Chapter 2

"Why Don't All Parents Talk about This Stuff"

Informational, Emotional, and Cultural Barriers to Meaningful Parent-Child Conversations about Sex

Amanda Holman

My five-year-old son Deacon's superpower is asking thoughtful questions. And, most *of the time I have a thoughtful answer. He and I have long conversations on a wide variety of topics, some of which fall into categories that many families struggle to discuss or avoid all together. He knows that not all families talk about the things we talk about. One evening, Deacon and I snuggled on the couch to read a pile of his favorite books, and as I started to read the book "It's so Amazing! A Book about Eggs, Sperm, Birth, Babies, and Families" (Harris & Emberley, 2014), his curious and sweet voice asked, "Mommy, why don't all parents talk about this stuff? "That's a great question," and I go on to explain that topics around bodies, touch, and how babies are made can be hard for families to talk about, especially as the conversations become more detailed; sometimes parents feel nervous, uncomfortable, or unsure of what to say, so they don't say much. "Huh, that's too bad" he says. "Yeah, it is too bad," I reply, as I pick up from where we left off in the book. After Deacon went to bed that night I thought more about his question—and my answer. As a family communication scholar who studies parent-child communication about sex-related topics, I should have a better answer for him. I know he is only five-year-old, but what are the barriers that prevent families, including my own, from engaging in more comprehensive and meaningful conversations with their children? I then did what any researcher and mom would do, I decided to search for the answer.*

Over the past fifteen years of researching family conversations about sex-related topics, I have come to understand a lot about the complex nature of these conversations. Research has found that parents want the best for their children when it comes to sex-related topics and want to help their children navigate puberty, healthy relationships, and sexuality (Jaccard et al., 2000; Flores & Barroso, 2017); however, parents often avoid these topics out of discomfort, lack of knowledge, and fear of failure (Jerman & Constantine, 2010; Pariera, 2016). Parents often report being unsure of what to say and when to have conversations about sex (Elliott, 2012; Jerman & Constantine, 2010) and worry that providing too much information will give the perception that sex during adolescence is acceptable (Jaccard et al., 2000). Parents who report having conversations note that many are narrow in scope, infrequent, and occur in later adolescence, often missing the opportunity to normalize conversations about sex-related topics in the family (Flores & Barroso, 2017).

Parents often perceive that their children do not want detailed sex-related conversations with them (Jaccard et al., 2000; Jerman & Constantine, 2010). However, researchers have found that adolescents do want their parents to engage in conversations about sex-related topics, especially when these conversations are open, honest, and thoughtful, and cover a variety of sex-related topics (Holman & Koenig Kellas, 2018; Pariera & Brody, 2017). In fact, comprehensive conversations, or "detailed conversations that cover a range of topics including relationships, safety, and emotions," are perceived by adolescents as more effective in helping them make sense of sexual relationships and associated risks than those conversations that are one-dimensional (Holman & Koenig Kellas, 2018, p. 373).

Considering that parents are the primary source from which children develop their knowledge and attitudes about sex (Miller, 2002), and that parent-child communication is a significant factor in delaying adolescents first sexual encounter and decreasing risky sexual behavior (e.g., unprotected sex; Holman & Koenig Kellas, 2015; Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2012). It is relevant to further explore the barriers parents perceive for engaging in open and comprehensive conversations about sex-related topics with their children.

Reasons why parents fail to engage in sex-related conversations with their children is well established. In a foundational study, Ram (1975) found four barriers to parent-child communication about birth control: (a) children are too young for information, (b) parents do not know what to say, (c) parents' lack of sexual knowledge, and (d) parents lack effort in talking with children. Jerman and colleagues (2000) investigated African American adolescents and their mothers' reservations about conversations around sex and birth control. They found mothers were most anxious about embarrassing their adolescents and lacking answers to questions. More recent research has suggested that parents' perception of their children being too young and disinterested in their

parents' opinions about sex were the two most salient roadblocks to conversations (Pariera, 2016). In fact, Pariara noted, "parents think their children are too young to talk about sex, but as the child gets older that barrier is replaced by a perception that their child does not want to hear what they have to say" (p. 281). Taken together, these findings provide valuable insights to reservations parents have in discussing sex-related topics with their children.

