

Intersectional Cultural Values Affecting Latinas' Relationship with Sex: A Latina Discussion

by

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(Under the Direction of Edward Delgado-Romero)

ABSTRACT

There were several motivations for examining Latinas' knowledge about sex, sex education, and how they acquired this information. These included understanding what was being taught to women of color, raising awareness of the sources of this knowledge, assessing the comfort levels of Latinx families when discussing sex, and, most importantly, identifying what could have improved the learning experience for Latinas regarding the concept of sex. Various factors hindered research-based discussions on sex within Latinx cultures, including religious views, cultural perspectives, Latinx history, traditions, differences in knowledge, and discomfort in discussing sex (Caal et al., 2013). This study employed a *Platica* qualitative methodology, featuring two focus groups comprising six and five individuals who were raised as Christians, identified as Latina, and were willing to share their experiences with sex-related conversations, education, or the lack thereof. The purpose of this research was to explore Latinas' sex education experiences through school programs, socialization, and parental discussions, and to understand the influence of culture and religion on topics of sex and sexuality. The *Platica* results aimed to provide insights into how to improve conversations to enhance women's health, prevent diseases among teenagers, and improve dialogue among parents and educators. Additionally, the study sought to empower Latinas to advocate for culturally attuned conversations that upheld respect, dignity, and liberational views on sex.

INDEX WORDS: Latina, Sex, Sex Education, Religion, Culture

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DEDICATION

I am so grateful to dedicate my work to my wonderful parents, Rosaelia Escobedo and Francisco Espinoza. They have done everything possible to support my education and make sure I stay in school. My parents consistently underscored the significance of education, as they were unable to complete their high school education. Pursuing a PhD has always been a goal I seek to achieve, especially in recognition of the hard work and time they have dedicated to me. I dedicate my work to my husband, Alex Moreno, who has witnessed my growth from an undergraduate student to an aspiring psychologist. He has always been my primary motivator and support, continuously encouraging me through the challenges I face. My wonderful siblings and in-laws, Joanna, Rudy, Ricky, Amador, and Sharon, have always been my biggest cheerleaders, celebrating my accomplishments with shared dinners, cherished moments together, and refreshing vacations. My family has truly been my rock, and even though it can be challenging to understand my journey at times, they consistently show me their love and encouragement. I also wish to dedicate my work to my nieces, nephews, and other Latinx children, who will face difficult but essential conversations regarding sex, sexuality, and bodies for their protection and well-being. I hope studies like these will be shared and examined by researchers, educators, parents, and physicians to foster care for children and encourage healthy sexual development. Lastly, I want to dedicate this to my wonderful hometown friends, Alondra, Juan, and Paola. They have been by my side since childhood, encouraging me and helping me stay motivated through all these years. I'm so grateful for their support.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

There was a lack of studies that explored the experiences of first to third-generation Latinas who might have experienced acculturative stress due to the differing cultural views on sex and sex education between the United States and Latinx countries (Smith, 2015). As Latinx families migrated to the United States, young women received different messages regarding sex education from school, television, social media, friends, or the internet compared to those from their families and heritage culture. US cultural views often conflicted with those of their families and culture, resulting in acculturative stress. This stress arose from intercultural contact brought on by post-immigration factors such as difficulties assimilating to the beliefs, values, and norms of a dominant culture, and the frustration of limitations imposed by language barriers (Berry, 1997). Acculturative stress could cause depression, anxiety, identity crises, somatic symptoms, and isolation (Berry, 1997). Latinx parents also felt acculturative stress due to their children receiving messages that conflicted with the ones they grew up with, fearing that their children were abandoning traditions and values from their home countries. Latinx parents might have felt disrespected as parents and perceived a lack of respect toward their culture and values, which could bring embarrassment and a sense of shame to the family (Caal et al., 2013).

Religion among Latinx communities is deeply embedded in cultural identity, far beyond its role as a religious system (Campesino et al., 2009). Latinos are not a monolithic group; differences related to class, immigration experiences, acculturation, and country of origin exist. Nonetheless, there are common historical and modern experiences that connect Latinx

subgroups. This interconnectedness illustrates a rich tapestry of spirituality and history (Campesino et al., 2009). A fundamental cultural value among Latino subgroups is the emphasis on spirituality. Given that Latino culture is collectivist, the context for faith experiences is deeply rooted in family and local community (Magana & Clark, 1995). Therefore, religion is often intertwined when discussing culture due to its significance in *Latinidad*.

Culture and religion could serve as both protective and risk factors for Latinas in relation to sex and sexuality. Religiosity is a protective factor for Latinas due to the religious encouragement of avoiding sexual acts and risky behaviors (Manago et al., 2015). However, religiosity can also be a risk factor, as adherence to Christian values often prohibits the use of most contraceptives, and religious parents may be unwilling to discuss sex with their children (Manago et al., 2015). *Familismo*, a cultural value emphasizing family closeness, has been considered a protective factor because of increased parental monitoring. Conversely, it can also be a risk factor due to traditional roles between parent and child, which may create distrust and judgment (Manago et al., 2015). These potential risks or protective factors may create barriers to obtaining informative sex education for Latinas. Using a *Mujerista* and *Chicana* theoretical lens, it is important to examine current sex education and reproductive health in the United States, acculturative factors, protective factors, the history of Latinx culture and religion, and Latinx parental views on sex and sexuality. This approach aims to implement evidence-based sex education for Latinas better while considering religious and cultural factors. Additionally, understanding the perspectives of US-born or US-raised Christian Latinas and their journey toward sex education is crucial for helping parents support and educate their adolescents.

Middle and High School Sex Education in the U.S.

The United States has the highest rates of youth pregnancies, births, and abortions among young women in developed countries (Weaver et al., 2005). One study found that the average age of first intercourse in the United States was 15.8 years, lower than in other countries (Weaver et al., 2005). The United States also has one of the highest rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) among 15- to 19-year-olds, with the highest rates of sexually transmitted diseases such as gonorrhea in 2005 and Human Papillomavirus in 2020 (Weaver et al., 2005; National Conference of State Legislatures, 2020). The National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) reported that chlamydia cases were highest among women aged 15-24 years, while gonorrhea cases were highest among men aged 15-24 years (NCSL, 2020).

One significant factor contributing to the high rates of STIs in the United States compared to other countries is the U.S. policies on sex education (Weaver et al., 2005). In the U.S., there are no federal laws mandating sex education in schools, whereas countries like the Netherlands and France have policies for mandatory sex education (Weaver et al., 2005). Due to the lack of federal laws or regulations, individual states determine their sex education policies. For instance, as of 2020, 39 states provide HIV education, but only 30 of those states offer a comprehensive sex education curriculum (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2020). Furthermore, in 36 of these states, parents have the right to opt their children out of sex education, which can potentially hinder the child's knowledge. Additionally, it is problematic that the U.S. sex education curriculum is not based on current and/or updated evidence-based research (Weaver et al., 2005).

Of the programs that do exist in the US, most are abstinence-based programs that focus on preventing sex before marriage and preventing adolescent pregnancies. Many of these

programs are based on US American values, customs, and religion (Weaver et al., 2005; Astle et al., 2021). 70.6% of the U.S. population practices Christianity, which makes it the largest religious faith in the U.S. (Pew Research Center). Due to Christianity being the largest religion in the US, traditional Christian values such as abstinence and sex after marriage dominate the discourse of sex education (Mitchell & Tirado, 2019; Allen, 2014). It is often aspirational that women remain virgins until their wedding night as a form of morality and virtue in the Christian religion (Mitchell & Tirado, 2019; Allen, 2014).

The U.S. has two primary types of sex education programs: abstinence-plus and abstinence-only. Abstinence-plus programs allow conversations and education around contraception, resources for safer sex, and evidence-based facts, although most facts and resources are outdated (Weaver et al., 2005). Abstinence-plus programs focus less on the concept of marriage and religion and more on evidence-based research and health education (NCSL, 2020). Abstinence-only education emphasizes the need to postpone sexual intercourse until marriage. However, it also allegedly provides information regarding healthy relationships, the consequences of premarital sex, and the impacts of raising children outside of marriage (NCSL, 2020). Abstinence-only education is the dominant program that schools adopt, and some researchers believe that these programs result in increased rates of STIs, teenage pregnancies, abortions, and unnecessary fear among teenagers (Weaver et al., 2005).

Roe V Wade

In the 1970s, “Roe,” a woman who wanted an abortion, was denied access because her pregnancy did not pose a threat to her life. In January 1973, the United States Supreme Court ruled that the Constitution (14th Amendment of Liberty) gives women the right to choose whether to continue or end their pregnancy (<https://reproductiverights.org/roe-v-wade/>). On June

24th, 2022, the Roe ruling was overturned, and the protection of women's bodily autonomy and reproductive health was dismantled. Abortion is now not protected by federal law and is determined by individual states; currently, 13 states have made abortion at any time of pregnancy illegal, and many more states are following the path to making abortions illegal in their state.

(<https://reproductiverights.org/roe-v-wade/>). The overturn of Roe v. Wade impacts all women in various ways, but specifically women of color (Latinx and Black) who have the highest maternal mortality rates, less access to safe reproductive healthcare, and less access to safe abortions (<https://reproductiverights.org/roe-v-wade/>).

Many people believe that the overturning of Roe v. Wade is a setback for women's rights in America and a means to once again control women and uphold the patriarchy (Berg & Woods, 2023). For many women, having control over their future and body is essential for understanding and educating others on proper care for women's bodies and sexuality, as well as the use of contraception to prevent sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and/or for procreation (Garcia, 1989). Parents of color often struggle to have conversations about sex with their daughters. Although these topics can be uncomfortable and embarrassing, such conversations are crucial for adolescents, as they provide information on STIs, healthy relationships, and ways to care for their bodies (Figueroa-Cosme et al., 2018). Given the overturning of Roe v. Wade and the prevalence of abstinence-only education programs in the U.S., it is important to stay informed about policies to help improve children's reproductive health and to advocate against future policies that undermine women's rights (Figueroa-Cosme et al., 2018; Weaver et al., 2005; <https://reproductiverights.org/roe-v-wade/>).

Problem Statement

There were various motivations for exploring Latinas' knowledge regarding sex, sex education, and the means through which they acquired this knowledge. These motivations included gaining a better understanding of what was being taught to women of color, raising awareness about the sources of this knowledge, evaluating the comfort levels of Latinx parents and children when discussing sex, and, most importantly, identifying ways to improve the learning experience for Latinas regarding sex education. Numerous factors hindered the ability to engage in research-based conversations about sex within Latinx cultures. These factors included religious and cultural views, differences in knowledge, and discomfort with discussing sex (Caal et al., 2013). Previous studies had examined Latinx views on birth control, parental perspectives on reproduction, and Latina acculturative experiences in the US (Caal et al., 2013).

For example, in one research study, Latinas from the US West Coast were interviewed, and they discussed the importance of parental involvement in their reproductive health visits (Caal et al., 2013). Latinas indicated that their parents served both as supportive and discouraging people in their lives when it came to reproductive health services (Caal et al., 2013). Due to adherence to traditional cultural values, family cohesion is significant in Latinx culture, and it is common for parents to accompany their daughters to health appointments, regardless of their age. In this study, few Latinas reported parental support concerning access to sexual reproductive health services. The Latinas who reported support from their parents indicated that mothers who had children at a young age were more open to reproductive health and more encouraging of birth control (Caal et al., 2013). Most Latinas participating in the study disclosed not feeling supported by their parents regarding reproductive health services due to cultural values and beliefs. Parents, specifically those of Mexican, Dominican, and Cuban

descent, place a high value on virginity, specifically for women. They also believe that Latinas who are not married should not be sexually active, and lastly, there is a belief that conversations around sex encourage sexual activity and promiscuity (Caal et al., 2013). Many of the women in the study explained that parents viewed sexually active women as “dirty,” “shameful,” or “promiscuous,” which has hindered Latinas from seeking reproductive services or has led them to go to great lengths to hide their health appointments (Caal et al., 2013).

There were numerous factors contributing to the inability to provide appropriate sex education to middle and high school students, particularly students of color, due to US views on abstinence, contraception, religion, and politics. Astle and colleagues (2021) interviewed thirty-eight Latinx students from public universities in the southwestern United States; researchers asked questions regarding the quality of their sex education and how it could be improved (Astle et al., 2021). Most of the students described sex education in their schools as unhelpful, inadequate, and awkward (Astle et al., 2021). Students indicated that negative tactics regarding sex before marriage were employed to encourage abstinence, which may stem from religious, political, and patriarchal views. Many students reported that teachers provided false information; for instance, one student mentioned a teacher stating, “If you have sex and you’re not married, you’re going to get an STD” (Astle et al., 2021, p.26). Students also indicated an inability to connect with the material because it was old and unrelatable. Students mentioned wanting videos and conversations that reflect the world they live in and discussions on what is important in today’s culture (Astle et al., 2021).

Statement of Purpose

The qualitative study conducted interviews with two groups, each consisting of six to ten individuals who were raised as Christians, identified as Latina, and were willing to disclose their

experiences with sex topics, sex education, or the lack thereof. The purpose of this study was to explore Latinas' experiences with sexual discussions through school education, parental conversations, and the influence of culture and religion on topics of sex and sexuality. The interviews provided insights into enhancing discussions to improve women's health, preventing diseases among teenagers, parents, and educators, and how Latinas could advocate for culturally attuned conversations that incorporate respect and dignity. The study aimed to better understand sex education experiences from Latina perspectives and how these insights could lead to healthier conversations, liberational sex, and culturally sensitive, evidence-based sex education. This, in turn, would help future Latina generations make healthier choices, preventing unexpected pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases. The study suggested ways to improve sex education conversations within the Latinx community, particularly for young Latinas in their preteen and teenage years. It also aimed to dispel the belief that discussions about sex encourage sexual activity and promiscuity. This study explored the following questions:

- 1) How did traditional Latinx cultural factors influence conversations around sex?
- 2) How did Latinx participants learn about sex?
- 3) What kind of sex education did Latina participants receive and what kind of sex education would they have liked?
- 4) What can be done to improve sex education for the next generation of Latinas?

Definitions

Below are definitions of key terms:

Acculturation: acculturation is defined as “changes in value orientations among minority groups in the direction of White norms probably occur within a contact situation of high exposure to the

Anglo group, identification with them by the non- Anglos, and economic access to the resources and rewards of the mixed society within which they are living” (p. 347; Graves, 1967).

Biological Sex/Sex Assigned at Birth: The assignment and classification of people as male, female, intersex, or another sex based on a combination of anatomy, hormones, chromosomes (Trans Student Educational Resources, 2015)

Chicana feminist Epistemology: is an epistemology that is centered in a critical, social, economic, political, and cultural perspective and highlights ways Chicanas struggle against oppression in the United States (Delgado Bernal & Elenes, 2021).

Chicana: A U.S American born women of Mexican origin or descent (Delgado Bernal & Elenes, 2021).

Christian: major religion stemming from the life, teachings, and death of Jesus of Nazareth (the Christ, or the Anointed One of God) in the 1st century CE (McGinn et al., 2023)

Colonialism: is a process in which one group attempts to impose its institutions and culture on another through conquest (Sigal, 2009).

Cultural values: culture values are defined as "beliefs, values, traditions, and other practices passed on across generations represent a synthesis of many different cultures" (Arredondo et al., 2014, p. 18).

Emotional Attraction: Romantic/emotional orientation. sexual and romantic/emotional attraction can be from a variety of factors including but not limited to gender identity, gender expression/presentation, and sex assigned at birth (Trans Student Educational Resources, 2015).

Gender Identity: One’s internal sense of being male, female, neither of these, both, or another gender(s) (Trans Student Educational Resources, 2015).

Latina: A person who identifies as a women or girl of Latin America origin or descent.

Latinx: Latinx is the gender-neutral term used as an alternate to Latino, Latina, Latina/o, and Latin@.

Marianismo: an idealized traditional feminine gender role characterized by submissiveness, selflessness, chastity, hyper femininity, and acceptance of traditional the gender role of machismo in males. Although clearly derived from the traditional ideal of the Virgin Mary, marianismo is not to be confused with a specific religious practice of the Roman Catholic Church (APA).

Mestiza: A person of mixed race (Anzaldua, 1987)

Mestiza Consciousness: Developing Chicana consciousness that recognizes the struggle and need to straddle cultures, languages, spiritualities, and sexualities (Anzaldua, 1987).

Mujerista: Someone who makes a preferential option for Latina women, for their struggle for liberation. Mujeristas struggle to liberate themselves not as individuals but as members of a Latino community. They work to build bridges among Latinx individuals while denouncing sectarianism and divisionary tactics (Isasi-Diaz, 1996)

Sex Education: Sex education helps people gain the information and skills they need to make the best decisions for themselves about sex and relationships (Planned Parenthood Federation of America, 2023).

Shame: is a highly unpleasant self-conscious emotion arising from the sense of there being something dishonorable, immodest, or indecorous in one's own conduct or circumstances (American Psychological Association, 2023)

CHAPTER II

Review of Relevant Literature

As previously mentioned, culture and religion can act as both protective and risk factors for Latinas concerning sex and sexuality. Conflicting messages may create negative beliefs about sexuality, resulting in a lost opportunity for women to develop a healthy sense of self. Furthermore, miseducation can contribute to a higher incidence of sexually transmitted infections and pregnancies among young Latinas (Manago et al., 2015). Recent statistics indicate that 17% of Latina adolescents will give birth before turning 20 and are more likely to contract STIs than white adolescents in the United States (Evans et al., 2020). A review of the literature will emphasize the significance of understanding history and how misconceptions about sexuality have been perpetuated by colonization and remain a pressing issue (Mitchell & Tirado, 2019).

Latinx History

Between 150 and 800 C.E., the Moche and Nahua peoples were among the first known Latinx communities to write or speak about sexuality openly (Sigal, 2009). The Moche inhabited what is now Peru. They created pottery that depicted masturbation, fellatio, and anal intercourse, but rarely showed vaginal intercourse. For the Moche, vaginal intercourse was not the only significant reproductive act; they believed that all sexual and social activities forged a connection between humans, nature, and the gods (Sigal, 2009). The Moche viewed reproduction as a communal activity, not merely the role of one male and one female.

disperse control over reproduction by creating a physiological system in which no one individual or pair acts alone: not the married couple, not the mother breast-feeding her

baby, not even the all-powerful and massively fertile ancestor. Each form of bodily engagement is only one link in a chain of physical processes that nourishes not only babies but also a vigorous network of linkages between social actors. (Sigal, 2009 p. 1352).

The Moche people used their “sex pots” to analyze social interactions and explain things about their society. For example, as mentioned above, a wide range of sexual acts were a part of a powerful connection to their ancestors and the productive and reproductive system in their society.

The Nahua people were from Mexico, Nicaragua, Honduras, and other modern-day Latin American countries who created ritual practices in which Nahua priests used the skin of a woman to offer to a fertility goddess (Sigal, 2009). The ritual performance began with naked women dancing for several days. Once a woman was chosen by a Nahua priest, he had sexual intercourse with her, decapitated her, and used her skin through the remainder of the ceremonies as the fertility goddess priest. Women were of value within the Nahua people, which can be contradictory to modern sensibilities when hearing about women being skinned and decapitated, but women were sacrificed because they were the most valuable offering to the Gods and the growth of the land. The Goddess Priest, who was a man dressed as a woman with women’s skin and clothes, led ceremonies by “sweeping” the city of Tenochtitlan, planting maize, and leading warriors to battle. These ceremonies were intended to ensure the fertility of the earth and the welfare of their warriors. (Sigal, 2009). The Nahua people used sex and sexuality to discuss and enrich the relationship between humans and gods (Sigal, 2009).

Aztec, Mayan, and Incan cultures, while not identical, all shared connections with cosmic forces through sexual rituals, as sexuality was crucial in religious ceremonies (Marcos, 1992). In

Mayan culture, women had the freedom to leave their husbands, change partners, or temporarily suspend a union (Marcos, 1992). In Aztec culture, two goddesses held significant importance: the goddess of illicit sexual relations and the protector of fertility and abortions (Marcos, 1992). Both goddesses provided forgiveness through a confessional ritual as a means of repentance. In Incan society, marriage centered on mutual service; if a couple did not form a permanent bond after a year, they could separate and start a new family (Marcos, 1992). Latin American populations possessed notably different values regarding gender, sexuality, marriage, and eroticism prior to European Christian colonization (Marcos, 1992).

Changing the nature of intimate connectedness between these societies and their ancestors came quickly upon the arrival of the Spanish conquistadors and the acts of colonialism during the late 1400s (Mitchell & Tirado, 2019). Colonialism is a process in which one group attempts to impose its institutions and culture on another through conquest (Sigal, 2009). The journey of Spanish colonialism aimed to convert native people to Christianity (Mitchell & Tirado, 2019). The Spaniards viewed these societies as sinful and unlawful due to their differing views and customs, particularly regarding sex and sexuality. The indigenous people of Latin America were often nude, had female leaders and gods, engaged in same-sex sexual acts, participated in premarital sex, and births outside of marriage were common (Marcos, 1992). Colonial leaders and priests condemned these acts and brutally punished those who continued to uphold behaviors and beliefs that were deemed immoral by Christianity (Mitchell & Tirado 2019). The traditions and symbols used by these communities differed significantly from the “masculine trinity of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit” (Marcos, 1992, p.168) that symbolize Christianity.

