

The Sexual Experience of Latino Young Adults in College and Their Perceptions of Values About Sex Communicated by Their Parents and Friends

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Abstract

This study examines the values in Latino young adults' perceptions of messages about sex during their formative years and their current level of sexual exploration and sexual assertiveness. Latino young adults in college ($N = 218$) rated the prevalence of four types of messages they heard from parents and friends: Sex is only for marriage (procreational), sex is only appropriate in a loving relationship (relational), sex is for pleasure (recreational), and the sexual double standard. Relational sex was most prominent in parental messages; recreational sex was most prominent in friend messages. Women reported more relational sex messages and men reported more recreational sex messages from parents and friends. Fewer procreational sex messages from parents and more recreational sex messages from friends were associated with higher reported levels of sexual exploration and assertiveness. We propose that sexual exploration and assertiveness are behavioral manifestations of individualistic values embedded in sexual discourses among friends and family.

Keywords

communication, cultural context, gender, minorities, parenting, peers, positive youth development, sexual behavior, sexuality, transitions to adulthood

Norms and expectations that inform our sexual decision making are part of larger cultural scripts about human sexuality. These scripts dictate courtship practices, relationships that are normative (e.g., monogamous and heterosexual), and what is considered arousing. According to DeLamater (1989), cultural discourses about sex reflect three prominent value assumptions: procreational discourses assume that sex should take place within a marital relationship for the purposes of procreation; relational discourses emphasize that sex should happen within a loving, committed relationship; and recreational discourses highlight sex as a pleasurable and fun activity. A fourth discourse that pervades each of these is the sexual double standard, which argues that sexual exploration is more acceptable for men than for women. It also includes gender-specific sexual roles (e.g., initiator vs. gatekeeper).

Learning these scripts is part of the sexual socialization process that occurs during childhood, adolescence, and emerging adulthood. Family, friends, and the media are among the various, sometimes contradictory, sources of these scripts. Young people actively interpret and selectively embody ideals embedded in discourses about sex (Morgan, Thorne, & Zurbriggen, 2010) and tend to select friends whose values resonate with their own (Brechtwald & Prinstein, 2011). In addition, sexual learning is not straightforward because

how a message is perceived and remembered is likely influenced by previous beliefs and behaviors (Akers et al., 2010; Beadnell et al., 2007).

The complexity of discourses may be especially salient among ethnic minority adolescents and young adults, such as Latinos, who must manage messages about sexuality rooted in familistic values characteristic of their families' ethnic backgrounds, alongside messages they encounter in the mainstream individualistic culture of the United States. Because existing quantitative research has focused on the frequency with which select sexual topics are discussed (e.g., birth control and fertilization), less is known, outside of qualitative research, about underlying values in these formative communications. Our goal, then, was to *quantitatively* explore the values that Latino young adults at college report having heard

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from parents and friends during their formative years and examine contributions of these perceived discourses to Latino emerging adults' sexual behaviors.

Cultural Values in Sexual Discourses: Familism Versus Individualism

A cultural dimension along which discourses about sex may differ is the degree to which they emphasize family interdependence versus individual independence (Manago, Greenfield, Kim, & Ward, 2014). Familism in traditional Latino cultures is a constellation of values and practices characterized by strong family interconnectedness (Romero & Ruiz, 2007; Steidel & Contreras, 2003). In the United States, individual independence is prioritized (Hofstede, 2001). Whereas sexuality in familistic cultures has traditionally been framed in terms of family honor and procreation (Raffaelli & Iturbide, 2009), individualistic cultures emphasize romantic love, personal choice, individual responsibility, and pleasure (Dion & Dion, 1993; Hatfield & Rapson, 1996). Previous research has demonstrated familistic sexual socialization in Latino families.

