



# "Sex Is a Sin": Afro-Caribbean Parent and Teen Perspectives on Sex Conversations

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## Abstract

This study characterized (a) mothers' childhood and teenage experiences with sex conversations and (b) families' perceptions of current parent–child sex conversations within two underserved Afro-Caribbean communities in the U.S. Fourteen dyads comprised of Haitian and Jamaican mothers and teens (aged 14–18) living in Miami, Florida, completed semi-structured interviews sharing their experiences with sex conversations. Researchers analyzed data using thematic content analysis. Mothers' mean age was 41.85 years, ( $SD = 5.50$ ) and teens' mean age was 16.35 years, ( $SD = 1.31$ ). Most mothers reported forbidden or little childhood experiences with parent–child sex conversations. They affected their sexual attitudes, behaviors, and ability to discuss sex with their children. Although some mothers benefited from educational and skill development others shared fear-based messages with their children that some teens believed adversely affected the mother–child relationship quality. Culturally appropriate, skill-based approaches are necessary to improve families' communication self-efficacy for healthy sex conversations to occur in Afro-Caribbean families.

**Keywords** Mother–child sex conversations · Culture · Haitian · Jamaican · Parent–teen perspectives

## Introduction

Healthy engagement in parent–child sex conversations has been linked to delayed adolescent sexual debut, consistent condom use, and less sexual partners [1–5]. How and when parents engage in parent–child sex conversations may be linked to their cultural sexual views. Yet, most sexual risk-reduction and prevention interventions do not incorporate culture as an influence on adolescent sexual health behaviors [6]. The sexual health literature suggests that parents are often their child's earliest and most influential sexual socializing agent using sex conversations to share their expectations for adolescents' sexual behaviors [5, 7, 8].

The benefits of family-sex conversations are essential for Black youth as they face a high STI and HIV burden. In Florida, HIV is the third leading cause of death for Black women aged 25–44, many of whom acquired the virus in adolescence [9]. Of all new HIV cases in Florida, 17% occurred among those under age 25, the majority of whom were Black [10]. Among Blacks in Florida, African Americans (69%), Haitians (23%), and Jamaicans (2%) make up 94% of HIV cases [9]. Similarly, youth aged 15–24 accounted for 64.3% of recent chlamydia cases and Black youth were again more likely to be diagnosed [11]. Unfortunately, most public schools in Florida do not require comprehensive sexual education as part of their curriculum eliminating an important source of accurate sexual health education [12]. The onus is then on parents to provide accurate sexual health information. However, discomfort and poor communication skills limit parents' ability to do so [1, 13]. Parents' childhood experiences with sex conversation are also believed to influence the approach, content, and comfort for family-sex conversations [14].

Although understudied, Afro-Caribbean constructions of sexuality are believed to endorse both chastity for girls and limited sexual discussions within families [15]. While exploring cultural differences in sex conversations, a study

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conducted in Boston Massachusetts with mothers and their daughters (aged 11–17) found that Haitian mothers experienced more discomfort engaging in sex conversations with their daughters than African–American mothers [16, 17]. While a study in Kingston, Jamaica exploring maternal influences on girls' sexual attitudes found healthy mother–daughter relationship quality to be a precursor to healthy sex conversations [18]. Additionally, Afro-Caribbean groups adhere to strict Christian sexual principles and some Christian mothers have reported opposing sex conversations especially those initiated by their children [18, 19]. African Americans cite a lack of readiness and not believing teens were sexually active as barriers to sex conversations while Afro-Caribbean cultural norms have been cited as potential barriers to sex conversation [20].

The health of Afro-Caribbean immigrants is an important national public health concern because Afro-Caribbeans are one of the largest growing immigrant groups in the U.S [21]. Currently, 3.8 million Black immigrants live in the U.S., more than 4 times the number in 1980 [21]. Jamaicans are the largest Black immigrant group in the U.S. accounting for 18% of all Black immigrants and Haitians accounting for 15% [21]. However, most research on Black adolescents does not investigate cultural and ethnic differences in sexual health attitudes and behaviors. Consequently few studies have examined Afro-Caribbean family-sex conversations [22]. The current study investigated Afro-Caribbean parent–child sex conversations among the 2 largest Black immigrant groups, hypothesizing that some unique cultural practices existed within each group. Researchers also aimed to capture an in-depth understanding of parent–child sex conversations by including parent and teen perspectives that would highlight any discordance sometimes overlooked in other studies [22]. For study purposes, *Black* is defined as a heterogenous population of people with African ancestry, *African American* is defined as Black American, *Afro-Caribbean* is defined as a Black person of Caribbean descent, *Haitian* is defined as a native of Haiti, and *Jamaican* is defined as a native of Jamaica [23]. First-generation immigrants are defined as those who are foreign-born and migrated to the U.S [24]. The current study investigated (a) mothers' childhood and teenage experiences with sex conversations and (b) families' perceptions of current parent–child sex communications within 2 Afro-Caribbean groups.

