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Exploration of Religious Parents' Involvement in Their Children's Sexual Education

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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Helenita Thomas

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Walden University
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Abstract

Exploration of Religious Parents' Involvement in Their Children's Sexual Education

by

Helenita Thomas

MS, Phoenix University, 2011

BS, FUMEC University , 1980

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Psychology

Walden University

February 2022

Abstract

Research has indicated that religious families influence the sexual education of their children. This qualitative phenomenological research addressed the research gap of how religious parents engage and communicate with their children concerning sexual education and sexuality. Bronfenbrenner's multilevel ecological theory supported the notion of parents as first teachers developing the basis for socialization with family, relatives, neighbors, friends, church, schools, peer, and other groups in the community. The study included 10 qualitative data sets collected through guided interviews with parents in four separate conservative faith communities. Data analyses via explication process identified the major themes of self-preparation by parents, communicating processes and challenges, and modeled education by participant's parents. The research outcomes contribute greater understanding of religious parents' experiences and perspectives of parent-child communication regarding sexual education. This information may be useful in supporting further development of educational processes and materials for parents in faith communities and support further research on the topic.

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Dedication

I want to declare and dedicate my research study to God, our Heavenly Father and Creator, who guided me through all my life to be build my foundation, experience, and knowledge to achieve this level of study and understand the purpose of my life. I offer to Reverend Sun Myung Moon and Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon all my many hours of work, reading, researching, writing, and revising, facing hard times with tears, and controlling my physical health. Father Moon always spiritually inspires me and shows me how I can help to make changes in the social environment in the world to help families through the significant tasks of education and parent-child communication.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Sexual education program development and research span more than five decades, but researchers now question the effectiveness of sexual education for children (Hall et al., 2016; Pop & Rusu, 2015). In addition, parental communication and parental involvement need further research (Moore et al., 2015). Religious parents regularly influence the education of their children; however, information on religious parents' involvement in parent–child communication related to sexual matters is not available (Moore et al., 2015). Religious leaders continue to discuss the ways religious parents can communicate with their children concerning sexual education (Moore et al., 2015). The discussion continues as leaders field more questions from parents concerning how to talk to children, what materials to use to discuss sexual education, and whether school programs are available and appropriate (Dickson & Lobo, 2018). Greater knowledge about how parents communicate with their children about sex education has become a necessity in the process of best facilitating the development of support for parents in this task.

Background

Sex education includes (a) comprehensive sex education, (b) preventive sex education, and (c) abstinence (prohibitive; Pop & Rusu, 2015). Comprehensive sex education programs provide information on sexual and reproductive health, sexual behavior, sexual orientation, gender, sexual pleasure, safe sex, contraception, abstinence, and open explanations related to sexuality, dangerous risk situations, and decision making (Harberland & Rogow, 2014; Pop & Rusu, 2015). Harm prevention sex

education programs provide minimal explanations related to sex and sexuality guiding the children on how to avoid sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy and relies on presentations for the use of condoms (Nobel, 2018). Abstinence is a sustained choice to refuse sexual activities before marriage and is seen to be protective of child health and well-being if fully utilized (Manning, 2017).

Parents' education, life experience, knowledge, cultural and social influences, and religious beliefs affect the education provided to children (Christopher & Xu, 2014; Queiros et al., 2016). Parents may rely on public and private school programs to provide sexual education; however, sex education programs are declining (Hall et al., 2016; Pop & Rusu, 2015). Sexual education in schools declined from 2006 to 2013, and most adolescents received this education after the sexual activity had begun (Hal & Santelli, 2016). Additionally, the education provided may be insufficient to help the children understand the significance of sexual behavior, sexual health, and well-being (Pop & Rusu, 2015).

Further, faith-based communities have their own perspectives regarding sexual education for their children. A study on parental opinions regarding Catholic schools' sexual education programs found that only 43% of parents were satisfied with sexual health education for children at school (McKay et al., 2015). Clergy and other religious leaders have also wanted more connection between sex education and religious teachings (Hach & Roberts-Dobies, 2016). There is a positive effect of parent-child communication with religious values motivating better understanding of sexuality and well-being (Lomas, 2015). Parents seek assistance from clergy and health professionals

to develop appropriate conversations encouraging child development, emphasizing self-esteem, and understanding friendship, family values and well-being. But there are limitations to religious parents' involvement in decision-making to discuss what is the best sexual education program for the children (Nobel, 2018).

To approach declining sexual education, researchers have noted that qualitative research emphasizing a better understanding of parents' communication with children concerning sexual education is necessary (Fond-Harmant & Gavrilă-Ardelean, 2016; Morawska et al., 2016; Queiros et al., 2016; Santa Maria et al., 2014). Quantitative research has provided results on students having sexual intercourse and the use of birth control pills and condoms (Abma & Martinez, 2017). But researchers have suggested qualitative approaches to better understand the positive attitudes of sex education with parents involved in sex education with their children (Dent & Malone, 2016). Qualitative research performing interviews with religious parents individually may clarify information concerning parents' involvement in sexual education (Santa Maria et al., 2014). Exploring parents' perspectives from different ethnological cultural backgrounds concerning sexual education of the children is also important (McKay et al, 2015). This study involved a phenomenological qualitative research method to explore participants' experiences regarding religious parent–communication surrounding sex education (see Alase, 2016).

Problem Statement

The American Federal Interaction Forum on Child and Family Statistics (FIFCFS) (2017) gathered decades of sexual education program information consisting of

instructions for safe sex, avoiding transmitted infections, and providing formal orientation of how to use contraception and condoms. But using the information from FIFCFS to develop programs may be creating a general problem, as many parents and faith communities may object to the contents of sexual education programs presented to children (Bowes et al., 2017) It is important to ask parents what kind of sexual education parents provide in addition to what schools and church programs provide (Christopher & Xu, 2014). Religious beliefs often contradict and conflict with materials presented in schools (Dake et al., 2014; McKay et al., 2015). Some religious faith leaders have indicated that a comprehensive sexuality education could benefit the curriculum of parochial schools (Hach & Roberts-Dobie, 2016). Religious leaders may also want to incorporate parent–child–church communication regarding sex as part of education programs (Moore et al., 2015). The problem is that the extent of parent–child communication on sexual education is unknown (Moore et al, 2015). Some parents have difficulty developing conversations, often using some websites and books, and children often received sex information from friends (Morawska et al., 2015). The fundamental concept of this study was to explore and better understand religious parents’ communication with children concerning sex and sexuality. This study supports and broadens the scope of current research parent–child communications.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore how religious parents engaged and communicated with their children concerning sexual education. There is a need to discover the level of involvement and discussion between parents and children regarding

sex education in faith communities, and this study helped to address the gap of knowledge regarding religious parents' participation and communication with children concerning sexual education (see Moore et al., 2015). Children may be confused concerning sexual conduct in a social environment, which may be caused by a lack of parental communication with children regarding sexual education (Bierman et al., 2014). The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services presented 18 factors related to sexual behavior of children and parent-child communication with children concerning sex education that can be missing when children develop a premature sexual activity (Lee et al., 2015). Individual interviews with parents helped gain a deeper understanding of the communication process and perceptions of religious parents regarding what supports and challenges they experienced in the process of their children's sex education.

Research Question

Researchers have indicated that sex education received from parents is an informal and limited conversation, and in many cases, the adolescent has already explored sex experiences (Moore et al., 2014). There is a need for further research with religious parents from different communities and religious traditions to investigate the parents' sexual education of their children (Christopher & Xu, 2014; McKay et al., 2015). Following these recommendations, the research question was "How do religious parents from different faith communities engage and communicate with children concerning sexual education and sexuality?"

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study was Bronfenbrenner's theory of the multilevel ecological system. Bronfenbrenner (1986) created a multilevel ecological organizational approach for addressing societal concerns, which include the microsystem, mesosystem, ecosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. Bronfenbrenner's theory highlights that human development starts in the family with parents as first educators, then proceeds in the faith community through interaction with others and extends through the multilevel ecological environment. The children develop in the system and receive support from other families, friends, peers, and others they meet, successfully developing well-being and independence, then entering the social systems (Lomas, 2015). The microsystem is where the influence of early learning experiences of children within their families occurs, and the external communication between families occurs in children's interactive environment (Lomas, 2014). The mesosystem is the intersection of a family at microsystem levels and the faith community, and the external influence occurs during children's interactive environmental communication (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Interaction between parents and children concerning sexual education bridges the microsystem and mesosystem, contributing to positive development for the well-being of children (Fond-Harmant & Gavrilă-Ardelean, 2016). The mesosystem environment of the parents' religious community directly impacts the microsystem of communication between parent and child. This is an opportunity for interaction between families and community. Thus, the theory supported the idea that parents as participants in faith-based communities may

influence how, as children's first teachers, to communicate with children on sex education.

Nature of the Study

The qualitative phenomenological approach was the method for this study through personal interviews with participating religious parents who engaged weekly with church activities and traditions and held membership with one of the designated faith-based communities. The religious faith communities were Catholic, Muslim, Protestant, and Unificationist in the deep south of the United States, including Louisiana, Texas, and Alabama. Parents from each of these communities had an opportunity to express experiences and perspectives of their sexual education of their children. Researchers have indicated the benefit of qualitative phenomenological research being better opportunities to collect parents' experiences, perspectives, and perceptions concerning sexual education, especially in the gap related to religious parents (Morawska et al., 2015; Rose et al., 2014; Santa Maria et al., 2014).

Definitions

Abstinence: A sustained choice to refuse sexual activities before marriage and is seen to be protective of child health and well-being (Manning, 2017). In the study, abstinence is synonymous with education programs prohibiting premarital sex.

Comprehensive sex education programs: Provide information on sexual and reproductive health, sexual behavior, sexual orientation, gender, sexual pleasure, safe sex, contraception, abstinence, and open explanations related to sexuality, dangerous risk situations, and decision making (Pop & Rusu, 2015).

The faith community: A religious group in the geographic area where families share and communicate in the social environment (Moore et al., 2015).

Parent–child communication: The dialogue with children providing education and life experiences (Hach & Roberts-Dobie, 2016).

Preventive sex education programs: Provide minimal explanations related to sex and sexuality, guide the children on how to avoid sexually transmitted diseases and prevent pregnancy, and present the use of a condom (Nobel, 2018).

Purity pledge: A personal agreement to maintain virginity until marriage. Some religious communities establish purity pledge as a condition for children’s preparation for a better sexual relationship between the couple after marriage (Manning, 2017). The purity pledge is abstinence and a prohibitive sexual education program.

Religious parents: In this study, this referred to a religious couple who held membership in a faith-based community and frequently joined church activities and provided education to their children following the religion’s tradition.

Sexual education: Part of education related to the aspects of sexuality to increase the child’s knowledge that would bring beneficial effects to the child’s sexual health and general well-being (Pop & Rusu, 2015).

Sexual health education: A program created by school nurses and health professionals which provides information on sexual and reproductive health, contraception, risk situations, and decision making (Dickson & Lobo, 2018; Pop & Rusu, 2015).

United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO):

Provides international conferences involving several topics (<https://en.unesco.org/>).

Well-being: The presence of a healthy mindset allowing for resilience, and consistently bringing to the social environment optimism and positivity (Bronfenbrenner, 1986).

Assumptions

I made several assumptions related to religious parents from Catholic, Muslim, Protestant, and Unificationist communities. The first assumption was that members of these faith-based communities had religiously based perspectives regarding sex education for their children. The Vatican guides for sexual education focus on modesty, purity and chastity, and abstinence (Whitehead, 1996). Muslim members often do not discuss sex with children until after arranging marriages for youth, and abstinence as sex education in the Islamic community may be insufficient (Tabatabai, 2015). Protestant religious communities focus on abstinence, religious tradition, and parental authority (Christopher & Xu, 2014). Protestant parents discuss the insufficiency of abstinence educational programs (Dent & Malone, 2016), but there needs to be more information to prevent pregnancy and disease. The Unificationists religious group also maintain abstinence until marriage as sexual education (Otomo, 2011).

I also assumed that religious parents accurately and honestly described how the communication with children concerning sex education and sexuality occurred. The final assumption was that religious parents' responses yielded a significant degree of

information for gaining a better understanding of how these parents engaged and communicated with their children concerning sexual education and sexuality.