Religion

Christianity

Due to the Spanish conquistadors and religious leaders colonizing Latin America by conquering lands, condemning cultures, and forcibly replacing their religious beliefs, Catholicism became the dominant religion in Latin America during the 1500s (Mitchell & Tirado, 2019). Throughout the 1600s, the government and Catholic Church continued to focus on suppressing sexuality and condemned those who engaged in "sinful" sexual acts (Mitchell & Tirado, 2019). The church's primary objective was to regulate all forms of sexual activity that did not result in reproduction. In the views of the Catholic church, marriage was the only way that man and women were allowed to have sex, and then only for the purpose of procreating. Through the 1700-1900's revolutions and independence movements began which challenged the strong connections between church and government, finally ending the formal rule of the Spanish. Though Spanish rule had ended, the colonization process ensured that Catholic values were embedded in the fabric of society, leading many countries to adopt Catholicism as their official religion (Mitchell & Tirado, 2019). This colonization served as a means to maintain control over indigenous people through the institutionalization of Catholicism, which fostered machismo, marianismo, shame, dishonor, and negative perceptions of sex before marriage.

Catholicism

Catholicism is the largest branch of Christianity (Allen, 2014). The differences between Catholicism and other Christian faiths include beliefs about sacraments, the role of the Bible, the importance of the Virgin Mary, the significance of saints, and the authority of the Pope (Allen, 2014). In 2012, there were 1.2 billion Catholics in the world, primarily in Latin America, Africa, and Asia (Allen, 2014). As previously mentioned, due to the colonization of Latin America, most

Latin Americans practice Catholicism and base many of their cultural values and norms on Catholic traditions (Mitchell & Tirado, 2019).

Catholic practices affect Latinas and their families today in the 21st century, due to cultural clashes between Catholic beliefs and current cultural movements aimed at enhancing women's rights, LGBTQ rights, abortion rights, and Mujerista movements that seek to abolish traditional gender roles (Ellison et al., 2013; Espinosa-Hernandez et al., 2015). Many Catholic Latinx families are socially conservative and hold traditional views and values that value heterosexual relationships, marriage, family, virginity, *machismo*, and God (Ellison et al., 2013). Catholicism has a history of oppressing women through conservative views and male dominance (Padilla, 2000). Regarding religion as both a risk and protective factor, Latinas' faith provides women with strength, love, resilience, and a means to foster community, despite the ongoing oppression of women by the Catholic Church. (Padilla, 2000).

Latinas' relationship with the divine is a very intimate one. This intimate relationship is a matter not only of believing that God is with us in our daily struggle, but that we can and do relate to God the same way we related to all our loved ones. (Padilla, 2000, p. 978).

Due to religious tradition, through colonization, all women, regardless of class or ethnicity, were excluded from leadership; their role was to be procreators, housekeepers, and wives. In early December 1531, an event that directly affected many Catholic Latinas to this day was the revelation of La Virgen de Guadalupe (Padilla, 2000). The sighting of *La Virgen Maria* established hope for Latinas. By choosing to reveal herself to a poor, oppressed, indigenous man, it was believed that all people were deserving of recognition and salvation, regardless of race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status (Padilla, 2000). *La Virgen* recognized that indigenous people believed in past gods and held different religious views, but regardless, *La Virgen* accepted and prayed for all

people (Padilla, 2000). Due to La Virgen's views, she inspired hope among Latinas by suggesting that the Catholic Church was evolving in their perspectives, and many felt optimistic about liberation (Padilla, 2000). However, to this day, Latinas remain largely invisible in Catholic leadership, yet La Virgen Maria continues to be a source of prayer, hope, and strength for Catholic women (Padilla, 2000; Comas-Diaz 2014).

According to tradition, La Virgen María de Guadalupe was chosen by God to conceive Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. God chose Mary to conceive Jesus Christ because she was obedient, strong, courageous, a woman of scripture and faith, and most importantly, pure (a virgin) (Campesino & Schwartz 2009). For many Latinx individuals, La Virgen Maria is synonymous with God, embodying qualities of love, comfort, and strength (Campesino & Schwartz, 2009). Catholic Latinas venerate La Virgen because she represents empowerment for la Raza (race), dignity, respect, hope, womanhood, and autonomy (Campesino & Schwartz, 2009; Comas-Diaz, 2014). Ironically, the Catholic clergy used the Virgin Mary to convert and control the indigenous community into a pure, obedient Catholic group (Comas-Diaz, 2014). The clergy's plan succeeded until she was perceived by an indigenous man as a dark, impoverished woman, leading the indigenous people to reclaim her as one of their own. She is now regarded as a symbol of ethnic affirmation, pride, hope, and feminism for many Catholic Latinas (Comas-Diaz, 2014).

Denominations

As mentioned above, Christianity is a religion that holds multiple different branches of Denomination, including Protestantism, Orthodoxy, Anglicanism, and Assyrian. It is important to note that some Latinx individuals identify with these branches of Christianity. (Padilla, 2000). Protestantism began as a movement seeking to reform the Roman Catholic Church. Protestants view the Bible as the only accurate document of Christian faith and believe in salvation by grace

alone through faith. Lastly, Protestants believe each Christian is a priest before God and has direct access to Him (Rhodes, 2015). Orthodoxy believes that God has revealed Himself to us as Jesus Christ. The Orthodox Church holds many of the same beliefs as the Catholic Church but expresses them differently; for example, they are not governed by a Pope, but it has its own ruling body (bishop or primate) (Rhodes, 2015). Anglicans believe that Jesus Christ is both completely God and completely human. They hold the conviction that they are always reforming and seeking better ways to proclaim the Gospel (Rhodes, 2015). Assyrians were the first people to convert to Christianity as a nation or movement. Their official language is Syriac, which is said to be the language Jesus would have spoken during his lifetime. Assyrians are predominantly Christian, with most adhering to the East and West Syriac liturgical rites of Christianity (Rhodes, 2015). Many denominations branched into groups due to differences in teachings, beliefs, authority, and sociopolitical factors. Despite these differences, all Christians believe that God is the creator of heaven, earth, and the universe and that Jesus is the son of God who was sacrificed (Rhodes, 2015).

Culture Values

Personalism, sympathy, respect, family, marianismo, and machismo are crucial cultural values practiced across generations in the Latinx community (Ortiz, 2020). Traditionally, Latinas are taught to embrace and recognize each of these cultural values, as they are raised to be mothers and caretakers of the family (Hussain et al, 2015).

Personalismo, Simpatia, y Respeto

Ortiz (2017), defined *personalismo* as “the Latino/a’s preference for connectedness with others and for interpersonal relationships based on trust” (p. 423). Ideally, personalism helps the Latinx community engage in pleasant, meaningful, intimate, and non-confrontational relationships. The Latinx population generally values personal character and inner qualities that

create warmth and familiarity (Ortiz, 2020). These values of *personalismo* promote trust and cooperation, which achieve a powerful feeling of connectedness (Ortiz, 2020). In the Latinx culture, women are held to a higher standard of engaging in *personalismo* due to their status of being caretakers, mothers, and spiritual beings. Latinas are expected to actively fill this role through holding casual conversations with friends or acquaintances, inquiring about family members in a caring manner, being hospitable and inviting, and celebrating a sense of shared history (Castillo et al., 2010; Ortiz, 2020).

Simpatia translates to friendliness, sympathy, and kindness, whereas *respeto* translates to respect. These two values are highly emphasized in the Latinx community due to the nurturing and collectivistic nature of relationships (Ortiz, 2020). Latinx children are socialized to be loving, respectful, and agreeable in all settings, especially with family and elders (Ortiz, 2020). A Spanish saying, “*No faltarle el respeto*”, implies that one must not talk back or assert themselves to those higher on the hierarchical family structure, and because women are self-sacrificing as *marianismo* suggests, women have the responsibility of being respectful and mindful to everyone (Castillo et al., 2010). Latinas also play a role in enhancing their family's esteem; therefore, women are accountable for how their family presents itself to others, ensuring they maintain family honor and avoid bringing shame. (Castillo et al., 2010). When it comes to *simpatia* the role of women is to maintain harmony, be patient, forgiving of others, not talk about controversial subjects (Castillo et al., 2010).

Familismo

According to Ortiz (2017) and Sabogal and colleagues (1987), *familismo* is one of the most important values in the Latinx community. *Familismo* “comprises close bonds with one’s family, cohesiveness, interdependence, fulfilling familiar obligations, and holding strong

perceptions of familial support” (Sabogal et al., 1987, p. 421). Latinx families are comprised of extended and nuclear families that embrace loyalty, solidarity, and reciprocity (Sabogal et al., 1987). A priority for Latinx families is to protect each other from external forces and emotional stressors. Latinx families make sure to provide a support system that facilitates love and strength in a gendered, hierarchical way (Ortiz, 2020). According to Ortiz (2017), Latinx individuals have internalized attitudes and strong beliefs regarding their families that are often acquired during childhood. Traditionally, women are expected to demonstrate their adherence to familismo by providing physical and emotional support to the family, bearing and raising children, and managing the household (Castillo et al., 2010).

Marianismo

The concept of marianismo was introduced in the 1970s by Evelyn Stevens. Marianismo is a gender role that embodies the qualities of la Virgen Maria, which include caretaking, self-sacrifice, passivity, respect, and sexual morality (Hussain et al., 2015). There are both negative and positive influences that marianismo may have on Latinas. The negative influence may stem from the self-sacrificing and passive characteristics that women are expected to embody as a form of being a good Catholic. Latinas are expected to uphold high standards of sexual morality and control their sexual desires, while ignoring or normalizing promiscuity among men. Often when Latinas do not achieve these values, they may experience shame, pain, and suffering due to damaging the family name (Hussain et al., 2015). For Latinas, sexual morality significantly influences how their character is shaped and judged. For example, Latina adherence to gender roles and expectations (e.g., virginity until marriage) is associated with honor for oneself and family (Hussain et al., 2015). According to Gil and Vazquez (1996), one common rule or moral

law of *marianismo* is that sex is for procreation and not for pleasure. Below are the “Ten Commandments of Marianismo” described by Gil and Vazquez (1996).

1. Women should not forget their place
2. Women should not give up their traditions
3. Women should not be independent
4. Women should not put themselves first
5. Women should not be anything but a housewife
6. Women should not have sex for pleasure
7. Women should not be unhappy with their husbands
8. Women should not ask for help
9. Women should not discuss personal problems outside the household
10. Women should not change things that make them unhappy.

On the other hand, Marianismo may also embody pride and dignity in women, as it symbolizes moral and spiritual superiority to men (Stevens, 1973). Women who embody marianismo are known to be strong, capable, and a symbol of power in their homes (Castillo et al., 2010). They are recognized as exemplary mother figures and emotionally intelligent, particularly towards their immediate and extended family (Castillo et al., 2010). The internalized pain and suffering that women experience is also viewed as a form of strength and power by many Latinas. Just as La Virgen Maria held her pain silently and faithfully, many Latinas aspire to be as strong as she was by modeling La Virgen’s sacrifice of putting others first and suffering in silence, hoping for a reward in the afterlife (Hussain et al., 2015).

Parents and the Topic of Sex

Parents have a significant role in the sexual development of their daughters (Figueroa-Cosme et al., 2018). A parent's role is particularly important during the adolescent developmental stage because this is often when sexual development, socialization, and potential sexual risk-taking occur (Figueroa-Cosme et al., 2018). Figueroa-Cosme and colleagues (2018) identify five factors through which all parents influence sexual behavior: 1. Monitoring, 2. Maintaining closeness, 3. Modeling of sexual behaviors, 4. Disapproval of sexual activity, and 5. Sexual risk communication. Taking all this information into consideration, Figueroa-Cosme and colleagues (2018) state that the most important role for parents is communication: "Effective communication skills that foster responsible sexual decisions are known to have the potential to reduce the risky adolescent sexual behavior" (p. 2). While discussions about sex and sexuality can be challenging for both parents and teenagers, they are essential as they significantly influence a child's knowledge, beliefs, and behaviors. One also needs to consider that these conversations should be educational and non-judgmental; otherwise, they can jeopardize any future trust or communication between parent and daughter (Figueroa-Cosme et al., 2018).

Conversations between Parent and Daughter

Latinx parents often engage their children, especially their daughters, in discussions about cultural beliefs, values, and messages of protection. According to Figueroa-Cosme and colleagues (2018), these conversations about sex between parents and daughters correlate with decisions to abstain from or postpone sexual involvement. Robles and colleagues (2007) reported that adolescents whose parents disclosed having poor communication about sex were three to four times more likely to engage in sexual activities at an earlier age. Many Latinx parents may lack the skills to engage in effective conversations about sex since they grew up during a time

when discussing sexuality was prohibited and sexual information was difficult to access (Figueroa-Cosme et al., 2018). For example, Figueroa-Cosme cite one mother who reported “When I was a little girl I was never oriented about sexuality, in my house, it was considered a taboo.” (P. 5). The lack of communication may inspire Latinx parents to do differently, another parent commented, “As soon as they ask the first question, 10, 12, 13, 17, or 25 years... at their moment of curiosity. I am prepared to talk to her; I will not do the same as my mom did, I had to learn about it from books.” (P. 8)

When exploring conversations between parents and children, research shows that an adolescent’s sexual decision-making is often influenced by parental figures (Killoren et al., 2022). Latinx parents frequently hold differing expectations and apply varied treatment for their sons and daughters regarding sexual behavior (Killoren et al., 2022). Often, traditional Latinx fathers implement strategies (e.g., prohibit dating) to prevent their daughters from engaging in sexual activity. In the study by Killoren and colleagues (2022), one female participant reported, “My stepdad always says, I can’t date until he’s dead” (pg. 9). Latino adolescents report having sex despite having strict dating rules and prohibitions (Killoren et al., 2022). Another gender difference noted was that parents had conversations regarding condom use with their male adolescents but not with their female adolescents. Some female adolescents stated that they did not receive any type of conversation around sex and mentioned that parents often would ignore the concept as a whole (Killoren et al., 2022). Only 34% of participants indicated that parents were the primary source of sex education, while 66% of adolescents received their information from other sources (Killoren et al., 2022).

Adolescents are highly aware of the reasons behind different expectations for males and females; these differences are shaped by traditional gender roles, parents’ personal sexual history

and experience, and culturally based values (Killoren et al., 2022). In a study by Manago and colleagues (2015) studying the sexual experience of Latinx young adults in college, the researchers had comparable results to Killoren and colleagues (2022). Findings concluded that Latinx young adults often reported receiving messages from parents emphasizing sex solely for procreation rather than highlighting love and feelings. The findings indicated that Latinas were more likely to hear relational sex messages from their parents, which stressed that sex is only appropriate within a monogamous relationship. In contrast, Latinos reported receiving more recreational sex messages from their parents, highlighting that sex is a common and pleasurable activity. Additionally, women reported experiencing higher levels of sexual role messages (expectations pertaining to their biological sex) from their parents compared to men (Manago et al., 2015). Furthermore, Latinas are more likely to consider love and traditional roles when thinking about sexual relations, whereas Latinos are more likely to view sex as pleasurable and fun (Killoren et al., 2022).

Although there are parental roles based on tradition, it is important to note that education and acculturation may impact parental beliefs and actions in such a way that “cultural values conveyed by Latinx parents with higher levels of education have shifted toward individualistic values, emphasizing sex outside of marriage, as long as it is in the context of a committed, loving relationship... suggesting that acculturated Latino parents embrace more individualistic values in supporting sex for love outside of marriage” (Manago, 2015, pp. 19-20). Therefore, modern Latinx culture, particularly in the US, is not static; it is constantly evolving and changing, often alternating between progressive and regressive perspectives on women’s sexuality.

Uncomfortable with Sex and Negative Messages

Latina adolescents are more likely to receive negative messages about dating and sex than Latino adolescents (Killoren et al., 2022). According to Romo and Hurtado (2020), discussions between mothers and daughters regarding dating often emphasize the negative impacts of romantic relationships and sexual engagement. One mother told their daughter, “The one that sleeps with you, slept with another, this other person slept with another, that other person slept with another, and when you come to realize, it is a chain” (Figueroa-Cosme et al., 2018, p. 6). Faulkner (2020) explores the saying “Good Women,” suggesting that such women are depicted as disinterested in sex, resembling the idealized asexual Virgin Mary. Latinx women are often taught to suppress their sexuality and look to men for sexual education (Faulkner, 2002). Ironically, however, Latinas are also expected to embody sensuality, warmth, and physical attractiveness (Faulkner, 2002).

“Staying a Senorita” is another saying or *dicho* that refers to the ideal of women remaining virgins and staying pure. Terms like “flirt girls” or “easy woman” describe a woman who embraces her sexuality but often faces labels like “whore” or “slut.” In contrast, traditional gender roles suggest that men should be adventurous, risk takers, and promiscuous (Faulkner, 2002). Faulkner (2002) conducted interviews with Latinas who identified as “senoritas”; many of these individuals held a strong conviction in their faith, expressing both value and pride in their virginity. Some women expressed that sex held significance for them, and they desired to share it with someone they genuinely loved. In contrast, others viewed sex as a “gift” meant to be cherished by their future partner (Faulkner, 2002). Although a negative connotation often mentioned was the idea that if a woman gave up her virginity, men would not be willing to have

a serious relationship, waiting to have sex until marriage was seen as a strategy to keep a man from cheating or “straying.” (Faulkner, 2002).

According to Faulkner (2002), some US Latinas discussed their sexual urges as something negative and shameful. Many disclosed that they held these views because they were never taught about positive sexual feelings. Most women expressed pride in controlling their sexual urges before marriage to avoid bringing shame to their families. While other Latinas disclosed engaging in sexual intercourse as a form of rebellion against their parents due to the strict rules and unfair double standards for men and women (Faulkner, 2002). The women who rejected the role of *senorita* felt that women’s roles encompassed more than just motherhood and being a relational partner. One Latina stated, “self-worth can derive from many other places than between your legs” (Faulkner, 2002, p. 318).

Ultimately, the absence of sex education can lead to significant vulnerabilities for Latinas:

It is known that there appears to be a taboo against discussing sexuality in many Latino cultures, and parental communication regarding sexuality is often lacking...Latina women in general are raised not to discuss their sexual feelings, which may impede the negotiation of safe sex and may increase their vulnerability to sexual abuse. (Kenny & Wurtele, 2013, p. 932)

Latinx Statistics

Due to a culture of silence, Latinas in the United States face a higher risk of negative sexual outcomes, such as chlamydia, HIV, and unplanned pregnancies, compared to non-Latinas (Espinoza, 2018). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s 2018 statistics indicate that, among Latinx females in the United States, 87% of new HIV diagnoses were linked to

heterosexual contact. In 2018, the rate of reported gonorrhea cases among Latinx individuals was 115.9 cases per 100,000 people. The rate of primary and secondary syphilis cases among Latinx individuals was 2.2 times higher than that among White individuals. Lastly, the rate of congenital syphilis for Latinx individuals was 3.3 times greater than that of the White population (CDC, 2020).

Guarini (2011) stated that in the first decade of the twenty-first century, approximately 53% of Latina adolescents became pregnant by age 20. This rate was nearly twice the national average in the United States (Martin et al., 2006). In 2005, a national survey revealed that “42.3% of sexually active Latinx high school students did not use condoms, compared with 31.1% of African American students and 37.4% of white students” (Guarini, 2011, p. 201). Due to the high rates of risky sexual behavior among the Latinx adolescent population and the increasing number of Latinx individuals in the US, understanding sexuality among Latinx adolescents is of great importance (Guarini, 2011). It is crucial to comprehend the sexuality of Latinx adolescents because the outcomes of their sexual risk behaviors (e.g., unwanted pregnancies, STIs) have significant impacts at the individual, family, and societal levels. In a study by Brindis and colleagues (1995), they examined the rates of unintended pregnancies and found that first-generation Latinos had significantly higher rates of unintended pregnancies (34%) compared to more acculturated Latinas (22%). This discrepancy may be attributed to acculturated Latinx individuals receiving some form of sex education through books, friends, or media.

Evans (2020) highlighted several factors that lead to poor sexual health outcomes for Latina adolescents when compared to their non-Latina white counterparts. These include issues like student retention, high dropout rates, inadequate parent–child discussions about sexual

health, and restricted access to healthcare services (Evans, 2020). Evans (2020) states that “Latina adolescents who strongly display cultural values of *familismo* ... and *simpatía* ... are more likely to delay sexual initiation and less likely to engage in sexual risk behaviors” (Pg. 2). Research has shown that sex education and cultural factors are linked to a postponement in young people’s initiation of sexual activity and an increase in contraceptive use (Espinoza, 2018; Evans, 2020).

Summary

This chapter reviews literature on Latinx history in the context of sexuality, religion, values, and culture. It also includes statistics on U.S. Latinas impacted by inadequate sex education. The goal is to help readers grasp the different factors that shape the sex education available to Latinas. The literature review is structured to highlight the psychological, social, and cultural factors contributing to the challenges and barriers women face concerning sexuality, autonomy, and sex education. Furthermore, it seeks to address the existing gaps in the literature regarding the significant role of religion and culture on U.S.-born and U.S.-raised Christian Latinas. The following chapter explores the qualitative design that will guide this research study.

CHAPTER III

Research Design

“Qualitative methodology purposely represents, involves, and benefits understudied populations” (Delgado-Romero et al., 2018, p. 326). Qualitative research has been cited as culturally compatible when exploring Latinx history and culture (Delgado-Romero et al., 2018). By employing a qualitative research method, I can reflect on the complexities and intersectionalities of my Latinx participants. This methodology can give a voice to the participant, provide a space for vulnerability to tell their stories, and help better understand someone’s worldview (Delgado Bernal, 2020). As *personalismo* (close personal relationships), *dichos* (folk sayings), and *cuentos* (storytelling) are traditional ways of connecting in the Latinx community, qualitative research offers these connections a familiar space that ideally fosters a bond between the researcher and participant to collect rich and informed data. Lastly, reflexivity holds significant importance in qualitative studies as it investigates the extent to which the researcher’s positionality influences the presented study (Delgado-Romero et al., 2018).