## Theoretical Framework

The PEN-3 Model guided the study design and analysis. The model was applied to this study to provide a cultural context for parent–child sex conversations and has been used to design, implement, and evaluate health promotion and prevention programs [25]. Three interrelated and independent domains each with 3 constructs are central components.

The *person construct* of the cultural identity domain was used to explore the gender roles in shaping parent–child sex conversations. The *perception and enabler constructs* of the relationships and expectations domain was used to explore the cultural and personal characterizations of sex conversations and their influence on participants' sexual attitudes and behaviors. Finally, the *positive, existential, and negative constructs* of the cultural empowerment domain was used to characterize influences of sex conversations on participants' attitudes and behaviors.

## Methods

Florida International University's Institutional Review Board approved the study protocol. This research is part of a larger mixed methods study undertaken to (a) characterize the nature, perceptions, enablers, and nurturers of sex conversations between Haitian and Jamaican parents and their adolescents and (b) to explain the relationship between sex conversations and adolescent sexual activity [26].

## Participants

Using purposive sampling strategies, participants were recruited through community-based organizations and local churches in Miami-Dade County, Florida. Within the context of family-sex conversations, mother–child communications are strongly supported in the literature, therefore, mothers were selected as the primary parent of interest [27], however, the study was also open to fathers. Fourteen mother–teen dyads/triads (N = 31) were enrolled. Families were eligible to participate if: (a) family-units had at least 1 parent and 1 adolescent (aged 14–18) who lived together and agreed to participate; and (b) mothers who self-identified as first-generation Haitian or Jamaican immigrants.

## Data Collection

Using a narrative inquiry approach, data were gathered using face-to-face in-depth interviews with open-ended questions. All participants completed a demographic questionnaire before each interview. The researcher-developed interview guide was designed using PEN-3 Model domains. An expert panel of sexuality researchers assessed the guide's face and content validity. The expert panel members consisted of subject matter and Black culture experts, inclusive of 2 academic sexuality researchers with over 10 years-experience and a lay panel Afro-Caribbean educator selected because of his cultural expertise. After establishing face and content validity, the guide was pilot tested with 2 Afro-Caribbean dyads to evaluate cultural appropriateness, study procedures, and appropriate follow-up probes. This paper will report on

7 interview questions developed to best characterize the nature of parent–adolescent sex conversations (Table 1). All interviews were voice-recorded and conducted separately in closed-door spaces to ensure privacy.

## Data Analysis

Descriptive data was analyzed using IBM SPSS 21 [28]. Thematic content analysis was used to analyze the interview data [29]. The process included: (a) data collection and familiarization; (b) coding the data; (c) applying templates of codes; (d) connecting codes and identifying themes; and (e) corroborating and validating themes. An ethnically diverse 5-member team was trained to conduct the multi-step data analyses. First, interviews were transcribed and reviewed for accuracy, allowing better identification of meaningful units. Second, team members highlighted meaningful units. Analysts met on several occasions to determine preliminary codes. Using a consensus building process, the team agreed on a set of codes, each with a unique definition. These codes served as the preliminary codebook from which themes would be developed. Third, preliminary codes were placed in an excel spreadsheet and each question included a set of codes each with supporting responses. Analysis was guided by but not limited to the preliminary codes. New codes emerged inductively while reviewing the data. Fourth, clustering of previously identified codes was used to develop themes. Next, emergent themes were reviewed to ensure they were representative of participants' responses. Interpretation of the data was conducted with 1 Haitian and 1 Jamaican data analyst. Data were analyzed at the group level comparing parents and teens, and within group comparing Haitians and Jamaicans, and boys and girls. However, questions producing data on current sex conversations were analyzed within family units as they were expected to produce discordant responses.