Scope and Delimitations

Volunteer religious parents from four faith communities in my geographical region, which included Catholic, Protestant, Islamic, and Unification religious communities, received invitations. The topic of the study was to explore the active religious parents' engagement and communication with their children concerning sexual education. Health professionals and religious groups have argued to find effective sex education that helps children to understand sex and sexuality and decrease the potential risk of emotional and physical problems in the social environment (Hach & Roberts-Dobie, 2016). Parent-child communication also promotes youth well-being (Newland, 2015). A qualitative approach helped explore parents' involvement in their children's sex education to open opportunities and guide continuing studies connected to the same topic. The multilevel ecological theory supported the positive result of child development with parents educating the children and expanding the relationship relative, friends, neighbors, church, and other groups in the community (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). This study was a phenomenological examination of religious parents' communication with their children regarding sexual education.

Limitations

The selection of the area of southcentral United States limited the selection of religious parents from the four included faith communities. Other faith communities were available as well; however, the four communities were thought to be representative of

invested groups in the geographical area. The participants were 10 self-selected volunteers, which may have limited information gathered. Another limitation was the sample size; however, even limited interviews gained through qualitative phenomenological study design can bring significant input with information that can be dependable (Dawidowicz, 2016). I also expected the possibility of some limitations on responses to some questions. However, participants were generally forthcoming in their interview responses.

Significance

This study helped gather information regarding religious parents' engagement and communication with children concerning sexual education. The exploration of religious parents' involvement in sexual education may contribute to creating new opportunities for health professionals and educational designers to create dialogue in the community and develop better sexual education programs that more successfully address children's needs through the support of parents for involvement in the process. The research provided direction for the development of program materials focusing on and encouraging parent-child communication concerning sexual education. The research might also provide community leaders useful information for collaborating with parents to make better connections between religious communities and health professionals for developing sexual education making positive changes in the social environment. My objective was to support the development of a social environment where the children understand sexuality in the context of well-being.

Summary

Religious parents regularly influence the education of their children through communication (Moore et al., 2015). But there was a gap in the literature regarding religious parents' communication with children concerning sex and sexuality. The focus of this research was to gather perspectives of religious parents from a variety of cultural and faith communities and gain an understanding of their current practices and communication in the process of offering sexual education to their children. Researchers have noted that faith leaders regularly discuss with religious parents their children's sexual behavior and parents' involvement in sex education of their children. Different faith communities have mixed social environments, where families engage and create multilevel ecological social life. The qualitative phenomenological approach offered opportunities for religious parents from Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, and Unificationist communities to express experiences and perspectives on their children's sexual education. The research contributed to a better understanding of how religious parents engaged and communicated with children regarding sex education and sexuality. This understanding may provide information to assist in creating better materials and programs for children. Chapter 2 presents a review of literature available with relevant evidence of the problem and supporting theoretical background.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to qualitatively examine religious parents' perspectives of their role and communication in their children's sex education. The following literature review provides an examination of available literature relevant to this research. The studies examined in the following chapter included theoretical underpinnings, current thinking in the field of sex education for children, and views of faith communities and religious parents on sex education. A description of the literature search strategy precedes the literature review sections.

Literature Search Strategy

The keywords utilized in this literature search included *communication, parent-child, religion, religious, sexual education and behavior, teen, adolescent, and peer*, in a variety of combinations. The supportive resources reviewed were scholarly literature, books, journal articles, doctoral studies, and dissertations from Walden University. The literature reviews were from several disciplines, including psychology, nursing, social work, education, and medicine. The focus was on parent-child communication concerning sexual education and how religious views on sex and sexuality affect sexual education. For this review, American populations and researchers received priority; however, most articles were more than 4 years old. For more recent research, I also explored and included publications from other countries.

Theoretical Framework

Bronfenbrenner's multilevel ecological theory supported the idea that parents provide communication and support to children reinforced by their support systems,

which includes faith communities for religious parents (Fond-Harmant & Gavrilă-Ardelean, 2016; Lomas, 2015; Newland, 2015; Pittenger et al., 2016; Smokowski et al., 2014). The family is the first source of learning for communication and the setting in which the child develops socialization with parents, siblings, and relatives before expanding to neighbors, friends, church, school, peers, and other groups in the community (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Newland, 2015). The microsystem level from Bronfenbrenner's theory shows how the community engages and interacts to make positive changes that benefit the child, family, and groups for children's well-being (Fond-Harmant & Gavrilă-Ardelean, 2016). Research has also shown the benefit of the microsystem structural levels in ecological system theory include developing parenting skills, which can contribute to the well-being of child development (Lomas, 2015). The microsystem is an opportunity for religious parents to find support for their children's sexual education (Smokowski et al., 2014).

Many studies have been conducted with Bronfenbrenner's theory related to children's development. Font-Harmant and Gavrilă-Ardelean (2016) conducted a study using Bronfenbrenner's theory to study children's progress in the families from the same social group with focus on two school pedagogical projects to create an environment of healthy development for the children under 10 years. The researchers noted children's ability to work in groups helping one another increased in these projects, thus highlighting Bronfenbrenner's perspective for primary development of a child in the family environment.

Newland (2015) focused on literature between 2000 and 2014 regarding parents' involvement in children's education, using Bronfenbrenner's theory to guide the observations of the status of parental well-being, and parents' affection, engagement with children for education, encouragement, positive thoughts, and interaction with family and social environment. The reviewed research indicated that parents who demonstrate affection while educating children use positive discipline and provide encouragement and care. Newland also noted that youth have increased levels of depression and self-esteem when there is a lack of positive communication with parents. In this context, this study may contribute further perspective to ways in which the quality of communication between parents and children regarding sexuality is utilized and described by parents who are supported by faith-based communities.

Regarding sexual education, interaction between parents and children bridges the microsystem and mesosystem, contributing to positive development for the general well-being of children (Fond-Harmant & Gavrilă-Ardelean, 2016). In contrast, uninvolved parents increase the negative impact and risks to children's mental health (Pittenger et al., 2016). Parental influence and the social environment can thus both positively and negatively impact children's sexual education. Considerable time spent with parents and relatives can result in children discovering and understanding the norms and values of the family and building self-esteem. Children develop a useful understanding of the phenomenon of sexual behavior within a broader ethical-cultural environment that might otherwise create negative impact and risk of children's mental health. The current study, underpinned by such an understanding of ecological systems theory, examined the

connections between parents supported by a faith-based community as first teachers and their children, and the experience such parents described in communicating with their children about sexuality.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

Current Research Regarding Sexual Education Programs

Research regarding sexual education programs spans five decades (FIFCFS, 2017). Children's sexual education programs exist in public and private schools, social service organizations, and religious communities. Public sex education programs include comprehensive sex education, harm-prevention sex education, and promotion of abstinence (Pop & Rusu, 2015). Researchers have grappled with a lack of consensus as to the best methods for sexual education. The current research regarding sexual education programs shows the impact of the involvement of parents in the family environment (William et al., 2015). The following sections focus on research encompassing current sex education programs.

Public Sex Education

The following literature may help clarify what public education instructors have provided to children outside of home. Current programs offer various levels of information and education to children based on age and grade in school (FIFCFS, 2017). Programs have varied from state to state and school district to school district. The limited involvement of parents in the education, communication, and decision-making process concerning what is best for the children is evident (Nobel, 2018). Defining current

structured sex education will give a foundation for discussion regarding views of parents and religious leaders regarding public sex education in later sections.

Types of Public Sex Education. Public and private schools and professional organizations offer different and inconsistently structured programs for sexual education across the United States (Pop & Rusu, 2015). Comprehensive sex education provides information on sexual and reproductive health, sexual behavior, sexual orientation, gender, sexual pleasure, safe sex, contraception, abstinence and open explanations related to sexuality, dangerous risk situations, and decision making; prevention sex education offers information on contraception and condoms to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted infection; and abstinence promotes avoiding sexual activities before marriage. Despite support for the official formal traditional sex education programs of abstinence, prevention, and comprehensive sexual education offered by schools and communities in America (Dickson & Lobo, 2018), programs may not be effective and need improvement.

Comprehensive Sexual Education. Comprehensive sexual education programs showed all the aspects of sexuality and include all the types of sexual relationships, abstinence (avoiding premarital sexual activities), sexual health education and education regarding sexually transmitted disease, and pregnancy prevention (Pop & Rusu, 2015). School programs emphasize gender and rights perspectives toward education to reduce sexually transmitted infections and unintended pregnancy (Haberland & Rogow, 2014). There are positive effects on the protection of sexual health of adolescents after receiving comprehensive sexual health education (Dickson & Lobo, 2018).

Harm-Prevention Sex Education. Louisiana was among the many states that provided minimal education related to sexuality, guiding children to avoid health issues including unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases (Nobel, 2018). After researching 77% of public education in New Orleans, Nobel (2018) discovered only 29% of schools had any sex education program at all and explained informal sex education may be the only education received, and some teachers simply presented children with free condoms, thus informally offering sexual education. Parents and caregivers were described as the first educators needing to communicate with children concerning sexuality. Thus, it is important to explore the level of involvement and discussion between parents and children regarding sexual education (Nobel, 2018).

Abstinence. Abstinence is the sustained choice of foregoing sexual activities before marriage, and when successful, seem to be protective of child health and well-being (Manning, 2017). Often public schools in America have provided school-based abstinence-only sexual education programs as a formal requirement to move adolescents toward desired behavior. But these programs of abstinence-only have minimal impact, leaving students feeling the justification for abstinence is unsatisfactory (Gardner, 2015). Abstinence and purity pledges do not provide sexual education, leaving adolescents at risk for breaking the abstinence pledge and increasing the potential of mental and physical health problems.

Problems with Public Sexual Education

Formal sexual education programs in schools and community institutions declined from 2006 to 2013 (Hall et al., 2016). But adolescents often participate in sexual activity

prior to receiving educational information (Gardner, 2015; Hall et al., 2016). Other problems include sexual education program designers failing to consider religious beliefs and culture when creating and presenting materials (Haberland & Rogow, 2014), and program providers assuming there was adequate parental communication with children (Nobel, 2018). Under these circumstances, sex education programs may not be effective.

Health professionals and religious leaders have struggled to find effective sex education programs that helped children exhibiting sexually disruptive behavior (Hach & Roberts-Dobie, 2016). As programs in public schools continued to decline, more adolescents may engage in sexual activities prior to receiving sex education at school or through communication with parents at home, making sexual education further ineffective (Gardner 2015; Hall et al., 2016). However, there is a high potential for acceptability of comprehensive approaches in schools and motivation of health professionals for comprehensive sex health education program approval in public schools (Dickson & Lobo, 2018).

Summary

Controversy continues to occur concerning public education programs, even after five decades of research (FIFCFS, 2017). Researchers showed a greater representation of public sexual education programs than parent-provided or religious sex education programs or parent-child communication. Differences of opinion have occurred as sexual public education programs in America vary between abstinence-only, prevention of pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, and comprehensive sexual education. Available programs declined between 2006 and 2013 as research demonstrated public sex

education programs to be ineffective in helping educate children (Hall et al., 2016; Gardner, 2015; Pop & Rusu, 2015). A lack of parental communicating with children also exists concerning sex education programs provided in the public schools (Nobel, 2018). More research studies concerning how parents engage and communicate with children about sexual matters were seen as necessary (Pop & Rusu, 2015; William et al., 2015). The issues bring into focus the discussion regarding the value of researching parental involvement in sexual education.

Current Research on Sexual Education in Faith Communities

Though public sex education research spans five decades, only about 5 years of focused research into faith communities sex education programs are available. An explanation for the discrepancy may be that children in faith communities often attend public schools and participate in public sex education programs provided (Moore et al., 2015). However, conservative religious parents recognize but often disagree with secular sex education (Christopher & Xu, 2014). The following section focuses on the research pertaining to religious influences on sex education within faith communities and problems identified for sex education within these communities.

Religious Influences on Sex Education

Many religious communities develop and provide sexual education to children (Hach & Roberts-Dobie, 2016). Thus, faith communities can develop peer support for children identifying with similar views and beliefs. Within a social learning paradigm, parental expectations for children's behavior and understanding the role of religion for healthy growth and development, including sexuality, are useful to optimal growth and

development (Smokowski et al., 2014). Adolescent involvement in religious activities can also be beneficial in contributing to better control of sexual behavior in the social environment (Dalmida et al., 2018).

