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Communication of Sexual Information from Child to Parent

by

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Thesis

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Abstract

Communication of sexual information from child to parent is an area of communication that remains understudied. During the winter of 2018, a researcher conducted in-depth retrospective interviews with emerging adults from the ages of 18 to 22 to determine what adolescents share with their parents about their sexual beliefs and experiences. Communication privacy management theory was used as a framework for analyzing how and why adolescents shared sexual information and beliefs with their parents. The researcher found a better understanding of the process a child goes through when deciding if they should disclose their sexual beliefs and experiences with their parent. The researcher also found that individuals are likely to have moderate boundary permeability when it comes to discussing their sexual beliefs and experiences whether it is with family members or non-family members.

Keywords: communication privacy management theory, adolescents, sexual information

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Children start their learning about the world through the interactions they have with their primary caregivers (i.e., parents or guardians). As they grow older, it is likely that children develop their attitudes and beliefs about sex within their family as well. A primary caregiver's influence on a child can very well impact the beliefs and attitudes a child develops, especially when it comes to sex.

Not every primary caregiver will feel comfortable talking about sex with their children. Sex is one of the many "taboo topics" that are common in families. The reason sex is a taboo topic is because it is often perceived as an "off limits" discussion, especially when the discussion takes place between a primary caregiver and their children. Despite its taboo nature, communicating about sex in families is important. According to Kirkman, Rosenthal, and Feldman (2007), a parent's openness in regard to communication with their child about sex and sex education is important to a healthy relationship between the parents and children and a healthy attitude about sex and sexuality in adolescents.

What researchers don't know about these conversations is what exactly adolescents are sharing with their parents or guardians in regard to sexual beliefs and experiences. The study uses communication privacy management theory as a framework to examine what sexual information adolescents are sharing with their parents.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Taboo Topics in Family Communication

A taboo topic is something that is often considered an inappropriate topic to discuss. Some of these taboo topics include sex, religion, death, divorce, infidelity, violence, and politics. These topics are difficult to discuss, especially when the discussion is between a primary caregiver and their child (Holman & Kellas, 2015). Some researchers, such as Holman and Kellas (2015), claim that fear is a large reason parents and children shy away from communicating about sex within the family communication setting. Holman and Kellas (2015) write, “Despite the evidence that parent–child communication helps adolescents make sense of sex, many parents shy away from these discussions citing discomfort, lack of knowledge, and general communication issues as deterrents” (pp. 388-389). The reason these fears exist for parents is because communication about sex is so taboo and uncomfortable. Parents fear that because of their lack of knowledge around sexual information, they may incorrectly guide their child.

However, what researchers have seen in the past is that it isn’t just parents that find the communication to be uncomfortable; it is also adolescent children who find this topic difficult to discuss. This is made evident in a study done by Booth-Butterfield and Sidelinger (1998). They found that both the parents and the adolescents may have a feeling of being uncomfortable with discussion about sex. Also, the parent may feel that they have insufficient knowledge about sex themselves as well as having poor communication skills. Although research has shown a positive correlation between parent and child communication about sex, many parents decide not to talk about it, out of fear (Booth-Butterfield & Sidelinger, 1998). It is very unfortunate that parents have this fear to speak with their children about sex because of the impact it can have on the child.

Sources of Information About Sex

For children and adolescents, there are a variety of sources where they can gather their information about sex, sex education, sexual behaviors, and attitudes about sex, which according to Heisler (2005) can include, but is not limited to, media, family, religion, and peers. Of those three sources, family is often considered the main source for children who are seeking information about sex, whether it be from their parents or siblings.

Peers have been known to influence sexual decisions among their adolescent friends; however, researchers have suggested that an adolescent's family, usually the parent(s), will play a much more significant role in the sexual socialization of the child (Diiorio, Pluhar, & Belcher, 2009). This means that children often look to their parents and other family members as a main source for information when it comes to sex.

Family communication about sex plays an important role in determining their children's sexual decision making and helps reduce risky behaviors (Heisler, 2005). However, if the parent is not knowledgeable, or thinks that they are knowledgeable but have inaccurate information, having them be the main source of information for children and adolescents can prove to be problematic.

Sexual information that is communicated or kept private from parent to child may have a significant effect on sexual decision making during a person's adolescence. According to Holman and Kellas (2015), in the United States 7 out of 10 adolescents have engaged in sexual intercourse by age 19.

