

“LITTLE BITS AND PIECES”: THE PROCESS OF REVEALING SEXUAL
INFORMATION IN CLOSE MOTHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIPS

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by

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled

“LITTLE BITS AND PIECES”: THE PROCESS OF REVEALING SEXUAL
INFORMATION IN CLOSE MOTHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIPS

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To God. Through Him all things are possible.

To Mom, Dad, Travis, and Tonya...the loves of my life.

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ABSTRACT

Sexual communication between parents and adolescents is believed to be challenging. Ample research has examined parent-adolescent sexual communication, but has been limited. The current study was designed to overcome some of the limitations of previous research by interviewing nine mothers and their 19 year old daughters in joint and individual interviews. Using Communication Privacy Management theory (Petronio, 2002) as a backdrop, the results reconstruct the process of sexual communication in close mother-daughter relationships. Namely, communication about sex began when daughters were young. Daughters came to learn more about sex as they get older and their mothers revealed sexual information in small increments over time.

CHAPTER 1: RATIONALE AND JUSTIFICATION

Sex is often viewed as a taboo topic in close relationships (Baxter & Wilmot, 1985) and is discussed relatively infrequently within families (Jaccard, Dittus, & Gordon, 2000; Warren & Neer, 1986). Adults report difficulty and discomfort in communicating about sex with each other (Meschke, Bartholomae, & Zentall, 2000; Turner & West, 2002); therefore, it is not surprising that parent-adolescent discussions on the topic would also present challenges. For example, research suggests that some parents are reluctant to discuss sensitive information, such as sex, with their children, because of the embarrassment it might cause their children, the challenges in determining the right time and place, and the difficulty in explaining ideas clearly (Jaccard & Dittus, 1991). Moreover, adolescents also report that they avoid talking to their parents about sexual and dating experiences in an effort to protect their privacy boundaries (Guerrero & Afifi, 1995a; Mazur & Hubbard, 2004). Thus, it appears that parent-adolescent sexual communication is a formidable task that requires special effort by both parents and adolescents.

Despite the challenges of sexual communication, discussions about sex between parents and adolescents are important. Youth need to be educated about a variety of sexual topics such as reproduction, pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, contraception, or morality in an effort to promote healthy adolescent outcomes and to prepare for intimate relationships in adult life (Feldman & Rosenthal, 2000; Meschke et al., 2000).

Communication from parents is viewed as one critical way to influence the sexual behaviors of adolescents (Clawson & Reese-Weber, 2003; McKay, 2003). Jaccard and Dittus (1991), for instance, found that 28% of the variance in teen sexual behaviors was accounted for by parental communication. Parents are often deferred to as the primary socialization agent for their children (Christopher & Roosa, 1991; Rollins & Thomas, 1979; Stafford, 2004), and their communication with adolescents has been studied more than any other parental influence on adolescent sexual behavior (Meschke et al., 2000). Rosenthal, Feldman, and Edwards (1998) summarized beliefs about the role of parents by writing, “It has always been assumed that parents should play a pivotal role in the sex education of their children because of their primary role in preparing young people for adult life and because sexuality brings with it questions of values and morality” (p. 727).

Evidence supports the influence of parent-adolescent communication on sexual decisions adolescents make in their lives (Jaccard & Dittus, 1991). For example, some early research suggested that adolescents who communicated with their parents about sex were less sexually active (Fox & Inazu, 1980; Spanier, 1977). More recent research has also shown that adolescents were less likely to engage in intercourse when parents communicated about sex (Karofsky, Zeng, & Kosorok, 2000). In another example, adolescent females who communicated with their parents about sex were more likely to use contraception (Kotva & Schneider, 1990). To briefly summarize, sexual communication presents challenges in interpersonal relationships, and communication between parents and adolescents is particularly important because of the impact the interactions have on adolescent sexual behavior.

Parent-Adolescent Sexual Communication

A wide research net has been cast to describe the sexual communication between parents and adolescents. Researchers (e.g., Fisher; Fox & Inazu; Jaccard & Dittus; Warren & Neer) have been motivated by the linkages among parent-adolescent sexual communication (PASC), adolescent sexual activity, and subsequent health outcomes (e.g., pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, condom and contraception use). The extant PASC research was summarized by Jaccard and colleagues (1998) using five “dimensions” they called (a) “extent of communication, (b) content of the communication, (c) style in which information is conveyed, (d) timing of the communication, and (e) general family environment” (p. 247). A thorough review of the literature comprising these five dimensions will be presented in the next chapter. However, some of the noteworthy findings related to each of these dimensions are presented below to show how PASC has been advanced and where opportunities for additional research reside.

The first two dimensions, extent and content of communication, are intertwined because they have been measured simultaneously. Content has been measured by asking respondents how frequently individual topics have been discussed. Then, the data on frequency have been used to report on the extent of sexual communication. The results of studies measuring extent and content demonstrate a high degree of variability in what has been discussed between parents and adolescents and how often various topics have been discussed (Jaccard, Dodge, & Dittus, 2002). For example, studies have shown that parents and adolescents discuss topics such as pregnancy (Darling & Hicks, 1982;

Heisler, 2005), condom use (Lehr, Demi, DiIorio, & Facticeau, 2005), sexually transmitted diseases (STDs; Hutchinson & Cooney, 1998), or menstruation (Tucker, 1989), among many others, and these topics have been discussed with varying levels of frequency.

The third dimension, parents' style of sexual communication, has mainly been studied by examining openness/closedness (e.g., Kirkman, Rosenthal, & Feldman, 2005; Pluhar & Kuriloff, 2004). Results from these studies have shown that openness is important, but not always achieved. For example, parents said being open means answering questions, being willing to talk, or having an open mind (Kirkman et al., 2005). However, parents also said that privacy and being open need to be balanced (Kirkman et al., 2005). In another example, African American mothers reported that silence became a roadblock to communication and connection (Pluhar & Kuriloff, 2004).

For the fourth dimension, researchers have studied the timing of sexual conversations. Researchers have recommended that parents talk with children around age 12 (Jaccard & Dittus, 1991) or no later than age 16 to have the greatest impact (Warren & Neer, 1986). Jaccard and colleagues (1998) called the fifth dimension general family environment and described it as the "overall quality of the relationship between parent and teen" (p. 247). This dimension, among the five listed above, seems to be the least attended to by researchers as only three PASC studies to date have gathered data on any form of relationship satisfaction or quality (i.e., Heisler, 2005; Jaccard et al., 1998; Jaccard, Dittus, & Gordon, 2000). One study found that there is a positive relationship between mother-adolescent relationship satisfaction and the number of topics mothers talk about as reported by both mothers and teens (Jaccard et al., 2000). The findings

from the studies in each of these dimensions have made unique and important contributions to the PASC literature. However, there are at least four limitations with the literature.

Limitations of Parent-Adolescent Sexual Communication Literature

First, communication is often treated as a predictor variable and the process by which communication occurs is overlooked. Second, communication is assumed to be occurring and understanding the reasons why communication does not occur have been neglected. Third, researchers have treated communication as if it flows in one direction from parent to adolescent, thereby forgetting that adolescents may also initiate and/or influence the communication process. Fourth, theory has not been utilized. Fifth, the term *parents* has been misused. Each of these limitations will be discussed next.

Measurement of Communication

Communication has usually been measured by asking about the frequency with which any assortment of sexual topics have been discussed. Researchers have asked parents or adolescents to respond to how often pre-selected topics have been discussed and then correlated or regressed these data on behavioral outcomes such as engaged in sexual activity (Fisher, 1988; Jaccard, Dittus, & Gordon, 1996; Karofsky et al., 2000; Wight, Williamson, & Henderson, 2005), used a condom (Wight et al., 2005) or other contraception (Jaccard et al., 1996; Rodgers, 1999). The data gleaned with this approach have been useful to ascertain if sexual communication has occurred, to describe the content of conversations about sex, and attempt to show how PASC impacts adolescents' sexual activity. Because the focus of the present study is on communication rather than

adolescents' sexual behavior, I proceed by discussing the operationalization of the communication variable and leave the behavioral outcomes to other disciplines.

By treating communication as a predictor variable measured as a global, dichotomous variable or by the frequency of discussions on specific topics, researchers have disregarded the process of how sexual communication occurs between family members. By examining multiple variables in one study and how these variables relate to one another, there has been little examination of the communication process itself. Pluhar and Kuriloff (2004) concur that “relatively few studies have looked at *how* communication occurs, i.e., communication *process*” (p. 304). The importance of understanding process was articulated by Poole, McPhee, and Canary (2002):

Ideally, a narrative explanation provides an account of how and why a sequence of events typically unfolds that is sufficiently flexible to encompass a range of observed cases, yet sufficiently powerful to help the researcher discern the operation of the generative mechanism in a multitude of particularized sequences.
(p. 29)

Kirkman and colleagues (2005) laid the groundwork for PASC studies on process by trying to find out what the word *open* meant to 51 mothers, fathers, and adolescents from 19 Australian families. They found that the term open had multiple meanings and they cautioned future researchers on their use of this term. More importantly, the authors emphasized that “openness...has been shown to be far more complex than the number and frequency of sexual topics discussed within families” and recommended “that

researchers investigate specific and clearly defined components of communication, to which they apply a term other than openness” (p. 64).

Communication is Assumed to be Occurring

Another gap in the extant literature is the assumption that communication is occurring between parents and adolescents. This assumption is flawed because not all families communicate about sex. In one sample of 249 late-adolescent females, for example, 20% reported they never talked to their parents about sexual issues (Pistella & Bonati, 1999). In another study, 59.4% of undergraduate students reported never having a meaningful conversation about sex with either a father or mother (King & Lorusso, 1997). Thus, there are a substantial number of parent-adolescent relationships in which sexual communication is not occurring. However, researchers have overlooked these findings. In so doing, opportunities have been missed to find out what their experiences could reveal about the challenges of talking about sex or the rules family members have about discussing or not discussing sexual information. In other words, there are many family members who report no sexual communication, but there is seemingly no research that has attempted to understand why this might be. Indeed, few attempts have been made to seek understanding about the difficulties of communicating about sex, particularly in family relationships. Jaccard et al. (2002) confirm that “of primary practical and theoretical interest is why some parents fail to engage in meaningful discussions with their children” (p. 22).

Communication is Unidirectional

A third problem with the extant literature is that communication has not been viewed as an interactive process. Instead, communication has been treated as if it flows in one direction from parent to adolescent. There have been no studies of which I am aware where children or parents have been surveyed or interviewed about how much sexual communication children have initiated with their parents. Nor have there been studies in which parents and adolescents come together and talk about their sexual communication. Parents and adolescents often disagree about whether or not sexual communication has occurred (Jaccard et al., 1998; King & Larusso, 1997); therefore, it seems important to examine sexual communication from the perspectives of parents and adolescents to increase the reliability of data.

Theory is Absent

The fourth problem with the extant literature is that theory has been poorly utilized. Much of the early research explicitly or implicitly utilized a socialization perspective (e.g., Darling & Hicks, 1982; Fox & Inazu, 1980; Koblinsky & Atkinson, 1982; Lewis, 1963; Spanier, 1977). Yet, subsequent research has not incorporated theory. Theory is important to organize and summarize knowledge obtained from data, to focus attention, or to clarify observations (Littlejohn, 1999). Incorporating theory into the study of sexual communication would synthesize the literature and propel the findings into stronger theoretical and practical applications. Without theory, the findings from this line of work will continue to be fragmented and lack utility.

Mothers' Role in Sexual Communication

Finally, the term parents has been used precipitously and incorrectly in the literature. While researchers use the term parents, research is very clear that mothers are, for the most part, communicating with adolescents about sex more than fathers (e.g., Fox & Inazu, 1980; Furstenberg, Jr., Herceg-Baron, Shea, & Webb, 1984; Newcomer & Udry, 1985). This phenomenon was well established in early PASC research and as a result, some subsequent scholars focused their attention on mothers only without providing a rationale for this decision (e.g., Brock & Jennings, 1993; Hockenberry-Eaton & Richman, 1996; Pluhar & Kuriloff, 2004; Rosenthal et al., 1998). By contrast, only one known study has focused on fathers' sexual communication (i.e., Lehr et al., 2005). Such differences between mothers and fathers are not surprising because adolescents tend to talk to mothers more than fathers about nearly all topics (Noller & Bagi, 1985). Nearly half of the adolescent females in one study said they were more likely to discuss personal problems with their mothers more than anyone else (Furstenberg, Jr. et al., 1984). Lefkowitz, Kahlbaugh, Au, and Sigman (1998) justified their focus on mothers because adolescents (a) spend more time with mothers, (b) talk to mothers more than fathers about personal problems, and (c) feel closer to mothers than fathers. Fox and Inazu (1980) speculate that sexual socialization is a female responsibility and "an extension of the mothering function" (p. 9). The current project follows previous studies by utilizing mothers because they are the primary sexual communicator. Therefore, this study will henceforth maintain a focus on mothers, but will use the term parents when the literature includes both mothers and fathers.

Thus far, I have attempted to establish the following. First, sexual communication is perceived to be challenging to discuss, but research has not substantiated this claim. Second, sexual communication between parents and adolescents is believed to be important and has been the focus of many studies (over 90 according to DiIorio, Pluhar, & Belcher, 2003). However, additional research is needed because within this body of literature, there are at least four problems: (a) communication has been treated as a predictor variable and the process of communication has been overlooked, (b) communication is assumed to be occurring, (c) communication is treated as unidirectional from a parent to an adolescent, and (d) research has poorly utilized theory. Third, mothers communicate with adolescents about sex more than fathers and are therefore, important to study because of their dominant role in sexual communication. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to: (a) seek understanding about the challenges of discussing sexual information in mother-adolescent relationships, (b) emphasize the process of communication, (c) gather dyadic data from mothers and adolescents, and (d) incorporate theory. To fulfill these objectives, I have selected Communication Privacy Management (CPM; Petronio, 2002) as the theoretical framework for the study.

Communication Privacy Management

Communication Privacy Management (Petronio, 2002) sets the theoretical tone for the current project because it is a theory about private information, such as sexual information, and the processes by which it is managed. CPM uses a boundary metaphor to illustrate the process by which individuals manage the transfer of information from inner to outer, private to public. The process is guided by a rule-based management

system with three separate components called *Privacy Rule Foundations*, *Boundary Coordination*, and *Boundary Turbulence*. The Privacy Rule Foundations segment has been selected for this study because it describes considerations made before revealing private information. Further explanation of CPM and justification of its use follow.

CPM is a theory about private information (Petronio, 2002). While private information is not explicitly defined by Petronio, she is clear that the focus of the theory begins with the content of the information, rather than the process of self-disclosure. Thus, it seems important to clarify the definition of the terms *sexual communication* and *sexual information*. Warren (1995) distinguishes sex communication from sex education where sex communication “implies the valuation of a co-creation of meaning about sexual beliefs, attitudes, values, and/or behavior between persons exchanging messages, with verbal and nonverbal symbols equally important in the transaction” and sex education “generally implies the valuation of a teaching model of information transfer, where senders seek to add knowledge to receivers’ frames of reference about biological reproduction, sexuality and sexual intercourse, and birth control” (pp. 173-174). For this project, I collapse Warren’s two definitions into the terms *sexual communication* or *sexual information*. Petronio agrees that sexual information is private information as set forth by CPM because it is “proprietary family information” (personal communication, July 19, 2007).

Using a boundary metaphor, CPM explains the process individuals go through to manage and control private information as they move information across the privacy boundary from their inner self to an outer public arena (Petronio, 2002). As such, CPM

will lead the current study toward a process approach to understanding sexual communication and will simultaneously attempt to explain why sexual information is revealed by some and concealed by others. More specifically, the Privacy Rule Foundations discuss the rules individuals use when they negotiate revealing or concealing private information. These rules “tangibly show the way people regulate and therefore coordinate their privacy boundaries with others” (Petronio, 2002, p. 37). Rules about revealing information are believed to vary not only by relationship type, such as families, but also by the specific topic (Dailey & Palomares, 2004). The diversity across families regarding discussing sexual communication can be understood by considering how mothers create privacy boundaries around sexual information and establish rules about how to reveal or conceal the information. In sum, CPM seems to be an appropriate and useful theory to use for the current study. Additional explanation of the theory and its applicability follow in the subsequent chapter. Next, I focus on the implications of the current study.

Practical and Theoretical Implications

A robust and comprehensive understanding of sexual communication processes between mothers and adolescents has several important practical and theoretical implications. First, the study will make unique contributions to the practical application of parent-adolescent interactions. When more information is known about the views parents hold about sexual information, they can identify ways to circumvent myths or stereotypes that may restrain them from meaningful communication with their adolescents. Hypothetically, suppose a parent believes that sexual information is dirty

and refuses to talk to a child about it. If parents who adhere to this belief learn that sexual information is treated as educational information by other parents, they may begin to alter their own conceptions of the information and become more willing or open to engage in conversations about sex. Second, because families create co-owned privacy boundaries, they may retain information within the family boundary about how they communicate about sex. This study attempts to permeate family privacy boundaries and bring understanding about sexual information and communication from individual families to a larger community of readers. As such, information about PASC can be shared across families to help them in their process of improving parent-adolescent sexual communication. Third, sexual communication, regardless of relationship type, is often assumed to be challenging. This study will advance knowledge about sexual information by asking if it is challenging and why. If some mothers perceive sex to be easy to discuss, their views can be shared in an effort to create more comfort around sexual information.

The study will make unique theoretical contributions in at least two ways. First, most PASC research is atheoretical (Jaccard et al., 2002) or relies on an implied socialization framework. Thus, incorporating a theoretical lens to this body of literature will provide explanatory power to the phenomena of sexual communication within interpersonal contexts, particularly family relationships. Second, the introduction of CPM to sexual information will strengthen the theory's suppositions and explanation of rule management processes. Because CPM is a relatively new communication theory (Petronio's *Boundaries of Privacy: Dialectics of Disclosure* was published in 2002), it will be advanced by applying another type of content to the tenets of the theory. Some

topics/contexts that have applied CPM (or its precursor, Communication Boundary Management) include chronic illness (Greene, 2000), residential care facilities (Petronio & Kovach, 1997), parent-adolescent topic avoidance (Mazur & Hubbard, 2004), or stepfamilies (e.g., Golish & Caughlin, 2002). The current project attempts to learn more about the nature of communicating sexual information in mother-adolescent relationships, and, in so doing, CPM can be advanced because of its application to another topic/context.

To summarize, the purpose of this study is to: (a) seek understanding about the challenges of discussing sexual information in mother-adolescent relationships, (b) emphasize the process of communication using the privacy rule foundations of CPM, (c) gather dyadic data from mothers and adolescents, and (d) incorporate theory. This study will make unique contributions in several ways. First, theory will be used for PASC research. Namely, the Communication Privacy Management theoretical framework will guide the investigation of sexual information and its management within families. Second, the inherent difficulties of sexual information will be explored. Rather than make claims that sexual communication is challenging or difficult, I ask if sexual information is considered difficult and challenging to talk about and why. Third, this study will consider how privacy rules for revealing/concealing sexual information are developed by mothers and adolescents. Mothers and adolescents may regulate the disclosure of sexual information in different ways. However, no research has attempted to understand how the information is regulated, nor the rules used within families to control the flow of sexual information. The next chapter expands the ideas presented here by discussing the

challenges with sexual communication, elaborating on the gaps in the PASC literature, introducing the suppositions of CPM, framing sexual information with CPM's five privacy rule foundations, and suggesting practical and theoretical implications for the study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Mothers discuss many topics with their children with varying levels of openness. Some family members have a high conversation orientation and discuss many topics quite openly (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002). Other family members limit the range of topics discussed and are restricted in the amount of disclosure or conversation they have (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002). For example, late adolescents reported that topics such as personal interests, general problems, and plans were discussed more frequently by their mothers and fathers than sex information or sex problems (Noller & Bagi, 1985). Sex seems to be a topic that is particularly challenging for family members to discuss (Warren & Neer, 1986). Pistella and Bonati (1999) suggest that sex is so difficult for some family members to talk about that it is not discussed at all.

A review of extant parent-adolescent sexual communication literature shows considerable diversity in how sex is discussed, if it is discussed at all. Researchers often discard data from the sample when no communication has been reported, and they rarely report on topics that were not discussed. Rosenthal and Feldman (1999) provide one exception when they asked adolescent males and females to identify sexual topics their mothers never discussed. Approximately 50% of males said their mothers never discussed pregnancy, homosexuality, or sex before marriage, and over 75% of males said their mothers never discussed abortion, sexual desire, sexual satisfaction, masturbation, or wet dreams.

The research is clear that sexual communication does not happen in all families, and when it does, it occurs in various ways. The extant literature shows that content, timing, and frequency of sexual conversations have been repeatedly studied by researchers (Jaccard et al., 1998). These approaches have described the nature of sexual communication, but lack theory and an explanation of how the communication operates in mother-adolescent relationships. Additionally, no research of which I am aware has sought to understand why sexual information is perceived by many mothers and adolescents to be challenging to discuss.

In this chapter, I first discuss whether sexual information is challenging to discuss and justify the need to understand how sexual information is viewed. Second, I present and critique existing research in five areas as outlined by Jaccard and colleagues (1998): (a) the content of messages, (b) the style of communication, (c) the extent of parent-adolescent sexual communication, (d) the timing of conversations, and (e) the general family environment. Third, I discuss the need for a process approach to understanding PASC. Fourth, I justify the use of CPM as an appropriate theoretical framework by discussing its suppositions and the privacy rule development criteria.

The Challenges of Sexual Information

Sexual information seems to be challenging to discuss in interpersonal relationships. Dating partners identified some sexual information, including previous sexual experiences or the timing of sexual intercourse, as avoided topics with partners during relationship development (Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004). Additionally, young adults acknowledged that some sexual information, such as sexual history,

extradyadic affairs, and sexual preferences, was secretive in nature (Caughlin, Afifi, Carpenter-Theune, & Miller, 2005).

The mother-adolescent relationship is also plagued by difficulty where the topic of sex is concerned. Turner and West (2002) stated that, “talking about sex can be a very difficult undertaking for parents and other family members” (p. 303). Some of the difficulty may be due, in part, to the uniqueness of the adolescent phase of child development. During this stage of child development, adolescents continue to depend on parents while simultaneously establishing independence on the path to adulthood. In general, adolescents grapple with identity development (Blieszner, 1994; Erikson, 1968), physical and hormonal changes (Galvin, Byland, & Brommel, 2004), and independence from their parents (Bell, 1967). These changes alter the relationship between parents and adolescents as evidenced by changes in communication. For example, adolescents make fewer disclosures to their parents than they did before reaching adolescence (Noller & Bagi, 1985), avoid topics (Mazur & Hubbard, 2004), or withdraw (Caughlin & Malis, 2004). Also, increased conflict is often a distinct marker of parent-adolescent interactions (Roloff & Miller, 2006). These communication changes on the part of adolescents may affect the ways in which parents strategize about talking with their children about vulnerable or risky information, such as sexual topics. The awkwardness associated with sexual information coupled with the communication changes between adolescents and parents may complicate parent-adolescent sexual communication.

Despite the assumptions and beliefs about the difficulties of sexual communication, little scientific research has been conducted to confirm whether or not

sexual information is challenging to discuss. Brock and Jennings (1993) offer one exception. In their study of adult women, the women were asked to identify reasons for their mothers' approach to sex education. The women speculated that sexual communication rules were a result of their mothers' inadequate education, a conservative family background, lack of sexual pleasure, personal problems, or lack of time.

The assumption that sexual information is difficult to discuss is challenged by some adolescents who reported that sexual communication with their parents was generally comfortable (Pistella & Bonati, 1999). Even though this report of comfortable conversations is available, there are no data about why the adolescents had this perception. Nor is there any explanation of how to achieve strong comfort levels of sexual communication. Additionally, there are no data that describe the nature of sexual information and whether or not it is believed to be challenging to discuss. If some adolescents report that sexual conversations are comfortable, then sexual information may not be viewed as difficult for everyone. Thus, it seems important to first understand if mothers and adolescents perceive sexual information as challenging to discuss, and second, to understand how their perception might clarify their decision to reveal or conceal sexual information to their adolescent or mother. Therefore, to understand the nature of sexual information and the beliefs that mothers and adolescents hold about it, the first research question asks:

RQ₁: In what way, if at all, do mothers and adolescents frame sexual communication as challenging to discuss?

Extant PASC Literature

As stated in the introduction, sexual communication between mothers and adolescents is important and has received considerable attention by researchers. Research on parent-adolescent sexual communication has captured the attention of scholars across several disciplines. My conclusions about organizing this research were echoed by Jaccard and colleagues (1998) when they described five communication dimensions: (a) the content of conversations, (b) style or manner in which information is communicated, (c) the extent of communication, (d) the timing of the communication, and (e) the general family environment. Jaccard and colleagues (1998) claim that “few empirical analyses of parent-teen communication have taken these dimensions into account” (p. 247). I agree with this claim if the authors are talking about analyses using all five dimensions in one study. However, many studies touch upon one or two of these dimensions in individual studies. For example, the content of parent-adolescent sexual conversations has been labored over repeatedly. Thus, I proceed with the literature review by categorizing the extant literature into one of these five dimensions.

Content

The content of conversations about sex captivated the attention of researchers in a variety of ways. To determine the content of conversations about sex, most researchers listed several topics and then asked respondents to indicate the frequency with which each topic was discussed. The topics selected vary widely from study to study (see Table 1). Rosenthal and Feldman (1999) collapsed 20 topics into four factors: development and societal concerns, sexual safety, experiencing sex, and solitary sexual activity. Most of

the topics from other studies align with these factors, as can be seen by the organization of topics in Table 1. I have added a fifth category called “Other” to list topics that did not seem to fall into one of the other four.

Rather than pre-select topics, Heisler (2005) took a different approach by asking participants to list any topic related to sex that had ever been discussed with a parent or child. Using a qualitative approach, she noted emerging themes: relationship, pregnancy, morals, general sex talk, HIV/STDs, physical differences, abstinence, emotions, miscellaneous, emotional differences, abuse, timing of sex, self-esteem, homosexuality, infidelity, and peer pressure. These topics show some overlap with the predetermined topics from other studies such as HIV/STDs, pregnancy, or the relationship. However, the topics also show some marked differences such as morals, emotions, timing of sex, or infidelity. Heisler’s study was important because it showed the breadth of information that families considered to be sexual communication. Additionally, Heisler’s approach was one of the only studies to examine sexual communication in isolation, as a phenomenon bound unto itself.

Jaccard and colleagues (1998) found that all the selected topics on their survey instrument were discussed as reported by mothers and teens ($N = 745$ African American adolescents and their mothers). However, mean reports for several topics were quite low, indicating a strong likelihood that some respondents said these topics were never discussed. DiIorio and colleagues’ (1999) sample of 405 13-15 year olds and 382 mothers of whom 81.2% were African American reported considerable variety of topics discussed. The percent of males who reported having at least one conversation about the

topics ranged from 36.6% (menstrual cycle) to 78.9% (STD/AIDS). For females, the percentages who reported ever having a conversation with a parent ranged from 34.3% (father thinks about teens having sex) to 89.9% (menstrual cycle). Rosenthal and Feldman (1999) also found variety in teens' reports of what topics their parents had discussed with them. Combined, these findings support the argument that sexual communication does occur, but the topics that are discussed vary across families. Further, within one family, certain topics are discussed and others are not, indicating there are different views about different types of sexual information across families. While we can say that sexual communication may be challenging for many, the discomfort may vary by the specific topic.

One alternative way to look at the content of sexual conversations is to think about how private the information may be perceived to be. For example, information that is educational in nature such as reproduction, menstruation, AIDS/STDs may be considered less private and is therefore, easier to reveal to adolescents. By contrast, information about sexual values or dealing with sexual pressure may cause more discomfort because these topics are less descriptive and more complex, requiring a transference of sexual beliefs, morals, values, or attitudes. Some of these issues may be perceived as private. At this point, I can only conjecture as to the perceptions of different types of information. But one point is clear, sexual topics are revealed in some households and not in others, and there is considerable variety in how sexual topics are revealed or concealed.

In brief, studies that measured topics were useful to describe the content of conversations among family members. However, as Heisler's (2005) study makes clear, the information sharing within families spans a wide breadth of information. But, lacking from the quantitative and qualitative approaches to measuring the content of sexual conversations is an understanding of how private the information is believed to be. The beliefs about different types of sexual information may influence whether or not a given topic is discussed. When looking at the results of these studies, it is clear that great variety exists in how sexual topics are discussed among family members.

Extent of Communication

The second aspect researchers of parent-adolescent sexual communication have stressed has been the extent of communication. Jaccard and colleagues (1998) explained that the extent of communication is measured as frequency and depth, although the literature shows that frequency has been measured, but not depth. Extent of conversations is important to measure because "...the channels must be opened sufficiently in order for sex discussion to become an effective part of a family's communication agenda" (Warren & Neer, 1986, p. 91). Further, persistent communication between mothers and daughters was identified by African American mothers as an important feature of sexual communication with their daughters (Pluhar & Kuriloff, 2004). Thus, frequency of communication is believed to have relevance to the study of sexual communication.

Extent of sexual communication has been ascertained by asking mothers, fathers, or adolescents to report on a Likert type scale the extent to which a given topic (as discussed above) has been discussed. Scales vary from 0-4 (e.g., Fisher, 1986, 1988;

Jordan et al., 2000; Rodgers, 1999), 0-5 (e.g., Hutchinson & Cooney, 1998), or 1-10 (e.g., Karofsky et al., 2000). The diversity of measuring frequency is compounded when also considering the variety of topics asked about. For example, Booth-Butterfield and Sidelinger (1998) used one global item to measure extent of discussion with a 4 anchor scale. By contrast, Jordan and colleagues (2000) asked for frequency on a 4 anchor scale but used 17 topics. Warren and Neer (1986) and Hutchinson and Cooney (1998) found that sex is discussed infrequently within families based on low mean scores for frequency of discussion on individual topics. By contrast, Tucker (1989) found that there were high percentages of sexual communication by topic in her study. But, she asked female participants (53 African American daughter-mother-grandmother triads) about three items, which were menstrual cycle, sex, and contraception. The diverse ways in which frequency has been measured have led to few consistent findings across studies. However, individual studies have resulted in some interesting outcomes.

The approach many researchers have taken is to determine the effects of extent of sexual communication on a particular adolescent sexual behavior. To that end, results have shown either no correlation, negative effects, or positive effects. For example, Fisher (1988) found no relationship between the extent of communication and premarital sex. In addition, the extent of sexual communication in the family (using the median to divide respondents into high or low categories) had no interaction effect with sexual attitudes. In other words, the sexual attitudes of adolescents had no bearing on the extent of sexual communication with parents.

By contrast, Clawson and Reese-Weber (2003) found negative effects of sexual communication. They found that the greater the extent of sexual communication with fathers or mothers, the younger the adolescents were at first intercourse and the higher were the number of sexual partners. This finding failed to support their hypothesis, which stated that more communication would result in fewer risk-taking behaviors. However, their sample consisted of 223 college students aged 18 to 21 years of age. The students were asked to reflect on the extent of sexual communication with their parents during their lifetime, and to report on their sexual risk-taking behaviors. Risk-taking behaviors were operationalized in this study as age at first intercourse, number of lifetime partners, condom use in the last 30 days, and ever tested for HIV/AIDS. Because the sample consisted of late adolescents, it seems logical that they would have had more time to have had sex partners. What the study fails to find out is how many sex partners the students had when they were in high school, a time when adolescents are at greater risk. It is also important to note that data from 51 of the 223 respondents were omitted because they (the 51) reported no sexual communication with their parents or reported being virgins. Thus, the data on age at first intercourse and number of partners is skewed because they include responses from only those who are sexually active. Not having sex is also a sexual behavior and a potential outcome of parent-adolescent sexual communication. Further, the conclusions drawn about frequency of communication did not incorporate the data from adolescents who had no direct communication. Because communication scholars acknowledge that we cannot not communicate (Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson,

1967), then even no communication becomes useful in advancing understanding.

However, reports of no communication were discarded in this study.

Other studies show positive effects of sexual communication on sexual behaviors. For example, Karofsky and colleagues (2000) surveyed 259 patients between the ages of 12 and 21 at the University Hospital-Middleton Clinic in Madison, Wisconsin, which specializes in pediatrics. They found that the extent of sexual communication with parents was lower among nonvirgins than among virgins. This study lends support for the generally held belief that more communication with adolescents results in lower risk taking behaviors.

In another example, Booth-Butterfield and Sidelinger (1999) surveyed 133 college students and their parents. They found that if parents discussed topics related to sexual activity more frequently, then the children engaged in more safe-sex practices. Although the data from this study support the assumption that more frequent sexual communication promotes safer sex practices, the findings should be interpreted with caution because frequency of communication was operationalized with one global item. One item is not enough to measure frequency because the topics discussed and quality of the communication are unknown.

These examples show how measuring frequency of communication has led to a variety of results, often conflicting. Taken together, there is at least one reason why the results may fail to yield consistent findings. The extent of communication alone is not a good predictor of behavior because other variables influence behavior. The topics discussed or quality of conversation, among others, impact communication, while

attitudes, peers, self-esteem, or the media also influence behavior. In these attempts to isolate one variable, sound conclusions cannot be inferred about the extent of sexual communication and the subsequent impact on adolescent sexual behavior.

Also at issue with the extent approach is the omission of information about parents or adolescents who have no communication. As with content of communication, we again see diversity in the ways in which sexual information is managed. Some information may be discussed frequently suggesting parents have highly permeable privacy boundaries. However, other topics are infrequently or never discussed, indicating tighter control and ownership of the privacy boundaries around sexual information. The studies about frequency also assume that parents are the only ones in the family who own, reveal, or conceal sexual information. Adolescents get sexual information from several sources, and they have their own sexual experiences, thoughts, and ideas. Thus, it is plausible that adolescents also maintain control over the sexual information they possess. However, adolescents have not been asked how frequently they discuss sexual information with their parents, nor are parents asked how frequently their adolescents talk with them about sex.

In sum, several studies have attempted to describe the extent of parent-adolescent sexual communication resulting in an assortment of findings. These results fail to yield any firm conclusions because of the variety in measurement techniques and samples, as well as the influence of other variables on behavior. The extent of communication alone provides interesting descriptions about the nature of parent-adolescent sexual communication and tells us that control over sexual information is quite diverse across

families. We know that some information is revealed, but we also know that some information is protected within a highly permeable privacy boundary erected by parents. Children are likely to have their own privacy boundaries around the sexual information they possess, but their role in parent-adolescent sexual communication has been neglected. Within the discussion of extent of communication, Tucker (1989) reminds us that "...those involved in sex education and adolescent family planning need to be concerned about the *quality* [italics added] of the information teenagers are receiving" (p. 276). It is towards the quality of communication that I now turn.

Style of Communication

Jaccard and colleagues (1998) define style, the third aspect of extant parent-adolescent sexual communication literature, as the manner in which sexual information is communicated. To that end, several different approaches have been taken to examine the style of communication such as information seeking, turn taking, dominance, comfort, or openness. Information seeking was of interest to O'Sullivan, Meyer-Bahlburg, and Watkins (2001) when they found that Latina mothers engaged in information seeking with their daughters but their daughters avoided conversations. However, daughters in these focus groups were between the ages of 6 and 13. The lower age range of this sample represents a very young age for parent-adolescent sexual communication to occur and may explain some of the avoidance.

Turn-taking was a style characteristic examined by Lefowitz, Kahlbaugh, and Sigman (1996). They measured turn-taking during mother-adolescent conversations about sexuality and conflict, which was measured by coders who recorded the number of

times either the mother or adolescent was successful at taking over the conversation. After two types of conversations—nonstructured (any topic) and sexual—results showed that there was more turn taking in nonstructured conversations than in sexual conversations. However, the study does not indicate if mothers were dominant during sexual conversations or if daughters were uncomfortable and didn't want to take a turn. Thus, another study was done by Lefkowitz and colleagues (1998) to measure dominance as a style variable in their study of AIDS conversations between mothers and adolescents. Dominance was measured by coders who viewed videotaped interviews with mothers and adolescents and recorded the number of seconds each mother and daughter spoke. Then, the amount of time spoken by the mother was divided by the amount of time spoken by the daughter. Results showed that mothers dominated these conversations and that the dominance changed very little from time 1 to time 2. Mothers spoke 2.2 times more than their daughters during conversations at Time 1 and 2.3 times more at time 2. However, comfort by adolescents with sexual content may influence dominance of conversations that occur. Indeed, comfort and openness are two variables that have been selected frequently as a means to understand the style of communication.