Although much research has established general barriers to comprehensive family communication about sex, the study presented in this chapter advances our understanding of why parents avoid *in-depth* conversations. Many parents report feeling comfortable with basic and scripted conversations about sex, but often avoid the more comprehensive and supportive conversations that include characteristics of detail, focus, active listening, two-way conversation, empathy, person-centeredness, and validation (Burleson, 1983; Jones et al., 2016) with their children. Even in conversations with my son, my impulse is to engage in surface-level conversations rather than a more in-depth one. Therefore, I posed the following question: *What are the barriers parents provide for avoiding comprehensive conversations about sex-related topics with their children?*

METHODS

To understand parents' realities and experiences surrounding sex-related conversations, or lack of conversations, I adopted Charmaz's (2014) constructivist grounded theory approach. The constructivist approach explores "*how*—and sometimes *why*—participants construct meanings and actions in specific situations" and acknowledges the participants' contextual beliefs are situated in time, space, positions, and interactions (Charmaz, 2014, p. 239). Thus, the themes that emerge in their shared experiences represent the theoretical viewpoints of these parents.

Participants

Following approval from the university's institutional review board (IRB), I engaged in a purposeful sample (Tracy, 2013) to solicit parent participants, with the goal of achieving a sample that roughly reflected the ethnic, racial, educational, and religious diversity of the local area. Flyers were posted at local community organizations, libraries, clinics, and shops, as well as shared via a local organization's email list-serve and social media sites in Omaha and Lincoln, Nebraska. To participate, individuals needed to be at least nineteen years of age, a parent or legal guardian of at least one child between the ages of eight and eighteen years old, and currently living in the state of Nebraska.

A total of 78 parents/guardians (55 women and 23 men) ranging in age from 29 to 70 years of age ($M = 42.56$, $SD = 7.75$) took part in one of the 12 focus groups. Most participants described themselves as the parent ($n = 74$, 94.9%; biological or legal), with a few participants identifying as grandparents ($n = 4$, 5.15%) with legal guardianship. Sixty participants (76.9%) were married, ten (12.8%) divorced, and eight (10.3%) single (never married). Participants number of children ranged from one to six ($M = 2.8$, $SD = 3.64$). With respect to ethnicity, thirty-nine (50%) identified as white/non-Hispanic, seventeen (21.8%) as Black/African American, fifteen (19.2%) as Hispanic/Latino/a, four (5.1%) as multiracial (Black and white), two (2.6%) as Asian, and one (1.3%) as American Indian. Participants' sexual orientation included heterosexual ($n = 74$, 94.9%), gay/lesbian ($n = 3$, 3.8%), and bisexual ($n = 1$, 1.3%). Participants also provided their religious and educational background, which was mostly Christian ($n = 64$, 83%) and educated (55.2% having four-year college degrees or advanced education).

Procedure

The twelve focus groups were conducted over a six month time period and ranged from four to nine people per group. The focus groups included eight mother and father mixed groups, two with mothers only, and two with fathers only. Ten of the focus groups were conducted in English ($n = 66$, 47 mothers, 19 fathers), and two focus groups were done in Spanish ($n = 12$, 8 mothers, 4 fathers) due to the large population of Latino/as in urban Nebraska.

Focus groups were conducted in private meeting rooms at local universities, libraries, and coffee-shops. Upon arrival, parents filled out an online consent form and a demographic questionnaire. After completing the demographic survey, I provided time for participants to talk with each other and get comfortable. I served as the focus group moderator and two trained research students took notes. In the Spanish-speaking focus groups a professional translator was present and translated all of the questions and participants' responses and discussion. The online demographic survey and consent form were also translated from English to Spanish for those focus groups.

I used a semi-structured interview protocol (Tracy, 2013) with open-ended questions to elicit participants' responses and probes to generate discussion. The interview questions prompted participants to share their experiences, struggles, goals, and beliefs surrounding sex-related communication in the family. Due to the research that suggests parents often only engage in surface-level conversations with their children (Holman & Koenig Kellas, 2018), one of the main questions I asked was, "*What are some reasons you may avoid more in-depth or comprehensive conversations with your child/children about sex-related topics? Comprehensive conversations meaning those conversations that cover multiple topics related to sex.*"

At the end of each session, the participants had an opportunity to ask questions and each received a $50 Target gift card for their participation. Focus groups lengths ranged from 90 minutes to almost 3 hours ($M = 2$ hours 18 minutes) and were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim, and all participants were assigned a pseudonym.