Parent–child communication for sexual education in religious communities may involve giving advice following the bible codes, communicating sparingly with children on the subject, and using judgmental words when disciplining children (William et al., 2015). The following subsections present research relating specifically to four different religious groups represented in the geographic area in which the research occurred.

Examining the grouped research studies and reports may be useful in noting commonalities and any differences between the religious groups, each of which comprise faith communities invested in sexual education of their children.

Catholic. The Vatican for Catholicism guides religious beliefs and traditions in Catholic families' sex education with focus on modesty, purity, and chastity (Duffy, 2016; Whitehead, 1996). But personal dialogue is important between parents and children with parents as first educators responsible for children's sexual instruction (Whitehead, 1996). Catholic parents recognize the importance of children learning from the relevant sexual education programs in public schools along with religious values education (McKay et al., 2015). However, parents may experience cultural, religious, and socioeconomic factors that create difficulty in addressing sex education with their children (Quieros et al., 2016). Thus, parent–child communication concerning sexual education rarely occurs and what discussion does occur continues to be insufficient.

Muslim. Researchers have described concerns regarding the absence of sex education for Muslim children (Tabatabai, 2015). Parents in this communities have been seen as reticent to give children any information regarding sexual matters, preferring to assume sexual abstinence of young people until marriage. A model of gradual growth toward independence and maturity in teenagers was not employed. Members believed the time to talk about sexual matters was only in preparation for marriage. Despite the family assumptions and approaches, a considerable number of teens are sexually active before marriage. This brings risks of sexual health issues and problems in well-being, emotional health, and social behavior. A study of 37 Islamic parents also showed that the parents communicated with their children without expression of basic knowledge and created barriers between the children and essential education (Mahboubed et al., 2016). Parent participants asked for support and education to be better able to provide useful sexual information to their children.

Protestant. Dent and Malone (2016) developed qualitative research with 20 Christian parents as participants in interviews, to find out their sex education preferences for children. In contrast to information provided by Christopher and Xu (2014), participants in this study did not fully support an abstinence program. While some parents ascribed to abstinence as the basis for sexual education, others supported a comprehensive sex education program. Dent and Malone (2016) concluded that most parents asked for more informative education, teaching children how to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease.

Hach and Roberts-Dobie (2016) analysed the formal sex education guided by religious evangelical Lutherans, Methodists, and American Baptists, to identify major five themes involving: (a) the church's role in sexual education, (b) congregation reaction, (c) negatives related to teaching sexuality education, (d) God's intent for sex, and (e) the ideal curriculum. They also interviewed church leaders and concluded that religious leaders demonstrated an interest in engaging with other denominations, including non-Protestants, to create a sexual education program for both parents and children. The preferred plan would help parents to conduct sexual education at home, following the religious congregation's program.

Unificationist. Otomo (2011) reported the sexual education tradition of the Unification Church is abstinence until marriage, resembling Catholic traditions. Data was collected from Unificationist families in Europe, Japan, and America. The researcher expressed concerns with religious children's sexual behavior, as well as with parent-child communication. Otomo (2011) suggested involvement of religious parents from Unification church in research to help provide information on how religious parents engage and communicate with children concerning sex education and sexuality.

Summary

The research presented encompassed four religious' communities. Only three provide some form of community-provided sexual education classes. Christopher and Xu, (2014) explained that religious leaders and parents encouraged children to follow the bible code, traditional discipline, and maintain virginity until marriage. Though sexual education focusing on abstinence is predominant in the four religious groups discussed

above, it has not seemed to prevent religious young people from engaging in premarital sexual relations. (Christopher & Xu, 2014; Tabatabai, 2015). However, religious leaders and parents agreed that further development of sexual education within faith communities could help build better understanding of the mindset of parents (Hach & Roberts-Dobie, 2016). This research project focused on what that mindset currently included and how religious parents described communicating the information to children.

Problems with Religious Sexual Education Programs

Though religious communities may recommend sexual education as promoting ideal conduct, providing children with sexual education seems to be difficult for religious parents. Within a number of religious traditions, lack of communication, and disagreements over types of education programs continue to plague leader and parent discussions.

Research indicates that religious families have followed the traditions on sexual education guided by faith communities from generation to generation (Christopher & Xu, 2014). Religious parents from religious groups such as Catholicism, Islam, Protestantism, and Unificationists have received support for sexual education within the communities' religious principles through their faith communities, peer groups, families and relatives (Smokowski, et al., 2014). Smokowski and colleagues described parental expectations for children's behaviour and understanding the role of the religion for healthy growth and development, including sexuality, noting that many researchers indicated sex education programs may not be effective and discussed problems with abstinence-only education programs.

Abstinence. A research study developed by Paik, Sanchagrin and Heimer (2016) used the National Longitudinal Study to investigate sexual abstinence pledging and reproductive health outcomes. The participants were 3,583 sexually active teenagers and young adult females from several religious affiliations. Of girls and young women in the United States, 12% pledged abstinence and most broke their pledges, engaging in first intercourse before marriage. Paik and colleagues' (2016) research concluded most of these participants engaged in sexual intercourse with a high exposure to sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy.

Lack of Communication. Bayer, et al. (2015) developed a qualitative study for better understanding of teenagers engaging in pre-coital and coital sexual behaviours. The participants were 150 females and 150 males with parents' consent. The participants were from a community in Lima, Peru and assumed to be families with religious Catholic tradition. Bayer et al. (2015) concluded 54% of males and 27% of females are precoitally sexually active and had unprotected sexual relationships. Bayer et al. (2015) agreed that peer group support and monitoring from parents and relatives increased the understanding and restraint. Without communication with parents, teenagers' risky, unprotected sexual behaviour increased. The researchers suggested continuing to study the different dimensions of the teenage peer group connection and the parent-child communication related to sexual education in early adolescence.

Disagreements Over Types of Sex Education. Steadman, et al. (2014) studied parents from different religious communities in Utah to learn the parents' preferences for sexual education programs in public schools. Steadman et al. (2014) found that religious

parents from Utah may exert strong moral and political influence in the sexual education of the children. The results showed that of the 344 participants completing the survey, 70% disagreed with sexual education. They cited contraceptives encouraging students to have sex, and agreed with abstinence-only programs, believing this could help delay sexual activity. Steadman et al. (2014) pointed out that leaders and parents identified problems introduced with differing approaches used by sexual educational programs in religious groups and public schools. The researchers suggested further work exploring parental attitudes regarding involvement in sexual education of the children.

Summary

Parents from different religions expected the children to be best served by agreement for abstinence until marriage (Christopher & Xu, 2014). The degree of religious parents' participation in sexual education seems to be unknown (Smokowski et al., 2014). Paik, et al. (2016) found that religious teenagers and young adults typically broke abstinence pledges and engaged in sexual intercourse. Researchers found parents disagreed with sex education programs typically offered in schools (Smokowski et al., 2014). Evidence of sex education problems increased concerns for children's protection from premature engagement in sexual activity.

A significant gap remains between current practices, invested beliefs, and values promoted in various religious groups regarding education and desired outcomes for children. Further information regarding actual educational approaches used by parents within these communities may be useful in further understanding and addressing the

research exploring how religious parents engage and communicate with children concerning sexual education and sexuality.

Current Research Regarding Sexual Education from Parents

Current research on religious parents' communications with their children regarding sex is sparse. The following section of research is notable in that the focus of the first part of the section is on parent's opinions, rather than specifics of communication. Two prominent literature reviews delineate religious beliefs affecting parental communication and the necessity of parental communication in the matter of sexual education. Religious parents' communication and perceptions regarding sexual education of the children may vary. The second part of the section focuses on parental communication studies without a religious focus. The subsequent sections explore research completed on how religious beliefs and parents impact sex education, and how parental communication and the lack of parental communication impact children's sexual behavior in social environments.

Prominent Literature Reviews

Bronfenbrenner's (1986) work underpins the notion that religious parents' education, life experience, knowledge, cultural, and social influences affect the education provided to children. In this context, the researchers Christopher and Xu (2014) developed a prominent literature review connecting religious groups and family life in social scientific study. Sections of the review and specific researchers' studies regarding the impact of religious beliefs on sexual education follow. In addition, Pop and Rusu (2015) prepared a report for UNESCO reflecting on the development of parental

communication during childhood concerning sex and sexuality. Further sections discuss specific studies in the areas of impact of religious beliefs on sexual education and the development and reflection on parental-child communication about sex and sexuality.

Impact of Religious Beliefs on Sexual Education. Christopher and Xu (2014) limited the literature selected for their review to the issue of sexual education in the United States. Christopher and Xu sorted the studies collected into three areas of investigation: (1) the models and tendencies of religious family traditions, as demonstrated by the study of Brown, Orbuch and Bauermeister (2008) that developed associations between religion and families from multiple ethnic groups; (2) religious family life relating to children's sexual education connecting religion and family for the benefit of religious families' life as demonstrated by Edgall (2006); and (3) parent-child communication and family variations related to issues of sexual diversity, underpinned by research conducted by Ellison and Sherkat (1993) on sex education, and parent-child communication. The following research studies from Christopher and Xu's review influence this study in the areas of religious models and tendencies, religious family life and sexual education, and parent-child communication.

Religious Models and Tendencies. Brown, Orbuch, and Bauermeister (2008) examined religious mixed-race couples and found that divorce in this group was less than that of the general population. Religious support might have contributed benefit to the social environment and parental involvement in children's sexual education. The researchers found that couples with a stable relationship and structured family brought benefit to the children's education.

Religious Family Life and Sexual Education. Edgell (2006) conducted a study focused on the lifestyle of religious males from a community in upstate New York from 1950 and examined religious congregations in America to discuss how the family structure changes and parents' participation in local religious community affected sexual education of the children. Edgell (2006) concluded that religious parents in traditional families showed the men tending to be more conservative than women.

Parent-Child Communication. Ellison and Sherkat (1993) showed the influence of religion on parental education of children regarding sexuality to be different between conservative Protestant and Catholic groups. Ellison and Sherkat (1993) developed least squares regression and structural equation models, interviewed parents, and indicated the conservative Protestant parents were more focused on biblical literalism for abstinence, created punishment against sins related to sexual behavior attitudes, and seemed to not focus on parent-child communication providing sex education.

Summary. This part of the literature review highlighted aspects of parents providing sex education to their children. The indication of parental communication in children's life is noticeable (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Christopher & Xu, 2014). Religious parents bring family tradition to the children's education, and the children experience the impact of peers' influence on sex education within the faith community (Brown, et al., 2008; Edgall, 2006). Ellison and Sherkat (1993) stated conservative religious groups may differ on religious roles of tradition regarding sex education linked to biblical literalism and may not provide parent-child dialogue for sexual education. Christopher and Xu (2014) reflected on various aspects of family life connected with family function and

their ethnic and cultural beliefs. The studies presented by Christopher and Xu (2014) indicated possibilities of better family functioning with developed relationships between parent and children for education and social environment activities. Conservative religious parents may present a tendency for males to be more radical than females regarding sex education (Brown, Orbuch & Bauermeister, 2008). The researchers suggested future investigation to include social and religious institutions and families. The study conducted, examined involvement of religious parents in the sex education of their children.

Developing and Reflecting on Parental-Child Communication Concerning Sex and Sexuality

Pop and Rusu (2015), in a report to UNESCO, expressed concern about limited parent and child dialogue addressing sexual education and its impact on childhood sexual education. Pop and Rusu (2015) presented important studies including: Walker (2007), who advocated that parental involvement in sex education matters; Vidourek, Bernard, and King (2009), who studied the effectiveness of parent communication; Downing et al (2011), who researched parental intervention in adolescent sexual activities. The following sections provide further information in these areas: parental involvement, effects of television, parental communication effectiveness, and parental intervention concerning sex and sexuality.

Parental Involvement. Walker (2007) noted that the changes of sex education over the last 20 years had not been beneficial, with health care professionals' provision of sexual education for children. Walker (2007) argued that parents' involvement in sexual

education of their children does matter and that parents needed motivation and assistance to increase skills to provide effective sex education of their children.

Parental Communication Effectiveness. Vidourek, Bernard and King (2009) reviewed 12 articles that described 6 intervention programs for African American youth sex education. The programs generally indicated the benefits of parents' engagement in sexual education with children. The purpose of the study was discovering the effectiveness of parents' communication with the children, especially teenagers who are at risk for negative sexual behavior and early pregnancy.