Discourses About Sex Among Latino Parents

Traditionally, Latino parents in the United States communicate the importance of waiting to engage in sex until marriage (Raffaelli & Ontai, 2001; Villarruel, 1998). The emphasis on abstinence is consistent with the presumed purpose of sexuality as the continuation of the family line (Raffaelli & Iturbide, 2009). The abstinence ideal is also consistent with studies that have found Latino adolescents and young adults receive little information from parents about how to protect against pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases (Hutchinson, 2002; Romo, Lefkowitz, Sigman, & Au, 2002). Instilling children with tools to manage nonreproductive, nonmarital sexual relations is contradictory to familistic values. Moreover, promoting personal responsibility for sexual health is discordant with paternalistic values in a traditionally familistic framework. Instead, restrictive parenting practices serve the goal of protecting and limiting sexuality to marriage (Raffaelli & Ontai, 2001; Wilson, Dalberth, & Koo, 2010).

However, recent research has shown that Latino parents have become more realistic about expectations for abstinence, particularly because of the postponement of marriage for college during emerging adulthood (Guilamo-Ramos, Jaccard, Dittus, & Collins, 2008). Acculturation is associated with fewer familistic sexual messages communicated to children (Gonzalez-Lopez, 2003) and decreased likelihood that Latino adolescents and young adults maintain their virginity until marriage (Afable-Munsuz & Brindis, 2006; Guilamo-Ramos, Jaccard, Pena, & Goldberg, 2005). Acculturation is also associated with adolescents' decreased adherence to traditional gender roles (Lorenzo-Blanco, Unger, Baezconde-Garbanati, Ritt-Olson, & Soto, 2012), embodied in cultural ideals of *Marianismo* and *Machismo* (Gil & Vazquez, 1996). *Marianismo* includes notions of female premarital virginity,

faithfulness, and maternal caretaking. *Machismo* idealizes male virility, paternal provisioning, and courageousness. Earlier research suggested that abstinence messages and parental control over sexual safety focused more on women than men among Latino families (Raffaelli & Ontai, 2001; Villarruel, 1998); however, these messages may be shifting with acculturation and the incorporation of individualistic values that emphasize gender equality and personal responsibility in sexual relationships (see Manago et al., 2014).

Discourses About Sex Among Latinos' Friends

Few studies have examined messages that Latino adolescents hear from their *friends*, and we therefore know little about whether messages from friends support or undermine parental values. Some qualitative work suggests that friends could be sources of both familistic and individualistic values. One study found that Latina girls hear cautionary messages from their Latina friends about boys pressuring girls for sex (Adams & Williams, 2011). Another showed that inner-city Latina adolescents negotiate mixed messages from their ethnically diverse friends, including encouragement to be both sexually active and to adhere to familistic norms for sexual restraint (O'Sullivan & Meyer-Bahlberg, 2003). Although quantitative studies have shown that Latino adolescents report endorsing familistic values for sexuality (Deardorff, Tschann, & Flores, 2008; Milbrath, Ohlson, & Eyre, 2009), adolescents' friends generally communicate less restrictive messages about sex compared to parents (e.g., Epstein & Ward, 2008). For this reason, we expected that Latino young adults would report hearing more individualistic values about sex from friends than parents.

Sexual Development on North American College Campuses

Values imparted through messages about sex are likely to inform sexual decision making. Latino youth at college are making choices about sex in an individualistic milieu where casual sex flourishes. The "hook-up culture" on college campuses is characterized by acceptance of uncommitted sexual encounters (Bogle, 2008; Grello, Welsh, & Harper, 2006). Deemed immoral from a familistic perspective, sexual exploration with different individuals is valued in individualistic cultural contexts. Exploration furnishes learning opportunities for the individual to develop personal responsibility, personal preferences, self-confidence, and self-expression (Manago et al., 2014). Indeed, a recent review suggests that values consistent with individualism, specifically values for personal pleasure and sex outside of marriage and family, predict whether emerging adults engage in the hook-up culture at college (Claxton & van Dulmen, 2013).

