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Jamie White
Fathers' Perceptions of Sexual
Communication with Adolescent
Daughters: An Exploratory Study

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explored sexual communication within the father-daughter dyad. Sexual communication between fathers and early adolescent-aged daughters was examined to recognize strategies fathers use when discussing sexuality and to identify barriers that may inhibit sexual communication. The investigation is based on the perspectives of seven males (n=7) who identify as the father of one or more daughters between the ages of 11 and 15 years old. Participation included completing a short demographic survey and sitting for a taped interview regarding how the topic of sexuality was discussed with their early adolescent-aged daughter. It was hypothesized that fathers would identify feelings of discomfort with sexual communication with their daughters and assign greater responsibility to mothers to discuss sexuality with daughters. The majority of fathers (n=5) agreed that sexual communication is beneficial to daughters and all fathers indicated putting forth efforts to develop an open dialogue with daughters. Four barriers to father-daughter sexual communication were identified: feelings of discomfort, feeling unsure about how to approach the topic, feeling it was more of Mom's responsibility, and feeling that the daughter was not ready for such conversations.

**FATHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF SEXUAL COMMUNICATION WITH ADOLESCENT
DAUGHTERS: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY**

A project based upon an independent investigation, submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Social Work.

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2012

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

This thesis utilizes a qualitative approach to further understand sexual communication patterns between fathers and early adolescent-aged daughters. There is a plethora of information regarding absent fathers and incest among the father-daughter dyads, but little findings relating to an involved father's communication style concerning his daughters' sexual development (Nielson, 2001; Hutchinson & Cederbaum, 2011; Kieffer, 2008; Perkins, 2001; Scheffler & Naus, 1999; Lamb, 2000). Scheffler and Naus note, "Fathers have the more profound impact on a woman's sexual and romantic choices and relationships. ... And yet, of all family ties, the father-daughter relationships the least understood and least studied" (1999, p.44).

This lack in the examination of father-daughter relationships illustrates a need for research concerning how a father's relationship with his daughter affects a woman's psychosexual development. Due to the lack of studies concerning father involvement, it seemed beneficial to give fathers the opportunity to have a voice in the research and express their opinions and efforts in their relationship with their daughter. A qualitative approach, in comparison to a quantitative method, proved less limiting and more able to gather detailed information from fathers for this study's purpose.

A qualitative method allowed the researcher to gain an in-depth examination of the father-daughter dyad through use of open-ended questions when interviewing fathers. This method allowed participants freedom to discuss aspects of their relationship that may not have

been directly inquired about in interview questions, thus creating opportunity for further areas of research. A disadvantage of this method is that time to gather and interview participants was not available to include a large subject group. Another disadvantage to utilizing a qualitative method is that the subjectivity of the researcher can bias the study.

The absence of father-daughter research explains why little is known about barriers to sexual communication between a father and adolescent-aged daughter. Furthermore, little is known about how these conversations are occurring when they do happen within the relationship. The literature demonstrates that a supportive father-daughter relationship can act as a protective factor against risky sexual behaviors for the daughter (Bowling, Werner-Wilson, 2000; Bronte-Tinkew & Moore, 2004; Hutchinson, 2002; Pick & Palos, 1995). Research also indicates that fathers are more likely to discuss sexuality with their sons in comparison to their daughters (Wilson, Dalberth & Koo, 2010; Wyckoff et al. 2008). This study asks: What are the barriers to sexual communication in this dyad? What are the benefits to fathers addressing sexuality with their daughters? What topic areas do fathers struggle with addressing in regards to sexuality? A qualitative method was chosen to arrive at a theory to explain why fathers may experience difficulties when communicating with their daughters about sexuality and what interventions would be most helpful to initiate more conversation concerning sexuality.

In this study, *sexual communication* refers to how the topic of sexuality is addressed in the relationship. The term *sexuality* may include a variety of topic areas such as: puberty, dating, sexual orientation, gender identity, sexual practices and sexual health. It was clarified to participants before beginning the interview process that sexuality is a broad and inclusive term and is not being used to solely address sexual intercourse and sex practices. Participants in this study self-identified as a father of at least one daughter who is currently between the ages of 11

and 15. It was explained to participants that the definition of a *father*, for purposes of this study, was not exclusively limited to a man who is the biological parent of a daughter. The father role could also include a man who is the legal guardian of a daughter (ie. step-father) or a man who is currently involved in raising a daughter. To be included in this study, fathers had to identify as an involved parent in the daughter's life; however, it was not required that the father currently reside with the daughter.

It is hoped that the narrative data will identify barriers to sexual communication and help to gain an understanding of the father's perceived role and approaches to communicating with his daughter. Understanding more about this dynamic, and deficits to communication, may allow clinicians to develop the most effective interventions for this this specific dyad. These interventions may be used in therapeutic work with families to develop open communication between a father and daughter. Interventions specifically designed to create dialogue regarding sexuality within this dyad may reduce the daughter's risk of engaging in unsafe sexual behaviors and possible experiencing sexual traumas or consequences to risky sexual behavior. Family policies may also be enriched and more inclusive of all members of the family system when fathers are acknowledged as influential and having an important parenting role with their children.

Research concerning communication between mothers and daughters about safe sex practices and sexuality is more readily available and illustrates that female adolescents are more likely to communicate with their mothers about sexuality than with fathers (Hutchinson & Cederbaum, 2011). However, there is a deficit in research concerning father-daughter communication and specifically communication regarding sexuality (Hutchinson & Cederbaum, 2011; Punyanunt-Carter, 2005).

Researchers speculate that when a father withdraws from his daughter by showing lack of physical affection or disregarding her, she may develop a weak grasp on her sexuality and self-image (Scheffler & Naus, 1999). Fathers may find it difficult to engage with daughters due to the socialization process of genders, and this may in turn influence the amount of information a daughter receives regarding sexuality (Punyanunt-Carter, 2005). Further exploration of the father-daughter dyad and communication concerning sexuality is necessary to understand the influence of a father's role and barriers to father-daughter communication.

A hetero-normative bias was present when exploring the literature concerning father daughter relationships and sexual development. This bias may be found in the literature due to the gender components to a male and female father-daughter relationship. This research also favors Western culture when discussing how gender roles and socialization have influenced fathers and daughters. The research will further explore father-daughter communication to identify barriers to communication and fathers' perceptions of what they feel has been helpful to their daughters when discussing sexuality.

This thesis is composed of five chapters and begins with a review of the literature. The ensuing literature review will discuss the socialization process of genders, adolescent sexual behavior, sexual communication and father involvement. This research is rooted in the Family Systems Theory and Object Relations Theory. Family Systems theory further supports how roles within the family are defined, while Object Relations theory is used to explain how experiences of object relations with a parent influences later sexual experiences with a whole. Bowen's Intergenerational Family System Theory and Object Relations Theory are the fundamental theories in this study and are attended to throughout various chapters. A chapter regarding the methodology of the study follows the literature review to provide information regarding the

research design and sample used. Chapter Four highlights the findings from the interviews and includes themes relating to the father's perceptions of qualities of the daughter and their relationship, communication patterns between the father and daughter and how sexuality is discussed and barriers to sexual communication. The thesis concludes with a discussion chapter addressing key findings, limitations within the study and areas for future research. This chapter has addressed the purpose of the study and begins to explain the research method implemented. The next chapter, the literature review, compiles a plethora of past research studies to provide relevant information that supports this research topic.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

This literature review is organized into several topic areas. First, a father's influence upon a daughter's sexual behavior is reviewed. Then sexual communication with daughters is examined as well as a section concerning the topic area of general communication patterns between fathers and daughters. The influence of a father upon a daughter's self esteem and how socialization has impacted the father-daughter relationship is later addressed. The chapter concludes with a theory section addressing Bowen's Intergenerational Family System Theory and Object Relations Theory. This chapter seeks to explore the current literature available regarding father-daughter communication and sexuality.

Fathers Influence on Daughter's Sexual Behavior

Bowling & Werner-Wilson (2000) cite a study in which a sample of 320 adolescent females illustrated that those with a poor relationship with their fathers were more likely to engage in promiscuous sexual behavior. Similarly, in another study when 160 female college students were studied, results indicated that the females who perceived their fathers as unloving and harsh had a greater frequency and extent of risky heterosexual behavior (Bowling & Werner-Wilson, 2000).

Bowling and Werner-Wilson examined father-daughter relationships in order to understand the paternal qualities associated with a female's sexual behavior. Seventeen undergraduate female students between the ages of 20 and 24 participated. Participants were

randomly divided to create four focus groups for the interview. Focus group interviews were conducted to obtain qualitative data about father-daughter relationships and adolescent female sexuality (Bowling, Werner-Wilson, 2000). Three general themes transpired during the focus group dialogues. Findings suggested that daughters with involved fathers were more likely to engage in responsible sexual behavior. Secondly, responsible sexual behavior was related to fathers who encouraged androgynous behavior in their daughters. Lastly, responsible sexual behavior was also connected with positive father-daughter communication about men, dating, sex, and marriage (Bowling, Werner-Wilson, 2000).

Another factor contributing to a daughter's sexual behavior is the absence of a father in her life. East, Jackson, and O'Brien (2006) explain that female children raised in a home where the father is absent (does not live in the family home) have higher rates of teenage pregnancy and earlier sexual activity when compared to females who lived with their fathers. Bowling and Werner-Wilson (2000) demonstrated that daughters with an absent father were greatly influenced by other forces in their lives, such as peers, school involvement, and substance abuse. Although an adolescent female can manage without a prominent male figure in her life, a supportive father-daughter relationship can act as a buffer from risks such as Sexually Transmitted Diseases, AIDS, and teen pregnancy (Bowling & Werner-Wilson, 2000).

The focus groups created a few strengths for the study. The focus group interviews allowed participants to influence each other by responding to the perspective of other participants. Another strength of the study is that the focus groups created a non-threatening environment which is especially necessary when investigating sensitive topics such as sexuality (Bowling, Werner-Wilson, 2000) However, some participants may withdraw from answering truthfully in fear of being judged by other participants present in the focus group.

A limitation in this study is the small and fairly homogeneous sample of participants, which affects the external validity of the study. Bowling & Werner-Wilson (2000) note that participants were primarily white and from a middle-class background and due to this homogeneous sample emerging themes are not generalizable to other populations.

Research has illustrated that fathers who are present and involved in their daughters' development tend to positively contribute to their daughters' safe sex practices (Bowling & Werner-Wilson, 2000; Bronte-Tinkew & Moore, 2004). Research indicates that sexually active adolescents who use contraceptives report considerably better communication with their parents when compared to sexually active youth who do not use contraceptives (Pick & Palos, 1995). Studies illustrate that adolescent sexual activity and pregnancy, is closely related to the level of satisfaction experienced within interpersonal relations within family (Ostrov et al., 1985; Vance, 1985). According to a study by Bennett (1984), females who grew up with their fathers equally involved in their childcare, reported lower risky sexual activity and more comfort with discussing sexuality with their fathers. Data from the National Longitudinal Study of Youth in 1997 also support Bennett's findings concerning involved fathers. Bronte-Tinkew & Moore (2004) explain, "... we find that a more positive father-child relationship predicts reduced risk of engagement in first risky behaviors" (p. 2). Open sexual communication between parents and adolescents is associated with a reduced risk of engagement in risky sexual behavior and less adolescent sexual activity (Bronte-Tinkew & Moore, 2004; Hutchinson, 2002; Bowling & Werner-Wilson, 2000).

