear that such communication may alienate daughters or condone sexual behavior” (Yowell, 1997, p. 181). In general, mothers appear to be increasingly open with their daughters as they age and the two develop a familiarity of communication symbols, patterns and meanings. So, for the five participating mothers, we ask if the mothers’ communication is influenced by the age of the daughter and what other additional factors may play a role in the presence of these four themes.

The process of identifying these four themes served as a constant reminder that through Symbolic Interactionism “sexuality is a socially constructed reality and this reality is not the same for everyone” (Longmore, 1998, p.47). Each mothers’ experiences seem to vary for many different reasons. Therefore, efforts were made to identify themes that would permit identification of potential relationships and provide a view of how the mothers compare without creating a strict line of similarities and differences.

The four themes were initially recognized through the multiple readings of the interview texts. With each reading, connections between what one mother says to her daughter were seen with another mother, so that a preliminary list of quotes representing those associations was composed. This list of quotes was organized by topic and then

formally labeled, as all five mothers appeared to be addressing a similar aspect of their communication with their daughters. The labels were carefully reviewed and then denoted as the four themes detailed below.

Telling Daughter that Mother had Sex before Marriage

Listening to the mothers speak about what they say to their daughters about their past experiences with sexual development, the first theme identified is about telling their adolescent age daughters that they had sex before they were married. As all of the mothers expressed a desire for their daughters to wait to engage in sexual intercourse until marriage, or at least until a much older age, it is interesting to note how these mothers have communicated about their past experiences with the same decision to their daughters.

As previous studies have found that other mothers seem to compliment these five participating mothers with a “shared a goal of maintaining their daughters sexual abstinence indefinitely” (O’Sullivan, et. al, 2001) this study asks, if these mothers share this goal, how does this perspective relate to any possible goals of communication about the mother’s sexuality. Why does it appear to be that some mothers tell their daughters about having sex before marriage while some do not?

Four of the five mothers had sex before marrying their husbands, with the exception of one mother whose first sexual intercourse was with her fiancé. Three mothers appear to express a voice of comfort and a sense of need to tell their daughters that they had sex before marriage, in addition to encouraging their daughters to wait until marriage to engage in sexual intercourse. Where the other two mothers express a voice of conflict with the thought of disclosing this information to their daughters because of the

image that they feel they represent in their daughter's eyes. This image is communicated as the mothers say that there is a possibility that they may not tell their adolescent age daughters that they had sex before they were married.

The three mothers who appeared to express comfort and a sense of need to tell their daughters about having sex before marriage vary in their thoughts about this decision. One mother shares how, even though she does not feel her decision is the best example for her daughter, "She knows that I had premarital sex. She knows that I was 14 having premarital sex...I told her, who knew at 14 I would have a beautiful daughter" (*Josephine age 39, sex at 14, daughter age 12*).

Two mothers experienced their first sexual intercourse in their later years of ages 18 and 20. Though these two have yet to tell their daughters about their own experiences, they say that they would, while expressing a voice of wanting their daughters to learn in different ways from their experiences.

One mother experienced her first sexual intercourse at age 20 with her husband to be, this mother was the oldest out of the sample. Having yet to tell her daughter about this decision, she shares, "I have not talked to her about any of my sexual experiences...I don't have a problem telling her about myself, but it is difficult trying to explain, but I do want to be honest with her" (*Karen age 35, sex at 20, daughter age 10*). In her voice we hear a mother who appears to be proud of her past decisions to wait to have sex and plans to communicate hope for the same decision from her daughter "not because I did, but because it was a good solid decision."

On the other hand, where another mother who experienced her first sexual intercourse at age 18 tells her daughter about her decision because she wants "to keep her

safe. Knowledge is key...I would just tell her that I don't want her to do it" (*Shawn age 42, sex at 18, daughter age 15*).

Just as this second mother expressed a desire to keep her daughter safe by telling her about these past experiences, we can see how two other mothers are choosing not to tell their daughters for a similar reason of protecting their daughters. In their case, protecting an image.

Expressing a strong desire to not tell their daughters about having sex before being married these two mothers differ in that one says that she may tell her daughter "but it would probably be something that when she is 17...18 kind of thing. Not now because of that emulation" (*Joann age 50, sex at 15, daughter age 12*). Where the other mother shares that she does not tell her daughter because "she never asked and I never offered the information to her. I think that she thinks I'm just like the angel sent from heaven...I wonder if she thinks that mom could have ever possibly did that [not always been a virgin]" (*Natasha age 38, sex at 15, daughter age 14*).

These findings suggest that in telling daughters about their decisions to have sex before marriage, one mother does not want to because she fears that her daughter wants to be so much like her mother that she will repeat the same behavior. The other, fears that in telling her daughter it may unpleasantly affect the "angel" image that the daughter has of her.

These mothers also demonstrate a connection with findings from the literature where parents were found to want to make sure their children are aware of the consequences of their behaviors, encouraging responsibility (Feldman and Rosenthal, 2000). So a point to ponder becomes, do mothers teach consequences by sharing their

own learning experiences? For, where some mothers appear to feel that telling about their own past behaviors will cause their daughters to do same, if the mothers shared the consequences of their behaviors, would the lesson be the same? The majority of the mothers interviewed wanted their daughters to know the lessons, but there was a disconnect between telling daughters to be responsible and offering the potential tool of the mothers' own experiences and lessons learned.

This theme about mothers telling their daughter that they had sex before marriage may be related to the struggle that mothers from Yowell's (1997) study were found to have with their daughter's emerging sexuality. It is possible that if the mothers are still coming to terms with their decisions, be it to have sex before marriage or other aspects of their sexual development, and they may not be ready to share these decisions or aspects of themselves with their adolescent age daughters.