Parental Intervention Concerning Sex and Sexuality. Downing et al (2011) conducted a wider review of 18 databases with 12,108 references. The review focused on parents and family-based intervention related to sexual outcomes and alcohol education for young people. Downing et al (2011) found parental interventions were inconsistent in reducing the risk of young sexual activity. Parent-based intervention showed positive impact, however, not effect enough to decrease the risk of sexual behavior.

The research from Dowling et al (2011) showed evidence of need for intervention with the purpose of helping parents to develop sex education to prevent poor sexual health. The conclusion suggested further investigation related to parental sex education to include socio-economic, genetic, psychological, educational, developmental, intra and inter individual perspectives. The researchers encouraged scientific study with the intention of bringing helpful benefits for the future of sexual health and well-being.

Summary. The involvement of parents with children for dialogue and education in sexual education was a topic discussed by Pop and Rusu in 2015 during UNESCO

conference in their presentation of research completed. Walker (2007) indicated parents communication with children concerning sex education did matter and needed to be addressed. Vidourek, Bernard and King (2009) reviewed the benefits of parents' engagement in sexual education with children and pointed out education needs for parents and the assistance that would be helpful for the benefit of the children and better results in parent-child communication concerning sexual education and sexuality. Dowling et al (2011) pointed out the need for scientific study to create interventions helpful to parents for providing sex education to their children. The present study explored the involvement of religious parents in sex education of their children and may assist in the development of materials which could help improvement in parental communication with children regarding sexual education.

Parental Impact on Sex Education

Religious parents can have input and impact upon the sex education in which their children participate, whether at school or elsewhere. Moore, et al (2014) and Jerves et al. (2014) provided insight into religious parental communication from Catholic and Protestant religious groups. Two additional sections below highlight religious parental preferences compared to a study without religious preferences indicated and religious parental attitudes.

Moore et al., (2015) presented a research study involving adolescents' views of parents' religious beliefs and discussion of sexual topics with children. Participants were 54 African American adolescent students, recruited through African American churches in Kansas City, with parental consent. The participants completed a 10-minute survey

related to parent-child communication, and religious and sexual behaviour. After the survey, the group participated in confidential discussion. Participating adolescents explained their perception of the benefit of receiving religious guidance from their parents and religious community as being protective. However, according to the participants' opinions, their parents needed to be better prepared for parent-child communication, with strategies considering each child's background experiences and behaviour. The researchers suggested continuation of the study, involving parents and religious leaders in discussion exploring the children's behaviour and the development of parent-child communication (Moore et al., 2014).

Jerves et al. (2014) studied the attitudes of religious parents, Catholic and Protestant, in Ecuador. They focused on the parent-child communication related to sex education and sexuality, explored views of sexual education and the traditional religious restricted education, and addressed morality and the risk and dangers of sexual activity. The research strategy was qualitative focus groups with 20 participants who had children ages 12 to 19. Four focus groups consisting of a total of 61 parents, 21 males and 40 females, participated in the discussions. Parents reported limited ability to open conversation with children, demonstrated insufficient knowledge and understanding of issues related to sexuality, and continued family traditions of avoiding conversation with children concerning sex education. Jerves et al. (2014) also discovered that parents were eager for schools to provide an orientation program for parents to help improve their communication with their children for providing sexual education. They noted that negative parental communication, such as identifying sex as an immoral and sinful act,

could have a detrimental impact on children's sexual understanding and developing a positive attitude toward abstinence. The children who did not receive sex education and did not understand their parent's definition of immoral and sinful behaviour may have had a more challenging time understanding the value of abstinence.

Religious Parental Preferences. The sexual education provided to children is often impacted by parental preferences. Dent and Malone (2016) developed research focusing on parental evangelical Christians' attitudes toward sex education. These researchers conducted qualitative research via snowball sampling, selecting 20 religious parents from 5 different evangelical churches who attended weekly church services. The assumption was that Christian evangelicals supported abstinence only. The interviews focused on the parents' sex education preference for the children. The results showed only three parents preferred abstinence as the basis for sexual education, only providing additional information on reproductive organs as taught in anatomy and biology classes. The rest of the participants (17) supported a comprehensive sex education program with more informative education, teaching how to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. The findings seem to agree with other research not specifying religious preferences.

Parental Preferences without a Religious Scope. Dake et al (2014) surveyed parents for preferences on sexual education programs at school. In a three-wave mailing survey questionnaire, 433 of a random sampling of 2400 parents from different counties in the Midwestern United States provided responses. The researchers concluded that 84% of participants agreed that parental involvement in education was necessary. Of those

responding, 78% of parents (76% of those were mothers) also indicated support of comprehensive sex education. As to who should provide this education at school, 52% agreed on teachers providing sex education; however, 36% argued that a health professional should provide needed education. The research did not include a survey of how parents should engage in sex education with their children.

Religious Parental Attitudes. Millner, Mulekar and Turrens (2015) explored religious parents' education concerning sexual behaviour, and attitudes of parents regarding sexual education of the children in the southern United States. These researchers used a non-experimental descriptive survey design with a Computer-Assisted Telephone Interview system, conducting 18,463 phone calls. The participants were 522 parents with children in public school, including 34 adolescent female participants with a child in kindergarten. Millner and colleagues (2015) found that the religious parents who supported abstinence expressed the desire to participate in study for how to address sex education. Parents wanted better education to understand and convey how to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. This research concluded the parents needed better education to provide effective sexual education to children.

Summary. This section reviewed research regarding parental preferences, parental attitudes, and parental decisions. The study by Moore et al. (2015) showed adolescents desired for parents to be prepared to have conversations about sex and sexuality. Jerves et al. (2014) presented the result of qualitative research in which parents endorsed a limited ability to open conversation with children. Jerves et al. (2014) recognized the parental deficits in level of knowledge, and parents' eagerness for

orientation from health professionals to help improve their ability to engage in conversation with children concerning sexual education and sexuality. Dent and Malone (2016) indicated the majority of religious parental preference within a Protestant sample was for comprehensive sex education. The study from Dake et al. (2014) provided agreement with Dent and Malone and added the context the preferences that health professionals provide sex education in schools. Millner and colleagues (2015) showed that religious parents desired to encourage abstinence but also wanted to have better education and be able to educate their children regarding how to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. The section showed that parents needed and asked for help to better understand how to communicate with their children concerning sexual education and sexuality. The current study explored the current level of religious parents' engagement in sex education with their children.

Parental Communication

Theory posits children's learning and discovery in the world starts with parental care (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). The following section contains research studies related to parent-child communication and non-communication concerning sexual education, and the results of parental participation in education for children. Highlighted, are issues of communication cycles, identifying the communicator, timing the conversation and peer influence to communicate better.

Communication Cycles. Bronfenbrenner (1986) explained a child is sensitive to parents' voices and expressions, and that the regard and attitudes thus conveyed assist in the natural transitions of the child's development stages. Parent-child communication

thus creates the foundation of the child's personality and behaviour (Bronfenbrenner, 1986).

Flores and Barroso (2016) reviewed published studies from 2003 to 2015 related to parent-child communication, and then explored the impact on the adolescent interaction with social environments. These researchers presented studies that emphasized how parental engagement with children developed family expectations for the child's life, including attitudes and values, modelling for the child's socialization. Flores and Barroso (2016) indicated the cycle of communication started with parent-child conversations, then moved outside the family. The researchers pointed out that environment can also change child learning experiences positively or negatively based on emotional responses during observed conversations with others. The studies Flores and Barroso (2016) reviewed indicated parent reaction and response to children's social learning carried continuing impact for parent-child communication and related emotions and behaviors.

Identifying the Communicator. Research studies often do not focus on who is communicating with children and adolescents. In Chicago, Brown, et al. (2104) surveyed African American families about communication with their female youth regarding sexual concerns. They utilized an online questionnaire to which 171 African American teenage and adult women from Illinois University responded. Participants disclosed that their sexual education was primarily from close male relatives. Brown et al. (2014) concluded participants' responses showed paternal caregiver fathers, grandfathers, and

stepfathers, most often oriented young women to control relationships and protect themselves in sexual relationships.

Timing the Conversation. Morawska et al. (2015) studied parental confidence and self-efficacy in communicating with children offering sexual education, and the parent's preferred sexual education program type. The study used a questionnaire related to child sexual development. The researchers selected 557 parents with children aged 3 to 10 to complete the survey. Parents indicated difficulty conversing with children about sex and sexuality. Parents disclosed that they often waited for the children to become older to have a conversation, and then used internet websites to give children an orientation. In addition, the parents who had difficulty talking about sex did not take the initiative to continue the conversation, even when in agreement that parental education is important. Steadman (2014) deemed further exploration of parental attitudes and communication regarding education in the family environment, as necessary.

Using Peer Influence on Communicate Better. Choukas-Bradley and colleagues (2014) used an experimental survey with a chat room paradigm to evaluate hypotheses regarding socialization of sexual activity. From 9th grade classes in southeastern United States, 75 youth participated. Other research indicated that religious parents often extended their supervision of their children by asking other adults and their children's adolescent friends from peer groups to help monitor the child for greater protection (Santa Maria et al., 2014). The contribution of peer group monitoring showed benefits with adolescents discovering how to be protected and developing appropriate behavior in social environments; however, Choukas-Bradley and colleagues (2014)

concluded peer groups can also influence adolescents to engage in sexually risky behaviour. Results of both studies highlighted the impact of peer influence on sexual activities.

Summary. Parental communication with children to provide sexual education seems to be a challenging task for parents who are religiously active church members, as well as others. Bronfenbrenner (1986) contributed to the study of child development and education with parents and social environment that built a foundation for knowledge and personality of the children. The study by Flores and Barroso (2016) showed the cycle of communication beginning with parents and growing through environmental influences as the children experience emotions and motivation to engage with friends in discovering the world. Ethnic and cultural perspective must be considered as Brown et al. (2014) pointed out for example, a family tradition of paternal caregivers providing orientation to young women in African American families. Morawska et al. (2015) noted parents' difficulty in having conversations related to sex with children, and often waiting for the children to become more mature. The influence from peer groups and community was part of the research study from Choukas-Bradly and colleagues (2014). Santa Maria et al. (2014) also studied the peer group and parents monitoring the children using peer group to help adolescents remain protected and avoid risk of sexual behavior. The conclusion of the studies reviewed indicated parent's communication with children concerning sex education remains unclear. The current study explored how religious parents engaged and communicated with children concerning sexual education and sexuality in order to contribute to gaining greater clarity.

Effects of a Lack of Parental Communication

The lack of parental communication with children concerning sexual education and sexuality can cause changes in social behavior and increase risk factors of poor decisions-making. Bierman et al. (2014) studied how the social environment at school and in the community affected the social behavior of children. Lansford et al. (2014) connected poor decision-making skills with poor social behavior. Parent communication is important in the control of the influence of the social environment, decision making skills, and early sexual behavior. Santa Maria et al. (2014) linked the lack of parental communication with early sexual behavior. Without positive parental communication, risk factors such as disease and early pregnancy increase exponentially (Lee, et al., 2015; Bowes et al., 2018). These studies are presented in more depth in the following subsections.

Social Behavior. Bierman et al. (2014) conducted research with 9,594 parents and teachers of children, aged 5 through 18 from 55 schools in Nashville, Seattle, and a rural area of Pennsylvania. The study focused on the children's behavior using a multi-stage screening procedure to describe and score behavior for three years successively for the purpose of improving assistance programs. The result showed African American youth had early sexual activity and higher rates of pregnancy than European Americans. Also, the results showed that lack of parental communication and discipline increased the potential for risk of childhood physical and emotional problems, in addition to difficulties in understanding sex, sexuality, and boundaries. The researchers thus indicated children's confusing, unregulated behavior around sexual behavior of others increased with the

decrease of parental communication presenting sexual education, which in turn created problems for the children in social environments. Bierman and colleagues (2014) suggested continuing the study to better understand what is missing in early education which contributes to children's early sexual activity, especially in African American adolescents.