Claxton and van Dulmen also point out the dearth of research on ethnic differences in the sexual experiences of emerging adults in college. Owen, Rhoades, Stanley, and Fincham (2010) found that casual sex relationships are more common among European American college students than among Latino-American college students, which coincides with studies indicating that Latino college students hold more

restrictive beliefs about sex outside marriage (Eisenman & Dantzker, 2006). However, Eisenberg, Ackard, Resnick, and Neumark-Sztainer (2009) did not find substantial differences between Latino and European American college students' reports of noncommittal sexual relationships. Ahrold and Meston (2010) found that Latino college students have sexual attitudes similar to their European American counterparts. Given inconsistent findings, studies on the role that cultural values play in sexual engagement among Latino young adults in college are sorely needed.

Sexual exploration on North American college campuses is also likely to be nuanced in gendered ways. Some studies suggest that men participate in the sexual hook-up culture to a greater extent than women; others suggest that women and men participate at equal rates (see Claxton & van Dulmen, 2013). Evidence also indicates that the sexual double standard persists in college students' attitudes (Crawford & Popp, 2003) such that sexual exploration is unequivocally idealized for men but confounded by social stigmas that condemn sexually "loose" women (Milhausen & Herold, 1999). Nevertheless, sexual standards for women in individualistic contexts may be more liberal compared to those in familistic contexts, the former permitting female sexual expression in the context of love and the latter restricting female sexual activity until marriage.

Cultural Values and Healthy Sexual Development

Cultural values shape conceptions of healthy sexuality and cultural practices promote these ideals in development (Manago et al., 2014). Abstinence is considered healthy in familistic cultures, and thus greater amounts of parental monitoring and dating restrictions predict later sexual initiation and fewer sexual partners among Latino adolescents (Hovell et al., 1994; Velez-Pastrana, Gonzalez-Rodriguez, & Borges-Hernandez, 2005). Latino mothers who talk about values (Romo et al., 2002) and who have a close maternal style (Fasula & Miller, 2006; Trejos-Castillo & Vazsonyi, 2008) instill these values, and adherence to them, in their children.

However, healthy sexuality from an individualistic perspective includes understanding one's desires and protecting oneself from sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancy (Tolman, Striepe, & Harmon, 2003). In this case, healthy sexual development involves *sexual exploration* and *sexual assertiveness*, defined, respectively, as exploration of sexual interests and sexual self-efficacy. In the process of sexual exploration, young people learn about their preferences and desires and gain the confidence to pursue what they want and prevent what they do not. Exploration is thought to be central to identity development and adaptive for college students in individualistic cultures (Arnett, 2010). Because research on youth and sexuality focuses primarily on risk and prevention, studies have not examined how sexual socialization promotes sexual exploration and sexual assertiveness.

Yet, sexual experimentation during college is remarkably normative; between 60% and 80% of North American college students have had a casual sex encounter (Garcia, Reiber, Massey, & Merriwether, 2012). Experimenting with different sex partners is not likely to be healthy unless it supports the development of sexual self-understanding and sexual assertiveness. Sexual assertiveness is linked to advocating for one's sexual needs, avoiding sexual coercion, and insisting on the use of protection (Auslander, Perfect, Succop, & Rosenthal, 2007; Impett, Schooler, & Tolman, 2006). Given that Latino young adults are less likely to report being sexually assertive than their European American counterparts (Rickert, Sanghvi, & Wiemann, 2002) and that increasing numbers of Latinos are attending 4-year colleges (Fry & Lopez, 2012), it is important to understand sexual socialization in this ethnic group.