Furthermore, according to Miller, Kotchick, Dorsey, Forehand, and Ham (1998), young people have indicated they would rather receive information about sex from parents than their peers or school health programs. This shows the importance of parents' involvement in their children's sexual knowledge.

Importance of Parent-Child Sexual Communication

Even though these conversations can be uncomfortable for both parents and children, Regnerus (2005) writes, “Adolescents who have no communication with their parents about sex tend to evaluate such silence negatively both in the short run and later as adults” (p. 79). So learning to alleviate these fears can improve the openness about the communication of sex and sex education from parent to child.

Warren and Warren (2015) discuss the importance of parents being the ones who communicate with their child about sexual information. Studies have shown that there may be a delay in sexual initiation for children if the parent is in communication with their child about sexual information (Warren & Warren, 2015).

Research has shown that the earlier children learn about sex the better it is for their understanding of the subject. The earlier parents discuss sex with their adolescent children, the more likely their children will delay engaging in sexual and risky behaviors.

Openness about Sex and Sex Education

The most important aspect of sexual communication between parents and their children is the degree to which they have an open line of communication (Kirkman et al., 2007). However, if they cannot find a way to alleviate their fears of communicating the subject, that openness will not occur. According to Kirkman et al. (2007)

It has been argued that open communication is essential to the development of social and coping skills in adolescents; that well-functioning families tend to have open communication styles; that open and receptive communication styles by parents are associated with less adolescent sexual risk taking; and that less open communication is associated with more, and more serious, delinquency in adolescents. (p. 50)

Research suggests that children are more likely to be emotionally disclosive to their mothers rather than their fathers. When an adolescent feels that they can openly communicate with parents, especially mothers, they are more likely to discuss emotions and be influenced in decision making (Kirkman et al., 2007). Is the reason children feel more comfortable approaching their mother for information, especially when it comes to difficult situations or taboo topics, because mothers are viewed as more nurturing and compassionate with their children?

There are programs in schools that promote parent-child communication about sex and sex education. These schools have developed a program where they send home activities regarding sex for the child to discuss with their family. According to Grossman, Charmaraman, and Erkut (2013) these “family homework activities [are] designed to increase family communication about sexual issues” (p. 810). With the outcome of these activities being a delay of sexual debut among children and adolescents, these activities can also lead to a better line of open communication between children and parents.

Communication Privacy Management Theory

Communication privacy management theory was created by Sandra Petronio and was originally known as communication boundary management. This theory can play a large role in the parent-child dyad in determining what information is being shared, if any at all. The theory was designed to inform how people decide whether they should reveal or conceal their or others' private information. The theory suggests that people decide who to share their information with as well as how much of that information they are willing to share (Littlejohn, Foss, & Oetzel, 2017).

When it comes to communication about sex within families, it is up to the primary caregiver and the child to decide what information and how much of that information they are

willing to share with one another. Because sex is considered a “taboo topic” this is where communication privacy management theory emerges. Children have to decide whether or not their parents should know if they are sexually active or not, as well as what sexual information and beliefs they want to share with their parents, and parents need to decide how much about sex they want to share with their child.

Research suggests that open communication is important. So it can be assumed that when there is established open communication between children and parents, children may be more likely to share sexual information, ultimately leading to positive outcomes from conversations about sexual experiences and beliefs.

In a study conducted by Kirkman et al. (2007), it was found that most of the parent participants offered that open communication was important to the dialogue they had with their adolescent child about sex, even though the researchers never explicitly asked a question about the importance of open communication. They also stated that only two parents said there was too much openness about sexuality in their communication with their child, which may mean that those parents were uncomfortable talking about sex with their children.

Communication Privacy Management within Families

Sandra Petronio (2002) explains that within families there are different rule orientations when it comes to exterior boundaries that are outside the family construct and interior boundaries that are within the family construct laid out by different families. Petronio (2002) states that there are different levels of boundary permeability within families. Each of these levels of permeability affects what and how much an individual chooses to disclose within families. Although there are nine different levels of boundary permeability, the participants only seemed to exhibit moderate permeability rule orientation with exterior and interior boundaries.