Telling Daughter about Dating

As the five mothers spoke about what they choose to say to their daughters about their past experiences with sexual development, the second theme identified in their voices is telling their daughters about dating. Four of the mothers mentioned telling their daughters about their relationships as adolescent age females with boyfriends. Some of the mothers appeared to express that her reasons for wanting boyfriends at an early age were not favorable, but unlike mothers previously studied, they did "see themselves in their daughters," but did not feel a fear that sharing these decisions would cause their daughters to make the same (Yowell, 1997, Wyatt 1997). All of the mothers were heard to not specifically say that their daughters did not need men but they did point out negatives of dating at early age.

While reading the interview texts, the voices of two particular mothers are highlighted here as they represent the difference between mothers who have shared with their daughters that they, during their adolescent years, wanted boyfriends and those who did not.

One mother has told her daughter, who has expressed an interest in dating, about how she used to feel that she needed a boyfriend, “how crazy I was and how I was looking for so much, but what I was looking for I could have gotten by just being a good friend to guys,” (*Josephine age 39, Daughter age 12*), but because she was looking for a sense of fulfillment from these relationships could not see the options for something different than a boyfriend-girlfriend relationship.

Previous studies have found that mothers want their daughters to think about why they even want or need to date as relationships are said to influence other aspects of their daughter’s lives, important aspects such as educational and career goals (Kerpelman, 2002). None of the mothers in this study said to their daughters that they should not date because boyfriends would interfere with their education, but one mother does encourage her daughter to think about the potential influence.

One mother asks her daughter to think ahead into the future as the mother saw that dating caused conflicts with her peers and increased the risk of pregnancy, as we hear her say, “I want her to realize that if a boy doesn’t want to be with her because she will not have sex, then he wasn’t for you anyway. I didn’t care.” This mother appeared to avoid having any boyfriends because she felt that it just “wasn’t worth it” we hear how this mother tells her daughter that other things, besides boyfriends were more important

and worthwhile when she was younger and still as an adult, seeing that “they all work at the Hardees now or are in jail” (*Karen age 35, Daughter age 10*).

Telling Daughter Specific Details about Own Experiences

As the mothers spoke about what they choose to say to their daughters about their past experiences with sexual development, a third theme identified in their voices is one found in the mothers’ responses to the question of “is there anything that you would not or could not tell your daughter about your experiences with sexual development?” Interestingly, most of the mothers replied saying that they would not mind telling their daughters about their experiences but their willingness to disclose specific details about those experiences was not the same.

It appears that each mothers voice of disclosure may have varied based on feelings about what these details have meant to the mother and how the mother feels her daughter would interpret them. Some of the mothers appeared to be more comfortable with their daughter’s potential interpretation and others were not and were heard to express a subsequent struggle with how much detail of their past experiences to disclose.

Similar findings are found in previous studies that discuss how there may be a “need for mothers to explain the meanings behind their communication, or lack thereof with their daughters” as the “majority of mothers tend to focus on the biological issues more than emotional aspects because they are more comfortable with the factual” (Feldman and Rosenthal, 2000, p.120). It could be asserted that in the current study, mothers were not found to bring up the details of what they were communicating, but they were still filtering what they felt their daughters needed to hear. Asking, even if

mothers are not detailed in what they share about their own experiences, do they at least explain the factors that influenced their decisions?

For example, one mother expressed a very open voice of disclosure, saying:

“I have had some serious things happen, but I would tell her because I would want to keep her safe. Knowledge is key. I am not ashamed of anything that I have done...so that if it happens to you, you don’t feel like you are the only one.”

(Shawn age 42, Daughter age 15)

In contrast, another mother also shares that she is not ashamed of her past experiences “...there is nothing I would keep from her. There is nothing that I have ever done that I wouldn’t mind sharing with her.” Yet, her voice of disclosure appears only in response to a need to help her daughter as this mother struggles with whether she should tell her daughter that she wasn’t a virgin when she married:

“I don’t know whether I would just jump up and say it just because she needs to know everything about me, but if it came up and I felt there was a reason, that this was just about to happen to her and it might help her to know my experiences, I would tell her” *(Natasha age 38, Daughter age 14)*.

Turning to two other mothers, similarities are seen in how they feel about telling their daughters specific details about their experiences. One, responds to the initial question of what she would never tell saying “I don’t know, I may share that” adding how sharing details could “be harmful for her,” daughter *(Joann age 50, Daughter age 12)*, while another mother hesitates, sharing her feeling that when it comes to telling her daughter details “there are some things I would never tell her and the reason is because I think it would cause more harm than good” *(Karen age 35, Daughter age 10)*. Posing the

question of could this common conflict over causing harm to their daughters by disclosing details of their experiences be related to the young age of both of the daughters or are there other influencing factors?

One mother was very specific about the topics she would not want to tell her daughter about. These were all related to her experiences with sexual intercourse and included graphics, places been and people been with. She shares:

“I probably couldn’t tell her graphics...I’ve told her in general that by the time mommy and daddy married on our wedding night there was nothing new for us to do. I say that, but I say that loosely, but I wouldn’t want her to know that there was nothing left for us to do because we had done everything sexually you can think that there was to do”

This mother also shares, “She knows about everything else, but I guess I probably wouldn’t want to tell her that I’ve had sex in my mama’s house because I’ll probably tell her that when she gets older.” (*Josephine age 39, Daughter age 12*). This exemplifies a very unique approach for this and one other mother who both felt comfortable talking to their daughters about sexual desire and pleasure, saying what they enjoy within the context of marriage (Feldman and Rosenthal, 2000).

Through these words we see that the mothers’ different actions held certain meanings to each of them and possibly because of those meanings, the feelings are related to experiences that may be so deeply rooted that there are some things the mothers will choose to never tell their daughters.

Approach to Telling Daughter

As the mothers spoke about what they choose to say to their daughters about their own past experiences with sexual development, a fourth and final theme identified in their voices is about how the mothers approach the prospect of this topic of communication with their daughters. As the three previous themes represented specific topics, it can be said that this theme represents the mothers' overall approach, be it communicating with details or being more vague, choosing the time when to bring certain topics up or wanting to wait to communicate certain messages with their daughters when a reason presents itself. As a 'theme' that describes the delivery of the other themes, this shared aspect demonstrates how each mother expresses a preferred style in their approach. Identifying the mothers' individual styles serves to conclude this first level of analysis.