Current Study

This study examines how perceptions of values in sexual discourses among parents and friends during the formative years contribute to Latino young adults' sexual behaviors. First, we examined whether Latino college students perceive more *procreational sex* messages from parents than from friends, more *recreational sex* messages from friends than from parents, and whether parents or friends would be perceived as more often promoting *relational sex* messages. We also measured whether men perceive hearing less sexually restrictive messages than women and the extent to which Latino college students perceive sexual double standard discourses in parental and friend communications. Because parent education and religiosity have been shown to be important factors in Latino sexual socialization (Afable-Munsuz & Brindis, 2006; Edwards, Fehring, Jarrett, & Haglund, 2008), we examined their associations with reports about parental discourses. Higher levels of parental education and lower levels of religiosity are associated with more individualistic values for sexuality (Manago et al., 2014). Finally, we examined which of the discourses predict sexual exploration in terms of sexual experience and sexual assertiveness. We hypothesized that more recreational sex discourses from parents and friends would predict increased sexual experience and sexual assertiveness.

Method

Participants

Latino participants were selected from a data set of four studies conducted over a 10-year span from 2000 to 2010, which included participants of diverse ethnicities attending a large Midwestern university where Latinos comprise 6–7% of the undergraduates. Year of data collection was not related to any of our outcome measures of interest. Our final sample included 218 Latino American undergraduates (63% female) aged 17–23 ($M = 19.7$). Approximately 90% ($n = 196$) of all participants

reported spending their formative years in the United States. Average years of education for fathers ($M = 16.28$, standard deviation [SD] = 3.16) and mothers ($M = 15.16$, $SD = 2.73$) indicated that most parents graduated from high school and attended college.

Religiosity was measured with 3 items ($\alpha = .86$). Participants rated how religious they currently felt, how frequently they currently attended religious services, and how frequently they currently prayed, each on a 5-point scale anchored at 1 (*not at all*) and 5 (*very/very often*). Responses were averaged to produce an overall religiosity score. On average, participants were moderately religious ($M = 2.90$, $SD = 1.12$). Because there are complex issues concerning the sexual development of sexual minority youth, we focused our analyses on heterosexually identified participants, who comprised 97% of the initial Latino sample.¹ Finally, 13 participants reported cohabitating with their mates and 4 were engaged or already married.

Measures of Sexual Messages and Sexual Behaviors

Parental and friend communication. To measure participants' perceptions of messages about sex, a 29-item adapted version of the Sexual Socialization Discourses Measure was used (Kim & Ward, 2007). Versions of this measure have been used successfully with young adults and adolescents and with European American, Asian American, African American, and Latino American samples (Epstein & Ward, 2008; Trinh, Ward, Day, Thomas, & Levin, 2014). Participants are introduced to the measure with a brief prompt, stating that messages about sex are prevalent in society, come from many different sources, and exist in many forms, direct or implied, true or false. Participants are instructed to reflect upon these messages and report the extent to which each of the 29 messages was communicated by their parents and by their friends during their formative years (ages 5–18). No specific instructions were given with regard to which friends participants should consider. The prompt emphasized that participants may or may not agree with the message, but should indicate only how strongly the notion was communicated to them. Responses to each item were made using a 4-point scale anchored by 0 (*none*) and 3 (*a lot*).

We conducted a maximum likelihood factor analysis using promax rotation to examine the latent constructs underlying the messages about sex. Based on previous theoretical and empirical work (Kim & Ward, 2007; Trinh et al., 2014), we limited the number of factors to four, and a scree plot test confirmed that the last substantial drop in magnitude of Eigenvalues occurred with Factor 4. Items were included in the factor on which it loaded the highest. Four themes emerged as anticipated: gendered sexual roles, recreational sex, relational sex, and procreational sex. Procreational sex (parents: $\alpha = .84$; friends: $\alpha = .79$) consists of 5 items and refers to delaying sex until marriage (e.g., "Sex belongs only in married relationships"). Relational sex (parents: $\alpha = .84$; friends: $\alpha = .78$) consists of 5 items and refers to valuing sex in committed and emotionally intimate relationships (e.g., "Sexual intercourse should be a deep and beautiful expression of love between two people"). In contrast to this factor,