## Results

Participants included 6 Haitian and 8 Jamaican families. Jamaican dyads included: 6 mother–daughter dyads and 2 mother–son dyads. Haitian dyads/triads included: 2 mother–daughter dyads, 1 mother–son dyad, and 3 triads including mothers and 2 teens. Mothers mean age was 41.85 years, ( $SD = 5.50$ ) and teens' mean age was 16.35 years, ( $SD = 1.31$ ). Teens (43%) reported mothers as the most common source of sexual health information (Table 2). Results characterize mothers' childhood experiences and families' current experiences with sex conversations.

## Characterizing Mothers' Childhood and Teenage Experiences with Sex-Conversations

Three questions were used to characterize mothers' cultural and childhood experiences with sex conversations. Question (1) *What do you think the Haitian/Jamaican cultural view is on parent–teen sex conversations?*, this explored the positive, existential, and negative cultural beliefs and practices associated with sex-conversations. Question (2) *Think back on your childhood and describe your experience having sex conversations with your parents?*, this explored the cultural perceptions of sex-conversations. And Question (3) *Tell me how your childhood experiences with sex conversations may have influenced your ideas on sex, sexuality, and sexual behaviors?*, this captured the positive, existential, and negative perceptions of the influences of sex-conversations. The nature of parents' childhood experiences was characterized using 4 themes: (a) Forbidden or no experiences with sex conversations; (b) Messages characterized as verbal warnings; (c) Influences on mothers' sexual attitudes and beliefs; and (d) Generational shifts in cultural perspectives.

### Theme 1: Forbidden and or No Experience with Sex Conversations

Mothers of both cultural groups reported no, limited, or infrequent sexual discussions during their youth. Haitian mothers uniquely characterized parent–adolescent sex conversations as *forbidden* or *taboo*. One Haitian mother, (age 51, 40 years in U.S.) characterized this saying, “It’s taboo almost. We just didn’t talk about it, it’s not until somebody, a teenager comes home pregnant.” Meanwhile, Jamaican mothers expressed avoidance of sex conversations as a common practice within their culture. One Jamaican mother (age 51, 10 years in U.S.) said: “It’s like they scorn [parent–teen sex conversations], it’s like don’t touch that topic... that’s something we don’t talk about”. Similarly, when asked about their childhood experiences talking to parents about sex, most mothers described it as *forbidden* or *no experience*. One Haitian mother (age 51, 40 years in U.S.) said, “my parents had this thought process that you don’t need to know none of this or we don’t need to talk about [sex]”.

### Theme 2: Messages Characterized as Warnings

Mothers who did engage in parent–child sex conversations during their childhood characterized them as: (a) warning messages without explanation or (b) warning messages accompanied by physical discipline. One Haitian mother (age 43, 30 years in U.S.) recalled being told: “Don’t talk to boys. They can’t call you. They can’t look at you... [my parents] never got to why not talk to boys”. Some mothers experienced physical punishment if they were perceived to

**Table 1** Interview questions categorized by domains of the PEN-3 model and linked to emerging themes and categorical codes

Domain	Interview questions	Emerging themes	Subthemes
Cultural empowerment/relationships and expectations	Question 1: What do you think the Haitian/Jamaican cultural view is on parent-teen sex conversations?	Theme A: restricted or little cultural practice Theme B: generational shifts in cultural perspectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Subtheme A1: no conversation</li> <li>• Subtheme A2: taboo</li> <li>• Subtheme A3: limited content</li> <li>• Subtheme A4: avoidance</li> </ul>
Relationships and expectations	Question 2: Think back on your childhood and describe your experience having sex conversations with your parents? (parents only)	Theme A: forbidden experience Theme B: no experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Subtheme A1: no conversation</li> <li>• Subtheme A2: taboo/forbidden</li> </ul>
Cultural empowerment/relationships and expectations	Question 3: Tell me how your childhood experiences with sex conversations may have influenced your ideas on sex, sexuality, and sexual behaviors? (parents only)	Theme A: influence on mothers' sexual attitudes and behaviors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Subtheme A1: positive outcomes</li> <li>• Subtheme A2: existential outcomes</li> <li>• Subtheme A3: negative outcomes</li> </ul>
Relationships and expectations	Question 4: How would you describe your experience having sex conversations with your teen(s)/parent(s)?	Theme A: feelings associated with parent-teen sex conversations Theme B: content and context of current parent-child sex conversations Theme C: limited or no engagement in sex conversations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Subtheme A1: comfort level</li> <li>• Subtheme A2: feelings of regret</li> <li>• Subtheme B1: warning messages or rules</li> <li>• Subtheme B2: expectations about sex</li> <li>• Subtheme B3: prompts</li> </ul>
Cultural identity	Question 5: How does your gender affect the conversation? (parents/teens) How do fathers' gender affect the conversation?	Theme A: Gender associated differences in sex conversations Theme B: No gendered differences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Subtheme A1: gender of the child affects content of sex conversations</li> <li>• Subtheme A2: same or cross gender conversations</li> <li>• Subtheme A3: gender affecting sexual expectations</li> </ul>
Cultural empowerment/relationships and expectations	Question 6: Tell me how these conversations have influenced your ideas on sex, sexuality, and sexual behaviors? (teens)	Theme A: influences on teens' sexual attitudes and behaviors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Subtheme A1: positive outcomes</li> <li>• Subtheme A2: existential outcomes</li> </ul>