Moderate Permeability Rule Orientation (Exterior/Interior)

Whereas families with highly permeable boundaries share everything with everyone, and families who have a low level of permeability do not share anything with anyone, families that enact boundaries with moderate permeability have more control over internal and external boundaries. Compared to high permeability where the whole story could be shared outside the family, with moderate permeability only a small portion of the story may leave the immediate family boundary. An excellent example of this style of permeability is given by Petronio (2002), stating that a discussion of a family member's battle with cancer would not leave the construct of the immediate family.

Within the immediate family disclosure of information may only occur with particular family members. However, according to Petronio (2002), the individual sharing the information with that particular family member may allow permission to that family member to share with other members of the family, thus changing the level of permeability. For example, if the sister discloses information to her brother, she may tell the brother that this information should not be shared, or she may give the brother permission to share with their father or their mother, or even both. However, the issue with this level of permeability is that it can cause too much filtering of the information, which can cause an inappropriate level of awareness to the issue of the individual.

The amount of research done using communication privacy management in regard to family communication about sex can in no way be considered exhaustive, as there have only been a handful of studies done on the subject. So the direction of my study is to shine new light on the subject and add a new chapter to the theory.

Much of the research on parent-child sexual communication focuses on what parents say to children. This study will contribute to our understanding by focusing on what children are saying to their parents.

What has been found in previous research is that adolescents use communication privacy management to maintain and manage what they are keeping from their parents rather than what they are sharing with their parents and making them co-owners. What we want to find out is whether they are willing to make their parents co-owners of sexual information, what it is they are actually sharing with their parents, how much of it that they are sharing, and the rules they follow for deciding to reveal or conceal that information.

Research Questions

RQ1: What sexual information and/or experiences, if any, do adolescent children share with their parents?

RQ2: Do adolescent children feel comfortable sharing sexual information or experiences with their parents?

Chapter 3: Method

Participants

The participants were recruited by the use of a convenience sample. The researcher made a post on Facebook with a brief description of the study. The individuals that were interested in participating in the study were asked to contact the researcher privately. The participants of the study were 3 males and 10 females between the ages of 18 and 22 years. The researcher chose this age range because emerging adults are more likely to recall sexual information that they shared with their parents. The final sample consisted of eight white individuals, three Hispanic individuals, and two Asian individuals.

Procedure

After institutional review board (IRB) approval was achieved (see Appendix A), participants were interviewed individually in the private office of the researcher until data saturation was reached. The interviews were designed to allow for open-ended discussions with the participants. The researcher chose to use open-ended questions to allow the participants to reflect on their past conversations about sexual experiences and beliefs with their parents. The researcher worked from a list of interview questions which is included in Appendix B. The topic was sensitive in nature, so the participants were provided with a consent form and also reassured that no one except for the interviewer would be able to identify them and were then encouraged to be as open with their responses as possible.

The participants were asked to describe the conversations they had with their parents about sex and provide any advice that they would give to adolescents who want to disclose sexual information to their parents. Each interview lasted anywhere from 5 to 15 minutes, depending on how much the individual shared.

Analysis

The researcher chose to follow researchers Braun and Clarke's (2006) method and conducted a thematic analysis by reading the transcripts to get familiar with the data as a whole and generating initial codes. The researcher generated 11 initial codes and then read and re-read the transcripts of the participants' audio recordings 10 times to detect recurring themes and other important themes that may not have been recurring.

After the researcher generated initial codes, he moved onto the next phase to detect relating codes and develop them into larger, overarching candidate themes and their candidate subthemes, as instructed by Braun and Clarke (2006) in their research.

The researcher then reviewed the candidate themes and decided that some themes were not actually overarching themes, but subthemes and combined them with larger themes. This involved deleting major candidate themes, moving around extracts from the transcripts, recombining overarching themes and their subthemes, and reconfiguration of major themes for a flowing pattern.

When the researcher found a flowing pattern and thematic map, he started naming and defining the major themes and their sub-themes. The researcher found three major themes and three subthemes.

Chapter 4: Findings

Three major themes and three subthemes emerged from the data. The three major themes are open communication, sex of parent matters, and with whom the child lives. The three subthemes are friendship with parents, communication can be too open, and sexual assault.

Theme 1: Open Communication

Many participants made mention of or alluded to open communication. Open communication was referred to as an important aspect of the parent-child dynamic, especially when it comes to the communication of sexual information. When asked if they had any advice for adolescents, Parker (22) said:

I think that having an open line of communication with your parent, or parents, is important, especially when it comes to sex because, like, that has to do with your health and you never really know what your parents may already know and can help you out with, you know?