Sexual Communication with Daughters

There is a lack in research concerning father-daughter communication and satisfaction (Punyanunt-Carter, 2005). Findings reveal that although mothers supply daughters with more

information regarding sex, fathers are important sources for general moral and sexual issues. Fathers can provide daughters with a better general understanding of men and men's perspectives in heterosexual relationships (Hutchinson & Cederbaum, 2011; Hall, 2009; Wilson, Dalberth & Koo, 2010). Hall (2009) states, "There are reasons to suspect that fathers can make an important contribution to the eventual romantic relationships of their daughters, and that it is different from the contribution of mothers, and different from fathers' contributions to their sons" (p.2). The majority of research available concerning the relationship between parent-child communication and sexual behaviors focuses on mother-child communication or the parental unit as a whole (Wilson, Dalberth & Koo, 2010). Research focusing on father-child communication is lacking; however, fathers have been found to more readily speak to their sons about sexuality (Wilson, Dalberth & Koo, 2010; Wyckoff et al. 2008)

Hutchinson & Cooney (1998) found in a study of 173 young women participants (ages 19 to 20) that African Americans reported higher levels of sexual communication with parents, although rates of parent-teen sexual communication were overall low. Participants reported 73.8 % of mothers provided them with information concerning human sexuality in general while only 20.9 % of fathers were reported to have provided sexuality information. African American and Caucasian participants reported receiving more information regarding sexual risk topics from their mothers and 87% of participants desired more information specifically from fathers. Findings illustrated that "nearly half of young women (45%) reported feeling "somewhat" or "very" uncomfortable discussing sexual matters with their parents. The percentage perceiving their parents as "somewhat" or "very" uncomfortable was lower but still substantial (32%) (Hutchinson & Cooney, 1998, p.191).

In a study of study of 135 African American mothers, fathers and their 9 to 12 year old children, Wyckoff et al. (2008) support Hutchinson & Cooney's (1998) findings regarding the gap between mothers and fathers and sexual communication with daughters. Results indicated that mothers and fathers were equally as likely to discuss sexual topics with their sons, yet daughters received more sexual communication from their mothers in comparison to their fathers (Wyckoff et al. 2008). Fathers may communicate less with daughters due to feelings of discomfort and/or inadequacy to provide sexual information to daughters. Fathers may also assign more responsibility to mothers to educate daughters on sexual topics yet research indicates that daughters desire more sexual communication from fathers (Hutchinson & Cooney, 1998; Punyanunt-Carter, 2005; Wyckoff et al. 2008).

Wilson, Dalberth & Koo (2010) supported an evaluation of the Parents Speak Up Campaign by conducting research involving focus group discussions concerning parent-child discussions of sex. In total, 131 parents of children aged 10 to 12 years old participated in focus group discussions led by an experienced moderator utilizing a semi-structured guide exploring sexual risks and factors influencing parent-child communication about sex. Sixteen focus groups of parents were conducted; eight groups of fathers or male guardians and eight groups of mothers or female guardians.

Parents of this specific age group were included due to the campaign's emphasis on parents' having sexual dialogue with their children prior to their children likely being sexually active. In addition to the focus groups, parents viewed a 60 second ad for the Parents Speak Up Campaign and were questioned about their reactions. A brief questionnaire was also given to participants to gather social and demographic characteristics (Wilson, Dalberth & Koo, 2010).

Findings indicated that all fathers were invested in their child's well-being but many reported feeling uncomfortable speaking with their children of either gender. Mothers and fathers reported barriers to sexual communication, such as: feelings of embarrassment discussing sexual topics, feeling their children were not ready to hear about sex, and feeling unsure about how to initiate such conversations. One strategy commonly reported by fathers was encouraging children to pursue their aspirations and to avoid risky sexual behavior so that possible consequences, such as STDS and pregnancy, do not influence their successes (Wilson, Dalberth & Koo, 2010).

The majority of parents who participated in this study belonged to intact nuclear families and felt an interest and comfort discussing the topic, which may be viewed as a limitation within the study. This study was more representative of fathers from a variety of cultural and ethnic backgrounds in comparison to other research. Potential generalizability is a strength within the study (Wilson, Dalberth & Koo, 2010).

Whalen, Henker, Hollingshead & Burgess (1996) conducted a study that observed 140 parent and young adolescent dyads during structured communication concentrated on AIDS. The study included 39 mother- daughter dyads, 39 mother-son dyads, 29 father- daughter dyads, and 33 father-son dyads. Fathers were less willing to participate when compared with mothers, but persistent efforts yielded a substantial amount of father-child dyads.

The study indicated that gender influenced the quality of parent-adolescent communication concerning AIDS. Regardless of the parents' gender, findings illustrated that parents were more mutual (equality in interactions) with daughters and more directive when communicating with sons. The study also noted that fathers and daughters appeared to be highly engaged with one another during their dialogue. Family discussions of AIDS are linked to

greater knowledge and a decreased risk of contracting HIV as a young person. The study noted that many youth participants commented on having quality time with a parent to hold such a dialogue. Findings from this study, although not designed as an intervention, indicate the value of family-based AIDS education (Whalen, Henker, Hollingshead & Burgess, 1996).

Father-Daughter Communication

Punyanunt-Carter (2005) investigated the motives fathers' and daughters' have when communicating with one another. This study also examined the influence of communication upon the level of satisfaction felt within the relationship. The study included 250 female college students from a variety of majors ranging in age from 18 to 35 years old. Out of the 250 female participants, 207 of their fathers, ranging in age from 18 to 35 years old, also participated. Participants completed questionnaires containing scales relating to their interpersonal communication motives, relationship satisfaction and communication satisfaction.

The results of the study indicate the particular roles that fathers and daughters take in their relationship with one another. Fathers typically communicate control with their daughters and demonstrate themselves as being "the man of the house" (Punyanunt-Carter, 2005, p. 299). Daughters who are more compliant with their fathers' wishes and able to share their opinions are more satisfied with their relationship with him. High levels of satisfaction were demonstrated when fathers and daughters communicate to assist each other, express their feelings, and show gratitude. Punyanunt-Carter (2005) explains, "...daughters' relationship satisfaction came from their motives of relaxation, pleasure, and inclusion and fathers' motive of affection. Daughters were satisfied when their fathers communicated their feelings of love to them" (p. 299). Fathers and daughters felt most satisfied when communicating with each other for pleasure (Punyanunt-Carter, 2005).

This study provided some insight to the communication behaviors in father-daughter dyads; however, findings illustrate the possible need to provide training in communication in order to increase satisfaction levels within the father-daughter relationship (Punyanunt-Carter, 2005). A strength of the study is that a large sample size was used and it had an 83% response rate from the female participants' fathers. The questionnaires limited the study due to reliability and validity being unknown.

In a follow-up study conducted by Freeman & Almond (2010), 10 females between the ages of 18 and 22, participated in qualitative interviews regarding their communication patterns with their father. These 10 participants were chosen for a follow-up interview due to their unusually high or low report of attachment support from their fathers in a previous study. The purpose of the interviews was to explore father-daughter communication patterns and gain an understanding of how daughters describe their relationship with their fathers (Freeman & Almond, 2010).

Freeman & Almond (2010) found several themes present in daughters who rated a low reliance on their relationship with their father in the original study. Findings included that daughters explained feeling more satisfied with their relationship with their father as a young adult versus their satisfaction with the relationship during their adolescent years. Another noteworthy theme was that daughters expressed communicating in a more open and sincere way with mothers when in conflict than with fathers. Daughters reported being more selective with what information they approached their fathers with when compared to mothers because they did not feel they would gain the support needed from their fathers and/or because they felt he would disapprove.

Daughters who were qualified as having a high reliance on their fathers reported feeling that their fathers were more understanding and approachable. This group of daughters also reported feeling that their fathers were sensitive and responsive to their point of view. This group, although the minority, was found to possess the skills to resolve disagreements within the father-daughter relationship due to open dialogue and a basis of respect within the dyad (Freeman & Almond, 2010).

According to Freeman & Almond (2010), “Although fathers were atypical targets for daughter’s day-to-day personal concerns, daughters consistently spoke of their fathers as reliable alliances who could be counted upon in the event of a potential or real hazard (p. 244).” Daughters often described the quality of security in their relationship with their father; however, few daughters felt comfortable enough to access their fathers for support. Freeman & Almond (2010) discuss results from an attachment perspective and explain that an adolescent daughter is more capable of exploration and expression when a healthy parent-adolescent relationship is available to be used as a secure base. However, results from the interviews indicated that, “... such a balance is rarely desired, sought or achieved within father–daughter dyads. Nonetheless, this type of communication typified daughters who reported a significant use of fathers as emotional support figures (Freeman & Almond, 2010, p. 245).”

Father’s Influence on a Daughter’s Self-Esteem

According to Morgan, Wilcoxon and Satcher (2003), a woman’s perception of her father’s unconditional regard was significantly related to self-esteem, whereas her perception of her mother’s unconditional regard was only weakly related to self-esteem. A young woman’s emotional development is greatly affected by her satisfaction with her father’s support and approval. Morgan, Wilcoxon and Satcher (2003) indicated that females who are able to identify

with their fathers have higher measures of self-esteem, independence, and success, and that a father active in child-rearing was associated with less stereotypical views of gender roles.

In a study conducted by Scheffler and Naus (1999), 57 female students recruited from a variety of psychology courses at a university in Ontario voluntarily completed a questionnaire. The purpose of the study was to investigate the relationship between fatherly affirmation and a female's self-esteem and other psychosexual characteristics. The questionnaire contained 5 scales: Rosenberg's Scale of Self-Esteem, Barrett-Lennard's Relationship Inventory, and scales measuring Fear of Intimacy, Comfort with Womanhood, and Construction of Sexuality. Results indicated that a positive relationship between perceived fatherly affirmation and self-esteem existed and that there was a negative relationship between fatherly affirmation and fear of intimacy (Scheffler & Naus, 1999).

Due to the study's small sample size and lack of age range in the participants, external validity is jeopardized and the power of the study is decreased. It is difficult to generalize the female population from such a small sample; however, consistent findings indicate the study's reliability.

A lack in fatherly encouragement can lead to the deterioration of a woman's feelings of self-worth and her sense of femininity (Lebe, 1986). Creating and maintaining healthy relationships is difficult when one does not have a high sense of self-worth. Scheffler & Naus (1999) found that women who were raised by a detached father desire intimacy but find it difficult to allow a male to closely bond with them.