recreational sex (parents: $\alpha = .82$; friends: $\alpha = .82$) consists of 8 items and refers to sexual activities being acceptable and normative outside of relationships (e.g., "Having sex is just something fun to do"). Sexual roles (parents: $\alpha = .91$; friends: $\alpha = .81$) consists of 11 items and refers to traditional sexual roles and expectations proscribed for men and women. Here, men are the sexual initiators and aggressors, whereas women are the gatekeepers and limit setters (e.g., "It is up to women to limit the sexual advances of men and to keep men from 'going too far'"). Mean scores were taken across the items for each subscale, such that a higher score indicates greater exposure to that discourse.

Sexual experience. Participants were asked to respond to 1 item asking, "How would you describe your current level of experience with dating and sexual relationships?" Participants circled one number from 0 to 10 where 0 = *just starting out*; 3 = *some dating but still a virgin*; 5 = *1 sexual relationship; no longer a virgin*; 7 = *two sexual relationships; no longer a virgin*; and 9 = *several sexual relationships*. Higher scores on this index ($M = 4.24$, $SD = 2.27$, Range = 0–10), denote greater self-reported sexual experience. Participants were also asked to report the number of partners with whom they have had vaginal intercourse ($M = 2.09$, $SD = 2.97$, Range = 0–19), and the number of times they have had vaginal intercourse with somebody they just met (a casual sex encounter; $M = .27$, $SD = .53$, Range = 0–3).

Sexual assertiveness. Sexual assertiveness was assessed using the Hurlbert Index of Sexual Assertiveness (HISA; Hurlbert, 1991). This measure was designed to assess the levels of assertiveness experienced in the sexual context with a typical partner (whether short or long term). Participants were asked to indicate the level of agreement with each of 25 statements using a 6-point Likert-type scale, anchored by *strongly disagree* and *strongly agree* and including an option, *not applicable*. Example items included "I speak up for my sexual feelings" and "I feel comfortable initiating sex with my partner." Negatively worded statements were reverse-coded, and scores across statements were averaged to create a sexual assertiveness index; higher scores indicated higher levels of sexual assertiveness with a typical partner ($\alpha = .85$). Because the items require the respondent to have had some sexual experience with which to reference, participants who did not have sexual experience responded "N/A" to the majority of the items. Participants responding N/A to the majority of items (more than 10) were dropped from the final analysis for sexual assertiveness, leaving 136 participants ($M = 2.53$, $SD = .71$).

Results

Parental and Friend Discourses

Mean values of participants' reports on each of the four discourses associated with parents versus friends are reported in Table 1. We conducted paired sample *t*-tests to compare mean differences between participants' reports about their

Table 1. Perceptions of Parental and Friend Messages About Sex: Gender Differences.

	Parents		<i>t</i> (<i>d</i>)	Friends		<i>t</i> (<i>d</i>)	Parents vs. Friends
	Women	Men		Women	Men		<i>t</i> (<i>d</i>)
Procreational sex	1.51 (.96) <i>n</i> = 137	1.38 (.90) <i>n</i> = 80	1.00	.68 (.60) <i>n</i> = 137	.66 (.66) <i>n</i> = 80	.20	12.33*** (.84)
Relational sex	2.14 (.86) <i>n</i> = 136	1.90 (.86) <i>n</i> = 80	2.00* (.28)	1.74 (.66) <i>n</i> = 135	1.35 (.70) <i>n</i> = 80	4.05*** (.57)	7.61*** (.52)
Recreational sex	.47 (.48) <i>n</i> = 137	.72 (.65) <i>n</i> = 80	-3.19** (.44)	1.74 (.69) <i>n</i> = 136	2.12 (.63) <i>n</i> = 80	-4.04*** (.58)	-26.05*** (1.77)
Sexual roles	1.17 (.85) <i>n</i> = 137	.72 (.63) <i>n</i> = 80	4.16** (.60)	1.68 (.58) <i>n</i> = 136	1.66 (.61) <i>n</i> = 80	.22	-13.25*** (.90)

Note. **p* < .05, ***p* < .01, ****p* < .001.