Warren and Neer (1986) measured communication comfort with six items related to degree of openness. They surveyed 93 male and 94 female undergraduate students and found that parents were perceived as hesitant to open up about sex and unable to get their children to open up. But, parents were also perceived to be moderately open-minded and supportive. Warren and Neer (1988) also developed a Supportive Sex Discussion scale to measure supportive sexual communication. Support was measured by asking about open-

mindedness, judging children, impatience, and hesitation, among others. They used the instrument in a study of 40 mothers in the Midwest and found that supportive mothers were more likely to reveal their views of sex when they were younger. By contrast, mothers with low levels of support waited for their children to approach them to talk about sex.

DiIorio and colleagues (1999) measured comfort in another way. First, adolescents were asked three global questions about comfort. Second, mothers were asked to rate their comfort level discussing 14 different sexual topics. The researchers found that female adolescents were most comfortable talking to friends about sex and least comfortable talking to their fathers. Male adolescents, also, were most comfortable talking to their friends about sex. Mothers indicated they were comfortable talking about all the sexual topics. These findings reveal that adolescents have privacy boundaries around sexual information and these privacy boundaries change depending upon who they are talking with. The rules of sexual communication seem to change as adolescents interact with different people. It is interesting to note that mothers indicated they were comfortable talking about a lot of different topics while results from studies about what is actually discussed show a great deal of variety in what topics are discussed and how frequently. Thus, there may be a disconnect between thoughts mothers have before sexual conversations and actual communication. Understanding why this gap in the communication process is present can be useful to help families actually close the gap and increase communication.

Perhaps the most robust and comprehensive approaches to understand communication style were derived from the research team led by Shirley Feldman and Doreen Rosenthal. Together with other colleagues, they have amassed considerable data about communication style as it relates to parent-adolescent sexual communication. They began their program of research by interviewing 30 Australian mothers of 16-year-olds to develop a typology of communication styles (Rosenthal et al., 1998). In this study, they derived communication styles of mothers as avoidant, reactive, opportunistic, child-initiated, or mutually interactive. In the avoidant style, mothers ($n = 3$) were uncomfortable talking about sex and therefore did not initiate conversations. Reactive communicators ($n = 6$) initiated sex-related conversations infrequently and only when the mothers believed there was a pressing issue. Opportunistic communicators ($n = 9$) were willing to talk with their adolescents and waited for a catalyst to prompt conversations. Examples of catalysts were television programs, issues with friends, or school-related curriculum. Child-initiated communicators ($n = 7$) waited for their children to talk with them. Finally, the mutually interactive communication style ($n = 5$) consisted of mothers and adolescents who initiated conversations. These styles of communication are useful because they show how varied parent-adolescent sexual communication can be across families. Previous studies seem to want to force data into yes/no or high/low categories and fail to account for the diverse ways in which family members reveal sexual information. The descriptions of each communication style also show that there are rules about how communication occurs. For example, waiting for an adolescent to ask a question is a different rule from approaching a child because of a perceived need.

However, this study is limited in that it asks mothers only for their accounts of their own communication.

Rosenthal and Feldman (1999) attempted to take a stronger interaction orientation by giving questionnaires to 296 16-year-olds in Australia. However, the questionnaire resembled that of earlier researchers by asking adolescents to rate how often 20 specific topics had been discussed. Different from previous research, adolescents were then asked how important it is that their mother and father (separately) communicated about each topic. Interestingly, adolescents reported very little sexual communication and indicated that sexual communication with their parent was not important, except on subjects related to sexual safety.

Feldman and Rosenthal (2000) persisted in their research efforts by using the same data set from the 1999 publication to explore how mothers, fathers, and teens evaluated parents as sex educators. To gather this data, a 33-item instrument was developed called the Quality of Sex-Related Communications. The style of communication was adapted from the 1998 qualitative study and dimensions were called comfortable, mutual, controlling, unwanted, and avoidant. The results of these analyses showed that mothers were evaluated by teens more positively than fathers. But, mothers described themselves more positively as sex communicators than their children evaluated them. Adolescents also reported that their evaluations of mothers' general and sex-related communication was influenced by the frequency of sexual communication, a comfortable communication style, and a good general communication style. An avoidant communication style by mothers was evaluated negatively by adolescents. Evaluations of

fathers' were influenced by their general communication. The quality of fathers' sexual communication was not a predictor of adolescent evaluations.

The Feldman and Rosenthal (2000) study contributes to the overall literature on PASC because it included mothers and fathers, it began to look at quality and style of conversation, and it considered the general family communication environment separate from the communication about sex. This study continues to demonstrate variety in how sexual information is revealed to adolescents and reinforces the idea that some information is concealed. The categories of communication styles hint at the notion that rules guide communication. However, these data are limited because they only consider the parents' communication styles and fail to consider the simultaneous influence that adolescents' communication styles may have on communication about sex and the general communication environment within the family.

Pluhar and Kuriloff (2004) were perhaps the first to draw attention to the need to examine communication as an interactive process. They interviewed 30 African-American mothers and adolescents and analyzed the data for emergent themes. Two themes emerged from the data—an affective dimension and a stylistic dimension. The affective dimension captured emotions such as comfort, empathy, anger, or silence. The stylistic dimension referred to a continuum of conversation styles that ranged from interactive to didactic. Other themes emerged from the data and were reported as the use of storytelling, fear, persistence, body language, and setting. Ironically, the authors argued that sexual communication should be studied as a process rather than an isolated conversation suspended for one moment in time. However, when reading the results,

many of the emergent themes were specific to communication style during isolated conversations. Despite this shortcoming, the authors emphasized process in their discussion section and did have many important findings about communication style overall.

Openness is another style of communication that has been studied in relation to parent-adolescent sexual communication. Booth-Butterfield and Sidelinger (1998) measured openness by using Ritchie and Fitzpatrick's (1990) Family Communication Patterns instrument. After surveying 133 college students and one of their parents, the researchers found that the perception of openness in the family communication environment leads to a stronger perception of regular sexual discussions. In addition, the more frequently parents discussed topics related to sexual activity, the more likely the children practiced safe sex. White and colleagues (1995) also measured openness, but they used Olson's (Olson, Portner, & Lavee, 1985) FACES III instrument. They surveyed 608 parents of children grades kindergarten through 12 in three rural Midwest school districts. They found a positive correlation between openness and sexual discussions between mothers and children. It seems as if openness is an important component in PASC because it correlates with revealing sexual information. Perhaps openness is a rule that guides sexual communication in families. What is interesting about these studies is that the sexual communication across families may not be different, but if the openness is strong in one family, the adolescents perceive that more sexual communication has occurred. This finding reinforces the need to examine parent-adolescent sexual

communication with more than a descriptive (content, frequency) approach. The style of communication is an important consideration.

But, these studies are not without problems. One critique of this literature is the operationalization of communication style. Because the researchers who have studied style cross multiple disciplines, they do not have a consistent approach to the measurement or discussion of style variables as evidenced by the variables of turn taking, dominance, comfortability, or openness. Through a communication lens, communication style is defined as “the way one verbally and paraverbally interacts to signal how message content should be taken, interpreted, filtered, or understood” (Norton, 1978, p. 99). Norton (1978) operationalizes communication style by measuring subscales called friendly, impression leaving, relaxed, contentious, attentive, precise, expressive, dramatic, open, dominant, and communicator image. One can see how this definition stands in contrast to the way in which Jaccard and colleagues (1998) defined style—“as the manner in which sexual information is communicated” (p. 247). Communication researchers can enhance PASC by bringing thorough, well-developed applications of communication constructs.

One study did rely on a well developed understanding of communicator style by using Norton’s (1978) Communicator Style Measure (Mueller & Powers, 1990). Mueller and Powers (1990) surveyed 234 college students at a Midwest university. Students were asked to report on their perception of their parents’ communication style about sex when the student was in junior high, high school, and college. When students’ recollections of their parents’ sexual communication style during junior high were contentious,

expressive, dramatic, open and/or dominant, the students were more sexually active. In high school, dramatic communication styles by parents correlated with higher levels of sexual activity. In college, parents' friendliness, impression leaving, attentiveness, and communicator image were the communicator style characteristics that were positively correlated with sexual activity. These findings hint that the stage of adolescence may be important when studying parent-adolescent sexual communication because perceptions of communication styles and how they relate to sexual activity were distinctly different in junior high, high school, and college. This study also has some shortcomings. First, the data are nearly 20 years old. Second, recollections of communication may not provide the same level of accuracy as when participants respond shortly after communication events occur. Third, data from mothers and fathers were collapsed into one parent variable for the data analysis such that the styles of mothers and fathers could not be compared. Based on many studies that show a difference between mothers and fathers and their sexual communication, it seems important to identify differences and similarities in their communication styles about sex.

Overall, the research on style of communication is important because it begins to tap into the how of communication, rather than the what. The how of communication moves the research from description toward process. Further, the acknowledgement of different styles of communication shows that parents approach communication differently. Because adolescents evaluate different styles of communication differently, it would be interesting to find out if communication styles are consistent by one parent, or if these styles change in any way and for what reason. Perhaps there are rules that parents

consciously or subconsciously follow to guide them in their sexual communication. Also absent from this line of research is the communication style of the adolescent and what rules they use to alter this style before or during conversations about sex.

Timing

The fourth way in which researchers evaluate PASC is by measuring the timing of conversations with children about sex. Parents struggle to determine the appropriate time to discuss issues of sexuality with their children. Parents of children between the ages of birth and 5 years identify timing of conversations as one of five categories of parental concern about human sexuality (Geasler, Dannison, & Edlund, 1995). The parents' concerns are further compounded by a perceived societal pressure requiring them to discuss sexuality at ages younger than parents deem appropriate (Geasler, et al., 1995). Some warn that adolescents must receive sexual information before engaging in sexual activity in an effort to delay sexual activity (Perrino, González-Soldevilla, Pantin, & Szapocznik, 2000). Others recommend an optimal age to talk with adolescents such as 10 or 11 and suggest conversations have the greatest impact when they happen before age 16 (Warren & Neer, 1986). Parents report that age 12 is best (Jaccard & Dittus, 1991).

Instead of establishing a particular age as the suitable indicator to have sexual discussions with an adolescent, Clawson and Reese-Weber (2003) categorized sexual interactions as on-time or off-time where on-time discussions happened before the first intercourse and off-time happened after first intercourse. Such an approach seems appropriate because Fisher (1986) found that the extent of sexual discussions and the age of the children in her study were uncorrelated. The Clawson and Reese-Weber (2003)

study revealed several interesting results about timing. First, the mean age of the participants ($N = 214$; $n = 110$ males; $n = 113$ females) for the first sex talk was around age 13 whether having “the talk” with the mother or father ($M = 13.4$ for males; $M = 13.11$ for females). Second, the mean age of first intercourse was three years later ($M = 16.77$; $M = 16.8$ for males; $M = 16.74$ for females). Only 10% percent of the sample indicated virgin status at the time of completing the survey. Third, teens reported on-time discussions with their mothers and fathers quite differently: 37% of teens said their fathers were on-time and 58% reported their mothers were on-time. By comparison, 58% of teens reported their fathers were off-time and 42% said mothers were off-time.

If a parent is going to be on-time and communicate before his or her child is sexually active, data on the average age at first intercourse prove useful. However, data on the average age of first intercourse vary by source. Two examples of reported average age at first intercourse include 15.1 years (Karofsky et al., 2000) and 17 years (Guttmacher Institute, 2006; Heisler, 2005). Another strategy to guide on time or off time communication is to stratify the percent of adolescents at a given age who are sexually active. O’Donnell, O’Donnell and Stueve (2001) found that 31% of 7th grade males and 8% of 7th grade females had experienced intercourse, and by the time the study cohort had reached the 10th grade, 66% of males and 52% of females had engaged in intercourse. In brief, Perrino and colleagues (2000) warn that additional research must be done to assist families and sex educators about the timing of sexual communication with teens. The exemplars of data presented here support this claim.

The problem with measuring timing is that sexual communication is, as I argue, a process that occurs over time. It would seem that parents and children have multiple opportunities for discussions and that sexual communication extends far beyond one conversation. Various sexual communication messages could be sent by parents such as jokes, comments to others, reactions to mediated messages, or innuendos, among a host of others. Thus, measuring the timing of conversations may be impossible because of the variety of messages that are conveyed over a child's lifetime. Also, because sexual messages can be sent in a variety of ways, adolescents responding to a survey may not recall these instances, but may be prompted to think only of serious conversations resembling sexual education, rather than sexual communication.

Another problem with measuring timing is the search for an optimal age at which to communicate. Perhaps family members send multiple messages to each other over the course of the child's development. Some messages may be intentionally given at designated times during the child's life. It seems reasonable that parents may have some internal guidance system or set of rules about when it is appropriate to share certain types of sexual information with their child. Further, parents may respond to their children's inquiries, suggesting that children may have their own curiosities at various stages in their development. Children's questions may prompt a response from a parent at unexpected times as far as the parent is concerned, but at times when the child is curious or feels safe and comfortable in seeking information. Thus, timing of communication may be governed by implicit rules parents and adolescents have, and the rules may be different for each of them.

General Family Environment

The fifth and final category of extant PASC literature is the general family environment. Jaccard and colleagues (1998) define the general family environment as “the overall quality of the relationship between parent and teen” (p. 247). While family environment could be likened to family satisfaction or quality (i.e., Heisler, 2005; Jaccard et al., 1998; Jaccard et al., 2000), this concept could be called family communication culture from a communication standpoint. Communication culture was of interest to Koesten, Miller, and Hummert (2001) in their qualitative study of 25 women between the ages of 18 and 25. Females were asked questions about their family communication culture and engagement in risk-taking behaviors (i.e., drinking, smoking, use of drugs, had sex). Women were assigned to high, moderate, limited, or low risk groups based on the number of risky behaviors they had attempted before graduating from high school. Then, the transcripts from women in each group were analyzed for descriptions of their family communication culture. The women in the low risk category described family communication cultures as having trust, comfort in talking to parents about a number of topics, and openness to negotiate rules. By contrast, women from the high risk group felt as if they had limited opportunities for discussion or negotiation, described a lack of trust and openness in their families, and weren’t comfortable talking to their parents. This study is important because of its use of family communication culture. It emphasizes characteristics of family environments that are similar among a group, albeit small groups, of women who engaged in similar behaviors. However, the study does not have a heavy emphasis on sexual communication, but rather suggests the importance of the

family communication culture among young women with similar patterns of behavior. Thus, additional work connecting family communication environment, sexual communication, and sexual behaviors would be useful in future research.

Summary of Extant PASC Literature

Parent adolescent sexual communication research has emphasized the content of conversations, extent of communication, style of communication, timing of conversations, and the general family environment. These approaches have been useful to describe conversations about sex. Descriptions are useful to understand what is happening between parents and adolescents and how that may contribute to adolescents' sexual behaviors. However, the emphasis in the literature has been to use communication as an independent variable to predict sexual behavior. I argue that the communication process itself is a phenomenon worthy of examination. Communication scholars are in a position to investigate communication from perspectives that may be unknown to researchers from other disciplines. Therefore, the quality of the communication and the process of how the sexual communication unfolds in families can be understood in new, meaningful ways.

Gaps in the Literature

As stated in the introduction, there are at least four main gaps in the literature. First, communication has been treated as a predictor variable, leaving an opportunity to study the process of communication. Second, there is an assumption that communication is occurring, but the research shows that communication does not occur in all mother-adolescent relationships. Third, parent-adolescent sexual communication has been treated

as though parents give information to adolescents and adolescents do not influence the interactions. Fourth, theory has been under-utilized. I argue that there is one solution to address these four gaps, which is to use a process-focused theory that explains revealing or concealing sexual information. Communication Privacy Management (CPM; Petronio, 2002) fits this description and will be discussed in the next section.

Communication Privacy Management

Communication Privacy Management (Petronio, 2002) is a theory about how individuals manage the disclosure of private information. Further, it is a dialectical theory that recognizes the tensions communicators feel about revealing or concealing private information. The theory makes a unique contribution to this study because of its dual emphasis on information and process. The focus of the theory is on private information and the unique characteristics of revealing or concealing the information. The theory further acknowledges that the information is managed during interaction by a process. In this section, I describe both the content and process elements of the theory to justify its applicability to parent-adolescent sexual communication.

CPM uses a boundary metaphor to illustrate the separation of private and public and the process by which information moves from private to public. There are multiple considerations made by the individual who reveals information, and then by co-owners of mutually shared information. The theory accounts for these considerations by outlining five suppositions, which serve to outline the assumptions associated with sexual information in mother-adolescent relationships. The suppositions are called private information, privacy boundaries, control and ownership, rule-based management system,

and privacy management dialectics. Each supposition will be elaborated upon while considering sexual communication in a mother-adolescent context.

Supposition 1: Private Information

The first supposition of CPM is called private information. Petronio (2002) uses this supposition to make clear that the theory is about information deemed to be private. The content of information is an important distinction made in CPM because many view the process of revealing or disclosing private information as a means to enhance intimacy during romantic relationship development (Altman & Taylor, 1973). CPM is clear that self-disclosure is a process, whereas the private information supposition emphasizes the content of the disclosure. Further, disclosure in CPM is not limited to disclosures about the self or to romantic relationships. Private information may include content that is not about the self, and CPM has been applied in contexts other than romantic relationships such as healthcare settings (Petronio, Sargent, Andea, Reganis, & Cichocki, 2004), families (Caughlin, Golish, Olson, Sargent, Cook, & Petronio, 2000), or nursing homes (Petronio & Kovach, 1997).

Sexual communication is deemed to be private information and is considered “proprietary family information” (Petronio, personal communication, July 19, 2007), even though it may not contain information about the discloser’s sex life. In fact, when referring to parents’ personal sexual experiences, Bekaert (2005) has claimed that “self-disclosure is never appropriate nor necessary” (p. 162).

A discussion of private information must also distinguish between secrets and topic avoidance because the two bodies of literature are related to sexual information yet

qualitatively different. Guerrero and Afifi (1995b) have made it clear that there is a difference between topic avoidance and secrets. Secrets imply that information is hidden and unknown to others and often contains negative information (Vangelisti, 1994), whereas topics that are avoided may be known to another, positive or negative, or not discussed with another (Guerrero & Afifi, 1995b).

The PASC literature on sexual topics has demonstrated that the content of sexual information is often reproduction, pregnancy, menstruation, or birth control, among others. This information is not secretive information because it is commonly included in such public spheres as the sex education curriculum in schools (Kirby, 2002). Further, adolescents obtain sexual information from sources other than or in addition to their parents (Daugherty & Burger, 1984; Gephard, 1977; Spanier, 1977). Therefore, sexual information is likely known by both parents and adolescents.

The failure to communicate about sexual information is, as Guerrero and Afifi (1995a) found, a result of topic avoidance, rather than an attempt to conceal private, secretive information. However, if personal information such as pregnancy, a sexually transmitted disease or infection, or rape were the content of a conversation, then the self-disclosure and secrets literature would be more appropriate than topic avoidance research. For the purpose of this study, the emphasis will be on the content of sexual information that may be avoided, rather than secretive. In sum, sexual communication fulfills the first supposition of CPM because it is private information in the mother-adolescent relationship.

Suppositions 2 and 3: Privacy Boundaries and Control and Ownership

The second supposition of CPM calls attention to the boundary metaphor, which is a visual image that represents the line between information that remains private in the interior and information that becomes public after it is revealed. The privacy boundaries may be thin and permeable allowing for much information to cross, or they may be thick and viscous, limiting the flow of information. Mothers and adolescents illustrate the second supposition because they maintain privacy boundaries around sexual information, regulate the flow of information across the boundary, develop rules about whether or not to discuss sex, and if so, how and when to reveal the information. The boundary metaphor of CPM shares many characteristics of boundaries in Family Systems Theory (von Bertalanffy, 1975) such as being open or closed. However, the use of the term *boundary* in CPM is distinct because it is applied to a particular context, namely to the management of private information. Therefore, CPM uses the phrase *privacy boundary* to refer only to the point of separation between private and public information.

Mothers and adolescents also exemplify the third supposition of CPM, that of ownership and control. Mothers and adolescents consciously or unconsciously make decisions about what to do with sexual information. One example of parents of preschool children shows that parents were cognizant of their established expectations about what sexual information they intended to talk with their children about during adolescence (Koblinsky & Atkinson, 1982). Thus, parents and adolescents attempt to control the flow of sexual information, demonstrating their ownership of the information.

Supposition 4: Rule-Based Management System

The fourth supposition of CPM is labeled the rule-based management system, and explicates the planning and coordination processes individuals undergo prior to or when revealing private information. The management system is useful in three ways: (a) to understand how individuals develop privacy/disclosure rules, (b) to explain the coordination of privacy boundaries between or among individuals once information is revealed, and (c) to manage boundary turbulence when co-owned information is mismanaged. The focus for the current study is on the development of privacy rules because this part of the process is the most beneficial to understand why mothers or adolescents reveal or conceal sexual information. Rules about revealing sexual information are established prior to disclosure episodes as evidenced again by the mothers of preschool aged children who were able to identify their intentions for managing sexual information years before their children reached adolescence (Koblinsky & Atkinson, 1982). For example, over 90% of mothers of daughters ($n = 47$) reported their intentions to discuss the birth process and menstruation; 80-89% intended to discuss body differences, reproduction, sexual morals, venereal disease, contraception, intercourse, and rape/sexual offenses; 70-79% intended to discuss obscene words, petting, or abortion. By contrast, mothers of sons ($n = 35$) intended to discuss the same topics, but with different levels of frequency. The only topic selected by over 90% of the mothers was sexual morals. Topics selected by 80-90% were birth, body differences, reproduction, venereal disease, contraception, and menstruation. Topics selected by 70-79% were obscene words, intercourse, petting, rape/sexual offenses, abortion, and

homosexuality. These frequencies show that mothers have different intentions to discuss sexual topics, and that their intentions are different with daughters and sons. However, the specific rules for revealing or concealing sexual information between mothers and adolescents is unknown, and will be discussed in greater detail in the next section.

Supposition 5: Privacy Management Dialectics

The fifth supposition of CPM clarifies that CPM is a dialectical theory (Petronio, 2002). Within a relationship, partners experience tensions between the decision to reveal or conceal private information with one another. Applied to sexual information, Kirkman and colleagues (2005) suggested that parents may feel a contradiction between the need to discuss sex with their adolescents and the need to avoid the topic. Montgomery (1993) aptly described a hypothetical situation:

Consider, for instance, a parent and a teenager dealing with the mutually negating needs to be open in order to reaffirm their closeness and to be closed in order to protect vulnerabilities. They may achieve a resolution of these opposing forces by refraining from disclosing personal information or critical judgments about particularly sensitive topics. But in so doing, they become susceptible to regrets about the lack of candor, and these regrets may increase over time, recreating the tension between the need to be expressive and the need to be self-protective. The two even may adapt by revealing their needs to conceal, thereby elevating the dilemma to a new plane of dialectical experience. (p. 208)

To summarize, CPM relies on five suppositions identified as private information, privacy boundaries, ownership and control, rule-based management system, and privacy

management dialectics. These suppositions have been presented with the specific content of sexual information in mind and have established some assumptions embedded within this study. Next, the fourth supposition, the rule-based management system, will be explained in more detail. The rule-based management system explains three processes by which information is revealed or concealed. The first process is the foundation of privacy rules, which describes the criteria individuals have for revealing or concealing information.

Rule-Based Management System: Privacy Rule Foundations

CPM employs a rule-based management system that explains the foundation of rules for disclosing private information, the coordination of boundaries once private information is disclosed, and boundary turbulence that may result from mismanagement. In the present study, I limit my focus to the first management system—privacy rule foundations. By limiting the focus, a thorough understanding of the privacy rules can be achieved in order to understand mothers' and adolescents' considerations about the process of revealing or concealing sexual information. According to Petronio (2002), "Rule development focuses on the way people come to know or establish privacy rules" (p. 38). For example, mothers of deceased children established criteria about discussing their deceased child (Toller, 2005). Mothers evaluated the confidant with whom they were speaking as to the depth of the established interpersonal relationship. When the mothers were not close to the confidant, they did not discuss their deceased child, but if the target was a close, personal friend, mothers were more comfortable disclosing.

As introduced earlier, one illustration of the variety of rules that operate in mother-adolescent discussions about sex is provided by Rosenthal et al. (1998). They labeled five patterns of communication as avoidant, reactive, opportunistic, child-initiated, or mutually interactive. The first pattern was called avoidant. With this pattern, mothers acknowledged that they did not discuss sex, felt uncomfortable, or perceived their adolescent as unreceptive. Viewed through a CPM lens, these mothers appear to have impermeable privacy boundaries around sexual information. Second, with the *reactive* pattern, mothers initiated communication only in response to a perceived pressing issue. Mothers who followed this pattern reported having had only one or two conversations of a sexual nature with their child. Reactive mothers appear to have thick, although not impermeable, privacy boundaries around sexual information. Third, with the *opportunistic* pattern, mothers initiated conversations and sought opportunities in which to engage their adolescent in conversation. Further, these mothers discussed more topics than mothers in the other classifications, reflecting more open and permeable privacy boundaries. Fourth, with the *child-initiated* pattern, mothers talked with their child only after the child confronted her. Like reactive mothers, mothers in the child-initiated classification did not reveal sexual information on their own initiative. Fifth, with the *mutually interactive* pattern, both mother and child initiated conversations about sex. Mothers described themselves as open, reflecting a permeable privacy boundary.

This typology confirms the variation in mothers' approaches to discussions about sexual information. While the focus of their study was not on privacy management, the types of communication they observed provide evidence about various ways in which

mothers have approached conversations with their adolescents in which sexual information is the main focus.

Rule Development Criteria

One shortcoming of the Rosenthal et al. (1998) study was that it provided no additional information about how the rules for discussing sex were developed. Knowledge of rule development is important to reach understanding about the differences between mothers who reveal sexual information and those who do not, and to deepen understanding about the process of initiating conversations about sex. The privacy rule development management process of CPM resolves this issue because it sets forth five criteria that guide decisions to reveal/conceal private information. The criteria are culture, gender, context, motivation for revealing or concealing, and the risk-benefit ratio. Commentary on each criterion follows.

Culture

Cultures have distinct norms about revealing private information at societal, familial, and individual levels. Western culture has particular ideologies about sexuality that guide the treatment of sexual information in interpersonal relationships. Reiss (1981) describes how the history of sexuality has arrived on the 20th century with “strong guilt, secrecy, and psychological qualms woven into its basic fabric” (Reiss, 1981, p. 278). Nock (1998) concurs by asserting that families in the United States are more private than they were during colonial times. Toller’s (2005) study of bereaving parents infers a violation in privacy norms in Western culture. In the study, parents who talked about

their deceased child reported being judged and criticized by others. They revealed private information, yet experienced negative reactions.

Co-cultures within the United States are believed to have different rules about communication. Vangelisti and Daly (1988) showed that communication skills vary by culture; thus, it seems likely that the process of communication may be different, as well. However, co-cultural differences may have little impact when the topic is sex. Barber (1994) asserts that cross-cultural similarity is unique to the topic of sexual behavior because there were no significant differences about parent-adolescent disagreements over sexual behavior in his study among Black, Hispanic, and White parents. But, several examples show that co-cultural differences do exist.

First, Orgocka (2004) interviewed 30 Muslim immigrant mothers and 38 daughters living in the United States. Results of focus groups and individual interviews showed that Muslims may be restricted in their mother-daughter sexual communication. These mothers reported discomfort with sexual communication because of embarrassment, lack of knowledge, lack of parental role models, daughter's age, and being undermined by daughters. Communication to daughters was limited to two messages: "sexuality is an endowment from God," and "virginity until marriage is important and the key to successful new marital relationships" (Orgocka, 2004, p. 265). The daughters in the study reported that sexual communication with their mothers would threaten the "social order" (p. 265). No further explanation of what this threat implies was provided in the study. Further, daughters reported that if they were to initiate sexual

communication with their mothers, they feared their mothers would assume they were already sexually active.

Second, Asian American college students ($N = 165$) reported results similar to White samples in that mothers communicated with daughters and sons more than fathers, daughters were talked with more than sons, and some sexual topics were discussed more than others (Kim & Ward, 2007). For example, menstruation was discussed with 81% of daughters ($n = 74$), dating norms with 66%, intercourse with 27%, and STDs with 12%. By comparison, menstruation was discussed with 9% of sons ($n = 91$), dating norms with 31%, intercourse with 12%, and STDs with almost 8%. However, other results were markedly different from White samples. For example, the researchers compared their results to those of Hutchinson and Cooney (1998) and Miller, Kotchick, Dorsey, Forehand, and Ham (1998) and indicated that sexual communication overall was much lower among Asian-Americans than Black, White, or Latino samples. Kim and Ward (2007) suggested that a cultural taboo about sex pervades Asian American families. They also noted that differences in vocabulary could limit sexual communication as well because respondents who spoke to their parents in English but were spoken to in the respective Asian language reported significantly less sexual communication than families in which only one language was spoken in the home.

Third, McKee and Karasz (2006) interviewed 11 Hispanic mothers and daughters from New York's inner city. Mothers reported that social mobility was their primary motivator to talk to their daughters about sex. Most of the mothers began their sexual activity at an early age and became pregnant. Their desire was for their daughters to have

an easier life than they had, and the solution was education and delaying sex and pregnancy. Further, the mothers and daughters discussed how important open communication about sex was for them and mothers suggested this openness was in stark contrast to the conservative, religious views of their childhoods. Despite the proclaimed openness by mothers and adolescents, they also admitted that sexual communication was challenging, a source of embarrassment, risky or painful, or promoted sexual activity. Thus, the Hispanic mothers and adolescents in this study parallel the sentiments of mothers in other studies about the importance of openness juxtaposed with some challenges. But, their motivations for sexual communication stand in stark contrast to the findings in other studies.

Fourth, Pluhar and Kuriloff (2004) interviewed 30 African-American mother-daughter dyads after videotaping conversations about family rules, intercourse, and birth control. Similar to the results in studies with predominantly White samples, some of the dyads in this study reported comfort with these topics while others reported discomfort or silence. One exception was the theme of anger, which had not been mentioned in any other study reviewed for this project. Daughters reported that if a mother spoke to her with anger while enforcing rules, she would not respond, while mothers indicated that if a daughter was angry, she avoided communication with her daughter.

Fifth, O'Sullivan and colleagues (2001) conducted 21 focus groups of African American or Latina mothers of pre-adolescent daughters. Some noteworthy communication differences were that African American mothers emphasized pregnancy and STD prevention whereas Latina mothers were concerned with preventing sexual

contact. These different approaches led the mothers to seek different types of information. For example, the African American mothers sought information about sexual activity but the Latina mothers discussed relationship development with their daughters. In brief, there seem to be several similarities across cultures such as valuing open communication, finding sexual communication to be challenging, or talking with daughters more than sons. However, there are also subtle differences across cultures that influence the sexual communication between mothers and daughters.

After considering co-cultural differences, families, too, have unique communication cultures (Koesten et al., 2001). For example, in a study of white female adolescents conducted by Koesten et al., the researchers noted two themes of family communication culture: (a) open, inclusive, and supportive, or (b) limited opportunities for discussion and negotiation. Petronio (2002) also suggests that families have unique privacy rule orientations based on the permeability of exterior and interior family privacy boundaries. She used high, medium, and low as descriptors for exterior and interior family privacy boundaries. An exterior family privacy boundary represents the separator between the family unit and those outside the family, and the interior privacy boundary represents borders shared by relational partners within the family privacy boundary, such as a parent and child. The exterior and interior privacy boundaries combine with high, medium, and low levels of permeability to create nine different family privacy orientations (Petronio, 2002). Such diversity reinforces the idea that even after cultural and co-cultural privacy rules are considered, families vary in their rule development and privacy boundary management. Asking mothers to reflect on societal, co-cultural and

familial cultural norms is important to develop a comprehensive understanding of the development of rules about revealing or concealing sexual information.

Gender

The second rule development criterion is gender. Men and women have been found to develop different rules about disclosing private information (Petronio, 2002). Overall, women tend to disclose more emotions than men (Snell, Jr., Miller, & Belk, 1988) and evaluate the recipient of the information differently from men (Petronio, Martin, & Littlefield, 1984). For example, women evaluate the target's warmth, openness, trustworthiness, and sincerity more than men.

The data on sex differences in disclosure were gathered from adult populations and do not reflect similarities or differences of disclosures between an adult and an adolescent. Perhaps, as Snell, Jr., Belk, and Hawkins II (1986) have suggested, it is gender-role norms and expectations that most strongly bear on the establishment of rules for communication between parents and adolescents. Derlega, Metts, Petronio, and Margulis (1993) also assert that expectations influence the choice of disclosure to males or females.

Gender certainly has an impact on parent-adolescent sexual communication. The PASC literature shows marked sex differences between fathers and mothers and between daughters and sons. Because the focus of this study is on mothers, attention in this section will be on the differences in the PASC literature between daughters and sons. Numerous studies have shown that daughters receive more information than sons and that the

information daughters hear is different from what sons hear (e.g., DiIorio et al., 1999; Fisher, 1988).

One early example of sex differences between daughters and sons was established by Darling and Hicks (1982). They asked 363 male and 333 female unmarried college students directed questions during interviews. They found that males received four strong messages out of a possible 12 from their parents: (a) there are negative consequences to pregnancy before marriage (58.7%); (b) sexual relations express love (31.7%); (c) it's easy for petting to lead to intercourse (20.8%); and (d) nice people don't have sex before marriage (20.4%). For females, the topics were, in rank order: (a) the negative consequences of pregnancy (61.0%), (b) nice people don't have sex before marriage (43.8%), (c) petting too easily leads to intercourse (35.7%), and (d) sex is a good way to reflect love for someone (34.2%). While the topics discussed most frequently with males and females were the same, the percentages of males and females who heard each topic were different. For example, 20.4% of males reported hearing the message "nice people don't have sex before marriage" but 43.8% of females reported hearing this message.

In another example, Lefkowitz and colleagues (1996) found that conversations about sex between mothers and daughters ($n = 17$) contained more words than conversations with sons ($n = 14$). Specifically, mother-daughter conversations contained 1798 words and mother-son discussions contained 1529 words. Interestingly, there was no significant difference between the numbers of words the adolescent males or females used, but it was the mother who altered communication based on the sex of her child. DiIorio et al. (1999) rank ordered 14 topics of discussion between mothers and

adolescents. The top three topics for males were STD/AIDS, using a condom, and sexual intercourse, whereas the top three for girls were menstrual cycle, dating and sex behavior, and STD/AIDS.

Not only do mothers talk with sons and daughters about different topics, they also talk about more topics with daughters than sons. For example, combined data from mothers and adolescents showed that 13 out of a possible 14 topics were discussed more frequently between mothers and daughters than between mothers and sons (DiIorio et al., 1999). Specifically, 89.9% of female adolescents indicated their mother talked about menstruation whereas 36.6% of males reported having discussed this topic. Dating and sex behavior was discussed by 85.4% of the females but only 76.7% of the males. STD/AIDS were reported by 83.7% of the females and 78.9% of the males. Not having sex at all was discussed with 82.6% of females and 61.2% of males.

Perhaps some, although certainly not all, of the difference between sons and daughters is due to the fact that adolescent females self-disclose more than males (Guerrero & Afifi, 1995a; Noller & Bagi, 1985). The propensity for females to approach their parents and initiate conversations is greater than it is for males, as well (Guerrero & Afifi, 1995b). The differences may also be due to the type of information. For example, Koblinsky and Atkinson (1982) found that when mothers were asked about their plans for discussing sexual information with their sons and daughters, menstruation was identified as a topic to discuss more frequently with females than for males. Similarly, mothers expected to talk about wet dreams, masturbation, and homosexuality with their sons more than their daughters. Absent from these reports of differences is an understanding of why

the differences might exist. Mothers have not been asked to articulate how their approaches to sexual communication differ for sons and daughters.

Motivation

The third criterion for rule development is the motivation of the sender to reveal private information. CPM identifies three types of motivations used to develop privacy rules—expressive needs, self-knowledge, or self-defense (Petronio, 2002). Expressive needs motivate individuals to disclose when they have a desire to share their thoughts or feelings. It seems as if sharing important knowledge, such as sexual education information, would fit with this type of motivation because parents or adolescents would have thoughts they may want to disclose to the other. Self-knowledge needs are those in which the revealer wants to know more about him/herself, and uses self-disclosure to obtain feedback. Self-defense needs are motivations which guide non-disclosure because the risks associated with revealing seem too great. In one study, Guerrero and Afifi (1995a) identified social inappropriateness, self and relationship protection, and parent unresponsiveness as the motivations adolescents had to guard private information. Several motivating factors have been identified, but research has not adequately explored what motivates mothers to reveal or conceal sexual information.