Data Analyses

To analyze the focus group data, I read each transcription to gain familiarity with the data, identifying noteworthy themes relevant to the current study's research question. Following Charmaz's (2014) guide for establishing grounded theory, I carefully read each transcript and completed one memo per transcript to summarize the data, generate initial themes, and highlight connections from previous transcripts (Charmaz, 2014). Then I constructed higher-level themes (i.e., supra-themes) and themes using Owen's (1984) criteria of repetition, forcefulness, and recurrence, paying particular attention to participants' thoughts on struggles or barriers they perceive in sex-related communication with children. I then engaged in constant comparison analysis (Charmaz, 2014) and modified the supra-themes and themes, when necessary, confirming the themes accurately represented the participants' experiences.

At this point, I engaged in data conferencing, a method of peer verification (Braithwaite et al., 2017). I met with two scholars versed in qualitative approaches and discussed findings, examples, and verified the themes were reflective of participants' experiences. In addition, I conducted member-checking through emailing several participants a brief overview of the initial supra-themes and themes. Based on their feedback, I revisited the transcripts and found more examples that illuminated the multidimensional barriers parents' experience.

FINDINGS

The goal of this project was to understand why parents avoid having meaningful conversations about sex-related topics with their children. Three supra-themes of parents' perceived reasons emerged from the data: *informational*, *emotional*, and *cultural*. In what follows, I explain the three supra-themes, detail the themes that emerged within, and provide exemplars.

Informational

Participants overwhelmingly expressed that their avoidance of sex-related conversations stemmed from a lack of information and understanding. Within this supra-theme, two distinct themes were present: *lack of conversations with own parents* and *lack of accurate information.*

Lack of Conversations with Own Parents

In the theme of *lack of conversations with own parents*, participants described that they grew up in families who were not comfortable talking about sex, providing little to no framework for holding sex-related conversations. For example, Robert expressed, "In my Hispanic community our parents and grandparents didn't really teach us about sex because it's shameful to mention. I respect my parents, but I feel their lack of conversations sets me up for doubting myself" (F.G. #10). Another parent, Candice, talked about her lack of conversation in this way:

> I think it's hard to talk to your kids if your parents didn't talk to you about it. Like, I don't know, my mother is pretty liberal about a lot of stuff, but we did not have a sex talk, at all. EVER [laughs], that I remember having. I mean ever. I don't know, I guess I was lucky that I just didn't have sex right away. . . . I was 22 when I had my first baby. But there were no conversations at all, so this seems to keep me from talking to my kids. Even though I know I should. (F.G. #1)

For these participants, the lack of socialization around sex-related information appears to create a barrier in conversations about sex with their own children. As these participants try to make sense of why they avoid more in-depth and meaningful conversations, many of them reflect on the lack of familiarity or exposure to these types of conversations growing up. One mother, Jodi, even questions how her struggle with talking to her children may be different if her parents had talked with her. She offered, "I would be curious to know if my parents had been able to talk to me, I would find these conversations less intimidating? What your parents say or don't say really shapes you" (F.G. #5). These participants' comments acknowledge and reinforce that parents play an important role in the acceptance and socialization of sex-related topics.

Lack of Accurate Information

In addition to a lack of conversations with their own parents, the theme *lack of accurate information* as a perceived barrier emerged in almost all of the focus groups. In this theme, participants emphasized the difficulty in finding

credible and comprehensive educational resources to help navigate sex-related conversations, especially related to detailed conversations about intimate relationships, sexuality, birth control, and consent. Rosa explained, "It's just hard for me to find information to help me know what to say. Information beyond abstinence talk" (F.G. #10). Brooke echoed similar sentiments: "I've looked online for information and it just seems too basic. I want stuff that covers the hard stuff, like um, consent, masturbation, sexting" (F.G. #8). Many participants discussed their struggle of wanting to have more in-depth conversations, but lacking helpful resources. Mila expressed this struggle by saying, "I want to talk to them about sex, but I can't find information that seems accurate or realistic. And yeah, then I get all these mixed messages about what is best so I just default to not saying much" (F.G. #1). Anthony responded to this, saying:

> I struggle too. . . . My son is 12 and my girls don't ask me what my son is asking me at 12. My son is asking me a lot of things and I have a tough time finding helpful books or websites. Kids get sex ed in school, if only parents had a class. I bet we would avoid these talks less [laughs]. (F.G. #1)

Although these parents seem comfortable talking to their children about some sex-related topics, it appears that the lack of accurate, consistent, and realistic information hinders more meaningful conversations with their children.

