



# Latina/o Adolescents’ Ideas about Romantic Relationships and Sex

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## Abstract

Using sexual-script theory, we explored Latina/o adolescents’ perspectives on romantic relationships and sexuality ( $N=44$ ). Adolescents said that parents were stricter with daughters compared to sons, parents’ thoughts about teen pregnancy and cultural values/background shaped these different expectations and rules, and parents gave greater autonomy to their sons vs. daughters. Next, adolescents noted that parents’ communication about sex, sexual attitudes, and experiences were influential on adolescents’ ideas about dating and sex. Lastly, adolescents described older siblings being role models and playing a protective role, but that these roles depended on the quality of the sibling relationship.

## Findings

- Adolescents said that parents were stricter with daughters compared to sons, parents’ thoughts about teen pregnancy and cultural values shaped these different expectations and rules, parents gave relatively greater autonomy to their sons.
- The importance of parents communicating about sex, parents’ goal of preventing teen pregnancy, parents’ attitudes toward sex, and parents’ own experiences were described as influential.
- Lastly, adolescents described older siblings as being role models and playing a protective role, yet this depended on how close siblings were to one another.

## Introduction

- Parents and siblings are influential on adolescents’ romantic relationships and sexuality development (Doughty et al., 2015; Raffaelli, 2005; Whiteman et al., 2014) this may be particularly true for adolescents in Latino families because of the importance placed on family relationships (Cauce & Domenech-Rodríguez, 2002).
- It is important to study Latino adolescents’ perceptions of romantic relationships and sexuality because: a) traditional gender roles in Latino families instill *Marianismo* (the idealization of female chastity and service to family) and *Machismo* (the idealization of male virility and courageousness; Gil & Vazquez, 1996) that may have implications for adolescents’ romantic relationship roles; and b) Latinos have the teen highest birth rates (i.e., from ages 15-19) compared to White and Black adolescents (Martin et al., 2017).
- Guided by sexual-script theory (Simon & Gagnon, 2003), the aim of the study was to understand Latina/o adolescents’ perspectives on romantic relationships and sexuality.

## Method

- Participants were 44 Latina/o adolescents (59% female), aged 14-18, recruited from Midwestern cities using community organizations and word-of-mouth.
  - 86% identified as Mexican or Mexican-American (11% South American and 2% Central American).
- Five same-sex focus groups were conducted, recorded, and transcribed.
  - The ethnicity of the coders was diverse and included women who were European American, Mexican American, and African American.
  - The coders also included undergraduate research assistants.
- Inductive thematic analysis was conducted using steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006).
- A codebook was created that defined and named the themes and codes relating to each theme. Internal reliability was established by discussing the coding among members of the research team to obtain consistency (Gibson & Brown, 2009).

## Excerpts from Focus Groups

### Parents’ Expectations

Girls vs. Boys	M: Like sometimes like I have sisters and like sometimes when I want to go out it’s more easier for me to leave the house and not have to provide that much information like who I’m going with or where it’s at but like for my sisters I guess it’s different because I mean I guess I don’t want I mean cause they can get pregnant, I can’t.
Culture	F: Like not saying that all the fathers are the same, like the Mexican fathers, but basically they think that men are above the woman. And they have more privileges towards them.
Teen pregnancy	M: Mine would yell at me and then, my dad tells me all the time if I get a girl pregnant that I would have to pay child support and he wouldn’t help me so that would be, I would be on my own he said he didn’t care how much it cost that I would support my child so.
Rules	F: Mine don’t really care about that, they just care about respect. Like as long as he respects you, and he respects the relationship, then you guys are good.

### Parents’ influence

Parents’ experiences	F: She’s always asking me, but I just don’t, I don’t know, but she’s always on that, but she’s the one that tells me wait til you’re in a civil relationship or married or something cause you know, she got pregnant young, so she’s like go party, go explore, go do this.
Teen pregnancy	M: Well kind of like, you know, they can influence you mainly because they are not from this country that they were from a different country and when they came here they saw the difference the differences between the two cultures and that’s why their, they like tell you hey don’t do this don’t do that and then in another sense like how my parents they start, they start having a family at a early age so they would advise you this is what happened between us and I don’t want this to happen to you to have these much like these big responsibilities at an early age.
Parents’ attitudes	M: I don’t think a parent just wants you to go out there and have sex like that but if they know you not not gonna get any you might as well use protection.
Communication	F: My mom, she’s always like, every time, when she talked to me about my boyfriend or something, she’s always like tell me when you guys are having sex so I can put you on birth control or something, but I honestly don’t feel comfortable like oh yeah mom I’m having sex and just like telling her.
Stricter	M: If you are gonna go out anywhere with that girl they are gonna have to know where you are gonna be, how long, what time.

### Older Siblings

Roles	F: Like my brother’s really protective over me, and when I first started bringing my boyfriend over, my brother would always like, he would always stare at him, like a death look like look at him and my boyfriend didn’t feel comfortable so he was like can I just leave? So until then my brother like started trying to talk to him, ask him questions, and he set him aside and asked him questions and talked to him and like after that like my brother even tried to hang out with him sometimes, but since my brother’s 22, my boyfriend is 17, they’re like, they have different ways of hanging out.
Relationship quality	F: I don’t know what my sister does. I don’t ask her stuff. M: I guess me and my brother don’t get along and that’s why.

## Discussion

- Our study sheds light on how siblings’ perceptions of parental differential treatment in the context of sex and romantic relationships may shape their own perceived gender norms, sexual attitudes, and romantic relationships, and it provides new insights in the protective role Latina/o older siblings play in adolescents’ dating experiences.
- Future research should examine how older siblings’ protective role may serve as a protective or risk factor in younger siblings’ sexual socialization.
- Finally, these findings suggest that family-focused programs that promote healthy romantic relationships and sexuality development should consider the role of family factors that shape parents’ and siblings’ communication about dating and sexuality.