The motivation for nearly all PASC research presents other possible motivations for revealing private information. The primary motivating factor of PASC researchers has been to show that parental communication influences adolescents' sexual behaviors, and that communication is a prerequisite to keep adolescents from having sex that may result in pregnancy, AIDS, or STDs (e.g., Clawson & Reese-Weber, 2003; Jaccard & Dittus,

1991; Miller, Benson, & Galbraith, 2001; Rosenthal, Senserrick, & Feldman, 2001). Jaccard et al. (2002) clearly state their view, “We believe that parents should assume responsibility for the information that their children have about sex and birth control” (p. 22). But, are parents motivated to talk with their adolescents for the same reason that researchers believe? Fifteen to twenty percent of parents believe it is permissible for their adolescent to engage in intercourse under certain conditions (Jaccard & Dittus, 1991). Thus, it seems important to ask mothers what motivates them to talk with their adolescents about sexuality. Further, because evidence shows that not all mothers talk with their adolescents, knowing what motivates them not to communicate about sex will provide an interesting contrast to the extant literature. Reasons why adolescents might reveal sexual information to a parent have yet to be examined.

Context

The contextual criteria for privacy disclosures include the social environment and the physical setting (Petronio, 2002). The social environment for this project is clearly bound within a family context, more specifically, the mother-adolescent relationship. Further, the onset of adolescence, which prompts PASC, is a life circumstance that requires a change in the way privacy boundaries are managed (Petronio, 2002). Because adolescence is marked by age, then the age at which children receive sexual information is another contextual criterion. Space for conversations seems to be another consideration for the establishment of rules. I address each of these contextual criteria—family, timing, and space—in this section with a focus on how these contextual factors might affect the development of privacy rules.

Family. Family structure has been shown to effect privacy management differently in intact, single parent, and blended families. For example, Golish and Caughlin (2002) found that the motivation to avoid topics was significantly different for biological parents and stepparents. Afifi (2003) found that boundary management in stepfamilies is characterized by feelings of being caught, enmeshed boundaries, and a revealing/concealing dialectical tension, among others. Even though rule development was not the focus of these studies, the findings show that family structure brings about differences in privacy management and must be considered when seeking understanding about the development of privacy rules.

Timing. Another contextual factor influencing the development of privacy rules is the appropriate timing to communicate with children about sex. Timing was identified by Petronio (2002) as part of the social environment context, and timing has also received attention by PASC researchers. For example, parents of children between the ages of birth and 5 years identified timing of conversations as one of five categories of parental concern about human sexuality (Geasler et al., 1995). Parents' concerns were compounded by a perceived societal pressure to discuss sexuality at ages younger than parents deemed appropriate (Geasler et al., 1995). Parents and adolescents alike have confirmed that sexual information should be revealed to adolescents based on the maturity and sexual development of the child (Kirkman et al., 2005). Perrino and colleagues (2000) contended that receiving sexual information before engaging in sexual activity would delay the onset of sexual activity, and Warren and Neer (1986) argued that conversations have the greatest impact if they happen before the age of 16. Parents and

adolescents reported having conversations during the pre-teen or early teen years such as ages 10 or 11 (Warren & Neer, 1986), 12 (Jaccard & Dittus, 1991), or 13 (Clawson & Reese-Weber, 2003; Fisher, 1986), which indicates adolescence is not the only time period during child development when sexual communication occurs. Clawson and Reese-Weber (2003) also categorized sexual conversations as on time or off time. With this approach, parents were on-time if they communicated with their child before engaging in sexual activity and off-time if they talked with their child after he/she had engaged in sexual activity. Their results showed that 57.5% of mothers were on-time.

The current project will contribute to previous findings about ages for sexual conversations, but will do so with the guidance of CPM and its tenet of timing-as-context as part of the development of privacy rules. In this way, mothers and adolescents will be asked to describe their thoughts about the timing of sexual communication, and how they determine the age at which they will talk, think they will talk, or have talked about sex, and what they will talk about at various ages or stages of child development.

Space. Another contextual aspect to consider is the physical setting for privacy disclosures. To that end, very little research discusses the physical environment in which parent-adolescent sexual conversations occur. In one study, mothers who were open with their adolescents indicated they had sexual conversations when sexual communication was not the only purpose for the interaction (Rosenthal et al., 1998). These mothers had conversations in the car, in the kitchen after school, or in front of the TV. The participants in Pluhar and Kuriloff's (2004) study reported nearly identical details about

the setting for sexual conversations. This study will ask mothers and adolescents how they determine what physical environment will be used for sexual conversations.

Others. There are other contextual factors that may influence mother-adolescent sexual communication such as social class, religion or education. Wight and colleagues (1995) surveyed parents ($N = 608$) of school-aged children in rural Midwest communities (population of 4000 or less). Socioeconomic status specifically was not one of the demographic variables, but parents were asked for their occupations. In this sample, 27% were managers, lawyers, physicians, teachers or nurses; 20% were homemakers; 18% were technicians, clerical, or sales workers; 12% were laborers, waitresses, or factory workers; 8% were farmers/ranchers; and 15% were unemployed. The religions reported were 17% Lutheran, 16% Methodist, 14% Baptist, 11% Catholic, 21% Christian (unspecified denomination), 15% other, and 6% none. Results where these variables were measured showed no relationship for mothers between religion and discussion of sexuality topics with either daughters or sons. It seems as though researchers are more interested in how social class, religion, and education influence sexual behaviors than sexual communication. Based on the Wight and colleagues (1995) findings, it seems as though parents' religion and occupations have little influence on their communication.

Risk-Benefit Ratio

Even though parents may be motivated to talk to their adolescents about sex, the act of discussing requires a decision-making process. The risk-benefit ratio is one criterion of CPM's privacy rule development that may lead to understanding the differences between parents who proceed to have conversations about sex and those who

do not. Communicating with an adolescent about sex does have risks such as tuning out a parent (Pluhar & Kuriloff, 2004) or being evaluated negatively by the adolescent (Feldman & Rosenthal, 2000). However, there are some benefits of sexual communication such as closeness (Pluhar & Kuriloff, 2004) or fewer sexual risk behaviors by adolescents (Jaccard et al., 1996; Koesten et al., 2001; Miller, Forehand, & Kotchick, 1999).

Using a CPM lens, the level of risk is evaluated while deciding whether or not to reveal or conceal private information. Three levels of risk, according to CPM, are high, moderate, or low (Petronio, 2002). Petronio (2002) defines high-risk information as that which causes “shame, threat or severe embarrassment” (p. 67), whereas moderate-risk information involves that which is “uncomfortable, troublesome, or aggravating” (69). The views about sexual information, as discussed in a previous section, are important in order to assess the risk that mothers associate with sexual information. A second consideration of the risk-benefit ratio criterion is the type of risk. Petronio (2002) identifies types of risk as security, stigma, face, relational, or role risks. Managing the disclosure of private information is guided by considering the type of risk and the benefits or costs the disclosure may impart. No studies have asked mothers to describe their perceived risks and benefits of sexual communication and how that guides their decision to reveal or conceal sexual information.

Summary of Rule-Development Criteria

According to CPM, disclosure of private information is guided by three rule management processes, the first of which is called privacy rule foundations. This first

process considers the development of rules for disclosure and considers the criteria of culture, gender, motivation, context, and risk-benefit ratio. The rules about revealing sexual information are important to understand because they describe the processes leading up to the revelation or concealment of sexual information. Further, because some mothers do not communicate with their adolescents about sex, it is important to understand what hinders this interaction. The sexual communication process and the rules for revealing or concealing sexual communication from a mother to an adolescent can be understood by asking the following research questions:

RQ_{2a}: How do mothers and adolescents describe the process of revealing or concealing sexual information?

RQ_{2b}: How do mothers and adolescents describe the rule development criteria of culture, gender, context, motivation, and risk-benefit ratio for revealing or concealing sexual information?

Strengths in the Literature

In review, substantial PASC research has been conducted and yielded important contributions to the understanding of communication. First, sexual communication between parents and adolescents has been characterized in several ways such as uncomfortable, embarrassing, or challenging. Second, despite these negative assumptions, sexual communication is occurring between parents and adolescents, particularly between mothers and adolescents. Research strongly demonstrates that mothers engage in much of the parent-adolescent sexual communication. Third, mothers talk about a wide variety of sexual topics with their sons and daughters and do so, for the most part, when children are between the ages of 11 and 16. Fourth, mothers who

communicate about sex believe that openness is an important attribute of the communication. This body of literature has also contributed to findings about the sexual behavior of adolescents. However, the sexual behavior outcomes are beyond the scope of the current project.

Gaps in the Literature

As mentioned in the introduction, sexual communication can be challenging in interpersonal relationships, but the literature has yet to begin to understand why this might be. Researchers have been able to identify the feelings associated with talking about sex, such as discomfort or embarrassment, but have not been able to explain the source of the discomfort or embarrassment, among other sentiments, that are attached to sexual information. Several explanations are likely to exist, but empirical research has not captured the reasons why they exist in relationships, particularly between parents and children. Further, some adolescents have reported that sexual communication with their mothers is open and comfortable. Thus, it is important to understand the qualities of sexual information, as reported by mothers and adolescents, that lead them to reveal or conceal sexual content to each other.

Additionally, by measuring communication as topics, researchers have failed to adequately pursue an understanding of the sexual communication process. Some mothers or adolescents seem to be able to talk about sex while others do not. Further, communication has often been treated as if it moves from parent to adolescent and neglects the possibility that the receiver of the information influences the communication process. Another gap has been the under utilization of theory. An attempt to fill these

gaps can be achieved using the rule development criteria of CPM—culture, gender, context, motivation, and risk/benefit ratio.

Implications

Theoretical Implications

This study attempts to make three contributions to the advancement of theory. First, the challenging nature of communicating sexual information will be questioned. Second, PASC will be studied with a theoretical lens, a practice rarely done in previous studies. Third, CPM will be advanced by using a new example of private information—sexual information.

First, the results of this study will advance the understanding of sexual information. Sexual information has been identified as a challenging topic to discuss in interpersonal relationships but the reasons why have not been adequately understood through research. This study seeks to clarify why sexual information is often considered taboo, and why it is particularly challenging for mothers or adolescents to discuss with each other. Identifying the reasons why the information is difficult may help break down some of the barriers surrounding the topic of sex or support a movement toward healthy approaches toward openness about sexual information. Additionally, some mothers or adolescents may not believe that communicating about sex is challenging. Understanding why sexual information is comfortable for some mothers and adolescents may assist other family members for whom the topic is difficult.

Second, PASC will be advanced by using theory. Indeed, much PASC research has been largely atheoretical (Jaccard et al., 2002), so this study will explain the findings

through a theoretical lens. Using theory is important to organize and summarize knowledge obtained from data, to focus attention, or to clarify observations (Littlejohn, 1999).

Third, Communication Privacy Management theory provides a comprehensive and detailed explanation of the management of private information and the dialectical tensions that reside with the decision to reveal or conceal private information. Applications of the theory to various types of information show the rigor and power of the theory to explain social phenomena. This study will apply the theory with information that is not self-disclosure or secretive, two bodies of literature that were instrumental in the conceptualization of CPM. As such, the theory can be strengthened in its applicability through the present study because it will use information that is private, but not secretive.

The specific boundary management process of privacy rule development receives particular attention in this study, and is perhaps the first study to systematically and specifically seek understanding about rule development using CPM's five criteria. One study used some of the criteria for rule development—gender, culture, and context (specifically school context; Serewicz, Dickson, Morrison, & Poole, 2007). The findings from this study as reported by 264 college students showed no significant relationship between any of the three rule development criteria and the families' orientation toward privacy. However, the family privacy orientation was measured narrowly using a relatively new scale. The scale's reliability was adequate ($\alpha = .80$) but may need additional manipulation to be valid. Additionally, this study asked for one family member

to report on the privacy orientation for the family. Asking multiple family members to report on their perceptions of the privacy orientations may have led to different results.

Another study focused on boundary access and protection rules (Petronio, Reeder, Hecht, & Ros-Mendoza, 1996), but the study did not specifically target participants' recollections of the criteria set forth in CPM. Instead, the findings from the 38 children and adolescent victims of child abuse revealed three rules about revealing the abuse. The first rule, tacit permission, described how the victims responded when asked about potential abuse. The second rule, selecting the circumstances, described how victims sought places to make their disclosure that felt comfortable or reduced fears, such as while watching TV or washing dishes. The third rule, incremental disclosure, refers to disclosing the abuse using small amounts of information over a series of conversations across time.

In brief, even though some of the privacy rule criteria are not correlated with the families' privacy orientations, it seems as if participants from qualitative studies can articulate their considerations about revealing or concealing private information. While Petronio (2002) sets forth specific categories for the rule development criteria, it is possible that other categories for rules may exist. One unique aspect of CPM is its stated goal to be of practical use. Petronio (2007) wrote:

When a theory is built to be *of* practice, as CPM has been, the theoretical formulations are customized to guide users toward developing translational research. For CPM, the goal is to offer a theoretical perspective that suggests a

way to understand the tension between revealing and concealing private information. (p. 218)

It is therefore toward the practical implications of this project that I now turn.

Practical Implications

Parenting a teen in an age of friends-with-benefits relationships/hooking up (Paul & Hayes, 2002), ambiguity about the meaning of virginity loss (Carpenter, 2001), and questioning whether oral sex is sex (Remez, 2000) seem to make parent-adolescent sexual communication more challenging and more realistic than the topic seemed while simply reading research articles for this dissertation. As I communicate with friends of adolescents, I am reminded of the potential this research project has to make valuable, realistic contributions to the day-to-day lives of families.

First, I hope to gain insights from mothers and adolescents about how easy or challenging sexual information was to discuss. What is it about sexual information that makes it a topic so challenging to talk about? Why is it that some parents believe sexual information is challenging to discuss, but they talk with their adolescents anyway? Why is it that some adolescents want to ask their parents questions, but may choose to reveal their inquiries? These are the questions that I hope to answer. In so doing, one possible implication of this study is to help parents and adolescents ease the tension between revealing and concealing sexual information.

Second, I hope to obtain useful information about the process of communication. My intent is to provide suggestions about how to talk with adolescents or parents about the topic of sex. While some researchers have looked at openness or comfort specifically,

my aim is to look at a variety of communication qualities that are relevant to parent-adolescent sexual communication. Additionally, I intend to show how the adolescents participate in and affect PASC.

Third, there is a great deal of variation in how families talk about sex. This variety makes it hard to coach parents to know what is right, what is appropriate, what is best for the adolescent, or what is best for the parent-adolescent relationship. Parents have fears about revealing sexual information to their adolescents, and about their teens engaging in sexual behaviors, which can lead to harsh consequences. So, if I can contribute in one, small way by showing the rules that parents or adolescents have about revealing sexual information, I can then share this information to a non-academic audience (in addition to an academic audience) through presentations at schools or churches in my local community, or by submitting articles to parenting magazines. When I have massed enough data, I can start my own website to provide practical, useful information to parents who seek assistance.

Summary of Purpose

In sum, the purpose of this study is to: (a) seek understanding about the challenges of discussing sexual information in mother-adolescent relationships, (b) emphasize the process of communication using the privacy rule foundations of CPM, (c) gather dyadic data from mothers and adolescents, and (d) incorporate theory. Communication Privacy Management theory guides the study because of its focus on private information and how such information is managed. This project will make unique contributions to the Communication literature by exploring one specific type of

communication—sexual—and why it is problematic in interpersonal relationships in Western cultures. The study will also contribute to family communication literature by analyzing a specific aspect of conversations about sex. Finally, the study will advance CPM by applying a specific type of information to the theory and seeing if the rule development criteria are sufficient to explain the process of revealing or concealing sexual information between parents and adolescents.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

Interpretive Paradigm

The interpretive paradigm is a way of knowing in which understanding is achieved through observing lived experience (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002) or human action (Schwandt, 2000), and, as such, was an appropriate stance for the current project. The interpretive paradigm permitted me to seek mothers and adolescents and to listen to their beliefs, prejudices, and rules about sexual information and conversations. Schutz (1967) called our beliefs, prejudices, and rules *stocks of knowledge*, which are used to guide the behavior, actions, and communication practices of members of a given social milieu. Schwandt (2000) said that “the [interpretive] inquirer must grasp the meanings that constitute that action” (p. 191). In part, one of my goals was to understand the meaning of sexual information in the family context. After understanding this meaning, I intended to learn mothers’ and adolescents’ rules for revealing or concealing sexual information. The interpretive turn provided the opportunity to obtain multiple meanings of sexual information and to understand how these elements shaped meaning.

The interpretive paradigm was also useful for this study because it accounted for multiple realities across families. Family systems are unique and distinct from one another and create a great variety of lived experiences. Families shelter “the essence of the everyday world” (Burrell & Morgan, 1979, 31), a concern of the interpretive paradigm. The diverse ways in which families operate create a plethora of explanations about sexual information and how it is treated within families, particularly between a

parent and child. Through qualitative research, I came in close contact with participants to learn the socially co-constructed meanings of sexual information, to understand the rules for revealing/concealing it, and to interpret the findings across participants. Specifically, interviews allowed me to engage participants in lively, meaningful discussions about a topic, listen attentively to the explanations of their reality, make interpretations, induce meaning, and suggest common themes from their collective responses.

Encounters with participants also afforded some flexibility in the research process (Bryman, 1999). As a participant shared descriptions of his/her subjective, lived experiences, I directed and redirected the conversation as I learned more *in situ*. I also modified questions from one participant to the next as I reflected on past interactions with participants. What I have learned from my own experience as a researcher guides my approach with future participants. Thus, I was able to come as close as possible to the emic view, which is “see[ing] the scene through the meanings that the members attribute to their own communicative actions” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 80). With some degree of flexibility, I was able to see how the beliefs about sexual information and rule development processes emerged from participants’ actual, lived experiences.

Qualitative research and its “ideographic mode of reasoning” (Bryman, 1999, p. 41) coincide with CPM because privacy rules are fluid (Petronio, 2002). Also, because CPM is a dialectical theory, “Stability is but a momentary transition in a stream of continuous change” (Montgomery, 1993, p. 208). Indeed, as Bryman explained, ideography of qualitative research indicates that the data represent understanding at one

moment in time. Therefore, the data are not conducive for the establishment of long-standing laws or principles, which are common in the quantitative research tradition. Rather, the understanding gained from participants captured an in-depth and detailed perspective about private parent-adolescent conversations. Further, the information obtained was different from previous research that asked respondents to recall objective information such as timing or content of conversations. Rather, the information obtained in this study provided details about the beliefs and rules that precede mothers' or adolescents' conscious or unconscious decisions to reveal or conceal sexual information.

Methodology

Within the interpretive paradigm, I loosely positioned my research within the grounded theory methodology (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). One important aim of this project was to understand the process of sexual communication. As such, the grounded theory methodology permitted me to theorize about process based predominantly on data. Strauss and Corbin (1998) supported researchers in their fragmented usage of grounded theory. They stated, "We know that readers will treat the material...as items on a smorgasbord table from which they can choose, reject, and ignore according to their own "tastes"—and rightly so" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, pp. 8-9). From the "smorgasbord," I have chosen the principles of the methodology, rather than the exact steps of the method. My "tastes" were to (a) theorize about sexual communication by developing process models as a result of participants' stories and reflections, (b) conduct the research using interviews, and (c) analyze the data with thematic analysis. While none of the specific analysis techniques of grounded theory such as open or axial coding were used in this

study, the philosophy of the grounded theory methodology blanketed the data analysis and interpretation by allowing the process of sexual communication to emerge from the data. The coding procedures in the grounded theory methodology serve several purposes, some of which can also be achieved using data analysis techniques from other methodologies. For example, one purpose of coding in grounded theory is to build rather than test theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), which was one of the functions of this study. Further, grounded theory also allows researchers to “identify, develop, and relate the concepts that are the building blocks of theory” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 13). By focusing on the process of sexual communication, I contributed to theory development. While my intent was not to present a developed theory, I believe the results may prove resourceful for theory building in the future.

Researcher Stance

The stance of the researcher in qualitative research favors closeness with the research participants in order to get an insider’s perspective (Bryman, 1999). By gaining access to mothers and adolescents, I hoped to get a stronger understanding of their perspectives on PASC than can be obtained through survey data. As such, I wanted to give voice to mothers and adolescents and allow them to elaborate upon their communication experiences with each other. As I gave mothers and adolescents voice, I also recognized my narrative presence (Lindlof & Taylor, 2000) in the project and need to disclose my thoughts and views on PASC. Therefore, before continuing, I offer my stance on the topic of sexual communication to reveal my background and interests and how they guided this project.

I believe sexual information should be communicated openly and comfortably in all interpersonal relationships where issues of sex are concerned. However, I have rarely experienced these ideals in my own interpersonal relationships, particularly with my parents. I recall a moment during my early adolescence when my mother initiated a conversation about menstruation. I also recall a conversation with my mom that I initiated as a late adolescent in which I professed my desire to remain a virgin until marriage. My father never made a comment to me about sexuality nor about the broader scope of romantic relationships. The most remote verbal expression from my dad was a directive when he told me to leave the room when he and my younger brother were watching comedian Andrew Dice Clay. When I eventually had the opportunity to watch Clay's comedy routine, I thought it was raunchy and filthy. The early 20s feminist in me resented my dad for allowing my brother to watch the show but not me. Now, as a woman in my mid 30s, I am glad for that one boundary of decency my dad set for me. I am also saddened by his tacit approval of this female-objectifying material for my brother. Perhaps these combined experiences led me to grieve for more open communication with my parents, which I believe would have given me a healthier outlook on romantic relationships.

As an adolescent, I also learned that I could overcome the "miss-goody-two-shoes" perception my peers had of me by making sexual innuendos. My desire to fit in and feel accepted during adolescence was achieved when I made sexual remarks. This positive reinforcement led me to have a comfort level with sexual information among my peer group. Over time, the content of my statements has changed from sexual innuendos

and “mind-in-the-gutter” comments to healthier commentary on human sexuality and the role of sex in relationships. When others react with surprise or discomfort to my openness, my belief that talking about sex is challenging is reinforced. This bias has developed my research interest to determine if sexual communication is indeed challenging and, if so, why. Then, I want to know how people talk about sex. I chose the family context for the dissertation because of my academic and personal interest in families and my belief that the family is the basic unit of society. My hope is that this brief narrative helps to explain my own interest in the current research project and my stance on sexual information.

Data Collection

Participants

The participants in this study were nine 19 year old late adolescents and their mothers. The convenience sample of participants who volunteered for the study showed great diversity in family structure, size of community, and mother’s educational level/occupation as shown in Table 2. Some of the daughters had experienced sexual intercourse and others had not. A connection to the Catholic religion was mentioned by five of the dyads. No other religious affiliation was mentioned by the participants. The participants were all of European American descent. There were virtually no common structural or contextual factors that were consistent among the nine dyads.

An important consideration regarding participants is how many to interview. Establishing a sample size for qualitative research is usually expressed by using the phrase *theoretical saturation* instead of developing a sample number as is the case in

quantitative research (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Theoretical saturation indicates the point when the researcher is hearing similar information from participants and no new data are emerging. Saturation could hypothetically be achieved after 15 interviews or not until 50 interviews. Within the grounded theory methodology, saturation refers to a point where “collecting additional data seems counterproductive” or “the researcher runs of time, money, or both (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 136). Overall, saturation was achieved with these participants because of the similarity in their relationships and beliefs about sexual communication and the pragmatics of completing this project within a reasonable time frame.

Recruitment

I utilized convenience sampling to recruit participants for this project (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). I recruited late adolescents who were students enrolled in Communication courses at the University of Missouri-Columbia (UMC). Recruitment proceeded as follows. First, I sought permission from the Basic Course Director of Introduction to Public Speaking (COMM 1200) and the Instructor of Introduction to Communication (COMM 2500) to contact individual course/lab instructors who would allow me to recruit students enrolled in their classes in exchange for extra credit or a chance to win \$100 (Appendix A). Second, upon approval from the course directors, I contacted one COMM 1200 instructor, two lab instructors from COMM 2500, and instructors of other courses (Appendix B). I explained the purpose of the research project and requested a day to enter their classrooms and recruit students. Third, I visited each class on the agreed upon day, described the study to the students, and described how the students could participate in

the project in exchange for extra credit or a chance to win \$100 (Appendix C).

Specifically, students were invited to participate along with their mothers. Students were told that participation involved three separate interviews: one alone, one with their mother, and one with their mother alone. Three students received 10 extra credit points after they and their mother completed all three interviews before December 7, 2007. No interviews were completed between December 8 and December 31, 2007. Therefore, there was no drawing for \$100 in cash.

An alternate assignment was available for college students who were ineligible or unwilling to participate. Specifically, students were asked to write a 2-4 page, double spaced paper that answered the following questions, “Do you believe sexual information is challenging to discuss between a parent and an adolescent? Why or why not?” Further, the length required some depth of thought into the questions, thus providing data that may be useful for future studies. Course instructors were asked collect the papers by December 7, 2007, record 5 points of extra credit for 2 pages or 10 points for 3-4 pages, and deliver them to me. Additionally, students were asked if their paper could be used for research purposes. Those students who agreed, were asked to sign an informed consent form, as approved by the university’s Institutional Review Board (Appendix D). I obtained approximately 75 papers and consent forms as a result of the alternative extra credit assignment.

Students who wanted to participate were given a recruitment script to use when inviting their mother (Appendix E). Then, students contacted me to set up a time and place to conduct the interviews.

As of December 31, 2007, I had presented the recruitment script to approximately 200 college students, resulting in 3 interviews. Because of the difficulty in recruiting participants, I made modifications. Namely, the incentive for extra credit was changed to a financial incentive of \$25 for each member of a dyad (Appendix F). I continued to recruit students from Communication courses and by mid February had recruited a total of six mother and adolescent dyads. Therefore, I modified the recruitment strategy again, with approval from the dissertation committee, to recruit a late adolescent and mother, but to offer individual interviews as an option. I returned to some Communication courses and to a large lecture class in the Human Development and Family Studies Department with the new change and obtained an additional two interviews. Because a financial incentive was offered to those who volunteered to participate instead of extra credit, there was no need to offer an alternative extra credit assignment. One of the interviews was obtained through network sampling. After nearly four months of recruiting, I had interviewed nine mothers and adolescents after presenting the opportunity to approximately 700 students. Needless to say, recruitment proved to be quite challenging. Furthermore, the daughters and mothers who did agree to participate described very close relationships. Further elaboration on the qualities of the participants follows in a subsequent section. The next section discusses the specific procedures used once the interviews were scheduled and data collection began.

The Research Setting

The interpretive paradigm encompasses naturalism (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002), which advocates for the researcher to enter the setting of the researched. The scene

specifically defines the most intimate location where the social action occurs (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). The argument is that the natural setting of where the phenomenon under question resides reveals important information. The participant remains close to his/her natural environment such that, when the researcher approaches, the participant is comfortable and mindful of lived reality. This mindfulness enables the participant to be authentic in his/her disclosures to the researcher.

Not all interpretive research is naturalistic (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002) and, as a result, qualitative research may not always occur at the scene. Further, the scene of mother-adolescent sexual conversations may be entered infrequently and in very private places such as bedrooms or automobiles. Therefore, I attempted to approach the natural environment of the parent as closely as possible by requesting that interviews be conducted in their home, neighborhood, or community. Thus, I went to the site—"the specific, local, physical place in which the researcher and the social actor coexist" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 79)—at a specific time and place coordinated between the participants and me. I asked each participant to select a quiet location where we could meet, such as their home, public libraries, conference rooms, or quiet restaurants or coffee shops. Five interviews were conducted in the home of the participants. One interview was conducted at the work site of a mother. Three interviews were conducted in the Department of Communication's research lab. The lab offered another possibility for a secure, quiet location in Columbia in which to conduct interviews. The lab had comfortable couches where participants could sit comfortably. Some even took off their

shoes, put their feet on the couch, or wrapped their arms around the pillows. In other words, participants attempted to become as comfortable as they could.

Upon arrival at the site, the informed consent (Appendix G) and demographic (Appendix H) forms were completed by the participants. The informed consent form included information about the purpose of the project, the procedure of the interview, the potential positive and negative consequences of participation, and the process to safeguard confidentiality. Participants signed the form, acknowledging they had been informed of these issues and agreeing to participate at their own will. The demographic form asked adolescents for their age, race and occupation while mothers were asked for their age, race, occupation, marital status, number of children, and ages of children.

Interviews served as the primary method of data collection. According to Lindlof and Taylor (2002), qualitative researchers use interviews

“to understand their [participants’] perspectives on a scene, to retrieve their experiences from the past, to gain expert insight or information, to obtain descriptions of events that are normally unavailable for observation, to foster trust, to understand sensitive relationships, and to create a record of discourse that can subsequently be analyzed.” (p. 5)

Thus, interviews were useful to enter into the mother-adolescent relationship and obtain their perspective of how sexual information is managed within the family. Such conversations are rarely seen by others, and interviews enabled mothers and adolescents to tell their stories and experiences about communicating sexual information.

The understanding sought from mothers of adolescents was achieved with quality interviews. Kvale (1996) identified six characteristics of quality interviews:

The extent of spontaneous, rich, specific and relevant answers from the interviewee; the shorter the interviewer's questions and the longer the subjects' answers, the better; the degree to which the interviewer follows and clarifies the meanings of the relevant aspects of the answers; the ideal interview is to a large extent interpreted throughout the interview; the interviewer attempts to verify his or her interpretations of the subject's answers in the course of the interview; and the interview is "self-communicating"—it is a story contained in itself that hardly requires much extra descriptions and explanations. (p. 145)

My role as researcher was to remain mindful of these six criteria during all phases of the research project and in particular, immediately preceding each interview. I printed these six criteria on a separate sheet and reviewed them before each interview. This mental preparation placed me in the moment of the interview and reminded me of my aims for the interview. I believe this simple practice helped me improve as an interviewer for qualitative research and obtain the rich, detailed descriptions of lived experience needed for meaningful findings. It was also important to establish rapport and put the mothers and adolescents at ease from the moment we met. I did this by smiling, being relaxed, asking the participants non-threatening questions, and expressing gratitude for their participation.

Respondent interviews (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002) were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide (Appendix I). Respondent interviews were selected because

they “elicit open-ended responses” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 178). Further, the interviewee speaks of her own experience rather than speaking for a group as a whole. The semi-structured interview guide offered a flexible alternative to the more rigid interview schedule, and as such, provided me with a grouping of topics to discuss and suggested questions for each major topic area. The topics for my interview guide were centered on the research questions and more specifically, on the five rule development criteria of the CPM theory. The questions on the guide combined directive, nondirective, and closing questions (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). The directive questions were used to discover the respondents’ positions such as, “Is sexual information challenging for you to communicate?” In this way, the respondent’s stance was discerned, and I could then proceed with probing questions such as, “Why?” or “Why not?” Nondirective questions were also useful to garner participants’ accounts. Examples of these questions included “Tell me about a conversation you have had with your adolescent/mother about sex” or “How did you prepare for the discussion?” Finally, closing questions, which Lindlof and Taylor (2002) describe as sensitive or loose-end questions, were used toward the end of the interview. An example of a closing question was, “What didn’t I ask you that you thought I would?” At the conclusion of the interviews, mothers and daughters were thanked for their participation and reminded of the importance of the study. In sum, several types of interview questions were prepared and organized to guide the conversations I had with participants.

The total time I spent conducting joint and individual interviews ranged from 1 hour 8 minutes to 1 hour 46 minutes with an average time of 1 hour and 30 minutes. The

data yielded a total of 319 pages of single spaced data. Specifically, conversations from the joint interviews ranged in length from 31 to 75 minutes and yielded 193 pages of single spaced data. Individual interviews were considerably shorter. Interviews with mothers ranged in length from 13 to 29 minutes and resulted in 72 pages of single spaced data. Interviews with daughters ranged in length from 11 to 23 minutes and yielded 54 pages of single spaced data.

Interviews were digitally recorded for later analysis. Participants were notified in advance that our conversation would be recorded. They were also assured that confidentiality of their information would be protected by the use of pseudonyms in any written transcripts or manuscripts and by storage in secure locations. I kept the data in four, secure locations: 1) an external, electronic storage device that I carry with me at all times or have locked in my apartment or office, 2) an electronic copy on my personal laptop computer that is stored in my locked apartment, 3) an electronic copy on the computer in my office at UMC of which I am the only occupant, and 4) a paper copy of transcripts to be stored in my locked office at UMC. Multiple storage locations provide insurance in the event of destruction to a paper or electronic copy, but each location is secured to protect the data from inappropriate use.

Data Analysis

One advantage of qualitative research is the collection of “rich, deep” data (Bryman, 1999, p. 44) filled with intricate details. The stories and experiences told by participants “convey social life in the language and style of the subjects” (Bryman, 1999, p. 45). I used my training and experience as a qualitative researcher to analyze the data

and interpret the findings by looking for emergent themes. I followed Lindlof and Taylor's (2002) method of data analysis by using asides, commentaries, and in-process memos during early analysis, and coding and categorization during later analysis.

First, early analysis began with the completion of the first interview. I transcribed interviews as soon after an interview as possible, and began to reflect upon the conversations and information I heard. As I transcribed, I utilized asides as needed. Asides are brief notes bracketed into the transcribed data that explain, clarify, or interpret a particular detail from the interview (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Commentaries were also required while transcribing. These are substantial paragraphs following a short interaction within the interview from which I wrote about noteworthy aspects of the interview that were not evident from the transcript such as a nonverbal cue or hesitation. I also used commentaries to begin recording some of my connections between the data and theory or from one data set to another. Each of these analysis tools helped me record immediate thoughts and observations I had from the interviews. They provided an outlet to record a range of thoughts, such as nonverbal mannerisms of import, observed during the interview or noteworthy theoretical connections. As transcription proceeded, I occasionally departed from this task and proceeded to another document where I recorded in-process memos—interpretations of the data. The iterative processes of interviewing, transcribing, reflecting, interpreting, and writing continued throughout the data analysis period. Because this process occurred across time, the asides, commentaries, and in-process memos proved to be valuable resources to make needed adaptations to data collection, and to begin the lengthier coding and categorization processes.

Categories aggregated similar ideas or concepts together as they emerged from the data (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Careful and repeated reading of the transcripts allowed me to reflect upon the experiences of the mothers and adolescents and see shared experiences that answered the research questions. Data were reduced by noting recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness (Owen, 1984). Interesting or poignant data that were repeated across several participants were placed in a new document, separate from the original transcripts. In the new document, I collected several exemplars from the participants within similar categories. Continued analysis of these smaller bundles reduced the data further. I also began to record the codes, or reasons why the data were collected together, as a way to explain to readers why the information belonged to a particular category. Categories were named in meaningful and useful ways.

Some of the categories were developed in etic fashion. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) note that, “researchers sometimes look to existing theory and research for categories and apply them to the data in deductive or etic fashion.” Other categories were inductively derived through data analysis and then subjected to verification.

Verification

Verification provided trust and authenticity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) in the data and was performed employing a variety of techniques. Creswell (2003) recommended using a minimum of two techniques. In this study, I utilized persistent observation, thick, rich quotes, and member checks. First, persistent observation (Creswell, 2003) occurred *in situ* by checking for inconsistencies in the participants’ responses. As the interviews were conducted, I listened to responses and asked probing or clarification questions if

inconsistencies were heard or information was unclear. Second, thick, rich quotes were included in the results section for further verification. These exemplars follow the description of each category and illustrate for the reader the codes which interpret the meanings of the participants. Third, member checks were completed after data analysis. Excerpts of the analyses were shared with six interviewees who were asked to read a one page summary of the results and comment on how well my interpretation matched their lived experience. Three responded to me at the time of this printing and replied that the information seemed accurate.

Ethical Considerations

An important consideration in all research is ethics. This section discusses my desire to conduct ethical research borrowing from Creswell's (2003) list of ethical issues during data collection. Creswell (2003) began with the statement "do not put participants at risk," (p. 64). Data collection for this study did not have the potential to instill physical harm to the participants. The harm that was a possibility was mild discomfort as participants discussed a sensitive topic—sex—and how they talked about this subject with their mother or adolescent. Part of the impetus for this study was to understand if sexual information was challenging to talk about and why or why not. The participants I interviewed seemed to be very open and to have little discomfort when talking about sex. Part of the ease of the conversations was a result of the self-selection on the part of the participants. It was also important for me to establish rapport with the participants, and to be relaxed and comfortable with them to put them at ease. My ability to establish trust

and to clearly explain the study and why their perspective was important were vital to obtaining the rich data I obtained.

Creswell (2003) notes another ethical consideration of reciprocity between researcher and participant. He cautions against participants feeling coerced and suggests that participants be involved in all phases of the research project to the extent possible. I reduced the possibility of coercion in two ways. First, college students were able to earn extra credit in either of two ways—helping me with recruitment or completing an alternative assignment. Students had the choice first to pursue extra credit and second, to determine which way they would like to receive the extra credit. Second, participants were invited to participate, and they had the choice of accepting or declining the invitation. Participants interviewed after December 31, 2007 had the opportunity to receive a small incentive of \$25. However, I do not believe the incentive was substantial enough for participants to have felt coerced into participating. The suggestion to involve the participants was also achieved by asking participants for feedback on the questions and interview process at the end of the interviews. I also asked for member checks to help with verification, as described above. I have also kept the participants' contact information (separate from the data) to keep them informed on the progress of the project, if they so desire. Some participants were curious to see the final project, and I would like to follow up with them by informing them of the completion of my dissertation and the publications that will result from it. I will offer participants the web site address where the online version of the dissertation will be available after my graduation.