Poor Decision-Making Skills. Lack of education and communication can lead to poor decision-making skills and behavior (Lansford et al., 2014). These researchers conducted a multi-site longitudinal study with 585 participants from Tennessee, ages 5 to 8 with parental consent. The researchers collected data from participants each year for nine years focusing on peer rejection, childhood sexual behavior, and parent-child communication. Mothers completed the children's behaviour checklists. Study results showed 517 participants indicated high-risk sexual activities and 17.11% had a sexually transmitted disease. Results also indicated cases of early sexual activities with multiple sexual partners contributing to sexually transmitted diseases, teenage childbirth, and sexual abuse. Parents' expressed concerns regarding the efficiency of education through conversation with their children. Lansford and colleagues (2014) argued that if parental communication is missing in early childhood, this may result in lack of development for routine parent-child conversation, and in some cases, children do not then engage with peer groups to develop self-esteem and maturity. Future research was recommended, involving parents and family members.

Early Sexual Behavior. Santa Maria, et al. (2014) posited a direct connection existed between the lack of parental communication and early sexual behavior. Parent-

child communication, parental monitoring, and pre-coital sexual behaviour were the focal points of cross-section analyses. A sample of 1609 was gathered from an urban school district in south-central Texas with participants older than 12 years of age from different races, ethnicities, and genders. The researchers discovered parental monitoring helped to control the adolescent's sexual behavior; however, they did not receive appropriate parental sexual education, and most participants stated pre-coital sexual activity occurred before sexual communication with parents. Future research with a qualitative report was recommended for better contextual information.

First sexual experiences can happen very early. Allen and Lavender-Stott (2015) explored through qualitative study young men's first introduction to sexual experiences with 199 undergraduate participants in a public university in Virginia. The results showed 90% of the participants saw their first sexually explicit images while in elementary school, prior to any parental education. This research noted participants' preference to engage in conversation with friends rather than with parents for sharing sexual knowledge. As young men, participants felt challenged with trying to begin a dialogue and engage with parents in an educated conversation on subjects including sex and sexuality.

Risk Factors. Research showed ethnicity and culture may be factors in communication between parents and children (Lee, et al., 2015). This research evaluated factors related to sex education programs for Asian-American adolescents in the United States based on an integrative literature review of 122 articles from the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. Of the 122 articles, 18 presented factors related to sexual

behavior of Asian-American adolescents showing five major factors to include family, values, parental relationship, acculturation, gender roles, and lack of information and knowledge. Lee and colleagues (2015) concluded that the lack of parental involvement in sexual education led these adolescents to engage in premature sexual activity, and that embarrassment and fear of punishment prevented them from initiating conversations with their parents.

Lack of sex education from parents could bring higher risk of sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy, suicide, and drug and alcohol abuse according to Bowes et al. (2018). The researchers presented statistics from the US Department of Health Services Family and Youth Service Bureau with Native American and Alaskan in 2013, which showed adolescents aged 15 to 19 at highest risk of sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy, suicide, drug and alcohol abuse. This research indicated sexual activity among at least 300 out of 1000 adolescents. Bowes and colleagues (2018) concluded cultural factors influenced sexual education for Native Americans and Alaskans, and tribal leadership was essential for change.

Summary. The literature review helped identify the minimal information and lack of studies pertaining to the communication between religious parents and children sexual education (Moore et al., 2014). However, research indicated that religious adolescents engaged in sexualized behavior and that the sex education by religious parents tended to be informal with limited conversation with children (Moore et al., 2014). Parents often waited until children were older to start conversation concerning sexual behavior, in many cases too late, with the children learning with friends before

communicating with parents (Morawska et al., 2014). Parents seemed to count on monitoring the children rather than providing appropriate sex education for encouraging self-monitoring (Santa Maria et al., 2014). Parents recognized that their own lack of understanding sexuality created difficulties in communicating with children and asked for parent education on the topic (Jerves et al., 2014). Bierman et al. (2014) noted that children lacking communication with parents concerning sexual education faced higher risk of sexual behaviour problems. Parent-child communication represents an important experience for childhood development and education and the communication between parent and child is significant in all aspects of life, discovery, and growth, including sexual education (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Social environment can change a child's behaviour positively or negatively based on emotional experiences, and responses and research relating parent involvement with children's sexual behaviors and attitudes continues to be needed. (Flores & Barroso, 2016; Bowes et al., 2018). The gap of knowledge regarding parents' communication with children concerning sexuality is a significant topic, and one especially relevant to religious populations who have deeply held values and attitudes toward sexual behaviours. Research on parental communication could help parents with poor communication skills to better examine the child's social behavior and to intervene earlier. This research is limited to one specific area and four religious' groups: however, the results contribute to further understanding of parent-child communication regarding sexual education in religious families.

Phenomenological Qualitative Research Method

Researchers interested in sexual education for children have recommended phenomenological qualitative research methods (Morawska, et al., 2014; Queiros, et al., 2016; Vella, et al. 2015). The method provides an opportunity for participants to explain the actions and responses, describing experiences and perceptions concerning sexual education communication with children at home (Fond-Harmant & Gavrilă-Ardelean, 2016). Fond-Harmant and Gavrilă-Ardelean (2016) explained the contribution of phenomenological approaches in allowing for study of the families from diverse cultures to better understand parents' difficulties. A qualitative research study was an appropriate method to explore sexual education and parent-child communication regarding sexual education (Queiros et al., 2016). Parents can have difficulty expressing feelings and having conversations related to sexuality, and an interview can help parents to become engaged, answer questions, and provide information and background regarding personal decisions (Queiros et al., 2016). Morawska and colleagues (2014) felt using a qualitative approach would help explore more deeply sexual education provided by religious parents to their children for better understanding of the status of the education.

Vella, et al. (2015) developed a qualitative research study using phenomenological analysis, to discover parents' experience in being part of the group "Understanding your child's behavior" in Solihull, United Kingdom, and evaluated the efficiency of the program with 8 mothers and 2 fathers from 7 groups in various locations. Vella et al. (2015) pointed out that the phenomenological approach was an

appropriate method for collecting information to understand parent-child communication in education.

Summary

The literature review focused on the available literature exploring religious parents' communication and involvement in their children's sex education. Researchers described sex education programs as comprehensive, harm-preventive, and prohibitive. Sexual educational programs do not show significant positive results for helping children with safer sexual behaviour (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2017). Bronfenbrenner's multilevel ecological theory supports the idea of growth of parents' communication techniques, helping positive development of children, developing socialization with parents, siblings, and relatives, and then expanding to groups in the community (Newland, 2015). Parents who provide communication in the social environment can contribute to better education of the children (Bronfenbrenner, 1986).

Religious parents' have concern over the types of sexual education programs which give information that can motivate the children to have sexual experiences not otherwise considered (Moore et al., 2015). At present, parents' participation in sexual education of their children is unclear (Pop & Rusu, 2015). Parental communication with children is vital; however, parental participation and communication with children seems to be insufficient (Mackey et al, 2015; Hach & Roberts-Dobie, 2016; Manning, 2017). In addition, religious leaders' concerns over sexual education have continued to rise (Mackey et al, 2015, Christopher & Xu, 2014). Significant concerns exist about the lack

of education of parents and the parental efficacy of education and communication with children (Queiros, et al., 2016; Santa Maria et al., 2014).

Chapter 3 presents the methodology for a phenomenological study examining religious parents' communication with children addressing sex, sexuality, and behavior, and perspectives of their communication with children focusing on sex education. The methodology includes rationale for a qualitative phenomenological approach, interview collection methods, and research requirements.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of the study was to explore how religious parents engaged and communicated with their children concerning sexual education. Chapter 3 provides rationale for the qualitative phenomenological research method such as the opportunities it provided to collect parental experiences, perceptions, and perspectives concerning sexual education (Santa Maria et al., 2014). The chapter also describes the appropriate method for collecting data as described by Dawidowicz (2016) as well as the role of the researcher, instrumentation, and trustworthiness.

Research Design and Rationale

The research design was a qualitative phenomenological approach, which helped answer the research question: “How do religious parents engage and communicate with children concerning sexual education and sexuality?” There is limited information on parental communication with children concerning sexual education (Hach & Roberts-Dobie, 2016). The level of religious parents’ communication with children further limits involvement in sex education. The study thus gathered further information on how parents communicated and presented sexual education, with the importance of developing better teaching methods for public and private sexual education programs as requested by religious leaders being noted (Hach & Roberts Dobie, 2016). The research tradition is described in the next section, and then reasons for choosing the phenomenological tradition are provided.

Research Tradition

Phenomenological research is one of several qualitative research methods and offers an opportunity to create a description of phenomenon from collected data (Alase, 2016). The qualitative phenomenological approach is an appropriate method to collect data and analyze people's experiences, perceptions, and reactions to phenomenological issues (Dawidowicz, 2016). This is relevant for research involving family members' relationships and their extension into social environment (Fond-Harmant & Gavrilă-Ardelean, 2016). Additionally, the interview process is flexible to encourage the participants to reflect on the meaning of the topic, interview questions, and their experiences.

Rationale

Faith leaders have had concerns about children's sexual behavior and the limited information on parental communication with children providing sex education (Hach & Roberts Dobie, 2016). Evaluating the status of the education and parents' skill to integrate sexual topics into their children's education can benefit the children's life experiences (Christopher & Xu, 2014). The study helped develop better information for understanding parent-child communication concerning sexual education based on the responses from each parent. Religious parents from four religious communities answered questions about the communication between themselves and their children. These responses helped to understand the level of parents' participation in the children's sex education. Based on the responses from each parent, I had a clearer description of the education, parents' communication, and engagement skills to integrate sexuality topics

into the children's education. The phenomenological approach has been helpful in identifying the parent-child relationship in order to understand more clearly parents' and children's communication in terms of education (Vella et al., 2015); thus, this approach was deemed useful to this research as well.

Role of Researcher

My role was that of an observer-participant. Person-to-person, in-depth interviews with participants occurred by teleconference. I as the interviewer did not have any close relationship with participants or the religious community leaders. Invitations went to potential volunteer parents from Catholic, evangelical Protestant churches, Islamic, and Unification religious communities outside my own community. Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct guided compliance with ethics and professional scholarly practice in this study as described by the American Psychological Association (2010).

Researcher Biases

I avoided expressing bias related to responses from the interviewees, not mentioning my personal beliefs or making comments regarding religion. The researcher may express self-reflective perspectives with participants (Galdas, 2017). But the researcher should resist the tendency to solve problems and should focus on collecting accurate data and objectively interpreting results for producing valid study outcomes (Galdas, 2017). I also remained aware of the context and cultural issues from the interviewees, using caution and sensitivity with the questions. An interview guide, careful attention to participants' responses, and use of relational principles gained the richest

input from participants. I wrote notes identifying the interviewee with only the personal number assigned to maintain anonymity and privacy.

Methodology

Participant Selection

The population consisted of volunteer members from the following religious communities: Catholic, Islamic, Protestant, and Unificationist, in the deep south of the United States. I chose religious communities within proximity of the location of the researcher. The sampling strategy was convenience with four conservative religious communities that were disparate one from the other, which provided a significant participant pool, as well as being part of the social environment of proximal southern states: Louisiana, Texas, Mississippi, and Alabama. It was important to include religious parents from different religions and cultures to better discover the parent–child communication concerning sexual education in the multicultural social environment (Christopher & Xu, 2014).

The eligible participants were religious adult parents who had children aged 10 and upwards. Adult participants with children ages 12 to 19 are the most appropriate for a qualitative research study on the quality of parent–child engagement in conversation (Quiros et al., 2016). The recruitment included religious parents who were active members in religious communities with children 10n years and older as best having the ability to answer question concerning recent experiences of the communication with their children on the topic of sex and sexuality. The religious communities that received

invitations for parents to participate in the research included a range of belief systems and had leadership willing to disseminate the invitation to their members.

Saturation and Sample Size

Following the examples from other research studies (e.g., Dent & Maloney, 2016), I planned to select 20 participants, five participants from each of the four communities, in order to gain a balanced set of input across four diverse communities that had leaders willing to disseminate an invitation to the study amongst members of their group. Qualitative phenomenological research studies consist of a small number of participants for interview, which help the researcher to understand phenomenon issues developed in social environments through thick and rich data (Dworkin, 2012). The small number of participants answer questions expressing concerns and detailing experiences that will contribute to the description of the phenomenon (Dworkin, 2012).