Emotional

There were many emotional responses and reasons participants discussed for avoiding sex-related conversations. Within this supra-theme, three major emotional themes were present: *fear*, *uncertainty*, and *discomfort*.

Fear

The theme of *fear* emerged in numerous participant discussions. Participants struggled with apprehension and fear surrounding talking to their children about sex-related topics—especially contraception—as it may suggest approval of sexual activity. Camila expressed, "I always have this fear that if I talk to my kids about sex I'm telling them it's okay to do it" (F.G. #1). Another parent, Luca, mentioned, "In our family we strongly discourage premarital sex. We also have high rates of teen pregnancies in our community. I know I should provide some preventative facts and at the same time fear that will just encourage it" (F.G. #12). Erin voiced a similar fear:

> My mom would always say, I don't want you having sex, but if you're going to have it, you need to be on birth control. Or to my brother, you need to take these

condoms. They always said we don't want you doing it, but if you do it, this is what you need to do. It was confusing. (F.G. #4)

For these participants, it was apparent that they feared educating their children about sex-related topics may normalize sex and promote sexual curiosity or experimentation. Other parents mentioned a fear of "destroying their [children's] innocence" (F.G. #9, Tara; #11, Nate). In the focus groups, parents discussed the desire to preserve their children's innocence and that talking about bodies, puberty, and other sex-related topics seems to taint their pureness. For example, Allison mentioned, "My kids are 6 and 9 and I really haven't talked to them about anything related to sex. I know I should. . . . They are just kids and I worry by exposing them to sex stuff I'll take away their innocence" (F.G. #2). Brenda elaborated on this in her group as she stated:

I think some of the barrier for me is I don't want to traumatize my kids. My friends are talking to their kids about bad touch versus good touch, and um the negative side of sex. I mean, I think this is a good idea, but I also worry that it may create fear and confusion in kids about relationships. (F.G. #4)

Uncertainty

In the theme of *uncertainty*, participants described feeling apprehensive and unsure of what sex-related topics to discuss, what age to start the conversation, or how to respond to questions. The uncertainty they expressed seemed to act as a barrier to more detailed or informative conversations. For example, Abby simply stated, "I'm unsure of what to say about sex, um so we don't talk about it" (F.G. #9). Another mother, Alexa expressed, "Anytime my daughter brings up questions about sex I instantly get unsure of what to say and change the subject" (F.G. #12).

Some participants noted that the uncertainty of how their children would react to the conversations often kept them from having sex-related conversations. Heather shared her struggle with talking to her older children about sex because of what they may or may not already know. She expressed, "I don't have a clue what they know about sex besides the 'you're too young for sex speech' we give them. I want to talk with them more, but I don't know how they will react. Is it even worth the effort?" (F.G. #3). Grace agreed with Heather as she discussed her derailed attempt to talk to her son about sexting based on his initial reaction. She expressed her uncertainty this way:

A few of my friends were having conversations with their teens about sexting. I felt I should do it too. Right? When I started asking him if he knew what sexting was? If his friends were doing it? He seemed completely surprised by my questions. I suddenly became unsure and basically ended the conversation with, "okay, well don't do it." (F.G. #3)

Discomfort

Along with fear and uncertainty, the theme of *discomfort* emerged in some of the discussions. Participants noted that the shared embarrassment, anxiety, and awkwardness between parents and children serve as an obstacle to sex-related conversations. Molly emphasized this theme by saying, "You're just busy. When you do find time to have a conversation you know your kids are going to be completely uncomfortable with it, which makes you feel uncomfortable with it so you just stop making time for it" (F.G. #4). Jack also expressed his discomfort in sexual conversations as a barrier this way:

It's kind of an awkward topic, it's something that you discuss with your partner, but to discuss it with your kids is different. Um, it's two different conversations. Anytime I try to start a conversation related to dating or sex, I'm not sure if my kids are more uncomfortable talking about it or if I am. I mean, I think we both are a little bit, you know. (F.G. #5)

Andrea related to Jack's comment and added:

I agree. I can't think of the name of the class, your everyday living class or something like that. And at the beginning of the year parents have to sign some paper that it's okay for them to be part of sex education curriculum in that class. I signed it and thought that maybe him learning about it at school would open up the conversation at home? So I'd ask him about the class and he was open to talking about it, but then I just got embarrassed when he asked questions. (F.G. #5)

Clearly multiple emotional factors hindered parents from more open and honest sex-related discussions in the family.

