



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

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Introduction

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-Latinx White counterparts (Morales-Aleman & Scarinci, 2016).
- Latinas are less likely to use birth control compared to their other background counterparts (Sterling & Sadler, 2009).

SOCIOCULTURAL INFLUENCES

- Discussion of sexuality among adolescents is compelled by values such as religion which is often influenced by culture (Sterling & Sadler, 2009).
- Latinas religious perspective possibly constructs their sexual behaviors (Deardorff, Tschann, & Flores, 2008).
- Latino adolescents' sexual health choices are influenced by the information received from parents (Romo, Lefkowitz, Sigman, & Au, 2002).
- 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).

DISSONANCE IN BELIEFS AND ACTIONS

- Latinx youth report there are increased feelings of shame or guilt when engaging in sexual behavior that is conflicting to cultural and familial values (Faulkner, 2003).
- Need to better investigate cultural beliefs related to a variety of sexual behaviors among Latinx youth (Afable-Munsuz & Brindis, 2006).



Method

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%

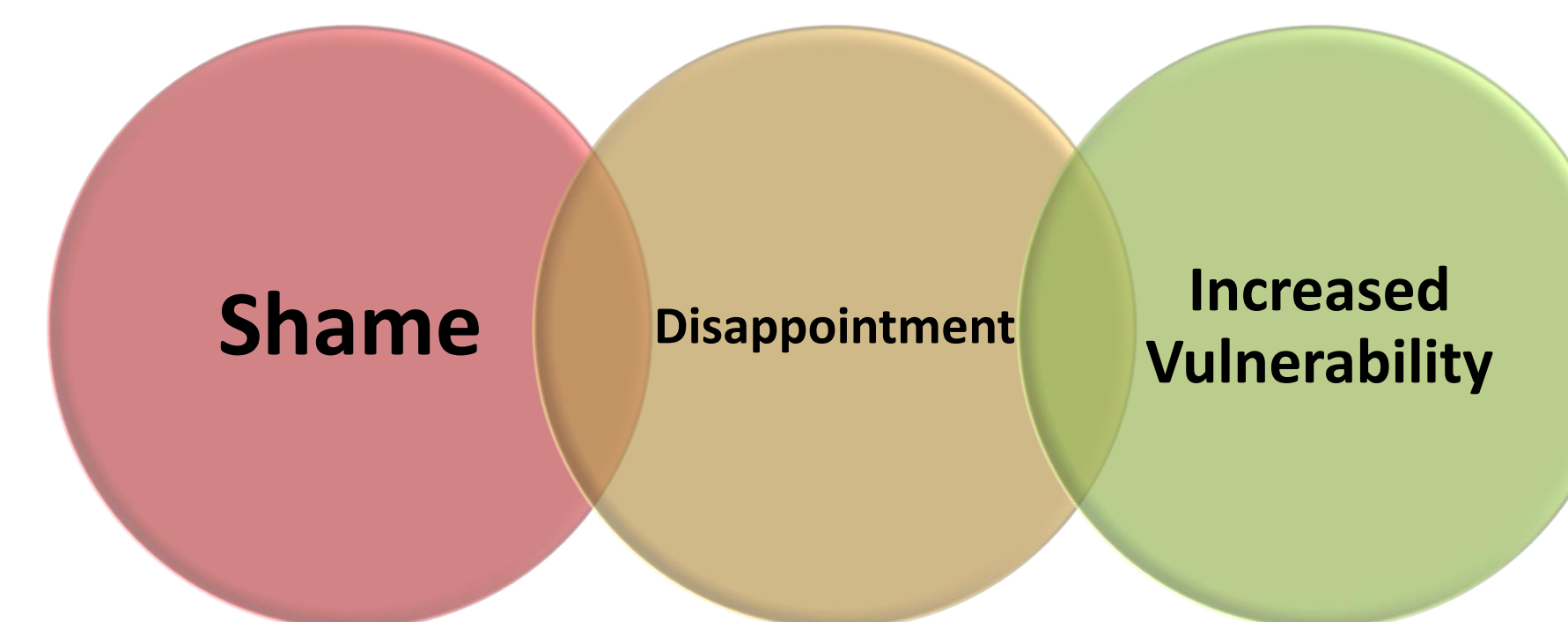
DATA COLLECTION AND PROCEDURE

- In-depth, semi-structure 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 audiotaped and transcribed.
- Thematic Network Approach was used (Attride-Stirling, 2001). This approach allows identification of recurrent themes in the qualitative data.

Results



THEMES

Theme 1: Shame

Description: This theme highlights shame about the incongruence of actual sexual behaviors and socialized behaviors under specific domains, such as family, culture, religion, etc. Most experience shame due to this incongruence and fact that they may not have met with parental/religious expectations.

Quotes

- “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** there 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 in me. Like I felt those things and not because I'm a girl. Just because I don't believe that you should continue to do these things because I was tempted to be more open to more and let myself engage in sexual intercourse. And now I've come to terms to where it's too much for me.”

Theme 2: Disappointment

Description: This theme highlights the women's disappointment in the lack of guidance and education provided by respected family members. Sometimes comments alluded to feelings of resentment due to the inadequacy of information/guidance provided.

Quotes

- “At least I got some knowledge [in 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 **formal** [private] that way **I could have learned.**”

Theme 3: Increased Vulnerability

Description: This theme highlights increased potential vulnerability to STIs and unplanned pregnancy due to lack of accurate sexual health information. Often times lack of guidance may lead to an increased risk of potential negative sexual health consequences.

Quotes

- “Uh, STDs, **especially like incurable ones**, like HIV or herpes, like you know, like especially if you, like, want to have kids in the future. Like, I, honestly if I had STDs don't think I would have kids because I wouldn't want to give them that STD and like have them grow up 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 Latinx females.

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