Saturation is the principle of estimating sample size that is enough to fully develop information from data accrued for analysis providing insights related to the research question (Alase, 2016). Transferability is also important for the value of the results (Dawidowicz, 2016, p. 207). The anticipation of enough data with 20 participants to develop analytic coding was sufficient within the research tradition. Should insufficient depth and overlap of information from any one of the four groups have been seen in the process of data collection, further invitations for participation would have been issued and interviews conducted until saturation was reached.

Instrumentation

To conduct the interviews with participants, I used the following purpose-constructed instruments: the interview questions (Appendix C), observation sheet, and video recording. The interview guide comprised four closed questions and nine open-ended questions regarding parents' experiences of talking with their children about sexuality. The guide was used for similarity of cueing participants to describe their experiences.

Interview Protocol

I developed an interview guide for use with religious parent participants. Each interview was with one participant and videotaped. During the interview, I took notes for better organizing and understanding the thoughts related to the participants' emotional expressions. I asked the interviewee to repeat responses for clearer explanation as needed. I did not insist when questions created emotional discomfort for the interviewee. Good initial dialogue between interviewer and participant is important for developing the interview as a conversation with direction to achieve the purpose of the interview (Alase, 2016). I prepared for any response and had the appropriate next question or comments fit for an efficient data analysis. The response from the participant could have varied, but I was prepared with the next question to help the parent to open up and point out what happened in the parent-child relationship during sexual educational conversation.

Observation Sheet

The researcher wrote notes from the participants' responses using the interview observation sheet. The interviewer asked the interviewee to repeat responses to continue

the thoughts for clearer explanation. The interviewer would not have insisted should a question have created emotional discomfort to the interviewee; however, no emotional, or other distress reactions were observed during the interviews. The observation sheet is intended to allow notation of emotional, or other reactions observed in relation to the portion of the interview to which they may pertain. Observations can be useful in gaining further data relevant to parent feelings and reactions in relation to the topic about which language may be sparse or limited (Tabatabaei, 2015).

Video Recording

The researcher recorded each interview to confirm all the notes from the observation sheets. The Zoom meeting platform met the required procedures to deal with the coronavirus pandemic, and all the interviews was through the Zoom meeting. The researcher used the recording to transcribe answers from participants for accurate analysis of spoken data collected.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

The researcher identified each of the individual potential participants with a number and faith community designation, such as C1- (i.e., Catholic participant 1). After the time ended for the participants to volunteer, the researcher contacted each of the candidates to confirm participation and set the interview type, time, and date. Though a waiting list during the initial phase of accepting applications was planned, this proved unnecessary. The members of each community to respond and meet the criteria participated.

Participation

The interviews occurred over the course of one month. Each participant had one interview. Interviews were around 15 to 30 minutes. The interviews started four months after the initial invitation letter went out to more than 60 religious' leaders. Ten candidates responded to the research invitation. The day and time were flexible for each participant to choose an interview slot. Informed consent process included interviewees agreeing to interviews recorded for accurate analysis by the researcher.

Data Collection

The procedures for selection of participants were conducted with approval number 12-24-20-0318634 from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) from Walden University. After sending a letter to religious community faith leaders (Appendix A), the researcher spoke with leaders to explain the purpose of the study and discuss the agreement. Leaders posted the invitation letter (Appendix B) to their website communication with members. Potential participants contacted the researcher via phone or email to express willingness to participate and availability during the open invitation timeframe. The researcher explained to potential participants the interview process via Zoom meeting, assessed potential participants' eligibility, discussed informed consent, and set up an interview date and time. The researcher sent the informed consent to the participants by email, to which they replied "I consent" prior to the interview date time.

After receiving the informed consent, the researcher conducted single interviews with participants. The researcher informed the interviewee of the intent to record the session by video, the use of an interview guide in the questions asked (Appendix C), and

the researcher's use of the observation sheet. The interviewer opened conversation with the interviewee and explained the purpose of the study, and the value of the responses and participation of the parents to contribute to the research question, "How do you engage and communicate with your children on the topic of sexual education?"

The researcher collected the data by asking and recording answers to the interview questions and making observation notes. The recording of the interview helped maintain accuracy of data gathered. Additional to the demographic information collected, all the data from interviews, observation notes, and videos related to the research question, "How do religious parents engage and communicate with children concerning sexual education and sexuality?"

The researcher assigned a number (1-10, C/P/M/U) to each participant, which was then use on all research records to protect privacy. Member checking for accuracy of data was offered through emailing each participant a transcript of their recording, inviting any corrections or clarifications they deemed important. No participant chose to engage member checking. Participants and stakeholders were offered a summary of the study results.

Data Analysis Plan

Explicitation of data is the chosen process for examining data accurately. Groenewald (2004) developed a procedure for Explicitation based on Hycner's work (1999). Groenewald (2004) agreed with Hycner's (1999) direction that Explicitation of data, or the process of making data explicit instead of using analysis broken into parts

which can more easily allow for bias, is a better choice for validity and liability. The researcher chose to follow Hycner's five steps of examining data, as explained below:

- 1) Listed to the recording of each interview until the words become clear and understandable. The researcher opened each file and had access to all information relevant to each participant in conjunction with listening to each interviews.
- 2) Delineated responses from each question, carefully concentrating on the statements that gave insights connected to the research question.
- 3) Created themes with the interview questions to bring out significant arguments that mattered in helping with the exploration of religious parents' involvement in their children's sex education.
- 4) Summarised each interview to integrate and validate all themes, creating wide context data. The researcher carefully returned to listen to interviews and read transcripts to be sure that essential responses were captured.
- 5) Created a summary outline composed from the themes presented in interviews.

Coding

Alase (2016) explained coding procedures for thematic analysis was to search for repeated words in the interview responses, identify common themes, and then condense the sentences in a transcript. The researcher used a thematic procedure of coding the interview responses, observation notes and video and analysed the data using the following coding.

- 1) Participants were identified by religion and selection, i.e., C1 to C5 for Catholic and so on for other religions after participant calls to make an appointment for an interview. The researcher used the initial letter to identify what religion, to label thematic analysis results, and for interpretation in chapter 4 without using the original order of interview.
- 2) The researcher analyzed the answers to questions to find themes from the interview questions. For example, question number 10 asks, “Can you describe what kind of sex education your children received?” to which answers might indicate themes of religious education, school programs, videos, or other kinds.
- 3) The researcher used personal observation in the case of interviewee behavior, which in this study did not contribute significantly to data analysis as participants uniformly answered all interview questions without visible reaction.

Issues of Trustworthiness

The quality of phenomenological research depends on the interviewee being able to understand and answer questions connecting to the research topic (Dawidowicz, 2016). Dawidowicz (2016) indicated phenomenological research sample size used need not be large and that most researchers selected no more than 20 participants for interviews to gain effective saturation. Analysis of metadata is considered impractical and unnecessary in this tradition. The proposed study utilized ten data sets using an interview guide and process that allowed optimal input from participant volunteers.

Credibility

Qualitative approach is an appropriate method to provide accurate evidence of people's experiences, perceptions, and reaction to phenomenon issues (Dawidowicz, 2016). The researcher planned to recruit 20 parents, who were active members of four religious groups representing a range of different large faith communities; however, pandemic circumstances led the researcher to only selecting ten participants after four months of extending invitations. The selected parents voluntarily participated in individual interviews with questions related to the topic of the study, which was exploring how religious parents engaged and communicated with children concerning sexual education. The participants needed to have children in the age range of ten years and upwards to answer questions related to their present experiences of communication with the children concerning sexual education.

Transferability

Nowe, et al. (2017) suggested using qualitative research methods to collect significant amounts of information described by participants' answers, which can be applicable to other contexts and studies. By using common methods, future researchers can replicate studies using a previous researcher's notes and methodology description. All data collected was thoroughly clarified for the readers to have a clear understanding of the research process and thus have opportunities to replicate the study in other contexts.

Dependability

Dependability occurs when the process of data collection based on the responses from the participants shows experiences and perspectives related to the phenomenon, and the data can thus be considered dependable and replicable (Dawidowicz, 2016; Nowe et al., 2017). The researcher carefully eliminated all possibilities of bias and poor dependability through using Hycner's (1999) process for examining data. The researcher composed a summary outline of the five steps of data examination, which can contribute to further research study related to the topic of religious parents' participation in children's sexual education.

Confirmability

The interpretation of data analysis highlights the accurate information from the participants' response and the researcher's stable confirmation (Nowe et al., 2017). The interview was an appropriate way to collect phenomenological data with open-ended questions to confirm and reach the objective of the interview encapsulating the interviewee's response (Alase, 2016). The researcher guarded against bias or interference with the interviewee's response. An examination of the research using member checking confirmed the accuracy of the data. After completing the interviews, the researcher offered to email each participant the transcript following the participants' preference for the further contact, to confirm the responses in the interview and allow any changes prior to the completion. No participant wished to follow-up this opportunity.

Ethical Procedures

The ethical procedures and documents related to data collection for qualitative phenomenological research complied with IRB requirements and application. The researcher requested permission to invite parishioners by sending a request to community leaders (Appendix A and B). Leaders then received information about the study to publish in community news inviting parishioners to participate. Participants then had an opportunity to contact the researcher to participate in the study. Informed consent processes were carefully followed with each participant.

The approval by university Internal Review Board (IRB) was necessary prior to data collection. The researcher submitted the proposal to the IRB for approval, with the planned research procedure documented. The institution gave permission to begin research with approval number 12-24-20-0318634, which allowed the researcher to continue the project to present a complete dissertation.

The researcher was the interviewer and had no relationship with interviewees. The organizational IRB required approval for this academic research project and designated the researcher address the gap with knowledge, observation, and data collection, following the United States regulations and international guidelines.

Materials presented in the Appendices were created by the researcher for approval by IRB. The materials given to faith community leaders and made available to potential participants prior to study contained necessary information for informed participation. Only the researcher saw signatures from faith community leaders. The researcher provided phone and email information to communities to apply to participate in the study.

The number of planned participants was 20 participants, 5 from each religious group; however, due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, only 10 volunteers responded, each of whom was eligible for participation. The procedure for protecting the data was as follows: 1) The interviewed participants were identified by code to protect privacy; 2) Only the researcher had access to the emails, recordings and transcripts; 3) Data collected was digitally stored on a password protected external hard drive; 4) All hard copies of data were shredded; 5) The hard drive was stored in a safe in the researcher's home; and 6) the research data will be destroyed in five years (2026).

Selection of participants from the researcher's own religious group was from another state to avoid any relationship overlap between interviewer and interviewee. All other groups were from outside the researcher's field of influence. The only location of participant information was on the Informed Consent email. Copies of the secured consents were in a locked safe until digitized and destroyed. Participant names do not appear on any other documents.

Summary

Chapter 3 presented a plan for selection of participants and data collection addressing religious parents' experiences and perceptions related to communication with their children in process of sex education and listening to the children's reactions and understandings. The research tradition chosen was qualitative phenomenology. The main rationale for the study was to help develop better information for understanding parent-child communication within active faith communities concerning sexual education based on the responses from each parents' response. The role of the researcher and ethical

processes used were also described. Chapter 4 will present data and observations collected during the interviews, as well as the analysis.

Chapter 4: Results

The following chapter includes the results of the qualitative phenomenological research as described in Chapter 3. I sent letters to religious faith leaders (Appendix A) with a request to notify members of the request for participants over the course of 16 weeks, with delayed responses due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A total of 10 parents voluntarily participated in interviews and provided insights into religious parents' involvement in their children's sexual education. Chapter 4 presents the procedure and results of data collection and analyses through the following sections: Setting, Demographics, Data Collection, Data Analysis, Evidence of Trustworthiness, Study Results, and Summary.

Setting

On December 28, 2019, I received approval from Walden University IRB to develop the research and initiate my collection data. At the beginning of January, I started sending letters (Appendix A) to religious communities' faith leaders to meet them and discuss my proposal to invite parents who were members of their community to participate. The religious groups were from Catholic, Unification, Protestant, and Islamic faith traditions. Presumably due to COVID-19, replies to the research invitation did not occur. In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic forced the government to lockdown, creating difficulty in communicating with people. With religious faith leaders working for safety and well-being in their congregations, an extension of the research invitation to the family department leaders in these communities was successfully implemented using the same planned approach.