Another caution Creswell (2003) noted was that researchers should be prepared for the possibility of receiving harmful information during data collection. Because my area of interest is sexual information, I took this caution quite seriously and considered the possibility that I might hear troubling information. For example, a parent could have told me about an experience with rape, sexual assault, or sexual child abuse and how that experience could have influenced the rule development of talk about sex. Creswell advised, “the ethical code for researchers is to protect the privacy of the participants and to convey this protection to all individuals involved in a study” (p. 66). I was proactive and safeguarded against potential disclosures that could have revealed illegal activity by including a statement on the informed consent form that read, “It is important to note that if you report instances of child abuse, rape, or sexual assault, your identity and confidentiality related to the assault may no longer be protected because of the interviewer’s responsibility to safeguard the welfare of children” (Appendix F). There was one incident of date rape that was revealed during an interview. One mother reported on her date rape experience when she was a teenager and how she shared this experience with her daughter. Because of the statute of limitations, this piece of information presents no legal implications for me. During the interview, I expressed my sympathy. The mother spoke about the incident with a matter-of-fact tone. Her vocal quality and demeanor did not change when she disclosed this information to me.

I believe I exhibited the highest level of sensitivity I could when participants revealed information, especially harmful or delicate information. As an interviewer, I attempted to put the participants at ease throughout the interview process and by being an

attentive listener. I demonstrated sensitivity by using phrases such as, “That must have been difficult” or “I am sorry to hear you (or the child) went through that experience” and by stating these phrases with a soft, gentle voice.

A final note on ethical considerations is to mention the role of the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The research project was presented to the IRB at the University of Missouri-Columbia because human subjects were used for data collection. Their approval was secured before data collection began. The primary function of the IRB is to protect the rights of human subjects and their procedures serve as another safeguard to ensure ethical behavior on my part.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Overall, a consistent element across the dyads was the established, open relationships the mothers and daughters had with each other. Because the study was designed to interview mothers and daughters together, the daughters and mothers who volunteered to participate in the study were very comfortable with each other. The daughters had no difficulty asking their mothers to participate in a study about sexual communication. In turn, the mothers were comfortable and open with their daughters to the extent that they agreed to be interviewed and participate in the research project. The closeness between the mothers and daughters in this study was perhaps atypical, as the data will show. They spoke to each other frequently and shared considerable information with each other about sex and other aspects of their lives. Therefore, the results of the study are best understood from the perspective of extremely close mother-daughter relationships. In this chapter, I describe the mothers and daughters who participated in the project and their families; comment on the variation of sexual attitudes, beliefs, and values; and then proceed to share the results of the study. Thick, rich quotes from the interviews were included throughout to verify the results.¹

Participant Introductions

Even though the participants were similar in their closeness to one another, they showed considerable diversity in family structure, size of community, and mothers' educational level/occupation. Table 2 showed the characteristics of the families by listing a family number, family structure, pseudonyms of family members, ages of children in

each family, the type of community where the daughters were raised and the mothers currently lived, the mothers' occupations, the virgin/nonvirgin status of the daughter, and the religious affiliation of the family.² Brief introductions of each family appear below, using information provided by the daughters and mothers on their demographic forms and/or offered during the interviews.

Family 1: Mae and Dana

Family one was a blended family. Mae remarried a few years after the death of her first husband when Oscar and Dana were aged 1 and 4. Mae's current husband had two children from a previous marriage. Mae and her husband had one son together. Combined, the children ranged in age from 14 to 21. Dana's older brother and step-sister were 21, and she and her other step-sister were 19. Her younger brother was 14. Dana called her step-father "Dad."

Family 2: Myrna and Deanne

Family two consisted of a single mother, Myrna, with four children ranging in age from 7 to 19. Deanne was the oldest. Her sister was 9 and her twin brothers were 7. Her biological father has been absent all of her life. She labeled Myrna's second husband and father to her siblings as "Dad." Myrna and her husband began the divorce process approximately one year prior to data collection. Neither Deanne nor her siblings have had any contact with their father since the time of the separation.

Family 3: Marge and Dawn

Marge and her husband, Scott, were an intact family with one daughter and one son. Dawn was 19 and the second child, Chad, was 17 years old.

Family 4: Maureen and Deidra

Maureen and her husband, Daryl, were an intact family with two daughters. Deidra was the younger of the two siblings. The first daughter, Beth, was 23 and married.

Family 5: Muriel and Diane

Muriel and her husband, Andrew, were an intact family with two daughters. Diane was 19 and the older of the two children. The second daughter, Tamara, was 17.

Family 6: Marla and Donielle

Donielle's parents divorced soon after she was born. Both of Donielle's parents have remarried. Donielle had three siblings from her mom and step-dad aged 15, 10, and 3. She also had two siblings from her dad and step-mom and maintained regular contact with them. She referred to her "dads" at several points in the interviews.

Family 7: Michelle and Desiree

Monica and Bob were an intact family with three children. Desiree was 19; Matt was 18; and Emily was 16.

Family 8: Monica and Debbie

Family 8 was a blended family. Debbie's dad, Bob, was widowed with two daughters when he married Monica. Monica and Bob have two children together, Debbie and her younger brother, John. Bob's first two children called Monica "Mom." The children were aged 31, 27, 19, and 16.

Family 9: Mary and Donita

Mary and her husband, Terry, had 8 children ranging in age from 14 to 31. Donita was one of three girls, the 6th child, and had 4 siblings-in-law.

These brief summaries were intended to demonstrate the array of family structures represented among the participants. Regardless of the variation in family structure and background, however, all of the mothers and daughters described their relationships as close. A few quotes were provided to verify this claim. Dana illustrated the closeness with her mom by reporting the frequency of their conversations.

Dana: I'd say it's good. Um, we get in trouble a lot, by my dad, because we talk on the phone too much. I would say we talk every day, and when we do talk. We probably talk, 3 or 4 times a week, every other day, maybe? But we talk for like, 20 minutes, or so.

Mae: Yeah.

Dana: A good, not just like a "Hey, what's up?" It's a good chunk of time that we talk. We don't have the quick five minute phone calls that my roommate has with her mom everyday. So, when we talk, we like really talk. (1j:189-197)

Dana made a point to clarify that the quality of their communication was good because they "really talk." In her individual interview, Dana confirmed the closeness in her relationship with her mother.

Dana: We have a very close relationship and I'm very thankful for that. (1d:25-26)

Dana used the word "close" specifically to describe the relationship with her mother. In the next example, Deanne also described the closeness with her mom.

Deanne: She had me when she was real young, so she and I are a lot more like sisters than we are mother-daughter. We talk on the phone every day or you know, best friends sort of thing. Yeah, she's definitely one of the best people that I know. I love my mom. She's awesome. (2d:14-17)

Deanne viewed a sibling or best friend relationship different from—perhaps stronger than—a mother-daughter relationship. She distinguished the relationship with

her mother as close in the sense of siblings or best friends. Michelle viewed her relationship with her daughter similarly when she referred to Desiree as her “soul mate.”

Michelle: Desiree has probably always been the one that is most likely to be my best buddy. She and I have similar interests. We have compatible personalities. And maybe personality traits that, we just get along. We get along. She’s probably the most likely of my kids for me to say she’s kind of a soul mate. (7m:14-17)

Michelle recognized the unique qualities of her relationship with Desiree when she compared Desiree to her other children. These excerpts represented the closeness described by all the mothers and daughters who participated in the study. Despite the similarity of closeness across the mother-daughter dyads, the sexual attitudes, beliefs, and values they possessed were quite diverse.

Variation in Sexual Attitudes, Beliefs, and Values

The participants varied widely in their sexual attitudes, beliefs and values. The exemplars included in this chapter illustrated diversity in the content of the messages exchanged between mothers and daughters. However, the focus of this study was on the process of communication, rather than the content of the messages. Therefore, the ways in which families managed sexual information was of greatest import. It was also interesting to note that of the participants who volunteered to participate in the study, there was no dominant value, belief, or attitude about sexual behavior among them. Some participants held to a strong belief that sex was reserved for marriage. Others held this belief, but called themselves “realists” and acknowledged how difficult it was “today” for teens to wait until marriage to have sex for the first time. Some held permissive attitudes about sex and accepted teens having sex in high school. These attitudes reflected the

diversity present in the larger society. Four exemplars were provided to illustrate the range of sexual attitudes, beliefs, and values among the participants in the study. The examples ranged from conservative to liberal values, and these values were present among both the mothers and daughters.

Example 1: Conservative Mother

Mary: Being Catholic, I mean, we strongly believe in the 10 commandments and if you believe that, then you would have to somehow convey the idea that these sexual sins are wrong because they're against the 6th commandment. And, had we had no faith, I can't imagine giving a hoot what happens. (9j:282-285)

Example 2: Conservative Daughter

Diane: Our faith is, we save ourselves for the person we're going to marry, our bodies. And, so, that's how we mainly talk, we talk about sometimes, just saving ourselves. (5j:271-273)

Example 3: Liberal Mother

Myrna: At 14 she [another daughter] will go on birth control just like Deanne did. I, you know, I don't want my daughters to have to struggle with making the decision of that's right, um, making the decision to care for an infant and put your college education on hold. (2j:419-422)

Example 4: Liberal Daughter

Desiree: Or the people who are naïve and think their kids aren't having sex. Yes, they are. There's middle schoolers who are pregnant. Stop teaching them abstinence and teach them about how if they're gonna have sex, use this, do this. Know that you're gonna get this. You know? [makes disgusted noise] So I think that's why we're so OK with it because it was talked about. And it's not like this big, bad thing that you have to be afraid. (7j:230-235)

Despite the variety of values, attitudes, and beliefs, the common thread among the participants was the tenet that communication about sex was appropriate to discuss between a mother and daughter. Further, the participants claimed to have an open

relationship such that communication had occurred or could occur with ease. Some of the families engaged in extensive sexual communication. Others indicated not having as much, but they believed their relationship was capable of generating additional sexual communication. Regardless of the extent of communication, the participants were consistent in their description of the process by which they revealed sexual information. I now turn toward the results as related to the specific research questions posed.

Process of Sexual Communication

Using the interwoven stories of the participants, I prepared two models that conceptualized the process of revealing sexual information and called them the Sexual Communication Process Model in Close Mother-Daughter Relationships (Process Model; see Figure 1) and the Sexual Communication Interaction Model in Close Mother-Daughter Relationships (Interaction Model; see Figure 2). The Process Model captured the process of sexual communication over time, whereas the Interaction Model magnified the process to see the details of individual conversations. I proceed by providing a broad overview of each model. Then, I decompress the models and answer the research questions using excerpts from the participants and theoretical components of CPM.

The Process Model was comprised of four major components—information, privacy boundaries, time, and privacy rule development criteria. First, sexual information was the content or subject matter of the information contained within the communication process. Second, privacy boundaries were placed around sexual information. The model displayed three sections of conjoined circles representing privacy boundaries around sexual information. Each set represented a mother's privacy boundary, a daughter's

privacy boundary, and a mother-daughter co-owned privacy boundary around sexual information. Third, time was depicted by the horizontal arrow. Fourth, privacy rule development criteria refer to the basic processes the participants used in constructing rules for how to communicate about sex in their relationships.

The premise of the Process Model was that a mother and a daughter erected individual privacy boundaries around her sexual information. The sexual information included both sexual knowledge as well as personal sexual practices. The size of the mother's privacy boundary was the same in each set, but the permeability of her privacy boundary became more open as her daughter aged. As the daughter matured, the circumference of the daughter's privacy boundary expanded as she obtained new sexual information. The daughter's privacy boundary also increased in permeability as she became more open with her mother. As the mother and daughter revealed information to each other, their privacy boundaries overlapped indicating co-ownership of the same sexual information. The privacy boundary of co-owned sexual information also expanded over time as the daughter and mother revealed more and more information to each other.

The mother-daughter sets were depicted at three different time periods. The three phases of Toddler Through Pre-Adolescence, Early Adolescence, and Late Adolescence were selected based on recollections of the participants in the study. However, the horizontal arrow representing time acknowledged that the process was fluid and continuous. The dashed arrow around Late Adolescence served as the linchpin between the Process Model and the Interaction Model. The Interaction Model provided a microscopic view of the communication *during* a specific interaction. The dashed arrow

was used at the Late Adolescence phase for illustrative purposes only, even though the Interaction Model represented communication at any time period.

Unlike the Process Model that highlighted the entire process across time, the Interaction Model examined the process of revealing sexual information during a *specific* interaction. Like the Process Model, the Interaction model began by showing the individual privacy boundaries mothers and daughters had around their sexual information. From there, the Interaction Model proceeded by exhibiting additional details of the communication process. The arrows signified the introduction of sexual information into a conversation by either the mother or daughter. The mother-adolescent interaction represented by jagged lines showed that, preceding a revelation, the mother or daughter might experience a tension or strain as she decided whether or not to reveal information or how much to reveal. The model ended by showing the intersection where information was revealed and subsequently co-owned, while also showing the area where information was concealed and maintained within the individual's privacy boundary.

As mentioned, the process of sexual communication was guided by privacy rule development criteria that lead to the creation of rules for sexual communication. The results do not specify the actual communication rules, but instead show seven criteria upon which rules were founded. The results show that specific rules may differ from one mother-daughter dyad to another, but the criteria upon which the rules were established were similar across families. These privacy rule development criteria were reflected in both the Process Model and the Interaction Model and will be elaborated upon in a subsequent section. In the remainder of the chapter, I deconstruct the models to show the

components and how they operated for the participants. Simultaneously, I answer the research questions and present the results using excerpts from the mothers and daughters.

Research Question One: Framing Sexual Communication as Challenging

The first major component of the Process and Interaction Models is the sexual information contained within a mother's or a daughter's individual privacy boundary. While analyzing the data, it became apparent that CPM's first supposition of private information was a useful tool to understand the participants' treatment of the content of sexual information as either public or private within the mother-daughter relationship and answer the first research question:

RQ1: In what way, if at all, do mothers and adolescents frame sexual communication as challenging to discuss?

Recall that the supposition of private information in CPM emphasized the content of disclosures. Applied to the Process and Interaction Models, the focus on the content of sexual information between mothers and daughters informed the ways in which they framed the process of sexual communication as challenging.

Overall, sexual information was treated as public information in these close mother-daughter relationships and was, therefore, not challenging to discuss. In this section, five themes were presented that emerged in this part of the analysis to answer the first research question and simultaneously begin the explanation of the sexual communication process models. The first two themes were labeled Public Information and Private Information to demonstrate the participants' treatment of sexual information. The next two themes were labeled Sex is a Natural Topic and When I Was Younger.

These latter two themes relied on the findings from the public and private information themes as they recounted participants' renditions of sexual communication as challenging. The fifth theme I called More to the Story? Its purpose was to show contradictions in the ways in which mothers framed sexual communication as challenging.

Public Information

The results indicated that sexual information covered a broad range of topics for these participants. Very little sexual information was considered private. Indeed, the participants reported several conversations on many different topics. The following three examples illustrated the breadth of topics considered to be sexual information. In the first example, Dawn and Marge represented mother-daughter dyads who talked about the daughters' sexual activity and contraceptive needs.

Dawn: Like when she first found I was [having sex], she goes, "Dawn, are you having sex?" Like, "Yeah, have been for a while." "OK."

Marge: I said, "OK." I said, "So, are you using any more protection?" She goes, "Mom, we use condoms and we use." There was one day she goes, "Mom, will you pick Brad up some condoms?" I'm like, "OK." I would rather have not bought. Yes, I did, didn't I? I went out and got them. I said I would much rather buy...

Dawn: I'm like, "Yes! That's my mom. She's so cool." (3j:899-907)

Marge and Dawn talked about the fact that Dawn had started engaging in sexual intercourse and Dawn's use of protection. Additionally, requests for condoms were treated openly in their relationship. In the next quote, Dana's account of sexual information that was public focused on dating relationships and women's health.

Dana: I guess just the communication. We talk about the relationship with a guy, and me, and like if I'm sexually active or not. And, like, if I have a boyfriend or if I don't have a boyfriend and if I've gone out on any dates. Or, even like growing up, like, becoming aware of the world [around] me, and what's going on in it. But, I mean, I wouldn't say we really talk ever about STDs or HIV or anything like that. But like, we do talk about how I need to go to the OB/GYN and like, communication like that type of stuff. (1j: 236-242)

Dana relayed that non-private information between her and her mother was about her relationship status, awareness of her surroundings, and appointments with her gynecologist. Her comment about not talking about STDs or HIV was noteworthy, also. I sensed these topics were not discussed, not because they were private, but because they weren't necessary as Dana was not sexually active. STDs and HIV were brought up in the joint interview with ease, leading me to believe that the topics could be discussed with relative ease between Dana and Mae. Donita's example below showed another example of information that was not private.

Donita: Other than that, not much. It's just been like. My parents have taught us not to have sex until we're married. And that's about it. (9j:174-175)

In Donita's family, sexual communication centered on abstinence until marriage. As a result, there were very few examples of communication on other sexual topics between Donita and Mary. However, Donita considered the message about remaining chaste until marriage to be sexual communication, and she believed that she and her mom were open with each other, as evidenced by her description of her mom.

Donita: We talk a lot. I'm not really afraid to communicate anything with her. And sometimes there are like, as I mentioned before when she, she tends to draw things out [laughing] sometimes! And that is frustrating to me sometimes. But I know that things that I do frustrate her too. But, we have pretty good communication I would say. Yeah, we are both really open with each other. (9d:18-22)

Donita and Mary reported substantially less sexual communication than the other mother-daughter dyads in the study. However, they were similar to the other dyads because they considered themselves close and open. Because of their religious beliefs, the content of their sexual communication was limited to the teachings of their faith. Mary did not see a need to communicate any other sexual information to Donita because Donita was not sexually active. This was an important point because additional sexual information was not discussed between Donita and Mary, not because it was considered private, but because there was no perceived need.

Three examples of sexual topics discussed between the mothers and daughters were presented to illustrate the breadth of information classified as sexual communication. In brief, most of the sexual information held by many of the participants in this study was viewed as public information within the context of the mother-daughter relationship.

Private Information

Despite the openness in the participants' relationships, mothers and daughters alike confessed that some aspects of sexual information were private, hidden, or secretive. Specifically, the details of one's sexual activity were considered taboo by nearly all the participants. In the first exemplar from Monica and Debbie, they began in agreement that all information was available to the other. But, Debbie pointed out one exception.

Monica: I'd say everything.

Debbie: Yeah. I'm really comfortable talking about anything with her. Not that I can think of anyways. I think pretty much everything's open, except I mean like, I don't really tell her, like I just said. Other than when I have sex.

Monica: I don't want to talk about details.

Debbie: Who I'm having sex with. Yeah, details like that.

Monica: That's a.

Debbie: [interrupts] That's kind of like, an unsaid rule. That I don't discuss with my mom. (8j:590-601)

Debbie and Monica mentioned details of sexual activity as the type of information that would be concealed. Included in the details were who Debbie's partners were and when she had sex with them. This was the only exception to "everything" that they considered private. Michelle and Desiree had a similar conversation with each other in which they acknowledged some information was private, particularly the details of sexual activity.

Michelle: I think there are probably some unspoken rules that Desiree and I, that maybe out of respect, I don't know if it's respect or...

Desiree: I don't...

Michelle: ...privacy.

Desiree: Yeah.

Michelle: Yeah. That we don't ask. I think probably what you're saying about, while you may ask for information, or you may communicate about whether or not something is a positive or a negative experience, that it goes beyond the bounds of privacy to ask for details about someone's relationship. That, that's not something that you discuss. I mean, you could, you could ask me about different sexual positions and I'm not gonna say, "Oh my god! I can't believe you asked me that." But if you asked me...

Desiree: Yeah, she would tell me that.

Michelle: ...or asked me what positions me and your father...

Desiree: I'm not going to ask.

Michelle: ...then I would say, "Do you really want me to answer that?"

Desiree: But, making it clear that she would still answer it if I said yes.

Michelle: Might just scar you for the rest of your life. You know, and we'd laugh about it and she'd say, "You're right, I don't want to know." And I wouldn't ask you that question either. (7j:305-336)

In this example, Michelle and Desiree focused on the details of Michelle's sexual activity with her husband more than Desiree's sexual activity. But, like Monica and Debbie, they identified the specific details of sexual activity as being private between two sexual partners. Some additional explanation about the meaning of graphic details was evidenced in the next conversation with Mae and Dana.

Mae: Well I would never want to. I mean I trust her. So I would never want to invade her privacy. I mean I would never say, "Oh he touched you where and then what happened next?" And then, you know?

Dana: Yeah.

Mae: "You took your shirt off and then what." You know what I mean? I wouldn't. I would not ever want that level of...

Dana: And I would never tell her that.

Mae: ...detail. (1j:452-463)

These examples showed that the details of sexual activity were considered private and would not be discussed. This sentiment was expressed among the adolescent participants who were virgins as well as those who were not. This observation increased the strength of the claim that the details were private because it did not matter if the

adolescent was sexually active or not. There was an understanding that the details of sexual activity remained private. The participants' understandings of sexual information as public or private illuminated the results presented in the next two themes, which underscored the ways in which participants framed sexual communication as challenging.

Sex is a Natural Topic

Because most sexual information was treated as public, it was not challenging for the participants to reveal. Participants positioned sex as a natural topic of discussion in their relationships. All of the participants agreed that sexual communication was not challenging in the present. Some even said that sexual communication had never been challenging, whereas a few of the mothers and daughters indicated that sexual communication had been challenging in the past. For those who thought sexual communication was not challenging now or in the past, they described sexual information as a natural topic that was comfortable to talk about and therefore public information between them. Further, they had difficulty understanding why sex would be a challenging topic for discussion. Muriel mentioned that sexual communication was comfortable for her to discuss at several points throughout her individual and joint interview. The example below was one direct comment she made when asked whether sexual communication was challenging.

Muriel: I think for me, um. It was comfortable because I know. I'm comfortable with—that my girls should learn. This is the fact of life. These are things they should know and I feel like knowledge is power for them. (5j:313-315)

Muriel spoke with a confident voice. At times, her tone approached defensiveness as if she felt challenged by being asked if sexual communication was difficult. For her, it

seemed to be understood that parents should and would talk with their children about sex. Other mothers were equally confident when they proclaimed that sexual communication was not challenging or was comfortable for them to talk about with their daughters. For Myrna, sexual communication was likewise a comfortable topic to discuss, and she was amazed that it would be any other way.

Myrna: You know, you don't need to go to the library. You don't need a book. You've been through it. Why would you have somebody else put words into your mouth to spew to the one thing that you gave birth to? How did you create it? Hello! You know? I just don't get that. I just really don't. And I don't know why people have such a hard time with it and have such hang ups about it. I mean, it's pleasurable, it's fun. It's the most intimate experience you can share with another person. It creates life, which is miraculous. I mean it's a wonderful topic. I don't understand why people are so afraid of it. I really don't. (2j:673-680)

Myrna's example represented the attitude that because sexual activity was perceived with positive qualities, then sex should likewise be a "wonderful" topic to discuss. Her confident tone mimicked Muriel's, even to the point of approaching defensiveness. For mothers who believed sexual communication was not challenging, they seemed to have a taken-for-granted attitude about the naturalness of the topic of sex. In addition, Myrna's comments supported the normality of sexual activity, thereby reinforcing the natural way she and others believed sex should be viewed and subsequently discussed.

Like mothers, some daughters were equally comfortable with the subject of sex both in the present and the past. In the next example, Deidra indicated that sexual communication was not challenging for her.

Tina: So how challenging is actually having these conversations?

Deidra: Not challenging at all. We kind of have everything constantly. And, I think it would be [challenging] for a lot of people. A lot of my friends were just like, “I don’t even go there with my parents. If they start talking about it, I don’t even talk about it at all.” We talk about everything. It doesn’t matter. It really doesn’t matter, we talk about everything. (4j:525-528)

Deidra was perhaps aware of the normality of sexual communication with her mother because of the comments made by her friends. Her friends’ relationships with their mothers stood in contrast to her own, such that she identified the different ways other families framed sexual communication. Because she and her mother talked about everything, sex was a normal topic for discussion for them and had always been that way.

The ideas of naturalness and comfort with sexual content were reinforced in the individual interviews, as well. In the next excerpt from an individual interview, Desiree described the naturalness of the subject of sex in conversations with her mother.

Tina: Is sexual communication challenging for you to talk to your mom about?

Desiree: No.

Tina: OK. Why do you think that is?

Desiree: Just because we’re open and it’s been, like she said, it’s been normalized in our family. It’s not a big deal. It’s OK. And, the fact that I know that she’ll support the decisions I make or tell me, “That’s stupid, and you need to stop, and this is why.” And even though I might not listen to her, I know that she’ll give me her honest opinion on things. (7d:55-64)

Desiree mentioned both the normality of the topic and the openness between her and her mother. Her past tense use of the verb “has been” reflected her family’s acceptance of sexual information throughout her lifetime.

The individual interviews with the mothers continued to strengthen this theme as some mothers echoed the aspect of open relationships with their daughters as Marge’s

comment below illustrated.

Marge: I don't know that it's real challenging. Of course, like I said, we're pretty open, and pretty... And if you take a lot of stuff that you started out with, just something like a sense of humor, if you make it light, then I don't. I never pounded and questioned her... I don't think it's been real challenging. (3m:60-63)

In brief, all of the mothers and daughters believed that sexual communication presented no real challenges as a topic of discussion in the present and some said it had not been challenging in the past. Because they talked about everything, they viewed sexual information as a natural discussion topic. However, some daughters described their relationships as open and/or close and were comfortable talking about sex in the present, but admitted that sexual information had been difficult to talk about in the past.

When I Was Younger

Some daughters reported that sexual communication was not challenging for them in their present relationship, but it had been challenging when they were younger. Their use of the term *younger* usually referenced junior high or high school. The daughters indicated that talking about sex seemed awkward, embarrassing, or uncomfortable. Their discomfort seemed to be associated with the information rather than on their relationships with their mothers. The quote below from Diane highlighted the embarrassment and awkwardness she attached to sexual information when she was younger.

Diane: Well, of course, when I was younger it was awkward. But, I guess gradually it became less embarrassing. Sometimes, it's still a little bit...you know, embarrassing. But now though it's, I mean, it's just so, it's more open. You know, I tell my mom a lot. (5j:339-342)

Diane also pointed out that to some extent, sexual communication was still somewhat embarrassing. But, she noted more openness in her relationship with her

mother that fostered a gradual decline in the embarrassment. In the next reflection by Debbie, she compared sexual communication in her sophomore/junior years to that of her senior year in high school.

Debbie: It was one of those things where she [Mom] just kind of tried to completely walk around it and stuff. And, I don't know. When I was in high school. Like, not my senior year. By the time I got to my senior year, I was kind of like, whatever. They're Mom and Dad. They are smart. They know stuff. They're not stupid. So, why even lie about it? So I was really relaxed about it and I didn't really care. But probably like my sophomore and junior year when I'd go out with friends or something. Or if I'd be going out with a boy, I'd get really nervous and scared to like tell them that I was even going out with friends since there were boys with us. I don't even know why. I was just afraid that they were going to have a sex talk with me and it would be really awkward and uncomfortable.

Monica: You mean, so you avoided sex talks?

Debbie: Yeah. I, I, I did, for a long time in high school. (8j:311-321)

Debbie reinforced this theme by noting the awkwardness and discomfort surrounding sexual information. Debbie believed that her mom had a desire to talk about sex, which led her to avoid sex talks with her mother. However, as Debbie got older, she accepted her parents' knowledge about her activities and became more relaxed with her parents. Dawn also noted awkwardness when she was younger.

Dawn: I think it used to be. When we were younger and you first start talking about it. Even before I knew what sex was. Like, you know, when you first start talking about sex to your kids. I was like, I don't want to talk about this with you.

Marge: Yeah

Dawn: It's awkward.

Marge: Yeah.

Dawn: But, I like, as you get older it gets less awkward. (3j:328-338)

Some of the daughters, therefore, were keenly aware of how challenging sexual communication had been when they were younger. They felt embarrassed, awkward, and uncomfortable talking about sex with their mothers, namely as a result of the type of information. However, as time elapsed, they became more comfortable with sexual information and were able to talk with their mothers about sex with ease. Daughters' changes in sexual communication from when they were younger to the present foreshadowed the results presented in the next section. However, before proceeding, it is important to mention contradictions in the data by some of the participants.

More to the Story?

Mothers remained firm in their claim that sexual communication was not challenging. Some participants responded to the question, "Is sexual communication challenging?" with a negative response followed by an explanation. However, as the interviews progressed, some mothers began to disclose particular aspects of sexual communication that presented difficulties. I noted this contradiction and added a final theme called More to the Story? Whereas daughters seemed to experience challenges because of the information, mothers were inclined to be challenged by the process of communication. Interestingly, one of the daughters, Deidra, explained the contradiction between agreeing and disagreeing with the challenging nature of sexual information:

Deidra: First off, I would say no. Like automatically, that's my automatic response. But, there are those times that you're just like, "That's a little weird that I'm talking about this with my mom." But it never stopped me. (4d:82-84)

Deidra's explanation provided additional depth to the framing of sexual communication as challenging. While the immediate response of most participants was a

firm “No,” the data showed that some participants recalled moments when sexual communication was challenging. For example, Muriel was a mother who mentioned how comfortable she felt talking about sexual information with her daughters, Diane and Tammy. In the next passage, Muriel began with a response to a comment Diane made, then transitioned to another topic and described how hard it was to explain the various ways to obtain STDs.

Muriel: Right! There's not just one way to have sex! There's other ways and I made sure to explain that too, so they wouldn't think— I have another daughter—you know, that it only counts if you have sex this one way. There's other ways too, that you can still get the STDs and...

Diane: Mm hmm.

Muriel: ...so I tried to explain that to em. Which, that's hard to do to a young girl. And then they're like, they hear it and they're like, "Ew!" [everyone laughs] "Why are you telling me this?" (5j:201-206)

Muriel admitted that some aspects of sexual communication were challenging despite her initial response that she was comfortable talking about sex with her daughters. This example also showed her persistence to communicate, despite resistance or negative comments from her daughters. Therefore, even though she was comfortable with the information, something about the process was still challenging for her. Toward the end of Marla's interview with her daughter, she admitted that sexual communication was challenging.

Marla: It's a challenge, but you have to, you have to show them what they need to see, so that they do open up. (6j:863-864)

In her interview alone, she responded to the question, “Is sexual communication challenging?” by stating, “I don't think so.” However, when asked if sexual

communication was easy, she said “It’s touchy.” The selections that follow showed the explanations Marla provided with each of these responses.

Marla: I don't think so, because um [sigh]. I just wanted Donielle to know the things that were best for her. You know, like I said, as you become an older person, you can always look back and see, "Oh, I understand if things would have went this way, how much better or worse that could have been." So, I think in having that type of hindsight on everything, that's how I try to be with her.

Tina: Would you say that sexual communication is *easy*?

Marla: It is—I mean it's touchy because I don't want to... You never know how much to say sometimes. You don't want to give too much information, to give ideas I guess, but you wanna kind of be on their level. You don't want to like, be so not offering them information that they don't understand or they think you're not. You know, they're gonna know so much. It's not like you can really hide what you're going to talk about. You're just gonna have to talk about it. And I think that the honesty of that, as we were talking earlier, being a parent's responsibility, it just, it has to be. It just has to be. (6m:41-55)

Marla did not believe that sexual communication was challenging. However, she did not believe that it was easy, either. Thus, there were some aspects of sexual communication that were challenging, even when the broad topic of sexual communication was framed as not challenging to discuss. It seemed as if there was a comfort level with sexual information because it was natural and public, but there were other factors that made the process challenging. Marla elaborated on the tension involved with wanting to reveal information coupled with some concern about how much to reveal. Her comments, combined with comments from other mothers, hinted at the possibility of a dialectical tension between revealing and concealing sexual information. Additional results provided in a subsequent section shed further light on this possibility.

In sum, the Process and Interaction Models began with an explanation of the information within each boundary and an understanding of the views held about sexual information. The results showed that mothers and adolescents in close relationships drew clear privacy boundaries around sexual information that was public or private. Namely, details of sexual activity were viewed as private, and all other sexual information was public within these mother-daughter relationships.

Not only did the distinction between public and private information lay the foundation for the models, but it also proved beneficial to answer the first research question. Because mothers and daughters perceived much sexual information to be public information and a natural topic, they experienced few challenges with the process of sexual communication. However, some daughters appraised sexual information as challenging to talk about when they were younger while mothers appeared to experience some challenges with the process—not sexual information—of communicating about sex.

Overall, the consensus was that at this juncture in these close mother-daughter relationships, sexual communication was not challenging. However, the challenges of sexual communication may be more complex than the participants realized. The contradictions noted in their interviews suggested subtle, perhaps denied, tensions or difficulties when communicating about sex. Therefore, all sexual information the participants conveyed to each other, whether viewed as public or private by them, was incorporated into the rest of the results to further explain the models and help shed light on the potential for underwritten tensions of sexual communication. Further explanation of the models elaborated upon the management of sexual information.

Research Question Two: The Process of Revealing Sexual Information

The second major component of the Process and Interaction Models is privacy boundaries. In the previous section, the breakdown of the process models began with an explanation of the sexual information contained within privacy boundaries. In this section, the elucidation of the Process and Interaction Models continues and in so doing, partially answers the second research question:

RQ_{2a}: How do mothers and adolescents describe the process of revealing or concealing sexual information?

The third major component of the Process Model—time—also answered the second research question. Because the data showed that time was an important element of the process, it has been reserved for a separate section to follow. The focus herein resided on the privacy boundaries.

The boundary metaphor, a supposition of CPM, was beneficial to construct the ways in which participants described their sexual communication experiences. The results showed that privacy boundaries guarded participants' sexual information. While the previous section emphasized the content of disclosures, this section focuses on the privacy boundaries around the information. This section dissects the Interaction Model by explaining how mothers and daughters came to co-own sexual information during an individual encounter.

Privacy boundaries Around Sexual Information

As both models showed, sexual information was protected within an individual privacy boundary before it was revealed and subsequently co-owned. The permeability of

the boundaries gradually shifted from closed to open. Several mothers and adolescents in this study described ways in which they maintained sexual information within their individual privacy boundary. In the example below, Desiree declared her ownership of some information.

Desiree: There are things to this day that I won't reveal to her. But they're not things that bother me not to tell her. They're just things that I don't think she needs to know. Or I know I wasn't supposed to do. So, I'm not going to reveal those until I'm a little older. (7j:604-607)

Desiree admitted in front of her mother that she still conceals information. Her tone of voice was strong and confident when she made this declaration. Desiree was aware that she had control over the information and could decide if she would like to reveal it to her mother. Myrna remembered her decision to make her privacy boundary highly permeable with her daughter where sexual information was concerned.

Myrna: I think, when we had that discussion when she was 13, I remember the discussion and I remember deciding, you know what, I'm not going to keep secrets. I'm just not. (2m:47-49)

Myrna recognized the control she had over private, sexual information and the ability she had to regulate the flow of information across her privacy boundary. The next aspect of the process was the movement of sexual information from an individual privacy boundary to a co-owned privacy boundary, depicted in the Interaction Model.

Co-Owning Information: The Interaction Model

The Interaction Model pinpointed the process to the intersection where mothers or daughters decided to reveal or conceal sexual information. In the model, mothers and daughters were depicted as individual circles containing sexual information. This model,

in contrast to the Process Model, showed the mother and daughter separately before they encountered each other. In this way, the Interaction Model used arrows to indicate the mutual influence mothers and daughters had on each other. Further, either the mother or the daughter took the lead in turning conversations toward the topic of sex. The role of the daughters was salient among the participants, even though mothers also initiated communication about sex. An emergent theme from the data called Kids Will Ask resulted, again relying on *in vivo* codes. Immediately preceding the decision to reveal or conceal, some mothers and daughters experienced tension, depicted in the Interaction Model by two jagged edged shapes intersecting. Daughters specifically talked about strained or tense moments when they had to decide if they should Bring It Up, referring to their first experience with sexual intercourse. The next two segments described these two themes.

Kids will ask. This theme helped answer the research question and supported the Interaction Model by demonstrating the influence children had on the process of sexual communication. In the Model, the arrow from the adolescent to the mother was supported by the evidence presented in this theme, which showed how daughters initiate conversations with their mothers. Indeed, in their attempts to gain new sexual information and expand the circumference of their privacy boundaries, daughters approached their mothers and attempted to access their mothers' privacy boundaries by asking questions. Several exemplars from mothers and daughters reinforced this theme. For example, Muriel mentioned how children will ask questions.