Two of the five mothers questioned the need to disclose full information about their pasts to their daughters based on their preferred style of approach. As both say that they will be honest in response to any questions their daughters may have, these mothers filter the information they disclose because one doesn't "know whether I would just up and say it just because she needs to know everything about me" (*Natasha age 38, Daughter 14*). And the other shares "I don't need to use my own examples. I don't have to tell her that I've been through it, because sometimes your children don't need to know every little thing" (*Karen age 35, Daughter 10*). Then, another mother is seen to differ from these two as she shares, "I feel, let me cut this at the pass" by telling her daughter "this is what happened to me" (*Shawn age 42, Daughter age 15*).

The need to be honest with their daughters appears to be an important aspect of the mothers' approach as we hear two mothers say: "I am just going to be honest. As her mother I owe her that," (*Karen age 35, Daughter 10*) and "I've made a vow to my children not to lie to them" (*Josephine age 39, Daughter age 12*).

For another mother the fact that her daughter does not respond to the experiences that she would share with her "not in the way I want her to take it" appears to be a factor in her approach. (*Joann age 50, Daughter age 12*).

A pattern of mothers asking whether there is a need to even share details of their experiences with their daughters is also heard throughout the interview text. Though scholars have noted "it can be reassuring and helpful if mothers relate stories of their own confused feelings and difficult episodes during puberty" (Miller, 1997) the key word is that it "can" be. There are potential benefits to mothers being aware of the messages they send and identifying the sources of discomfort as they have been shown to be connected to they cycle of avoidance that occurs when mothers do not take time to think about any unresolved issues of their past (Miller, 1997).

While an aspect of the past may not be labeled as an issue, recognition of how a mother was or is influenced by her experiences may be key to breaking, or continuing, a cycle of mothers not sharing their own experiences with their daughters, but at the same time wanting their daughters experiences to be better than their own (Wyatt, 1997). The five participating mothers exemplify how the "issue" of their mothers not talking to them when they were adolescents is being reversed as the current mothers express a need to be at least a little more open with their daughters.

This first level of analysis demonstrates that there are the four themes representing what the participating mothers choose to share with their adolescent age daughters about their experiences with sexual development; 1) telling daughter that mother had sex before marriage, 2) telling daughter about mother dating, 3) telling daughter specific details about mother's experiences, and 4) mother's approach to telling daughter. As such, the analysis of this study could conceivably conclude here, but identification of these themes only suggests one very surface level of understanding of the factors that may influence why these five mothers say what they say to their daughters.

The present research goal is to not only know what mothers say to their daughters about their experiences with sexual development, but to explore the why and why not behind this communication. Identification of these themes further begs answers to the question of why these four themes were recurrent throughout the narrative text. Asking, are these mothers expressing aspects of their past to their daughters, because of the daughter's age or level of maturity? Or, maybe it is the relationship between how the mother feels about her daughter and how she feels about herself? Or, could the mothers' choice of communication be influenced by what the mothers' mothers said to them during their own adolescent years? Such potential relationships are explored in the following, second and final, level of analysis.

Additional Relationships between Themes and Factors

Following the Guide to Listening, this analysis will take one step further into the exploration of what potentially influences why mothers tell their daughters what they do about their own experiences. Listening even deeper for the orchestration of thought and

reasoning when each mother describes her communication with her daughter, one can not help but to hear the connections between how the mother describes her daughter, herself and her own experiences of communication about sexual development with her mother.

With realization of these connections, it is almost impossible to listen to one factor without hearing the others. Listening and then separating these voices for further exploration lends understanding to the individual yet connected layers. This process sets a foundation that leads to a holistic interpretation of what each mother says and the unveiling of a true in-depth context of the communication between mothers and their adolescent age daughters. Proceeding through the lens of Symbolic Interactionism the theory is more concretely integrated into this analysis, along with findings from the prior studies, to suggest a more complete picture of what mothers choose to say to their daughters and the relationship between the themes and the influencing factors. This final section of analysis is organized by the three factors of how the mother describes 1) her daughter, 2) herself, and 3) her mother's response to her earlier sexual development, as they help us to understand the potential influences creating each of the four identified themes.

How Mother Describes Her Daughter

The third of the five Guide to Listening analytical readings represented an effort to listen specifically to how each mother spoke about her adolescent age daughter. What mothers choose to say to their daughters appeared to be strongly influenced by the factor of how the daughter appears in the mother's eyes. Through Symbolic Interactionism, the mothers' perception is shaped by how the daughter's emerging, evolving and stabilizing experiences with puberty are defined by the mother (Longmore, 1998).

Each adolescent female's experiences with sexual development will vary and the participating mothers are aware, and in many ways cautious, of the potential influence that sharing their own past experiences could have on their daughters development. The mothers seemed to be especially aware of the influence of sharing their experiences of dating and/or having sex before marriage. As such, when mothers may be attempting to focus their communication about sexual development on encouraging their daughter to be responsible for her decisions (Longmore, 1998) mothers may feel the need to filter or not share stories about their own decision-making. This need depends on how the mother perceives her daughter and how disclosing such information may influence the daughter.

For, where one mother appears to be open and willing to share details of her past with her daughter saying that her daughter is "at 12 she is probably where I was at 24 with her confidence and her ability to work around situations" (*Josephine, Daughter age 12*), another mother shares the opposite about her daughter "her personality trait is like I'm [she's] perfectly resisting it" it is like she is saying:

"I don't want to deal with this, I want to go to school, I want to play, I don't want to deal with this aspect of my life...my younger one is definitely one who will get into a situation and then think about it later how she is going to get out of it."