Demographics

The participants for the voluntary interview were active religious parents from Catholic, Unification, Protestant, and Islamic groups in the southern states of Florida, Georgia, Alabama, and Arizona. The parents eligible for participation had children aged upwards of 10 years old and had firsthand experiences of parent–child communication. The number of volunteers were limited, with seven people responding. After 16 weeks, I decided to accept parents who had children who were young adults and still living with them. Some families included children both less and greater than 10 years of age. Cultural backgrounds represented included African, Indian, Central American, and Caucasian Americans. The multicultural group of parents brought varied traditions rooted in their families and their religions, with perspectives of how to respond to their children’s sexual understanding and parent–child communication on this topic. Descriptive information collected was the age and sex of children (Table 1) and the length of participation in faith communities (Table 2).

Table 1

Age and Sex of Participants’ Children

Participant #	# Children	Boys’ Ages	Girl’s Ages
Parent #1	3	21	26, 28
Parent #2	4	5, 17	8, 11
Parent #3	2	21, 23	
Parent #4	2		9, 11
Parent #5	3	10, 16	12
Parent #6	2		9, 11
Parent #7	2	6, 11	
Parent #8	3	10, 16	12
Parent #9	3	19, 22	17
Parent #10	1	25	

Table 2*Length of Membership in Faith Community*

Participant	Faith Community	How long
Participant # 1	Islamic	Lifetime
Participant #2	Islamic	Lifetime
Participant # 3	Catholic	Lifetime
Participant # 4	Protestant	One year
Participant # 5	Unification	16 years
Participant # 6	Protestant	One year
Participant # 7	Unification	23 years
Participant # 8	Unification	16 years
Participant # 9	Unification	6 years
Participant # 10	Unification	35 years

Data Collection

The procedures for selection of research participants followed the plan described in Chapter 3. However, some changes become necessary with the COVID-19 pandemic. I sent a letter (Appendix A) to more than 60 religions leaders from the faith communities, by extension including those leaders from departments of family and education, until I received 10 positive responses from parent volunteers. Despite the lower number of participants than anticipated, saturation of data was reached with the available sample. The interviews started in February and continued as shown in Table 3.

Table 3*Dates and Places of Interviews*

Month	Day	State
February	24	Alabama
February	18	Florida
February	18	Florida
March	5	Alabama
March	11	Louisiana

April	8	Georgia
April	8	Georgia
April	24	Louisiana
May	2	Arizona

I also extended my initially planned demographic area in the South in order to achieve the participant pool of 10 parents. I contacted leaders by phone and email to explain my plan and what I needed from them. Those leaders posted my invitation letter (Appendix B) to active members, 10 of whom in turn voluntarily responded to my invitation. The consent form was discussed with each participant by email and phone call, and the participants emailed back to me their signature-confirmed agreement.

The interview was recorded and conducted by Zoom individually in private meetings. Each participant spent around 15 to 20 minutes to provide brief descriptive information requested and discuss eight open-ended questions regarding their experiences to engage and have a conversation related to sex and sexuality guidance and information with their child or children aged 10 and older. All participants answered all the questions in a quiet, private room using Zoom.

I digitally recorded interviews and wrote additional notes registering observations of the participants' reactions or expressions. Following the interview, the participants had opportunity to ask questions or make comments. Immediately following the interviews, I transferred (uploaded) the audio recording to the Sonix transcription program and completed the editing process. Some participants spoke with a heavy accent, and two interviews were conducted in Spanish and translated to English, as I am fluent in both languages.

At the end of the interview, I asked the participants: Do you have any comments or questions for me? Some participants queried my intention in researching this topic, others explained their appreciation for my work and their desire to help me with such an important issue of education. No one expressed interest in receiving a copy of their interview; however, I will email to each one my final document with gratitude for their significant contribution to my study.

Data Analysis

Each interview was successfully performed with a Zoom meeting as planned to avoid face-to-face contact during COVID-19 pandemic conditions. I uploaded the audio-video recorded and used Sonix audio transcription software. Sonix automatically transcribes and translates in several languages. I had interviews in Spanish and Sonix translated in English automatically.

Explication of Data

Explication, or the process of making explicit the data, was my choice for examining data. The procedure for explication of data was developed by Groenewald (2004), who studied and simplified the original explication analysis process from Hycner (1999). The process guards against introduction of researcher bias in the data analysis. I chose explication of data to help me exclude my bias in my data analysis.

I followed the procedure as I detailed in the Chapter 3, recording each interview, and copying the transcript to have all the information clear from each response to the interview questions. I delineated each question carefully and concentrated on the insights connected to the research question, with multiple readings of all the transcriptions. I

saved all communications with participants and community leaders, and all emails and videos to one hard drive. I created a list of each question with my analysis from each participants' answers. From this analysis, I found codes and themes from predominant points. With this procedure I created a summary from each interview and integrated all the responses to discover themes that created context data centered on the research question.

Study Results

The research question of my study was: How do religious parents engage and communicate with children concerning sexual education and sexuality? This section presents the themes that emerged and the relevant quotes from participants' responses, which are the most essential contribution to finding the answer to the research question. The analysis produced three integrated and validated themes that contribute to the answer to the research question: How do religious parents engage and communicate with children concerning sex and sexual education? The result of my exploration on those emerging themes helped demonstrate the explicit data showing the common experiences of the participants. The themes in general included following ideas: (a) Parents conduct self-preparation and use materials available from the religious community for communication on the topic; (b) parents either engage in the communication personally or present materials in a format children can view, and some parents find starting a conversation difficult, while others do not; and (c) some participants did not have modeling to emulate through education from their own parents but do nevertheless have the conversation with their own children.

Self-Preparation

Preparing themselves seemed to be common and each participant thought about how to broach the subject and what to say before starting the communication with their children. The preparation could be different between each participant. One participant explained how serious it was to prepare herself with words and notes prior to spending with time with the children, especially children at early teenager ages. Participant# 2 said, “Whatever I know, like whatever I do, I get the idea it is very sensitive. I just give to them, you know. Whatever they like to know and ask me, I said yeah.” This clearly shows how different parents began engaging in the process of communication as related to the research question.

Participants generally used materials provided by the faith community. Materials included books, such as Divine Principle, the Bible, and the Quran, videos, and other written material from workshop and education center for parents. Participant #7 said they used “The material from Divine Principle book, provided by my church.” Material provided was age appropriate and often provided directly from church-associated school. Participant #4 said, “There was series of books for the age of the children. The school provided books for parents to teach. It is very conservative Christian tradition for the children.”

Communicating

Through the interview and emerging themes, each participant demonstrated responsibility for the sex education of their children as a religious parent. Some parents expressed more deeply their dedication to be the first person to provide sex education to

their children. Participant # 8 said, “I was committed to provide sexual education to my children with great responsibility.” Conversation occurred depending on the parent’s preparation; however, all participants offered time to their children for sexual education dialogue. Participant #2 showed the positive result of providing time for sex education with opportunity for the children to speak about anything related to sexuality, saying “I am totally free with my kids, whatever they want to ask me, whatever question they ask me. I do not hide anything from my kids.” Participant #1 said,

I really want to them to open, and I am pretty open with them. I was kind of caught off my daughter and she started her cycle very early. Fortunately, my second daughter was usually right there with those conversations.

The explicit data extracted from the interview showed the participants’ experience with the phenomena and described their communication. Most parents complemented their dialogue with readings or watching videos related to sex education accessed from their faith community. Participant # 5 said, “I talk to them a lot and I tell them uh, uh about the tradition. We read to them books of Divine Principle.”

Reading and video materials were part of the sexual education in the four faith communities. The parents provided materials according to the topics as a complementary support for the education after individual or group dialogue. Participant # 3 said,

I feel like if you have some book or some website or some direction by the church or something, you like the little guy that help you to provide. Did you know? I kind of rely on what I learned in the Catholic education.

Participant # 9 said,

Actually, it has not been one to one talking on topic. I am using videos from Divine Principle, then, when it comes to chapter two on the book, I can explain some details to them. The chapter two is about Adam and Eve's fall.

Some parents explained how difficult it was for them to start the conversation with their children. Participant # 3 said,

It is not easy, Helenita. It's not that easy, you know, the kids grow, and you see, you know, sometimes, especially one of them was a teenager, he rejected to listen to me. He was like that, put his hand in his ears saying: no, no, no, I already know.

Some children did not want to discuss the subject, especially in teenage years. Participant # 10 stated,

It was twofold, one is an understanding [of the] that growing period is. Meaning as a teenager, he is still going through a harrowing period. Growing period requires growth and maturity; therefore, it means his physical body in puberty may be ready to have sex. It was no ease [not an easy] engagement of discussion.

Some parents may not have been abstinent of sex before marriage and feeling that this brings difficulty to their conversation with their children. Participant # 9 stated, "I really find difficult to talk to them in things like broken [breaking] the vote [vow] on abstinence. So, I don't know." One participant mentioned the emotional difficulty of open conversation with children regarding the possibility of sexual abuse as part of sexual education. Participant # 5 said,

For me it is very difficult, because I am thinking it steals a little bit of their innocence in having to talk to them, something they need to know like pedophilia of people who steal children stuff like that. I prefer to be the one to talk to them and explain.

Participant Education by Their Parents

All participants came from religious family background. Explication process of data focused on the interview question of background sexual education of participants lead me to understand that most of the participants did not receive sex education from their parents, or only had inadequate conversations without preparation. Lack of communication was part of the parent-child relationship. Participants described this in the following ways. Participant # 6 said, “Not much. My daddy talked with me for 2 minutes when I was 10 years old.” Participant # 4 said, “Yes, a little bit. Only at my time in college [did] we have conversation.” Participant # 8 noted, “No, my parents did not talk to me much, they did not talk to me about [it].” Participant # 2 similarly answered, “No, and that we feel like they are responsible and in India it is considered criminals we are. We are not allowed to talk about it.” Participant # 10 said, “Yes, my mother was big on teaching us about being a temple of God, focus on our religious’ tradition to be pure.” Participant #9 responded, Yes, I grew up with my parents in the village. So yes. That was the traditional education and I voted from them.” Participant # 1 said, “My mother clarified and gave a little synopsis of menstrual period.” Finally, Participants # 3, 5 and 7 answered that they had never had sexual education from their parents.

Summary

The results of my exploration on those emerging themes helped demonstrate the explicit data showing the common experiences of the participants. Religious parents engaged and communicated with their children concerning sexual education and sexuality. Parents either engaged in the communication personally or presented materials in a format children could view. Some parents found starting a conversation difficult, while others did not. Parental influence over children changed over time. Some participants did not have conversations with their own parents, but as adults felt having the conversation with their own children was necessary. Missing sexual education from their parents may have contributed to participants' difficulties engaging and opening conversations with their own children.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

This qualitative phenomenological approach presented the results of the interviews from ten participants. The analysis of data followed the explication of data process, in which the analysis of collected data explicitly avoids bias and provides better choice for validity and liability. Following the steps as detailed in chapter 3, the researcher listened to the recordings of each interview, copied the transcripts of the 10 interviews' responses, delineated each interview to integrate and validate all themes, and found 34 themes. Explicit data showed three predominant, emergent points for themes. The following is the review of the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the data analysis.

Credibility

The qualitative approach is an appropriate method to provide accurate, credible, evidence of people's experiences, perceptions, and reaction to phenomenological issues (Dawidowicz, 2016). All 10 participants voluntarily participated in individual interview with questions related to the topic of the study, which explored how religious parents engage and communicate with children concerning sexual education. The responses contributed to describing religious parents' responsibilities and initiatives taken to educate their children, even when it was not easy for them. Each family was an active member of a faith community which represented traditionally held values. Each participant had children upwards of the age of 10 years, thus, the participants responses brought credibility to the analysis data.

Transferability

Nowe et al. (2017) suggested using qualitative research methods to collect significant amounts of information described by participants' answers, which can be applicable to other contexts and studies. After listening to recording and developing all the procedures of the chosen data analysis, I concluded that the participants' answers to each question contributed with a significant source of information in this qualitative research. These religious parents were active members of Catholic, Unification, Protestant, and Islamic, faith communities and showed the influence of their religious traditions on strategies used to carry out their participation in the sex education of their children. Questions from my interview can be used for another project in another environment.