Muriel: I think it's important to start early.

Tina: And, again, does early mean...

Muriel: Well, probably even earlier than fifth grade. I mean, they'll ask you. Especially if they ask, just... (5j:686-692)

Muriel was speaking from experience when she said "they'll ask you." Indeed her experience working as a speech pathologist in a school gave her considerable access to children. Daughters were also aware of their role in the process. In the next quote, Desiree recalled many times when she had approached her mother with questions.

Desiree: Well I initiated the conversation after the first time I had sex. I said, "Mom, I had sex. Oh, gosh." I've asked her about when you're most likely to get pregnant. How effective are certain forms of birth control. You know, like you hear things in the media and, this is effective, this is only this part, you know. But, I wanted to see what she thought, what's the most effective. And honestly, she thought I should get a diaphragm. But, we didn't go that route. So. What else did I ask her? [whispering to herself] Whenever, I guess, just the way school and friends and society is. I thought that girls, you know you could have sex, but, you weren't necessarily supposed to have sex for fun. And, my mom's a big pusher of, "You know, don't go out and have sex with everyone." But, sex should be a pleasurable thing. It should be something you want to do. Not something like. Not necessarily it needs to be a right of passage. You have to have sex before you graduate high school. Or, you have to be the cool kid who, you know. That kind of stuff. So, I talked to her about that. I've had lots of conversations with friends who have had questions who, it's been me and my friend talking to her about, "What is this disease? Or you know, if I'm having sex and this happens, what's, you know, if the condom breaks, what are my chances? What's the problems that are going to be talked about?" I've had conversations with her and friends about how did they talk to their parents about sex. (7d:72-88)

Desiree recalled instances when she had asked her mom questions about many different aspects of sex. Deidra also initiated conversations, primarily in response to words or information she had overheard her sister and mother discussing.

Deidra: Um, like anything my sister brought up. Like, "What's a blow job?" And then I'd just be like, "Hey mom, I don't know what this is." [laugh] Like, I know I'm probably not supposed to be learning this, but she brought it up, so I might as well know. [chuckle]. Kind of like that. (4d:88-91)

Deidra gave an example of how she asked her mom questions as a result of sexual information revealed by her sister. Deidra's questions linked back to the challenging nature of sexual communication by showing that some mothers and daughters treated sexual information as normal and therefore, not challenging to discuss. However, as mentioned previously, some aspects of sexual information were challenging. The next component of the Interaction Model elaborated on possible tensions.

Bring it up. As noted earlier, some mothers and daughters experienced occasional challenges and tensions when talking about sex. The middle section of the Interaction Model showed that tensions may exist at the moment of encounter between a mother and daughter. The results in this theme confirmed that participants were comfortable, overall, with sexual information, but were uncomfortable with the process. Maureen offered substantial detail in her description of her thought processes associated with the challenges of conveying sexual information.

Maureen: You know, and they'll have that look on their face. And sometimes, I can remember, and I can't remember specific things we were talking about, but you would give them an answer and think, "Oh please god, let that be enough." And, um, you know, and at times, they would be ok with that, you know. And I can remember a few times where they would ask a question and you would think, "Ok. Now you're going to give the big long, you know." And then, you, I would catch myself and say, "Ok, just feed them a little bit and see what happens." You know, and it was something so simple. And you would say something and they would be like, "Oh, ok!" like, "Oh my god. Thank god I didn't go into it." But, then there's times, and it's usually the worst time. They ask you a question and you think, "Ok, well this will be fairly simple." And I, I wish I could remember specifics, but I can't. (4m:270-281)

Maureen provided a level of detail in her experience that poignantly illustrated the frustration and uncertainty some mothers experienced at the point of disclosure. Maureen

had several sexual communication encounters with her daughters and described the intricacies of her disclosures by regulating how much information she gave. She strategically gave her daughters small doses of information and waited for the response. She then used the response to guide her next decision about whether or not to reveal additional information.

Some of the daughters' excerpts were equally riveting in their discussion of tensions and strains in their relationships with the mothers. For these daughters, the strain was brought about because they had started having sex, but had not told their mother. However, the daughters sensed that their mothers knew the information, but weren't saying anything. Donielle noted her challenging moment, which was bringing up the topic of her own sexual activity for the first time.

Donielle: I think the only time when it felt challenging for me personally was when I actually started experiencing the things instead of just being curious about them. Because then it got to the point where I was like, "Well, is she gonna be mad that I did this?" And not, like a fear that I would get in trouble, just that...it was a fear for myself to talk about it because I didn't want to. I just kind of wanted to keep that a private thing. And so that's the only time I felt like it was difficult, was just actually bringing it up the first time. (6j:278-283)

Donielle attributed the change in sexual communication with her mother to her first experience with sexual intercourse. She described her thoughts and feelings before deciding to reveal information, noting the feeling of fear. She further noted her desire to keep her sexual activity private. Despite the tug between revealing or concealing, Donielle decided to tell her mom that she had started having sex. Donielle was also descriptive in retelling another story about an attempt to conceal information.

Donielle: She did not approve of the guy that I was with. And I had snuck around

with him a little bit because it had been right after another breakup and I just wanted to have fun, but she didn't like him. So, I just didn't tell her. I would be like, "Well, I'm going to the movies with this person." And I'd really be with him. And then, eventually I told her because I felt so bad about hiding it. I could tell that hiding it was changing my personality. And changing my relationship with her and I didn't like...

Tina: How do you think it was changing?

Danielle: I was being more secretive. And I was getting angrier with her because I was afraid. I was getting angry with myself! And I was afraid of letting something slip. And so, I would just shut her off completely with everything. I wouldn't talk to her about anything. And then I hated that because then so much was building up. And so then, it took a couple weeks. Then finally I was like, "OK. I have been seeing him. And, you know, we've been doing whatever. And I want you to know because I'm tired of hiding it." (6d:152-167)

In the story, we saw how Danielle maintained control over her privacy boundary around the sexual information, how long she concealed the information, the feelings that led her to reveal, and the decision she made to regulate the flow of the information. She was aware of the strain of "holding it in," as if withholding information was a violation of the openness in her relationship with her mom. She felt as if she was "hiding" information from her mother when she initially attempted to conceal the information. A little later in the interview, Danielle added insight about how her comfort level with sexual communication changed after she revealed her first sexual experience to her mom and co-owned this information with her.

Danielle: I guess once we finally did bring it up, it became a lot easier to talk about it from there on out. It was just like that first conversation after it actually happened. (6j:299-300)

Danielle's examples showed that sexual communication was challenging when she was younger, a change in her sexual activity resulted in a tension between revealing

or concealing, and sexual communication was now easier for her and her mom. In the next example, Dawn maintained control of the privacy boundary around the information that she had started having sex. She chose to keep this information private, but like Donielle, seemed to be frustrated by concealing the information. Unlike Donielle, however, Dawn waited for her mom to approach her.

Dawn: Up until I ever brought it up, it was just the fact that I was scared to tell her, cause I was like, "Oh man, it's my mom. Do I tell her those kind of things?" I didn't know what the boundaries were to talk to her about it. And I didn't know how comfortable she would be talking about it, cause she never really brought it up. I was having sex, probably six months until my mom found out that I was having sex. I knew she knew, but she didn't say anything. And so that was even more awkward to me, cause I'm like, "Why doesn't she say anything? Why isn't she bringing this up?" And then I thought, I just thought she'd be mad or something, but she wasn't. It's strange. (3d:180-187)

Dawn felt "awkward" because she believed her sexual activity was known by her mother, but had not been verbally discussed between them. Further, she noted uncertainty about the boundary rules with her mother when the subject was Dawn's sexual activity. She was concerned about her mother's comfort with the information. Eventually, Marge approached Dawn about Dawn's sexual activity and Dawn admitted that she was having sex with her boyfriend. After the information was co-owned, Dawn and her mother concurred that sex became easier to talk about, as described in the next excerpt.

Dawn: I don't know. I feel more mature and I could talk about it without it freaking me out, so I don't think it freaks them out as much.

Marge: And probably since you're having sex now...

Dawn: Yeah.

Marge: ...it's kind of easier to talk about.

Dawn: Yeah, and when you're not [having sex] and you hear about it, you're like, ugh, like, eww. (3j:342-351)

Dawn labeled her tension “freaking out” and also agreed with her mother that having sex made the subject easier to talk about. She also referenced distaste for sexual information before she experienced sex, providing additional clues about the tension associated with revealing sexual information. In brief, tensions were present for several daughters and mothers at the moment of revealing or concealing sexual information. For daughters, the tension was experienced most strongly after they started having sex and before they disclosed this information to their mothers.

To summarize the Sexual Communication Interaction Model, mothers and daughters guarded their sexual information with privacy boundaries. Daughters were initiators of the process by asking questions of their mothers. Mothers' initiations of conversations were assumed and also referenced on the model. At the meeting point of an interaction, some mothers and daughters experienced tension, suggesting the dialectical aspect of revealing and concealing information. For daughters, their strain seemed to result from experiencing sexual activity but not disclosing the information to their mothers. Their attempts to control the permeability of their privacy boundary and keep their sexual activity private were often unsuccessful in the long term as these daughters eventually disclosed the information to their mothers. The Interaction Model ended by showing the decision to reveal information, resulting in co-owned information between the mother and daughter. The description of the models now shifts back to the Process Model.

More of the Process: Time

The third major component of the Process Model was time. The element of time was crucial to completely answer the second research question. For these participants, there were many conversations about sex over time. With each interaction, mothers maintained control over the permeability of their privacy boundaries by releasing small amounts of information and choosing to conceal the rest. Indeed, participants, namely mothers, discussed how sexual information was revealed in *Little Bits and Pieces*. Mothers regulated the permeability of their privacy boundaries by revealing small segments of sexual information during each encounter. As information was released to the daughters, the circumference of daughters' privacy boundaries expanded to account for new sexual information. Mothers and daughters noted three specific time periods when considerable sexual information was revealed—the toddler/early elementary years, middle school, and late adolescence. Therefore, the Process Model emphasized the communication at each of these points. The participants mentioned other time periods, as well, but not with the same forcefulness or repetition. Therefore, the horizontal arrow on the Process model represented the fluidity of the communication across time.

Little Bits and Pieces

In this theme, the results showed that mothers and daughters communicated about sex at various points during the child's entire span of development. No dyad could recall one, specific, all-inclusive conversation—commonly referred to as *The-Birds-and-the-Bees*—in which information was revealed. Instead, revealing sexual information occurred in small increments. Further, the sexual communication itself was rarely bound

as an isolated conversation. Rather, the topic emerged out of another conversation or in response to an event. Thus, this theme showed how information was revealed incrementally over time and within a given conversation. Mary's quotation below previewed the theme as she recalled several instances when sexual information entered the topic of conversation with her children.

Mary: But you know, one other thing I thought of just now was, like I said, a lot of times you bring in stories or something. OK, if we'd read something in the paper. If I read an article in the paper. And it was what happened to somebody who made many wrong choices. Then I would say, "Well look at this." Or whatever. Or the kids would see first hand uh, girls that got pregnant in high school, and some early high school, especially at this little public school out here. I mean there were like how many kids in one class? Like 6 or 7 kids in one class that got pregnant in one year. And I was in there looking at that and my little, Danny, who was, maybe he was 10 or 11 at the time. He would say, "So, how are they having a baby? They aren't married." And so he didn't understand it. So I'd say, "Well, you don't really have to be married. There just has to be another man. And you have sexual relations." And he. I didn't explain exactly how it is. But um, um, so anyway. And then like with the boys, too, they would see Donita's or Diana's pads or whatever upstairs. "What is this?" So that would be the time you would say, "Well, when girls get to a certain age, their body gets ready to where someday they can have a baby and so they have to wear these pads cause they bleed every month." "Eww, sick." [joint laughter] But, so things came up like that where. Things around town, articles in the paper. Magazine articles. Things they saw around here. It was just kind of learned like that. OK, and like when Christina was breast feeding, you know. Actually when I, I breast fed em all. So, um, I never was one that liked to sit out in front of people and do it. So when company comes, I would always, when my kids were around, I always made sure the other part of my shirt was pulled up so I, you know, everything wasn't exposed. So they saw, you know, that part and knew that the breast is good use for something, you know. So. It was just kind of like, they learned just little bits and pieces all along. But as far as sitting down and talking about it, we probably didn't talk too much because they would say, "Oh, we already know all of that. We learned it in school." So, maybe I failed in that part. You know? (9j:177-200)

Mary's re-telling of experiences with her children showed the "little bits and pieces" of information that were conveyed to her children. Notice the conversation with

Danny. She specifically recalled how she did not give him detailed information about how reproduction occurs. She refrained in that moment from revealing additional information. The same was true when her sons asked about feminine products. She provided enough information to give an explanation of women's menstruation. Mary's quote was useful to introduce the theme. The remaining quotes showed further details of communication at designated ages or grade levels.

Mothers recalled instances when their daughters were toddlers or in the early elementary years and some aspect of sex would meld into a conversation.

Muriel: But you guys, I mean, even when you were younger, you would ask. In fact, I'm sure you asked. I know you asked when you were younger, "How do babies happen?" But we didn't, when they were real young like that, first, second grade, I don't, you know...

Tina: How do you answer that question?

Muriel: Well, at that age, when they're young like that, pretty much, you just say, "When two people love each other, that's what happens! You're blessed with babies." I mean, that's what we did. But, you wouldn't get graphic with the young one. At least we didn't in our family. But, we did explain what things were called. I mean, not make up things, like their body parts. You talked about what each part was called and the boy part too, if you asked. I don't remember if you did or not. (5j:232-243)

Muriel revealed information to Diane when it was asked. There was no hesitation to conceal information, which reinforced the normalized aspect of sexual information. However, Muriel maintained control of what information would be revealed and regulated the disclosure of sexual information. Muriel obviously knew considerable sexual information, resulting in a privacy boundary around sexual information that had a larger circumference than her daughter's. However, she regulated control over her

information and revealed only a small amount of information, thereby creating a co-owned privacy boundary around a small amount of sexual information. The challenging aspect of communication seemed to be with the process of regulating the permeability and flow of the information. Mary also remembered an example when her oldest daughter asked questions at a young age. Mary changed her tone of voice to baby talk when telling this brief story, reflecting the young age at which the questions were asked.

Mary: I remember Christina asking me one time. She said, "Can you get pregnant by swimming in the same water as your brother or other boys? No, no Christina. You can't. Can you get pregnant by using a towel after a boy?" "No, you can't." So she was just a little innocent. And I thought, "Oh, that's sweet." (9j:103-109)

As with Muriel, Mary answered Christina's questions and provided no additional information. Christina's privacy boundary contained only a small amount of new information as she learned how not to get pregnant. Mae also indicated the type of information that children needed to hear before intercourse and reproduction were discussed. Notice that Mae used the phrase "little snippets" to convey this idea.

Mae: It doesn't start out, "OK, this is the act of sex. This is how babies are made." It has to start out so much earlier with, "This is not an appropriate thing to wear and this is why." And, it's like little snippets of information through time. (1j:1215-1217)

Mae pointed out that the small amounts of information were revealed beginning at an early age, showing that the process spans most of the child's life.

During the toddler years, mothers also discussed body parts and how babies were made. In the first example, Maureen mentioned a book she bought for her oldest daughter when she was pregnant with Deidra, her second daughter.

Maureen: Like a book for a. Well, Beth was 3.

Deidra: A little kid.

Maureen: When I was pregnant with her [Deidra], we used this book, “How Babies are Made” and it goes through flowers, chickens, and dogs, and whatever.

Deidra: Humans.

Maureen: And then humans. And then, so after she was born then when she started to learn to read at 2 or 3 then....

Deidra: Had the book, too.

Maureen: You know, read the book, too. (4j:456-469)

Deidra also remembered reading this book. In Michelle’s individual interview, she discussed some of the questions her children asked her when she was pregnant.

Michelle: I think with them it started when, when they were little. When I was pregnant. “Where did I come from? Where’s that baby? How did that baby get there?” You know? OK. It’s not. Yeah. Why is that a big deal? Why is that a secret? It’s not. (7m:60-63)

Michelle was describing the process of sexual communication for her and her three children, of whom Desiree was the oldest. As she did, she cited her pregnancies as events that prompted questions from her children who were toddlers. She recalled the questions her children asked and inserted her beliefs that these questions should be responded to openly and naturally.

The next grade levels mentioned by a mother were grades 4 and 5 when Mae recollected advice she received and took from another mother about the importance of strong communication during those years. Mae’s excerpt did not specifically refer to sexual communication, but her thoughts reflected how important communication in general was at that particular age to establish a strong relationship during the high school

years and the potential to discuss any number of topics or situations that could emerge during adolescence.

Mae: An older mother told me when my kids were in elementary school. She goes, “You really have to work with your kids and make sure you are really close to them in 4th and 5th grade. Spend all kinds of time with your kids in 4th and 5th grade because, that’s the basis of your relationship when they’re teenagers. You have to develop the trust with them in 4th and 5th grade. Really, with all your kids spend as much time as you can during those years, and it will benefit you later,” and I did that, and I found it to be absolutely true. That when they got to, through those rocky middle school years and high school years, that we did have a strong relationship during that time, cause I, both my husband and I made a really concentrated effort in those late elementary school years to be there for them and be around a lot.

Dana: Yeah. Which they were. (1j:356-366)

Mae referred to the importance of communication in grades 4 or 5 at five different points during the joint and individual interviews. She firmly believed that the foundation she set during those years impacted her relationships with Dana and her other children.

Dana chimed in to validate her mother’s and father’s actions.

The examples thus far have focused on the sexual communication between mothers and their toddlers or elementary school-aged children. Mothers revealed very small amounts of information to children during these early years, resulting in a small privacy boundary of sexual information for the child, as well as a small, co-owned privacy boundary of shared information between the mother and daughter. Mothers treated information as natural and experienced no challenges with the information, itself. However, they carefully regulated the permeability of their disclosures, being mindful of their daughters’ ages.

The Process Model showed that considerable sexual communication resurfaced when the daughters entered the middle school years. Mothers revealed additional information to their daughters, thereby expanding the daughters' individual and co-owned privacy boundaries. However, the mothers continued in their practice of revealing information incrementally. Diane and Muriel had quite a bit of sexual communication and grade 5 seemed to be the beginning of most of it. The following story began when Diane was in grade 5. Muriel and Diane continued to describe several aspects of sexual communication and how it evolved as Diane got older.

Diane: Well, first off, well, cause it was, I was [in] 5th grade whenever we had um, sexual, sexual education at my school. And, you know, where they taught, you know, the facts of life and, you know.

Muriel: About [the] period and...

Diane: Yeah.

Muriel: ...boys, you know. Every aspect of how the body is going to change. For males and females.

Diane: Yes. And um, so, before that um, my mom and I talked. She talked to me about that beforehand, so I'd be more prepared in the classroom and just not sit there and going, "Oh my gosh! I don't want to watch this! I don't want to listen to this!" Cause it's something I need to know, obviously! And then, um, after that...

Muriel: Well you got a. I got you a book.

Diane: Yes, you did. You got me a book. About how, well, my body changes...

Muriel: Right, we talked about that.

Diane: ...and what goes along with that and um...

Muriel: We discussed it.

Diane: Yeah. And then I think it just got broader and broader.

Muriel: Yeah, because in fifth grade, you don't tell them everything, you know, you just gradually tell them more and more. And I just told them enough. The school that the girls went to was good about letting us preview the information that they were going to teach them. So, we knew what to teach them. But I mean, you just start like, you don't tell them everything, you just give them a little bit each time. And then as they get older, you explain it more in detail. You just give them what. Because like fifth grade, uh, they were introduced, there was a sexual act. All they do is define it.

Diane: Yeah.

Muriel: They don't go any further than that. They just explain it in medical terms, you know.

Diane: Uh hum.

Muriel: The, whatever, penis is inserted, you know, it's just very, like a little definition of it. And you don't elaborate on it. But then, as she gets older, you elaborate and explain more about it. Because they're only able to comprehend so much at that point. And, I don't think they, you have to be real graphic at fifth grade. I mean, I think pretty much though by sixth, seventh, eighth grade, you knew, pretty much by sixth grade, we tried to explain as much as you could...

Diane: Um hmm.

Muriel: Right? In that area. (5j:154-194)

Diane and Muriel recalled grade 5 as the starting point for most of their sexual communication. Diane explained that the sex education in school spurred her mom to talk with her. Muriel then described the content of what was taught in grade 5, namely the “definition” of sex using “medical” terms. Muriel supplemented her communication and the school’s curriculum with a book, as well. Note how Diane reinforced the privacy boundary expansion by saying the communication became “broader and broader.” Desiree remembered getting a book, too. However, she was around 13 when she received hers.

Desiree: I was like 13-ish when you gave us those books?

Michelle: For your 13th birthday, for you and Emily, yeah. (7j:164-166)

Michelle noted that she gave her daughters books about sex for their 13th birthdays. In the next example, Myrna had taken her children to a wedding and went outside away from the crowd for a few minutes and Deanne came with her. Deanne was 13 when this conversation occurred. As they were talking, Myrna disclosed that she became a date rape victim at approximately age 14.

Myrna: And it was the same thing with Deanne and I in the sexual, the talk, up in [State]. I was outside, smoked outside, I'm a smoker. And she said, "Mom, can I go with you?" She was a kid by herself up there. And we started talking about. Actually we started talking about weddings. And it just, flowers, and just, inner talk, you know? And one thing led to another and it was, it was just like we were meant to have that conversation. It just kind of flowed, you know? (2m:65-75)

Myrna's revelation to Deanne emerged out of another conversation. The flow of the information followed other topics. But, when the information about Myrna's rape was revealed, that did not lead to a robust conversation about every topic related to sex. Myrna regulated the permeability of her privacy boundary to reveal information specific to her tragic experience, but contained the information to that which was relevant to the story. Myrna's and Deanne's privacy boundary of co-owned information expanded at that moment, as well, to accommodate the new information. In the next example, I asked Donielle and Marla if they recalled the first time they talked about sex. The junior high years were once again recalled. Donielle began:

Donielle: Like, from the beginning. Just always having, like an openness, like junior high on, when, you know, girls start making out with boys, and all that stuff. And you hear things in the hallway, and like just always being able to go to her with that. I never felt the pressure from like, you know, the peer pressure to go

out and experience it, because I knew I didn't have to. Because I had the communication with my mom. (6j:524-528)

Donielle referred to junior high as “the beginning” of when issues related to sex started. She commented that she “had the communication” with her mom, suggesting that sexual communication had been established between them by this time. Shortly thereafter, the conversation continued and further details about revealing sexual information were provided.

Donielle: I don't think so, because I think it was... I know I was younger, probably in Junior High, is when we first really ever...

Marla: [interrupts] Probably watching a movie or something, brought the topic up...

Donielle: Yeah.

Marla: ...I would think, um.

Donielle: It was probably something like watching “Titanic,” cause there's that whole scene, like in the car and I was like...

Marla: [interrupts] Well, yeah. You saw that but I didn't. [laugh]

Donielle: I think I talked to you when I got back from seeing it. And a, or something like that. (6j:448-459)

And in another example:

Marla: Well Donielle read a lot too. She was always a big reader. So I think she uh. Probably in those books...

Donielle: Yeah.

Marla: ...she read a big series, Sweet Valley High series.

Donielle: And like, they didn't like [Marla talks over her]

Marla: It wasn't too detailed, but it was, the curiosity was there, I believe.

Donielle: Yeah.

Marla: And the, just the...

Donielle: Always like the hint of something else and.

Tina: So then, would you then go to your mom and ask her questions?

Donielle: I think so, yeah. I don't remember how I would word them, but I would be like, "Hey, I read in this book," and then be like, "What does it mean? Like what did they do?" And then, she'd try to tell me in the best way [laughing] she could without freaking me out I guess! [everyone laughs] (6j:461-476)

Donielle's examples showed that her mother was receptive and willing to reveal information. As Marla revealed information, she was careful in her disclosures, according to Donielle. Donielle retrospectively understood her mother's disclosures as being "the best way she could without freaking me out."

In addition to age, some mothers noted developmental markers as catalysts for sexual communication. Mary noted initial sexual communication as a result of menstruation, which typically happens during the middle school/junior high years.

Mary: Well, I guess I felt like the girls. There were certain things that you had to talk to them about initially with like the periods and stuff. (9j:481-483)

Like Mary, Myrna believed her communication with her daughter began with the beginning of menstruation.

Myrna: I think all of it kind of started about the time that she started, I think you started your period and all that and we decided to, OK. (2j: 307-308)

Mary and Myrna relied on the triggering event of menses to prompt sexual communication. These excerpts have shown how sexual communication was managed during the middle school/junior high years. As the Process Model showed, the privacy

boundary of sexual information for the daughters expanded in circumference with the addition of sexual information. Additionally, the privacy boundary of co-owned information between the mother and daughter continued to overlap.

The third section of the Process Model referenced late adolescence. Participants referred to the senior year of high school or early years of college as periods of frequent sexual communication. Daughters' privacy boundaries expanded because of their sexual experiences and additional revelations from their mothers. Monica reflected on a conversation with Debbie during the senior year of high school.

Monica: She had a boyfriend. She really went through most of high school, you know, with no serious boyfriends. And so when she started dating this [Other Town] boy, um, and she asked him to prom and he asked her to prom, is really when I started really questioning her about sex and... (8j:188-191)

Monica's expansion of the co-owned privacy boundary with Debbie was brought about because of prom. Other details of how the privacy boundary expanded occurred a few seconds later in the interview.

Monica: And so, so uh. So then I asked Debbie, "Debbie, you know, just because you think you're in love with someone doesn't mean you have to have sex. Where are you going to be at on prom night, cause are you guys going to be sleeping somewhere together? Because you know, when you sleep with a boy, and you let him go so far, then he's going to want to go all the way." So, you know, we kind of got into that sort of conversation and. Talked to her about condoms...

Debbie: I think I was...

Monica: ...and protection.

Debbie: I think I was probably really obnoxious. I was probably like, "Well, yeah, Mom, I've had sex."

Monica: Yeah, she did. She said, "Mom, we've...had sex." (8j:214-229)

Monica remembered talking with Debbie about the details of birth control and condoms because Monica had started dating seriously and would be attending her prom and her boyfriend's prom. The privacy boundaries of co-owned information contained considerably more information than at previous time periods for Debbie and Monica, as they did for many of the mothers and daughters during late adolescence, because of discussions about sexual behavior, attitudes, morality, and protection. Mothers' regulation of sexual information became highly permeable as they attempted to convey more information to their daughters. Control over sexual information was loosened as very little information was concealed. Daughters' privacy boundaries expanded in circumference to be nearly equal to their mothers' privacy boundaries, and the overlap between mothers and daughters co-owned information was quite extensive.

In brief, sexual information was revealed to the participants at various ages or grade levels. Myrna provided an excellent summary of how the sexual communication with her daughter evolved as Deanne got older. While Mary opened this section with a lengthy quote, Myrna's narrative was offered here as a summary of revealing sexual information at various ages.

Myrna: That's where you get into the whole, rely on Mom. What did you do? That and getting in with the school. So you know, 4th, 5th, 6th grade we did the whole basic, "Ok so you saw the sex film today?" kind of talk. But, you know, I think that's just prep work, really. I mean basically you're turning over the responsibility to someone who sees your child more than you do at that point. And they're going to do it from an educational level. But let's face it, there's more to sex than just how it works and what body parts you have. That's what they're doing. Then you get into junior high and they start this boy likes this girl, this girl likes this boy. You know, that kind of thing. And yeah, I kind of just, quite honestly, I winged it. I did it as we were there and she was fighting with somebody. And I'd say, "Well, what's going on?" and "Do you like him?" "Have

you kissed him?” Then, when she got into high school, it was, I don’t remember exactly when it was, but I remember her telling me how far she had gone with her one and only steady boyfriend. And they had not had intercourse, but it had been further than I had anticipated. And I remember being kind of taken aback. But, we’re having this conversation and I’m telling myself, “Ok, you just have to smile. You can’t act shocked about it. You’re going to have to act cool about it because she’s talking to you. Can you believe it?” I mean, my head is just like spinning 90 miles an hour. And I think that was the real turning point for me, too. That’s when I decided, you know what? This is how I want to communicate with my kids. I want them to feel comfortable enough to be able to ask me anything. And vice versa. (2m:112-134)

These examples showed how little bits and pieces of information were given to the daughters over time. These accounts finished answering the research question about the process of revealing or concealing sexual information, and they supported the models by showing how daughters’ privacy boundaries expanded over time to account for new sexual information. Additionally, the exemplars showed that the co-owned privacy boundary between mothers and daughters expanded as additional information was revealed over time. The final element of both models was the privacy rule development criteria that illustrate overarching guidelines guiding their sexual communication.

Privacy Rule Development Criteria

The fourth major component of the Process and Interaction Models was the privacy rule development criteria. The focus thus far has been to explain the overall process of sexual communication over time and during individual interactions, emphasizing the sexual information held within privacy boundaries, the ways in which the information became co-owned during an interaction, and how sexual communication changed over time. As mothers and daughters revealed information, it appeared that they were guided by several rules. However, while specific rules did not emerge from the data,

the criteria upon which rules were founded were described by the participants. The criteria formulating the rules proved to be very informative to understand the intricacies of how the process of sexual communication operated both over time and during a specific interaction. It is toward the privacy rule development criteria guiding the Process Model and Interaction Model that I now shift while answering the next research question.

RQ_{2b}: How do mothers and adolescents describe the criteria for rule development for revealing or concealing sexual information?

My initial intent during data analysis was to use the five criteria of CPM—culture, gender, motivation, context, and risk-benefit ratio—in etic fashion (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002) to understand the criteria for rule development guiding the sexual communication process. Interview questions were prepared based on these five criteria. However, it became clear that these criteria limited my analysis and ability to see the larger, emic view of the participants' experiences. Therefore, I modified the research question above to fully capture the essence of the forces influencing mothers and daughters to reveal or conceal sexual information with each other.

Overall, there were seven privacy rule development criteria that emerged guiding how participants talked about sex with each other: (a) mothers want to talk about sex differently from their mothers, (b) sexual communication is reserved for the mother-daughter relationship, (c) mothers have many motivations to talk about sex, (d) adolescents are motivated to talk with their mothers to get accurate information, advice, or support, (e) religious beliefs impact the content of sexual messages, (f) sisters

influence the process in both positive and negative ways, and (g) the benefits of talking about sex far outweigh the risks.

Different From my Mother

Several mothers stated a desire to communicate differently from their mothers. Many mothers explained that their mothers did not talk with them about sex. As a result, the mothers desired to have a different relationship with their daughters and circumvent some of the fear and anxiety they felt as adolescents. Mary explained the absence of communication with her mother and the resulting feelings quite succinctly.

Mary: My mom never talked to me and I found this little book one time on her shelf. I was reading it. But when I started my period I was scared to death. I said, "Look how much blood." And she's like, "It's OK. It's normal." (9j:484-485)

Mary noted that there was some communication after her period began, but she experienced a lot of fear before talking to her mother because she was not prepared for the realities of menstruation. In her individual interview, Mary elaborated on her own sexual education, recalling that most of it came from a neighbor and friend.

Mary: When I was young, we didn't have sex education in school. My next door neighbor told me most of it. I thought, "Yuck!" [both laugh] And then uh, my mom, when I, when I started my period and I was just alarmed. And she said, "Oh, that's ok." But she really never. My girlfriend, my next door neighbor, I was probably twelve years old when she told me about how the sex act is done. And I was like, "Ohh. That's kind of sick." [laugh] Isn't that weird? (9m:118-123)

Mary mentioned the lack of communication with her mother again, after having referred to the lack of interaction during the joint interview. Mary also made known that she did not have sex education in her school. In another portion of the interview, it was made clear that Mary's children were taught sex education and sexual morality in their

Catholic school. Thus, her statement in her individual interview was made comparatively and collectively. Comparatively, she didn't have sex education in school as some do presently. Collectively, her use of the pronoun "we" could have referred to her siblings or to a larger generational cohort who were not exposed to sex education in school.

Monica's comments mirrored Mary's.

Monica: I came from a really strict Catholic family. And Bob [Monica's husband] came from a very open, honest, say anything family. And that's why I said, they sat around the dinner table and talked about sex. At my house, where I grew up, when I had my first period, I had to go to my sister and ask her what was going on because you didn't talk to Mom and Dad about sex or anything like that. And Mom never talked to us. And at that time they didn't talk about it in school, either. (8j:34-38)

Monica and Mary experienced four similarities: (a) they shared the same Catholic upbringing, (b) their mothers did not talk to them about sex, (c) they relied on a third party for some of their sexual information, and (d) sex education was not included in the school curriculum. Marla related to Monica and Mary because of the lack of communication with her mother. However, she elaborated more on how she felt as an adolescent.

Marla: I always wanted that [open communication with her daughter] because it wasn't like that at my home growing up. It was totally different. And I just didn't want the same. I didn't want the way I felt toward my mother at that point in my life, I didn't want her to ever feel that way toward me. And I just wanted to be more open about. I just didn't want her to feel threatened. I wanted her to feel safe about it. You can talk about it, you can experience, but, you gotta be smart about it, you know. (6j:494-498)

Marla remembered the negative feelings she had toward her mother when she was an adolescent and did not want her children to feel the same way toward her. She recalled feeling less open and threatened as a teenager in her mother's household. She also

referenced the dissatisfaction with her mother's sexual communication as a motivator for change. Her open communication and relationship with Donielle was created, in part, because of Marla's desire to make change. Other mothers in the study also offered information about their mothers, but unlike the first three participants, called to mind some sexual communication with their mothers.

Muriel: No, I would tell them those things. I wanted them to know that they're [boys] gonna try those things. I don't think my mom, I mean she did some of that, but not all of that. So, when you get out on a date, I'm like, "Whoah. Maybe I shouldn't. I mean, am I supposed to let the boy do this kind of stuff?" I think with my mom, we weren't as open because back then. I mean she told me some things, but she didn't talk about a lot of other things.

Diane: Grandma's very, kind of reserved in that area.

Muriel: Right. (5j:671-680)

Muriel's mom may not have said a lot, but there was an acknowledgement of some communication. Muriel mentioned her mother in the middle of answering another question. She had not been asked anything about her mother, yet it seemed important to bring up as she discussed sexual communication with Diane. Diane's statement indicated that she had some awareness of how her grandmother communicated about sex. These examples focused on passing on different communication styles from one generation to the next within the same family.

In sum, the first criterion guiding the development of communication rules for sexual communication for some mothers in the study was to communicate differently from their mothers. Several mothers strived to achieve more openness with their daughters than they had experienced with their mothers.

Gender

Research has consistently shown that there are at least three main gender differences with parent-adolescent sexual communication. First, mothers talk with children and adolescents about sex more than fathers do (e.g., Lefkowitz et al., 1996). Second, daughters are talked with more than sons (e.g., DiIorio et al., 1999; Fisher, 1988). Third, daughters receive different messages than sons (e.g., DiIorio et al., 1999; Fisher, 1988). The intent in this study was to reach some understanding about why these differences might exist and how the differences influence revealing or concealing sexual information. All the mothers and daughters in this study confirmed that sexual communication was predominantly the mother's function and, for those who had brothers/sons, the mothers' communication was different for daughters and sons.

Overall, daughters preferred their mothers over their fathers to be their source of sexual information. Fathers were predominantly absent from direct conversations about sex but did play a role behind the scenes in some families. As described earlier, the mother-daughter relationships of these participants were very close. As such, sexual communication was believed to be appropriate for mothers and daughters. Some of the daughters were described as Daddy's little girl and as such, there was no sexual communication between fathers and daughters. However, in this capacity, fathers were credited with communicating via protecting their daughters or teaching them self-respect. However, not all participants could relate to the Daddy's little girl relationship. Instead, these daughters commented on their fathers' communication style as a barrier to

discussing sex. I begin by presenting the results that place sexual information within the mother-daughter relationship.

Sex talk is between mothers and daughters. The closeness of the mothers and daughters was highly pronounced for these participants, such that sexual communication was conducted between mothers and daughters, and communication with the fathers was seen as not necessary. Also, the same-sex aspect of the relationship promoted being able to relate and to understand the feelings and emotions attached to sexual activity. For example, Donielle specifically stated that her mother's biological sex influenced her decision to talk about sex.

Donielle: I think it's because she's a girl. Like a guy, guys don't really understand the way that girls feel. So, I think if I went to my step-dad crying about something, he'd be like, "Why are you crying about it?" [Tina and Marla chuckle] My mom would understand better. He'd just be like, "Get over it!" [laugh] (6j:693-696)

Donielle compared her mother's ability to understand her feelings to her step-dad's desire for her to "get over it." Donielle insinuated that her step-dad was insensitive to her feelings, and she needed someone who could relate to her feelings. Donita concurred with the same sex dimension and the emotional closeness she felt with her mother.