**Table 2** Participants' demographic characteristics

Variable	Response	N	Percentage
Mothers' mean age	41.85, <i>SD</i> = 5.50	14	
Mean year's in the U.S.	23.5, <i>SD</i> = 9.87		
Number of children 18 or under living in the home	One	7	50.0
	Two	6	42.9
	Three	1	7.1
Marital status	Married	7	50
	Single, never married	4	28.6
	Divorced	2	14
	Unmarried, living with romantic partner	1	7
Mothers' education level	Some college	9	64.3
	Bachelor degree	3	21
	Vocational training	1	7
	Advanced or professional degree	1	7
Employed	Yes	13	92.9
	No	1	7.1
Dyads' ethnicity	Haitian	6	43
	Jamaican	8	57
Teens' mean age	16.35, <i>SD</i> = 1.31	17	
Teens' gender	Male	7	42
	Female	10	58
Born in the U.S.	Yes	14	82.4
	No	3	17.6

be dating or sexually active. A Jamaican mother (age 34, 20 years in U.S.) recalled her experience "At the age of 16, I did kiss a boy and the reaction of my mother was not nice. She actually spanked me in front of all my friends... she punched my neck and I was on the floor just crying because I couldn't believe the same person who had me did that to me and she couldn't take my word".

### Theme 3: Influences on Mother's Sexual Attitudes and Behaviors

Using the cultural empowerment domain of the PEN-3 Model, the influences of mothers' childhood sex-conversations were characterized as: (a) negative; (b) existential; and (c) positive (Table 3). Some mothers reported positive outcomes including preparing teens for sexual decisions in healthier ways than their parents had done for them, developing feelings of self-worth, and avoiding risk behaviors. A Haitian mother (age 42, 35 years in U.S.) said, "I didn't have the experience [with sex conversations]. I didn't want to do the same thing my parents did to me".

While existential outcomes included viewing sex as sin or bad.

I look at sex as a sin. Even when I was married, it felt wrong. I can't wrap my mind around sex being a normal thing—Haitian mother, age 43, 30 years in U.S.

[Parents] put fear inside of you because sex is a sin... because the bible say you must not fornicate—Jamaican mother, age 51, 10 years in U.S.

Mothers most commonly reported negative outcomes resulting from childhood sex conversations, these included fear of sex, fear of males, engaging in *rebellious* sexual practices that resulted in pregnancy, and discomfort discussing sexual topics. One Haitian mother (age 43, 30 years in U.S.) said: "Instead of preparing me, my parents tried to keep stuff from me... What are you keeping from me? The minute I could have sex, I went out and I did. It was disastrous. I got pregnant as a teen".

To circumvent the negative outcomes, mothers report 3 useful strategies: (a) coaching from trained professionals;