(*Joann, Daughter age 12*)

While it cannot be assumed that this mother will not share details of her past with her daughter solely because of this description of her daughter, it is clear that this mother strongly feels that her daughter is "very immature". Where one mother appears to be disappointed that her daughter was not as mature in her decision-making as she felt she

was at her daughter's age, another mother express her caution about sharing her past experiences that may be influenced by this perception of immaturity.

The same is heard when another mother shares that it is "hard for me to think of her with any sexuality because she is such a baby...I think she is going to have a hard time embracing her sexuality because she is really young for her age" (*Karen, Daughter age 10*). Even though describing her daughter as "immature" and saying "her 15 is definitely different from my own...she is completely oblivious and doesn't have the street savvy...my daughter is that naïve side of me when I was that age" this mother is seen to be very open and comfortable about sharing her past experiences and saying to her daughter "that I don't want her to do it [the same things]" (*Shawn, Daughter age 15*).

Interestingly, both Shawn and Josephine appear to be more open in sharing their past experiences with their daughters, yet these two mothers describe their daughters as one being immature and the other mature. The similarity of approach to communication but different perception of their daughters demonstrates how there are other factors that may influence the four themes and why mothers say what they say to their daughters.

How Mother Describes Herself

The fourth of the five Guide to Listening analytical readings represented an effort to listen specifically to how each mother spoke about herself. Just as how a mother describes her daughter appears to influence what mothers choose to share with their adolescent age daughters, how a mother feels about herself has a role. As Symbolic Interactionism recognizes that "the self is reflective, both a subject and an object," communication becomes a process of giving and receiving where "significant symbols, particularly words, are directed at others, but also ourselves" (Longmore, 1998, p.45).

Where a mother's decision to share aspects of her past with her daughter requires the mother to not only deliver a message to her daughter but to also receive parts of herself as the subject of those messages.

Mothers can be said to have two roles when it comes to talking to their daughters about sexual development. These two roles may conflict or blend beautifully together, with one being as a woman with recollections of past experiences with sexual development and the other as a mother with a daughter presently experiencing sexual development. For some mothers there may be a conflict between being a sexual woman but at the same time feeling the need to be a de-sexualized mother in order to promote their daughter's indefinite sexual abstinence (O'Sullivan, 2001) and/or avoid communication about any of their past decisions. Listening to these five mothers, some appear to "create and re-create roles from one situation to another" (Longmore, 1998, p.46) from what they feel about their own experiences with sexual development and what they choose to share with their daughters.

Furthermore, how the mothers feel about their experiences will influence how they approach telling their daughters and this is exemplified by one mother who says that her decision as to have sex "everybody is doing it and you want to try it kind of thing so I tried it probably when I was 15" is something that she is debating whether to tell her daughter because of a fear that this decision representing her as a sexual woman may conflict with the "angel" image that could be said to equate to being a de-sexualized mother.

All five of the participating mothers were asked to describe themselves as a sexual being now and when they were their daughters' ages. One of the mothers shared

how her self-perception has changed from when she was an adolescent age female to now as an adult woman. Saying that she thinks of:

“Pleasure and being sexually confident...something to be done and expressed within the context of a relationship...committed relationship, a role in my marriage and a responsibility that I enjoy now.” Whereas in her past, she saw her sexuality as “a tool to get and keep boys’ attention.” (*Josephine*)

This specific transition from adolescence to adulthood, as well as those that the other mothers may have experienced but did not express during the interviews, may influence why mothers choose to tell their daughters about their experiences. Though all of the mothers were found to integrate their past experiences into the behaviors that they emphasized as appropriate for their daughters, it can only be inferred at this point that the more comfortable a mother is with that transition the more willing she is to tell her daughter.

What Said to Mother about Her Development

The fifth and final Guide to Listening analytical reading represented an effort to listen specifically to how the mothers’ described their mother’s responses to their sexual development. This process illustrated the intergenerational influences of the cycle of communication about sexual development between mothers and their daughters (Collins, 1987 and Hill, 1996). For, just as the five participating women are now mothers to their own daughters, they were once adolescent age daughters experiencing their mother’s responses to their sexual development. The messages that were communicated to the mother during her adolescence influence how the mother describes her past experiences and may be a factor influencing what the mothers choose to say to their own daughters.

Complimenting the past research that has revealed that many mothers recall “that the sexuality education they received from their mothers was characterized by extremely limited discussion; the strong presence of negative, non-verbal messages; and the frequent use of warnings or rules,” (Brock and Jennings, 1993, p.62), the five participating mothers shared similar thoughts about communication with their mothers:

“My mom didn’t talk to me very much about sex. She never really ever told me you know you better not do it. It was kind of one of those unspoken things that you just better not do it” (*Natasha age 38*).

Still, throughout this limited discussion, one mother shares recollections of communication with her mother:

“We were a tight knit family but the relationship between my mother and my stepfather was kind of estranged and basically because you are not really interacting with that person. So she would talk to us about that you see how our life is and how we have to deal with things and struggle with certain type of things and we don’t need to have extra {emphasis on word}” (*Joann age 50*)

For this mother extra represented extra stresses of an early pregnancy or out-of-wedlock birth and other mothers have stressed how having children can result in the loss of important resources such as time and money (O’Sullivan, et al., 2001)

The current mothers did not share this emphasis on the potential outcomes of financial strains if their daughters were to become pregnant, but one mother spoke about how she is concerned about the potential outcomes of her daughter becoming pregnant but even more so of her contracting HIV:

“If you have a baby and get AIDS in high school that’s life altering... I told her that you can get things like AIDS and I told her there’s a lot of things that can happen to her other than just having a baby...I do think that the HIV/AIDS is worse because if she gets HIV or AIDS it does something to your body that you can never {emphasizes never} recover from. If she gets pregnant and she has a baby, she can still go on and go to college. She can do that with AIDS, but it will be hard because she could be sick a lot and miss a lot of class. She gets pregnant, she makes a mistake and gets pregnant, my husband and I will help her because that is our child, but AIDS, it separates her from everybody. If she meets a man that she really loves and cares for and she tells him I have AIDS, he’s gone, but if she meets a man and she tells him, well I have a two year old, that’s okay. This AIDS puts a stigma on my baby and I don’t want that for her” (*Karen age 35, Daughter age 10*).