Donita: Well, my mom is obviously a woman [laugh] and it makes, I think that makes it a little less awkward. And just in general, she, my mom has been the parent that we go to, you know, when we have problems and stuff and we're upset. And my dad, um. I'm not as close, emotionally, with my dad. I don't really. I tell my mom a lot more than I tell him, just cause it's. I don't know if that's something you can change or if that's just the way it is, or. I just feel more comfortable around my mom, and more comfortable telling her stuff about myself, and asking questions and stuff like that. (9d:114-120)

Donita reinforced the need to talk with someone with whom she had established comfort and emotional closeness. Myrna echoed Donielle's and Donita's sentiments about the ease of communicating with someone who can relate or shares common physical features.

Myrna: And I would say that's [sex of parent and child] a factor for communication, too. You know, it's much easier to talk with someone who shares the same body that I do and the same feelings and all of that. (2j:615-617)

In the next example, Maureen and Deidra conversed about the role of Daryl in family sexual communication. Daryl engaged in sexual communication to a point. Deidra explained her father's departure by suggesting a mother-daughter privacy boundary around sexual information, as if fathers had no role because the information belonged to the mother-daughter relationship.

Maureen: And I think my husband, her dad, had a lot, had a more difficult time talking openly about it. But he would.

Deidra: Uh hum. [affirmative]

Maureen: Because, you know, I would say. I didn't want to hide anything. They're going to find out. Obviously, they're going to find out. And that's what I always talked to him about. They're going to find out. It's just a matter of do you want to tell them the accurate [information], or do you want them to find out by trial and error or their friends telling them, or god knows what. And you know, he didn't want them to find out inaccurate information. And he didn't want them to try it out to see what it was like. So, he agreed to talk about it. But there would be times, he would make up some excuse to go do something when it was getting like, he wasn't comfortable anymore.

Deidra: Like that's not his place anymore.

Maureen: Yeah. He was like, "OK, I'm out of here."

Deidra: That's a mother-daughter thing.

Maureen: Uh hum. And then he would leave. (4j:826-845)

Deidra and Maureen talked about Daryl's presence during sexual conversations more than any other mother-daughter dyad discussed the presence of their respective husband/father. However, even they noted that sexual communication was a mother-daughter thing belonging to females instead of males. Deidra and Maureen pointed out that some sexual information may permeate a co-owned privacy boundary among the three of them, but the permeability had its limits and Daryl would eventually leave the scene as Maureen and Deidra continued to exchange information through highly permeable privacy boundaries. Marge reported her husband's views on sexual communication, which supported the idea that sexual information belonged to females and men do not want to be a part of it.

Marge: He just doesn't talk. He avoids it. He knows it's there. He's not stupid by any means. He knows what he was like, and he knows that his daughter. But, he's just like, "Don't want to know." If there was a problem, he would be right there for her. I mean, I'm sure she says some things once in a while, just to raise the hair on the back of his neck, cause that's just the way she is. And he's never bought Kurt [Dawn's boyfriend] condoms, where I have. [laugh] There's a difference. [both laugh] And he probably doesn't want to know. Cause he's said a few things, once in a while, where he's made a comment like, "They weren't having sex," and I just looked at him and go, "Ok. If that's the world you want to live in, that's ok. You know they're probably." He's like, "Uh! I don't want to know." (3m:267-278)

In this example, Marge's husband appeared to have a very impermeable privacy boundary and wanted no sexual information about his daughter to cross it. The exemplars have shown that fathers and/or daughters have impermeable privacy boundaries around sexual information and leave this domain to the mother-daughter relationship. Another theme that emerged was the characterization of the daughters as Daddy's little girl.

Daddy's little girl. Some of the participants described the father-daughter relationship with the phrase Daddy's Little Girl. Present in this theme were the ideas that daughters wanted their fathers' love and protection or fathers took on the role of protector. Mothers and daughters alike perceived the fathers as assuming this protective role for their daughters. In the first example, Debbie clearly saw herself as daddy's little girl.

Debbie: I'm like, his youngest girl. So I'm kind of daddy's little girl. So I'm sure if I told him or anything, he'd be the kind of dad who I'd be afraid who would go and kill one of the boyfriends 'cause my dad's pretty like, tough, you know.
[laughs] (8j:246-248)

Debbie not only referred to herself as daddy's little girl, but she also hinted at his role of protector. She feared he might harm her boyfriends and described her dad as tough. In the next conversation with Muriel and Diane, Diane also observed that her father's role had been to protect her from her boyfriends. Muriel and Diane realized that Andrew had not engaged in any conversations about sex. But Diane was aware of Andrew's presence and the impact his nonverbal communication has had with her boyfriends as Andrew attempted to protect Diane from them.

Muriel: I don't know. Did he talk to you guys?

Diane: No, he didn't. It was mom! It was all mom! [laugh]

Muriel: I don't think Andrew, my husband Andrew, really, you know.

Diane: He's more of the, he just kind of sits there and. I mean, my dad, all my boyfriends have been scared of him. I mean, he's more of the...

Muriel: Right, and doesn't talk much.

Diane: "Don't touch my daughter. I'm just sitting here and saying, not even saying

anything. But you get the message. Don't touch my daughter.” But my mom has been the one who's, um, talked to us about that. Yeah, I haven't talked to my dad about it, at all. (5j:510-523)

Diane ended by contrasting the role of her mother and father where her mother talked with her and her dad protected her. Dawn believed her dad saw her as a child and did not want to acknowledge his daughter's sexuality.

Marge: And I'm a realist, you know. Her dad is like, “No, no, no, no.”

Dawn: And he knows [that she is sexually active], but he just. He avoids it.

Marge: He ignores it.

Dawn: He's just like, “Don't tell me about it, I don't care.”

Marge: Yeah.

Dawn: “You're my daughter and I don't want to know. You're my five year old, still.” (3j:280-290)

Dawn reiterated the little girl idea again. Marge and Dawn agreed that Dad ignored his daughter's sexual activity and therefore avoided sexual communication. When the mothers or daughters were in their individual interviews, they expounded on the “little girl” idea and described how their fathers/husbands did not want to imagine another man being sexually active with his “little girl.” The next quote showed a mother's perspective.

Marge: That's daddy's little girl. He doesn't want to know some other man might be doing nasty things to her! I'm sorry! Daddy, she has him wrapped around his little finger. And she does. She could call him, he'd be, not even go to sleep in the morning, would drive straight out here and bring her stuff, or get her whatever she needed, or you know. “Whatever you want, honey. Mom's got money. I gave Mom money. She's got money.” But, that's his baby girl. And I don't think men want to know what their baby girls are doing. That's the way I look at it anyway. (3m:280-288)

Debbie also added more detail to her explanation in her individual interview:

Debbie: So if he knew that I was having sex with that person, I just know he would, I don't know, he would imagine his little girl having sex [laughing] with this guy, and he'd probably get mad. (8d:122-127)

Overall, in this theme, participants described the fathers as protectors of the daughters. As such, the fathers did not engage in direct communication about sex with their daughters. Instead, some fathers would espouse a protective role and use nonverbal communication to keep their daughters from harm from other males.

Not all participants related to the daddy's little girl relationship. Several daughters noted qualities of their fathers' communication style that made communicating with them on any topic generally difficult.

Dad's communication style. Daughters admitted that communicating about sex with their dad would be awkward or uncomfortable, so they avoided communication with him. They also recognized qualities about their fathers' communication styles, such as not saying much or being quiet, that made it difficult for daughters to discuss sex. Dana began by saying in a few words that her dad doesn't have much to say.

Dana: He talks, but he's not. We can't have a 20 minute conversation on the phone. It would probably be 15 minutes of silence. [Tina chuckles] He just doesn't have a lot of words to say. (1d:155-157)

While Dana noticed how little she and her dad had to say to each other, Desiree commented on the uncomfortable aspect of sexual communication with her father.

Desiree: I would never, ever, ever, talk to Dad about sex or any of that. That would be a very uncomfortable conversation. (7j:367-368)

Donielle has two dads and observed a difference between the two, but still noted that communication with either one of them was difficult.

Donielle: Yeah, I mean like. You know, my step-dad, he is, he's like, I don't know, he's got a hard exterior. And so, it's hard to break through that with him. And like my dad, he's just very quiet and reserved. So, it's like, he'll just kinda soak everything in. And then he'll form an opinion. It might even take him days! [Marla and Tina laugh]

Marla: Yeah! That is soooooo the way to explain it. [laugh]

Donielle: And then, you know, my step-dad he's...

Marla: Mellow.

Donielle: ...automatically puts up a wall. And then you have to like chisel through it. And so I think that's why it was just like, I know I can go to them, but it'll take me longer to get through to them than with my mom. (6j:852-861)

Donielle's metaphoric descriptions of her dad lend some insight to fathers' discomfort or not being talkative as mentioned by Desiree and Dana. Donielle continued the explanation of why it was difficult to talk to her fathers about sex by pointing to some men's need to solve problems or control a situation.

Donielle: I think he would, he would be more inclined to go out and fix the problem himself, instead of letting me fix it. Because that's just how dads are, I think. Well that's how my dads are. Like, they want to take control, instead of giving me advice, to let myself take control. So I think it, that just makes [it] easier to talk to my mom about it, as opposed to my dads, because she is a girl. She knows. She has the same feelings. (6j:701-705)

For Donielle, her fathers' communication styles formed the criterion for whom she would talk with about sex. Donielle also conveyed how her similarity to her mom was an important criterion to determine who she would talk with about sex, which linked back to the theme of That's a Mother-Daughter Thing.

In sum, another privacy rule development criteria for these participants was that mothers, not fathers, engaged in sexual communication with daughters. Mothers talked about sex with their daughters considerably more than fathers did among this group of participants. Participants described Daddy's little girl, characteristics of the fathers' communication styles, and the strength of the mother-daughter relationship as reasons why a co-owned privacy boundary between fathers and daughters had not formed. Gender differences were also noted between daughters and sons.

Boys are challenging. Because only daughters volunteered to participate in the study, the results regarding communication differences with daughters and sons were obtained by asking mothers and daughters for their perceptions about the communication. Seven of the nine participants had a son/brother in their family and these males were aged 7 to 29. Everyone agreed that communicating with their adolescent son/brother was much more challenging than communicating with adolescent females. In the joint interviews, the comments made by mothers and daughters focused on the content of sexual messages. In general, mothers mentioned that they taught their sons to respect females or discussed the consequences of pregnancy. In the first excerpt, Mary mentioned that her oldest two sons were taught to respect girls but were told no other sexual information because they did not date.

Mary: But if you're not exposed to that thing, to parties like that. Then, I guess you don't feel a need to bring up, to the boys who never date, except to respect girls. So I guess that's why we didn't really talk to them that much. And then they had it in school. I guess we could have covered more ground. But we didn't.
(9j:497-501)

Mary and Terry had three other sons and Mary recalled more conversations with the youngest two boys than with the oldest two, in part because the two youngest boys lived at home at the time of data collection, and the conversations were more recent. Another reason she may have recalled more from the two youngest sons was because their middle son, Phil, dated a teenage mother, which seemed to spawn quite a bit of sexual communication for this family. Regardless, other participants sent the same message of respecting women to their sons.

Michelle: With Matt, and I didn't [emphasis here] do this with you guys, with the girls, we didn't talk about, "Are you being a respectful partner?"

Desiree: Oh yeah.

Michelle: Very sexist of me. Have had that conversation with Matt many times. And I'm not sure why I didn't talk to you guys about it. I guess I didn't. I just. It's just sexist. I just assume that boys are more disrespectful. More inconsiderate about enjoying sex. And, just saying you need to be considerate. You need to be respectful the way that you treat a girl. (7j:415-424)

Michelle not only identified the message she conveyed to her son about respecting females, but she also pondered why she did not send the same message to her daughters. Her comments supported the claim that males and females receive different messages. Marge had several thoughts about the communication with her son about sex.

Tina: What differences do you notice about yourself in terms of how you talk to Dawn and how you talk to your son about sex?

Marge: My son just doesn't talk about it.

Tina: Have you tried to initiate conversations with him?

Marge: About sex?

Tina: Mm hmm.

Marge: Oh yeah. Anytime I do, it's like "Ehh!!! NO NO! This isn't happening!" My son, he's funny. I wish he would talk more, but he's funny. He's a funny kid. I mean, I can remember him walking into my room one day and I was bent over, I had my bathing suit on, I was bent over and he was like, "Ohhhh! I'm damaged for life." And I'm like, "Oh god. Thank you so much, I just needed that." [sarcastically] I know he knows. He's a smart kid. He's not stupid by any means. I mean, he does stupid things sometimes, but, he knows all about reproduction, he knows all about protection. And like my daughter says, she doesn't mince words, "Need condoms? I'll get em for you if you need em." "Aaaargh!" [imitating Chad's response to Dawn]

Tina: Well how do you know that he knows those things?

Marge: Well, first of all, he went to the same classes that she did, as far as education and school. And you know, he's kidded around. He's showed me a couple goofy things on the internet or whatever, people, sexual. Not pornographic, but you know, kidding around, like a cartoon or something. And he'll just laugh and laugh. I mean, Scott, I know my husband has talked to him.

Tina: And how do you know that?

Marge: Cause my husband, cause I sent my husband to talk to him.

Tina: Ok.

Marge: No, I mean. I said, "Have you had a talk with him?" "Yeah." And I said, "Well, how'd it go?" And he goes, "He already knows everything. It's not like I gave him any new information." (3m:290-328)

Marge discussed her son's negative responses to sexual communication. She also noted that he was knowledgeable about sexual information based on sexual jokes, her husband's conversation with him, and her daughter's offers to buy him condoms. Monica also believed communicating with her son was hard, even on topics other than sex.

Monica: So, so that's the first and foremost and that sticks in my mind, is that with Brian, it's hard really to talk to him about anything. And when we do have a conversation, it's short. And he doesn't want to know very much details. And he doesn't really want to talk about it. So, yeah, I think guys are more close-minded than girls are. Like I said, girls are so curious about everything and want to know and ask and talk. You know how girls are. So, it, so for that right there, it's easier

to sit down and talk with a girl than it is a guy, for those reasons. And I think that's even when it's your own son. You know? (8m:140-146)

Monica compared her daughters to her son to highlight the differences between them. She focused on the positive attributes of her daughters and their natural curiosity and desire to talk. In the interview with Monica and Debbie, they had a rather lengthy discussion about sexual communication and Brian.

Monica: Well, I think with boys, I think a woman looks at her son or a boy a little bit like they're their dad, in a little bit of a way. And I think [sigh]. I think guys think they know it all almost. A girl is always more curious and she. She may try to come across like she knows it all, but she really doesn't. So she's going to be curious and ask. A boy thinks he knows it all, but he's not going to lower himself to ask anybody. He's going to try to figure it out for himself or not. So that goes back to. We kind of wait until the kids come to us and ask us things. Brian's never gonna come and ask us anything. So, I think it's harder to open up a boy—a lot harder to open up a boy—than it is a girl. You know, a girl will spill her guts about anything eventually. And the boys, hmmm.

Debbie: But they're really relaxed, so they don't care. Like, if you say something. Brian, my parents know that Brian has sex. But, and like she said, he didn't come up and say, "Hey Mom, I'm having sex." He probably wasn't as open with it as what us girls are with her.

Monica: No, I think I have...

Debbie: But, when Mom said, "Brian, are you having sex?" I mean, he'll be like, "Well, yeah, duh, Mom."

Monica: Yeah. And then he does not want to talk about it. And that's kind of how his dad...

Debbie: He's very defensive about it.

Monica: That's how his dad sort of is. If he doesn't want to talk about something, you can just know by when he says one word out of his mouth. OK, not gonna go there cause he doesn't want to talk about it. And if I keep talking, he's probably not really gonna listen. And I have like, this last year, Brian had his first real girlfriend. And I think over a phone conversation, or something that she said to him, that they'd spent the night together. So that's when I was like, "Brian, if you

guys spent the night together, what's going on? Have you had sex?" And he's like, "Yeah." And so I'm like, "Brian, [sigh] you're way under the age. And you have to use." "Mom, I know. You don't have to talk to me about it. I know."
(8j:1091-1021)

Debbie and Monica brought up several attributes about their perceptions of the differences between males and females. Monica reiterated her belief that females were more curious than males. She also pondered the idea that males may be equally curious, but won't take the initiative to ask questions. Monica mentioned how much harder it was to "open up a boy." Debbie and Monica agreed about Brian's defensive, almost stand-offish, tone when questioned about his sexual activity. When Michelle and Desiree were talking about Matt, the issue of a teenage boy's curiosity also came up.

Desiree: I think Matt's more blunt about things. "Yeah, I had sex with her. So what?" Kind of thing. Not so much now, but then, he didn't. That wasn't a big deal for him. He didn't place any value on sex. It was just whatever. I don't know. Is he different talking to you? I would say like...

Tina: Well you mentioned that one example of how. I'm sorry, go ahead.

Desiree: You're fine. I. personally I would say I value her opinion on what I do more than he does.

Michelle: Ummm.

Desiree: Apparently not.

Michelle: I don't think so. He's less likely to say...

Desiree: Yeah, I know. To say something bothers him.

Michelle: ...to be outwardly vocal about it. But he asks. He asks a lot of things.
(7j:632-649)

In this conversation, Desiree assumed she was more inquisitive than her brother, but her mother's reaction led her to re-think her brother's behavior. Michelle limited her

comments, but said enough to let Desiree and me know that Matt had asked questions, but he was more reserved than Desiree. Because Desiree was unaware of her brother's inquisitions, it was likely that Matt and Michelle have had private conversations separate from the rest of the family. Thus, to summarize, the second privacy rule development criterion was that sexual communication was a component of a mother-daughter relationship.

Mothers' Motivations

The third privacy rule development criterion that impacted the foundation of communication rules about revealing or concealing sexual information was motivation. Mothers were asked what motivated them to share sexual information with their daughters. They had many reasons to share information including health, safety, abstaining from sexual activity, or using contraception and protection. Some mothers had one or two specific issues that were of greatest concern to them. Other mothers identified many reasons why sexual communication was carried out. The most pronounced reasons included physical safety, physical health, relational health, and circumventing inaccurate information from peers. A series of quotations from mothers follow about their motivations to talk about sex. Because a mother may have listed several motivations in a sequence, the data are difficult to separate by category. Therefore, several excerpts are included that demonstrate the multiple motivations held and the complex ways in which these motivations operated for the mothers. For example, in Michelle's dialogue below, she listed emotional health, physical health, and relational health as motivators.

Michelle: Because it's the right thing to do. Again, because I want them to be happy. I want them to be healthy. I want them to enjoy their lives. I want them to grow up to be good partners. Have good relationships. A healthy respect for their bodies, their sexuality, I mean all of those things. (7j:544-547)

Michelle was motivated by a desire for her daughter to be happy, have healthy relationships, be a good partner, and respect herself. Muriel echoed the health aspect and tied in the motivation to pass along sexual beliefs and values as guided by their religion.

Muriel: Well growing up she, you need to talk to your kids about it. I mean, that's just important. I wanted her to grow up and be healthy, sexual healthy woman. And not be afraid of sex or think it's wrong or anything like that. And we coupled that with, in our religion, which is, it's in the context of marriage. (5j:463-466)

Muriel's motivators were being sexually healthy and confining sexual activity to the context of marriage. Mae brought up another issue, physical safety.

Mae: You know, I do, I feel like she could really be easily taken advantage of and so, I do try and talk to her about being really aware that not everybody, there are evil people and there are evil men and evil situations that you could be in and you need to be very aware of that and um, so, I guess that would be my. That is a concern. That is a concern. Well, even with you dating, you know she hasn't dated a lot and so I think that's. I think that's a healthy thing to do when you're 18, 19 years old is to date different people, and not be waiting for, oh the one prince charming. (1j:743-754)

Mae's daughter, Dana, was described as naïve and Mae was motivated to try and protect Dana from a date rape situation. Therefore, much of her communication with Dana focused on the potential thoughts and behaviors of adolescent males as well as on Dana's behaviors and the messages she sent to males.

One other reason that emerged from the data was the concern about the influence of peers. Mothers were aware that sex was a topic that came up within their daughters' peer groups and were uneasy about the potential misinformation that their daughters

might receive. As a result, mothers were also motivated to talk with their daughters to circumvent inaccurate messages from friends. Myrna and Muriel explained their motivation to be the giver of sexual information in the following excerpts.

Myrna: Because I want to be the one to give her information. There's too much misinformation, warped information, too much potential for her to do something or hear something that makes her feel bad about something that she's done. And to second guess herself as a person, to me, is the worst thing that you could possibly do. So I want to arm them with as much information as I can. Not only information, but confidence, too. To be able to go out and say, "You know what? Whatever. This is what I choose to do." (2m:185-192)

As Myrna talked about misinformation, she coupled this sentiment with wanting to instill confidence. She seemed to be worried that other sources would send a message to Deanne that would weaken Deanne's self-confidence. Because of this concern, Myrna was motivated to empower her daughter. In the next example, Muriel supported the need to talk about sex to counterbalance the communication from friends.

Muriel: But they need to learn early. Because, if you don't tell them, they're going to know, I mean their friends will tell them. And, or they're not, then it's not going to be accurate. (5j:306-308)

Muriel was also convinced that information received from friends would be inaccurate. The influence of misinformation was again viewed as a motivator to talk about sex. Donita confirmed the role peers have as she recalled her introduction to sex in the 3rd grade by a classmate.

Donita: I was corrupted in third grade by Erin Smith. Like, it's by the kids. Really, the kids. Like, she told us everything about it. And by the time we had sex education in 5th grade, we already knew almost everything. (9j:111-113)

Donita used the verb “corrupted,” indicating she had no desire to hear the information about sex. However, she was able to recall this conversation that happened several years ago, lending support to the impact it had on her.

Thus, mothers identified many reasons why they communicated about sex with their daughters. Some mothers had one or two dominant issues, whereas other mothers had a range of reasons why they talked about sex. Reasons identified included physical safety, physical health, relational health, or accurate information, among others. Next, the results of the motivators influencing daughters to talk about sex are presented.

Daughters want a Trusted Source

The fourth privacy rule development criterion was that daughters were able to distinguish the motivational forces leading them to talk about sex with their mothers. Primarily, the reasons included wanting accurate information, valuing mothers’ opinions, or trusting mothers’ experiences. In the first example, Desiree described valuing her mother’s opinion.

Desiree: I value her opinion. I want to know what she thinks about it. I also think my parents did a very good job, not only raising us, but like, in their marriage. I want to know what they did right, what they think they did wrong. (7j:533-535)

Desiree wanted her mother’s opinion about sex and marital relationships. She complimented her parents on their relationship, hinting at the trust she has in her mother to ask for her thoughts. In her individual interview, Desiree added other reasons why she valued her mother’s opinion.

Desiree: And then I value her opinion, too. I want to know what she thinks. I still want to know what she thinks. I may not like it when I hear it. Or I may say, “Well, I don’t care. That’s stupid that you think that.” But I still want to know. I

guess it's more of that approval factor. But, then I can still make my own choice about it. (7d:150-157)

Desiree admitted that in some respects, she was still seeking her mother's approval. At the same time, she felt confident in her ability to make her own decisions, even if they differed from her mother's opinion. Donielle compared her mother to her friends. Presented this way, Donielle perceived her mother to be easier to talk with than her friends.

Donielle: I mean, it's easier for me to talk to my mom about it than my friends, because my mom's been in my life for 19 years. My friends have been in my life for a year. I mean, she knows me better. And, you know, I don't know if it, like if in her mind if it's like this? But when I talk to her, sometimes it's easier for her to like remove the momness and just be a friend sometimes? And that makes it easier for me, cause then I'm like, oh, I'm talking to a friend who knows what they're talking about. Instead of a friend who's like, just working off of speculation. And, so that's why I turn to her, because I know that, no matter what I tell her, she's not going to be judgmental and she's gonna give me the best advice that she thinks fits for the situation. (6j:632-645)

Donielle believed that her mom switched between a mom and friend role, such that her mom became a trusted source because of her knowledge and experience. Donielle liked the switch her mom made from mom to friend because her mom became easier to approach. Dawn, like Donielle, compared her mother to her friends, and also appreciated her mother's experience and knowledge.

Dawn: I just talk to her about it because, just someone that I think, number one, because I think she's experienced it longer than me and she understands everything. So if I really have something I was curious about or wanted to know if it bothered her, I can ask her, cause she's been around longer than me, and she knows what she's talking about. I think cause she's older. It's easier for me, for some reason, it's easier to talk to her, cause she's older, about it, than it is about my friends. I'm just like, "Well you're in the same boat I am, so what do you know?" (3d:149-155)

Dawn indicated a lack of trust in her friends because they were “in the same boat.” Dawn implied that if she had questions, her peers would have the same level of knowledge she had and not know the answers either. In brief, daughters were able to identify the reasons why they spoke to their mothers about sex. Namely, daughters were seeking advice and trusted their mothers because they were viewed as knowledgeable, experienced, and approachable.

Religious Beliefs

The fifth privacy rule development criterion was that religious beliefs impact the content of sexual conversations. Religious beliefs were considered as part of the context guiding the messages mothers wanted to send to their daughters about sex. Religious beliefs were not mentioned as a deterrent to engaging in conversations about sex. If anything, with some of the mothers and daughters, religion prompted sexual communication. Interestingly, four of the nine families shared that they were Catholic and their children went to Catholic school. Another mother mentioned how she was raised Catholic but no longer practiced. With the Catholic families, religious beliefs were mentioned as an influence on the message, but not on whether or not to have sexual communication.

Mary and I had a direct conversation about the influence of her religion on communication. During the conversation, Mary invited Donita to comment on what happened during her sex education classes in school.

Mary: Being Catholic, I mean, we strongly believe in the 10 commandments and if you believe that, then you would have to some kind, somehow convey the idea

that these sexual sins are wrong because they're against the 6th commandment. And, had we had no faith, I can't imagine giving a hoot what happens.

Donita: Uh hum.

Tina: Some religions actually discourage families from talking about sex...

Mary: Oh.

Tina: ...and so I was wondering if you ever felt like there were messages or pressure or suggestions to talk or if that might have influenced. You know, it definitely influences the message but does it influence the fact that you communicate or how you communicate?

Mary: Oh. In those classes that you had, in the sex classes, did they say, "Go home and ask your parents questions" or anything? Did they encourage that?

Donita: Not really. They didn't really mention anything about our parents.

Mary: Hum.

Donita: So. I don't know. I wouldn't say that they discouraged it. But, they didn't really approach asking our parents at all. (9j:282-312)

Mary referred to the teachings of her religion, namely the Ten Commandments, as her source of content for the sexual information she conveyed to her children. When pressed to find out how her religion influenced communication, rather than the message, Mary deferred to Donita and the sex education classes to see if communication with parents was encouraged. Donita replied that her sex education classes did not suggest communicating with parents. Muriel elaborated more on her religious views and how they influenced the message in her individual interview.

Muriel: I think that it [religion] really helps. I think it really helps if you have religion in your life. That helps. Cause then you can, you have that as you're raising them. And to be relaxed and calm when you talk to them about it. And not, make it so it's. It's neat! I mean, they need to know this. Like, their bodies are changing, it's great! They're growing in to be young people. And someday they

can have children! And that sexuality is a wonderful thing. And when you're in, when you're married and you love someone, it's just a wonderful thing. And I want them to realize it is. It's nothing to be ashamed of or.. But that, also with the religion, because, you wanna get in there, clear to them that it's not safe to have multiple partners any more. It's not safe to do that. It's not good for you emotionally, physically. So you have to balance it. You've gotta make sure you get that in there. And just, you want them to grow up and be, um, have good self-esteem and confident enough and respect themselves so that they don't, they don't have the sex, do things they don't want to do just so the boy'll like them or whatever. I don't know, I guess that's why it's important. (5m:363-375)

Muriel began by crediting religion as being a source of help with raising children. She elaborated on her beliefs about the sex act and returned again to her focus of religion. Muriel included several ideas in this paragraph, but religion was clearly an important part of her thoughts on sexual communication. Thus, religious beliefs were a relevant component of sexual communication for several of the mothers in the study. Further, the religious beliefs served as a strong contextual factor for these mothers.

Sisters

The sixth criterion guiding the rule development for sexual communication was the influence of sisters. Sisters impacted the sexual communication process by interfering with the mother daughter relationship in both positive and negative ways. All of the daughters in the study had siblings and eight of the nine had sisters. There were no commonalities among the daughters in the study regarding birth order, number of siblings, or sex of siblings. Some of the daughters had step or half siblings. Some had only one sibling and one participant had seven siblings. In other words, the daughters in the study represented several different structures of sibling groups. What united the participants was the influence of their sisters on their sexual communication, which

affected their communication with their mother. In the first conversation, Mary and Donita conversed about Donita's older sister, Diana.

Mary: I mean, if I would have anything to say to her or tell her I think I would be comfortable doing so. I don't know [joint laughter] if Donita has any concerns that she asked me, but I don't. At this point.

Donita: No.

Mary: I think you'd be pretty open, wouldn't ya? Or else you'd ask Diana.

Donita: I think I'd ask Diana, no offense.

Mary: Diana would. Yakkety, yak, yak yak. [joint laughter] I love her dearly, but she never. She's never quiet.

Donita: I would probably ask Diana over you just because Diana is a lot younger. (9j:406-419)

Throughout the interview, Mary and Donita described their relationship as open and believed talking about sex was comfortable. However, when it came to providing examples, they had experienced very little sexual communication together. In this example, Donita confessed that her primary source of sexual information was one of her sisters. She also mentioned that she had relied on her larger sibling network and talked to a brother-in-law and a sister-in-law about sex.

Debbie, too, relied on her older siblings. She stated earlier in the interview that the details of sex were private information that would not be shared with her mother. Later in the interview, she indicated that she would share this type of information with her older sisters.

Debbie: If I have detailed questions, I usually ask my two older sisters or something like. Or if I have a detail, want to tell them or something. Then I

usually don't tell her [mom]. I usually go to my two older sisters cause they like hearing that stuff. I don't know that my mom would necessarily. (8j:606-609)

Debbie brought up the aspect of "details" again and at this point in the interview, told me and her mother that she would communicate with her older sisters about this information. Debbie and Donita shared the common experience of having older sisters. However, Donielle was the oldest sister and offered information about her perceived role as such.

Donielle: Well, today we even told Abby [10 years old] that you were coming to interview us and you might be talking about the birds and the bees. [Marla chuckles] And she was like, "Oh. Well, I'm not going to be around then!" But, she knew what we were talking about. And I think for her it might be easier, too because she'll have my mom and she'll have me. And I didn't, like I'm the oldest, so I didn't have an older sister. I knew that what I would be doing would be influencing my siblings. And so, I wanted to make sure I was doing the right thing, which is why I always went to my mom because. Like, having four younger sisters, the two at my dad's house and the two here, just realizing that I'm such a role-model to them, it made it really hard for me to go out and be, you know, flamboyant and free and make whatever decision I wanted. I wanted to be, you know, the good role model. (6j:783-792)

Donielle was conscientious about her placement in the birth order and the implications for sexual communication with her younger siblings. She did not indicate a desire to replace her mother's role, but rather, to provide an extra resource for her younger sisters. She also added that she wanted to be a good role model for them and, as a result, monitored her sexual behaviors.

Mothers, too, noted how activities or communication by one child affected their sexual communication with other children. Muriel had two daughters and noted how her second daughter received information earlier than Diane because of the communication with Diane.

Muriel: Tamara asked questions earlier. Diane was the oldest and so as Diane was older, Tammy sees what Diane does, so she asks questions. Where Diane didn't have an older sister. So, Tammy would ask earlier, so I know I told her earlier than Diane because she would ask about menstruation earlier because Diane. Diane already so, she probably knew. She was asking questions about it, so I did tell her earlier what was going. (5m:316-323)

Muriel recalled Tammy asking questions in response to actions by Diane.

Maureen, the mother of two daughters, related to Muriel. Maureen's first daughter, Beth, was very open about her sexual activity and Deidra was often present during conversations about sex with Beth.

Maureen: I think more of it probably came out, not that, Beth, her sister, not that we were hiding and not talking about it before, but I think some of the things that she faced and the relationship that she had with some guys, and you know, bad judgments that she made. And then seeing that, how that affected her,

Tina: her being...

Maureen: Deidra, Deidra. Well, it affected everybody but yeah, especially Deidra. And, you know, then I think that helped us talk about it even more. You know, not like we planned on sitting down having a talk about it. (4j:530-539)

Maureen explained that Beth's activities affected the information Deidra heard.

Maureen confided that she had not planned to sit down and talk about the information with Deidra, but that the communication happened. Here, Maureen suggested that the conversations with Beth may have helped Maureen's communication with Deidra.

In sum, sisters were a contextual factor that affected mother-daughter sexual communication. Younger sisters reported turning to their older sisters for information in lieu of the parent or with different information. One older sister commented on her responsibility to model positive behaviors and to be a resource for her younger sisters. Mothers noted that communication or events of one daughter affected communication

with other daughters. This theme also crossed an earlier point that sexual information resides within the feminine domain.

Risks and Benefits

The final privacy rule development criterion was the ratio of risks to benefits. Overall, the benefits of talking about sex far outweighed the risks for these participants. The participants were asked to identify the risks and benefits of talking about sex with each other. Results were organized around the two categories of risks and benefits of revealing sexual information.

Risks of revealing sexual information. Risks of revealing sexual information were consistent among most of the participants. Mothers identified giving too much information as a risk, and daughters described fear of judgment. These risks provided additional explanation for some of the challenges and tensions mentioned earlier. I began with presenting the results from the mothers.

Several mothers reported one dominant risk, which was sharing too much information. The consequences of sharing too much information differed for mothers, but included reasons such as the backlash from other parents or appearing to condone sexual activity. Michelle described the risk of backlash from other parents.

Michelle: You know, other parents would say, “Oh my god. I can’t believe my kid was at your house and you guys were talking. And you were talking about this. Or they asked you about this and you said, and you gave them an answer.” I mean that’s certainly always a risk that you take when you choose to let your children—your child. (7j:511-515)

Michelle did not elaborate on whether or not she had experienced backlash from other parents, but she was aware of the reality of parents who did not condone revealing

sexual information to their children. Myrna identified the risk of appearing to condone sexual activity.

Myrna: I think for me, again, as a mom, one of the biggest risks is that it will be perceived as condoning.

Deanne: Hum.

Myrna: And, I walk a really, really fine line. Especially now, being single and in a relationship myself. You know, I'm excited and I'm talking about it and we're sharing things and experiencing a lot of the same thing. And then I, I take a step back and I think, OK, but I'm 38 and she's 20. And then I think, well, wait a second. Is that fair? You know, if it's OK for me to do, and I'm being responsible, then I've got to have the same faith in my child. And say, "You know what? I did a good job." (2j:509-519)

Myrna said that a risk of talking would be that her daughter would think it was acceptable to have sex. Deanne's paralanguage seemed to suggest that she had never considered her mother's communication as condoning. Myrna elaborated on the risk by referring to her own sexual activity and how she shared similar sexual experiences with Deanne. She finished by reassuring herself that she had done a good job with Deanne and accepted the level of sexual communication she had experienced with her daughter.

Marla echoed the risk of sharing too much information.

Marla: Well, the risk, if you're saying too much, things they don't know, you're offering too much information, you know, maybe your mind is not really hearing what they're saying. You're just like, "Oh my god! There was a question!" And you just start rattling off a bunch of information. They're standing there, mouth open. You know? So I think the biggest thing is just listening. Really listening to what they're saying so that you don't get too deep into something. That it just really answers where their curiosity level is. But, you've got to be in tune to your child to know that. You've gotta know where that level is. So, it's more than just this talk. It's about how you communicate on anything. And once you have that, I think. Yeah, it's a touchy subject, but you've gotta tell them about it. You know, you've gotta talk about it. (6m:119-128)

When Marla discussed too much information, she was concerned about overwhelming her children with information they weren't ready to receive or weren't asking about. This concern was proposed earlier when sharing the results about giving information in little bits and pieces. Marla went on to offer advice, listing listening skills as important. She also ended by saying "you've gotta talk about it" implying that communication about sex must happen, regardless of the risks. For her, the risks of communicating about sex were overshadowed by her parental responsibility.

Daughters identified two dominant risks. The first was fear or judgment from a parent and the second was fear that their dads would find out information. Deanne discussed her mother's judgment.

Deanne: Huh! I mean, like I said before, there's always that initial. "Oh, what if she thinks badly of me about this?" But I know that's, I mean, it's silly to even think of it that way because it's not going to make any difference either way. (2j:595-597)

Deanne's risk was her mother's judgment, but she also stated how silly it was to think that way. Debbie described her fears, particularly when she was younger.