This research study used *Platica* (Delgado Bernal, 2020) as a qualitative method, which is a branch of Narrative Inquiry that helps describe and identify Latinx world views and experiences (Delgado Bernal, 2020). The *Platica* qualitative method emerged from a Chicana/Latina feminist theoretical framework that emphasizes Latinas’ world views and lived experiences; it aims to uncover marginalized voices, expose Western patriarchal perspectives, and embrace brown bodies, sexuality, and spirituality (Delgado Bernal, 2020). There are five principles within the *Pláticas* methodology that I used in this scholarship. The first principle

reiterates the importance of Chicana/Latina Feminist theory, the second is the importance of honoring the participants, the third is the connections of everyday lived experiences and the research inquiry, the fourth is a space for healing, and lastly, *Platica* methodology relies on vulnerability and researcher reflexivity. The utilization of *Pláticas* in this research facilitated the amplification of previously neglected Latina voices and the acknowledgment of marginalized Latina experiences.

Theoretical Framework

The current study utilized a Mujerista and Chicana/Feminist theoretical framework to obtain a comprehensive understanding of Latinas' experiences concerning sex education and conversations about sex and sexuality with their parents and/or guardians. The Mujerista and Chicana/Feminist framework facilitated the exploration of the various intersections encountered by women, including but not limited to religion, spirituality, culture, age, and sexuality.

Chicana/Feminist Epistemology

The Chicana Feminist movement emerged in the 1970s, following the Chicano movement in the United States. The Chicano Movement involved Mexican American men advocating for political and social equality in the U.S. (Garcia, 1989). During this time, many Chicanas recognized the presence of gender inequalities within both the Chicano Movement and American society (Garcia, 1989). The Chicano movement primarily focused on Latino political and social inequalities, and it did not advocate for Latina rights (Garcia, 1989). Today, Chicana Feminists continue to challenge racist, sexist, and patriarchal systems both within the United States and in their cultural community.

Dolores Huerta, Vilma Martinez, Jovita Idar, Ana Nieto Gomez, and Elizabeth Toledo are recognized as pioneering Chicana feminists who fought and advocated for their rights as women in the United States. These women are known for their activism, involvement in civil rights movements, and support for reproductive and LGBTQ rights (Garcia, 1989). In academic settings and research, Gloria Anzaldua, Cherrie Moraga, and Dolores Delgado Bernal are significant contributors to works on Chicana feminist epistemology. Gloria Anzaldua was a Chicana feminist cultural and queer scholar who developed important concepts, including *Nepantla*, the state of being between two cultures, particularly one's original culture and the dominant one, and new tribalism, a theory designed to disrupt the matrix of imposed identity categories that the hegemonic culture imposes on people to maintain its power and authority (Anzaldúa, 2004; Delgado Bernal & Elenes, 2021). Cherrie Moraga is a Chicana feminist author and professor who writes about the intersectionality of gender, sexuality, and race (Garcia, 1989). Lastly, Dolores Delgado Bernal is a Chicana feminist professor who explores critical gendered epistemologies and community-engaged, justice-based research methodologies (Garcia, 1989).

Many feminists of color believe that White liberal feminist scholars have failed to provide useful concepts that examine gender, ethnic, and class oppression (Isasi-Diaz, 1996). Most liberal feminist scholarship has analyzed ideas and concepts from a white woman's lens or experience (Delgado Bernal, 1998). Black feminist scholars have distanced themselves from white liberal feminists to contribute culturally sensitive ideas for Black women, paving the way for other women researchers of color (Delgado Bernal, 1998). Acknowledging that Latina experiences differ from Black experiences, it is essential to develop a theory useful for individuals who identify within the Latinx diaspora. Chicana feminist epistemology is centered

in a critical, social, economic, political, and cultural perspective (Delgado Bernal & Elenes, 2021). Chicana feminist epistemology highlights ways Chicanas struggle against oppression in the United States. It is also important to emphasize the issues faced by Chicanas, such as immigration, migration, generational status, bilingualism, limited English proficiency, and the impact of Catholicism (Delgado Bernal & Elenes, 2021). This perspective provides a “theory of agency (modes of acting upon their world) showing how Chicanas have not passively accepted racist, sexist, classist, and heterosexist institutional and cultural practices” (Delgado Bernal & Elenes, 2021, p. 102).

“Epistemology involves the nature status and production of knowledge. Chicana epistemology is concerned with the knowledge about Chicanas and about who generates an understanding of their experiences and how this knowledge is legitimized are not legitimized” (Delgado Bernal, 1998, p. 4). Chicana epistemology aids women in maintaining their connection to indigenous roots by embracing dualities and questioning dichotomies. It brings to light problematic experiences that traditional patriarchal or liberal feminist perspectives often overlook or fail to address. In Chicana epistemology, Chicanas participate in intellectual discussions that connect experiences, research, community, and social change (Delgado Bernal & Elenes, 2021). As agents of knowledge, Chicana feminist epistemology grants Latina scholars the autonomy to interpret their research and advocate for new policies and practices that more effectively address the needs of Chicanas (Delgado Bernal & Elenes, 2021).

Anzaldúa (2004) offered theoretical concepts such as *mestiza consciousness* and *conocimiento* when understanding ways of experiencing the world. *Mestiza consciousness* involves recognizing the struggle and the need to dismantle dualisms, embracing ambiguity, and relying on “new symbols” and “new myths” (Delgado Bernal & Elenes, 2021, p. 102; Anzaldúa,

2004). The concept of Mestiza is important in Chicana feminist theory due to the idea of breaking down dualisms and old myths that negatively portray or neglect parts of a Latina (Anzaldúa, 2004). It gives Chicanas the ability to analyze structural inequalities in their everyday experiences (Delgado Bernal & Elenes, 2021). In Chicana feminist research, it is important to locate ourselves within our questions, frame questions in ways that give voices to women, and understand the purpose of our work (Delgado Bernal, 1998). In this way, Chicana scholars can tackle the limitations of conventional patriarchal and liberal feminist scholarship (Delgado Bernal, 1998).

Using the concept of Mestiza, Chicana feminist theory adopts hybrid approaches and draws upon decolonizing practices and strategies, such as testimonios and pláticas, Chicana Sacred Space, cultural intuition, spiritual activism, and the inclusion of the body in their methodology (Delgado Bernal & Elenes, 2021). In the current research, I used the narrative form of pláticas to highlight the experiences of Chicanas and/or Latinas to gain informative research data. Using a Chicana feminist approach and a pláticas form of methodology allowed the cultural intuition of the researcher to inform the research process. It also allowed participants to engage in the data analysis process so that they become co-constructors of knowledge (Delgado Bernal & Elenes, 2021). The idea of cultural intuition gives “legitimacy to the experiential knowledge of the researcher . . . when existing paradigms do not capture the nuances of Latinos’ educational experiences” (Delgado Bernal & Elenes, 2021, p. 114).

Mujerista Theology

Mujerista theology branches from Chicana feminist epistemology. Mujerista theology was introduced by two grassroots Latinas Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, a nun and missionary from

Lima, Peru, and Yolanda Tarango, a Chicana nun from El Paso, Texas (Hernandez-Diaz, 2011). Mujerista theology amplifies the voices of grassroots Latinas (marginalized, underserved) and challenges church teachings and religious practices that oppress Latinas/Hispanas (Isasi-Diaz, 1996). The goal of Mujerista theology is to bring about radical change that values Latinas both in society and religious communities.

Mujeristas believe that Euro-American feminists need to understand the oppression of racial and ethnic minorities; they need to share the power by creating space and commit to liberation by coming together (Isasi-Diaz, 1996). Latinas' oppression is deeply rooted in the patriarchy and racial/ethnic subjugation in the United States. To fight this oppression and restore their energy, many Latinas practice spiritually or worship higher powers in their healing process. However, Latinas are not allowed full participation in the leadership of the Catholic Church, for example, not allowing women to become priests simply because of their gender. The church has always looked at women as "others" or beneath men which many believe contradicts the way in which God views women. From the perspective of Ada Maria Isasi Diaz (1996) explains that God views women as divine individuals, which are individuals who are capable of birthing children, individuals who bring the hope of justice and peace, and individuals who are willing to work for the common good (Isasi-Diaz, 1996). Although as a Mujerista, Ada Maria argues that if women are so divine, as God portrays, why does the church continue to sustain sexist and patriarchal views? Catholic women may also question their divine nature due to infertility issues, remaining celibate, identifying as gay or transgender, and elective childlessness (Padilla, 2000). Due to these concerns, the development of the word *conscientization* takes place, *conscientization* is the multilayered oppression sustained in life by sexism, racism, ethnic prejudice, and classism (Isasi-Diaz, 1996). Mujerista theology helps Latinas continue to find and

uphold the presence of God in the midst of their community's prejudice and rejection (Isasi-Diaz, 1996). Mujerista theology helps create a voice for women struggling for liberation in the church, in faith, and in the Latinx community.

Using both Chicana feminist epistemology and Mujerista theology helped give a voice to the lived experiences of Latina participants while also understanding the importance of spiritual and religious practices within Latina culture in the midst of oppressive traditions.

Data Collection

Platica Methodology

The study utilized a *platica* qualitative design which addressed Latinx cultural factors in the interview process (Dolores Bernal & Fierros, 2016). *Platica* is grounded in decolonial Chicana/Latina feminist theories, which help understand the position of Latinas in a patriarchal society. The *platica* process possessed three phases that included *la entrada*, *la amistad* interview, and *la despedida* (Valle & Mendoza, 1978). *La entrada* phase included discussions of contact between the interviewer and the interviewee. It was a phase where the interviewer helped the interviewee understand what was being researched and if they were a good fit. It is also a space for the interviewee to get to know the interviewer and allow for mutual understanding and communication. *La amistad* interview phase comprises an informal conversation that takes place before the semi-structured interview. It is a space for the interviewee to become comfortable and familiar with the interviewer and to enhance the ongoing conversations. Lastly, *la despedida* involved saying goodbye and displaying appreciation from both parties. This involved gift giving, for example, foods and relics, sharing last-minute thoughts about their experience within the *pláticas*, or sharing final thoughts on cultural practices that are relevant to their identity and

narrative (Valle & Mendoza, 1978). Using a *platica* qualitative design highlighted the importance of relationships and reciprocity, which are important in the Latinx community but more specifically in working with Latina individuals (Dolores Bernal & Fierros, 2016).

When conducting *pláticas*, focus groups are used as a form of collective testimony (Madriz, 1998). A focus group is a type of meeting that interviews multiple people simultaneously using a flexible discussion format between participants, while the interviewer serves as the moderator (Qu & Dumay, 2011). When conducting *pláticas* in a focus group setting, the facilitator will have an active yet non-directive role that will foster and encourage the focus group to interact and stay on topic (Dolores Bernal & Fierros, 2016).

Focus Groups

A culturally responsive focus group is a way to collect data from a perspective that acknowledges many ways of knowing and making meaning. It is based on culture, history, ethnicity, and context (Rodriguez et al., 2011). Villegas and Lucas (2002), describe six aspects of a culturally responsive researcher. These aspects consist of being socially conscious, operating from an asset-based model, seeing oneself as a change agent, being aware of participants and their identities, being reflective and sharing one's own story, and utilizing participants' stories to expand participants' ability to co-construct knowledge. Focus groups that are culturally responsive and put gender and cultural identity at the center of research create data with greater value (Madriz, 1998).

Focus groups allow women to exchange their experiences with women of similar backgrounds and ethnicities (Madriz, 1998). Communication among women can be an awakening experience when expressing ideas and emotions that they have mutually suppressed

creating understanding and empathy. This awakening experience can validate their experiences and implement social change within the group and in their daily lives (Madriz, 1998). In Latinx culture, familism plays a big role, and communication and group sharing are the norm.

Therefore, sharing with other women can be a familiar experience and not seen as an uncomfortable space (Madriz, 1998). Although, as familism can be both a protective and risk factor there is a possibility of focus groups reinforcing stereotypes if not conducted well. As a facilitator of a culturally responsive focus group, I hoped not to perpetuate risk but to allow various voices of Latinas to be heard and document their struggles and strategies of resistance and change with empathy and vulnerability (West, 1988; Madriz, 1998).

In the conduction of focus groups, semi-structured interviews were set in place to better facilitate discussions. Semi-structured interviews involved preparing questions guided by identified themes and inserting probes to elicit more in-depth responses (Qu & Dumay, 2011). These questions, directed by identified themes, helped facilitate the conversation toward the topics and issues that the researcher wanted to investigate and learn about. Probing helps the interviewer follow up on an answer that the interviewee gave, which can look like “Please tell me more about that [...]” (Qu & Dumay, 2011, p. 247). Semi-structured interviews are based on conversation and allow the interviewer to modify the style, pace, and ordering of questions (Qu & Dumay, 2011). Most importantly, it permits interviewees to provide responses in their own words and in a way that is authentic to them. Semi-structured interviews are known to be one of the most effective and convenient means of gathering information (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Sample and Recruitment

The sample of participants was recruited through purposeful sampling. Patton (2004) stated that purposeful sampling focuses on selecting information-rich cases that require the researcher to develop specific criteria for those interested in participating in the study. Once purposeful sampling had occurred, the researcher used snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is a random sample of individuals drawn from a given finite population (Goodman, 1961). Snowball sampling was used to ask participants to identify others who might meet the criteria and be interested in participating in the study (Goodman, 1961). The research by Goodman (1961) indicated that two to three focus groups could capture 80% of the themes on a topic. Therefore, this study had two focus groups with 6 to 10 participants to better capture rich in-depth data and meet saturation (Guest et al., 2017). Saturation is the primary method for determining nonprobability sample sizes in qualitative research (Guest et al., 2017). Data saturation is "the point in data collection and analysis when new information produces little or no change to the codebook" (Guest et al., 2017, p.5). Recruitment strategies included flyers posted through social media networks such as Instagram, Facebook, and Snapchat, and word of mouth through colleagues, friends, and families. Flyers were only made in English due to the nature of the focus groups being conducted in the English language. Conducting the study in English gave Latinas who do not speak Spanish an opportunity to participate in the study.

The purpose of this study was to explore Latina's past conversations around sex education throughout their adolescence and emerging adulthood. To participate in the study, the participant needed to meet the following criteria:

1. The participants must be female at birth and currently self-identify as female.

2. The participant must identify as Latina.
3. The participant must have been raised in a Christian household but does not need to currently self-identify as Christian.
4. The participants must be between the ages of 21 to 40 years old.
5. The participants must be willing to discuss personal information on sex, sexuality, and bodies.
6. The Participants must feel comfortable participating in the focus group in English.

Measures

The measures that were given to participants included (a) a screener questionnaire (Appendix B), and (b) a demographic data sheet (Appendix B). I used the (c) plática guide (Appendix C), which guided the focus group discussion. This was not given to the participants but was used by the facilitator to guide and promote conversation.

The demographic questionnaire was administered to the participants after the informed consent. The questionnaire ensured that participants met the inclusion criteria. It further explored their level of Spanish fluency in case the focus group adhered to bilingual conversations. To further explore their comfortability with sex, it asked them questions regarding how comfortable they felt with disclosure and what may have been off-limits for them when discussing sex. Participants were also asked about their past religious experiences and their closeness to Christianity. They were asked to identify their past Christian denomination and if they still adhered to the same practices to better understand their worldview and perspective. They were asked to identify their ethnicity and their parent's country of origin. Lastly, they were asked

about their age and the generation they identified with (first, second, third, etc.) to better capture and understand their experience.

Procedures

Once participants contacted the researcher through email to show interest in the study, the researcher contacted them via phone to screen them and ensure they met the study's criteria.

Once all participants were contacted, a date and time were established for the plática. The pláticas were conducted for 60 to 90 minutes to obtain rich, in-depth data. Due to the intimate nature of the pláticas, the researcher attempted to conduct the focus groups in person in a comfortable space. These spaces include the researcher's home or a private counseling space where therapy groups are performed. To show appreciation, the researcher provided food, beverages, and snacks to the participants to make them feel comfortable and at home. The pláticas began with the participants reviewing and signing the informed consent and completing the demographic questionnaire. Once participants finished both items, the researcher reviewed all forms before beginning the plática. If there were questions or concerns, the researcher addressed these privately. As a group, we came up with a safe word in case something was off-limits for a participant, or a participant felt uncomfortable. We also came up with group rules to ensure empathy and nonjudgment. The researcher reminded participants that they were welcome to step out at any time. The researcher then informed participants that the recording would begin, and the researcher started with questions. Pláticas concluded by thanking co-collaborators and demonstrating a warm appreciation for their time.

Recordings were transcribed and reviewed by the Poderosa Psychology Research (PPR) team. The team consisted of a group of women from different nationalities, which was important

to consider when coding and theming due to the multiple viewpoints and worldviews of each researcher. If a difference of opinion arose, debriefing sessions were implemented to come to a conclusion that best represented the participants' voices. If a difference of opinion was not resolved, the primary researcher took both opinions into consideration and determined the best fit for the research. When transcribing each focus group, researchers developed pseudonyms for each participant to protect their identities. Audio recordings were deleted after transcription. The participants' identifying information and de-identified transcripts required two-step password protection and were stored on the researcher's laptop.

Data Analysis

In this study, a thematic analysis was utilized to examine the pláticas held within the two focus groups. Thematic analysis, a foundational method of qualitative analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), was used to identify, analyze, and report patterns within the data. Thematic analysis is flexible and easy to use when organizing and describing a data set. It allows for determining themes from an inductive approach, which indicates a strong connection to the data and is essentially data-driven (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This process involves coding data without trying to fit it into pre-set codes. This form of analysis is also compatible with constructivist approaches, which state that learners are not passive recipients of knowledge but are more active in the process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Using thematic analysis took individuals' lives, events, and experiences into account when analyzing and reporting data. It acknowledged the ways participants made meaning of discussions and questions within their social context and realities (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Using the Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic analysis six-phase approach, we began by familiarizing ourselves with the data, which involved transcribing data and noting down crucial ideas. The next step was generating codes, which meant coding interesting elements of the data. The third step involved searching for potential themes, creating sub-themes, and identifying possible miscellaneous codes that did not currently fit into a theme. The fourth step was reviewing and refining themes in a way that captured and told a story about the rich data that had been collected. The fifth step was defining and naming themes, ensuring clarity on what the themes were and how they would be reported. The final step consisted of producing the report in a way that “told the complicated story of the data in a way that convinced the reader of the merit and validity of the analysis” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 93).

As mentioned above, the Poderosa Psychology Research Team (PPR) helped transcribe, code, and theme both transcriptions. The PPR Team was made up of Mexican, Chinese, and Puerto Rican women who brought in different points of view to better capture the data and increase credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These women collaborated in Latinx trauma, Latina Trauma, and therapeutic research. Some of their work included presentations and posters such as: *Buscando El Camino: Systematic Review of Trauma Experienced By Latinas* (Sanchez et al., 2023), *Crucé la Frontera a Costa de Esto: A Thematic Analysis of 2015 to 2020 of Adults Latinx Traumatic Experiences* (Muro-Rodriguez, 2022), *Religion and Culture Influencing Latinas Sexual Decisions* (Espinoza-Moreno and Celaret, 2023), and *A Critical Analysis of Neoliberalism, Psychotherapy, and Counseling within Latinx Immigrant Communities in the United States* (Lopez, 2023). PPR was a peer-led women’s group where all members had similar journeys of being first-generation college students. A majority of the team came from marginalized communities who often faced more barriers in post-

educational settings. Our values comprised supporting each other through our educational journey, as many of us were pursuing doctoral degrees, by meeting weekly to support our academic and research endeavors. We had a positive, supportive, and open environment that promoted learning and mentoring opportunities. Most of the PPR team worked within a feminist or Chicana lens, which created a better understanding of women's experiences and put women's voices at the forefront of research.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was an important concept to engage in when working with Latinas and using Plática methodology (Fierros & Delgado-Bernal, 2016). In using Plática methodology, the focus group took place with a facilitator who could be trusted by the participants. Plática methodology was used for having in-depth, rich discussions with marginalized communities; therefore, trust and warmth needed to be developed to establish an interviewee and interviewer relationship (Fierros & Delgado-Bernal, 2016). Lastly, Plática relied on reciprocity, vulnerability, and research reflexivity. This form of methodology existed only if the process was reciprocated; facilitators had to be willing to contribute to the focus group by answering questions and sharing similar experiences to promote trustworthiness (Fierros & Delgado-Bernal, 2016).

Trustworthiness refers to the degree to which a qualitative study genuinely reflects participant perspectives, which is examined through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Morrow, 2005; Stahl & King, 2020). Credibility was a process of triangulation, which meant using several sources of information to establish identifiable patterns (Stahl & King, 2020). Transferability is the ability to expand understanding by transferring

findings from one context to another while acknowledging that qualitative studies are not generalizable (Stahl & King, 2020). Dependability, also known as trust in trustworthiness, is when researchers, both producers and consumers, actively build their trust in the events as they unfold (Stahl & King, 2020). Lastly, confirmability meant “getting as close to objective reality as qualitative research can get” (Stahl & King, 2020, p.27).

To deal with biases and assumptions arising from the researcher’s life experiences, the researcher engaged in reflexivity. To implement reflexivity, the researcher kept a self-reflective journal to maintain an ongoing record of their experiences and reactions. In implementing trustworthiness within this study, the researcher collaborated with multiple researchers in analyzing and comparing data. The researcher implemented peer debriefing sessions when differences arose, specifically during data analysis. The debriefing sessions helped the researcher reach conclusions that best represented the participants' voices (Stahl & King, 2020). The primary facilitator also had a research team member take notes during the focus group sessions as another way of collecting in-depth data by focusing on the present time and place. A competent researcher was selected as an auditor to ensure the study’s confirmability. An audit was important to ensure that the study was conducted correctly, and the findings were accurate (Stahl & King, 2020).