So, for various reasons such as the prevention of the loss of time or money, pregnancy, or the contraction of sexually transmitted disease, all five of the participating mothers expressed how they hoped that their communication with their adolescent age daughters would be different than the experiences that they recall with their own mothers. As such, it is apparent how these five current mothers were trying to break a cycle of silence by being more vocal with their daughters than their own mothers were with them, their communication just was not necessarily about their own experiences.

Conclusion

The dynamics of communication within the mother-daughter relationship are uniquely reflected through a cycle of influence that passes from one generation to the next (Goldberg, 1995). This cycle can be observed among all racial groups and at all ages

and stages of human development and particularly during daughter's adolescent years and the onset of puberty. Puberty, as a time when physical, emotional and hormonal changes take place, often leads a mother to communicating to her daughter about the topic of sexual development (Lefkowitz, 2002). This communication may be a direct reflection, the complete opposite, or a combination of how a mother's mother spoke to her about sexual development and how the mother then chooses to speak to her daughter. As such, this communication will have many different voices.

The available literature establishes a foundational understanding that the content of mother-adolescent daughter communication about sexual development is typically full of messages from the mother regarding the daughter's new responsibility for managing a monthly menstrual cycle and the negative consequences of engaging in sexual intercourse (Beaumont, 2000). Over the years, mothers have been seen to have a hesitant approach to talking in much detail about the positive aspects of the changes that are taking place in their daughter's bodies (Brock & Jennings, 1993). This reserved approach has been observed across racial and ethnic identities and across generations of women (Penington, 2004).

While efforts have been exerted to understand various aspects of what mothers say to their pubescent daughters, one specific voice appears to have not been directly considered. For, being aware that mothers across generations talk to their daughters about sexual development, a question becomes what do mothers, specifically African American mothers, say to their daughters about their own experiences?

Therefore, the current study was designed to capture the voices of five African American mothers as they spoke about their daughter's and their own experiences with

sexual development. In-depth interviews with five African American mothers were conducted and examined through the theoretical lens of Symbolic Interactionism and the Guide to Listening analytical approach. Interview questions were designed with reflection on how the cycle of intergenerational influence might be noticeable, as mothers appear to filter aspects of their own experiences into communication with their adolescent age daughters. This process revealed two levels of insights that address the research questions of what do mothers say to their daughters about their own experiences with sexual development and what are the factors influencing why or why not this communication takes place.

The first level of analysis identified that the five participating mothers share aspects of their past experiences with their daughters in varying ways. While the majority of the mothers were found to be somewhat, to very reserved, about this communication, it was apparent that these mothers were aware of the reasons why they should and could break a cycle of silence that they recall from their own adolescence. As the mothers spoke about what they share with their daughters, four themes were identified. Those themes were labeled as 1) telling daughter that mother had sex before marriage, 2) telling daughter about boyfriends, 3) telling daughter specific details about own experiences, and mothers 4) approach to telling daughter.

The mothers were found to express a desire to educate their daughters and to prepare them to best respond to their initial pubertal stages of sexual development. For some mothers, this desire was communicated by the mother eagerly sharing aspects of her own experiences while some mothers felt less of a need to share their past. Each mother's choice of communication to their daughters about their own experiences with

sexual development appeared to be influenced by different factors. Through the second level of analysis it was suggested that what mothers say was influenced by the three factors of how the mother describes 1) her daughter, 2) herself and 3) her mother's response to her development.

Communication about sexual development between these five mothers and their daughters appeared to involve a very complex process of giving and receiving. Mothers not only struggled with giving their daughters insights into their past experiences, but this communication also required the mothers to recall and process their own thoughts and feelings from those experiences. Depending on what these past experiences meant to the mothers, some were seen to be more open with sharing their stories with their daughters while others were not.

The voice given to the mothers' own experiences and most importantly the voice that they have chosen to give to communicating with their daughters is just as Symbolic Interactionism suggests, that according to the concept of the looking glass self, "our perception of how we appear to another person, our perception of that person's judgment of us and some self-feeling that arises from these perceptions" (Longmore, 1998, p.45). So that, just as one mother is trying to decide if and what to tell her daughter because of the sense that she has of how her daughter perceives her, also reflects the view of herself as being that way. So that, it can be suggested that there is a relationship between how the mother describes her own sexual development, how she feels about her daughter's sexual development and what the mother decides to share with her daughter.

Overall, the participating mothers wanted their daughters to learn the lessons that the mothers' past experiences had taught them. Even if this did not entail sharing exact

details about decisions to have sexual intercourse or to have boyfriends, mothers expressed a desire for their daughters to not have similar negative experiences. In many ways, the mothers hoped that their daughters would learn from their mistakes and somehow correct them.

Combining these two sets of “data” together, a web of relationships where one aspect influences another and subsequently the decision of what mothers say to their daughters are visible. These findings contribute to an understanding of the complexities of the communication that takes place between a mother and her adolescent age daughter.

Limitations and Suggestions

There were three aspects of this study that posed limitations to how the interview texts were gathered, analyzed and are then further suggested as applicable to future research. One limitation is the variability among the characteristics of the five participating mothers. While the goal of this study is not to generalize the findings to all African American mothers, it is important to be cautious of any generalizations of the five participating women. Characteristics such as mother’s educational level, age of daughter, age of menstrual on-set and birth order varied among the participating women and these differences subsequently represent multiple possible interpretations of why mothers say what they do to their daughters. The ability to suggest relationships with the three possible influencing factors could have been strengthened if the sample were more homogeneous.