**Table 3** Mothers' perceived outcomes of their childhood and teenage experiences with sex conversations

Subthemes	Codes	Supportive respondent quotes
Theme A: positive outcomes		
	A1: encouraged conversation	"I didn't have the experience [with sex conversations]. I didn't want to do the same thing my parents did to me"—Haitian mother
	A2: respect and appreciation	"I respected my parents, I didn't want to let them down"—Haitian mother
	A3: healthy outlook of sex	"I tried to give them a healthy outlook on boys"—Haitian mother
	A4: avoid hazards: boys, STIs, and pregnancy	"I keep myself away from boys 'cause I didn't want to catch no disease and I didn't want to get pregnant"—Jamaican mother
Theme B: negative outcomes		
	B1: fostered fear	"I was afraid of men"—Haitian mother
	B2: rebellious behavior	"I rebelled against her because I'm here being the innocent child like always now you accusing me of having sex. So, when she did that I said ok, I got you and I went and did it and in doing that that's the reason I have him[son]"—Jamaican mother
	B3: difficulty with conversations	"I didn't know how to start the conversation"—Jamaican mother
	B4: lack of knowledge	"But maybe if my mom had really sit down with me and said a b c or d maybe I would have retained it more than just reading a book"—Jamaican mother
	B5: uncomfortable with subject	"It was a very touchy topic for me"—Jamaican mother
	B6: poor outlook on sex	"It really messed up my outlook on sex"—Haitian mother
Theme C: existential outcomes		
	C1: sex is a sin/bad	I look at sex as a sin... If it's shameful and something bad, why would you want to teach that to your children?

(b) self-motivation; (a) sexual education and communication skills.

I find therapy very easy, cause you have somebody else that's knowledgeable, that can actually guide you when you don't have parents that did—Haitian mother, 34 years, 31 years in U.S.

I didn't know how to start the conversation. But in being open...listening to other people, radio, different talk show hosts and stuff like that kind of build up my confidence.—Jamaican mother, age 39, 22 years in U.S.

Some of us have gone off to college and universities we have grown and know how to put things across to the kid—Jamaican mother, age 37, 6 years in U.S.

#### Theme 4: Generational Shifts in Cultural Perspectives

Three mothers reported recognizing a generational shift in how their cultures viewed parent-adolescent sex conversations with younger parents appearing more open. One Haitian mother, (age 51, 40 years in U.S.) said: "You should abstain until you're married. But that's the really old culture, obviously, time has changed, and you have teenage pregnancy". And a Jamaican mother, (age 43, 30 years in U.S.) said: "My growing up, sex was a no, you never talk about it. The whole environment has changed nowadays, to me they

are more open... and I think the main reason is because of the media... they are trying to be Americanized."

#### Characterizing Current Parent-child Sex Conversations and Their Influence on Adolescents

Four questions elicited information on current sex conversations: Question (1) *How would you describe your experience having sex conversations with your teen(s)/parent(s)?* This question utilizes the relationship and expectations and cultural empowerment domain to characterize current parent-teen sex conversations; Question (2) *How does your gender affect the conversation?* Question (3) *How does the child's gender/parents' gender affect the conversation?* Both questions utilize the person construct of the cultural identity domain; and Question (4) *Tell me how these conversations may have influenced your ideas on sex, sexuality, and sexual behaviors?* This question utilizes the cultural empowerment and relationships and expectations domain to characterize the influence of current sex conversations on teens' sexual attitudes and behaviors. Researchers asked mothers questions 1–3 and teens questions 1–4. Five themes characterized current sex conversations and their influence on adolescent sexual beliefs and attitudes: (a) Feelings associated with sex conversations; (b) Context and content associated with sex conversations; (c) Gender-associated differences in sex conversations; (d) Limited or no engagement in sex conversations; and (e) Influence on teens' sexual attitudes and beliefs.

### Theme 1: Feelings Associated with Sex Conversations

Most mothers expressed being more comfortable engaging in sex conversations than their teens. Mothers also reported wishing they had done more to prepare teens for their sexual decision making. One Haitian mother–daughter–son triad captured the varying comfort levels experienced across families:

In all honesty, I enjoy talking to [them]—Haitian mother, age 42, 35 years in U.S.

It was awkward—Daughter, age 18, U.S.-born.

It gets kind of awkward—Son, age 15, U.S.-born.

### Theme 2: Content and Context Associated with Sex Conversations

Dyads characterized the content of current sex conversations using 2 subthemes (a) warning messages or rules, and (b) expectations about sex including topics emphasizing abstinence, STIs, and pregnancy.

We discuss pregnancy, disease, abstinence, don't be that girl with your name on the wall at school—Jamaican mother, age 39, 22 years in U.S.

Pretty interesting, there's not really conversations there are warnings about not getting pregnant and catching STDs.—Jamaican girl, age 18, U.S.-born.

Mothers and girls noted that the onset of menstruation and mass media content were prompts for sex conversations while romantic relationships were common prompts for boys. One Jamaican girl, age 18, U.S.-born, reported what prompted her mom to engage in sex conversations, “When [my mother] sees a condom commercial on TV”. Others reported:

She started [sex conversation] like around the time I started menstruation... she made a big deal about it. She took me to dinner to have a talk—Haitian girl, age 18, U.S.-born.