Influence of Socialization on the Father-Daughter Relationship

Fathers may find it more difficult to communicate with their daughters due to men traditionally being socialized to illustrate strength, independence and an unemotional attitude

(Bartle-Haring, 1997; Erickson, 1998; Punyanunt-Carter, 2005) Past history emphasizes a father's role as the breadwinner in the family system indicating to males that communication is minor in their role as a father figure, yet, connectedness is emphasized in the socialization process of women (Bartle-Haring, 1997; Lamb, 2000). Brotherson, Yamamoto & Acock (2003) find that father involvement usually changes with their daughters with the onset of the child's adolescence. Wilson, Dalberth & Koo explain, "... gender and views concerning male and female sex roles may hinder men's ability to communicate about sex openly and effectively with their children-especially their daughters" (p. 122, 2010).

Studies consistently indicate low levels of father-daughter communication regarding sex related topics, yet find that fathers play a substantial role in influencing a daughter's decisions in sexual behaviors (Dilorio et al, 1999; Hutchinson, 2011; Miller et al. 1998). Werner-Wilson (1998) illustrate in a study of 1,500 adolescent females that sexual attitudes were influenced by discussion with parents and particularly discussion between fathers and daughters. Past history emphasizes a father's role as the breadwinner in the family system indicating to males that communication is minor in their role as a father figure (Lamb, 2000; Punyanunt-Carter, 2005). Until recent decades in most heterosexual families, men traditionally prioritized their career and personal interests above investing time into family relationships (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2008). Lamb (2000) notes the influence of Sigmund Freud's archetypal father characterized to represent masculinity through his dominance within the family, psychological strength, assertiveness and success as a provider. Goldenberg & Goldenberg (2008) explain that the recent shifts in women's increased employment and the feminist movement have changed society's views on gender roles and thus impacted interactive patterns within the family structure.

Present culture has begun to stress nurture and communication in a father's role; however, research is only beginning to recognize that cultural shift. Understanding more about how fathers and daughters are socialized in U.S. culture will help researchers in their exploration of the effects a father has on his daughter. Punyanunt-Carter (2005) explains the differences in how men and women are gendered in society; nurture and expression of emotions are typically valued in women whereas assertiveness and withholding of emotions is expected of men. These differences in how society has framed the ideal roles and qualities of each gender may influence the communication and satisfaction within a father-daughter dyad. Women are expected to be emotionally available and flexible in relationships and are deemed failures when they are unsuccessful in them, while men are encouraged to pursue independence (Erickson, 1998; Kieffer, 2008). The influence of socialization indicates that success in relationships is significant from a female's perspective. According to Bartle-Haring (1997) traditional sex role socialization places both males and females at a disadvantage. A balance between connectedness and autonomy is necessary to support an adolescent's identity transition into young adulthood.

Bowen's Intergenerational Family Systems Theory

This research utilizes Bowen's intergenerational family systems theory due to the model's emphasis on the adolescent stage of development and differentiation of self (Bartle-Haring, 1997). The family or system is viewed as *an organized whole* in which individuals act as interdependent elements within the larger system or family. Family systems theory emphasizes understanding an individual within the context of the family and utilizes interventions that lead to changes in the cyclical behavior patterns within the family (Baker, Erdman, & Caffery, 2004). Specifically, Bowen's intergenerational perspective connects a family's level of differentiation to a child's differentiation of self. When an individual undergoes self-differentiation, he or she

obtains the abilities necessary to balance a sense of self that is both separate and connected to the family system. As Rosen explains, “Individuals growing up in families that do not allow members within them to differentiate have difficulty negotiating partner relationship boundaries wherein both intimacy and differences are tolerated (p.125).” Bowen’s theory indicates that a lack of differentiation of self leads to fusion in intimate relationships and a lack of boundaries (Rosen, Bartle-Haring & Stith, 2001).

Bowen’s intergenerational family systems theory also recognizes the existence of *subsystems* within the larger system. These subsystems are governed by *boundaries* and can include sibling subsystems or male and female dyadic subsystems (Baker, Erdman, & Caffery, 2004). Boundaries are in place to govern the information that stays within the system (or subsystem) and what information is allowed to permeate outside of the system (Greenspun, 1994). The father-daughter relationship would be considered a subsystem when utilizing the Family Systems Theory to conceptualize the relationship.

Greenspun (1994) applied the family systems model to describe dynamics within families where father-daughter incest exists. Greenspun (1994) places an emphasis on exploring boundaries when utilizing this theory and describes a complex pattern in regards to the boundaries of an incestuous family system. The impermeability of the boundary between the family and outside world contributes to the high degree of isolation from the family to outsiders. However, within the family system, Greenspun (1994) finds that the boundaries are more fluid and often allow the children, in this specific dynamic the incest victim, to have an excess of information that should remain solely within the parents’ relationship. Greenspun (1994) explains, “For example, the daughter in a family with incest may know details of the parents

sexual problems. Certainly the incestuous relationship itself represents a boundary violation (p. 3).”

When exploring father-daughter incest through a family systems lens, Greenspun (1994) also notes an intergenerational pattern of abuse. Greenspun (1994) notes that a study conducted by Cavanaugh-Johnson illustrated that 49% of child perpetrators of sexual abuse have also experienced being a victim of sexual abuse. This study also illustrated that one or more parents or grandparents had been sexually abused in 67% of the perpetrator’s families. Research indicates that often spouses of incest perpetrators were raised in physically and sexually abusive families. The transmission of the incest dynamic is important to examine and illustrates the power of intergenerational patterns and the significance in understanding these patterns in order to cease maladaptive behaviors within the system (Greenspun, 1994).

In an exploratory qualitative study conducted by Crohn (2010), 19 young women between the ages of 19 and 25 were interviewed regarding sexual communication with mothers and stepmothers. The study utilized a family systems and communication boundary perspective to compare characteristics of the stepmother-daughter relationship to the divorced mother-daughter relationship (Crohn, 2010).

Crohn (2010) uses family systems theory in the study to support the idea that people develop informal boundaries in their relationships and the degree of permeability varies depending on factors in the relationship. Crohn (2010) notes that the majority of literature concerning parent-adolescent communication refers to self-disclosure and topic avoidance and that findings indicate adolescents withhold more information from their fathers in comparison to mothers, yet, relational satisfaction is associated with self-disclosure. Although this study does not address father-child communication, it seems that understanding factors affecting self-

disclosure in father-child relationships would be beneficial to understand ways to increase satisfaction within this relationship.

Crohn (2010) conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews to gather the perceptions and memories held by young women. All of the women interviewed self-identified as having a positive relationship with their mother and stepmother. Findings illustrated that daughters confided in both mothers and stepmothers; however, more disclosure was present in the mother-daughter relationship. According to Crohn (2010), findings supported, "...given the choice of family members, adolescents and young adults preferred to self-disclose rule violations and conventional secrets about sexuality to a same-sex sibling, followed by their mothers and fathers (p. 360)." Several daughters indicated that they preferred disclosing conventional secrets with their stepmothers over their biological fathers. They suggested that the stepmothers were better able to offer empathy and sensitivity; however, Crohn (2010) notes that this finding is inconsistent with past literature. Crohn's (2010) study may indicate that further research concerning subsystems within the family dynamic is important to more fully understand how boundaries and communication act within the whole family system.

In order to fully understand family functioning the difference in experiences between genders must be taken into consideration. The different role expectations affect how men and women learn problem-solving techniques, develop their sexuality and cultivate different communication styles (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2008).

Object Relations Theory

Object relations theory is also applicable to this research due to the theory's discussion of whole object relations and its connection to sexuality. Rooting this research in object relations theory may also be beneficial to understand the dynamics present in the father-daughter

relationship and how those may influence communication. Object relations theory explains that the development of a cohesive self and differentiated identity is influenced by the object's childhood experiences with their caretaker. The theory suggests that good enough mothering or loving object relations in early childhood fosters "whole object relations." This developmental accomplishment enables objects to engage in healthy sexual interactions because one is able to distinguish between the self and other, while experiencing connectedness. This emotional development continues throughout the life span and allows a person to function in healthy relationships (Silverstein, 1994; Woody, D'Souza, & Russel, 2003).

Tucker & McNamara (1995) apply object relations theory to their study of 123 eating disturbed daughters and explain, "...children internalize the ways their parents relate to them and to the world; if there are disturbances in parents' object relations and eating attitudes or behaviors, the daughters' internalized representations would then influence the ways in which they relate to themselves and others (p. 312)." Tucker & McNamara (1995) note that research suggests that eating-disordered women encounter significant problems in the separation-individuation process. Studies of college women with eating-disordered symptomology reveal these women often experience difficulty separating from significant others due to internalizing disturbed object relations.

The mother-daughter relationship is commonly analyzed in this research and the imbalance in examination of family dynamics often leads to blaming mothers for their daughters' difficulties. Though there is some indication that conflict in the father-daughter separation-individuation process also exists (Tucker & McNamara, 1995). To address the limitations in father-daughter research and eating disturbances, Tucker & McNamara (1995) designed their study to focus equally on mothers and fathers. The sample consisted of 123 undergraduate

women and their mothers (n=115) and fathers (n=95). Questionnaires were administered to both parents and daughters and completion of the parent questionnaires did not influence the research credit given to the undergraduate women who participated.

Findings did not support the theoretical conceptualization of fathers and their relation to their daughters' eating behaviors and attitudes. Similar past studies have fostered similar findings in regards to the relation of a father's characteristics and their daughters' eating disturbed symptomology. Tucker & McNamara (1995) hypothesize that these results may illustrate that parental patterns are not adequately explained in existing theory. The researchers also hypothesize that the fathers who participated in the study may have been more involved in their daughters' lives and less characteristic of the fathers involved in a daughter's eating disorder treatment who were used to develop existing theory. Tucker & McNamara's (1995) findings further exemplify that there is a significant shortage in theory and understanding of the father's influence upon a daughter. According to Tucker & McNamara (1995), "...given that no support was found for theory about fathers and daughters, clinicians should be sensitive to this relationship and devote equal time to exploring it rather than ignoring it or accepting theory that downplays the role of father (p. 321)

As Lefer (1997) explains, "Sexuality is a psychosomatic experience that is a trajectory through time from the earliest experiences of intimacy and security to adult maturity and bodily functions (p.18)." To experience intimacy, sexual or non-sexual, negative projective identifications are minimal and schizoid splitting of the other is not existent. Needs and conflicts are often expressed in a sexual manner which is an understanding formulated through use of object relations theory (Lefer, 1997).

Jones (2007) notes that object relations theory tends to overlook the influence of fathers on children while emphasizing the mother's contribution to both the child's healthy development and psychopathology. Jones (2007) explains that acknowledgement of both maternal and paternal contributions support and optimal practice approach when working clinically with children. Further, understanding object relations theory and sexuality may guide clinicians to develop more useful interventions and skills used to elicit father-daughter communication and whole object relations.

These theories provide a context for exploring the specific experience of fathers in their relationship with adolescent daughters. Understanding previous literature concerning sexual communication and parenting allowed a frame for the exploration of this qualitative study. The next section outlines the methods used to examine the father-daughter dyad with particular recognition of the fathers' perspective of sexual communication with the daughter.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

This qualitative study was designed to explore sexual communication within the father-daughter dyad. Sexual communication in this dyad was examined in order to recognize strategies fathers use when discussing sexuality with adolescent daughters and to identify barriers that may inhibit sexual communication within this dyad. A qualitative method was used to develop a theory to describe why fathers may experience difficulties when communicating with their daughters about sexuality. A theory would be formulated in hopes to understand what interventions would be most helpful to stimulate sexual communication in the dyad. Specifically, this research questions: What are the barriers to sexual communication in this dyad? What are the benefits to fathers addressing sexuality with their daughters? What topic areas do fathers struggle with addressing in regards to sexuality.