Debbie: The risks, I guess, not so much now. But when, I guess, when I first, like I said, first became sexually active and stuff. I was mostly just scared to like, that she would think, like frown upon what I was doing, being disappointed. I have, no matter what the conversation is, or anything, uh, I just have this big fear of disappointing my parents. And, I've always had that. I think most children probably do. So that was like, I don't know. That was probably the biggest risk, I think. I didn't want to disappoint her and stuff and her be like, "Oh my gosh, you're having sex. You're a bad child." Cause like she said, she grew up in one of those Catholic girl schools, where her dad was the principal of the school and superintendent. So, she grew up in a really strict home so I was afraid that I'd disappoint her. But, that feeling of disappointment was kind of why, I guess. (8d:84-94)

Debbie shared this information in her individual interview. She admitted that most

of her fears were about becoming sexually active. She mentioned “disappoint” five times during her explanation. Noteworthy also was that she believed the risks were much stronger when she was younger, but did not perceive risks presently. The risk described by Donielle was doing “something wrong” or a fear of getting in trouble.

Donielle: Just feeling like I did something wrong, that I'll be in trouble. But, now that I'm older, it doesn't feel like I'll get in trouble as much. (6d:122-124)

Donielle also pointed out that she no longer perceived doing something wrong or getting in trouble as risks now that she is older. Risks of sexual communication described by several daughters in the study were fear of judgment or punishment by parents. However, several mothers and daughters reported there were no risks to sexual communication.

Donita: Risks? Hmm. I don't know. I don't know that there would be any, more than just me feeling a little bit uncomfortable. But, I don't, I can't see or think of any risks. (9d:92-94)

Donita considered the possibility that there might be some mild discomfort when talking to her mother about sex. But other than that, she was unable to think of risks of sexual communication with her mother. Dana was also unable to identify any risks for her personally.

Dana: Just that, I don't know. I don't have the risk of her telling other people, but it just makes me really trust her. I don't know if there's really a risk. Not that I can think of. She's not the type of mom to judge me for any of my actions. She just says, "Ok, you've done this. Now we need to worry about this now." So, I don't feel like she would judge me. I feel like that would be a risk, but I don't feel like I would have that risk. Does that make sense? (1d:117-122)

Dana was aware that there were risks associated with revealing sexual information to a mother, but these were not risks for her. Interestingly, she referred to the risk of being judged, but did not believe this risk applied to her and her mother.

In sum, risks of revealing sexual information for some mothers were the backlash from other parents and appearing to approve of sexual activity. Daughters identified fear of judgment from their mothers as the risk of sexual communication. Some mothers and daughters reported that there were no risks associated with sexual communication.

Benefits of revealing sexual information. Mothers and daughters believed there were many benefits to sexual communication. Mothers had no particular benefit but instead, discussed “tons of benefits” to talking with their daughters about sex. The daughters were specific about their benefit—a strong relationship with their mother. Results from the mothers were presented first, followed by the results from the daughters. Monica believed there were “tons of benefits.”

Monica: Well, tons of benefits. I don't see anything bad about it. I mean, I can't think of anything negative. I think it's all beneficial because. I mean in anything in life, the more you know and the more knowledgeable you are about things, then, the better off you are. The more knowledge you have and the more openness you have talking about something, then the better off you're gonna be in the long run. So, I guess what I'm hoping by, to get out of me being able to talk to her, is her feeling more comfortable and maybe thinking that, you know, sex is something important and sex is something that needs to be treated. (8j:848-854)

Debbie interrupted Monica with a question that took Monica off the topic of the benefits. But she began to explain several of the benefits she perceived by having sexual communication with Debbie. She referenced knowledge, long-term benefits, her daughter's comfort, and the importance of sex. To elaborate on “tons of benefits,”

examples from other mothers follow. Marla identified the relational aspect of sexual communication.

Marla: I just think it's really important, because it creates a great relationship. I mean, it's such a big part of life! That, to never be able to talk about that, you're cutting off so much of what you can talk about. And it just leads to so many other things. I mean, if you can talk about that, you can talk about anything. And, I think just a lot of one-on-one conversation would be lost. (6j:871-875)

Marla viewed sexual communication as an indicator of the ability to talk about other topics. Not only would a great relationship be formed by talking about sex, but other topics could be talked about with ease. Another benefit of sexual communication identified by Muriel was the perceived influence on sexual behavior.

Muriel: Well, it's a very important subject to talk with your child about. I mean, hopefully if you keep talking to them about it, they'll know the dangers of it and like I mentioned before, so they're not so naïve about it. And hopefully you can just have an open dialogue about it so it hopefully will prevent some problems. That's what you're hoping. And then, so it's healthy and not, it's not something that. I mean, it's just, you should talk about it. I don't understand why people wouldn't. (5j:366-371)

Muriel hinted at knowing the dangers of sex, making her daughters less naïve, and preventing problems that can result from sexual activity. Some daughters pointed to the development of a strong relationship with their mothers as a benefit of sexual communication.

Dana: I feel like sexual communication, if it's a barrier. I know a lot of parents, or a lot of kids my age won't even talk to their parents about it. [several sentences off topic] Then that makes us able to talk more about other things. Does that make sense? I trust her to tell her stuff. You know and so, I feel like it enhances our relationship. (1j:441-448)

Dana said sexual communication “enhances our relationship” and eliminated a barrier to other topics of conversation. Deidra echoed the notion that sexual communication opened possibilities for the relationship to handle other topics.

Deidra: Definitely the benefits are always just that I could come to her about anything. Once you pass the sexual communication, talking about sex to your parents. It’s just like, it doesn’t matter. (4j:916-918)

Deidra knew that if she could talk to her mom about sex, she could talk to her about “anything.” Debbie also referred to the relational aspect as a benefit.

Debbie: I couldn’t imagine not having an open relationship. Like I think that’s the beneficial factor to me. Because like, really, who else would I go talk with about [it]? I mean, obviously, like you have those girlfriends and stuff that you all like gossip with it about and stuff. But, really she’s the only person, like I always usually tell everything to. (8j:888-891)

Debbie described the relationship with her mom as “open” and declared that the openness was the benefit of sexual communication for her. In addition to the relational aspects, some daughters in the study also valued their mothers’ advice and input. Desiree listed several reasons associated with getting her mother’s advice and input.

Desiree: That if I had a bad experience, I could talk about it. If I felt like I was being taken advantage of, I could talk about it. If, anything. If I got pregnant, it would be OK. We would handle it. Just not being afraid to have any conversation with her about sex. Knowing that she has obviously told me what is her opinion on things and given me facts and I can make my own choices but that she’ll 99% percent of the time support those choices. (7j:346-350)

Desiree listed several benefits, and then summarized the benefit of not being afraid to talk about sex and receiving her mother’s opinion. During the individual interviews, the daughters elaborated more on the benefits of talking with their mothers. One idea expressed by several daughters was the notion of permanence from their

mothers. Daughters used the word “always” and “anything” to refer to the trust they had in their mothers because of the constant presence their mothers fulfilled in their lives.

Also, the idea that once you talk to your mom about sex, you can talk to her about anything, was reiterated in the individual interviews. Debbie provided substantial information on the benefits of talking with her mom.

Debbie: Just to have someone to talk to. Cause there's things that you, like I said. Everyone has friends and stuff that gossip and stuff like that. Those two or three friends that you do. But, like that's your mom. She's your family. No matter what you tell her, you can tell her anything and she's not gonna think that you're weird and stuff like that. You know, you're her child, so she loves you. So I know that. I know my mom's always going to be there for me. And so, I think that's the benefit for the most part. Just because she's always going to be there. She's always, always listening to me. It's not going to go in one ear and out the other. And, she always has advice to give me, which sometimes kind of annoys me, but [chuckle] I know that it's out of the goodness of her heart. So that's beneficial. Having someone who cares about you truly and being able to tell. (8d:70-80)

Debbie used the word “always” five times to refer to the permanence of the mother-daughter relationship. She continued to state the benefit that her mother’s care was true. Dawn’s quote below summarized the sentiments of many of the daughters about the benefits of sexual communication with their mothers.

Dawn: I think we're closer now because I can talk to her about it. A lot of my friends, that was one thing I always hated. My best friend, she's always talked to her mom about absolutely everything, even when I was like, "Oh that's weird. Why do you tell your mom that?" She talked to her mom about it. And I was like, "Man, I wish I could talk to my mom about stuff." And now that I can, I feel so much more comfortable. If I have anything that bothers me, being able to talk about. When we first started talking about sex and when I first started talking to my mom a lot about everything, it wasn't just sex after that, it was kind of everything. And so I think, because that was so big, then everything else didn't seem like a big deal that I talked to her about it. (3d:111-119)

Benefits of revealing sexual information were many, according to mothers in the

study. Mothers described many benefits such as conveying knowledge, influencing sexual behavior, or being comfortable talking about other topics. Daughters focused their comments on relational qualities, reporting that they felt closer to their moms because they could talk about sex. The daughters also indicated that “if you can talk with your mother about sex, you can talk to her about anything.”

In this section, the results regarding the risks and benefits of revealing sexual information were presented. The participants believed that the benefits of communicating far outweighed the risks. Mothers said there were “tons of benefits” of sexual communication and daughters pointed to a close relationship with someone they trusted as the dominant benefit. Some risks were identified by mothers such as sharing too much information or appearing to condone sexual activity. Some daughters feared judgment by their mothers as a risk to revealing sexual information. These results lend support for the tension that may be felt before revealing sexual information. Because the mothers and daughters believe the benefits outweigh the risks, they were inclined to reveal sexual information instead of conceal it.

Summary of Results

To conclude this chapter, I summarize the major findings from the study. Two models, the Sexual Communication Process Model in Close Mother-Daughter Relationships and the Sexual Communication Interaction Model in Close Mother-Daughter Relationships, conceptualized the macro and micro processes of sexual communication. They proved beneficial in answering the three research questions.

The Process Model illustrated the ways in which close mothers and daughters possessed sexual information, how they came to co-own some information, and how the change in co-ownership changed over time. The Interaction Model further depicted the boundary management during an individual encounter by showing that the mother and daughter arrived at the scene, initiated conversations about sex, experienced some tension before a disclosure, and revealed information. Participants articulated guidelines for the development of privacy rules that informed decisions they made regarding how, when, why, and with whom to talk about sex. The criteria for privacy rule development that emerged in the present study include the following: (a) mothers want to talk about sex differently from their mothers, (b) sexual communication is reserved for the mother-daughter relationship, (c) mothers have many motivations to talk about sex, (d) adolescents are motivated to talk with their mothers to get accurate information, advice, or support, (e) religious beliefs impact the content of sexual messages, (f) sisters influence the process in both positive and negative ways, and (g) the benefits of talking about sex far outweigh the risks.

Overall, the results answered the research questions and showcased how the participants framed sexual communication as challenging. Namely, these participants, who were in very close mother-daughter relationships, did not believe sexual communication was challenging in the present, although it was for some of them when the daughters were younger. Further, the sexual communication process was described using a boundary metaphor. Individuals first determined what information was private, maintained privacy boundaries around the private information, and controlled the

permeability of the boundary. When individuals met for interaction and revealed sexual information with each other, participants invoked several rules—which were formulated from at least seven criteria that emerged in these data—to guide the interaction. In the next chapter, I discuss the results presented in this chapter, as well as practical applications, strengths, limitations, and future directions.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Summary/Overview

Talking about sex presents challenges for many people across relationship types, including families. Within the family context, sex is discussed infrequently (Warren & Neer, 1986). However, sexual communication between parents and adolescents has been studied extensively with a focus on the content, timing, frequency, and style of sexual communication as well as the general family environment and the subsequent influences on sexual behaviors of adolescents. In their focus on behaviors, many researchers have been neglectful in their operationalization of communication. Further, parent-adolescent sexual communication research has been largely atheoretical. As such, findings across studies lack a clear synthesis to explain families' communicative experiences with sexual information.

The current research project was designed to study parent-adolescent sexual communication and to emphasize the process of communication. Such an approach was intended to deepen understanding of communication about sex in families. After examining the literature and theoretical framework of CPM, four specific purposes for the study were proposed: (a) to understand how family members frame sexual communication as challenging, (b) to emphasize the process of sexual communication and the privacy rule development criteria family members have for revealing and concealing information, (c) to gather information from dyads, rather than individuals, and

(d) to incorporate theory. To fulfill the goals of the study, mothers and their 19 year old daughters volunteered for joint and individual interviews.

In this chapter, I discuss the findings from the study, theoretical implications, contributions to sexual communication and CPM literature, strengths and limitations of the study, and future directions. Namely, I will discuss three overarching observations. First, sexual communication is not challenging for some mothers and daughters, particularly those in very close relationships. Second, sexual communication operates as a process where mothers and daughters reveal sexual information in small increments over time. Third, the process of sexual communication is guided by at least seven privacy rule development criteria that guide participants' decisions regarding their communication about sex.

Research Question 1: The Challenging Nature of Sexual Communication

The first observation from the study is that sexual information is and is not challenging in close mother-daughter relationships. Talking about sex is easy for some mothers and daughters over the course of the child's life. This finding supports Pistella and Bonatti (1999) who found that some adolescents believe sexual communication is very easy and comfortable to talk about with their parents. However, this study shows that some mothers and daughters experience tension, especially when daughters are younger, creating challenges. This finding supports the claims of Jaccard and Dittus (1991) and Turner and West (2002) who assert that sexual communication is challenging in families. Therefore, it appears as though sexual communication can be framed as challenging *and* not challenging, rather than challenging *or* not challenging.

This study sought to extend the research by understanding what makes sexual information challenging or easy to talk about. Sexual communication is not challenging, in part, because of the closeness in these mother-daughter relationships. Because the mothers and daughters are emotionally close and connected, the communication is open and as a result, the relationship can withstand discussions on many topics. The strong emotional bonds and sense of “we-ness” are similar to some of the mother-daughter relationships described in Miller-Day’s (2004) ethnography of adult, maternal relationships. Another reason why sexual communication may not be challenging for some mothers and daughters is because the topic of sex is considered public information within their relationships. For these dyads, sex is a relatively natural topic, and, as such, is comfortable to talk about. The normality, openness, and comfortableness about sex permeate the family such that mothers and daughters who are close report considerable ease talking about sex with each other.

Research Question 2: Sexual Communication is a Process

The second observation of the study is that sexual communication operates as a process, answering Pluhar and Kuriloff’s (2004) call for a process approach to the study of sexual communication. Two models (see Figures 1 and 2) emanate from this study and represent some of the complexities of the process of sexual communication in close mother-daughter relationships. The models coincide with the suppositions of CPM (Petronio, 2002) by showing how sexual information is contained within individual privacy boundaries and co-owned after information is revealed during interaction. Revealing sexual information is an indicator of the permeability of privacy boundaries.

As this study shows, when mothers and daughters have a close relationship, they have highly permeable privacy boundaries and reveal considerable sexual information to each other. This study lends support for White and colleagues' (1995) findings that openness and sexual discussions are positively correlated.

The models, grounded in the experiences of the participants, show how sexual communication operates over time and during individual interactions. The models show that mothers and daughters in close relationships contain sexual information within an individual privacy boundary. Then, during an individual encounter, mothers or daughters initiate communication about sex. At the point of revealing or concealing, some tension may result. Regardless of the tension, the mothers and daughters in this study chose to reveal some information. Coinciding with their revelations, some information was concealed, most notably by mothers. As their data show, mothers give their daughters information in little bits and pieces. During individual conversations, mothers regulate how much information to disclose, and over time, mothers also monitor the amount of information they provide.

Despite the open relationship and comfort with sexual information however, mothers in the current study noted experiencing some tension with the process of communicating about sex. As Kirkman and colleagues (2005) suggest, parents may feel a contradiction in their desire to discuss sex and avoid the topic. This contradiction may be dialectical in nature as parents and adolescents experience a tension between revealing and concealing, or openness and closedness (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). As the daughters mature, it seems as if the mothers privilege the pole of openness, contributing

to the expansion of their daughters' privacy boundary to contain increasing sexual information. Indeed, Petronio (2002) asserts that privacy boundaries expand from childhood, to adolescence, to adulthood. But, mothers are simultaneously cognizant of their daughters' development and other privacy rule development criteria guiding communication and adjust the access to sexual information accordingly.

The study also shows that some daughters experience embarrassment or awkwardness with the topic of sex. However, as daughters mature and obtain additional sexual information or begin to experience sex, the topic becomes easier to talk about, coinciding with CPM's claim that the circumference of privacy boundaries increases as more information is revealed during the adolescent years (Petronio, 2002). Privacy boundary permeability seems to become more open, as well, as reflected in these close mother-daughter relationships. As more sexual information is revealed to adolescents from their mothers—and other sources as well—their privacy boundaries expand to include the new information they possess.

Interestingly, the models also show that mothers' and daughters' privacy boundaries around sexual information converge and increase in their interconnectedness over time. This finding contradicts other research that shows adolescents renegotiate boundaries during adolescence such that there is more separation in the parent-adolescent relationship, particularly as adolescents struggle to develop their identity (Blieszner, 1994; Erikson, 1968) and gain independence from their parents (Bell, 1967). There are two possible explanations for this contradiction.

First, the mothers and daughters in the study may have enmeshed boundaries. The close relationships of the participants resembled enmeshed relationships because of their strong interconnectedness. In Miller-Day's (2004) description of enmeshed mother-daughter relationships, mothers and daughters experience difficulty establishing autonomy and independence well into adulthood. The enmeshment leads to negative reactions from the mothers and daughters. Further, Olson's Circumplex Model (Olson, Russell, & Sprenkle, 1989) depicts enmeshed family relationships as those with very high closeness, loyalty, dependency, and shared leadership with democratic discipline. These relationships create dysfunction for family members because of the inability to create healthy separation and independence. By contrast, the mothers and daughters in this study believe their relationships, while very close, are healthy, supportive, nurturing, and positive. Perhaps the relationships are enmeshed, but the dysfunctional aspect was not revealed during the interviews. Or, perhaps these mothers and daughters will experience difficulty with healthy separation in the future. Of course, such comments are only speculation, but they are worth discussing because of the intense closeness between the mothers and daughters in the study.

Second, the dialectical tension of autonomy-connectedness (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Petronio, 2002) may help explain why daughters increase their openness about sex during a time when they are believed to be establishing independence. The tug to remain connected while establishing autonomy is a lifetime tension for mothers and daughters (Miller-Day, 2004). This study extends Miller-Day's findings from adult maternal relationships to the adolescent phase of development and

shows that dialectical tensions may begin before the daughter reaches adulthood. The daughters in this study demonstrate a desire to remain connected with their mothers during a time in their life when their age cohort is constructing distinct identities separate from their mothers. As the daughters explain, they maintain the close ties with their mothers by making their privacy boundaries permeable and revealing information when they feel some tension in the mother-daughter relationship, particularly after they have had sex. Indeed, for many of these daughters, the revelation happened within a very short time after a sexual event occurred. Initially, daughters may avoid the topic of sex with their mothers because of privacy or self-protection, two of several reasons identified by Golish and Caughlin (2002) as reasons why adolescents avoid topics with mothers, fathers, and stepparents. However, in this study, the daughters' motivations to reduce the strain on their relationships with their mothers led them to reveal the information.

Another important element of the process of sexual communication is the role of the child, as this study shows. Researchers seem to approach sexual communication as if a parent gives information to a child (e.g., Jaccard et al., 2002). However, this study confirms that some children ask questions and initiate communication in close mother-daughter relationships. The study further shows that when children first ask questions during the toddler years, mothers respond positively by answering the questions. Then, children feel as if they can approach their parents in the future. Children's privacy boundaries expand only by gaining more information. Therefore, they ask questions in order to gain access to sexual information.

One important element of the sexual communication process is the acknowledgement of time. This study makes clear that sexual communication changes over time and it illuminates the ways in which the changes occur. Age, grade level, or important events in the child's life trigger sexual communication according to the participants in this study. These contextual aspects mentioned by participants support Petronio's (2002) claim that life circumstances require changes in boundary management. Indeed, based on the data of this study, more sexual information is revealed to daughters as they become older. During the toddler years, simple answers are given to daughters' questions about boys and girls or how babies are made. As daughters enter puberty, more information is revealed to them, particularly about menstruation and reproduction. Because puberty typically happens in the middle school years, this finding supports Jaccard and Dittus' (1991) argument that age 12 is optimal for conversations about sex. However, Jaccard and Dittus' claim is limited because sexual communication may happen more than once. The results herein are clear that mothers and daughters have several interactions over time where sex is discussed. Further, as daughters begin to date, the privacy boundary expands as information is given to them about expectations for sexual behavior. This finding supports Kirkman and colleagues (2005) who argue that sexual information should be revealed based on the maturity and sexual development of the child.

Research Question 3: Privacy Rule Development Criteria

The third observation from the study is that the process of sexual communication is guided by at least seven criteria that may assist mothers and daughters in their

decisions about how to talk about sex. The seven criteria that emerged from the data are: (a) mothers want to talk about sex differently from their mothers, (b) mothers talk with daughters, (c) mothers have many motivations to talk about sex, (d) adolescents are motivated to talk with their mothers to get accurate information, advice, or support, (e) religious beliefs impact the content of sexual messages, (f) sisters influence the process in both positive and negative ways, and (g) the benefits of talking about sex far outweigh the risks. Collectively, these foundational criteria shed light on how mothers and daughters may develop rules, which regulate the control of privacy boundaries around sexual information. The criteria suggest that mothers and daughters may invoke any number of rules during an interaction to manage the decision to reveal and any corresponding tension that may develop as a result of the decision to reveal. The existing study did not identify specific rules, but rather, the criteria upon which rules are founded. Seven criteria were revealed in this study.

First, some mothers are guided by a strong desire to manage sexual information differently from their mothers. A lack of sexual communication from one generation of mothers leads to a subsequent generation of mothers who may want to be more open about sex. This criterion supports Brock and Jennings' (1993) findings that some women believe their mothers do not talk to them about sex because of family background.

Second, mothers and daughters talk about sex, rather than fathers and daughters. The results of this study support previous findings that mothers talk with children about sex more than fathers (e.g., Darling & Hicks, 1982; Lefkowitz et al., 1996). This study extends previous research by seeking to understand why differences exist between

mothers and fathers. There seem to be two privacy boundary forces at work. The first is the co-owned mother-daughter privacy boundary. Sexual communication resides within this privacy boundary and is characterized as a mother-daughter thing. There is an implied ownership of sexual information to the mother-daughter relationship. With this double layer of protection, fathers are not entitled to talk to their daughters about sex. When this mother-daughter *co-owned* privacy boundary is highly impermeable, it may be difficult for fathers to permeate, even if they want to. These findings about revealing information to a same sex target in parent-adolescent relationships mirror those of Snell, Jr. and colleagues (1988) in adult populations. Further, just as victims of sexual abuse (Petronio, Flores & Hecht, 1997) or HIV/AIDS (Greene, 2000) are strategic about who they disclose to, so too are daughters selective about choosing their mother over their father to talk about sex. Victims of sexual abuse and daughters in this study share some characteristics in their targets including credibility, support, and protecting feelings. With the daughters, the same-sex aspect gives the mother credibility. Also, the established closeness in the mother-daughter relationship makes the daughters feel comfortable. Support and protecting feelings are important, especially for daughters, as they seek to relate to their mothers on an emotional level.

The second privacy boundary force is the father-daughter co-owned privacy boundary, which is basically nonexistent according to the mothers and daughters in this study. The walls of fathers' and daughters' privacy boundaries seem to be impenetrable where sexual information is concerned. Therefore, sexual communication with daughters is done by mothers because of the impenetrable, co-owned mother-daughter privacy

boundary and the impenetrable, individual privacy boundary of fathers and daughters. The findings also support and update those of Petronio and colleagues (1984) about the qualities of trustworthiness, warmth and openness women seek in targets of their disclosures. These qualities are similar to those described by the daughters in this study about why they talked with their mothers about sex instead of their fathers. Because fathers are males, they are perceived as lacking understanding of their daughters' feelings and experiences. However, the data show that some fathers are involved on the periphery. Fathers take on the role of protector and guard their daughters from boyfriends. In this role, the father-daughter relationship is characterized by treating daughters as daddy's little girl. In this sense, the direct sexual communication between fathers and daughters is virtually nonexistent.

Third, mothers have many motivators to disclose sexual information to their daughters. Mothers appear to reveal sexual information for expressive needs, which Petronio (2002) defines as disclosures of feelings or thoughts. The mothers in the study have many thoughts and feelings about sex that guide their decisions to reveal sexual information. They are concerned about their daughters' sexual knowledge, safety, attitudes and behaviors. These findings support the assumptions made of other researchers (e.g., Clawson & Reese-Weber, 2003; Jaccard & Dittus, 1991; Miller et al., 2001; Rosenthal et al., 2001) who connect communication to sexual behaviors. However, the findings also extend previous research by showing motivators other than influencing behaviors. For example, mothers want their daughters to have healthy, positive attitudes about sexual activity, to pass on moral values about the meaning of sexuality, or to get

information from a credible source. Indeed, several mothers believe much of the sexual information from friends is inaccurate as this study shows. Mothers believe themselves to be reliable, knowledgeable sources of sexual information and want to give daughters the information directly.

Fourth, adolescents are motivated to talk with their mothers to get accurate information from a trustworthy source as the results show. This finding supports Guilamo-Ramos, Jaccard, Dittus, and Bouris' (2006) who found a very high correlation between trust and expertise by adolescents when evaluating the source of their information about risky behaviors. Even though trust and expertise are mutually exclusive constructs, it is likely that adolescents perceive the two very similarly, especially when the target is a parent. As this study finds, daughters certainly talk with their peers about sex, but they trust their mothers' information, advice, council, and support.

Fifth, religious beliefs are a contextual factor guiding sexual communication for some mothers and daughters. However, religious beliefs are mentioned as part of the content of sexual information, rather than influencing the process of communication. Regardless, it is interesting that with so few volunteers for the study, four of the dyads are Catholic and one of the mothers was raised Catholic. The four who are Catholic sent their daughters to Catholic school. Research shows a correlation between religiosity and sexual attitudes (Meier, 2003), thus it is not surprising that religious beliefs would be included as part of the messages mothers sent to their daughters.

Sixth, the results also show that sisters influence the process of sexual communication between a mother and daughter by creating interference. Some daughters in this study say they seek their sisters in lieu of a mother as their primary source of sexual information. Other daughters may reveal information to their mothers and sister(s), but the information is different for each target. As such, sisters may impede the opportunity for mothers to engage in sexual communication. Mothers also experience some difficulty maintaining closed privacy boundaries around sexual information for one child when older sisters are engaging in myriad sexual behaviors or talking about sex without consideration for younger sisters as these results have shown.

Seventh, mothers and daughters identify risks and benefits of sexual communication, but the benefits outweigh the risks, thereby leading to openness and revealing information. Because these mothers and daughters describe their relationship as open or close, they see few risks associated with sexual communication. In fact, the participants here would likely say sexual communication is a no-risk activity. However, mothers did acknowledge a low level of risk, primarily face risk (Petronio, 2002). Mothers were somewhat concerned about the consequences of telling their daughters information and the potential for the daughters to tell their friends about what they heard. They are not concerned about their daughters giving misinformation, but rather the backlash from other parents who may not want their children to know information. Pluhar and Kuriloff (2004) found that parents identified tuning out a parent as a perceived risk of sexual communication. However, the data from these mothers and daughters do not show this as a risk. Further, Feldman and Rosenthal (2000) found that parents fear being

evaluated negatively by an adolescent. However, this finding was not supported among these mothers, either. These contradictions from previous studies demonstrate that sexual communication can be a low risk activity in some family relationships.

The risks reported by daughters mimic Petronio's (2002) descriptions of security or face risks (Petronio, 2002). The results show that some daughters fear getting in trouble or judgment from their mothers, especially after they start engaging in sexual activity. This makes sense because evaluation is one reason people keep secrets (Vangelisti, 1994). When the daughters in this study started having sex, they concealed the information from their mothers, which supports the findings from Guerrero and Afifi (1995a) and Mazur and Hubbard (2004) who suggest that adolescents avoid talking about their sexual and dating experiences to protect their privacy boundaries. However, the daughters in this study show that concealing sexual information can put a strain on some mother-daughter relationships. They believe their mothers know they are having sex, but are not saying anything. The strain creates awkwardness and discomfort for the daughters to the point that they eventually reveal the information to their mothers. The closeness between the mother and daughter may minimize the power imbalance between them, which has a direct effect on the concealment of secrets (Afifi & Olson, 2005). Perhaps the closeness experienced by the mothers and daughters in the study minimized the power imbalance such that the pressure to conceal the private information was short lived. Overall, the benefits of talking about sex far outweigh the risks for mothers and daughters. Even when mothers and daughters thought of a few potential risks, they

persisted with revealing sexual information because of the many motivators they experience.

Theoretical Implications

Theorizing about Sexual Communication

The study contributes to the parent-adolescent sexual communication literature in at least four ways. First, the study highlights communication by examining it separately from behavioral outcomes. In so doing, the study shows that the process of communication is important in addition to the content or topics discussed. Second, the process models suggested in the present study and indicative of close mother-daughter relationships, extend the parent-adolescent sexual communication literature by showing how the communication changes over time and by illuminating the role of the adolescent in the interactions. Third, acknowledging the presence of the adolescent demonstrates their initiation of communication as well as the mutual influence mothers and daughters may have on each other. Fourth, while this study was unsuccessful in its attempts to talk with parents and adolescents who had not talked to each other about sex, the study does show how information is given in small increments over time. In this way, some sexual information is concealed while other sexual information is revealed.

Implications for Communication Privacy Management Theory

The study augments CPM in four possible ways. First, CPM is extended to another subject or topic. The theory has been heavily applied in health care contexts (e.g., Petronio et al., 2004; Petronio & Kovach, 1997) or stepfamily research (e.g., Afifi, 2003;

Golish & Caughlin, 2002). While, these applications are appropriate and beneficial, additional contexts give the theory strength and utility.

Second, this study supports the use of a boundary metaphor by showing how sexual information crosses a privacy boundary when it goes from private (individual) to public (dyadic). Further, the study shows how individuals regulate the control over sexual information across the privacy boundary as they contemplate revealing or concealing the information. The circumference of the privacy boundary expands as additional sexual information is revealed over time, and the permeability of the privacy boundary is regulated with varying levels of openness. For most of the participants in this study, the boundaries were highly permeable as the pole of openness was privileged for most of the mothers and daughters. Specifically, the findings from this study parallel those of Petronio and colleagues (1996) because they share similar qualities in the process of how private information is revealed. The motivations for revealing information by mothers and daughters in this study and by child abuse victims in Petronio et al. (1996) are vastly different. However, it is interesting to note some similarity in the process of how information is revealed. As noted by Petronio et al. (1996), victims of sexual abuse reveal information through tacit permission, during mundane activities, and with incremental disclosures. Likewise, this study found that mothers and daughters use tacit permission by waiting to be asked questions, thereby obtaining reassurance and reducing vulnerability before revealing information. Petronio et al. (1996) also found that victims of sexual abuse grant access to their information during mundane activities. Similarly, the mothers' and daughters' conversations about sex analyzed in this study emerged while

watching television shows or movies, reading about events in the paper, or hearing local gossip. Finally, findings from Petronio and colleagues (1996) found that sexual abuse victims make incremental disclosures. Similarly, the mothers in this study disclose sexual information in small increments. While comparisons between victims of sexual abuse and mothers and adolescents who are not in the capacity of victims may seem odd, it is nevertheless informative that the process of how information is revealed is quite similar.

Third, this study offers limited support for the dialectical aspect of CPM based on mothers' and daughters' experiences with the tensions of connection-autonomy and revealing-concealing. Based on my analysis and interpretation, I conclude that dialectical tensions experienced by the participants are possible, but not substantial. The interview questions were not designed to target dialectical tensions, nor did associated data emerge with forcefulness, redundancy, or repetition (Owen, 1984). Therefore, additional research is needed to fully support the *dialectical* tensions of sexual communication in close mother-daughter relationships.

Fourth, the privacy rule development criteria for revealing and concealing information described by the participants in this study parallel the five rule development criteria of CPM. First, the culture criterion in CPM overlaps mothers' intergenerational criterion to communicate differently from their mothers. Second, CPM sets forth that gender is a criterion on which rules are formed. This study shows that gender influences the sexual communication process. Specifically, sexual communication is confined to the mother-daughter relationship among these participants. Third, the influence from sisters and religion reflect the contextual criterion of CPM. Fourth, this study shows that

mothers have many motivations to talk about sex whereas daughters are motivated by emotional closeness with their mothers, which aligns with CPM's claim that communication rules are developed based on the motivation for disclosure. The fifth criterion of CPM, risk-benefit ratio, is replicated in this study as mothers and daughters describe their risks and benefits and show that the benefits outweigh the risks.

Practical Applications

Textbook authors, public health officials, Internet resource providers, or journalists who focus on parenting skills and adolescent sexual activity could apply the results of this study in four ways. First, this study presents several motivating factors guiding mothers who have very close relationships with their daughters to talk about sex. Therefore, persuading mothers to talk about sex could emphasize protecting safety or health, promoting family beliefs and attitudes, influencing behavior, enhancing emotional closeness, or raising responsible children. Note that the motivations are relational as well as well as behavioral. Influencing adolescents' behaviors are not the only reasons to communicate with youth about sex, based on the results of this study.

Second, designing messages that discuss the risks and benefits of *talking* about sex could help alleviate fears and promote the positive outcomes that can result from sexual communication. Based on my observations, statistics about teenage sexual behaviors seem to be the dominant message and persuasive strategy used in public health campaigns or by educators. As a result of this study, I propose that resource providers would benefit from also sharing the risks and benefits of sexual communication.

Third, in addition to providing communication training and support to parents, adolescent daughters could be encouraged to participate in conversations with their mothers. Promoting emotional closeness and obtaining accurate information are two motivational factors that could influence females to talk with their mothers about sex.

Fourth, communicating with young children about sex could extend many training and education programs. Because children ask questions about sex long before adolescence begins, mothers could benefit from the experiences of others who respond positively when children ask questions.

Limitations

There are at least five limitations to the study. The first limitation of the study resides with the atypical closeness of the participants. Recruiting college students and mothers to be interviewed together about sex resulted in a sample of extremely close mothers and daughters. By contrast, mothers and adolescents who were not as close, had very little or no communication about sex, or were uncomfortable talking about sex did not volunteer for the study. Therefore, obtaining information from family members who conceal sexual information was not achieved while obtaining information about the sexual communication between very close mothers and daughters was obtained. Different research designs will be needed to solicit information from mothers and adolescents who have had little or no sexual communication. I do not believe a comprehensive understanding of parent-adolescent sexual communication can be achieved until we hear the voices of those who do not communicate about sex. Further, there were only nine dyads. Recruiting college students and their mothers was challenging because of the

nature of the topic, the geographic distance between the college students and their mothers, and scheduling a time for three people to meet. However, with more time and creative recruitment strategies, additional participants could be found, which would increase the strength of the saturation and make the results more transferable.

The second limitation of the study is that the voices of males were not heard. In fact, during recruitment, many people heard me say mothers and daughters, even when my exact language was mothers and adolescents. I made no specific request for daughters. After realizing this assumption, I made a point to mention that sons were eligible and desired for participation because their voices were important, too. However, no adolescent males volunteered to participate. I believe that their voices can be heard if interviewed by a male and separately from their mother.

Third, all the participants in the study were white and the students were in college. While the mothers ranged in education level from high school to master's degree, socioeconomic status of each family was likely middle class. More diverse participants in terms of race, socioeconomic status, and education level are needed.

The fourth limitation is the self-serving bias. Mothers and daughters painted a positive picture of their relationship. Very few examples were given of conflict between the mothers and daughters. Though the study was successful in permeating a family privacy boundary, it is important to note that the privacy boundary was likely only permeated to a moderate extent. I am sure some of the mothers and daughters experienced some level of discomfort when sharing sexual information with a stranger and were cautious in what they chose to reveal to me and somewhat strategic in their

impression management. Mothers and daughters allowed me to co-own information with them, but by using the logic of CPM, there is likely other information that was not disclosed to me.

Fifth, the interview questions have opportunity for improvement, as well. Specifically, the questions about not talking about sex were wordy. These questions were initially designed to be asked of mothers and adolescents who said they did not talk about sex. However, all of the participants who volunteered had talked to each other about sex. Therefore, questions about not talking were somewhat confusing. I reworded the question in two or three interviews, but still didn't get wording that seemed to be clear. After that, I stopped asking the question. Perhaps this question would have been better as a probing or follow up question, rather than a question to try and get new information.

Strengths

There are five significant strengths of the study. The first strength of the study is using dyadic interviews coupled with individual interviews. The dyadic interviews allowed the voices of mothers and daughters to be heard simultaneously. Much relationship research has relied on a single member of the relationship to account for the communication within it. But, "singling out one person does not give a full account of the communicative issues" (Petronio & Braithwaite, 1993, p. 104). This study relied on the co-construction of recollections from mothers and daughters about their relationship. This approach proved beneficial because the data were rich with interactions and multiple perspectives of the same event. Mothers and daughters relied on each other to help remember information. Further, their co-explanations of events provided merit to their

experiences. Information obtained from parents and adolescents separately is typically contradictory. But in this study, the mothers and adolescents were together to lend support or correct misinformation in the moment. The individual interviews strengthened the dyadic interview because mothers and daughters were asked nearly identical questions during the individual interview. Participants had the opportunity to add new information or tell me information they did not want to say in front of the other. Thus, verification of the data was completed, in part, during the individual interviews.