To further increase the trustworthiness of this study, an external auditor will be used as a sounding board by bringing in their wisdom and expertise. The external auditor is a Black Woman who is recognized as a counselor, teacher, and researcher. She specializes in religion and spirituality and works through an Endarkened Feminist Epistemological lens. As a therapist, she works with clients in exploring spirituality, sex, and sexuality. Her perspective of being a

feminist, identifying as a woman, and her knowledge of sexuality and spirituality will help the researcher with guidance, critical thinking, and decision-making.

Subjectivity Statement

To understand my perspective and worldview in relation to this research study, I speak on my identity and experiences. I am a first-generation Mexican American woman born in Riverside, California. I am the youngest of four children and the daughter of two Mexican-born parents. I moved to the state of Georgia when I was six years old and lived most of my life in the South. As a Latina and person of color, living in the South came with its challenges. From a young age, I encountered racism, stereotypes, and judgment from individuals who looked at me differently and had preconceived notions of who I was. With the support of my family, I overcame many obstacles and joined spaces that made me feel comfortable and helped me shine as an individual. Due to my mother and father, I was able to have a space dedicated to studying to receive the best education and good grades. Because of my hard-working parents I was able to join dance teams, soccer teams, and school clubs. My parents had no idea how to best support me as a child and teen, but little did they know everything they did was all I needed to feel loved.

As much love as my parents gave me, it was always hard for them to have difficult conversations with myself and my siblings. My parents never spoke with us about sexual relationships, healthy relationships, sexually transmitted diseases, or contraception. Not only were these topics not spoken of in our household, but they were explicitly not something good Catholics spoke about. As a Catholic, I was raised to go to church every Sunday, I was taught to pray before bed, I was taught to respect the bible's messages, and to abide by the church's expectations. Outside of religion, my parents also raised me to abide by the rules, not ask too

many questions, focus on school, and receive good grades. Any time I spoke to my mom about boys or crushes she would say “don’t worry about that, just focus on your schoolwork”.

My first secret boyfriend was in high school, I was a 15-year-old freshman dating behind my parents’ back. This was really scary because hiding something from my parents was hard, but I wanted to experience having a relationship because that seemed like a normal teenage experience. Having a boyfriend for me was odd because I didn’t want to kiss, hug, or hold hands due to how scared I was of showing affection and also the possibility of getting caught. As I got older (17-18) most of my friends were sexually active and I would often get made fun of because all I had done was kiss a boy. I told many of my friends that I was waiting until marriage because I didn’t want to give my body to someone that was not going to be with me for the long run. Of course, that caused another laugh from my friends.

I spoke to close friends and my sister about sex, sexuality, and one’s bodies. My sister is 10 years older than me and was a great source of information. My sister would buy me books on sexual health and bodies but also explained to me the normalcy of dating and sex. She always told me, “I would rather you wait to have sex until you are ready and until you meet someone who will truly respect who you are, but also don’t be stupid; please use protection”. My friends would always talk about their sex life and say, “Having sex is important in a relationship. It is not only for them but pleasurable for you... I have sex because I want to, but that doesn’t mean they are taking anything away from me”. These multiple conversations changed my perspective of sex before marriage. My new perspective was, if I have sex use protection and if I have sex, I’ll do it with someone I trust and love. Many of these conversations and thoughts were hidden from my parents, especially my dad. I never spoke to him about my boyfriends, my sex life, my crushes, or anything that had to do with my sexuality. My mom became a bit more open to the

idea of having boyfriends, but we never spoke about sex or sexuality. I was ok with this because I always had my older sister to talk to and she would always give me great advice. She was always there when I needed to talk about my relationships, my breakups, and my sex life.

When my husband proposed to me, I was 24 years old, I was so happy yet so scared to tell my family because I was barely allowed to have a boyfriend, even at that age. Telling my dad that I was engaged was the scariest feeling, I made myself cry so that he could feel bad and not have a negative reaction. Fortunately, he was just stunned but not angry or upset. He knew that I was happy, and my partner made me happy, but he was just a bit sad because I'm the youngest daughter and the last one to leave his house. Although, my fear and my thoughts were valid, because I was always told I could never have a boyfriend. As a woman in the family my parents were stricter on me. They never let me go on dates, I had earlier curfews than my brothers, I was only allowed to go out with my friends once a week, and never allowed to spend time with a friend that was a boy, alone. My experiences are consistent and similar to the experiences of Latinas in Figueroa-Cosme and Colleagues, (2018) research. Parents, specifically fathers, can instill fear in their children that continues to appear during adulthood.

When I was engaged COVID-19 happened and I was getting my PhD in Athens, Ga. It made sense for my partner and I, to get a house because houses went on sale during Covid-19 and I had to live in Georgia for at least 5 years due to my PhD program. Unfortunately, my parents were against us moving in together and getting a house because we were not married yet. Once again, my religion and culture affected my life. My mom said to me you need to be married before you move in together. I argued with her about the *machista* and old school cultural and religious ideology that she was fighting for but as a daughter I quickly lost the argument because she is my mom. As I clenched my fist and bit my tongue I walked away because in my culture I

should always obey my mom and never argue with her even if I believe she is in the wrong. Although my mom was telling me to get married before moving in, my mom did not expect me to get married anytime soon. She expected me to follow her rules by living in my own apartment until a beautiful planned out catholic wedding happened. But I was angry and upset, so I said to myself “ok, my mom wants me to get married? I will do just that, I’m going to get married as soon as possible” and 3 months later I had a courthouse wedding just so my partner and I can invest in our future, save money, and buy a house. This is not something I wanted to do but I felt like I had to abide by the rules but I also felt like I was rebelling in some way to get what I wanted. My mom did not like the idea of me getting married so soon but it was kind of a compromise. Another obstacle arose within my family.... I was still not married under God or through the Catholic church, in which my mother often voiced and reminded me. The following year we got married again through the church to officially be married under God and the Virgin Mary. This problem was not an issue for me because I’ve always wanted to get married through the catholic church, but it was really hard to get ahold of a church that wanted to marry us. I don’t often go to church so many catholic churches were questioning if I was a member. Thankfully I found a church that was a good match for my husband and me. Once I was married my partner’s family always asked when the baby was coming (as a joke) but I knew that’s something they really wanted or thought about because in our culture the next step is to procreate. Although, I know that I do not want children right now and I won’t do it or continue to do things to please others. As a Chicana and Mujerista, I struggle but continue to fight for what I want in my own way and at my own pace. I am a Chicana because I am learning to take my power back and speak up when battling Mexican American cultural clashes. I call myself Mujerista because I am a proud Catholic who finds peace through praying to God and la *Virgen*

de Guadalupe while also understanding and fighting against the patriarchy and certain views that I do not agree with.

I am currently a doctoral candidate in the counseling psychology program at the University of Georgia. In this program I have the privilege of working in different sites that cater to the Latinx community. As a bilingual therapist working with the Latinx community, I have come across conversations with Latina clients regarding sex education or the lack thereof. Many of these women disclose their experience of not having “the talk” or having a talk that was never useful or educative. In my personal experience as a heterosexual cisgender Latina, I had come to terms with the fact that I had never had “the talk” with my parents when I was a teenager, nor did they ever speak about sex in our household. I learned about sex education through my older sister, friends, and courses in middle school and high school. I learned that my Mexican parents were too embarrassed to have “the talk” or thought it inappropriate to speak of, especially with a young girl. As I spoke with my sister and friends who are also of Latinx origin, they too shared that having conversations around sex with their parents was completely taboo in which they had to find out information through the internet or personal experiences. My clients also disclosed religious and cultural attitudes that prevented them from doing things they wanted while also worshipping these values that have been carried throughout generations. To me, Religion and culture are both protective and risk factors that many Latinas must battle with, like a toxic love-hate relationship.

In my experiences of sex education throughout my middle school and high school years, sex education was not the best-taught subject. Much of the “sex conversations” were surrounding abstinence and sex prevention. While these are important topics of discussion, many teenagers were already having sex or were about to engage in sexual relationships. While the topic of

abstinence would have helped some students who were not engaging in sexual activity, other topics would have been useful for those engaging in sexual activity, for example: male and female anatomy, sexuality, sexual preferences, forms of contraception, and healthy sexual relationships.

As I am now an adult who provides therapy to the Latinx community, it is very worrying to see and hear that discussions have not changed much surrounding religion, culture, and sex. We are still battling these intersections and trying to navigate how to best resolve differences of view. As a Latina, I am worried that we are failing women of color in understanding healthy sexual education. I hope that my research will facilitate a rich conversation that discusses sex, religion, culture, and politics to better understand the needs of Latinas.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to use *platica* methodology to explore Latina's sex education experiences through school education, socialization, and parental conversations. Researchers also explore the impact culture and religion hold on topics of sex and sexuality. The researcher used *Chicana* Feminist Theory (CFT) and *Mujerista* Theology (MT) frameworks to help highlight a culturally informed feminist understanding of Latinx Women's experiences that drew upon decolonizing practices and strategies such as *testimonios* and *pláticas*.

Participant Characteristics

Table 1 is a demographic profile of participants in one of two focus groups. Selected demographic characteristics are highlighted that may be relevant to the purpose of the study (e.g., age, ethnicity, past and current religion, and birthplace). All eleven participants in this study are referred to by pseudonyms that they chose. One of the eleven participants chose to use their own name.

Table 1
Participant Demographic Profile (n=11)

Pseudonym	Age	Race/Ethnicity	Birthplace	Schooling	Heritage Religion	Current Religion
Sidra	28	Black/ Ecuadorian	Alaska	Georgia	Christian	Christian non-denomination
Seleste	27	Mexican	Georgia	Georgia	Catholic	Catholic

Eva	28	Mexican	Georgia	Georgia	Catholic	Baptist
Vanessa	32	Honduran	California	California	Catholic	Catholic
Paloma	25	Guatemalan	California	California/ Georgia	Catholic	Chrisitan
Jo	38	Mexican	California	California	Catholic	Catholic
Roberta	30	Ecuadorian	Ecuador	Ecuador	Catholic	Spiritual
Emilia	21	Mexican	Minnesota	Georgia	Catholic	Catholic
Maria	24	Mexican	Georgia	Georgia	Catholic	Christian non- denomination
Sophie	23	Mexican	Georgia	Georgia	Catholic	Exploring
Sandra	25	Venezuelan	Texas	Texas	Catholic	Christian non- denomination

Note: Schooling refers to the state where participants received sex education.

Heritage Religion refers to past family religious affiliation.

Current Religion refers to participants' present religious affiliation.

Analysis

The findings of this study are presented in four main sections, as they are separated by each research question. The thematic analysis method was used to identify, analyze, and report patterns within data. The thematic analysis method allowed the researchers to determine themes from an inductive approach, which indicates that it strongly connects to the data and is essentially data-driven (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is a process of coding data without trying to fit it into a code that has been set beforehand. Refer to Table 2 for research questions and themes. Quotes of participants who spoke *Spanglish* (English and Spanish combined) were translated

from Spanish to English by bilingual researchers who fluently speak both languages and will be highlighted in italics throughout this text.

Table 2

Themes sorted by Research Questions

Research Question	Themes	Subthemes
RQ1: How did traditional Latinx cultural factors influence conversations around sex?	● 1. Enculturation and Acculturation	● A. Parental Involvement ● <i>B. Dichos/</i> External Messaging ● C. Cultural Socialization ● D. Contextual differences
RQ2: How did Latina participants learn about sex?	● 2. Learning and Exposures	● A. Initial Exposure ● B. Participant Past Reactions ● C. Presence or Absence of Sex Topics
RQ3: What kind of sex education did Latina participants receive and what kind of sex education would they have liked?	● 3. Sex Education Outcomes	● A. Receiving School-Based Sex Education ● B. Outcomes and impacts of sex education ● C. Resilience ● D. Process Reaction Observations
RQ4: What can be done to improve sex education for the next generation of Latinas?	● 4. Sex Education Improvement	● A. Feminist Developmental Perspectives ● B. Technology and Access ● C. Importance of Family Conversations and Relationships ● D. Improving School systems

RQ1: Influence of Traditional Latinx Cultural Factors

The first question addressed the level of cultural factors influencing conversations around sex within Latina participants' experiences. This first theme was labeled Enculturation and Acculturation and was refined into four subthemes: (a) parental involvement, (b) *dichos*/external messaging, (c) cultural socialization, and (d) contextual differences.

The theme of Enculturation and Acculturation refers to the impact of various cultural factors on individual behaviors, beliefs, norms, and family structures. It encompasses how ideas, traditions, values, and customs shape the way Latinas think and act within a society or family structure.

Theme 1a: Parental Involvement

The Latina participants in the focus group often raised the subtheme of parental involvement. Some participants spoke about parents welcoming sex conversations, parents supporting their use of contraception, and parents being an active role in their educational sexual development. Conversely, many spoke about parents not wanting to hold conversations about sex, having a lack of sexual knowledge themselves, and parents not being helpful about reproductive health.

Roberta shared that in her household, her father was more willing to discuss sex, while her mother avoided the topic. She admitted feeling uncomfortable discussing sex with her mother but found her father approachable. Roberta explains that her parents view sex as synonymous with love.

I know in my house; my dad was the one who was more open to talking about sex. My mom would never bring it up. And even I would feel weird like, umm, I don't want my mom to know, haha, but my dad, he's always been much more open. But I think the view that they've had about sex is sex equals love. So, if you have sex with someone, it is because you love them.

Sophie shared a similar experience, she reflected that in her family, sex was considered a normal part of life and not a source of shame. While she doesn't recall specific conversations, she notes that her father was open and understanding about the topic. She attributes this openness to her parents being young when they had her, which made them empathetic and accepting of the idea that wanting to have sex at a young age was normal, as it was for them.

I guess for them, sex is a normal part of life. Like growing up. I don't know how, how we talked about it, but it wasn't like a shameful thing, either. I think that's why my dad did have a conversation with me. I've thought about this like why he was so open about this. And umm, really understanding. And, I think, because they were also young parents, and so, they understand if I did want to do it, it'd be a normal thing. Just how they did it at a young age. So, there wasn't like any shame.

Emilia conveyed that her mother has fostered an open and communicative family environment. Her mother has always encouraged her children to approach her with any concerns or questions, including sensitive topics like sex. This approach has made discussions about sex a normal and accepted part of their household conversations.

So, my mom has always been really, really open about us coming to her for anything. So, like talking about sex is pretty normal in my house. Like, my mom was always like, you guys can come for me... can come to me for anything. Like it doesn't matter what it is like, it doesn't matter. Like just come to me.

Many participants shared that as they grow older or go through pregnancy, parents become more open to discussing sex. Paloma shared a complex and somewhat contradictory relationship between herself and their mother. On one hand, the mother is open to having important and sensitive conversations, such as discussing the speaker taking a pregnancy test. However, despite this openness, the speaker felt that their mother also had a protective side.

Like it's very rare, but I'll be like, the other day. I was like, I had to take a pregnancy test. She was like Why and I said because I thought I was pregnant. And so, we were able to have those conversations, but to her, it is like she just wants to put me away and keep me locked up and all that, so it's funny that you said that because it literally is like that.

When asked about when she finally felt comfortable speaking about sex with her mother, Jo reported a similar experience. She felt as if the birth of her baby was so transformative and revealing that she no longer felt any shame.

When I had the baby, they saw my vagina ... I was like, don't look! And then everyone turned around (hahaha). They were like I see the head! And then it was over. And I was like, I don't care. Everyone saw my vagina.

There also were many instances when parents were uncooperative in discussing sex. Participants engaged in a back-and-forth discussion about the lack of parental involvement when asked at what point they felt comfortable speaking to their parents about sex. Seleste expressed:

I couldn't say anything to my mom, so I never talked to her about sex or anything. Sidra replies I haven't even started yet. And I'm almost 29, and I don't talk to her about it. I know she won't care but now it's just weird for me.

Some of the participants explained how their parents eventually spoke to them, but it was unfortunately too late for the conversations around sex and relationships. Maria disclosed:

So, I actually ended up dating a long-term partner after that. And he was the one that I lost, like, my virginity to and I just remember, like, we were like, two or three years in, and I'd like lost my virginity, like our first year dating, and my dad, like, two, three years in, he didn't like this guy, but he told me he's like, you know if you're going to have sex, I want you to have sex with someone you love and someone, who like deserves that. And I was like, well that's a little late... But I wish I would have had that earlier on. Like, I wish that like, we would have had that conversation. Like in freshman year of high school or something. But even like, to this day, like, it's not something we've discussed. I haven't even talked to my mom AT ALL about sexual relationships.

Sophie agreed with Maria by expressing gratitude for the openness her parents showed in discussing sex with her. As she entered relationships, she continued to appreciate the open discussions, recognizing sex as a natural part of life. However, she also conveyed a sense of wishing for more in-depth conversations on the topic. She felt that having more comprehensive discussions about sex before she started experiencing it herself would have provided better understanding and preparation.

I really appreciate my parents talking to me about sex. I guess with that little book started off. But then once I got into a relationship with being open about it and understanding that it's a natural part of life. I guess I wish we had more discussions about it. Even if it was awkward, I think it would have been a good conversation to have and understand it more before actually. Starting to do it myself.

Theme 1b: *Dichos*/ External Messages

Participants disclosed many *dichos*, which are folk sayings that are often handed down from generation to generation, intended to give insight, reinforce cultural norms, or teach cultural life lessons (Arredondo et al., 2014). Participants also reported other forms of external messages received from family and friends that often influenced their assumptions about sex, bodies, and sexuality.

The majority of the *dichos* and external messages reported by participants were negative. Jo recounted a conversation they overheard from their grandmother, who was speaking about another cousin. The grandmother made a critical comment about the cousin moving out of the family home after getting her first job and getting her own apartment in her twenties. The grandmother implied that by moving out, the cousin was acting irresponsibly or promiscuously, using the *dicho* "*ya se fue de la casa para andar de loca*," which translates to "she left home to act crazy."

I heard my grandma, I remember her talking about another one of my cousins. She's already like in her 20s. And she got her first job. And so, she got her own apartment. She was like, "*Ya se fue de la casa para andar de loca*" (*she left home to act crazy*). She said back in my days, ladies didn't move out until they were married....so "*ya se salió de la casa para andar de loca*." So she could, you know, Hoe around.

Jo then expressed that sex was a topic that was largely avoided in their home. It was never openly discussed, and if the subject did arise, it was typically ignored or dismissed, almost as if it didn't exist. Jo received this external message

The topic of sex was never really brought up in the home. And if it would come up, it was just kind of pretend you're not here.

Seleste shared a restrictive and stigmatizing message she received from her mother about sex. The mother's warning implies that having sex would diminish Seleste's value or desirability to others. This statement reflects a judgmental attitude towards sexual activity, suggesting that it would negatively impact Seleste's worth.

my mom used to tell me if I had sex, nobody would want me after that.

Vanessa shared her experience of getting pregnant and revealed her parents' reaction. She shared how her parents were not supportive of her and were disappointed to the point they punished her very harshly by calling her a hoe. A hoe or ho is also known as whore which is a woman who is known to have multiple sexual partners.

I mean, my parents, when I found out I was pregnant with Sophie, they just called me a hoe and stuck me in a room it's not a *dicho*, but that's what happened, haha.

Maria expressed that her parents have never explicitly talked to her about sex. Instead of having direct conversations, they have used euphemisms or indirect language. Maria gives an example of her mother using the phrase "*no me vayas a salir con el domingo 7*," a colloquial expression in Spanish which roughly means "don't come to me with a Sunday 7," referring to an unexpected pregnancy or surprise. The *dicho* is an expression related to the fear or mistrust that children will announce an unplanned pregnancy at a stage considered premature, that is, too young. The use of the *dicho* indicated that her parents preferred to address the topic in a roundabout way, avoiding direct discussion about sex itself.

Because my parents have really never like been specific about, like sex. They've never really talked to me about it. They've always used like, other words, like my mom's like, oh no *me vayas a salir con el domingo 7* or whatever.

Roberta reflected on a common *dicho* in her family, "*tu cuerpo es un templo*," which means "your body is a temple." The family's message was that she should not allow anyone to disrespect her body by engaging in sexual activities lightly. Roberta interpreted this to mean that if someone engages in sexual activity, it might be seen as not honoring the sacredness of their body. However, it should be noted that Latinx men are often not given this message; that is, this message concerns the sanctity of the woman and the need to preserve her virginity.

I always remember family saying *tu cuerpo es un templo*. So yeah, you cannot let anyone go beyond that. So, it's too sacred for you to just do it. So, I guess, umm, seeing that you're maybe not respecting your body in that way?

Sandra communicated that in her experience, sex was treated as a shameful topic that should be ignored and not discussed. This attitude led her to feel that there was something inherently scary or wrong about sex. The implicit message she received was that sex was taboo and not to be openly acknowledged or integrated into her life in a healthy way.

I just felt like it was just shameful. And you just you just don't talk about it. Just ignore it. pretend it's not there. So, the less it was discussed, the more I was like, there's something to be scared of here. Like, it's just not something that should be a part of my life that I should embrace. It's not a part of my life. So yeah.