As the literature review revealed, much has been written on communication between mother and child; however, there continues to be a gap in the literature regarding communication between the father and daughter relationship and more specifically conversations concerning sexuality. Nielson (2001) illustrates, "Much of the work that mental health and social workers do focuses on mothers' relationships with children -- and, except in cases of incest, tends to downplay or ignore the father-daughter relationship. By and large, our research in psychology and sociology pays the least attention to father-daughter relationships -- especially teenage and young adult daughters" (p. 280). This chapter presents the methods of research used to explore

the perceptions fathers hold concerning their communication with their daughter or daughters regarding various components of sexuality.

Research Method, Design and Rationale

This study utilized a qualitative approach to explore sexual communication between fathers and daughters. An advantage to using this method was that the open-ended questions used in interviews allowed participants the opportunity to expand upon their narratives and possibly report topic areas that would be beneficial to address in future research. The qualitative research design permitted participants to provide comprehensive descriptions of their relationship with their daughters, offering the researcher the opportunity to gain a rich understanding of the complexity of the relationship characteristics. Since little has been studied concerning the father-daughter relationship, it was useful to implement a qualitative study in order to develop a theory. A disadvantage to the qualitative method is that the researcher interprets the data and the analysis may include subjectivity. The flexibility of the research design was beneficial and permitted participants to elaborate on their experiences with their daughter; however, this design produced a small sample size due to the amount of time needed to conduct thorough interviews.

An advantage to utilizing a quantitative design is that this method may have produced a greater sample size allowing the study to have more generalizability. Another advantage to this method is that quantitative results allow for more objectivity in the data analysis and would provide the researcher with an opportunity to test a hypothesis. There are advantages to a quantitative design; however, it would not have thoroughly captured the father's experience and ultimately a qualitative design seemed more beneficial to utilize with the study's research questions.

Sample

The researcher used snowball sampling to recruit participants. After receiving approval (Appendix A) from the Human Subject Review Board (HSRB) at Smith College School for Social Work, the researcher contacted personal acquaintances, in person, via email or telephone, who may fit the inclusion criteria of the study or who may be able to refer potential participants. The researcher then contacted these initial referrals and discussed with referrals the purpose of the study and the inclusion criteria needed to participate. A copy of the informed consent (Appendix B) and recruitment information (Appendix C) was either mailed or e-mailed to participants prior to conducting the interviews so that potential participants could review components to their participation prior to deciding if they would like to proceed with the interview. Once an individual expressed interest in participating in the study, the researcher collaborated with them to arrange a time and date to meet for the interview. After each participant was interviewed, the researcher asked that they refer other potential participants who may meet eligibility requirements and be willing to participate in the study. Contact with participants was often fleeting and once the interview was over engaging with participants to recruit contacts was difficult. The researcher experienced some difficulties with the snowball sampling technique and this resulted in the small sample size of the study. Several participants did not refer potential participants and this influenced the time needed to recruit participants.

This study included male participants who identified as a father of one or more early adolescent-aged daughter or daughters. Participants self-identified as a “father.” The father role included, but was not limited to, a man who biologically conceived a daughter, a man who is the legal guardian of a daughter, or a man who is raising a daughter. It was not necessary for participants to currently reside with their daughter or daughters; however, it was necessary that

participants maintained an ongoing relationship with the daughter. This study addressed how involved fathers may or may not be addressing sexuality in their communication with daughters so an active role in the daughter's life was necessary for participation.

Inclusion criteria for this study included participants who identify as a father of one or more daughters currently between the age of 11 and 15 years old. Participants were recruited from the Greater New Haven area due to the interviewer's location. Participants who are not English speaking were not included in the study in order to avoid possible miscommunication between the participant and interviewer. Participants under the age of 18 years old were also excluded from the study. The researcher did not interview those who are colleagues' clients or personally connected to the researcher in any way.

Although a diverse population of participants is preferred, the researcher did not specifically recruit for diversity. During initial contact with a potential participant, the required credentials needed to fit participation criteria were stated. This study excluded those under the age of 18 years old. The desired sample size desired was 10 to 15 participants.

Data Collection

Data collection was gathered via semi-structured interviews conducted in the researcher's private office at a non-profit mental health clinic or in a location convenient for both the participant and researcher. This researcher adhered to the NASW *Code of Ethics* and received approval (Appendix A) from the Human Subject Review Board (HSRB) at Smith College School for Social Work previous to data collection. Prior to each interview, participants were given an informed consent document describing components of the study and their rights as human subjects. Potential risks and benefits of participation were also addressed in the informed consent (see Appendix B).

The researcher did not ask participants to provide identifiable information when completing the demographic survey. The researcher verbally explained confidentiality to participants and allowed time for participants to ask questions relating to the study and prior to conducting the interview. The informed consent forms were kept separate from the completed audiotapes of the instruments. The interviews took place in the researcher's private office or in the participant's home to protect confidentiality. The researcher considered safety issues pertaining to interviewing in the participant's home per the Human Subject Review Board's comments on the study design. The researcher personally transcribed the audiotapes. Confidentiality was maintained by excluding identifiable information in the narratives used within the thesis and related presentations. Pseudonyms were used to disguise the identity of participants used in narratives. The research advisor did not have access to any data that may be used to identify participants from the research discussion of results. Electronically stored data, such as the interview transcripts, was protected via password. All data and audiotapes will be stored for a minimum of three years in accordance with Federal regulations. If the data is needed beyond three years, it will continue to be stored securely, and destroyed when no longer needed.

The researcher reviewed the informed consent with participants and allowed time to answer any questions pertaining to the study previous to beginning data collection. The researcher verbally explained before conducting the interview that the participant could withdraw from the interview during any point. The researcher provided all participants with a paper copy of community referrals for adult mental health services (Appendix C) prior to conducting the interview. Participants were asked to read and sign the informed consent and then complete a short demographic questionnaire before the interview began. After receiving written consent, participants were given a copy of the informed consent document and encouraged to

keep the copy for their personal records. The researcher then utilized the interview guide (Appendix D) to direct discussion during interviews. Upon review, recording the interviews allowed the researcher to be more aware of the participant's affect and non-verbal communication during the interview.

All questions asked in the interview were open-ended to allow the participants opportunities to explain their experiences and provide the study with inclusive research. The researcher asked participants to discuss topics relating to the participant's relationship with their adolescent aged daughter and how sexuality may have been discussed within their relationship. The topic of sexuality included puberty, dating, sexual health, relationships, sex, gender identity and sexual orientation. Interviews ranged in time from forty-five minutes to sixty minutes to collect comprehensive data. The researcher used an audio tape recorder to gather the interview information and personally transcribed the interviews.

Data Analysis

The researcher transcribed the data verbatim from the interviews via audio recorder. The researcher analyzed data collected from the demographic questionnaires manually. The researcher reviewed the transcriptions separately and identified repeating ideas. The repeating ideas found in the separate transcripts were then combined from all of the transcripts into a composite list for the entire sample. This list was used to decipher common themes. If there was overlap between question responses, the researcher organized the topics according to the theme rather than the response to the particular question. Identified themes were organized into more abstract concepts in order to develop theoretical constructs.

The theoretical framework in this study and research questions, may have influenced what data the researcher interpreted as relevant when coding themes in data analysis. This study

questioned the barriers to sexual communication between fathers and daughters and hoped to gain a father's perspective in the research. Bowen's Intergenerational Family System Theory and Object Relations theory provide a framework for this study. The researcher's understanding of boundaries within a family system and the separation-individuation process, rooted in previously mentioned theories, may have influenced how data was analyzed and what themes were deemed important for the study.

Expected Findings

This study may provide a variety of implications regarding clinical practice and family policy. As a daughter develops from "daddy's little princess" into a young woman, the communication patterns between father and daughter may also change. Many fathers do not realize their influence on their daughter's psychosexual development; therefore many do not recognize how crucial it is to create a supporting and open environment for their daughter. The researcher identifies as a female and a daughter and recognizes that the expected findings in this study may be influenced by her own biases. The researcher's relationship with her father and how sexual communication occurred in their dynamic, may affect how the researcher interpreted the participants' narratives.

It is expected that fathers will express the desire to engage in more sexual communication with their daughter but may feel inadequate. Fathers may feel unequipped with the tools needed to initiate sexual dialogue with daughters. An unexpected result in this study may include that fathers will report feeling comfortable addressing sexual topics with their daughters. Another unexpected finding may illustrate that fathers perceived that their daughters will not benefit from communicating about sexuality with fathers.

There are a few possible limitations that may arise in this study. This study's small sample size and snowball sampling method decreases the generalizability of the population. Socially desirable responding may affect the participants' explanations of their experiences. Participants might overexploit positive experiences and/or underreport negative experiences in order to reply in a manner that seems more favorable to others (or to the way they perceive the researcher to desire their answers). Developing an increasing understanding of father-daughter relationships will benefit clients and therapists who participate in family therapy and may aid in the development of more effective interventions when working with fathers and daughters.

This Chapter reviewed the research design and detailed the expected findings supposed by the researcher prior to conducting the interviews. The following Chapter will include the narratives from the interviews to discuss this study's findings. This Chapter is organized to provide information regarding: the participants' demographics, the fathers' perceptions of qualities of the daughter and their relationship, communication patterns between the father and daughter, how sexuality is discussed and barriers to sexual communication, and any additional commentary from the fathers.

CHAPTER IV

Findings

The purpose of this study is to develop a theory explaining why fathers may experience difficulties when communicating about sexuality with their daughter. This study examines sexual communication within the father-daughter dyad and questions the barriers to sexual communication, the benefits to communicating about sexuality, and the topics within sexual communication that fathers find difficult discussing. A review of the literature revealed that there has been little examination of the father-daughter relationship when compared to research concerning mother-daughter relationships. Findings indicate that fathers can serve as a protective factor against daughters' risky sexual behaviors, yet, there is a deficit in research regarding father-daughter sexual communication. This study explores sexual communication in the father-daughter dyad through a father's perception. This chapter contains the findings from interviews conducted with seven men who identified as a father of one or more daughters between the ages of 11 and 15 years old. The interviews began by obtaining demographic information from participants through a short survey, which included: age, race, gender, marital status, religious affiliation, age of daughter, and the total number of children the participant identifies as a father to. Interview questions were open-ended and designed to gain an understanding of father-daughter relationship, characteristics of the daughter, and how sexuality may or may not have been discussed within the dyad.