A second limitation was imposed during the interviews with each of the mothers by the restricted extent of questioning. As a younger African American woman interviewing older African American women, I assumed the position of an “insider” who,

because of a shared racial identity already knew cultural standards and values around the importance of the mother-daughter relationship and the preservation of a females' virginity. While being the same racial identity has been shown to ease the researcher-participant relationship, the age differences appeared to pose a specific challenge of wanting to ask why the mothers felt the way they did but not wanting to appear disrespectful by asking 'too many' questions.

A third and final limitation of this study was the failed attempt to directly incorporate aspects of the participants' identity as African American women into the interviews. The potential relationship between racial identity and communication about sexual development could have been more explicitly considered by posing questions to the participating mothers about if and how their experiences with sexual development and/or their communication with their daughters were racially defined.

While two of the mothers mentioned an influence of their racial identity, throughout the process of analyzing the interviews this influence was more so assumed for the other mothers because all of the participants self-identified as African American. Future research may compare and contrast interviews with mothers of various racial groups in order to determine whether there are differences between races.

These findings contribute a new perspective to continuous scholastic attempts to understand the beautiful complexities of the mother-daughter relationship. As scholars further explore the messages about sexual development that mothers choose to share with their adolescent age daughters, the more those potentially influencing factors of how a mother describes herself, her daughter and her own experiences with sexual development will become relevant. Each of these factors contributes to the cycle of influence and

influence whether it will be embraced or altered by the next generation of mothers and daughters. In closing, a poem titled “The Concentrated Truth” by Gloria Wade-Giles (1987) illustrates this cycle:

THE CONCENTRATED TRUTH

Our
Mothers
pushed
us
out
of
darkness
into
darkness
and
became
our
light.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
RECRUITMENT FLYER

**ATTENTION:
AFRICAN AMERICAN MOTHERS**

Are you an African American mother of a 9-15 year old daughter
who has entered puberty?
Living in the Athens area?
Willing to participate in a one-time interview about
mothers communicating with their daughters about sexuality?

If so, Please contact Jessica Anderson at
706-542-4825 and leave a message
or email at jpa@uga.edu to participate in my study

TALKING TO OUR DAUGHTERS ABOUT SEXUALITY
*A Study Exploring Communication about Your Past and Your Daughter's
Future*



This study is being conducted as part of a Masters thesis.
This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board
for Research Involving Human Subjects at the University of Georgia.

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I agree to take part in a research study titled “A Mother's Past and Her Daughter's Future: An Exploration of Intergenerational Messages About Sexuality from Mothers to Their Adolescent Daughters,” which is being conducted by Jessica P. Anderson under the direction of Dr. David Wright, Department of Child and Family Development at the University of Georgia (706-542-2650). My participation is voluntary; I can stop taking part at any time without giving any reason and without penalty. I can ask to have information related to me, returned to me or removed from the research records or destroyed.

The purpose of this research project is to explore communication about sexuality between mothers and their adolescent age daughters. I will not benefit directly from my participation.

Procedures

I will be asked to respond to a series of questions in one 30-60 minutes audio-taped interview with the researcher at a mutually agreed upon public location, date and time.

While no risks are expected, a possible discomfort that may result from participation in this research is that the interview questions may be related to very personal emotions. I may withdraw from the study or decline to answer any question at any time, during or after the interview, with no penalty. Audiotape recordings may be turned off at any time during the interview or destroyed after the interview at my request. Furthermore, a handout listing options for local referral services will be provided to me in the event that contact with an outside resource is desired.

The information collected and results of this study will be kept confidential. The audiotape recordings will be stored in a secure location. Audiotapes will be retained, with participant's permission, for further study. All data access will be limited to the researcher and faculty advisor. Pseudonyms suggested by the participants will be used in any publication of data.

The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project and can be reached by telephone at 706-542-2650 or jpa@uga.edu.

My signature below indicates that the researcher has answered all of my questions to my satisfaction and that I consent to volunteer for this study. I understand the procedures described above. I understand that the audio tape recorded interview will be retained for

possible application to the future research. I give the researcher permission to contact me for future research. I have been given a copy of this form.

Name Researcher:

Signature:

Date:

Telephone:

Email:

Name of Participant:

Signature:

Date:

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 612 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research project. Today I hope to learn about how you communicate with your (*insert age*) daughter about general aspects of sexuality. Throughout this interview I will ask you about your own experiences and how they relate to the messages you choose or choose not to send to your daughter.

You have reviewed and signed the consent form. As agreed, if you would like to skip answering any questions, we can with your request. All of your replies will remain confidential. Any reference to what you share with me today will be made with use of an alternative name of your choice. At the end of the interview I will ask what name you would like to be used in place of your real name.

I will keep in front of me an outline of topics and related questions. I ask that you share your most honest and detailed responses to these questions. Your responses will help support my goal of understanding what mothers say to their daughters and the the factors that influence the reasons why or why not certain messages are shared. I will take notes of your responses throughout the interview. This interview will be tape-recorded.

Before we get started, please know that I realize that the topic of sexuality is very personal and intimate and that each woman will have their own views and reasons for those views. It is not my intent to pass judgment on your views, but rather to hear about your earlier experiences as a young woman and why you have or have not chosen to communicate or share aspects of your past experiences with your daughter.

INTERVIEW GUIDE

*WHAT MOTHERS SAY TO THEIR DAUGHTERS ~
WHY and HOW IT RELATES TO THEIR PAST EXPERIENCES*

1. What think of when hear word sexuality?

- a. Daughter as sexual being
- b. Self as sexual
- c. Women as sexual

For the purposes of this interview, would like to try to think of sexuality in all aspects of development...

2. What do you say to your daughter about sexuality? How approach topics of...
How feel when talking to her about...

COMMON TOPICS and ACTIONS (verbal and nonverbal)

- a. Response to her period
- b. Breast development/physical changes: how to dress, carry self
- c. Interactions with opposite sex/dating
- d. Intercourse, pregnancy, protection
- e. Emotions

- f. What feel is important for her to know? Not know?
- g. Challenges approaching topic? How deal with?
- h. What worry about? Trying to prevent?
- i. Comfort level?

- j. Ways girls your daughters' age learn about sexuality?