Sandra shared a personal experience where her family's attitudes towards her relationship and living arrangements caused drama during winter break. Her decision to stay with her boyfriend over winter break sparked conflict with her family. Sandra recounted that when she informed her mother about her plans to stay with her boyfriend, her mother responded by texting her "*Tienes que definir tu situacion*," which translates to "You need to define your situation." Parents may use this saying to encourage their children to make a decisive commitment when engaging in "marriage practices" like living together. The *dicho* suggests that if a couple is

already living together, they should either formalize their relationship through marriage, maintain a committed relationship but live separately, or reconsider their current living arrangement and possibly end the relationship altogether. The situation highlights potential generational or cultural differences in perspectives on cohabitation, temporary cohabitation, and relationships, leading to tension and misunderstanding within the family.

that thing that you mentioned is just so funny because I recently went through like a whole drama with my family this winter break because, like I said, I've been with my boyfriend for three years. And it's getting around the time ...like, it's going to happen. Haha. And he got an apartment in Houston, where I used to live before I moved here. And I just had decided I was going to stay with him a little bit over winter break before going to see my family, which hadn't really been a problem before, but I guess because I had my own place. My family could pretend I was at my own place. Even if he was there with me. Like they could just pretend he wasn't sleeping over. Um, but then over winter break. Like I told my mom, like, I was going to stay with (partner), and she was like, texting me, "tienes que definir tu situacion."

Theme 1c: Cultural Socialization

Cultural socialization was a major topic that was continuously brought up in both focus groups. Many aspects of culture, such as religion, country of origin, and gender differences, placed a variety of expectations and rules on most of the women in the focus groups. These expectations often caused a lack of knowledge and feelings of shame and influenced their behavior and relationships with others and themselves.

Jo spoke of an experience from when they visited their stepdad's side of the family in Mexico. While there, Jo noticed a house with a star displayed outside, which prompted them to ask their grandmother about its significance. The grandmother explained that the star indicated that the daughter of the household was getting married and was still a virgin, the star was a public message about a traditional cultural practice where virginity before marriage for women is

highly valued and publicly acknowledged. Jo found this custom surprising and somewhat uncomfortable because it clashed with Jo's views.

So it wasn't like a huge deal, although. I did see it when I went to Mexico, to my stepdad's side of the family. Umm, we were visiting or whatever, and I remember seeing a house, and it had like a star in front of their house. And I remember I asked my grandma and I said, why do they have a star outside of her house? She said, oh, it's because their daughter is getting married. And that's like, it shows that she's getting married as a virgin... That was really weird. But you know, those little towns in Mexico are very religious. And I was just like what?

During the discussions, gender differences were brought up in ways that made women feel unequal or less than men. Maria expressed frustration and anger over the unequal treatment she experienced compared to her brother, despite being only two years apart in age. She describes how her brother was allowed significantly more freedom, such as staying at his girlfriend's house until 2 a.m. without any issue from their father. In contrast, Maria's father was very strict with her, repeatedly calling her and insisting she be home by 10 or 11 p.m. This disparity made Maria feel upset and hurt over the perceived lack of trust and the double standard in how her father managed their curfews and relationships.

I felt like my brother had a lot more freedom than I did. And I remember it pissed me off. Because we're only two years apart. Um, and I remember that we had, like, long-term partners around the same time. And he would say, so both of our partners, like, well, they were living in the same town as us. And we were both dating someone from high school. And he was able to, like, stay at his girlfriend's house until, like, two in the morning and come home at two in the morning. And I was like, Dad, you're not going to say anything he's just like, no, I trust him. But for me, if I was ever out with my boyfriend, my dad would like, call me and call me, he'd be like, you need to be like, in the house at like, 11 you need to be in the house, by like 10 And I remember just being so pissed at him. I was like, what, like, why do you trust Jose more than me? Like, what did I do?

Vanessa also highlighted a double standard in how her family treated her compared to her brother regarding teenage pregnancy. When her brother fathered a baby at 15, the family congratulated him, indicating approval or acceptance of his situation. However, when Vanessa

had a baby at 17, she was punished. Vanessa's statement reflects her frustration and the unfairness of this disparity, pointing out the inconsistency and injustice in her family's reactions based on gender.

It was different. It was different. Yeah, they congratulated my brother when he had his baby at 15, but I got locked in a room at 17. Okay..., that makes a lot of sense.

Paloma and Eva reflected on their observation of *machismo*, a cultural attitude that emphasizes traditional male dominance and strict gender roles for men and women (Arredondo et al., 2014), within her Latinx community. Paloma suggested that this might be a common experience among the Latinx culture. Eva then underscores the cultural pressure for women to be passive, while also highlighting her personal resistance to this norm.

I think I don't know if it's just us Hispanics. But I feel like, or at least the people that I've been around. We're not going to discriminate on record ok haha. But I think that people that I've had in my life are really big on Machismo, like super big on Machismo, *Machista* to the, to the roof. Eva then replied; I think that's very big in the Latino community. Women from our background are taught to like not saying, that's not my case. I don't keep my mouth shut! But yeah, that's, I mean, that's how some women are, like, you can't say anything; you have to, you know, do whatever.

Emilia spoke of religion and the influence of her family's Catholic beliefs on their attitudes toward sex and marriage. Emilia explained that her mother was raised in a very Catholic environment and has passed those values on to her children, raising them with the same strong religious principles. She mentioned that her mother, who is very Catholic, advises them to wait until marriage for sex. Despite her mother being open to discussions about sex, Emilia and her siblings find it uncomfortable to talk about it with her.

She still tells us that you guys should wait till you get married. And this and that she is really Catholic. But which is kind of like, oooyy, we don't want to talk to her about this. Even though she likes to open up that space for us, it's so weird. I don't know... We're really Catholic in my family, and my mom grew up really Catholic. So, she raised us super Catholic. But.... But I know that like, even though she tells us to wait until marriage. I mean, she doesn't tell us to wait until marriage. I feel like she expects it of us because we are catholic so yeah.

Maria mentioned that although she was baptized Catholic, her parents gradually distanced themselves from Catholicism as she grew up. Despite this distance, her mother held on to the religious value of waiting until marriage for sex and was very strict and vocal about it. Additionally, the topic of sex was generally not discussed openly in the family, contributing to a lack of clear guidance or conversation.

My parents, like I, was baptized Catholic. But as I grew up, like, I felt like my parents pulled away from Catholicism. Um, but I felt like the only religious thing they held on to was like waiting until marriage. Like my mom was very strict about that. And, like, I would always talk about that, but my dad was never, like, adamant about that. He's never like you need to get married first. But also, we just didn't talk about it.

Theme 1d: Contextual differences

Although the focus groups consisted of women of Latinx origin and a Christian background, they all brought their own individual experiences, which contributed to a broader understanding of how sex was learned, discussed, or ignored in their lives. Many of these contextual differences include their age, birth order, place of education, generational differences, family dynamics, and childbearing.

When asked about having sex conversations with older siblings or cousins. Jo and Eva reflected on their experience growing up without anyone older than them to discuss sex with. They mention being the oldest sibling and cousin, suggesting they were the first in their family to encounter various life experiences, including discussions about sex. This might imply that they had to navigate these topics on their own without guidance or support from older relatives, which might be an acculturation challenge. Jo reveals

When I was younger, no, like, you wouldn't even talk about it. I was the oldest. Eva replies yeah no, I was the oldest... I was the oldest, I was the oldest cousin, and was the first everything so it's not something I spoke about.

It was often difficult for some participants to answer questions due to underlying family issues, so discussions about sex weren't really important to them at that time. Vanessa and Paloma acknowledged that there were deeper or unresolved issues within a context that is not specified but possibly related to personal or family dynamic challenges. These pressing family dynamics would take precedence over discussions about sex. Vanessa stated:

I mean, we had other underlying issues. So, it was kind of hard for me to answer any type of question like that, to be honest. Paloma replied yeah... I think it's because whatever we had going on at home, just, you know, like, the last thing you want to talk about is that.

Emilia also shared a personal experience shaped by her family dynamics, particularly highlighting her mother's influence and the challenges she faced as a single mother. She explained her mother's decision to prioritize raising them herself until they are grown, reflecting a strong commitment to her daughters' well-being and upbringing. She goes on to mention that her mother is very vocal about the importance of being in a respectful relationship. This emphasis stems from her mother's own past experiences, particularly an emotionally abusive relationship with Emilia's father.

Umm, I guess my experience is a little different. Because I have a single mom, she's been single since I was two. So, she hasn't dated since she's really big on, like, I want to raise you guys until you guys are out of the house...feel like because my sister, my little sister and I, we were alike, daughters, outside of marriage my mom. So, my older sister has a different dad than my little sister and I and my older sister; when she was conceived, my mom was married to her dad... She always tells us that, like, you have to be with someone who respects you. And not just like, because she went through, like, an abusive relationship with my dad too, a very emotionally abusive relationship.

As sex education varies significantly from state to state in the U.S., participants highlight the diversity in approaches and curriculum content across different regions. This variation can lead to differences in when and how students receive information about sexual health, relationships, and related topics. Paloma and Vanessa reflected on their experience with sexual

education, observing that they received it at a relatively young age while residing in California, whereas others encountered it later in life.

...but I have mine in California. And so, I don't know if it's because of all the stuff that they have going on there, like I got mine in sixth grade, like, I got mine super early. Vanessa agrees by saying, yeah, I got mine in 4th grade in California

In the second focus group, Sandra and Roberta shared their experiences of receiving sex education in different states and countries and how their experiences differed from those of other participants. Sandra shared her experience.

And Texas, y'all (everyone laughs), they literally had this like teacher. I don't remember who it was, but they were telling you a story about a girl in high school who got naked with her older partner. And she claimed that they didn't have sex, but she was pregnant. Roberta shared a very opposite experience and said, I remember in university in (country) when I took a class called sexuality attraction, she had us make a penis out of clay. And go to the *la entrada de la Universidad* (entrance of the university) and we would stay there with the penis and condoms to show students.

These quotes represent regional or national differences in sex education, which may have impacted the participants' overall environment. This can include their understanding of sex education, their attitudes and behaviors, sexual health outcomes, and informed choices about their bodies and relationships.

RQ2: Latinas Learning about Sex

Research question two addresses how participants learned about the concept of sex this could be through parental conversations, classmates, family, or healthcare. It also addresses the absence of learning about sex at a young age. This major theme is labeled learnings and exposure was refined into three subthemes that include (a) initial exposure, (b) participant past reactions, and (c) the presence or absence of sex topics.

Theme 2a: Initial Exposure

Participants described their first experiences when hearing the word sex or learning about the concept of sex. Many of the women dug deep into their memory and recalled different events of their childhood that exposed them to sex, which often included overhearing adult conversations, listening to friends at school, or putting context clues together from different conversations.

Jo shared an experience of overhearing her older cousins speaking about sexual experiences. At the time, due to her lack of knowledge on the topic of sex and sexuality, she was often confused about the topics being discussed. She had to use context clues to understand what was going on.

I heard a lot of stuff from my older cousins, and they will say nasty stuff. But I was young, so I didn't, I didn't understand most of them. It was like me, and my cousin my age would listen to the older cousins talk, and they were talking about "macking it" with boys and this and that, but that meant just kissing, like making out with boys.

Sandra expressed that she was never curious about the topic of sex and had no interest in it. She recounted an experience where she learned about sex by overhearing a conversation among other children on the school bus. By piecing together their discussion, she was able to understand what sex was.

And so, I remember. And I like, I don't know, I think it was just like this thing. And like, this part of my brain, I just wasn't like accessing, and I was like, Okay, it's like whatever, just a thing. And you know, it's not something I like, thought too much about. And then, in eighth grade, I was sitting, towards the back of the bus. And these kids were having a conversation behind me. And I don't remember what it was in that conversation. But I put two and two together about what sex was. and then. And that's literally how I learned what sex was, is just getting pieces together of like, the conversations from the back of the bus. I was like (gasp) THAT'S WHAT IT IS, that moment sticks in my brain.

Roberta recounted a different experience of learning about sex and periods. She recalled her father being very proactive and showing her an educational cartoon video where two children

learned about sex from their grandparents. The video explained reproductive systems and how they work.

I don't know exactly how old I was. But I remember I was I was younger. I was a kid. My parents talked to me about sex a lot. So, I don't remember the age. But I remember I was young... I just remember it was like it was an educational video. It was a cartoon. It has like two kids talking to their grandparents and the grandparents, they were teaching them about sex. *Como los reproductorios todo como funciona* (like explain how the reproductive systems function). So that's how I learned about periods. My dad was so annoying. He would pause. What happened? Summarize (hahaha) And if we didn't know he would go back, oh my god.

Sophie recalled a specific memory from her childhood when her mother read a book to her titled *Solo Para Chicas* (Only for Girls). This book discussed various aspects of girls' development, including topics like contraception. Sophie's statement highlights the role of parental guidance and early education in shaping her initial understanding of puberty and sexual health. It also underscores how her interest and knowledge evolved over time, influenced by both external factors like her mother's reading and her own developmental stage.

I don't remember exactly. I remember when I was younger, my mom read a book to me called *Solo para Chicas* (only for girls). It was like talking about your development as a girl. Okay. I think there was one part talked about, like contraception. But I don't really remember the details. But I was around like 10 or 11. But other than that, mentioning, I didn't really have an interest in looking more into it until I was older, in high school.

Theme 2b: Participant Past Reactions

It is crucial to acknowledge how participants felt during their adolescence when experiencing or learning about sex, sexual health, menstruation, and romantic relationships. The data primarily focused on how emotions and reactions tend to persist as individuals age, influencing their thoughts and feelings over time. Many of the reactions experienced by participants involved feeling shy, uncomfortable, confused, anxious, shameful, scared, and embarrassed.

Sandra described a strong emotional reaction where she broke down in tears and felt terrified when her mother found her birth control. She apologized and expressed regret, as she didn't anticipate her mother discovering it. Despite never discussing sex openly with her mother, she carried a sense of shame and guilt internally.

And I just broke down. I was so I was terrified. I was crying. I was like, mom like, I'm sorry, I didn't know you were going to find that. Yeah, it was, like, just a lot of pent-up emotion up emotions that came out in that moment because I had never talked to her about sex, but I knew that there was this undercurrent of shame. I grew up with, like a lot of internalized shame, even though we never talked about it. So, I just felt so guilty and like, dirty, she found me out...And, of course, it was my worst nightmare.

Eva's statement revealed her discomfort and hesitation when it comes to discussing sex with her friends, stemming from her upbringing where sex was a taboo or avoided topic at home. She explained that when her friends or family discuss sex, she tends to respond with jokes or deflecting comments.

I still felt shy around my friends, because it's something we never even talked about at home. So, when everybody would talk about it, you would be like mmmm... I don't want to talk about it. (laughs) I don't know what you're talking about. What? (sarcastic)

Jo emphasized the importance of receiving accurate information, particularly when it comes to sensitive topics like sex. She recalled a specific memory from elementary school when other kids mentioned the word "masturbate." Jo admitted to being confused because they didn't fully understand what the term meant. Jo's statement illustrates a childhood misunderstanding about sexual terminology, underscoring the need for accurate and clear information when discussing sensitive topics, especially in early education and development.

Because like, you're also going to be getting information from others. You want to get the right information. I remember I was like, in elementary school some kids were saying masturbate, and I was like, a master bathroom? tub, or like a big tub and bathe....literally what I thought they were talking about. I don't know. I was like, yeah, that sounds cool. I didn't know. I was confused.

Theme 2c: Presence or Absence of Sex Topics

When asking the participants about how and when they learned about sex, many participants had trouble answering because oftentimes these discussions were not had, not broached at home, taboo to speak about, and often scary to bring up. A few participants had experiences when conversations around sexuality were present and safe to converse. Often, participants had limited guidance on menstruation, contraception, and basic sex knowledge.

Jo's reflection indicated that discussions about sex were absent during her childhood, as it was not a topic openly addressed in her immediate environment. It was only as she became older that she engaged in conversations about sex. This shift suggests a change in the openness of her family regarding the topic as she grew older.

When I was younger, no, like, you wouldn't even talk about it. I would hear about it from older cousins. But now that I'm older, that's when I really talk about it more. But when I was young, not at all.

Sidra revealed a lack of open communication about sex within her family. Despite never discussing the topic with her mother, her mother took a proactive but non-communicative approach by placing her on birth control upon her high school graduation, anticipating potential sexual activity in college.

No, my parents never; I can't even talk about it with my mom. Now she just assumes and knows, because she's my mom, that I do stuff. But I never talked to her about sex ever... I remember she put me on birth control when I left or when I graduated high school put me on birth control, like, assuming I would do stuff in college; she was like here is birth control just to be safe.. but that's really... we never discussed why. She just said you are in college now here is birth control.

Eva described feeling completely uninformed about sex during her youth, as it was never discussed openly in her family. She only occasionally learned bits and pieces by overhearing conversations. This lack of discussion left her in the dark about the subject for much of her early life.

I was like in the blue. Nobody ever talked about it unless I would happen to hear conversation or something. But I was the oldest. I was the oldest cousin; I was the first everything, so it's just not something we talked about.

Paloma spoke about not receiving any information from parents on sex. She believed that her family was uncomfortable discussing topics related to sex, which led to them being completely avoided. As a result, she never received any direct information or guidance about it from her family.

Umm My, I think my family like all my family was like, scared like of those topics. So, it literally never ever, ever, ever got brought up... So, like, I don't know, like that stuff, like I don't think anybody ever told me.

There were a few participants who had open and forthcoming parents when it came to conversations around sex. Sophie and Roberta's fathers were very much proactive around the topic of sex. They offered support, emphasizing safety and offering assistance while respecting their autonomy. Sophie remembers her father by saying.

So, he was just very understanding, being like, I understand you want to try new things with a new partner, and I just want you to be safe. Roberta also speaks of her dad, saying, he was like, *ay mi amor*, let's have a conversation; I want to make sure that, you know, I would never tell you to not have sex; if you want to do it, just do it. But please use protection. If you want to go with your mom, to the gynecologist you can go with her.

RQ3: Receiving Sex Education and Expectations

Research question three focuses on receiving school-based sex education and the outcomes and impacts it has had on Latinas. It explores their resilient experiences and their present reaction to sex education conversations. This major theme is labeled school-based sex education outcomes and was refined into four themes that include (a) receiving school-based sex education, (b) outcomes and impacts, (c) Chicana resilience, and (d) process reaction observation.

Subtheme 3a: Receiving School-based Sex Education

When asked about the form of school-based sex education received, participants described their experience of going to sex education classes throughout their educational journey. They spoke on the limitations of sex education at their institution. They also spoke of the abstinence-focused programs and misinformation they received. Few participants reported enjoying their sex education program and leaving with useful information.

Vanessa expressed that she believes the information provided to her about sexual education was insufficient. While she did receive some education about menstruation and puberty in third grade, it did not explain the broader implications or what could happen after a period, leaving her with many unanswered questions. Vanessa felt that the focus on abstinence without comprehensive education on the subject is a significant problem.

I don't think they give enough information... because I didn't get any type of sexual education. But they did talk to me about my period and growing hair in third grade. And like that's irrelevant... and it's just like your uterus and yeah, it's just like what is that? It's like it doesn't explain it and doesn't go into detail about what happens afterward, like what can pos...like can happen after a period, you know, so I never got any of that, so I think the lack of and just them thinking is just about abstinence is the problem.

Paloma shared that when she finally received information about sex, it was overwhelming and too direct, especially considering that the topic was never discussed at home. This abrupt introduction left her feeling unprepared and stressed. She suggested that a different, perhaps more gradual, and supportive approach would have been more effective and less distressing for her.

I think when I got it, it was too straight on; I mean, like, it was too much for me, especially being that at home, we didn't talk about it at all. And I kind of just gave my mom the paper, and it was like, can you sign it really quick, and so she signed it. And so, I went in there not knowing what I was about to see. And so, it was kind of traumatic for me, so I think if you're doing it in a different way, then you know for sure, but I don't know... I feel like I have PTSD from my sex talk.

Sophie recalled that her first introduction to sexual education was in middle school, but it was limited to learning about STIs in health class, typically taught by gym instructors. She expressed a desire for a more comprehensive and continuous sexual education program, starting from middle school and continuing through high school.

I don't remember I think I learned about it first in middle school, but it was just like the health. The gym instructors teaching about the STIs and that was it but that sounds amazing, I wish that was promoted more at schools, starting from middle school, and in high school as well.

Emilia had a different high school experience when it came to sex education compared to other participants. While she did have gym teachers instructing the class, there was also involvement from a local organization that provided education on safe sex, birth control, and sexual health. Emilia appreciated her school for the comprehensive sex education program they implemented from middle school through high school.

It's funny that you got sex ed in high school; I got sex ed in sixth grade. And we had the same experience. They all brought us to the gym. They had a banana and, I don't even remember what, I think an apple... no peach, a peach a banana and peach. And we were again; we were all just looking at each other like what is this...like why are our teachers talking about this? It was the gym teachers because like health and fitness. Yeah, so they were talking about it. And we were just looking at each other like what is going on? And we had it every single year. So, I think like, in that sense, like Clarke County has done a really good job, like educating us about sex. We also have, like people come from Teen Matters, which is like a local organization that works with like, having like protective sex, and like birth control, and things like that. So, all of the social workers would talk to us about that. So that's really nice to have a middle school and high school too.....And there would be posters about it everywhere. And in the stalls of the bathroom, too. It would have like phone numbers that we could call to talk to someone that team matters. And they had like a hotline, too. So, it's like, and there's one outside of (school name), the high school local high school, and then outside of the other one. So, you could even just like walk there after class if you wanted to talk to someone. So, it was pretty cool.

Subtheme 3b: Outcomes and Impacts

When discussing forms of receiving school-based sex education, participants addressed the positive and negative impacts it has had during their adolescence and adulthood. They

discussed the outcomes of either not taking sex education seriously, having unknowledgeable teachers, lack of conversations at home, and obtaining misinformation.

Eva and Vanessa discussed the lack of proactive discourse surrounding sexual education, including discussions on sexual experience, contraception usage, and preventive measures, which often occur belatedly, resulting in unintended pregnancies.