The term sexuality was used as an umbrella term in the interviews and included a variety of topics such as dating, puberty, sex practices etc. The broad definition of sexuality was discussed with participants prior to questioning in order to clarify that questions pertaining to sexual communication were designed to gather information regarding more than just communication addressing sexual intercourse. Interview questions were divided into four main sections and the first section was designed to develop rapport with the participant and gain some understanding of the daughter since she was not included in the interview. The data is organized as follows:

- 1) Demographic information
- 2) Father's perceptions of qualities of the daughter and their relationship
- 3) Communication patterns between the father and daughter
- 4) How sexuality is discussed and barriers to sexual communication
- 5) Additional commentary from the father

Demographic Data

This chapter is comprised of the responses of seven fathers (n=7) to adolescent-aged daughters regarding how sexuality is discussed in their relationship. All participants were recruited from the Greater New Haven area in Connecticut and identified as "male" when asked about gender. It was explained to participants that the role of a "father" was not solely defined as being a biological parent. This study included both men who were biological parents and stepfathers of adolescent aged daughters, though the survey did not ask participants to identify if they biologically conceived the daughter pertaining to the interview. All participants had at least one daughter who was currently in between the ages of 11 and 15 years old.

Participants ranged in age from 39 years old to 58 years old. The majority of participants (n=6) identified as “White” when asked about race and one participant identified as “Hispanic.” When asked to identify religious affiliation, three participants left the question unanswered, one participant identified as “questioning,” one participant answered “Catholic,” one participant answered “Casual Catholic,” and one participant answered “Born Catholic not practicing.” The majority of participants (n=5) identified as currently “married” and two participants identified “single.” When asked about the total number of children, three participants were fathers of one child, two participants identified fathering three children, and two participants identified having two children.

The findings are organized into themes and presented as follows: qualities of the daughter and the father-daughter relationship, communication patterns between father and daughter, sexual communication, barriers to sexual communication and additional information provided from participants but not specifically asked during the interview.

Qualities of the daughter and father-daughter dynamic

This section details the fathers’ responses to questions pertaining to characteristics they would use to describe their daughter and qualities of their relationship. Participants were first asked to describe their daughter and responses included personality traits, interests, and strengths. The researcher began the interview with this question in order to stimulate thought about the participant’s daughter at the present time and to develop rapport with the participant before asking more intimate questions regarding the father-daughter relationship. Most participants (n=5) were succinct and briefly listed adjectives to describe their daughter such as “fun”, “curious”, “loving”, and “challenging.” Two participants described feeling their daughter acts more mature than what they commonly associate with her age range. One father explained,

“Very driven and does what she wants. Pretty mature for her age.” Another father described how an older sibling has influenced the daughter’s maturity level:

I think she’s a grown up 15. She’s watched her sister who is a few years older than her grow up and go through all that she’s gone through, and she just can’t wait to get there.

Two themes emerged in the description of daughters: outspoken daughters and quiet daughters. This theme was expanded upon later in the interview when communication was more directly asked about. Four participants (n=4) described having an outspoken daughter. One participant described his daughter as “...outgoing, very personable, has good relationships with adults” while another participant explained “she’s blunt, she will just come right out and say what’s on her mind and you know, it’s a bit much at times but appreciated...it’s allowed me to understand her a bit.” In contrast, three participants (n=3) described daughters who were less vocal; responses included: “shy”, “very quiet”, “funny, yet quiet” and “kind of a loner, well, she’s introverted really, she likes her alone time is a better way to put it I guess.”

When asked to describe their relationship with their daughter, a theme of closeness emerged: “Whatever I do, she is right there helping me”, “it’s a loving relationship” and “we’ve always been very close.” Two fathers (n=2) described their experiences being a stepfather and the transition into the daughter’s life and family dynamic. One stepfather of a 15-year-old daughter explained:

Her mother is a little bit sheltering for her kids. She likes to run everything through her instead of me interacting directly with her kids. I kind of talked with her from the start, that you really have to let us build our relationship together because that’s the way it will work and last and if I have to go through you all the time that it’s just not going to work. And you know she was resistant to that but we got counseling and everything and she’s now a little more into me being a kind of good role model for the kids.

A stepfather of an 11-year-old daughter further supported the difficulty regarding the transition into the father role:

She really did not like me much in the beginning. She made it clear I was not her father and she was not going to accept me. I don't know when it changed really but, maybe her mom helped, I don't know, but it's easier now. I guess she's older and I've been around a while now. It's definitely easier.

A few participants (n=3) mentioned how the father-daughter dynamic has developed as the daughter ages. One father acknowledged making an effort towards allowing the daughter more freedom while acting as strong presence in her life: "I'm trying to stay in tune as she gets older, trying to give her space but also keeping an eye on her." Another father explained:

We do a lot of the activities together although now that she's gotten older, she doesn't need Dad around with the soccer ball anymore, actually she prefers time for me to not be involved. I don't know how to put it, we are, I don't want to say friends, but definitely, you know we connect on a lot of different levels."

It was noted that all fathers indicated making efforts towards being actively involved in their daughter's life as she develops and the relationship changes.

The key findings in this section speak to the qualities of the daughter and the father-daughter dynamic. The two themes found within descriptions of the daughters contrasted between daughter who were prone to be outspoken and daughters who are quiet in nature. In regards to the father-daughter dynamic, the theme of closeness appeared in several narratives and illustrated the efforts fathers are making to remain connected to their daughters throughout their development.

Communication patterns between the father and daughter

This next section of questions pertains to how the father and daughter interact with one another. Participants were asked to identify who typically initiates communication within the dyad and to discuss their role while communicating with their daughter. Specifically, they were

asked to explain while communicating with their daughter, do they feel they are talking more than the daughter, doing more of the listening during the conversation, or would they identify that there is an equal exchange. This section addressed general communication in order later to compare and contrast daily communication patterns to sexual communication within the dyad.

As mentioned in the previous section, four fathers (n=4) described having daughters who were prone to be outspoken while three fathers (n=3) described having quiet daughters. These two categories also related to the father's perception of communication within the relationship. The three fathers (n=3) who described daughters categorized as quiet and less vocal also identified as being typically responsible for initiating conversation with their daughter. The father who described his daughter as "very quiet" and "she keeps to herself" described that he typically initiates conversation and is the more active speaker in conversations:

It's absolutely me on the talking end of it because it's not going to be her, and it's unfortunate because I'm a good listener and I wouldn't mind her doing a little more talking and having more listening going on.

One father identified that he feels the age of his daughter influences their communication style. He explained, "I tend to take the lead, I think I'm sort of used to doing that anyway because of how it was in the beginning...and she's still so young, she's 11 you know, so I... I'm the adult. I feel it's my job." Three fathers (n=3) indicated that they communicate as a way to role model for their daughter how interaction with a future partner may take place. A father of a 15-year-old daughter describes that his communication with her is "...teaching her for future that her husband should be understanding and open to listening, its not just one way." One father said, "I want her to know her voice is just as important so when she's older she knows she deserves a man who will take her into consideration." Another father explained:

It's important to establish a relationship of love and respect between father and daughter so the child understands they are to be respected and not allow themselves to be taken

advantage of. If daughters don't think they're worth that, I think it could be detrimental to them.

When discussing their role during communication, five fathers (n=5) emphasized the importance of listening to their daughter. One father said "If she came to me with a problem, I would listen and give her feedback, and I think she takes it in." One father responded, "I'm trying to listen; I think I'm actually doing okay at it too." A father of a vocal daughter explained, "If something has happened in school that she doesn't want to talk about, she makes it known and so I say okay I'll give you some space and you let me know because we want to know as parents what's going on." Another father explains how his role in communication has changed as the daughter ages:

There was more talk on my end when she was younger, even exchange as she grew older. The dynamic has changed where she's talking more and I listen to try to gather and see what's happening in her world, versus when she was 11.

The idea of gathering information from the daughter was also indicated from another father who responded:

I try to hear what's going on in her life to make sure everything's good, she's happy, doing good in school, ask questions about school, gather information about her world. I'm a spy, big covert operations. I'm just joking, as you get older you listen more, it's her life and I want to make sure she's happy and growing and progressing and doing more with herself.

The following section will address how the topic of sexuality is communicated within the father-daughter relationship in order to contrast and compare father-daughter communication to father-daughter communication regarding sexuality.

Sexual Communication

This next grouping of questions relates specifically to how sexuality is discussed within the father-daughter daughter. This section will be broken down into subgroups as follows:

frequency of sexual communication, topics discussed, barriers to sexual communication, and helpfulness benefits to communicating about sexuality.

Frequency of sexual communication

Participants were asked how often sexuality is discussed with their daughter and who typically initiates conversations regarding sexuality. One father identified that he and his daughter are equally responsible for initiating sexual communication: “Kind of equal, my opinion is that I don’t try to hold back, I give the harsh realities.” Other responses included, “It’s me initiating those conversations more. Not the main subject in the house” and “Rarely in the beginning as she got older became more often.” Some fathers went on to explain how sexual communication has developed in the relationship and influential factors in how sexuality is addressed. A father of an 11-year-old daughter explained conversation concerning sexuality “... hasn’t really happened yet. She’s not there yet, Mom has talked to her about her period and what to expect and so on but as far as she and I, yeah, I would say rarely.” One father answered that:

It was almost never brought up before she starting going out with boys. Mother always said, ‘*Oh she’s too young for that talk*’ and everything but you know mother is pretty frank and open with her.... but I really didn’t come into the scene until after she was actually dating and then I had some concerns.

Another father responded:

Initially it was rarely and say the end of 6th grade through the summer that was Mom’s role. That’s how she wanted it. It was Mom’s role. Dad, don’t go there. She let it be known she was not comfortable about her body changing, you know her mood swings, um she was um, really in the fall when she had her first period, she was very upset about it, dramatic about it, I don’t mean dramatic in a bad way, it wasn’t traumatic but she made it seem very over the top, and it was very hard on her, mostly because she didn’t want to grow up.

One father described his daughter initiating one of their first conversations about dating and how that occurrence acted as a springboard for future conversations:

On the track she asked me about one of the boys, we just got back and this kid was playing on the bikes with her, teasing her. She asked me who he was and I told her, and her and her girlfriend walked by their camp to see what he looked like and she came by to ask me questions. She asked '*Should I go up to him? Should he come up to me?*' I told her '*Let him come up to you first.*' This was her first crush. She asked me '*Do you think he likes me?*' She was very curious. After that weekend we talked a lot about dating.

When interviewing participants, general communication was inquired about separately from sexual communication so that there could be a deeper understanding of communication patterns and how the topic of sexuality acts within the father-daughter dynamic. Key findings when interviewing participants regarding general communication with their daughter included fathers feeling their role in communication, whether it was listening or talking, was an important one and there was a general comfort among fathers to initiate conversation with daughters. When questions specified how sexual communication occurs in the dyad, participants answered with varying levels of comfort initiating conversation. This contrast may be due to the varying ages of the daughters and what fathers may feel is appropriate to discuss with the age range. The following section further depicts how the age of the daughter influences how the father approaches topics of sexuality with his daughter.