Table 2. Zero-Order Correlations Between Discourses, Sexual Exploration, and Sexual Assertiveness.

	Sexual Exploration			Assertive
	Level of Dating and Sexual Experiences	# of Sex Partners	# One-Night-Stands	Sexual Assertiveness
Parent procreational	-.23**	-.16*	-.18**	-.01
Parent relational	-.13	-.12	-.10	.05
Parent recreational	.16*	.18*	.23**	-.07
Parent sexual roles	-.04	-.01	-.05	-.04
Friend procreational	-.24**	-.14*	-.13	-.27**
Friend relational	-.13	-.14*	-.16*	-.05
Friend recreational	.36***	.28***	.30***	.36***
Friend sexual roles	.06	.11	.04	.09

Note. Sample sizes range from 135 to 213.

p* < .05, *p* < .01, ****p* < .001.

parents and friends on each of the four discourses and a series of *t*-tests comparing women's and men's reports of parent and friend discourses. Confirming hypotheses, Latino young adults reported that sex messages emphasizing procreational sex were more common from their parents than from their friends, and recreational sex messages were more common in friend discourses than in parental discourses. The relational sex discourse was significantly more prominent in participants' reports about parental messages than in their reports about friend messages. The sexual role message was reported to be more prominent in friend than in parental communications. Results reported in Table 1 also showed that Latina women reported hearing more relational sex messages than did men from both parents and friends, whereas Latino men reported hearing more recreational sex messages than women from both parents and friends. In addition, women reported higher levels of sexual role messages from parents than did men; yet, there were no gender differences in sexual role messages from friends. There were also no gender differences in reports of procreational sex messages from either source. As expected, higher levels of mother ($r = .16, p < .05$) and father education ($r = .14, p < .05$) were correlated with perceiving more recreational sex messages. Religiosity was positively correlated with perceptions

of both procreational sex ($r = .34, p < .001$) and relational sex discourses ($r = .25, p < .001$).

Contributions of Parental and Friend Discourses to Sexual Exploration and Assertiveness

Zero-order correlations between all eight discourses, the three indices of sexual exploration, and sexual assertiveness are in Table 2. Parental procreational sex messages and parental recreational sex messages were significantly correlated with all three indicators of sexual exploration; procreational sex messages were associated with less sexual exploration, whereas recreational sex messages were associated with more sexual exploration. Among the friend discourses, procreational sex messages were correlated with lower levels of dating and sexual experience and fewer sex partners, whereas recreational sex messages were positively correlated with all three indices of exploration. Relational sex messages from friends were also associated with fewer numbers of sex partners and fewer casual sex encounters. Only friend messages were correlated with sexual assertiveness; procreational sex messages were associated with less, and recreational messages were associated with more sexual assertiveness.

We then conducted hierarchical regressions to identify the discourses most predictive of sexual exploration and assertiveness.

Table 3. Discourses Predicting Two Forms of Sexual Exploration and Sexual Assertiveness.

	Sexual Exploration				Assertive	
	Level of Dating Experience		Number of One-Night Stands		Sexual Assertiveness	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Step 1						
Age	.20*	.17*	.08	.02	.30**	.25**
Religiosity	-.15*	-.01	-.12	.00	-.04	.03
Male	.14 [†]	.04	.16*	.00	.16 [†]	.14
Step 2						
Parent procreational		-.19*		-.15*		.10
Parent recreational		.01		.13		.02
Friend procreational		-.09		.05		-.30**
Friend relational		.02		-.16 [†]		.07
Friend recreational		.33**		.27**		.18
Adj. R ²	.07	.19	.03	.12	.10	.18
Δ Adj. R ²		.12		.09		.08
Equation F	F(3, 176) = 5.40**	F(8, 171) = 6.24**	F(3, 203) = 3.42*	F(8, 198) = 4.59**	F(3, 127) = 5.67**	F(5, 122) = 4.54**

Note. **p* < .05, ***p* < .01, [†]*p* = .06.