3. What is the role of adults...teaching facts/right and wrong vs. telling own experiences and discussing?

- a. When on period how behave around daughter, when interacting with men, any particular way find self behaving when daughter is around?
- b. What appropriate to let daughter know about adult development and relationships? Preparing for future...

4. What are some similarities and differences between how you and your daughter communicate about sexuality compared to how it was for you growing up?

- a. Approach to sexuality
- b. Rules and restrictions
- c. Society/generational expectations and taboos
- d. Describe your mother...relationship with your father? What knew about her experiences?

HOW FELT ABOUT EARLIER EXPERIENCES

Think about, some of the ways that your experiences, and how you feel about them, may influence how you feel about your daughter's developing sexuality...

- e. How think daughter receive/respond? What meanings think daughter attributes to your experiences?
-

Demographic related questions to ask if not already mentioned in interview::

Describe household, age and sex
 Always lived in Athens? How long?
 Working arrangements, Income Range
 Grade level of daughter, public school?
 Marital Status at time of daughter's birth
 How long daughter resided with, if at all with anyone else

Final Question: Is there anything that I have not asked you that you would like to tell me about communicating with your daughter about your or her sexuality?

What name would like to use in place of real name?

APPENDIX D
CONCEPTUALLY CLUSTERED MATRICES

	What Say to Daughter about Own Experiences
Joann	✓ I haven't really talked to my youngest one because I think that she may take it not in the way I want her to take it like well you did it so why can't I ✓ It's more of an emulation because I am so attached to my mom that I want to do things that she did and it is potentially it could be harmful for her ✓ I'm thinking and I don't know if its because I was sexually active outside of marriage I don't know I may share that with her but it would probably be something that when she is 17...18 kind of thing not now because of that emulation ✓ Probably eventually I probably will tell her about a situation that I encountered with one of my mothers friends boyfriends when I was 13 and it was a slight little molestation and because of how my 12 yr old is developed ✓ I don't want to scare her and she is very touchy feely and she want to love everybody and she wants everybody to love her
Josephine	✓ She knows that I had premarital sex she knows that I was 14 having premarital sex ✓ I told her who knew at 14 I would have a beautiful daughter...I didn't know I would have her back then and if I would have known... ✓ I was like no and mommy didn't wait for daddy...who knew this day would come and I just let her know right then that I didn't have any info and I was looking for love, I wasn't handled properly and its not anyone's fault but because I was once her I've got to take care of her ✓ I probably couldn't tell her graphics I couldn't be as graphic with her ✓ I've told her in general that by the time mommy and daddy married on our wedding night there was nothing new for us to do I say that but I say that very loosely but I wouldn't want her to know that there was nothing left for us to do because we had done everything {emphasized} sexually you can think that there was to do and we had married at 19 {laughs} I'm not going to be graphic with her ✓ I definitely wouldn't let her know some of the places I've been ✓ If she were to ask I would tell her because I've made a vow to my children not to lie to them so if she were to come out and ask me I would have to talk about it and it would hurt ✓ I wouldn't want to talk about some of the people I have had sex with and one of the times I was out...I heard the word switch and they were trying to switch us out and it went from having sex to having a fight ✓ She knows about everything else but I guess I probably wouldn't want to tell her that I've had sex in my mama's house because I'll probably tell her that when she gets older ✓ I tell her mom did it wrong mom made a mistake, I hope that the meanings are positive that they are going to produce positive results that she will take my wrong and make it right

	What Say to Daughter about Own Experiences
Natasha	✓ I have not told my daughter that I have been with someone else besides her dad ✓ Stuff like that (going back home and meeting past boyfriends) she thinks that's funny and she loves to hear stories like that ✓ She knows my husband and I dated from the time I was 15 ✓ She never asked and I never offered the information to her ✓ I think she thinks I'm just like the angel sent from heaven {chuckles}... like she is so holy, I wonder if she thinks that mom could have ever possibly did that ✓ She knows that I've done some things because I am always relaying information to them ✓ I have never been able to tell her because I have no idea I don't remember (own period starting) ✓ I haven't told her that I wasn't a virgin when I got married ✓ There is nothing that I would keep from her there is nothing that I have ever done that I wouldn't mind sharing with her ✓ I don't know whether I would just up and say it just because she needs to know everything about me ✓ If it came up and I felt there was a reason that this was just about to happen to her and it might help her to know my experience I would tell her ✓ She has not asked me but I have been pondering over whether I should share with her that I lost my virginity at her age
Karen	✓ I don't know if I really have (talked about boyfriends) ✓ Story about first date, falling asleep ✓ I just tell her to because I did and it was a good solid decision I don't feel like I lost anything by not having sex...I saw the issues ✓ I am just going to be honest I am, as her mother I owe her that ✓ I started hanging out with these really nerdy white boys because they are not interested in having sex...black boys are interested in having sex and when you're shapely like I am they're only interested in having sex ✓ I've just seen so much and it just wasn't worth it for me ✓ I want her to realize that if a boy doesn't want to be with her because she will not have sex then he wasn't for you anyway...I didn't care they all work at the Hardees now or are in jail ✓ I have not talked to her about any of my sexual experiences ✓ She knows that I have had two children (stork story at first) ✓ I don't have a problem telling her about myself ✓ There are some things I would never tell her ✓ The reason is because I think it would cause more harm than good ✓ I would tell her reasons why certain things are not good ✓ I don't need to use my own examples ✓ I don't have to tell her that I've been through it because sometimes your children don't need to know every little thing but I will explain the reasons

	What Say to Daughter About Own Experiences
Shawn	✓ I believe I did tell her about that experience about the dance somewhere along the line but not at this point but before ✓ I have had some serious things happen but I would tell her because I would want to keep her safe ✓ Knowledge is key ✓ I am not ashamed of anything that I have done ✓ I would just tell her that I don't want her to do it ✓ So that if it happens to you, you don't feel like you are the only one ✓ I have not told her about the particular instance that I am thinking about ✓ I am hoping that she does not come into the situation that if she sees it she will cut it at the knees...male friend coming to house ✓ I feel let me cut this at the pass by telling her this is what happened to me ✓ No she has not really asked about that (mom first sex) I think probably once she gets into a relationship then she'll be able to understand it a little more