Nope, until after I had my first kid. Of course, now everybody wants to talk about it because I had my child so young, but before that, nobody sat here and had conversations about this is what you need to do to protect yourself or whatever nothing. Vanessa also mentions, I never had the conversation.... I was pregnant with (child) at 17. I think it's just like the lack of education kind of doesn't. I guess it goes to poor outcomes with everything that's happened. That happens, I guess in when you're developing, like, I didn't know the information. I didn't know the consequences. I didn't know everything that was in between when it comes to you know, starting to have sex with somebody, I guess. So I think maybe just the lack of education kind of affects the choices you make and outcomes.

Paloma reflected on her mother's tendency to refrain from disclosing family issues outside the household or speaking of private issues amongst others. She described feeling isolated from discussions among peers who engaged in casual and humorous conversations about sexuality, leaving her uninformed. Consequently, she approached sex in a lighthearted manner, lacking a full understanding of its implications, leading to personal repercussions.

And so, like Joanna says that, you know, she had like cousins and you know, family members and stuff like that. And because in my family it was just us like, because my mom didn't believe in taking problems and conversations out of the house. So, it was just us 4 at the house completely. So, like, I don't know, like that stuff like I don't think anybody ever told me....so then I would be in middle school, and the guys will be joking around, and you know, doing this and that like, you know, talking about this, and then I just be like what in the hell are y'all talkin' bout? I was clueless...because it was a joking matter. I kind of took it jokingly, as well and so when it came down to the consequences. I didn't really like it was just a joke. Like, it was just like sex, condoms. All that was just a joke. Because it was I mean, it was just a joke. And then, like, when I first got my period, I didn't tell my mom. My mom didn't know for years. And then she eventually found out because, you know, for whatever reason, but we didn't talk about it. Until like, four years later....I thought it was a joke. I just thought it was some it was I thought it was like just a funny subject. Like, I didn't take no seriousness about it at all whatsoever.

Knowing that, you know, you can get pregnant, or you know a whole bunch of stuff can happen. And I just I just I never took it seriously.

Vanessa discussed how children perceive sex education classes as enjoyable field trips yet fail to grasp the gravity of the educational content. Additionally, she critiqued the perceived inadequacy in how teachers introduce and conveyed this information.

But also, they're not you know, they're not introducing them properly to this thing. They're just like trying to get out of class and this is a fun field trip. It's not a field trip. Some don't take it seriously either. I just heard them like giggling.

Eva recalled being a teenage parent and expressed the love she has for her daughter while acknowledging the challenges she and her husband have faced being teenage parents. She mentioned a strong desire to engage in proactive dialogues with her daughter concerning birth control and sexual health to help her daughter make better-informed decisions.

we were talking about it. And we were like, I was like I don't want (daughter) to go through this at all. And I was like, you know, it's been a struggle. It's been a good struggle, but it's been a struggle, you know, being teen parents and everything. And I was like, and I want to have a conversation with her.

Maria discussed her lack of familiarity with pregnancy, menstrual cycles, and gynecological examinations, often expressing feeling shame around these topics. She recounted her decision to initiate birth control without fully comprehending its potential side effects, which led to feelings of depression that she initially perceived as normal. Without guidance, she advocated for herself at the gynecologist and discovered alternative options, broadening her knowledge base on contraceptive choices.

Yeah, seriously thought like, oh, it's like, only if you're like about to, like, get pregnant or something. Like, I didn't know anything about gynecology or anything. So, after my, like, second sexual partner, I was like, you know what, I think it's time to get a pap smear. And I was so scared. I was like, can someone like go with me and hold my hand, I know that's not how it works. But I remember like, feeling so much shame around it, and like, just not even wanting to go and feeling uncomfortable going. And then like, eventually being put on birth control, like after that, and still feeling very uncomfortable about that. I was like, I told myself, I'd never go on birth control, like, all this or that. And like, now

I'm currently on birth control. And also like, going through the side effects of it, like, having depression with the birth control, talking to the gynecologist and being like, feel pretty, like depressed. And she's like, Oh, this normal. And I'm like, for a whole year, and she's like, you've been on it a year. And you're still feeling this way. I was like, yeah, she's like, you need to get off it. And I was like, I've been telling you this for a year. So, like, having to advocate for myself, like, so just, it's, it's been a long road. And like, I haven't talked to any of this about my mom, or with my mom, like, it's just been through friends with my current boyfriend, like, so it's been, it's been a journey.

Emilia recalled an incident from her high school years when her friend experienced uncontrollable birth control pains. Emilia and her peers promptly escorted her to the school nurse, where medical professionals assessed her condition and ensured her well-being. Not knowing much about birth control, this event left a lasting impression on Emilia and her friends, instilling a sense of apprehension toward birth control.

We were so young, we were like 15, and we didn't know what to do with our friends. So, remember, we just went to the nurse with her. And we're just like there with her. But we had never, like ever tried birth control at that age. And she was like the only one of us. So, we were just like, so scared for her. But then, eventually, things got better. So, but it kind of just scarred like a few of my friends. And we were just like, we never want to go through that.

Subtheme 3c: Resilience

When asked questions about ways they learned about sex, menstruation, contraception, and the form of sex education participants would have liked, many Latinas responded with having to learn on their own, not taking no for an answer, not staying silent, observing others, and asking questions even when it felt as though both they and the adult felt uncomfortable.

Jo recounted an incident involving her aunt watching a televised program discussing sex. Upon encountering unfamiliar terms related to sex on screen, she inquired about their meaning. Initially hesitant and unsure how to respond, the aunt struggled to provide a clear explanation. Despite sensing her aunt's discomfort, Jo, persisted in probing with questions, employing various

approaches in her quest for understanding. Eventually acknowledging the challenge, Jo demonstrated resilience and directness in her pursuit of clarity on the subject matter.

So yeah, yeah, but I do you remember when I was little. I used to do a lot with my aunts, which they were like younger. They were only like maybe 14 or 12 years older than me. And so they had a TV show like Sally Jessy Raphael, Jerry Springer, and all the shows back then. And I remember hearing something on there that.... I already knew how to read, and it said something about sex. On the little title in the corner. And I remember I asked one of my aunts so what's sex? And she just like, oh shit, why are you asking... Yean and she didn't know what to say so I was trying to help her. So, I was like is it hugging? Mmm, no it's more than that. Hugging really good?... Is it kissing? she's like uhh more than kissing? Umm kissing a lot? Uhhh more than that. So, I just finally gave up, but I remember hearing it a lot.

Jo recalled a conversation with their grandmother where they expressed discomfort with a religious tradition regarding virginity. Jo openly conveyed to her grandmother that she found it strange and inappropriate for someone to announce or discuss whether they were a virgin or not. Despite knowing how her grandmother would react, Jo unapologetically inserted her opinion of what she felt was right.

Like, and I remember I told my grandma's like, like, that's weird. I was like, I wouldn't want somebody to announce if I'm a virgin or not. I don't think that is anyone's business. I thought that was like, creepy. I kind of told her something like that. She was just kind of like; ooh she didn't really say much.

Emilia shared the strength, encouragement, and resilience her mother showed. She recalled a specific instance where her mother reassured her siblings that being single and independent is perfectly acceptable. Emilia then shared that having a mother who demonstrates tenacity is notable in the role of a single parent.

but she also always, like, emphasizes the importance of like, you don't have to be in a relationship, if you don't want to, you can be single, if you want to. So, my mom's been single for a long time. So, like, since I was like two because she really again, like wanting to focus on raising us. So, she always tells us, like, if you guys don't want to be in a relationship, it's okay. Like, you know, you can be by yourself, like, look at me, she always says look at me. I've done a pretty good job, right? And we're all just like, yeah, haha, you can be by yourself, like you can live on your own. You don't have to depend on

someone, you can live your life however you want to be. So, it's like always really nice. So, it's been really nice to have that.

Roberta described an experience where she accompanied her friends to obtain contraceptives and undergo check-ups together. Following this, she began accompanying her sister to ensure she followed through with her own appointments. Even though Roberta is a bit scared, she shows the initiative in helping her friends and siblings navigate these appointments with comfort and solidarity.

And then for the contraceptives, I went with my friends, actually with like 4 female friends. Although I've also done pap smears with my A my husband my gay best friend. So, we *todos nos reunimos* (we all got together) And we were like ok we need to go we need to get contraceptives and get checked. So, we went as a group, we did it.... She's a family friend. So, I'm like, *ay no le digas a mi mami*, (don't tell my mom) and they would be like oh its ok haha. So I go with my sister, to make sure that she's doing everything. So, she has that space to go with me. So, every time I go home, or almost every time she needs to go to the gynecologist, she waits for me so I can go with her; she never goes alone.

Sophie, like Roberta, took the initiative by reaching out to friends to discuss the safest and most effective birth control options. Later, she apologized to her parents for not telling them but reassured them that it was for her safety.

I want to reach out to friends and see what their experiences have been like, either with the pill or with had another friend that had the Nexplanon herself. Did you like it? What are the side effects and took her advice and got it myself... that relationship that I started at 18 I'm still with that same partner now. And then we decided to use contraceptive like the Nexplanon. Which is a more long-term birth control. And I kind of pursued that with friends. Like, I didn't talk to my parents about, like, hey, what do you think about, like, the IUD or Nexplanon or the pill? I kind of didn't go to them. I went to Friends to see what their experiences were like. And then I went up to my parents, like, hey, I got this Nexplanon, like out of the blue. I said sorry to talk to you about it but I got it because I want to take care of myself, like, prevent unwanted pregnancy and all that. And they were just really happy, really supportive. They're like, well, we're glad that you're taking care of yourself and choosing when you're ready.

Theme 4c: Process Reaction Observation

In the focus group, particularly when discussing their experiences with sex education, participants seemed to struggle with certain questions and displayed reactions such as laughter, frustration, sadness, and relief. These responses not only validated the feelings of the participants but also made them feel heard.

Sidra reminisced and laughed about her mother's habit of closing her eyes during movie scenes depicting sex. Sidra felt annoyed because she saw it as a missed opportunity to learn about what sex is, and all participants agreed.

My mom used to close my eyes during a movie; she would be like don't look, I would be like ugh (hahaha), how am I supposed to know? (Everyone in the focus groups agrees and laughs).

Participants were left perplexed by a story recounting a game in sex education, questioning its value as a knowledge-enhancing experience. This narrative resonated with the group, fostering feelings of validation and acknowledgment among the participants.

Eva expressed, wow, oh my goodness, Jo trying to understand followed with, I feel like they're trying to say how it gets spread. Eva then says well, they could have said you could use protection. Paloma validated the participant by saying, I don't know what's worse, that or a slide show.

When queried about the messages they would retain from their experiences learning about sex or sexuality, participants humorously replied with lighthearted remarks, reflecting the prevalence of negative messaging they had encountered. They collectively expressed difficulty in identifying constructive messages to carry forward. The mutual exchange of comments contributed to a sense of validation and mutual support among the participants.

Sidra jokingly says, yeah, I don't know, just live, laugh, love, haha Everyone laughs and says, figure it out yourself. Seleste shouts, good luck. Eva realizes that everyone's jokes are actually a sad reality; that's sad, haha. Vanessa reiterates that regardless of the past she adores her parents, I love my parents, though ok haha

Paloma revealed that she continues to feel uneasy using anatomically correct terms for genitalia and discussing matters related to sex. Another participant affirmed this sentiment, sharing similar feelings of discomfort and shyness. Both acknowledge the significance of open conversation and knowledge-sharing despite their personal reservations. Paloma mentions:

I think it's still kind of a little uncomfortable. I mean, I feel like when we were doing, we were talking about, like, how easy the word vagina and penis, like just those words coming out my mouth was kind of weird. And so I'm still kind of like uncomfortable about that. I probably need more education haha. Sidra responds, yeah, like I said the P word because I cannot.

RQ4: Improving Sex Conversations for Future Latinas

Research question four aims to understand participants' views on how conversations around sex and sex education can improve for the next generation of Latinas. This major theme is labeled sex education improvement and was refined into four themes that include (a) feminist developmental perspective, (b) technology and access, (c) improve conversations within families and relationships, and (d) improve sex education in school systems.

Theme 4a: Feminist Developmental Perspective

When processing their experiences, most of the participants expressed a change in their cognitive and social development around the concepts of sex, bodies, menstruation, and contraception. There were often positive discussions around feeling older and wiser, being open-minded, deconstructing fear, and learning and unlearning information.

Throughout her life, Jo frequently heard derogatory terms like "hoe" used to describe women, which initially shaped her perspective. Over time, her views evolved, leading her to believe that women should have the freedom to make choices without fear of judgment or shame.

I would hear about girls have having sex like they were hoes and stuff like that, whatever. And that changed. Now, I feel like a woman should be allowed to feel more sexual if they want to or do not want to. I hate you, know; I don't like slut shaming anyone anymore.... I was like, I don't want to be. I don't want to be like that, you know. But now I feel like I'm

a little bit more educated and open-minded, and like, why does a girl get to be a hoe, but the guy just doesn't get to be?

Paloma reflected on her past perception of sex as something negative, comparing it with her current understanding where she associated it with emotional connection. This shift in perspective has contributed to her feeling more informed when making decisions about her sexual experiences. Paloma expressed a newfound comfort in exploring her preferences and boundaries, enhancing her overall sense of self-awareness and confidence in her sexual identity.

I finally started to understand that it's not, you know, like, it's not a bad thing. But, you know, I think now I've kind of attached it more to having feelings for somebody, also. And then so it's just I think now it's, it's more of a like she said now that I'm more educated and I understand my feelings more... I can figure it, like figure it out more, and it's not just something to be scared of or something and be, you know, awkward about it. It's just like she's saying, just exploring and being able to figure out what you do like and what you don't like, you know?

Seleste revealed that her husband holds a closed-minded view regarding their daughter. Seleste disagreed with his views, emphasizing the importance of fostering open communication with their daughter. She believed this approach would prevent their daughter from feeling compelled to hide or engage in secretive behaviors. Seleste aims to cultivate a close, trusting relationship with her daughter, aspiring to break the cycle of misunderstanding and distance.

He's pretty, like, close-minded about things. He's like, oh, she's not going to go out. She's not going to do anything. I'm like, no, because that's how I grew up. And that's how I ended up sneaking out of the house and doing stuff I wasn't supposed to do. And that's what I don't want. I want her to trust me. So, I'm like, you didn't grow up the way that I did. You had more leniency because you were close to your parents. You had a close relationship? I did not have that. And that's what I want with her.

Vanessa agreed with Seleste and spoke of her partner also being close-minded, specifically due to Hispanic machismo culture. She noted his gradual growth and improvement in communication and open-mindedness over time. She expressed a desire to shield her daughter

from feelings of shame and hopes to create an environment where their daughter feels supported by both parents.

You know, and I'm not going to shame my daughter to, you know, for him to be happy with his own opinion, like, you know, like she Sophia. She's just getting to that age, you're going to be 16. So, you know, yeah, he's, he's supportive. But his opinions are completely different. He's a little bit more closed-minded when it comes to things like that. A lot of things, he's very into that Hispanic culture, like *machista*, but I mean, he's getting better at it. You know, he's flourishing a little bit. It's taken time, you know... 10 years already, haha, you know, still evolving.

Maria reflected that despite not planning for a child right now, there are people like her mother who advise her not to have a child at this point in her life. Although Maria stood up for herself and acknowledged the practicality that having a child now wouldn't necessarily be a bad thing for them.

And like, that's still something as a 24-year-old, that's still, you know, very much, don't have a kid right now. Like, you have so much life ahead of you. And like, I'm not planning on having a child right now. I'm like, I'm being very, like, I'm trying to plan and see, like, if I want to have a child, like in the future, whatever. But it's more realistic for me to have a child right now. And for like, especially my mom to be like, oh, like, don't have a kid right now. I'm like but it's reasonable to like, it wouldn't be a bad thing if I did. So, it's just, it's really interesting how they kind of stay with that same idea.

Theme 4b: Technology and Access

When asked about hindering or salient resources they received in the past, technology, music, and access were major topics of conversation. Many participants believed that technology, such as shows, movies, music, and social media, impacted social norms and sexual health. Among participants, there was often a division of beliefs between technology having a positive or negative impact.

Jo and Eva discussed the influence of soap operas (*novellas*) within their culture, reflecting on how these shows have traditionally shaped perceptions of gender roles, relationships, and marriage. They highlighted the prevalent theme in these shows where women

are often portrayed as needing to marry the men they have been sexually involved with, and how failure to do so results in societal judgment labeling them as damaged for not waiting until marriage. They also noted the irony that many of these narratives are created by men with *machista* perspectives, which further perpetuates traditional gender norms and expectations.

Okay. Well, I feel like a lot of my culture was, umm, we were pretty much surrounded by a lot of novellas. So, in a lot of the novellas.... I watched now a novella that I watched back then when I was a kid, and the whole virginity thing was like a big deal. Like, *ya no es virgen ya se acostó con ese, y ya se tiene que casar con él*... (she isn't a virgin, she slept with him, so now she has to marry him). Like you know and that was the end. Thalia had her first boyfriend. And that was it. She had to marry him. And that was it. Like, you know, you never really saw anything I say; I feel like we were pretty much influenced a lot by these novellas that were made, I'm sure, by men; in Mexico... you see Thalia, she is all doe eyed. Eva responds, yeah, all innocent and stuff.

Sidra reflected on the impact of technology, particularly social media, on young children today, expressing concern about the accessibility of inappropriate content. She compared her own upbringing, recalling a time when such technology was not prevalent, and her primary focus was on childhood activities like playing with Barbies.

We didn't have that in my day. I wasn't even thinking about sex in fourth grade. I was just thinking about Barbie Dreamhouse, haha.

Paloma agreed with Sidra that technology had significantly impacted young women's perceptions of fashion, behavior, and appearance. She believed that modern technology, including filters and social media, had led younger women to present themselves as older than their actual age.

I feel like because of the technology they see so much now. So, like the fifth graders they be looking like they're, older like 15, like they be looking old. You have to compare them 4th grade pictures. Because when I was in fourth grade, I was not looking like that.

Jo and Vanessa engaged in a discussion about their perspectives on technology and its impact on younger generations. Jo suggested that despite concerns about children's behavior today, access to technology may not necessarily exacerbate the issue and could potentially

enhance their access to information. In response, Vanessa acknowledged the potential negative influences of technology, highlighting the importance of recognizing its dual nature, capable of conveying harmful content yet also offering valuable educational opportunities.

I feel like I know, they say like kids nowadays are bad, but I feel like they're the same. Because I remember back then. Also knowing of girls doing things and so it's never been like a new issue. I mean, I think there's more technology now. And people can talk about it more. But I feel like that could be positive too. So maybe there's more education, hopefully, or they can get the wrong ideas. Vanessa responds I think it's easier for kids. You know they're still developing; they're more susceptible to bad people. So yeah, I think there is good. I think there is bad as well. I think there's more bad than good, to be honest.

Even though Paloma had differing views on technology, she shared a post on Instagram about Planned Parenthood. She highlighted its usefulness in providing information about birth control, self-pleasure, abortion, and contraceptives. She believed it was a great resource for teenagers and adults with questions on these topics.

You know what's funny? I follow Planned Parenthood on Instagram, and so they'll post stuff And I think that, if they were to go like, that probably be a good option, because the way that they kind of worded it and they like, they just, you know, it's just like, it's good to know that there's a place to go if all, all choices are out of the question, and if you don't want to come to me, then go to the professionals. And so, like, because I follow them, I just see, like, the stuff that they put out there. And like, every, every once in a while, they'll post a post, and it'll be like about birth control about self-pleasure, like what like, you know, they'll put like, Oh, this is a vibrator. And like, they'll put like, little pictures and like, they'll describe it. So, yeah, so ...you know how they were making it illegal to do abortions. And so, they were posting all the facts about it, and what was going on. And then it was like, you know, if you're looking for options, reach out to this to this number to this link to be able to see your options.

Theme 4c: Importance of Family Conversations, Words, and Relationships

Throughout the focus group, participants acknowledged the lack of communication between adults and children in most family dynamics. When asked about how to better support and broach future young Latinas with the concept of sex, participants conveyed that it is important to take away feelings of shame and fright, become open-minded, value questions and

communication, feel confident in reaching out for help or resources, discussing healthy and toxic relationships, and becoming role models of healthy relationships for young women.

Vanessa discussed the use of unclear language when discussing sensitive topics like sexuality. Vanessa expressed concern that using vague terms impedes educational efforts. She believed that using precise terminology is crucial, as it avoids confusion and ensures children are properly informed about their bodies and potential risks, such as sexual abuse. Vanessa emphasized the importance of open communication between parents and children, advocating for discussions about anatomical terms.

So, they always like use weird terms. Which is I get it that sometimes, with every culture, language, you know, whatever, they use their own words. But I think that just impedes on the educational part. You know, and it just kind of it, like, gives the door for them to get like sexually molested, and parents don't know, you know, so yeah, I think using the correct terminology speaking to them without, you know, without being, you know, not being scared... Communicate and talk to them. Not being scared about a penis or a vagina conversation using the word because that was an issue that they never I'd never heard them say. Yeah, your vagina is going to bleed every month. You know?

Paloma stressed the importance of discussing sex education, including sexual anatomy and appropriate boundaries, with children at an early age. Initiating these conversations early does not involve discussing specific sexual acts prematurely, but rather establishing a foundation for open communication and understanding. This approach helps children comprehend their bodies, identify inappropriate behavior, and feel confident in communicating their concerns.

I think because of my experience, probably like, nine or 10. And when we say sex, like, I think I was just start talking about not actually the doing of sex, but what it is. And, you know, like how, like the anatomy, like saying vagina, and penis, like, start to bring up those terms, because you just never know what's, like, there's just too much going on. And that, you know, for how you said, you know, for something to happen to the kid, and them not know what happened, they just they don't even know what's going on, you know, like, unfortunately, there is, there's kids who get molested and stuff like that. And a lot. I mean, I've kind of seen a lot on the Hispanic side. And I think if it would have been brought up sooner, then maybe the kid would have been like, well, this is not this is not right, versus the kids just not knowing what's going on. So, I think, like, me

personally, like, nine 9 or 10 at the latest, just start talking about it, just, you know, slowly bringing it up into conversation.