We first conducted zero-order correlations between the five sexuality variables and background factors: age, religiosity, maternal education, paternal education, formative years, and family structure. Findings indicated that age and religiosity were the only background factors that consistently correlated with sexual behavior. Being older was correlated with having more sexual experience (*r* = .21, *p* < .01), higher numbers of sex partners (*r* = .22, *p* < .01), and more sexual assertiveness (*r* = .28, *p* < .01). Religiosity was associated with a lower level of dating/sexual experience (*r* = -.19, *p* < .05), fewer sexual partners (*r* = -.16, *p* < .05), and fewer casual sex encounters (*r* = -.14, *p* < .05). Age and religiosity served as controls in the regression analyses.

We entered gender, age, and religiosity in the first step of the regression analyses. In the second step, we entered the five parent and friend discourses that showed significant zero-order correlations. Results for the outcome variables level of dating experience, number of one-night stands, and sexual assertiveness are reported in Table 3. For each of these equations, adding the discourses contributed significantly and explained an additional .08 to .12 of the variance.

Across both indices of sexual exploration, the most consistently predictive discourses were friend recreational and parent procreational sex messages. The more recreational sex messages participants reported hearing from their friends, the more likely they were to have higher levels of dating experience and more one-night stands. Parental procreational sex messages predicted less dating experience and fewer one-night stands. Relational sex messages from friends moderately predicted fewer one-night stands; the more participants reported relational sex messages from friends, the less likely they were engaging in the most extremely individualistic form of sexual exploration. The regression equation for sexual assertiveness shows that friend

procreational sex messages was the only predictive discourse; the more procreational sex messages participants reported hearing from their friends, the less they reported being sexually assertive.

Because the outcome variable number of sex partners was skewed to the left (most participants had few sex partners), we conducted a Poisson regression using a log link function. We entered gender, age, religiosity, and the five parent and friend discourses as predictor variables, and number of sex partners as the outcome variable. The likelihood ratio omnibus test indicated that the model was overall significant, $\chi^2 = 126.45$, *p* < .001. Parameter estimates for the effect of each factor in the model showed that age ($\beta = .147$, *p* = .001), parent procreational sex messages ($\beta = -.171$, *p* = .006), parent recreational sex messages ($\beta = .209$, *p* = .017), friend relational sex messages ($\beta = -.255$, *p* = .003), and friend recreational sex messages ($\beta = .575$, *p* = .0001) were significant predictors of number of sex partners.

Discussion

This survey study found that Latino young adults in college perceived disparate messages about sex from their parents and friends during their formative years. They reported hearing more endorsements of recreational sex from their friends and more procreational sex from their parents. However, relational sex messages were the most prominent in perceptions of parental communications. This finding supports other research (e.g., Gonzalez-Lopez, 2003), suggesting that acculturated Latino parents embrace more individualistic values in supporting sex for love outside of marriage. The most prominent message from friends, recreational messages that promote sex for pleasure outside of love and commitment,

suggest that Latino college students' friends are a source of high levels of individualistic values for sex.

Gender is an important caveat when considering this pattern of parental and friend messages. Latino young men reported hearing more recreational messages about sex from both parents and friends, whereas Latina young women reported hearing more relational sex messages from both parents and friends. Regardless of the source of the message, Latina young women are more likely to perceive cultural values restricting sex to the context of love, whereas Latino young men are more likely to perceive cultural values stipulating that sex is for pleasure and fun.