	How Mother Describes Daughter
Joann	✓ 12 years old, Period at 11 ✓ Very immature, Attached in baby kind of way ✓ Every month remind about period, Constant reminding constant follow-up ✓ Personality trait don't want to deal with, want to play, perfectly resisting ✓ Get into situations not think how get out
Josephine	✓ 12 years old, Period very early at 10 ✓ Daughter sexual = precious, treasure, preserved, worthy of the best, not something just to be spilled, something worthy to be accepted by the proper person, husband ✓ Handling period like a pro ✓ At 12 she is probably where I was at 24, her confidence and her ability to work around situations ✓ Says waiting on husband
Natasha	✓ Age 14, Period at 12 ✓ Daughter sexual = innocence, naïve, don't think about ✓ Imagine day getting married as virgin ✓ Really low self-esteem ✓ Wants boyfriend maturing really fast
Karen	✓ Age 10, No period yet, showing signs of breast budding ✓ Daughter as sexual = much later in conversation says w/face discomforted and long pause, think daughter going to have hard time embracing sexuality because really young for age ✓ Very intelligent, in gifted program, but she's a baby ✓ Coming in room at night, plays with dolls ✓ Cried when first told about period ✓ Not really interested in boyfriends ✓ Hard for me to think of her with any sexuality because she is such a baby
Shawn	✓ Age 15, pd at 13 ✓ Daughter as sexual = I think of her as immature, her 15 is definitely different than mine ✓ the guy was coming on to her and I could see it but she did not get it...she was completely oblivious... I think her environment has a lot to do with it...she doesn't have the street savvy ✓ Naïve side of me when I was that age without a dad, I don't want her because she does not have a man in her life to feel that she has to have one I am very worried that she will put up with things because she did not have the experience of a man in her life ✓ Self esteem very low, Not emotionally mature but physically mature ✓ Can she wait till married, don't know, depends on how focused she is, how important it is to her

	How Mother Describes Herself
Joann	✓ Mom age 50, Period at 11, First sex at 15 ✓ Self as Sexual = how relate to spouse, responding in a female type way ✓ Outgoing, more open, certain limitations based on religious upbringing ✓ Very tenacious, very strong willed like mother ✓ Very mature child ✓ Decision to have sex because ready to handle ✓ Something really wanted to do ✓ This is not what I want ✓ What did clearly not right
Josephine	✓ Mom age 39, Period at 12, first sex at 14 ✓ mother murdered/adopted (was not told until adult) ✓ self as sexual = confident, pleasure, role in marriage, responsibility that enjoy now ✓ in past tool used to get boyfriends ✓ had low self-esteem/identity ✓ wild, having sex a lot ✓ crazy, looking for so much
Natasha	✓ Age 38, Period around 8th grade, first sex at 15 ✓ Very little recollection of events, don't remember when period started ✓ Self as sexual = everybody is doing it and you want to try it kind of thing so I tried it probably when I was 15 ✓ Best thing was marrying boyfriend from age 16, intimate with 2 others before him, been together forever ✓ Way handle things do what got to do ✓ Had low self-esteem
Karen	✓ Age 35, Period at 13, first sex at 20 ✓ Adopted at young age (was not told until adult) ✓ Self as sexual = rather reserved, really private, keep good image, when younger didn't have feelings of self as sexual, preferred school and books and shopping ✓ not easily influenced ✓ said not having sex, good solid decision ✓ crying, feeling friend stupid for being pregnant
Shawn	✓ Age 42, Period at 13, first sex at 18 ✓ Self as sexual = The importance of waiting for someone who appreciates my individuality my wants my needs that is physical and emotional ✓ I felt ostracized because I could not participate in the conversations with everyone else, if it was possible for me to do a little bit without actually having sex so I could take part in the conversation ✓ Never had low self-esteem ✓ [boyfriend out of town, friend coming over] I was totally oblivious I had no idea that this boy liked me I learned at that time that most boys are not your friend most are friends for a reason they have ulterior motives not to say that boys are bad but really what do you have in common

	What Said to Mom
Joann	✓ sat down and told whole thing ✓ tight knit family but estranged relationship b/w mom and stepfather ✓ mom wouldn't marry dad because of values ✓ a lot to take care of children ✓ do as I say not as I do and no I don't have to explain it this is just what you do and you go on
Josephine	✓ adopted after mother murdered, no one told her ✓ no one had talked to her about ✓ didn't understand ✓ thought hurt self ✓ "mom" was so depressed ✓ "this is your life" ✓ no voice given to it ✓ birth control at 14, mom didn't want to but eventually did
Natasha	✓ unspoken things with mom ✓ thinking mom just didn't make a big deal out of things ✓ mom said to ask for pills but ✓ when did didn't want to so ended up getting by self
Karen	✓ Adopted at early age, no one told her ✓ Went to counseling to resolve issues of adopted mothers fears mother never talked about ✓ non-gendered, just a child ✓ un-informed ✓ embarrassed when things started happening because felt like a stigma thought had done something wrong, no one talked about it ✓ told stay away from boys or get pregnant, so terrified, impt of not being fast and staying away from certain girls ✓ mom said would be disappointed if had sex outside marriage ✓ mother left me just hanging out just seeing what would happen
Shawn	✓ My mother was not one of those that was waiting for it to happen she told me about menstruation when I was 6 or 7 years old she started hers when she was 9 so she didn't know when I would start ✓ She told me about what was going to happen and why ✓ I was such an avid reader of harlequin romances and I could scarf them down and so early on she explained to me that I should not think that everything I was reading about was what I would get Everything does not happen that way ✓ I had both of my parents my dad would tell me all kinds of scenarios I had all these stories