Dependability

Dependability occurs when basing the process of data collection on the responses from the participants which show experiences and perspectives related to the phenomenon, allowing the data to be considered dependable and replicable (Dawidowicz, 2016; Nowe et al., 2017). After testing the accuracy of several online software programs for translation as several interviews were in Spanish, and transcription, I chose to use Sonix as the program provided the most dependable and accurate translations and transcription. I transferred the audio-video recordings to the Sonix transcription software and completed the editing process. The data from the transfer provided accurate information from the participants' data in a reliable way during data analysis.

Confirmability

The interpretation of data analysis highlights the accurate information from the participants' responses and the researcher's stable confirmability (Nowe et al., 2017). The interview was an appropriate way to collect phenomenological data with open-ended questions to confirm and reach the objective of the research encapsulating the interviewee's response (Alase, 2016). The interview questions brought responses from the participants that confirmed approaches taken within their faith context to provide sex education to their children and recognized the value of parent-child communication and their religious traditions. The participants expressed their preference to confirm their responses, and everyone accepted what they said on each question confirming the accuracy of the data. The participants preferred to receive an email with a completed document copy of the dissertation.

Summary

Chapter 4 included the description of the data collection process, and challenges and change of expectations resulting. All ten interviews were Zoom-recorded meetings. The participants completed consent process and confidential interviews, answering all questions. Most of them explained responses in detail. I analyzed interview data and integrated quotes from significant detailed statements in relation to the interview questions and research question. I found the most direct answer to the research question was that all participants offered time to their children to communicate and answer questions related to sex and sexuality, and recognized they needed to educate their children as a parental responsibility. Seven participants expressed difficulty in communicating, i.e., opening a conversation and talking about sex and sexuality, and used materials from their faith community rather than much conversation. In the Chapter 5, I will present my discussion regarding the study with the sections: Interpretation of Findings, Limitations of the Study, Recommendations, Implications, and Conclusions.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to explore religious parents' involvement in their children's sex education. Participants were religious parents who were active members of faith communities that endorsed traditional conservative religious views discouraging premarital sex. The research question was "How do religious parents engage and communicate with children concerning sexual education and sexuality?" A qualitative phenomenological research approach provided the opportunity to collect data directly from religious parents, who could express experiences and perspectives regarding involvement in their children's sexual education. Religious parents from Catholic, Unification, Protestant, and Islamic religious communities from the southern United States offered the information. Abstinence was the major outlook on sexual education endorsed in these four religions. Chapter 4 showed significant themes synthesized from the open-ended interview questions. The following sections include interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, and conclusions that emerged from the themes and analyses.

Interpretation of Findings

The responses from the participants were analyzed to comprise three main themes. These included self-preparation, communicating, and modeled education by their parents. The subsections that follow detail further information and perspectives regarding the key findings of this study.

Self-Preparation

Each of the participants expressed a process of having devoted thought to how they wanted to contribute to their children's education about sexual growth and development. For eight of the 10 participants, this included procuring and use of materials, mostly provided by their faith communities, with two participants amplifying this with involvement of faith community members. Materials were accessed from those provided in workshops, on community websites, and in religious texts. Connection between family and faith community in the microsystem was demonstrated, as described by Bronfenbrenner's (1986) underpinning theory for this study.

Based on participants' input in the present study, parents perceived the importance of their involvement in the sexual education of their children, which is similar to previous research findings (Walker, 2007). Though they accessed materials from their faith community to assist them in their efforts, half of the participants articulated that this process was utilized to shore up their level of personal skill and preparation for the topic. Accessing a more generally broad content base for information about sex education did not seem to have been engaged by the participants of this study and thus may have contributed to the degree of preparation felt by some parents.

Communicating

Though each participating parent in this study expressed the desire to communicate well with their children about sexual matters, and in particular to convey to them the values held by their faith community on the topic, four of the 10 participants expressed discomfort in the communication process, and one participant expressed frank

ambivalence in the communication process. Some, however, described easily engaging in conversation with children by asking questions and starting the discussion from the children's thoughts and questions offered. As might be expected, the parents who felt less inhibited in their communication process with their children experienced their children as being more open with them on the topic.

In the literature, conversation engaged with children by parents was difficult for most, with one study showing 70% of participants describing sexual education conversations as a difficult task (Morawska et al., 2015). Other reviewed literature pointed to significant concerns about parental efficacy in the education of their children, poor levels of communication between parents and children for this purpose, and the sexual education programs and the types of information accessed by parents seeming to be insufficient (Hach & Roberts-Dobie, 2016; Mackey et al., 2015; Manning, 2017). In comparison of the literature reviewed and perspectives of parents in the present study, comfort and efficacy for communicating sexual education is an enduring difficulty for half or more of the parents attempting to engage in sexual education of their children.

Participant Education by Their Parents

Study participants who did not receive sex education from their parents seemed to have more difficulty engaging and opening conversations about sex education with their children. One participant described seeking support from members of the faith community, and another found instructional materials helpful in preparing for discussion about sexual matters with her children. Yet another participant described choosing an

approach that was opposite to that of her parents. Thus, modeling from other than parents' approaches was accessed by some participants.

Sexual education is a relevant part of the role of parental education in religious groups' traditions, yet many faith community members did not receive instruction from parents (Christopher & Xu, 2014). This was shown also to be the case in the present research and seemed connected to the sense of discomfort and lack of preparation felt for the task by study participants. The lack of modeling and practice in discussion of the topic alongside the felt imperative to convey the faith community's values would result in tension and anxiety of parents facing the task.

Summary

The study showed that participants felt communication on sexual education and sexuality was a responsibility of the parent. Religious parents prepared for conversations with children. The results from the study, along with others previously conducted on the same topic of study, indicated that religious parents do learn to be better prepared to engage in teaching their children about sex and sexuality.

Limitations of the Study

The COVID-19 pandemic limited the ability to communicate with faith leaders across the states in preparation for the study. The research plan to interview 20 parents was not possible; however, with support from leaders of family ministry departments on posting the invitation letter to members in each of the intended faith community groups throughout the intended geographical region, 10 participants accepted the invitation. Even with the limitation of 10 rather than 20 participants, the results were substantive

with all participants contributing to all the interview questions asked, and saturation of information was achieved.

Another limitation was that this study was limited to adult participants, and only participants from four religions—Catholic, Unification, Protestant, and Islamic—were included in the study. In addition, the geographic locations of participants were limited to the southern states of Florida, Georgia, Alabama, and Arizona. The study also showed the limitation of religious traditional sex education in simply advising children to not get involved with sexual experiences before marriage (i.e., abstinence).

Recommendations

A future study in other locations in America and with other religious community members may provide additional information and a cross section to compare different regional and community ideologies. The participants from my research showed the communication on the issue of sexuality was centered on abstinence and religious norms in the included religious communities, and exploration with other groups with other norms is recommended. Another recommendation is to conduct focus groups regarding sex education options for children with researchers exploring the process of cross-germination and support. Two participants, one the father of four children and the other the mother of three children, expressed in their comments at the end of the interview that they would be interested in future research to know how the religious parents from different religions participate in communication with their children, including how to extend the conversation to different issues related to sexuality, and ideas for effective parental education and educational programs.

Future research is also recommended with an exploration of topics on sexual education that parents can use according to the children's age. Exploring children's perspectives more directly is recommended. Asking the children how their parents communicate with them concerning sexual education would provide more depth of understanding of parent-child communication. In addition, research asking parents about their own experience of sex education and communication could add information about traditional faith community communication practices and how they are changing

Implications

The study has positive implications for empowering religious parents providing sex education to their children. All participants expressed their appreciation of the material from their faith community for helping parents understand what to teach their children sexual education. Support for the process of preparation and engagement of communication with children by their parents is indicated at individual, family, and organizational and societal levels.

Individual

Participants in this study indicated that communication of sex education was difficult and that preparation was needed to start the conversation at timely intervals in their children's growth and development. They indicated that self-preparation including research and that materials to present to children are vital to the conversation.

Development of a broad range of educational and family and parenting materials and support within the framework of conservative religious communities is an implied need supported by this study.

Family

Participants in this study were motivated to use religious tradition to maintain the children's faith and grow spiritually in service of child and family well-being. Supporting this motivation through increasing parenting communication and sex education materials, along with making more available faith community support can empower, amplify, and extend religious families' capacity in their education of their children.

Organizational and Societal

Bronfenbrenner (1986) created a multilevel ecological organizational approach for addressing societal concerns which included the microsystem, mesosystem, ecosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. The interaction between family members in four conservative religious faith communities demonstrated the impact the microsystem of community between families and religion to create support for religious parents to unite and gain the motivation for effective sex education of the children.

Bronfenbrenner's theory also highlights parents as first educators, proceeding in the faith community through interaction with others, then extending through the multilevel ecological environment. This perspective could support parent meetings, where they plan how to communicate and learn what other parents from the faith community have been doing to successfully engage in conversation providing education. Parents from religious groups in the geographic area can thus share and communicate in the social environment (Fond-Harmant & Gavrilă-Ardelean, 2016; Moore et al., 2015).

The positive societal implications derived from the study observation is that parents from all the four religious groups saw the facility of religiously oriented

educational materials and faith community support in educating the children. Facilitation of conversation between various faith communities with similar beliefs regarding sex education for their children could be beneficial in gaining greater clarity and influence for developing communication of a conservative religious platform with others. Such strengthening of religious parents' capacity for effective sex education of their children would put them in a stronger position for participating and advocating with schools, health, and other societal agencies their perspective of appropriate sex education for their children.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research study was to explore religious parents' involvement in their children's sexual education. Participating parents indicated that they were open to communicating with their children about sexuality, though the communication process could be difficult. Parents liked to use the material provided by the faith community to motivate and guide the sexual education they gave their children. This information may contribute to the continued development of parent resources within faith communities. Cross-communication between like-minded parent groups within faith communities, or between faith communities with similar values, may provide expanded modeling opportunities and help to some parents to be more confident and inspired to develop dialogue in service of more effective communication with their children.

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Appendix A: Letter to Religious Community Faith Leaders

(Date)

Dear _____,

I am Helenita Thomas, Clinical Psychologist PhD candidate from Walden University. I am working on my doctoral research study and my topic is: Qualitative research study exploring religious parents' involvement in their children's sex education. I would like to interview parents from religious communities and would like to meet you to discuss my proposal and ways in which members of your faith community might be willing to help.

I would be grateful if you communicate with me scheduling day, time for meeting together, and I will explain to you a little more about this intended research. You can send me your response by:

Phone, [REDACTED],

email [REDACTED],

Thank you very much for your consideration!

Very Sincerely,

Helenita Thomas, Doctoral Candidate, PhD

Appendix B: Letter to Invite Parents for Participation

The researcher, Helenita Thomas, Clinical psychologist PhD candidate from Walden University is inviting religious parents from Southern States of America who have children between the ages 10 to young adult with firsthand experiences of parent-child communication to participate in an individual interview with questions related to the topic of religious parents' involvement in their children's sexual education.

The interview will take approximately one hour by zoom. Recorded interviews remain strictly confidential.

Participants will have the opportunity to review the interview transcript for accuracy for the information recorded.

For more information, please contact the researcher:

██

████████████████████

Thank you very much. I appreciate your kindness.

Helenita Thomas, CPM, Doctoral Candidate, PhD

Appendix C: Interview Questions

1. About your children:
 - a. Do you have a son (s)?
 - b. Do you have a daughter (s)?
 - c. What are the ages of your children?
 - d. Son (s)
 - e. Daughter(s)
2. How long have you been in the faith community?
3. Did you receive sexual education from your parents?
 - a. Describe the education you received.
4. How have you engaged with your children to provide sexual education?
5. What resources have you accessed to assist you in providing your children with sexual education?
6. Can you explain to me what type of sexual education is your preference for your children?
7. How easy was it for you to provide the sex education to your children?
 - a. Son (s)
 - b. Daughter (s)
8. What was the reaction of your children during the dialogue with you regarding sex and sexuality?
 - a. Son (s)
 - b. Daughter (s)

9. What do you expect from your children in response to the education that you provide?

In the case of no parent-provided education to the children:

10. Can you describe what source of sexual education your children have received? (For example: religious community workshop, school, website, books or other source of information or educational program)
11. Can you describe the source of sexual educational program your children are receiving /have receive?
12. Do you have any comments or questions for me?

At the end of the interview, the researcher will notify the respondent that an email transcript copy will arrive shortly for the participant's review with a request to add any comments or changes prior to data analysis.