Cultural

Participants described cultural beliefs and attitudes as factors to avoiding meaningful conversations about sex with their children. Within this supra-theme, there were three themes: *gender*, *religion*, and *generational*.

Gender

In the theme of *gender*, participants explained how their own gender and the gender(s) of their children were significant factors in engaging in or

avoiding sex-related conversations. Parents described how opposite gender or assigned-sex parental-child relationships often created a barrier due to differing body parts and experiences. For example, Lauren acknowledged that she is comfortable explaining puberty and body changes to her daughters, but completely avoids the topics with her son. She said, "It's because he's a boy, you know" (F.G. #5). In another focus group, Jade expressed, "I can talk to both my son and daughter about body stuff, but when it gets to the, you know, sex relationship details I'm not sure I'm up for that with my son" (F.G. #9). Robert also expressed his struggle with gender differences and conversations about sex:

> It is very important to talk to my kids about it, but it is very difficult. In my case, probably for a dad, it is easier to talk if it's a boy. Sometimes I also feel the sex talk is more of a mother's thing or she will do it better than me. . . . Even a simple thing like my daughter's got her period and I asked my wife about it and she said, "Oh, that happened a long time ago" and it just confirmed that it wasn't my place. (F.G. #10)

In addition, in a focus groups with only fathers, many participants expressed the concern that having comprehensive conversations with their daughters about puberty, masturbation, intimate relationships, or sex may be perceived as troubling, as compared to mothers holding the same conversations. For example, Greg expressed, "With my daughter, she's 8, I want to help her understand puberty and stuff. But anytime she asks questions about her body I tell her to ask her mom. I feel like it's not my place as a guy" (F.G. #7). Tim agreed with Greg and said:

> I think there's definitely a stigma or creepy factor about men having the conversation with a girl where there's gonna be, is there something going on here? That seems inappropriate. Even if it is your daughter, you know, people's minds instantly go to the wrong place. You know, cause you hear the talks about grooming, okay, is that conversation really grooming or are you really educating? (F.G. #7).

Greg further discussed gender as a barrier as he talked about outsiders perceptions. He noted, "yeah, what if she went to school, and they were talking about it in health class . . . and they ask, 'where'd you learn this?' 'Well, my dad told me.' Is that teacher gonna run down to the counselor's office and alert them?" (F.G. #7). Consequently, it was evident that while parents acknowledged that talking about sex-related topics is uncomfortable to begin with, they found gender differences between them and their children to be a strong barrier to eloquent conversations.

Religion

The theme of *religion* emerged throughout several of the focus groups. Although only a few parents perceived fear-based religious messages about sex and sexuality as most effective with their children (e.g., "sex is a sin before marriage"), many parents found their religious upbringing, traditions, and beliefs to complicate efforts to have more in-depth conversations about sexual health, consent, and contraception. Amelia noted, "I think many of us respect our religious upbringing and are also well aware of the rates of teen pregnancies in our [Hispanic] communities . . . sometimes I feel my faith is keeping me from reality" (F.G. #10). Cruz agreed with Amelia and added, "In school, they talk about values and religion, plus at home, so I thought because of all of that she was in good hands . . . but, at 17 my daughter got pregnant . . . in the end I shouldn't have relied on just religion" (F.G. #10). In another focus group, Erica described her struggle with religion this way:

> I think religion can hinder us from having good conversations around consent, pleasure, and um safety. Many of our religious leaders seem to only talk about sexual pureness. I'm a woman of faith. . . . I want to talk to my daughter about consent, being safe, and what is good about sex. Then that stupid catholic guilt stops me. (F.G. #5)

For these parents, engaging in conversations that go beyond religious-based messages or values meant abandoning their religious purity and principles. In this way, their religious ideologies became a barrier to more in-depth conversations about sexual relationships and safety with their children. For more insight on Lantinx familial communicative experiences about sex, religion, and culture, see chapter 3 of this volume.

Generational

The theme of *generational* emerged in a few of the discussions. In particular, parents expressed the generational gap between them and their children as a significant barrier to detailed and meaningful conversations. Parents mentioned how they would avoid certain sex topics because their children were too young to understand. Ashley stated, "I grew up so naïve and in such different times, will she even relate to me?" (F.G. #4). Nora also explained, "It's hard to relate my experiences growing up to her experiences. As an older mom, we are from such different worlds" (F.G. #1).