Topics Discussed

Fathers were asked if there are topics concerning sexuality that they feel more comfortable discussing with their daughters than other topics. Several fathers (n=3) suggested that conversation regarding dating occurs more frequently and is easier to discuss than other topic areas of sexuality. One father answered, "We don't have deep conversation about sex, more about dating. I want to make sure she'll be with someone who likes and respects her and treats her well. No bad relationships." Another father indicates comfort discussing dating and mentioned, "I always probe as far as dating between her and her girlfriends to see what's happening in her life." Another father agreed, "Dating has been more comfortable to talk about,

but besides that we don't really talk about this kind of thing." One father explained, "I don't know how to answer that, some of them are more comfortable but not really. I try to be really open, she might not want to hear my views, I might be too blunt sometimes, because if some boy likes her I come out and say he might just want a piece of ass. That might be a little too blunt but I'm trying to be truthful."

Two fathers, who have younger daughters in comparison to the other participants, expressed plans to become more involved and have more conversations as the daughter develops but that little conversation has yet to have happened. A father of a 13 year old daughter explains, "I mean, I know girls her age are dating I guess you could call it, I don't think it's a serious or exclusive sort of thing, but I plan to be involved, we don't want to be those parents who don't know about that type of thing." Another father mentioned, " Like I said, right now, we rarely talk about anything having to do with sexuality. She and her Mom have discussed her period and all but that's about it so far. I plan on talking to her, when she has her first big crush or whatever; I want to be there, I'm nervous about that really but I want to be there when it happens"

Participants expressed desiring keeping an open dialogue with their daughter; however, fathers discussed that certain topic areas were the mother's responsibility to address. One father who addressed dating frequently with his daughter but identified feeling uncomfortable talking about sex explained, "As far as sex we don't talk about it, I feel like that's more Mom's job."

This father went on to clarify:

Not that its Mom's job but its an odd conversation to have with your daughter. To talk about dating and watch out because guys only, unless they like you, are looking for one thing...you don't want your 15 year old to have sex. It should be more about courting, dating, puppy love. I want to make sure she experiences those things but I don't want her to get hurt or taken advantage of. Dating is more of our conversation but not too many sex conversations.

Another father felt that there were topics his daughter felt more comfortable talking to her mother about:

I mean we try to keep all topics pretty open, I think there are some things she would rather discuss with her mother but I make it known that I'm always open to talking about whatever with her and I don't feel too much uncomfortable. I want her to know she can come to me.

One stepfather of a quiet daughter explained how the daughter's mother and the daughter's quiet demeanor has influenced sexual communication:

Because Mom's been through it with the older child who started becoming sexually active at 15, she knew the possibility was there so she always talked to them about the possibility of, you know, sex and what to expect and what to do and so on and so forth. But I really didn't come into the scene until after she was actually dating and then I had some concerns.

He explains a situation when he and the mother were in disagreement about addressing sex because the mother was afraid that the daughter would retreat and this impacted how he and the daughter discussed sexuality.

She was always a quiet person and in school and in middle school especially. She was so quiet that she was picked on by the other girls and she was very self-conscious about everything and she used to wear a coat in school and get sweaty under the coat and everything because she didn't want to expose herself and it was just absolutely hurtful to see her come home and be upset with all the kids and the way they were treating her. But just before she got to high school everything changed. She just blossomed and she was the popular kid not trying to get in with the popular kids. And it was sweet to see and because of that Mom wanted to, you know, kind of let her bloom and so forth, but I was a little suspicious of putting her in harms way and everything. So a lot of the discussion was between me and mom and not between me and her because Mom didn't want me to come down on her and you know pull the covers over her blossoming and becoming a young girl and being popular and so forth. So I mean I always expressed my feelings, I always expressed doubts and everything. Through her Mother I would talk to her more or less. But less so me directly because she felt like that would shut her down all together.

Another theme that emerged from the interviews was that fathers felt they acted as a resource for their daughters to further understand a male's perspective. This theme will be

expanded upon in the next section as a benefit to sexual communication. However, several fathers described reflecting on how adolescent aged boys think and feeling protective of their daughter. One father said, “She’s my little girl, baby, young boys, I know how they think, I try to have their state of mind and give that to her.” Another father echoed that and explained,

I wanted her to be able to know a man’s point of view and how a man’s supposed to act. I was a young man and made mistakes and you grow up and have your own family, and I want to give advice and guidance and to keep an eye on certain things.

Another describes, “I’m on the boy end of it and everything. I knew a little bit of what they were thinking and she is very young and I want to protect her at all costs.”

Two fathers described a distinction from when they were adolescents and how they were raised to how they are currently raising their children and speaking to them about sexuality.

I was brought up that you’re not really dating until after you’re sixteen but times are different now. It’s not the same as it used to be, so I try to have a little more understanding with that and everything but I do tend to want to shelter the girls from, you now, boys who want to take advantage of them and so on and so forth. I’m always going to try to tone it down and everything and be a little suspicious and mom says you got to give her a chance, you’ve got to let her develop, you’ve got to trust her until you cant trust her when she does something wrong. But you know I’m just a little bit suspicious cause I went through those years and I knew what it was like and everything.

Another fathers adds:

My wife has said that her Dad, and I don’t really think her Mom either, was pretty cut off from that. She had three older brothers and I don’t know if maybe they didn’t know how to deal with her or didn’t think they had to in that sense, but we are trying to be a bit more involved. I think that’s what’s different really about that generation and ours.

Barriers to Sexual Communication

Participants were asked to identify barriers that may have prevented them from talking about sexuality. A variety of barriers were identified, such as: feelings of discomfort, unsure how to approach the subject, feeling it was Mom’s responsibility, and feeling that the daughter was

not ready for such conversations. Some of these barriers have been previously mentioned and will be further expanded on in this section.

The father of a 15 year old explains, “I wasn’t raised talking about sex. Sometimes I wish I knew what to say and so I would say nothing” This father later went on to say, “I told her to use protection and to try to save herself until she got married, but I know that’s not going to happen. After that, we haven’t talked about sex since.” This father describes a mix between feeling uncomfortable and not knowing how to go about conversing about sex. Likewise, one father who identified feeling uncomfortable discussing sex defined that there are boundaries within the father-daughter relationship that inhibit such conversations. He explains:

There’s almost like a known line, she doesn’t speak to me about it and I don’t speak to her about it. We haven’t had any awkward conversation about sexuality because I don’t think we talk about it beyond our comfort zone.

Another father identifies that the topic of body image is one that he is careful approaching due to his daughter’s sensitivity regarding the changes in her developing body. He explains:

Body image things, I’ve been really careful not to say anything to her about her physical appearance. There’s times she’ll run from her bathroom to her bedroom and yells ‘*I’m naked!*’ so I would stay in my room and know to stay out of the hallway. Other times she doesn’t think and I’m like whoa, you know, inappropriate, its just like too much. She has been really resistant to growing up and still has to remind herself that she’s growing and I don’t want to upset her further because she’s pretty vocal about it being tough on her.

A theme discussed in earlier sections was that fathers felt certain topic areas were the mother’s responsibility to discuss with their daughter. One father discussed how he and his wife work together, “I usually don’t talk to her about certain things unless my wife is present, it can be a little odd for me. My wife is my back up.” Another father indicates his wife being a support and how being a stepfather and transitioning into the family has influenced his role:

On a day-to-day basis she kind of leaned towards her mother a lot for guidance and questions and everything and kind of detoured around me. But I think as time has gone on, my relationship with my wife has developed to the point where they kind of look to me for advice but most of it goes through mother. I still do play a role in there and most of it is a role model than anything but still it's growing. It's developing.

Other responses regarding the influence of the mother's role included: "she goes to her Mom for being a woman and all that sort of stuff" and "I know her mother has talked to her about her period and some other stuff so I'm letting her take the lead with that." One father explained that when his daughter began puberty, "She went to her Aunt when she first got period then Aunt went to Mom and Mom came to me. It all happened in one day." This father identified himself as single and does not live in the same home as his daughter but explained that he and his daughter's mother keep the lines of communication open between the two of them. He explains:

I always know what's going on, even if she doesn't directly tell me because me and Mom, we talk pretty freely, I'd say we keep each other informed. She doesn't talk to her Mom about dating but she will talk to me and then she won't talk to me about her period or body stuff but she talks to her mom. So we always know what's happening eventually. At some point, someone will address it, but certain things I talk about and other things Mom will talk with her about.

A father of a quiet daughter who expressed wanting to speak with his daughter more about sexuality explained that his daughter's personality has acted as a barrier:

There certainly have been times, when I wish she was more open and I didn't know what she was thinking or what she wanted to say because many times I've talked to her and you get nothing, blank.

Other fathers supported this experience of feeling uncertain or insecure about addressing the topic. Responses included, "Sometimes I don't know what to say or what she's thinking" and "I can only give her a man's perspective" and "I know I don't have all the answers."

Two fathers identified that the daughter's age has influenced what conversations have taken place regarding sexuality. As discussed in earlier sections, the father of the 11-year-old

daughter believes that his daughter is too young to discuss most topics regarding sexuality. He explained, “She’s still just, she’s little. I think I’ll know when I need to start talking to her about boys and crushes and all that and I don’t think she’s there yet.” Another father specifically discusses his daughter’s reaction to her first period and describes treading lightly around sexual communication:

She was very upset about it, it seemed very over the top, and it was very hard on her, mostly because she didn’t want to grow up. She was saying, ‘*I’m not ready for this, I don’t want to deal with this*’ and she was big into, ‘*Dad I don’t want your opinions on this.*’ Even though we could talk about it, she was uncomfortable and I wouldn’t push it.

Benefits to Sexual Communication

Father’s were asked if they perceived sexual communication with their daughters to be helpful to their daughter and to discuss what may have made these conversations easier. Again, the theme of allowing the daughter to understand a man’s perspective arose in the interviews. Providing the daughter with feedback and a support system were other noted benefits. Role modeling a healthy relationship for the daughter was another perceived benefit. One father explained, “It’s important to spend the time and be not only their mentor but friend and confidant to bounce things off of and ask questions and get advice from.” Another father answered, “I want her to feel respected and understand that’s the basis for any sort of future relationship.” A father of a 14-year-old daughter believes:

I think its been helpful, at times she’s given me her opinion on stuff and we go back and forth, and have a conversation about it. Being willing and open with each other and trusting each other’s and opinions makes it easier.

The father who explained talking to his daughter about her first crush on the bike track observed that his daughter feels she can trust him and often speaks with him about her romantic interests. He explains:

She really doesn't hide anything from me. She will go for a walk and come back and tell me, *I made out with him* or whatever, and she says *you can trust me*. She's been so open with me, that's why I believe her and why she comes to me instead of Mom. Knowing she has someone to talk to I think has to be helpful.

Another father explains:

I think it's important and even with her friends, just talking about boys and stuff. A girl hearing from her Dad, I mean both parents, both parents I think are helpful, but showing her a man's point of view, letting her ask a man's perspective and actually getting an honest perspective is important.

One father expressed that he feels he has equipped his daughter with the skills to make good decisions and be able to abstain from pressures from men.

I always tell her to make good decisions. I was raised the woman make good decisions when it comes to sex, that she has to say enter and he says okay, the boy is always going to say okay so she needs to be the one making smarter decisions. I think she knows how to act with guys and stuff like that to get them interested but she'll ask me something and I'm blunt, I will tell her the things that she doesn't want to hear because I want to warn her. I'll say, maybe he's just looking to have sex and she'll get a little pissy for a little while but later she'll come back and say, '*you know I think you're right.*' So I see she's been thinking about a guy's objective more and I think that's good, I want her to do that.