Jordan (18) said:

If I had to give any advice to adolescents, it would be that they should try to have an open style of communication with their parents, or parent, or their guardian. Not just with sexual information, like open communication with everything. They should know that you're being safe and stuff.

Subtheme 1: Friendship with parents. Many of the participants mentioned that they were friends with one or both of their parents. This leads to the assumption that a developed friendship with one or both of the parents leads to an open line of communication where the adolescent is more likely to share with their parent or parents.

When asked about parental response of the disclosure of sexual information, Yolanda (18) said this of her mother:

She wasn't like scandalized or anything. She just like, laughed. She was cool with it, I don't know. For most of my life, I just felt like my mom was my friend, so I was just chill talking with her about whatever. She didn't react in a negative way, or anything like that.

Parker (22) also mentioned that she was best friends with her mother. When asked what sexual conversations were like with her parents, she said:

I mean, they were easy. They weren't awkward or anything. I was like best friends with my mom, so we talked about everything. I went to her when I needed to go to the gyno. I talked to her about the first time I had sex. When I was little, my parents were divorced, and I've always lived with my mom, so when I was younger, I would always go to her when I needed help with something, especially when it had to do with sex.

Subtheme 2: Communication can be too open. Two of the participants mentioned that they thought open communication with parents about sex is good, but that they thought it could be too open.

One of the participants mentioned that she felt that her friends' parents are too open about sexual information, or that her friends shared too much information with their parents. When asked about the advice that she would give to adolescents when sharing sexual information with their parents, Numa (19) said:

I think that you should be open with your parents about sex and your sexual beliefs, but I do think that there is a line that shouldn't be crossed. Like I mentioned before, I always went to my mother, but I didn't talk to her about like, how it felt when he fucked me, or what position I liked to be gone down on. I have friends who share that with their parents, and I think that that is just way too much information to be shared with the people who gave birth to you and raised you.

Yolanda (18) also stated that she believed what her friends shared with their parents was too much. Yolanda said, “Like I know, some of my friends will go into detail about exactly what they do with their partners, but just, I think that’s kind of gross.”

Another of the participants mentioned that sexual information is not something that should be shared with one’s parents. When asked what advice they would give to adolescents about the sharing of sexual information with their parents, Marcus (21) said:

I mean, I personally believe that that aspect of your life is private, that you shouldn’t feel obligated to talk to anyone unless you are in a situation where you are uncomfortable, and you need to seek advice. So, I guess the best people to talk about that with would be your parents, if you are in an uncomfortable situation. But if you are in a consensual sex situation, then I don’t feel that you should share. What happens in the bedroom, stays in the bedroom.

Marcus alluded to the fact that the only time an individual should share sexual information, outside of the relationship, is if the individual is uncomfortable within that sexual relationship. So, this particular individual believes that sexual information should not leave the confines of the relationship of the person they are with, especially not to be shared with the individual’s parents.

Subtheme 3: Sexual assault. Two of the participants mentioned that by choice they would prefer to talk to their mother over their father about sex, but when they encountered sexual assault, they went to their fathers instead of their mothers. The participants may have gone to their fathers because they were seeking a protection they may have thought their mother could not provide for them. Pilar (19) said:

There was only one time I ever went to my father when it came to disclosing sexual information. I was sexually assaulted, and I went to my father first because I like didn’t

know what to do about it. I'm from a different state, so my parents weren't here. I called my dad on the phone and told him what happened and asked him what I should do, and all that.

Alycia (18) said:

I was sexually assaulted and decided to talk to my dad about it. I was scared to go to my mom about it. At first, I just wanted to call him and talk to him on the phone about it, because well, I was scared of his reaction to the situation and he might hang up on me from being upset. But I chose to wait until we were in the car together and driving home, because then I knew we would be stuck in the car together and he'd have to listen. So, I told him about the sexual assault during our hour and a half car ride.

Theme 2: Sex of Parent Matters

Participants were asked if the amount of sexual information they disclosed depended on whether they spoke with their mother or their father and many of the participants said that it did make a difference which one they would rather talk to about sexual information. Angie (21) said this when asked if it made a difference which parent she disclosed to:

I talked to my mom more because, I mean I talked to my dad about everything else, but I guess, I'm his little girl and it was kind of one of those I didn't really want him to know that. Probably just... it might have been a sex thing. My mom went with me to the doctor, to all my appointments, and it was something my health wasn't necessarily like more my father's issue. Like, he wouldn't go with me to the lady doctor. Like, that was my mom's job. I guess, it was just easier to talk to her about it.