For both genders, perceptions of more recreational sex messages from friends and fewer procreational sex messages from parents predicted higher levels of sexual experience, more one-night stands, and more sexual partners. These findings could indicate that hearing individualistic sexual values from friends and less familistic sexual values from parents during the formative years influenced participants' sexual decision making in a more individualistic direction. Alternatively, participants could have been motivated to report messages from their formative years that were concordant with their current sexual behaviors. Additionally, it may be that participants selected friends during their formative years whose values matched their own beliefs and behaviors at that time. Interestingly, friend messages were more consistently and robustly predictive of sexual behaviors than parental messages, and sexual assertiveness was only related to friend messages, not parental messages. Sexual assertiveness was associated with perceptions of more friend endorsement of recreational sex and less friend endorsement of procreational sex, the latter being most predictive of sexual assertiveness in regression analyses. This pattern suggests that perceptions of friend norms and values may be quite important in sexual development during young adulthood. Future research should examine more closely the role of friends in sexual decision making, especially among emerging adults who are moving away from home and are embedded in peer contexts.

Contributions to the Literature

Other studies have shown that peer communications about sex among European American young adults in college are important predictors of sexual behaviors (e.g., Lefkowitz & Espinoza-Hernandez, 2007). In fact, one study showed that over the course of the first year in college, friends increased as a source of sexual values while parents decreased, and accordingly, endorsements of recreational sex increased (Morgan & Zurbriggen, 2012). Our study showed that Latino young adults in college are more likely to engage in sexual exploration when they perceive that their friends had endorsed this kind of behavior earlier in their development. Whereas the previous studies provide evidence of the important role current friends play in sexual engagement, our findings provide some initial evidence that friends play an important role in sexual development in terms

of how young adults interpret and make meaning of friends' beliefs and values during their formative years.

Conceptualizing procreational, relational, and recreational sex discourses within cultural value orientations of familism and individualism is another important contribution of this study. Familism and individualism cohere a number of specific values for sex that others have shown to be prominent among Latino families (e.g., Flores, Eyre, Millstein, 1998; Raffaelli & Green, 2003). In this study, we showed that more exposure to discourses that prioritize the goals of the individual (pursuit of sex for pleasure and fun) is associated with sexual behaviors that prioritize the goals of the individual (personal exploration and assertiveness). In this way, our study provides evidence that young adults' sexual behaviors match the cultural value system they perceive to be endorsed by friends and family. Further, the cultural values imparted by Latino parents with higher levels of education have shifted toward individualistic values, emphasizing sex outside of marriage, as long as it is in the context of a committed, loving relationship.

Conclusions and Limitations

Although this study breaks new ground in its quantitative assessment of the nature and impact of values in sexual socialization discourses among Latino young adults, we also acknowledge its limitations. This study's findings from a sample of Latinos in a large Midwestern university may not generalize to other Latino young adults who do not attend college or whose parents have less formal education. Most participants had mothers and fathers who had attended some college, and almost half had fathers with advanced degrees. Parental education may be an indicator of the acculturation of the family, and indeed, both maternal and paternal education levels were associated with participant reports of more individualistic parental messages that endorse sex as recreational. However, we did not have more nuanced information such as the language spoken at home or whether parents emphasize their cultural heritage.

Conclusions drawn from this study are also limited by a lack of information concerning the ethnic makeup of the participants' friend networks, that is, the extent to which participants' friends were Latinos, European Americans, or from other cultural backgrounds. The ethnic makeup of friend networks is likely to have an impact on the cultural values embedded in messages about sex. In addition, Latino young adults attending commuter schools, rather than residential campuses, may have different kinds of friend networks that might be more connected to their family life at home, where parents may be more of an influence. Finally, we have considered subgroups as all "Latino," but there may be important cultural differences between, for example, Mexican American and Puerto Rican young adults. Notwithstanding these limitations, this study is an important starting point for conceptualizing the influence of culture in healthy sexual development, shifting the focus from prevention to the ways in which the

cultural values perceived during development predict sexual expression during young adulthood.

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Note

- Analyses run with the six homosexually identified participants did not change the results.

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