Navigating the Dissonance between Cultural Messages and Actual Sexual Behaviors of Latina College Students

Department of Psychological Sciences, Texas Tech University

Introduction

SOCIOCULTURAL INFLUENCES
- Discussion of sexuality among adolescents is compelled by values such as religion which is often influenced by culture (Sterling & Sadler, 2009).
- Latinas are at greater risk for depression compared to their non-Latina White counterparts (Morales-Aleman & Scarinci, 2016).
- Latinas are less likely to use birth control compared to their other background counterparts (Sterling & Sadler, 2009).

SEXUAL HEALTH MATTERS
- Latina young adults living in the United States have high rates of negative sexual health outcomes such as early pregnancy, STIs, and HIV in comparison to their non-Latina White counterparts (Morales-Aleman & Scarinci, 2016).
- Latinas are at greater risk for depression compared to their non-Latina White counterparts (Morales-Aleman & Scarinci, 2016).
- Latinas are less likely to use birth control compared to their other background counterparts (Sterling & Sadler, 2009).

DISCUSSION IN BELIEFS AND ACTIONS
- The process of Latinas’ accepting their sexuality include conforming to messages that align with their values and represent their beliefs in order to be able to accept their own sexuality (Faulkner & Mansfield, 2002).

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH AIMS
- To identify themes related to how Latina college students navigate the dissonance between the cultural messages about sexual behavior and their actual sexual behavior.

PARTICIPANTS
- Latina college students attending university in West Texas
  - Ages: 18 – 21 years (M = 18.94; SD = 0.93)
  - Generation: Over 60% were born in the U.S.; 25% reported being 1st generation.
  - Religion: 69% identified or were raised as Catholic
  - Sexual Orientation: 75% identified as heterosexual
  - Hometown: 90% of them were raised in Texas
  - Relationship status: 56% were dating, 44% were single.
  - Sexual education from parents: 18%
  - Sexual education from school: 68%
  - Sexually active: 68%

DATA COLLECTION AND PROCEDURE
- In-depth, semi-structured interviews typically one hour in duration
- Participants were asked questions exploring the cultural messages they received about sex as well as their own actual sexual behaviors.
- Given course credit for participation.

DATA ANALYSIS
- Interviews conducted by Latina women. They were audiorecorded and transcribed.
- Thematic Network Approach was used (Atride-Stirling, 2001).

RESULTS

THEMES
Theme 1: Shame
- "So, like most of like Hispanics are traditional and so they would like their kid to be married with a man or woman... They are super religious and they're super traditional and so if they were to find out that I was the opposite, it would just be very hard. I kind of feel guilty and it makes me feel like I kind of don’t have a belonging here because I know they're all accepting but I still feel like they’re judging." 
- "Where I was at in sexual activity back then, it cost like shameful and guilt like me. I like I feel those things and not because I'm a girl. Just because I don’t believe that you should continue to do those things because I was tempted to be more open and more and let myself engage in sexual intercourse. And now I've come to terms with it, and I can’t do it and it’s too much for me."

Theme 2: Disappointment
- "At least I get some knowledge [at school] instead of being scared like how my parents inflicted their whole strictness instead of educating me."
- "A part of me wishes my dad’s side of the family wasn’t so informal about sex, that way I probably would have learned more growing up. I wish we'd have been more informed, that way I could have learned."

Theme 3: Increased Vulnerability
- "Uh, STDs, especially like incarcerated ones, like HIV or hepatitis, like you know, especially if you like, want to have kids in the future. Like I, honestly, I don't think I would have kids because I wouldn’t want to give them those STD and like have them do it with it with it."
- "They kind of make me scared to have sex, I guess. That I am more afraid to have it because of like diseases and pregnancy."

CONCLUSIONS
- These preliminary themes highlight thoughts and emotions that emerged as the participants made sense of the messages they received while they were raised from their family, their religion, and their culture and where they currently stand on these issues.
- Most of the participants do not indicate they regret or shame their current sexual behaviors but many report a lot of thoughts about how they may relay messages about sexuality differently compared to the ones they received.
- By better understanding the major themes that surround these topics we can provide culturally relevant information that could be used to inform prevention or intervention programming designed to reduce STI transmission, unplanned pregnancies, and increase sexual health knowledge with Latina females.

References