When asked what advice she would give young Latinas, Jo shared an example of herself as a child, always asking questions and being aware of the relationships around her. This helped her understand what she wanted and didn't want in a future relationship.

I don't know what I would advise somebody, but I think what helped me growing up was that I was very absorbent and chismosa (nosey or curious) hearing everybody ahha, so I will see relationships, and I would say I don't like that. I don't like that. And I would look at things like that, I didn't like, so then when it came to like me dating people, obviously like, I saw this in another person's relationship, and I don't want them, I don't want that. Like, for example, I had an aunt that her husband, would start trying to like get physical with her. And I'm glad that she like she fought back she was never like, oh no like crying, like NO she fought she fought back. But so at least I saw her fighting back. But I saw it, I saw the violence. But I was always like, I never want anybody like that, like I started, pointing out the issues in their relationships. And I was like, I don't want that. And when I would see something, or a person that you know, had the good qualities I would be like, you're good. You know, you're alright... until you piss me off haha

The way Jo spoke about her experience resonated with Paloma because of her own family history. Paloma agreed that observing others in negative or toxic relationships didn't help her personal development as a woman, and she felt powerless to fight back. She expressed a wish for a role model who would stand up and fight back, and she hopes others have that kind of support.

That's really big, like, you know, seeing that because my mom and my dad, like, problems all the way around, like, from point A to point B, but my mom would never fight back. Like ever, ever. Like, my mom and my dad were done when my brother was born. So, the fact that I was born like my mom, she wouldn't ever fight back. So, we would never she would never speak on it. Like when this man would come around and say stuff like she would never speak on it. It was just like, ignore it. Anything bad that was going on ignore it, ignore it. And so, I think if my mom would have fought back or if my mom would have, you know stood up, then maybe everything would be different. So, I feel like that's another thing is being able to, you know, not be scared to fight back... And my mom was not like that. So, I feel like that, seeing that I wish I would have saw that. I wish I would have saw somebody fight back. And then my sister, as soon as she turned 18, the first man came knocking on the door. She was out the door. so that's all I saw was either hiding or running away.

Maria emphasized the importance of family conversations about the distinctions between healthy and toxic relationships. These conversations can significantly benefit children, helping them recognize and navigate healthy dynamics in their interactions with others. Additionally, fostering openness in conversations, including discussing aspects like pleasure, can contribute to a more comfortable and informed approach to relationships and personal boundaries.

Also, I think, like, healthy relationships, I think and like, well, the difference between like healthy and toxic relationships would be really helpful and like identifying that in younger kids, because if their families aren't really talking to them about that, that's going to be really hard for them. And so just knowing that early on, I think, would be really helpful. Um, but also, like, just kind of restating what everybody else has said is like being open to these conversations, talking about pleasure, and just being more open and more comfortable with that.

Emilia emphasized the importance of open communication and support within family relationships, particularly between older and younger siblings. She reflected on her own upbringing, where she was encouraged to approach family members with any concerns. She concluded with a strong message advocating for adults to communicate this same openness and availability to young girls in their lives.

Something I told my little sister all the time is you can come to me for anything and that was told a lot to me growing up too but I feel like it's still like it was hard sometimes to come to my mom about stuff or come to like my older sisters about things and I notice now that I do that to my little sister she's like way more open and a little too open sometimes like ohh you don't need to tell me all that haha I'm like I always tell her like you can come to me for anything anything anything anything and I think that's like really necessary tell your kids your nieces any any little like girls you love like I'm always here for you.

Theme 4d: Improve Sex Education in School Systems

When asked about school-based sex education to improve the quality of material, participants spoke of sex educators having appropriate training, having clear, open communication, using correct terminology, having broader discussions other than heterosexual conversations, and providing more information other than consequences and abstinence.

Roberta believed that education systems should talk about protection and pleasure, not just focus on STIs and prevention. She thought that schools should have conversations about relationships and reproduction that go beyond heteronormative perspectives. She believed that it's important to be open to different identities and to normalize anatomical language for body parts when talking to children so that they have more knowledge and are able to express themselves.

Use protection and have that conversation. I think it should be also something that's done in school. I remember in my high school, they would have, like, sex education, but it was like gonorrhea, chlamydia, or just STIs... it has to be beyond that and a conversation about pleasure. Because sex is "*ay si hetero y reproducir, y te casas*" (yes, heterosexual and reproduction, and you get married) like it's more about that instead of pleasure. I think for me, for it to be a conversation that's beyond men and a woman just opening up for intersectional conversations. Because you never know. So, I think that's the main thing that I would add Pushing yourself even to have conversations about that..... I did some workshops about sexuality for kids. I think they were like, four or five. *Obviamente Tambien depende del material que ensenies verdad. Como bueno como se dice esto? Pene! Muy bien! Vagina! Como cosas que no estan normalizados en eso. Al principio es como que digan lo.* (obviously, it depends on the material you show. Like for example, how do you say this? Penis! Great job! Vagina! Like saying things that aren't normalized. At first, it's like just saying it.) I think that the earlier that you introduced them to something that's as natural as your body the better.

Vanessa suggested that there is a significant imbalance in the priorities of current sex education programs. She argued that too much emphasis is placed on discussing the negative outcomes. Instead, Vanessa believed that the education system should focus more on equipping young people with comprehensive tools for prevention and preparedness before they engage in sexual activity.

I think they are giving them more information of the things that there's.. little things that are irrelevant, but it's not what they really need. It's just about the consequences, which is the STD. That's all they think about STDs getting pregnant, but why not prevent them? Why not give them the materials to, you know, prepare them for that journey, you know, and so, yeah, I definitely don't think it's any better.

Sandra expressed frustration because she felt her high school sex education was lacking in crucial information. Sandra suggested that understanding the mechanics of sex would have been beneficial and valuable to them. They suggested that comprehensive education on these topics is important for young people to have a clearer and more informed understanding of human sexuality and reproduction.

I don't know what other schools taught... but I mean for me because they just literally didn't tell us anything about like the mechanics of it. Like, they're like, how does it happen? How does it work? Just so much that I didn't know for so long it would have been nice would've been really nice to know the mechanics of it.

Maria stressed the importance of providing sex education that is appropriate for different age groups. She emphasized the significance of teaching younger children about basic anatomy and body parts as a foundational introduction. Maria challenged the misconception that teen pregnancies only occur in older teens, highlighting that pregnancies can occur as early as 13 or 14 years old. She also acknowledged that in some cases, these pregnancies may occur without the teenager fully understanding or consenting to the situation. This underscored the importance of educating young people about sex, not only for their knowledge but also for their safety.

I definitely agree with that. Like having kids, like younger kids identify body parts. And I think that's a way to introduce them. And then maybe like, as I get into those, like preteen years, um starting to talk about sex and like, and how that like, comes into development. Because, like, you know, there, I feel like there are a lot of, like, very young teen pregnancies. And like, nobody really likes to discuss that. They're like, oh, teen pregnancies, like always, 16,17, 18. No, it happens, like 13 14. And sometimes it's like, not that child's choice that they got pregnant, you know. And so, I think it's a matter of their safety for them to understand that.

CHAPTER V

Discussion

This study represents a unique contribution to Latinx psychology as it explored Latinas' knowledge of sex and their relationship with sex within the context of cultural and familial values. This research used focus groups and *platica* methodology as a qualitative design to explore participants' experiences within the environment of the researcher's home to accurately model the *platica* framework of having a comfortable, authentic, and vulnerable healing space (Dolores Bernal & Fierros, 2016). The researcher used Chicana Feminist Epistemology to help highlight the importance of women maintaining their connection to indigenous roots by embracing dualities and challenging dichotomies. The research also used *Mujerista* Theology to highlight and challenge church teachings and religious practices that oppress Latinas (Diaz, 2004). By integrating these frameworks, the study aimed to amplify women's voices and advocate for transformative changes that affirm the value of Latinas within educational, societal, and religious contexts.

Participants in this focus group study provided insightful data concerning cultural expectations, familial perspectives, the influence of positive and negative messages, and their personal experiences regarding the acquisition of sex education. There were some aspects that hindered a few Latina participants from answering questions due to the immense barriers they faced in receiving sex education or having sex conversations. Despite these challenges, the researchers in this study described a strong commitment to providing culturally responsive conversations to all participants. Using Braun and Clarke's (2006) process of thematic analysis,

the researcher identified four themes: 1. Enculturation and Acculturation; 2. Learnings and Exposure; 3. Sex Education Outcomes; and 4; Sex Education Improvement. The findings in this study point to the need for research that centers on women and people of color, the need for bilingual researchers and health providers, and continued work on family, child, and healthcare communications to support and empower Latinas in navigating their sexual health successfully as a step toward creating a more culturally responsive sex education.

Outcomes and Contributions

The current study provided significant factors contributing to the understanding of Latinas' learned experiences regarding sex. The theme of Learning and Exposures highlighted salient factors that impacted how participants learned about sex, sexuality, and bodies. One pivotal factor influencing Latina perspectives on sex is the prevalence of silence or absence of discussions on the topic. When participants were asked about their experiences learning about sex, many struggled to recall such conversations, reflecting a common absence of dialogue on the subject within their homes. This lack of communication impacts young women's ability to engage in meaningful conversations about sex with their loved ones and to feel comfortable discussing such matters outside the home. The absence of these discussions often hindered their ability to make informed decisions regarding sexual health and relationships. Research often highlights data derived from women's responses to surveys and interviews (Figueroa-Cosme et al., 2018). However, there is a noticeable gap in addressing the silence or the challenges women face when they cannot provide an answer because the question assumes experiences or feelings that do not exist for them. This oversight can lead to a misunderstanding of women's diverse experiences and an incomplete representation in studies.

The subtheme 3c, Resilience, highlights the determination and curiosity children possess in their pursuit of growth and knowledge. In many cultures, curiosity and the act of questioning are often viewed negatively, especially in contexts where children are expected to remain obedient and refrain from speaking unless addressed (Ortiz, 2020). Despite these cultural norms, the subtheme reveals that children, often motivated by a deep desire to learn and understand, exhibit bravery by asking questions. This occurs even in environments where doing so may invoke fear or disapproval. The resilience displayed by these children highlights their courage to seek clarity on matters they deem important or to voice concerns when situations seem improper. For example, when a participant recalled a conversation with their grandmother where they expressed discomfort with a religious tradition regarding virginity. The participant openly conveyed to her grandmother that she found it strange and inappropriate. Despite knowing how her grandmother would react, the participant unapologetically inserted her opinion of what she felt was right.

I highlight this aspect because while research frequently discusses elements such as "*respeto*" and "*familismo*" within Latinx communities (Ortiz, 2020), it often overlooks the resilience of Latinx children who speak out against these deeply ingrained cultural norms when necessary. Challenging such fundamental aspects of one's culture can be daunting, yet it is sometimes essential, particularly when these norms contribute to perpetuating limiting cycles. Recognizing this resilience provides a more nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between cultural adherence and individual agency in Latinx children.

Through subtheme 4c, Importance of family conversations, words, and relationships, it was impactful to hear how much children observing relationships around them influence their sexual and romantic relationships, either positively or negatively. As we know through social

psychology and observational learning, Bandura (1985) found that people naturally gravitate toward observational learning. In observational learning, people learn by watching others and then imitate or model what they do or say (Bandura, 1985). In the current research study, participants revealed how witnessing either negative or positive relationships during their formative years influenced their behaviors by modeling those of older adults, as well as affecting them emotionally. A participant shared that observing family members in negative or toxic relationships adversely affected her personal development as a woman, leaving her feeling powerless to assert herself in similar situations. She expressed a desire for a role model who exemplifies strength and resilience in the face of adversity. Additionally, she voiced a hope that others might have access to such supportive and empowering figures in their lives, highlighting the significant impact that positive role models can have on individual empowerment and development.

This finding delves into the cultural emphasis on privacy within communities where there is a prevailing notion that family matters should remain within the family (Castillo et al., 2010; Ortiz, 2020). While privacy is highly valued in Latinx families, it is crucial to recognize that privacy does not inherently guarantee safety, nor does it imply weakness. Furthermore, speaking out or disclosing information is not necessarily a sign of disrespect. The perpetuation of certain negative messages, particularly those that discourage open communication, can instill fear in children, deterring them from speaking out against sexual or emotional abuse even into adulthood. A participant disclosed that because of her past experiences, she believes that there is importance in discussing sex and establishing a foundation for open communication and understanding because it helps children comprehend their bodies, identify inappropriate behavior, and feel confident in communicating their concerns. These findings suggest that it is

important for cultural teachings to balance the value of privacy with the need for safety and open dialogue to ensure the well-being of all family members.

Contrasting Contributions

Through the themes of Enculturation and Acculturation, it was interesting to find that a few fathers, in Subtheme 1a, Parental Involvement, were more open to speaking to their daughters about sex, love, and contraception. For example, a participant shared that in her household, her father was more willing to discuss sex, while her mother avoided the topic. She admitted feeling uncomfortable discussing sex with her mother, but found her father approachable. This finding contrasts with existing research on sex and parenting within Latinx communities. Killoren and colleagues (2022) found that fathers frequently attempt to discourage their daughters from engaging in sexual activity or avoid discussing sex altogether, under the belief that discussing sex may encourage sexual behavior. In contrast, mothers are often more approachable to daughters regarding discussions about sex, leading daughters to feel more comfortable disclosing information to their mothers rather than their fathers (Killoren et al., 2022). This underscores the importance of recognizing the unique dynamics within each family and the evolving roles parents play in educating their children about sexual health. It also points to the necessity for research to continuously update and consider these changing dynamics to provide a more comprehensive understanding of parental involvement in sex education.

Another intriguing discovery from my study pertains to the evolution of Latinas' religious and spiritual perspectives over the course of their lives, influenced by a sense of disconnection from Christianity due to traditional values, rules, and patriarchal hierarchical systems. Existing research on cultural perspectives of sex among Latinas often highlights religiosity as a significant factor influencing sex education (Rostosky et al., 2004). Rostosky et al. (2004) state

that traditional and religious views are likely to affect Latinx women more than men because women participate more regularly in worship services and report more frequently that religion is essential to them in their daily lives. However, the findings from the current study indicate that women are increasingly distancing themselves from religious teachings and traditions that contribute to feelings of inferiority or shame. While existing research often overlooks this aspect, there is a need for greater attention to how Latinas' engagement with religion evolve over time and the underlying reasons for these changes. This shift suggests a reevaluation of personal values and the impact of religious doctrines on individual self-perception and societal roles.

During the focus groups, a couple of participants shared about their mothers being teen moms or themselves being teen moms. In these discussions, they disclosed the ways in which their mothers or themselves approached conversations about sex and sexuality with their children. A notable finding was that mothers who experienced teenage pregnancies before the early 2000s typically showed little interest in discussing sex with their children, influenced by prevailing societal and cultural norms of the time. Conversely, those who became teen mothers after the early 2000s were more inclined to engage in discussions about sex and sexuality with their children. In subtheme 4a, Feminist Developmental Perspective, a participant who disclosed being a teen parent post-2000s emphasized the importance of fostering open communication about sex with her daughter, aiming to break the cycle of misunderstanding and secrets. In subtheme 2c, presence or absence of sex topics, a participant speaks of her teen mother who gave birth to her before the 2000s. The participant stated that she was never given a conversation about sex and felt completely uninformed.

This finding adds to research findings suggesting that women who report parental support often mention that mothers who had children at a younger age tend to be more open about

reproductive health and more supportive of the use of birth control (Caal et al., 2013). The current research suggests that the likelihood of teen mothers discussing sex with their children varies by generation, which encompasses individuals born and living around the same time and often sharing similar values and traditions. This observation points to a potential shift among millennial women, who appear to be advancing the conversation around sex education. Unlike previous generations, millennials may be more open and proactive in discussing sexual health, indicating an evolution in societal attitudes toward sex education within this demographic.

Connected and Consistent

Consistent with past research, acculturation has been a considerable finding that often comes up when working with Latinas living in the United States (Manago, 2015). Acculturative stress arises from intercultural contact that is brought on by postimmigration factors such as difficulties assimilating to the beliefs, values, and norms of a dominant culture and the frustration of limitations imposed by language barriers (Berry, 1997). In my study, within the theme of contextual differences (1d), a participant shared their experience of navigating sex-related topics independently as the eldest sibling in their family, lacking guidance or support. This situation caused stress but also fostered resilience through active inquiry and curiosity about unfamiliar subjects. Manago (2015) underscores the impact of acculturation on Latinas, highlighting how conflicting cultural messages can lead to anxiety and identity crises. Manago (2015) also highlights how modern Latinx culture is not static, and it is constantly changing, often progressing or regressing in views and values.

Persistent with prior research, subtheme 3a, receiving school-based sex education, addresses the limitations of current sex education in K-12 schooling. Participants reported issues such as abstinence-focused curricula, unqualified educators, and the distribution of

misinformation. One participant detailed that her initial exposure to sex education occurred in middle school but was restricted to learning about sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in a health class, often taught by gym instructors who lacked the proper qualifications. She articulated a need for more comprehensive and ongoing sexual education programs that would begin in middle school and extend through high school, aiming to provide a fuller understanding of sexual health and wellness. Comparable with research by Astle et al. (2021), most of the students described sex education in their schools as unhelpful, inadequate, and awkward. Students indicated that negative tactics about sex before marriage were used to encourage abstinence, which may come from religious, political, and patriarchal views. Students mentioned wanting videos and conversations that reflect the world they live in and discussions on what is important in today's culture (Astle et al., 2021).

Lastly, consistent with previous findings, research continues to show the significant emotional impact of words and external messages on mental health. In a study by Caal et al. (2013), participants reported that parents often perceive sexually active women as dirty, shameful, or promiscuous. This stigma has caused many Latinas to experience fear or shame regarding sex topics or when considering the exploration of a sexual relationship. As a result, these external messages have compelled women to conceal their private lives from their families and to make rash decisions in the absence of guidance from a parental figure or an older adult. (Caal et al., 2013). In the current study, a participant shared that her mother warned her that if she had sex, no one would want her afterward. The warning from the participant's mother implies that engaging in sexual activity would reduce her value or desirability, negatively influencing the participant's perception of sex and her self-image. This example underscores how words and messages from family and societal norms can have profound and lasting effects on women. The

participants shared that these messages can contribute to body image concerns, issues with self-esteem, and reduced confidence, highlighting the critical impact of the language used in familial and social contexts.

Implications

The findings identified through this study possess implications for research, theory, clinical practice, and counseling psychology.

Research and Theory

The researcher employed specific approaches and analytical methods to ensure that the participants' voices were heard and accurately represented in the study. By utilizing qualitative methodologies, feminist frameworks, and descriptive thematic analysis, the researcher aimed to capture and comprehend the diverse and interconnected identities that participants bring to the research context. This approach emphasized the nuances of identity and aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of how various identities intersect and influence participants' experiences and perspectives.

Qualitative research provided an understanding of the social, cultural, and historical contexts that shape the experiences of people of color. This approach goes beyond numerical data to explore the meanings, interpretations, and complexities of their lives within broader societal frameworks (Delgado-Romero et al., 2018). Traditional research methods have historically marginalized the voices and experiences of people of color by focusing on quantitative data (Delgado Bernal, 2020). Using qualitative methods offered a platform to challenge these dominant narratives and highlight diverse perspectives that may otherwise be overlooked. These methods often prioritize in-depth interviews or, in this case, focus groups, which enable participants to share their unique perspectives in their own words.

Doing culturally responsive focus groups with the Latinx populations was powerful in a way that collected data from a perspective that acknowledges many ways of knowing and making meaning. Culturally responsive focus groups are based on culture, history, ethnicity, and context (Rodriguez et al., 2011). In a recent article by Dr. Jori Hall, they emphasized the importance of culturally responsive focus groups to advance social justice goals by centering the culture of a community and supporting their empowerment. The article states that focus groups have a “unique format that allows for status differentials between the researcher and participants to be minimized and permits use across diverse cultural groups” (Hall et al., 2022).

It is also important to note the importance of using *pláticas* as a methodology when centering women and people of color (Dolores Bernal & Fierros, 2016). *Plática* involved conducting conversations in natural settings, such as informal gatherings, community settings, or, in the instance, the researcher's home. The aim was to capture authentic dialogues and interactions as they naturally unfold. Unlike structured interviews or surveys, *plática* offered flexibility in its approach (Dolores Bernal & Fierros, 2016). The researcher was able to adapt questions and topics based on the flow of the *Plática*. Researchers were able to pay attention to cultural norms, language use, and contextual factors that influence the conversation, allowing for a more organic exploration of themes and issues. This form of methodology also acknowledges the importance of context and cultural nuances in shaping individuals' viewpoints and behaviors (Morales et al., 2023). Future research should use *Platica* as a methodology as it underscores the importance of participant-centered research, gathers rich data that emerges from naturalistic interactions and provides opportunities for healing and resistance (Morales et al., 2023).

It is also crucial to recognize the importance of utilizing frameworks that accurately represent your population. By utilizing Chicana/Feminist and *Mujerista* frameworks, the

researcher has been able to illuminate a culturally informed feminist perspective on the experiences of Latinx women. These frameworks helped emphasize the intersection of race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality in shaping the experiences and identities of Chicana and Latina women (Isasi-Diaz, 1996; Delgado Bernal, 1998). It also challenged stereotypes and misconceptions about Latina women while affirming their cultural pride and contributions. Chicana feminism and *Mujerista* frameworks offered a transformative lens for analyzing sexuality, culture, and spirituality within Latina communities (Delago-Bernal & Elenes, 2021). It challenged dominant theological concepts that center the voices and experiences of Latina women and contributed to broader movements for justice, liberation, and inclusive sexuality and spirituality (Isasi-Diaz, 1996; Anzaldua, 2004).