One father indicated feeling hopeful about his daughter being more open to having more conversations and has observed that through trying to connect with her she has become more affectionate with him. This father had expressed difficulty transitioning into the father role with his stepdaughter and described growing up in a "touchy feely" family but that quality has been difficult to establish in their relationship. He expressed:

So I'm sure one day she'll open up 100 percent but right now, she's a little resistant to that but you know what, I'm getting my hugs out of her every now and then and she's fighting it less and less.

Two fathers were generally unable to identify if sexual communication has been beneficial to their daughter. One father explained that because the conversations have not yet occurred "It's too soon to tell" and another father expressed that he is unable to decipher if talking to his daughter has been helpful or not because of her demeanor:

It's hard to say because she's so quiet and everything. I do try to talk to her, like when I'm driving her somewhere, taking her somewhere, but she's not a big talker. It's hard to get anything out of her and even for her mother, her mother says the same thing, she's just a very quiet person.

When asked to describe what has made sexual communication with their daughters easier, several fathers (n=3) described how their interactions with significant females in their lives have influenced their comfort level. One father described a scenario when he purchased tampons for his daughter:

I'm okay with it, she couldn't understand that, my wife tried to explain to her...we've been together, my wife and I have been together for 30 years but we've been married for 22 and obviously through that time we've both had to deal with female reproduction stuff and we did fertility treatments in order to have her. So there's a lot of understanding between the two of us so my daughter couldn't comprehend that I could actually go to the store and buy tampons.

Another father explained being submerged in dorm life at college and living with both genders, exposed him to a broad range of topics concerning sex and the opposite gender.

I think being up college and living with coeds made it, I don't know, you just had to be more comfortable with certain things. My first year I lived in a dorm where the floors separated the genders and then I remember my next year with the increase of coeds, it ended up that instead of every other floor it was every other room, male or female. So you get used to being emerged in that and having roommates who would have their girlfriends stay over or having my own girlfriend stay over, things just don't really embarrass you after awhile. You become more sensitive I'd say.

Lastly, one father described his experiences living with four sisters:

Sometimes my wife and daughter joke about how I'm outnumbered in the house. We do have a male dog, I like to remind them of that! Anyway, I've always been outnumbered. I grew up with four sisters and my mother, and my father, of course he was around, but he was always really sick, so I was sort of the man in the house. I looked out for my sisters when they brought a guy home and they used to all gang up on me when I was little actually. They would put hair clips and makeup and crap on me, I was their doll for a while. The point is, I've always been around girls all my life. I'd like to think I've gotten pretty comfortable talking about dating and womanly sort of things.

Two fathers specifically cited the daughter's mother as being a support system for them to discuss sexual communication with their daughter. One answered, "my wife encourages me to talk to her" and another father explained, "Her Mom and I don't live together, we don't always hear first hand from her, but we talk on the side and that helps, I get all the background info. so to speak."

The majority fathers (n=5) gave responsibility to their comfort level with their daughter. A few fathers described their connection to their daughter and bonding experiences that have made it easier to discuss a wide range of topics. The father of a 15-year-old only child said:

I think we are comfortable with each other talking, I think we accomplished that. Now with learning how to drive we have been spending a lot of time in the car together. My wife has no patience with driving so it's just us, you know we go to football games together sometimes, we do those things; we get a chance to talk. There's a comfort level there.

Another father described:

What brought us closer when she was 7 or 8 years old, she would help me cook, like peel potatoes and stuff and when she was 10 it was more stove stuff. We bonded and we had a good connection. I don't know what to say all the time, there are times I don't say anything, but that's helped, she's like my sidekick.

Other supporting responses of the importance of a strong connection to alleviate difficulties in communicating with their daughter included: "We did used to read together, sometimes just walks on the beach. We still try to have some one on one time even though she's getting older", "we trust each other" and "I met her mother when she was 6 so I've been involved in her life for years now, we've developed, finally."

Key findings in the previous sections address the barriers, benefits and topics regarding sexual communication between fathers and daughters. Barriers to discussing sexuality with their daughters included fathers feeling uncomfortable discussing aspects of sexuality, not knowing how to initiate sexual communication, not feeling that sexuality was an age appropriate topic and

lastly giving more responsibility to Mom to discuss sexuality with the daughter. The topic of dating seemed easiest to discuss and was viewed as important for a father to discuss with a daughter even if the father felt the daughter was still too young to actually date. Other topic areas, such as puberty and sexual health, were weighted more as Mom's responsibility to discuss. Although fathers generally felt that Mom was an influential and important person in the daughter's life to discuss sexuality with, fathers perceived their position as a role model as significant for the daughter to gain support and an understanding of a male's perspective.

Optional Commentary from the Father

In closing, fathers were asked if there was anything additional they wanted to share regarding their relationship with their daughter and sexual communication and this study. Three fathers provided additional and brief thoughts while the rest of the participants (n=4) opted to end the interview. One father viewed this question as his closing statement and provided advice that he would give to all daughters:

Save yourself until your married! It's a little better, safer, easier. You want to find someone... jumping into sex, it's the wrong way. Find someone who wants you for you, that's all I could give to the world.

Another father described advice he would give himself:

I think I've been a little tough on her as far as trusting her to do the right thing. I tend to be a little bit on the looking on the side of suspicion and so forth. It's a hard thing to break but I should be more trusting of her.

One father explained his pride in his relationship and his hopes for his daughter's future:

We are close, our relationship has developed a lot. Its been nice. I've taken a step back and I'm noticing she's growing into herself, and I think she's happy. That's all I want, I want her to be happy. I want her to keep maturing into a lady, a woman who is always trying to better herself. Has respect for herself. Doesn't get taken advantage of. And knows she can come to me whenever.

Summary

This chapter presented the findings extrapolated from seven fathers interviewed about their relationship with their adolescent aged daughter. The interview questions were broken into four main sections and in the majority of sections. Individual comfort levels and the daughter's age may have influenced the depth and degree of detail that was provided by the participant. Participants unequivocally agreed that communication with their daughter is essential to her development and important in their relationship. All fathers provided responses illustrating that they make efforts towards creating an open dialogue in their relationship with their daughter.

Some participants had yet to have experienced sexual communication with their daughters and were unable to give a thorough assessment of the discussion of sexuality in their relationship. No participant explained feeling as though sexual communication is unhelpful or detrimental to his daughter or the father-daughter relationship. Several fathers agreed that they felt comfortable discussing the topic of dating and believed it was important to provide the daughter with a male's perspective. The topic of sexual intercourse seemed to be the most difficult for fathers to discuss with their daughters. Finally, several fathers expressed that certain topics regarding sexuality were the mom's responsibility to discuss with the daughter.

CHAPTER V

Discussion

The objective of this qualitative study was to explore the father's perception of sexual communication within the father-daughter relationship in order to identify barriers to sexual communication, difficult topic areas to discuss concerning sexuality, and perceived benefits to sexual communication. Individual interviews with persons who identified as a father of one or more adolescent aged daughter took place to capture how sexuality is discussed and barriers to sexual communication within this specific dyad. This chapter discusses the findings in the following order: 1) key findings, 2) implications, 3) limitations, and 4) conclusion.

Key Findings

Participants in this subject group ranged in age from 39 to 58 years old and all identified as a father of one or more early adolescent-aged daughter. Seven (n=7) fathers participated in the study and six identified as "White" while one identified as "Hispanic." A more diverse sample would have been beneficial to the study due to the homogeneity of the group possibly limiting generalizability.

The results indicate that fathers regard communication with their daughter as important and a theme of closeness within the relationship was derived from the narratives. The qualities of the daughters, found in the descriptions given via the fathers, contrasted between daughters who behaved in an outspoken manner and those who were deemed quieter in nature. This contrast in how the daughter is perceived permeated other findings because of the influence this quality had upon the relationship and communication patterns within the dyad.

This study revealed that in regards to general communication, father's felt their role of listening to their daughter was important. Illustrating their investment in the relationship through engaging in communication, whether it be taking an active talking role or listening role, was depicted in the narratives. Research from a study by Punyanunt-Carter (2005) illustrated that daughter reported high satisfaction levels with their relationship with their father when the dyad communicated to assist one another, express their feelings and show gratitude. This qualitative research study did not capture the perspective of daughters so communication is only understood from the father's viewpoint. It may be beneficial to explore how each person in the dyad describes the qualities of the relationship and their satisfaction levels to develop theory on how communication influences characteristics in the relationship.

Overall research concerning father-child communication is scarce; however, research indicates that fathers are more comfortable participating in sexual communication with their sons in comparison to their daughters (Wilson, Dalberth & Koo, 2010; Wyckoff et al. 2008). Although this qualitative study did not specifically address father-son communication, one father did support this finding and described that if he had a son, he perceived he would feel more at ease discussing sexuality with him than when he discusses sexuality with his daughter.

The majority of father's suggested that it was a mother's responsibility to discuss certain topic areas within sexuality with the daughter. Most fathers identified that communication regarding dating and relationships was easier than discussion about sexual intercourse and sex practices. This finding is in accordance with past studies that demonstrate mothers typically carry more responsibility to educate both daughters and sons on sexuality (Hutchinson & Cooney, 1998; Punyanunt-Carter, 2005; Wyckoff et al. 2008).

Results in this study regarding barriers to sexual communication within the father-daughter dyad relate closely to Wilson, Dalberth & Koo's (2010) focus group study evaluating the Parents Speak Up Campaign. Wilson, Dalberth & Koo's (2010) study identified that ready to hear about sex, and feeling unsure about how to initiate conversation were found to be barriers to parent-child sexual communication. This qualitative study concerning father-daughter sexual communication illustrated that feelings of discomfort, uncertainty about how to approach the subject, feeling it was mom's responsibility, and feeling that the daughter was not ready for such conversations were barriers fathers experienced when communicating about sexuality. Although this study's findings were relatable to Wilson, Dalberth & Koo's (2010) study, the participants in the study had younger children and may respond differently to the focus groups if they were parents of older adolescents.

Fathers typically found discussing sexuality helpful to their daughters. Several fathers specified that they felt providing their daughter's with a male's perspective concerning sexuality was beneficial to the daughter's development. This finding was in accordance with past research illustrating that fathers, in comparison to mothers, allow daughters a better understanding of men's perspectives (Hutchinson & Cederbaum, 2011; Hall, 2009; Wilson, Dalberth & Koo, 2010).

A daughter's safe sex practices have been found to be positively influenced by fathers who are involved in their daughters' development (Bowling & Werner-Wilson, 2000; Bronte-Tinkew & Moore, 2004). The daughters' actual sex practices were not addressed when gathering the fathers' perspective; therefore, the influence a father may have on a daughter's sexual behavior was not derived in this study. However, fathers were asked to describe if they felt sexual communication with their daughter was beneficial. The majority of fathers suggested that

discussing topics in sexuality with their daughter is helpful. The two fathers who indicated uncertainty regarding the benefits of sexual communication identified the daughter's age and lack of feedback as factors to their uncertainty.