Second, this was a qualitative study of sexual communication. Much of the previous research has relied on quantitative methodologies (e.g., Fisher, 1988; Jaccard et al., 2000; Karofsky et al., 2000; Miller et al., 1999). While these studies have produced useful information, they have been limited in their ability to probe into the actual, lived experiences of parents and adolescents. This study was successful in hearing stories about sexual communication in close mother daughter relationships, which were rich with details and explanations. The complexity of sexual communication came alive as participants reflected on their communication experiences.

Third, this study relied on theory to obtain understanding of the sexual communication process between mothers and daughters. Past literature is fragmented and lacks synthesis because of the underutilization of theory. Researchers recognize the complexity of communication and the need for theoretical frameworks to understand the communication process, particularly the communication leading to adolescent risk behaviors (Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2006). Theory improves the results of this study by

integrating a possible explanation of how the sexual communication process functions in mother-daughter relationships over time.

Fourth, the voices of mothers are included to find out if sexual communication is challenging for them. Some parents do not talk to their children about sex, according to adolescent reports (e.g., Pistella & Bonati, 1999). Speculations about why this might be were given in one study (i.e., Brock & Jennings, 1993), but the voices of mothers have not been heard directly. In the present study, mothers said sexual communication was not challenging, overall. But, some mothers admitted that certain aspects of communication were challenging. For mothers, the challenge seems to revolve around knowing how much to share or when to share.

Fifth, the study's greatest strength is the development of models that reflect the communication process between mothers and daughters in close relationships. Jaccard and colleagues (2002) conceptualized a model that moves the study of parent-adolescent sexual communication toward a process approach. However, with its components of the source of information (parent), the message, the channel, the recipient (the adolescent), and the context, their model fails to acknowledge the interaction. Their model places full responsibility for sexual communication on the parent and treats the adolescent as a passive recipient of information. It further omits the elements of time and privacy rule development criteria guiding the process. Indeed, the current study shows that the process of sexual communication is more complex than Jaccard and colleagues (2002) proposed.

Future Directions

Several opportunities remain for additional research on parent-adolescent sexual communication. I focus on six possibilities in this section. First, research is needed on family members who do not communicate about sex. Comparisons between families who talk about sex and those who do not and the subsequent consequences on any number of outcomes would be useful to understand the value of sexual communication. Perhaps adolescents obtain enough information from siblings, sex education, or their peers that parents do not see any necessity in talking. Or, perhaps parents experience apprehension or believe any form of sexual communication is improper. Further investigation will uncover the motivational forces that keep parents from revealing sexual information to their children.

A model for sexual communication in families who are less close and potentially have less sexual communication would look different from the models presented in this study. Again, because the mothers and daughters in this study were very close, the models are limited in scope to close relationships. Thus, I suggest that a model for mother-daughter relationships that are less close than those in this study would show two circles to represent the parent and adolescent, but there would be less overlap than in the models presented here. Or, in distant mother-daughter relationships, there may be no overlap if the distance leads to no sexual communication. In some families, the arrow representing time may be shorter if sexual topics are avoided during the toddler and elementary years. Further, channels outside the family such as friends or mediated messages may have a stronger impact on the sexual information the adolescent receives

because of the distance between the adolescent and parent. Therefore, the model might include circles representing other sources of sexual information. Another possibility with mothers and daughters who are less close, particularly with the Interaction Model, is that the process is linear. Perhaps sexual information is transferred directly from mothers to their daughters in other types of relationships. These ideas are mere speculation, but worth consideration in future studies.

Second, the private information supposition of CPM needs additional discussion and definition in the academic community. My attempt to use the terms sexual information and sexual communication interchangeably proved futile. It seems as if the term sexual information is most appropriate when discussing the content and sexual communication is best when describing the process. Indeed, the private information supposition of CPM focuses on the content of disclosures and the remaining suppositions focus on the process. Additionally, the mothers and daughters in this study considered only details of sexual activity to be private. Yet, there is considerable evidence that many parents and adolescents do not talk about sex. Perhaps the secrets literature (e.g., Vangelisti, 1994) or topic avoidance literature (e.g., Guerrero & Afifi, 1995a) could expand this discussion.

Third, work with sons would make much needed contributions to this body of literature. The lack of communication with and different messages to sons may not be a result of parents' efforts, but rather a lack of sons' responsiveness. It seems as though the mothers in this study are willing to be open and co-own a privacy boundary with their son, but the sons maintain a very closed privacy boundary and have little desire to reveal

sexual information to their mothers. However, future research with male family members, including fathers, may best be carried out by a male researcher.

Fourth, religion, religious beliefs, and religiosity, in relation to sexual communication, need examination. The results from this study lend support for the influence of religion, but only to the extent that religious beliefs impact the content of messages. However, because the only religion mentioned by half the participants was Catholic, there seems to be some broader influence on how sex is viewed. Perhaps the sex education curriculum in the Catholic schools and the openness the Catholic Church has about sexual morality tacitly persuade some of its members to talk about sex in their families. Or, the sexual communication by the institutional church may serve as a role model for normalizing the topic. It seems evident that the influence of the Catholic Church bears further analysis. But, the investigation of religion and sexual communication should not stop there. Other religious denominations should be analyzed as well as the religiosity of family members to obtain a robust understanding of how a religious denomination or an individual's religiosity effect sexual communication.

Fifth, the application of CPM to parent-adolescent sexual communication has other research opportunities. This study focused on the suppositions of private information, privacy boundaries, boundary ownership and control, and the rule development criteria. However, the theory also includes boundary coordination and turbulence. These two components of the theory are also important for an in-depth understanding of sexual communication within families. Boundary coordination explains how information is managed after it has been revealed and is co-owned by multiple

members. Boundary turbulence describes the process when a violation of a privacy boundary occurs, such as telling someone else's private information. Some of the mothers mentioned the consequence of their children telling other children about sex as one potential risk of revealing information. By contrast, mothers were concerned that their daughters would obtain inaccurate information from their peers. Therefore, it seems as if the ways in which families manage their family privacy boundary would glean useful information.

Sixth, continued work with multiple family members will also supplement this body of research. The results from this study lend support for the influence of fathers and sisters, and their voices are needed to report on their perceptions of how family communication processes operate. Certainly, future studies could select other dyadic relationships within the family to learn more about the co-ownership of sexual information. Perhaps a case study analysis of a few families with all members present would glean rich information about family sexual communication, individual boundaries, co-owned boundaries within the family, and the family privacy boundary. Also, sexual information comes into the family from other sources. Therefore, additional research is needed to understand how sexual messages from external sources permeate the family privacy boundary and how families manage the boundary turbulence.

Conclusion

In conclusion, as a result of this study, we know more about the process of communication between mothers and daughters in very close relationships. For them, sexual communication is a natural topic discussed at various points during the daughters'

lives. Questions about sex are not ignored, but rather responded to with small bits of information. As children increase in age, additional information is revealed to them as they ask questions, or parents respond to myriad events occurring in the environment. The process shows that some mothers and daughters experience tensions as they reveal and conceal sexual information to each other. The process is guided by privacy rule development criteria that assist mothers and daughters in their decisions to regulate the flow of sexual information over time.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A

Letter to Instructors of Communication Courses

Dear Drs. Olson and Dougherty,

I am writing to request permission to ask Comm 1200/2500 students for assistance with my dissertation in exchange for extra credit. My dissertation topic is entitled "Mothers' Development of Privacy Rules for Sexual Information." I need to recruit 20 mothers who have a child between the ages of 11 and 19 who have communicated about sex and 20 mothers who have a child between the ages of 11 and 19 who have not communicated about sex. I would like to ask students in Introduction to Public Speaking and Introduction to Communication for referrals of mother they know who fit either of these criteria. Students should spend approximately 5-10 minutes on the telephone or via e-mail recruiting participants. A recruitment script will be provided to the students. Five extra credit points would be given for each qualified referral up to 2 referrals or 10 extra credit points. Students would be asked to provide the name, telephone number, and e-mail address of mothers they have talked to who are open to learning more about participating in the study.

An alternative assignment is available for students who elect not recruit mothers. This assignment involves writing a 2-4 page, double spaced paper answering the following questions, "Do you believe sexual information is challenging to discuss between a parent and an adolescent? Why or why not?" Students who write 2 pages can earn 5 extra credit points and those who write 3-4 can earn 10 extra credit points.

Thank you for your assistance with this effort.
Sincerely,

Tina A. Coffelt

Appendix B
Letter to Individual Instructors

Dear Comm 1200/2500 Instructor,

I am writing to request permission to ask Comm 1200/2500 students for assistance with my dissertation in exchange for extra credit. My dissertation topic is entitled "Mothers' Development of Privacy Rules for Sexual Information." Gathering information from mothers is critical to increase understanding about how they reveal or conceal sexual information to their adolescent children. To that end, students in your class could help me recruit mothers. Here's how:

I would like to visit your classroom on a day convenient for you and make a presentation to your students about the research project. I need students to recruit mothers who have a child between the ages of 11 and 19 who *have* communicated about sex, and/or mothers who have a child between the ages of 11 and 19 who have *not* communicated about sex. I would like to ask students in Introduction to Public Speaking and Introduction to Communication for referrals of mothers they know who fit either of these criteria. Students should spend approximately 5-10 minutes on the telephone or via e-mail recruiting participants. A recruitment script and procedures sheet will be provided to the students. Five extra credit points will be given for each qualified referral up to 2 referrals or 10 extra credit points. Students will be asked to provide me the name, telephone number, and e-mail address of mothers they have talked to who are open to learning more about participating in the study. Students will have two weeks from the day I visit your class to provide this information to me.

An alternative assignment is available for students who elect not to recruit mothers. This assignment involves writing a 2-4 page, double spaced paper answering the following questions, "Do you believe sexual information is challenging to discuss between a parent and an adolescent? Why or why not?" Students who write 2 pages can earn 5 extra credit points and those who write 3-4 can earn 10 extra credit points.

I need to visit your classroom by **November 26, 2007** and have referrals made by **December 7, 2007**. I will send you a list of students and the number of referrals made or pages written by each in a Word document by December 7, 2007.

Research on sexual communication is very important, as you are well aware. Your help in this research endeavor is greatly appreciated. Thank you for your assistance with this effort.

Sincerely,

Tina A. Coffelt

Appendix C
Recruitment Script (college students)

Thank you for allowing me time to present you with this opportunity. My name is Tina Coffelt, and I am a doctoral student in the Department of Communication at the University of Missouri. I am conducting a research project on parent-adolescent sexual communication. The purpose of the study is to learn about the sexual communication of mothers of adolescents.

I am here to ask for your help with recruitment for the study. Participants for the study should be a mother of an adolescent. The mother must be at least 18 years of age and she must have at least one child between the ages of 11 and 19. Your decision to help with recruitment is completely voluntary. Choosing to help with recruitment or not will in no way impact your course grade. If you choose to help with recruitment, you will be given a recruitment script to guide you.

There are only minimal risks associated with recruitment, as you might feel uncomfortable asking an adult to participate in a study about sexual communication. Overall, risks associated are less than one experiences in everyday life. Benefits to assisting with this research will be 5 points of extra credit for one referral or 10 points of extra credit for two referrals. If you choose not to help with recruitment, you have the option to complete an alternate extra credit assignment which entails writing a two-page to four-page paper answering the question, "Do you believe sexual information is challenging to discuss between a parent and an adolescent? Why or why not?"

You are not required to recruit or complete the alternate assignment. If you would like to help with recruitment, please hold up your hand, and I will give you a recruitment script. The recruitment script is what you should say when you ask someone to participate. To receive the extra credit, you should send me an e-mail to tac244@mizzou.edu with the following information: your name, your instructor's name, the referral's first and last name, and the referral's phone number. I must receive this information within two weeks for you to receive the extra credit. If you choose to do the alternative assignment, e-mail them to me at tac244@mizzou.edu by December 15, 2007.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact the primary investigator, Tina Coffelt at tac244@mizzou.edu

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you are welcome to contact the Campus Institutional Review Board (IRB):

Office of Research
483 McReynolds Hall
Columbia, MO 65211
573-882-9585

Appendix D
Informed Consent Form (Alternative Extra Credit Assignment Papers)

Project title:	The Challenges (Or Not) of Sexual Communication Between a Parent and an Adolescent.
Researcher:	Tina Coffelt is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Communication at the University of Missouri-Columbia. She is advised by Dr. Loreen N. Olson, Associate Professor in the Department of Communication at the University of Missouri.
Purpose:	I am conducting a research project to see how mothers and adolescents perceive sexual information. I am also interested in the rules mothers and adolescents establish about revealing or concealing sexual information to each other.
Restrictions:	You must be 18 years of age.
Time:	Writing the 2-4 page paper should take approximately 1-2 hours, depending on how much you have to say.
Choice:	Your participation is voluntary. Writing the paper can help you earn up to 10 points of extra credit for your class. However, using the paper for research purposes is your decision. Signing this form indicates you grant permission for your paper to be used for research purposes.
Risk:	There is minimal risk involved with the study. It is possible that you might feel uncomfortable writing your opinions about sexual communication between parents and adolescents. In general, there is no more risk than you would experience in your daily interactions. Your participation is voluntary.
Benefits:	This research project is designed to how late adolescents perceive sexual communication between parents and adolescents.
Compensation:	Student participants can earn 5 points of extra credit for 1-2 page papers or 10 points of extra credit for 3-4 page papers.
Anonymity:	After your extra credit is recorded, your name will be removed from the paper by cutting off the corner (if you have included your name), or by removing the requested post-it note from your paper. This consent form will be used to separate papers where consent has been given from those in which consent has not been granted. The consent form will then be separated from your paper. By the time data analysis begins, your name will not be attached to the paper such that your information will be anonymous.
Contact:	If you have questions about this project, feel free to contact Tina Coffelt at 573-673-6792 or tac244@mizzou.edu. The advisor, Loreen Olson, can be reached at 573-447-0192 or olsonln@missouri.edu.
Questions:	If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Campus IRB (Institutional Review Board): Office of Research, 483 McReynolds Hall, Columbia, MO 65211 573-882-9585

Appendix E Recruitment Script (Mother)

Hi, Mom. A graduate student at the University of Missouri is looking for participants for a study on sexual communication. She's looking for adolescents and their moms to participate in interviews. I was wondering if you'd like to participate. Here are some of the details:

1. The graduate student, Tina Coffelt, is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Communication at the University of Missouri.
2. Tina is doing her dissertation on parent-adolescent sexual communication.
3. The purpose of the dissertation is to learn about the rule development for sexual communication between mothers and adolescents.
4. She is looking for 10-15 mother-adolescent dyads to interview.
5. Interviews are completely voluntary. Even if we agree to participate in the study, we can choose not to answer questions she asks.
6. We would be interviewed together, then she would interview each one of us separately. The total time would be approximately 2-3 hours, depending on how much we have to say.
7. We can do the interviews on campus in a research laboratory. Or, Tina will come to our house or someplace close. It's important that we be uninterrupted and have privacy for our individual interviews.
8. All interview information is confidential. All personal identifying information will be changed by using pseudonyms. You won't be able to hear my recording or read the transcripts from my interview. I won't be able to hear your recording or read your transcripts.
9. There are minimal risks associated with participating, as you might feel uncomfortable talking about sexual communication in front of me, or talking about sexual communication with the researcher. Overall, risks associated are less than one experiences in everyday life. Benefits to participating with this research will be making important contributions to knowledge about sexual communication in families.
10. There are two incentives for participating:
 - a. I can earn 10 extra credit points for one of my Communication classes if we are interviewed before December 7.
 - b. We can be eligible to win \$100 or \$50 each if we are interviewed by December 31, 2007. Tina will do a drawing on January 1, 2008 from the dyads who complete their interviews by December 31. She is looking for 10-15 dyads.
11. You can also agree to be contacted after the data are analyzed to check over the conclusions I've drawn to make sure that I have accurately reflected your experience. This is optional.

Would you like to participate? Would you like to talk to the researcher before you agree? You can contact her at tac244@mizzou.edu or 573-673-6792. If you agree to participate. I have some instructions to follow to get the interview set up.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact the primary investigator, Tina Coffelt at tac244@mizzou.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you are welcome to contact the Campus Institutional Review Board (IRB):

Office of Research, 483 McReynolds Hall, Columbia, MO 65211
573-882-9585

Appendix F Recruitment Script (Adolescent)

Thank you for allowing me time to present you with this opportunity. My name is Tina Coffelt, and I am a doctoral student in the Department of Communication at the University of Missouri. I am conducting a research project on parent-adolescent sexual communication. The purpose of the study is to learn about the rule development for sexual communication between mothers and adolescents

I am here to ask for your help with recruitment for the study. I need to recruit 10-15 mother-late adolescent dyads. Late adolescents must be 18-19 years of age. To participate, your mother must also agree to participate. Your decision to participate is completely voluntary. Choosing to help with recruitment or not will in no way impact your course grade. To participate, I will interview you and your mom together, then interview you and your mom separately. Your interviews will be audio recorded for later transcription. Again, your participation is voluntary and you can choose not to answer any questions I ask. The total time for the interviews will be approximately 2-3 hours, depending on how much you and your mother have to say. All interview information is confidential. All personal identifying information will be changed by using pseudonyms. Mothers will not hear the recording or read the transcripts of their adolescent. Adolescents will not hear the recording or read the transcripts of their mother.

There are minimal risks associated with participating, as you might feel uncomfortable talking about sexual communication in front of your mother, or talking about sexual communication with me. Overall, risks associated with participation are less than one experiences in everyday life. Benefits to participating with this research will be knowing that you have helped advance understanding of sexual communication. You and your mom can each receive \$25, payable in the form of a personal check on the day of the interview.

If you would like to participate:

- Contact your mother using the attached recruitment script.
- If your mom is willing to participate, discuss possible times when you and your mom are both available.
- Call me at 573-673-6792 or e-mail me at tac244@mizzou.edu to discuss a time to conduct the interviews.
- We'll agree on a location when you contact me.
 - The location should be a place where interviews can happen without interruption. The location should be quiet and private.
 - The Department of Communication has a research laboratory in Switzler Hall where we can conduct interviews.
 - I can travel to your home or other location close to your home if it is within a 3 hour radius of Columbia or Kansas City.

- You can also agree to be contacted after the data are analyzed to check over the conclusions I've drawn to make sure that I have accurately reflected your experience. This is optional.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact the primary investigator, Tina Coffelt at tac244@mizzou.edu

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you are welcome to contact the Campus Institutional Review Board (IRB):

Office of Research
483 McReynolds Hall
Columbia, MO 65211
573-882-9585

Recruitment Script (Mother)

Hi, Mom. A graduate student at the University of Missouri is looking for participants for a study on sexual communication. She's looking for adolescents and their moms to participate in interviews. I was wondering if you'd like to participate. Here are some of the details:

1. The graduate student, Tina Coffelt, is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Communication at the University of Missouri.
2. Tina is doing her dissertation on parent-adolescent sexual communication.
3. The purpose of the dissertation is to learn about the rule development for sexual communication between mothers and adolescents.
4. She is looking for 10-15 mother-adolescent dyads to interview.
5. Interviews are completely voluntary. Even if we agree to participate in the study, we can choose not to answer questions she asks.
6. We would be interviewed together, then she would interview each one of us separately. The total time would be approximately 2-3 hours, depending on how much we have to say.
7. We can do the interviews on campus in a research laboratory. Or, Tina will come to our house or someplace close. It's important that we be uninterrupted and have privacy for our individual interviews.
8. All interview information is confidential. All personal identifying information will be changed by using pseudonyms. You won't be able to hear my recording or read the transcripts from my interview. I won't be able to hear your recording or read your transcripts.
9. There are minimal risks associated with participating, as you might feel uncomfortable talking about sexual communication in front of me, or talking about sexual communication with the researcher. Overall, risks associated are less than one experiences in everyday life. Benefits to participating with this research will be making important contributions to knowledge about sexual communication in families.
10. You and I will each receive \$25 for our participation.
11. You can also agree to be contacted after the data are analyzed to check over the conclusions Tina makes. This is optional.

Would you like to participate? Would you like to talk to the researcher before you agree? You can contact her at tac244@mizzou.edu or 573-673-6792. If you agree to participate. I have some instructions to follow to get the interview set up.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact the primary investigator, Tina Coffelt at tac244@mizzou.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you are welcome to contact the Campus Institutional Review Board (IRB): Office of Research, 483 McReynolds Hall, Columbia, MO 65211; 573-882-9585.

Appendix G
Informed Consent Form

Project title:	Mothers' Development of Privacy Rules for Sexual Information
Researcher:	Tina Coffelt is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Communication at the University of Missouri-Columbia. She is advised by Dr. Loreen N. Olson, Associate Professor in the Department of Communication at the University of Missouri-Columbia
Purpose:	I am conducting a research project to see how mothers perceive sexual information and to understand the challenges of conveying this information to children. Also, I am interested in the rules mothers' establish about revealing or concealing sexual information to their adolescents.
Restrictions:	You must be at least 18 years of age and a mother of a child between the ages of 11 and 19.
Time:	The study should take between ½ to 1 ½ hours, depending on how much you choose to participate and how much you have to say. Additionally, after data analysis, you may be given the opportunity to verify and comment on my findings that will take approximately 10 to 30 minutes. Interviews will be audio recorded.
Choice:	Your participation is voluntary. You may quit at any time and you may refuse to answer any question.
Risk:	There is minimal risk involved with the study. It is possible that you might feel uncomfortable answering some of the questions, but that is the only foreseeable risk. In general, there is no more risk than you would experience in your daily interactions. The only exception to the minimal risk is that if you admit to criminal activities (e.g., child abuse) during the interview, then a judge could order your identity disclosed and use that confession against you. Such instances are extremely rare.
Benefits:	This research project is designed to show differences between mothers who communicate about sex and those who do not, particularly as it relates to their decision about revealing or concealing sexual information.
Compensation:	There is no monetary compensation for participating in this study.
Anonymity:	Neither your identity nor your child's will be revealed in the transcripts, written documents, or verbal presentations of the research findings. The following steps will be taken to protect your identity and confidentiality. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Consent forms will be separated from the data. 2. Personal identifying information will be eliminated from the transcripts and any reporting of the data. Pseudonyms will be used in any publication of this research. 3. You can refuse to answer any question asked. 4. Audio recordings will be kept on a secure computer.
Contact:	If you have questions about this project, feel free to contact Tina Coffelt at 573-673-6792 or tac244@mizzou.edu .
Questions:	If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Campus IRB (Institutional Review Board): Office of Research

	483 McReynolds Hall Columbia, MO 65211 573-882-9585
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Your participation in this study is voluntary. Your signature verifies that you are 18 years of age or older and have decided to participate, having read and understood the information presented above.

Signature of research participant

Telephone number

Date

Tina Coffelt
Principle investigator

Phone: 573-673-6792
E-mail: tac244@mizzou.edu

Appendix H
Demographic Form

1. Age: _____
2. Race: _____
3. Occupation: _____
4. Marital status: _____
5. Number of children: _____
6. Ages of children: _____
7. Have you talked with your adolescent about sex? YES NO

Appendix I Interview Guide

Opening/Rapport building questions

1. Tell me about your adolescent child(ren).
2. Tell me about the most recent conversation you had with your child.
3. How would you describe your communication with your adolescent?

Sexual information questions

4. Is sexual information challenging for you to communicate with your adolescent? Why or why not?

Rule development questions (select questions as appropriate for mothers who have or have not talked about sex)

5. Have you talked to your adolescent about sex? Tell me about that. How did you prepare for the discussion?
 - a. Timing; how did you decide?
 - b. Place; how did you decide?
 - c. Age; how did you decide?
6. What are the benefits of talking to (child) about sex? Risks? [Note: if participants focus on benefits and risks of sex, try and direct them to communicative/relationship benefits/risks as well]
7. What are the benefits of not talking to (child) about sex? Risks? [Note: if participants focus on benefits and risks of sex, try and direct them to communicative/relationship benefits/risks as well]

8. What motivates you to talk to your adolescent about sex? What do you believe to be your responsibility to communicate about sex with your adolescent?
9. What do you think has kept you from talking to your child about sex?
10. Do you and (child's) father communicate with your adolescent about sex differently? How so? Why do you think this is?
11. What differences were there between talking to your son and daughter about sex? (If any...) Why do you think there are differences?

Closing questions

12. What didn't I ask you that you thought I would? What else would you like to tell me about communicating with your child about sex?
13. What did you think of the questions asked of you? Clearly worded? Other?

Footnotes

¹Each quote begins with a name. Names beginning with an M are followed by quotes from a mother. Names beginning with a D are followed by quotes from a daughter. Pseudonyms of other family members or friends were assigned randomly. At the end of each quote is a notation in parentheses. The first identifier is a number, which refers to the family number. The letter following the number is the letter *j*, *d*, or *m* denoting either a joint, daughter only, or mother only interview. After the colon in the notation, a range of numbers appears that refers to the line numbers from the original transcript.

²Information about the biological or adoptive relationship of the daughters to their mothers was not obtained.

Table 1

Topics Measured

	Crosby et al. (2001)	Dilorio et al. (1999)	Fisher (1986)	Hutchinson & Cooney (1998)	Jaccard et al. (2000)	Jordan et al. (2000)	Rosenthal & Feldman (1999)
Developmental and Societal Concerns							
Pregnancy	X	X	X				X
Fertilization			X	X		X	
Intercourse	X	X	X				
Menstruation		X	X	X		X	X
Homosexuality			X			X	X
Not having sex		X		X		X	X
Sexual Safety							
STDs/AIDS	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Birth control		X	X	X		X	X
Abortion			X			X	X
Prostitution			X			X	
Using a condom	X	X		X		X	X
Solitary Sexual Activity							
Masturbation						X	X
Wet dreams		X					X
Experiencing Sex							
Dating and sex behavior		X				X	X
Getting a bad reputation					X		
Regretting not waiting					X		
Boy/girlfriend losing respect					X		

	Crosby et al. (2001)	DiIorio et al. (1999)	Fisher (1986)	Hutchinson & Cooney (1998)	Jaccard et al. (2000)	Jordan et al. (2000)	Rosenthal & Feldman (1999)
Dangers of many sex partners		X					
Managing unwanted pressures				X		X	X
Sexual desire							X
Sexual satisfaction							X
Different types of sex							X
Sexual abuse incl. rape						X	
Talking about sexual needs							X
Other							
Religious morals/sinful					X		
Upset mother/father					X		
Mother/Father punish					X		
Consequences of pregnancy		X			X	X	
Decision to have a baby					X		
Friends think about sex		X		X			X
Parents think about sex		X					
Choice of partner							X
Marriage/divorce						X	
Media pressures						X	
Pornography						X	

Table 2

Participant Profile

No.	Structure	Siblings (Age)	Mom & Dad	Home	Mother's Occupation	Sex (Y/N)	Religion
1	Blended	Oscar (21) Girl (21) Dana (19) Girl (19) Boy (14)	Mae	Suburb	Teacher's Assistant	N	Unknown
2	Single mother/ Divorced	Deanne (19) Daphne (9) Boy (7) Boy (7)	Myrna	Suburb	Stay home	Y	Unknown
3	Intact	Dawn (19) Chad (17)	Marge & Scott	Small town	Factory	Y	Catholic
4	Intact	Beth (23) Deidra (19)	Maureen & Daryl		Nurse	N	Catholic
5	Intact	Diane (19) Tammy (17)	Muriel & Andrew	Small town	Speech Pathologist	N	Catholic
6	Blended	Donielle (19) Boy (15) Abby (10) Melissa (3)	Marla	Suburb/ City	Stay home/ Housekeeper	Y	Unknown
7	Intact	Desiree (19) Matt (18) Emily (16)	Michelle & John	Approx 100,000		Y	None

No.	Structure	Siblings (Age)	Mom & Dad	Home	Mother's Occupation	Sex (Y/N)	Religion
8	Blended	Valerie (31) Amy (27) Debbie (19) Brian (16)	Monica & Bob	Small town	Admin. Assistant	Y	None
9	Intact	Christina (31) & Alan David (29) Rick (27) & Marci Diana (25) & Todd Phil (22) & Cindi Donita (19) Vince (17) Danny (14)	Mary & Terry	Small town	Stay home/ Bookkeeper for Terry's business	N	Catholic

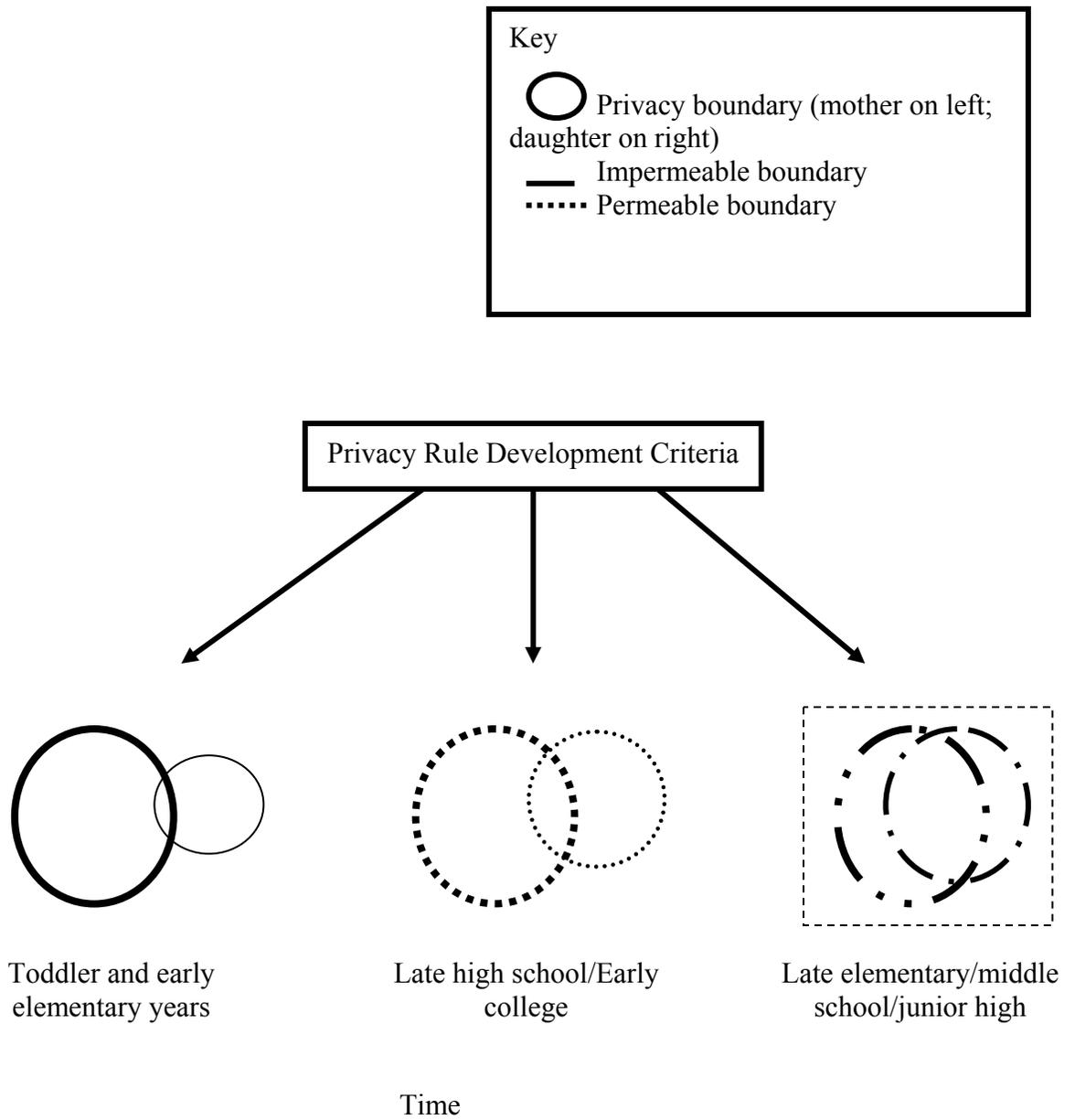


Figure 1. Sexual communication process model in close mother-daughter relationships.

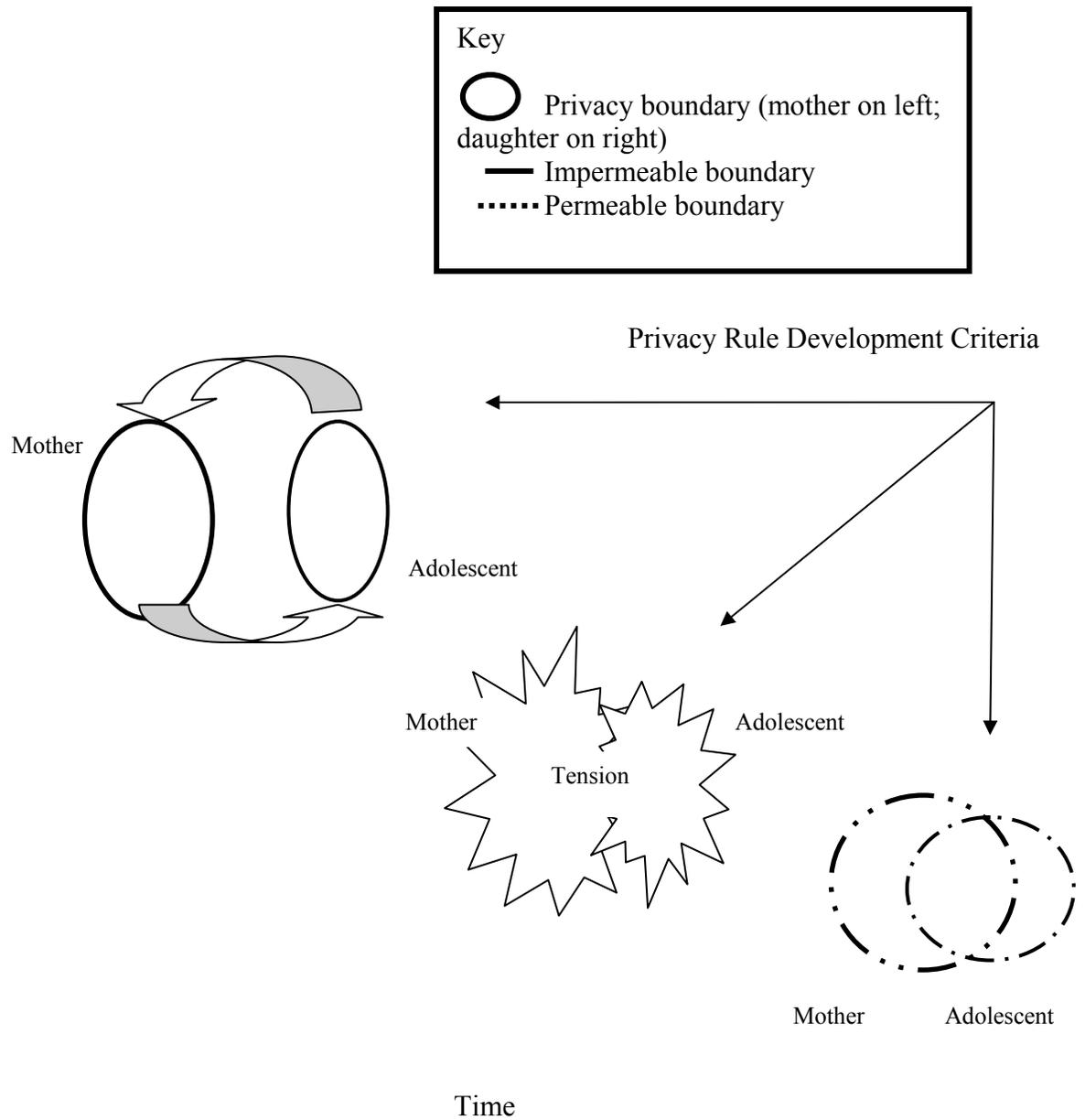


Figure 2. Sexual communication interaction model in close mother-daughter relationships.

VITA

Tina Coffelt obtained a Masters of Business Administration from Northwest Missouri State University in 2001 and a Bachelors of Business Administration from Florida International University in 1997. She worked as an Instructor in the Marketing/Management Department at Northwest Missouri State University from 2001 to 2004. She served as the Coordinator of Student Employment in the Office of Human Resources at Northwest Missouri State University from 1998 to 2001. She was a District Manager for Automatic Data Processing (ADP) in Miami, Florida from April 1997 to August 1998. She has held other part time positions such as realtor, office manager, and bookkeeper.