Using feminist and multicultural frameworks in future studies encourages researchers to examine the intersections of gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and other social identities (Delgado Bernal & Elenes, 2021). This approach highlights the complexities of individuals' experiences and challenges monolithic explanations of social experiences (Saavedra, & Pérez, 2012). These frameworks provide tools to critique and challenge existing power structures, hierarchies, and systems of oppression. By centering marginalized voices and perspectives, researchers can uncover how power operates differently across various social groups and contexts (Morales et al., 2023). Overall, integrating feminist and multicultural frameworks into research enriches research and learning by promoting inclusivity, equity, and a deeper understanding of diverse human experiences and social dynamics (Saavedra, & Pérez, 2012).

Overall, there is a critical need for increased research involving women of color, utilizing frameworks specifically tailored to this demographic. Incorporating women of color into research ensures that studies accurately represent the diversity and intersections within the

population (Delgado Bernal & Elenes, 2021). This approach is essential for comprehending the diverse impacts of social, cultural, and economic structures across different demographic groups. Such research not only highlights the unique challenges women of color face in accessing and receiving appropriate care but also underscores their significant contributions to society.

Involving women of color in research can empower them by amplifying their voices and experiences. Women of color contribute significantly to research by bringing their distinct voices, experiences, and expertise to the forefront (Delgado Bernal, 1998). Their involvement is crucial for advancing knowledge, promoting equity, and creating positive social change. Furthermore, findings from research involving women of color can inform evidence-based policies and interventions aimed at addressing disparities in healthcare, education, and other societal domains.

Clinical Practice with Latinas and Families

The findings of this study carry significant implications for clinical practice. Firstly, participants underscore the crucial influence of how older adult relationships impact children's perceptions of social and romantic relationships. This influence extends beyond perception, significantly impacting their mental health and potentially leading to trauma, depression, anxiety, and perpetuating certain behaviors. Enhancing clinicians' understanding of children's development, particularly in the areas of socialization and observational learning, is essential for effectively working with Latinx families and children. This can help clinicians in providing interventions for parents on how observational learning can be a key part of how children learn by watching the behaviors of others.

Family therapy is also crucial in better-enhancing communication and understanding family dynamics (Papero, 1983). It is recommended that clinicians understand Family Systems

Therapy based on the work of Bowen. His theory is based on human behavior that views the family as a living system whose relationships are primarily influenced by emotion (Papero, 1983). Clinicians can use several interventions to help Latinx families better communicate with each other, these interventions include genograms, self-differentiation, triangles, and intergenerational patterns.

A genogram is a graphic of a family that includes information about history, relationships, psychology, and patterns. Therapists typically create a genogram at the start of therapy but continue to add information throughout treatment (Papero, 1983). Self-differentiation helps clients identify the emotions occurring within the family unit and note when they are taking on the emotions of other family members. This technique involves helping each family member recognize their individual emotions and identities alongside their role in the family unit (Papero, 1983). The concept of triangles refers to a situation where three people are involved in a relationship dynamic. Therapists look at these triangles to understand family problems better. They help families see these patterns and find healthier ways to interact (Papero, 1983). Lastly, intergenerational patterns are when the therapist helps identify patterns persisting between generations and helps families identify which patterns benefit them and which patterns they want to challenge and break out of (Papero, 1983).

The findings of this study imply that acculturation continues to be a stressor for Latinas in the US. Balancing two cultures can create stress and confusion, leading to identity conflicts. Latinas might struggle to find a balance between their cultural heritage and the new culture, which can cause feelings of isolation or not fully belonging to either culture. Acculturation can change family relationships. Traditional values from their culture of origin might clash with the values of the new culture, leading to intergenerational conflicts and stress within the family.

Thus, clinicians should use models such as Berry's Acculturation Model (1992). The acculturation model is a framework for understanding how individuals adapt to a new culture while maintaining aspects of their original culture. It identifies four main acculturation strategies based on two dimensions: the degree to which individuals maintain their original culture and the degree to which they participate in the new culture (Berry, 1997). By using Berry's Acculturation Model, therapists can provide culturally sensitive and personalized support to clients navigating the complexities of adapting to a new culture.

Another great tool for clinicians is the Minority Stress Model by Meyer (2003). The Minority Stress Model explains how being part of a minority group, such as racial, ethnic, sexual, or gender minorities, can cause additional stress that affects mental and physical health. Understanding the Minority Stress Model helps in recognizing the unique challenges faced by minority groups and the importance of creating supportive environments to improve their overall well-being (Meyer, 2003).

To conclude, cultural competence is crucial in practice; helping clinicians recognize the values, beliefs, customs, and behaviors of people from different cultural groups creates trust and mutual understanding (Cross, 1989). Therefore, utilizing culturally responsive intakes can benefit both clinicians and clients by facilitating the disclosure of information in a manner that accurately reflects the clients' experiences and emotions (Cross, 1989).

Specifically, when working with Latinx clients, it is crucial to assess their proficiency in English and their comfort level with the language (Santiago-Rivera, et al., 2009). Determining the need for a translator or a clinician fluent in their native language is essential for effective communication. Additionally, it is important to frame questions in a way that elicits comprehensive and nuanced information. For instance, rather than simply asking about their

religious denomination, clinicians should delve deeper to understand their actual relationship with religion. Moreover, within the context of research findings, it is vital to inquire about clients' sexual activity and not assume that marital status alone provides adequate information about their sex life. Assuming that an unmarried individual is not sexually active can lead to misunderstandings and inaccurate client representations. Such assumptions may introduce judgment and biases, potentially causing therapeutic ruptures (Sue, 1998). Thus, a culturally responsive approach ensures an accurate and respectful understanding of clients' experiences (Cross, 1989).

Counseling Psychologist Call to Action

The findings of this study imply the importance of deepening social justice work in counseling psychology. This encompasses advocacy, training, multiculturalism, and bilingual work.

In general, advocacy in counseling psychology, particularly with the Latinx population, is crucial for several reasons. Latinx populations often face cultural and language barriers that can impede their access to mental health services (Santiago-Rivera, et al., 2009). Advocacy helps to break down these barriers by promoting culturally competent practices and policies that are sensitive to the unique needs of Latinx clients. We as mental health providers also need to be aware of the mental health stigma that is prevalent in many Latinx communities. Advocacy plays a role in education and outreach to reduce stigma, encouraging individuals to seek help without fear of judgment or discrimination. Providing psychoeducation while integrating holistic and traditional healing practices that consider the physical, emotional, spiritual, and social aspects of well-being can help Latinx families feel more comfortable in these spaces.

Advocacy for reproductive health care is particularly essential for Latina populations. Different cultures have varying beliefs and taboos surrounding reproductive health and sexuality. In some Latina cultures, discussing topics related to reproductive health, including pap smears, may be considered taboo or private (Guarini, 2011). This can affect women's willingness to undergo screenings. Pap smears involve inserting a speculum into the vagina to collect cells from the cervix, which can cause discomfort or mild pain for some women (Center for Reproductive Rights, 2023). Due to Latinx cultural values of being private and avoiding sex conversations, doing a procedure that is so invasive from a total stranger can contribute to feelings of unease or reluctance to undergo Pap smears (Brindis and colleagues, 1995). Overall, fear of being judged can make it uncomfortable for women to discuss their concerns or seek preventive care like pap smears. Due to these findings, it is important that counselors advocate for and discuss health services with their clients to prevent adverse reproductive health outcomes

Due to participants reporting issues such as abstinence-focused curricula, unqualified educators, and the distribution of misinformation, it is crucial that counselors are provided training on reproductive health, sex, and sexuality. Training in sex education and reproductive health equips counselors with the knowledge and skills necessary to address these topics competently and confidently. This ensures that they can provide accurate information and appropriate guidance to clients. Well-trained counselors can help clients make informed decisions regarding their sexual and reproductive health. By providing comprehensive and accurate information, counselors empower clients to understand their options and make choices that align with their values and needs. Training can also prepare counselors to work with diverse populations, understanding the unique cultural, social, and personal factors that influence clients' sexual and reproductive health. This cultural competence is critical in providing respectful and

effective care to people of color. Lastly, more than 90% of abusers are people children know, love, and trust (ICPYAS, 2022). Research says that 30-40% of victims are abused by a family member (ICPYAS, 2022). Therefore, it is crucial that counselors have training in sexual and reproductive health to feel better equipped to support survivors of sexual trauma or violence. They can provide informed, compassionate care and connect clients with appropriate resources and support services.

While multicultural training for counselors is crucial, delving deeper into this training to include aspects of religion and spirituality can significantly enhance their ability to address the integral role these elements often play in clients' lives. The study's findings indicate that women are increasingly distancing themselves from religious teachings and traditions that contribute to feelings of inferiority or shame. Findings also indicate that women are increasingly gravitating towards spirituality or different denominations that better represent or fulfill their needs. Therefore, it is important for counselors to enhance their training to better understand the diverse beliefs and practices of their clients.

Training allows counselors to integrate religious and spiritual concepts into therapeutic interventions when appropriate. This can make counseling more effective for clients who view their spirituality as a core part of their identity and coping mechanisms. Education in religion and spirituality helps counselors avoid biases and misconceptions, reducing stigma and promoting a more inclusive approach to counseling. This fosters an environment where clients feel their beliefs are respected and understood. It also enhances their ability to build trust, address existential concerns, reduce stigma, and support clients' coping strategies and overall well-being. By integrating this into their practice, counselors can better serve the diverse and multifaceted needs of their clients.

The importance of bilingual research and providers is clear. Although this study was conducted in English, it also allowed conversations in Spanish so that participants could fully express themselves. Bilingual research ensures that data collection includes participants who speak languages other than the dominant language. This inclusivity leads to more comprehensive and representative data, capturing the experiences and perspectives of diverse populations. Bilingual research also allows researchers to consider cultural nuances and context-specific factors that might affect the study outcomes. This leads to findings that are more culturally relevant and applicable to different linguistic groups.

There is also a need for bilingual providers and counselors. Bilingual counselors can bridge language barriers, making mental health services more accessible to non-English speaking or limited English proficiency clients (Santiago-Rivera et al., 2009). This ensures that a broader population can receive the support they need. Clients are also more likely to feel comfortable and build trust with counselors who speak their native language. This can enhance the therapeutic relationship, encourage open communication, and improve client engagement and retention in therapy (Santiago-Rivera et al., 2009). Overall, bilingual research and counselors are essential for providing accessible, culturally competent, and effective mental health services. They enhance communication, build trust, ensure accurate assessments, and support diverse populations, promoting equity and inclusion in mental health care (Santiago-Rivera et al., 2009). By addressing the unique needs of non-English speaking clients, bilingual professionals contribute significantly to the overall well-being and mental health of diverse communities.

Limitations

Qualitative focus groups are invaluable for acquiring profound insights, yet they do present various limitations. During my experience conducting two in-person focus groups post-

COVID-19, it became apparent that some participants might feel uneasy attending sessions in unfamiliar, potentially unsafe locations. Moreover, conducting these focus groups in the researcher's home could create a perception of informality or lack of a professional setting, possibly hindering participants from thoroughly engaging and sharing their experiences.

The initial focus group took place at my residence, attended by participants who were older and had children. To accommodate those with children, my mother provided childcare in a separate room. We employed sound machines to uphold confidentiality and ensure a distraction-free environment throughout the session. Unfortunately, due to a child crying towards the end, the focus group concluded 5 minutes earlier than scheduled, limiting the opportunity to gather additional information during that time. Fortunately, the *Platica* methodology employed in the study allowed participants the flexibility to attend to their children without feeling that they compromised the discussion, as it is culturally sensitive to such occurrences.

The last focus group also took place at the researchers' residence one month later, during a difficult political time for the Latinx population in Athens, Georgia. On February 22nd of 2024, a woman was killed in Athens, Georgia, by a Venezuelan man who was identified by authorities as undocumented (Williams et al., 2024). This incident ignited political unrest regarding undocumented immigration to the United States, with right-wing politicians and individuals exploiting the perpetrator's undocumented status for political advantage. Consequently, many in the community faced racism, verbal abuse, and bullying, exacerbating feelings of anger, fear, and stress among the Latinx population. These broader societal tensions also affected participants' experiences and mindsets during my study. Given the unstructured nature of the *platica* methodology, which encourages organic discussion, I provided space for participants to address the current societal issues. It was vital for me to express solidarity and acknowledge the emotions

of hurt, anger, and pain that they were experiencing. As a Latina, I was also emotionally affected by this tragic event. Given that *platica* encourages openness and honesty, it was important for me to create a safe space by addressing these emotions, both for myself and the participants. This approach facilitated a shared expression of concerns and sadness among participants. Once we collectively felt ready, we were able to refocus on the research objectives of the focus groups.

Focus groups typically involve a small number of participants, often selected based on specific criteria. Because most of the participants are of Mexican descent, the findings may be limited due to Latinx culture being heterogeneous. Additionally, it is noteworthy that a significant proportion of participants were born in the United States, potentially shaping perspectives and values among Latinas that may differ from those born in Latin American countries.

Due to the nature of the topic being discussed, I would also like to point out that speaking about can feel intrusive, awkward, and uncomfortable. This may cause possible shyness influencing participant responses. Some individuals may dominate the discussion, while others might be more reserved or influenced by peer pressure. This can lead to specific perspectives being overrepresented or silenced. Additionally, I would like to acknowledge my prior acquaintance with some participants through clinical settings or student organizations, which may also impact their responses. Participants might feel inclined to provide socially acceptable or desirable responses rather than expressing their genuine opinions or experiences, particularly in the presence of myself as the researcher.

Lastly, despite efforts to establish a secure and confidential environment, focus groups inherently involve multiple participants, each with their own discretion regarding the information

shared. Despite signing confidentiality agreements, researchers cannot ensure that participants will uniformly uphold the privacy of group discussions within and beyond the designated session

Future Directions

The current study examined Latina's sex education experiences through various sources, including school education, parental conversations, social interactions, and the influence of culture and religion on topics of sex and sexuality. The findings highlight the significant impact of culture and caregivers on Latina learning experiences in these areas. It is notable that women's perspectives evolve over generations, reflecting changing attitudes toward sex and sexuality. Participants in this study demonstrated open-mindedness regarding these topics, acknowledging both positive and negative influences of parental culture and religion on their experiences.

However, it is important to note that the participants in this study were not as religious as some other women might be. Future research should consider exploring these variables among women who are more religious and conservative in their beliefs. This approach could provide a deeper understanding of the religious aspects of sex and sexuality among Latinas who are more actively involved in Christianity or other religious practices.

This study recommends that future research involving Latinx populations, particularly Latinx women, should employ culturally responsive focus groups to ensure that diverse perspectives are accurately represented and understood. Culturally sensitive approaches foster trust between researchers and participants, resulting in more open and honest communication. Participants are more likely to engage and remain involved in research that acknowledges and respects their cultural backgrounds.

This is especially important in interdisciplinary fields such as sociology, counseling, health psychology, and reproductive health, which often collaborate to provide optimal care for

women. Focus groups with diverse participants can help identify health disparities and the specific needs of different population groups. They are valuable for evaluating the effectiveness of health programs and interventions, providing qualitative data on outcomes and experiences.

In summary, culturally responsive focus groups are a vital tool in interdisciplinary settings for understanding patient experiences, improving care quality, addressing health disparities, and supporting research. They provide a platform for participants to share their perspectives, leading to more effective research.

Lastly, research on sexual health is critically important, particularly because it addresses a topic that is often considered taboo or uncomfortable for many people to discuss openly. Research dispels myths and misconceptions about sex and sexuality, providing accurate information. It helps people make informed decisions about their sexual health, relationships, and reproductive choices. Research can empower individuals to understand and take control of their sexual health and well-being. It is also a way to promote healthy, consensual relationships by providing knowledge and tools for communication and consent. In conclusion, sexual health research is vital because it addresses critical aspects of reproductive health, education, equity among people of color, and individual well-being that are often neglected due to discomfort or stigma. By fostering open dialogue and informed practices, this research can lead to healthier communities and more comprehensive healthcare systems.

Reflecting Subjectivity

As I reflect on the study as a whole, I have realized that my experiences as a Latina navigating the topic of sex are quite similar to those of other women. This similarity made it challenging for me to analyze the data objectively. Fortunately, I had the support of a research

team and an advisory board, who assisted me in developing questions that were inclusive and easily understandable for participants unfamiliar with research terminology.

Additionally, my own negative experiences with this topic sometimes led me to view the data through a deficit lens. Once again, the research team played a crucial role in helping me adopt a more balanced perspective when interpreting the data. Their input was invaluable in ensuring a comprehensive and unbiased analysis.

I also recognized the difficulty of having these conversations due to the discomfort they often evoke. It can be challenging to discuss topics related to sex, and societal norms frequently induce feelings of awkwardness or the impulse to giggle when using terms such as "vagina." These reactions underscore the pervasive influence of societal attitudes on our comfort levels by discussing sexual health openly and candidly.

Conducting this study made me realize how challenging it can be for parents to discuss sex with their children, especially if their own parents never addressed the topic with them. This situation often places them in the position of being the first generation to navigate these difficult conversations. Cultural and religious influences, along with the prevailing culture of silence, add further complexity, requiring them to break multiple cycles in their lives. This study has deepened my appreciation for my parents and the decisions they made based on what they believed was right at the time. As an adult, researcher of color, and therapist of color, I am now even more committed to doing better for my community and breaking these cycles with my own children, nieces, and nephews.

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APPENDIX A

Screening Questionnaire

This questionnaire is verbally administered during the initial phone call. Participants are to be screened to ensure they meet the criteria.

1. Do you identify as female?
2. Do you identify as Latina?
3. Were you raised in a Christian household?
4. Are you between the ages of 21 and 40?
5. Are you willing to discuss information on sex, sexuality, and bodies?

APPENDIX B.

Demographic Questionnaire

Participant Name:

1. Age:
2. Gender:
3. Do you speak Spanish? If so, fluency level
4. Do you speak English? If so, fluency level
5. Do you identify as Latina?
6. Where were your parents born?
7. Where were you born? Where were you raised? (City/Region, country)
8. What generation do you identify with? (first, second, third e.g.)

Religion:

9. What Christian denomination were you raised in?
10. What religion do you identify with now? If you do not identify with any, please specify.
11. How strong would you say your faith is today? If not strong or views have changed, please elaborate.

Sex:

12. Did you receive school-based sex education? If so, where and at what age?
13. Did your parents speak to you about sex? If so, at what age?
14. Is there something that is off limits for you when discussing sex and sexuality? If so, please elaborate.

APPENDIX C.

Plática Guide

This is to be used as a tool to facilitate conversation. Consider this a “loose” semi-structured conversation. Alternative questions are available to facilitate discussion.

- A) How did traditional Latinx cultural factors influence conversations around sex?
1. What is your experience with having conversations about sex?
 - i. Who did you feel comfortable talking with?
 - ii. Who did you not feel comfortable talking with?
 2. Are you closely connected to your culture? Why or Why not?
 3. How does your culture describe or react to topics about sex?
 4. How was sex discussed within your Latinx household?
 - i. How was sex viewed within your household growing up?
 5. What are some of the ways your religion influenced your choices around sex?
 - i. Tell me about a time your religion influenced your thoughts about sex?
 6. How often did you have conversations about sexual health with your parents?
 - i. Friends?
 - ii. Church?
 7. Are there specific sayings, phrases, or passages that you remember to this day about the decision to have sex or not?
 8. What are stigmas about sex that you held or that your parents hold?
 9. If this applies to you, in what ways was religion used as a mediator for abstinence or safer sex?
 10. Were you ever told by someone in your family that you couldn't date?
 - i. How did this change as you got older? (value of marriage as an adult) (shame as an adolescent).
 11. Were you ever told by someone in your family that a part of your body was unflattering?
 - i. How has that affected your relationship with sex or with your body?
 12. What are the expectations of pregnancies? What were the conversations? How has that changed overtime?
- B) How did you learn about sex?
1. How were the conversations you had with friends or family about sex similar or different to your brothers or male counterparts?
 2. How did you learn about contraceptives? What messages did you receive about birth control? (tampons, pap smears)
 3. When was the first time you had a conversation with other people about “sex”? Describe further.

- i. Was anyone with you, how did you feel, what did you learn? What did that mean to you?
4. Has anyone spoken with you or had conversations with you regarding healthy relationships or boundaries when you were younger, if so explain.
- C) What kind of sex education did you receive and what kind of sex education would you have liked?
 1. In what ways did conversations or lack of conversations about sex impact your sexual identity?
 2. What do you wish you would have known about sex or sexuality that no one told you?
 3. What do you feel are the impacts of a lack of sex education, either from parents or school systems?
 4. Have you ever developed different conceptualizations/feelings about sex throughout your life? If so, what are they? What made you change your opinion?
 5. Looking back, do you agree with the education that you received? If not, what about it do you not agree with? Why?
 - i. Was there anything salient that impacted you? What type of impact?
 - ii. Have you ever had concerns or doubts about the education you received?
- D) What can be done to improve sex education for the next generation of Latinas?
 1. How could Latinx parents better support their children when it comes to conversations about sex and sexual health?
 2. Knowing what you do now, how would you talk to your children or adolescents about sex?
 3. Would you speak to your kids differently than your parents did with you about sex?
 4. What kind of information regarding sex would you tell your children?
 - i. At what age would you feel comfortable talking with your children, nieces, or nephews about sex?
 5. What was the most helpful advice, messages, or experiences on the topic of sex or sexuality you received
 6. Do you think sex education should be taught in school? Or should this be left to parents? Explain your rationale