Pilar (19) said:

It definitely made a difference. I always talked to my mom about this stuff. I would never talk to my dad about anything that had to do with sexual anything. Like when I broke up with my ex, I went to my mom and not my dad, to let her know that I fucked some random guy from Tinder to get over my ex. I told her that if you want to get over someone, you need to get under someone. But I would never say anything like that to my dad, that would not go well.

Elizabeth (18) said this when asked if it made a difference:

Yeah. I feel like it would be better to talk to my dad because my dad and I are much closer than my mom and I are. My mom, she's protective of me, like so is my dad but my dad understands more because of like age and everything that happens. Versus my mom. She just wants me to stay a little baby and everything. So definitely I feel like talking with my dad would be probably more beneficial.

Theme 3: With Whom the Child Lives

Three of the participants stated that their parents were no longer together. All three of these participants also stated that they lived with their mothers. Two of these participants alluded to not having a relationship with their father at all. Parker (22) said:

My parents are divorced, and I live with my mom, so I always just talked to my mom about these things. I haven't talked to my dad in almost 15 years, so like, I definitely wouldn't talk to him about it anyway. But like, I don't know, if I lived with my dad instead of my mom, I guess I would talk to him about this stuff instead.

Jordan (18) said:

My parents aren't together, I live with my mom. I talked to my dad about other things, but I guess because I lived with my mom it was just easier to just like, talk to her about

sex stuff than with my dad. It wasn't like, that I felt uncomfortable talking to my dad about sex stuff, I just didn't. I just talked to my mom about it.

Aaron (19) said:

I've always lived with my mom because my dad like, left when I was really young. I haven't talked to him since I was like eight years old. I always just discussed things with my mom when it came to sex. My dad wasn't around to teach me the guy things, like, the things you should do when it comes to sex, but like, I think my mom did a really good job of preparing me when it came to that kind of stuff.

From these results we can see that although the participants handle this topic differently, they all appear to have a moderate boundary permeability level. In the discussion, the researcher will reveal the different ways the participants moderate what information they reveal with whom.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to gain perspective into what sexual information adolescent children were sharing with their parents and to add to the overall research of communication privacy management theory by Sandra Petronio and to the area of family communication. Using open-ended questions as a strategy for the study proved efficient because it allowed the participants to think about and reflect upon the conversations they had with their parents about sex and then provide a deeper understanding of child-parent communication about sexual information.

Open Communication

A significant finding was that many of the participants in this study shared that they are open with their parents about sex, which research has shown is not true with most adolescents. This may be because most adolescents will go to their friends for sexual information, in an attempt to avoid an uncomfortable conversation with their parents.

Some of the participants stated that they were very open with their parents about discussion of sexual information. One reason this may be is because some adolescents develop a friendship with their parent(s), which implies that if an adolescent feels that their parent is their friend, they will feel more comfortable sharing sexual information with them than if their parent was not their friend.

Another reason that participants may be open with their parents about sexual information is because of health reasons. This may be because adolescents want to know what safe-sex practices are available for use, which is consistent with the research done by Heisler (2005) because it implies that open communication reduces risky behaviors.

Furthermore, another reason adolescents may have an open line of communication may be because, according to Petronio (2002), there are boundaries constructed within the interior of

families that are at a high level of permeability, which means the members of these families been conditioned to believe that it is a good thing to communicate with each other.

Rules of Disclosure

Another reason the participants were so disclosive could be due to their privacy rule development, specifically the gender rule. According to Petronio (2002), women tend to disclose more information than men do, which is seen within this study. Most of the female participants said that they are open with their mothers about sexual information.

Based on the gender rule, women will be more disclosive to other women and this is also seen in this study. The female participants stated that they preferred to talk to their mothers about sex, rather than their fathers. The reason the gender rule is sometimes put into place may be because they have a gender connection and feel that if they speak to someone of the same gender that person will understand more than someone of the opposite gender when seeking information. In the study, however, one of three males of the study stated that they would rather speak to their mother, so the gender rule does not seem to apply here. However, this may be because the father was not around for this male to disclose the information, too.