Implications

Evidence in both the literature and findings implicate the need to further study the father-daughter relationship and communication between the dyad. Further research exploring the dynamics between fathers and daughters will benefit the field of social work and future policies. Clinicians, especially those working with families, will be equipped with more effective clinical interventions in their social work practice. If there is more information available regarding the father-daughter subsystem, clinicians will be better able to develop skills and interventions specific for the relationship. Family policies regarding father involvement will be more comprehensive and inclusive if research was available to utilize in the development of policies concerning families. Theory could also benefit from a more inclusive understanding of how fathers and daughters relate. As the literature revealed, the mother-daughter relationship is often the focus in research and used to develop theory. Theory based on the interactions within mother-daughter relationship may not wholly explain parent-child relationships to encompass the unique dynamic between fathers and daughters.

Limitations

A limitation in this study is the small and fairly homogeneous sample of participants, affecting the external validity of the study. The majority of participants identified as white and all resided in the Greater New Haven region of Connecticut. Themes discovered in this study are not generalizable to other populations due to the homogeneous sample. Although it was hoped that a more diverse sample would have been recruited, time and resources were limited and

negatively influenced obtaining a larger and more diverse sample. Snowball sampling yielded a less than desirable sample size due to the difficulties with keeping in consistent contact with participants.

Interview questions were developed by the researcher and may include bias due to the researcher's personal experiences with father-daughter sexual communication. Anonymity and confidentiality was not provided for participants due to the nature of the qualitative study and this may have affected participants to respond with socially desirable answers. Participants may have overexploited positive qualities or underreported negative qualities or relationships in order to reply in a manner that seemed more favorable to the researcher. It was also noted that participants typically addressed how sexuality was discussed before being specifically questioned on sexual communication. Participants may have anticipated that this information was more useful to the researcher due to recruitment materials. Interview questions did not directly address the daughter's sex practices so this study cannot speak to the influence a father may have on his daughter's sexual behavior.

Although interview questions were open ended in hopes of yielding more inclusive responses, some participants did not provide detailed answers and may have felt that the interview process was intrusive or uncomfortable. Focus groups may have stimulated deeper conversation regarding sexual communication. All fathers volunteered to participate in the study and did not receive compensation. This sample of fathers may be more involved in their daughters' development and more apt to discuss their relationship in comparison to the general population of fathers.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research may benefit from interviewing the father-daughter dyad together in order to capture both perspectives. In general, future research regarding the father-daughter dyad is encouraged to continue to be explored. Examining the father-daughter relationship further may yield more involved fathers, more inclusiveness in family therapy dynamics, and healthier daughters.

Conclusion

The present study provides useful information regarding barriers fathers experience when discussing sexuality with their adolescent daughters. The purpose of the study was to explore father-daughter communication and capture a father's perspective of sexual communication with the daughter. The narratives in the study offer experiences and perceptions of such fathers. This chapter discussed the key findings of this study and the implications to the field of social work. Several limitations within the research design were also outlined in this chapter and suggestions for further research regarding the father-daughter dyad were made.

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APPENDIX A
HSR APPROVAL



School for Social Work
Smith College
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063
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7994

March 30, 2012

Jamie White

Dear Jamie,

Your project is now approved by the Human Subjects Review Committee. I can't wait to hear your results.

Please note the following requirements:

Consent Forms: All subjects should be given a copy of the consent form.

Maintaining Data: You must retain all data and other documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

Renewal: You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.

Completion: You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee when your study is completed (data collection finished). This requirement is met by completion of the thesis project during the Third Summer.

Best of luck with your research.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David L. Burton". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

David L. Burton, M.S.W., Ph.D.
Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Joseph Smith, Research Advisor

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT

Dear Participant,

My name is Jamie White and I am an MSW student at Smith College who is conducting a research study on father-daughter relationships. As a female and a social worker, I hope to further understand sexual communication between fathers and daughters. Smith College's Human Subjects Review approved this study and results will be used for my MSW thesis. While participating in this study, you will be asked to complete a short survey to gather your demographic information, and then participate in an individual interview regarding your relationship with your daughter.

You are eligible to participate in this study if you are age 18 or older and are a father of one or more daughters who are currently between the ages of 11 and 15 years old. You will be asked to participate in an individual interview at my office at the Clifford Beers Clinic in New Haven, CT or in a location that is convenient and comfortable for you. I will ask you to discuss topics relating to your relationship with your daughter and how sexuality is or is not being discussed within the relationship. The topic of sexuality may include puberty, dating, sexual health, relationships, sex, gender identity and sexual orientation. I predict that the interview will range from forty-five to sixty minutes and hope to capture your thorough perspective. I will use an audio tape recorder during the interview so that all information is gathered and will personally transcribe the interviews.

The potential risks of your participation in this study are minimal but may include emotional discomfort and stress. If at anytime you would like to withdraw from the study you have the right to do so. The researcher will provide you with a list of referral resources prior to beginning the interview. Compensation will not be provided if you choose to participate; however, I very much appreciate your time and contribution to the study.

I will make every effort to provide you with confidentiality and will disguise your identity when discussing results of the study. I will not ask you to provide identifiable information when completing the demographic survey. My research advisor will not have access to any data that may be used to identify you from the research discussion of results. The study's data may be presented or used in publications. All data will be stored electronically and secured with a password for three years as required by Federal guidelines. If the data are needed beyond three years, it will continue to be stored securely, and destroyed when no longer needed.

Participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw from participating in the study prior to May 15th, 2012. If you do not feel comfortable with an interview question, you may refuse to answer. Should you have concerns about your rights or other aspects of the study, you are encouraged to e-mail me at [REDACTED]. The Chair of Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review Committee can be reached at (413) 585-7974 if you have further questions. Please keep a copy of this informed consent for your records. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

As a mandated reporter, if you disclose child abuse or neglect I will be required by Connecticut law to file an oral report with the Department of Children and Families (DCF) or a law enforcement agency within 12 hours. Child neglect includes abandonment and denial of proper care and attention to physical or emotional needs. Child abuse occurs when a child has physically endured an injury to him or her other than by accidental means. Child abuse includes malnutrition, sexual molestation or exploitation, emotional maltreatment and cruel punishment.

YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THE ABOVE INFORMATION AND THAT YOU HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, YOUR PARTICIPATION, AND YOUR RIGHTS AND THAT YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY.

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date

Community Referrals

Community Health Resources

1-877-884-3571

www.chrhealth.org

Community Health Resources is a non-profit, community-based behavioral health agency providing services to children, adults and families struggling with mental health and substance abuse issues. Agency locations can be found throughout Central and Northeastern Connecticut.

Community Mental Health Affiliates

860-826-1358

<http://www.cmhacc.org>

Community Mental Health Affiliates (CMHA) has 18 locations throughout northwest and central Connecticut. CMHA offers services ranging from residential treatment to outpatient counseling and prevention programs to more than 10,000 children, adolescents, and adults each year.

Family Psychiatric Services

Hamden, CT

203-230-1102

www.familypsychiatricservices.com

Family Psychiatric Services is a private mental health practice offering psychotherapy, alternative treatment approaches, and/or traditional psychotropic medication. Family Psychiatric Services utilizes a holistic approach and serves children, adults and families.

Hartford Behavioral Health

860-727-8703

<http://www.hartfordbehavioralhealth.org>

Hartford Behavioral Health is a private, non-profit community agency providing outpatient services to adults and children in the greater Hartford area. Services include psychotherapy, psychiatric evaluations and medication management.

Integrated Wellness Group

New Haven, CT

203-387-9400

www.integratedwellnessgroup.org

Integrate Wellness Group provides individual, family and group therapy to children and families. Parenting classes, therapeutic mentoring and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultations are all services offered by the clinical team.

APPENIX C

RECRUITMENT INFORMATION

My name is Jamie White and I am currently an MSW student at Smith College School for Social Work. I am interested in researching sexual communication between fathers and daughters for my MSW thesis. I would like to further explain my study and provide you with the eligibility requirements if you are interested in participating.

My research study explores sexual communication between fathers and daughters. I am interested in learning more about how fathers and daughters discuss sexuality during the daughter's adolescent years. When I ask about sexuality, I am referring to a wide range of topic areas such as: puberty, dating, sexual health, relationships, sex, gender identity and sexual orientation.

You are eligible to participate in this study if:

- ✓ You are over 18 years old
- ✓ You identity as a male and as a father
- ✓ You have one or more daughters between the ages of 11 and 15 years old
- ✓ You play an active role in your daughter's life
- ✓ You and I do not personally know one another

It is not necessary that you live with your daughter or are the biological father. I am looking for men who feel they fit the role of father in the daughter's life. Your relationship with the daughter's mother will not affect your eligibility for the study.

If you are interested in participating in the study I will ask that you complete a short demographic survey and an interview. You may withdraw from the study at any time prior to May 15th and you may refuse to answer any question in the interview. If you are interested in learning more about my study and possibly participating, you may reach me through e-mail at [REDACTED] or by phone [REDACTED]

Thank you for your time!

APPENDIX D
INTERVIEW GUIDE

Demographic Information of Participants

Gender: _____

Age: _____

Marital Status: _____

Race and/or Ethnicity: _____

Religious Affiliation: _____

Age of Daughter/s: _____

Number of Total Children: _____

Father-Daughter Communication During Adolescence Qualitative Interview Guide

As you know, I am interested in studying father-daughter relationships. I am interviewing you today to learn more about the communication between you and your daughter during her adolescent or early teenage years. More specifically, I would like to inquire about how sexuality (i.e. dating, puberty, sexual health etc.) has or has not been discussed within your relationship. I may be asking some questions of a sensitive nature to further explore this topic. I am inquiring about your relationship in hopes to learn more about your experiences so that there is a better understanding of what was helpful during a daughters adolescent years (11-15 years old) and what might need to be improved in father-daughter communication.

1. Let's start by having you tell me a little bit about your relationship with your daughter (presently)
 - Please describe your daughter: What is her personality like? What are her interests? What do you think are her greatest strengths?
 - What qualities would you use to describe your relationship?
 - How much time do you typically spend together?
 - Are there any activities or special occasions you spend together?
2. Now I'd like to understand a bit more about how the two of you communicate
 - Who initiates communication?
 - While communicating do you talk more, listen more, or is there an equal exchange?
3. Now I'd like to specifically focus on how you may or may not have been talking about sexuality. When I ask about sexuality I am referring to a wide range of topics such as puberty, dating, sexual health, relationships, sex, gender identity and orientation
 - How often do you discuss this topic? (Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Often)
 - Are there topics concerning sexuality that you feel more comfortable discussing over others? (for example, discussing sexual health happens often but sexual orientation rarely happens)
 - Who has initiated these conversations?
 - What may have prevented you from talking about sexuality? (barriers to sexual communication)
 - What made it easier to discuss sexuality?
 - Do you feel like these conversations have been helpful to your daughter?
 - Has there ever been a time when you felt that you would have liked help or support when discussing sexuality with your daughter? Can you tell me about it?
 - Are there any conversations you would have handled differently? How so?
4. Is there anything regarding your relationship with your daughter and sexual communication that you may want to share or feel would be helpful to me in order to further understand how you and your daughter interact?