Some parents also emphasized how their adolescence was culturally different from their children—especially when it comes to the internet, phones, and technology. All their children are growing up in the digital age and can easily access information about sex. Lilly noted, "A barrier for me is

technology. Not in the aspect I don't understand it, or use it, but I don't even know how to start a conversation with my teens about sexting" (F.G. #9). Isaac, said, "We talk about sex in our house. Where I struggle is talking about how social media can be a dangerous place to learn about sex or relationships" (F.G. #8).

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this chapter was to explore what barriers parents perceive as hindering more meaningful and comprehensive conversations about sex-related topics. The findings confirm previous studies that showed parents avoid sex-related conversations due to lack of information, discomfort, child's age, and perceived knowledge (Jaccard et al, 2000; Pariara, 2016). The current findings add to this literature by revealing the innate *informational*, *emotional*, and *cultural* factors that prevent parents from more comprehensive conversations about sex. The importance of parent-child conversations about puberty, consent, dating, and sexual health was particularly salient in every focus group. However, few parents had engaged in sex conversations that were detailed, attentive, and collaborative out of lack of information, emotional tensions, and societal differences with their children. First, many parents recognized how their own parents' communication—or lack of—provided little framework to engage in meaningful conversations that would help their children make sense of sexual relationships and associated risks. Thus, when parents had limited exposure to communication about sex, they sought out additional resources (e.g., websites, friends, medical professional), which often left them feeling confused based on contradicting information or underwhelmed with conversations about more difficult topics like consent, masturbation, and sexual safety. Second, parents struggled with how to overcome their emotional obstacles (e.g., fear, uncertainty, and discomfort) to educate their children about puberty, consent, and sexual health. For example, many parents were hesitant to go "beyond the basics" out of self-doubt, fear, discomfort in detailed conversations, as well as the impression these comprehensive conversations may have on their children's sexual behaviors and attitudes. Third, findings showed that subconscious cultural beliefs or expectations (e.g., religion, gender, and generational differences) often hindered parents from engaging in wide-ranging conversations of both personal values and sexual facts. Interestingly, many parents were concerned about cultural misunderstandings that could be created with their children and outsiders (e.g., religious leaders, friends, and teachers) if they went into depth on puberty, touch, and sexual safety practices (e.g., condom use). It is also important to note that although three supra-themes barriers emerged, many of the parents

experienced multiple barriers, demonstrating the complexity of the barriers parents encounter.

These findings provide theoretical and practical implications for parents as they navigate communication about sex-related topics. These experiences demonstrate that although parents describe a variety of informational, emotional, and cultural barriers, most of them were clearly eager and motivated to develop more effective communication skills and approaches to these conversations. Thus, there is significant opportunity for researchers and local community leaders to develop empirically based training that allow parents to make sense of these barriers and offer tangible communicative and relational tools (e.g., conversation starters and conversation topics by age) to navigate these conversations with their children.

As a mom and scholar, I recognize the importance of learning from other parents' and my own experiences, and next time Deacon asks me "*why not all parents talk about this stuff*," I will be able to tell him that sometimes parents feel unqualified, nervous, or confused. But, I can also tell him that parents want to have these discussions, they just need more tools.

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Chapter 3

The Sex Talk was Taboo . . . So was Wearing a Tampon

Sexual and Menstrual Health Conversations among Young Latina and Latinx Women and Gender Minorities

Ashley Aragón and Angela Cooke-Jackson

LATINX SEXUAL SOCIALIZATION CONSTRAINTS

Talking about sex in Latinx families is rare. Thus, conversations and education about decision-making, sexual health, and agency for young Latinx women and gender minorities do not typically transpire. To that extent, we laugh, cringe, and relate to the honest, humorous, and upsetting comment from one of our participants, "I remember having to buy tampons on the down low because I didn't want my mom to know that I was using them lol [laughing out loud]." For us, whispering and hiding to the point of humor speaks volumes. For intimate health research, this silence is loud. In an effort to speak to these silences, this chapter explores the memorable messages and absent narratives of sexual health through a qualitative research study.

One in five women in the United States is Latina (Colby & Ortman, 2015), and researchers have projected that the Latinx population will not only double, but triple in size by the year 2050 (Stokes-Brown, 2012). Given that Latinx people represent the largest minority group, there is a need to better understand the factors that shape their sexual and reproductive health behaviors. Further, sexual and reproductive health socialization is a gendered process (Rubinsky & Cooke-Jackson, 2017). Because of this, many women and gender minorities have found themselves the recipients of negative narratives regarding menstruation, sex, and reproductive health, subsequently