Moderate Boundary Permeability

Some of the participants mentioned that open communication with parents about sexual information was a good thing, but that sharing too much information was not a good way to communicate. This may be because, according to Petronio (2002), the members of these families have constructed a moderate level of interior boundary permeability. Within families of this nature, the members are conditioned to only discuss certain situations, as other situations may violate the constructed boundaries.

One participant said that open communication is good, but not when it has to do with sex, as they thought this topic is something that shouldn't be shared outside of the relationship dyad.

This may be because they, according to Petronio (2002), exhibit a moderate interior boundary permeability when it comes to disclosure of sexual information, as they will share information that does not have to do with sexual experiences.

However, this individual mentioned that open communication about sex with parents would be okay in situations where individuals feel uncomfortable within their sexual relationships for any reason. So, in this instance, if an individual feels threatened during a sexual encounter, they should share that with their parent, thus maintaining a moderate level of boundary permeability, picking and choosing which information to disclose to whom.

As we move onto the next section, this is a similar belief of other participants who chose to communicate with one of their parents over the other about a sexual assault that they had personally encountered.

Open Communication When Sexual Assault Is Involved

A very significant and unexpected finding was that adolescents are disclosing their sexual assault to one of their parents. As sexual assault is not about sex at all, but rather about having control over someone and the violence of the event, it was a very unexpected finding. The researcher did not ask questions about sexual assault, but two of the participants mentioned that they had disclosed their sexual assault with their parent.

Although most of the participants stated that they would rather talk to their mother than their father when it came to sexual information, two of the participants stated that when they were sexual assaulted, they decided it would be better to talk to their father about it. One said that they went to their dad because they were not sure what to do and the other mentioned that they were afraid to talk to their mother about the sexual assault.

According to Petronio, Reeder, Hecht, and Ros-Mendoza (1996), one reason adolescents may choose not to share sometimes is due to receiving a negative response from who they

disclose to. So in the situation of the participants in this study, they may be choosing to share with their fathers instead of their mothers out of fear and needing protection. The participants may feel they can receive a certain level of protection from their father that their mother may not be able to provide to them.

These individuals are exhibiting a unique style of moderate boundary permeability, considering they will disclose sexual information and beliefs to their mothers, but when it comes to experiencing sexual assault, which is not about sex at all, the individuals chose to disclose to their fathers.

Sex of Parent and Who the Child Lives with Plays a Role in Disclosure of Sexual Information

Every participant said it mattered which parent they discussed sexual information with, and most of the participants mentioned that they'd prefer to talk to their mothers when it came to their sexual experiences and beliefs. This is consistent with research by Kirkman et al. (2007), who say that children are more likely to be emotionally disclosive to their mothers than their fathers. A reason for this may be because daughters, specifically, according to Coffelt (2017), reach out to their mothers, not their fathers, in hopes to gain "accurate sexual information from a trustworthy source" (p. 582).

As stated before, no questions were asked about the relationship status of the participant's parents, but three participants (Parker, Jordan, and Aaron) did mention that they lived with their mother and their parents were not together. They all stated that they would rather talk to their mother when it comes to sexual situations, but they also said that they discussed sexual experiences and beliefs with their mothers.

However, a significant finding, as discussed in the previous section, showed that this is not always the case. They do not always go to their mothers to disclose information. When

sexual assault is involved, the participants would rather discuss that particular topic with their father, rather than their mother. This may be because adolescents are looking for safety and a sense of security that their father may provide, and their mother may not be able to.

Thus, within the families of the participants, they exhibit a moderate level of boundary permeability when it comes to the disclosure of sexual experiences and beliefs. They moderate the boundary by making their mothers co-owners of their private sexual information, unless sexual assault is encountered.

The researcher found with this study a better understanding of the process a child goes through when deciding whether or not to disclose sexual beliefs and experiences with their parent. The researcher also found with this study that most individuals are likely to have moderate boundary permeability when it comes to discussing sexual beliefs and experiences whether it is with family members or non-family members.

Limitations

As with many studies, there were some limitations with this study, as well. Although a lot of important information was discovered from the study conducted by the researcher, there is still a lot missing from this area. The following are limitations to the study:

1. **Direct questions about the sexuality of the participant may prove useful in future studies about disclosure of sexual information from child to parent.** One of participants mentioned that they were asexual and that because of that they didn't really talk to their parents about sex. Another participant mentioned that they were gay and didn't know how to talk to their father about sex, so they would always go to their mother.
2. **Direct questions about the relationship status of the participants' parents may prove useful in future studies about sexual information from child to parent.** A few of the

participants mentioned that their parents were divorced, and this led to them disclosing with one parent over the other because of a lack of relationship with the other parent.

3. **Only looking at child's perspective.** As this study was to find out what children were sharing with their parents, the researcher only interviewed children and not their parents. So, there is no parent perspective within this study.
4. **Small sample size.** The researcher was using a convenience sample which lead to a smaller sample size.
5. **Lack of content.** The researcher was able to uncover the process and decision rules of the disclosure of sexual information, but aside from the topic of sexual assault, not much content was shared by the participants.

Future Research

For future research, it would be interesting and beneficial to this area of study to see more direct and specific demographic questions, such as:

1. **Identifying sexuality of participant.** Doing so could provide greater insight into the communication of sexual information, such as with the participant who mentioned that because they were gay, they spoke with their mother and not their father about sex.
2. **Identifying the relationship status of parents.** Doing so could provide a better understanding of why the adolescent chooses to discuss sexual information with one parent over the other.
3. **Rules for the co-owner of the information.** Asking specific questions about whether the child ever told their parent not to tell the other parent about the information that they were sharing may prove beneficial to similar future studies.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study provides a unique look at the child's perspective of the communication of sexual information, as well as how it relates to communication privacy management theory. The researcher found that adolescents are sharing sexual information with their parents at different levels of detail, which expands upon previous research of disclosure. The researcher also found that adolescents would rather talk to their mothers than their fathers about that sexual information, which couples with previous research of this nature. By seeing that children are disclosing and what sexual information they are disclosing to their parents, we have a better understanding of the different rule orientations of boundary permeability that can be exhibited within different families.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter

Mar 16, 2018 8:18 AM EDT

Andrew Armbruster
Eastern Michigan University, Comm Media and Theater Arts

Re: Expedited Review - Initial - UHSRC-FY17-18-283 Parent-Child Communication of Sexual Information

Dear Andrew Armbruster:

The Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee has rendered the decision below for Parent-Child Communication of Sexual Information. You are approved to conduct your research.

Decision: Approved

Findings: You must use stamped copies of your recruitment and consent forms.

To access your stamped documents, follow these steps: 1. Open up the Dashboard; 2. Scroll down to the Approved Studies box; 3. Click on your study ID link; 4. Click on "Attachments" in the bottom box next to "Key Contacts"; 5. Click on the three dots next to the attachment filename; 6. Select Download.

Renewals: This approval is valid for one year and expires on March 14, 2019. If you plan to continue your study beyond March 14, 2019, you must submit a continuing review application in Cayuse IRB at least 14 days prior to March 14, 2019 so that your approval does not lapse.

Modifications: All changes to this study must be approved prior to implementation. If you plan to make any changes, submit a modification request application in Cayuse IRB for review and approval. You may not implement your changes until you receive a modification approval letter.

Problems: All deviations from the approved protocol, unanticipated problems, adverse events, subject complaints, or other problems that may affect risk to human subjects or alter their willingness to participate must be reported to the UHSRC. Complete the incident report application in Cayuse IRB.

Please contact human.subjects@emich.edu with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee

Appendix B: Interview Questions

- Please state your age, race, and gender.
- Do you remember having conversations with your parent(s) about sex? If yes, what were those conversations like?
 - If no, why do you think that there were no conversations?
- Have you ever shared information about your sexual beliefs and/or experiences with your parents?
 - If yes, what did you share?
 - If no, why didn't you share?
- How did your parents respond to your disclosure?
- Why did you decide to share your sexual beliefs and/or experiences with your parents?
- Did it make a difference if you were talking with your mother or your father (for participants who had a mother and a father)? Why or why not?
- If no, why did you not share your sexual beliefs and/or experiences with your parent/s?
- Do you still have these conversations with your parents?
- Have your conversations with your parents about your sexual beliefs and/or experiences changed over time? If so, how and why?
- What advice, if any, would you give to adolescents about talking with their parents about their sexual beliefs and/or experiences?
- What else would you like to add that I haven't already asked?