The time I was in middle school and they wanted to see if I had a girlfriend and what I was doing with her and if I was doing the right things or wrong things, so my mom just kind of sit me down and have a conversation—Haitian boy, age 15. U.S.-born.

### Theme 3: Gender Associated Differences in Sex Conversations

Some dyads reported no gender-related influences on sex conversations while others reported: (a) child's gender affecting the content of conversations; (b) same and

cross-gender conversations; and (c) gender affecting sexual expectations. Mothers and girls reported an emphasis on pregnancy risk and abstinence for girls. While mothers and sons reported that messages to sons emphasized respect of others and the financial responsibility of fatherhood. Mothers and daughters also believed their shared gender made conversations easier, while some mothers revealed difficulty talking to their sons about sex. The following quotes captured gender-related experiences:

When you're speaking to your daughter, you have to let them know, Listen, this guy can get up at any given day and leave you with this baby. You're fully responsible for it yourself.—Jamaican mother, age 38, 27 years in U.S.

The way my dad talks, he's talking to me like I'm going to be taking care of not only the woman I want to spend my life with but also our kid financially—Haitian boy, age 17, U.S.-born.

I know I'm supposed to, so I've made some attempts to [talk about sex], but I have no idea how, especially being a woman and him being a boy—Haitian mother, age 43, 30 years in U.S.

### Theme 4: Limited or No Engagement in Sex Conversations

Some respondents reported never or limited engagement in current sex conversations. A few mothers reported difficulty broaching the topic because of limited experiences with sex conversation in their youth. One Haitian mother (age 43, 30 years in U.S.) said, “Me and my son, we don't really talk about sex. I've made references. I've attempted to. I guess because of my upbringing, it's not something you just talk about”. Additionally, a Haitian mother–daughter dyad showed discordant perspectives about engaging in sex conversations. The mother said: “We've had conversations about [sex] from they were about eight [or] nine”. While her daughter reported: “Well we haven't really talked about [sex] ...I know because of classes”.

### Theme 5: Influence on teens' Sexual Attitudes and Behaviors

Teens were asked to describe their perception of how current parent–teen sex conversations shape their sexual beliefs and practices. They reported both positive and negative outcomes (Table 4).

**Positive Outcomes** Girls reported a broader range of positive outcomes than boys. They believed conversations encouraged abstinence, avoiding boys, and viewing sex as normal and natural. Jamaican girls believed sex conversa-

**Table 4** Teens' perceived outcomes of their experiences with sex conversations with their parents

Subthemes	Codes	Supporting quotes
Theme A: positive outcomes of parent-child sex conversations	A1: avoid hazards; boys, STIs, pregnancy	"I didn't want to get pregnant I don't want to get any sexually transmitted disease. I just don't want to get in trouble"—Jamaican girl
	A2: respect/appreciation	"I know how to be respectful to a girl and know her, what she wants and not to go above that and force her into doing stuff"—Haitian boy
	A3: abstinence	"I shouldn't have sex outside of marriage"—Haitian female
	A4: responsible intimacy	"It would be okay for me to have a girlfriend but not be intimate with her"—Haitian boy
	A5: more knowledge	"It made me more knowledgeable, because if for instance I didn't have those conversations, where I would be now? I could have had a disease by now, I could have been pregnant by now"—Jamaican girl
Theme B: negative outcomes from parent-child sex conversations	B1: fostered fear	"It made me very afraid to have sex or even date anybody"—Jamaican girl
	B2: worsened relationship quality	"It just made you close off from them. I just draw away from them [parents]. I don't really tell them anything"—Jamaican girl

tions increased their sexual health knowledge. While, boys reported developing feelings of respect and appreciation for romantic partners and receiving messages of safe-sex. A Haitian boy, age 15 (U.S. born) said "Now I know what to do and what not to do. I know having sex at a young age is probably a bad thing, unprotected sex is also a bad thing".

**Negative Outcomes** Only girls reported negative outcomes including fearing sex and boys resulting from fear-based messages used by their parents. Some girls reported that difficult experiences with sex conversations negatively affected the closeness of their relationship with parents and their ability to talk with them about sex. After difficult interactions with parents, a Jamaican girl (age 18, 6 years in U.S.) said: "It made you close off from them".

## Discussion

Mothers were reported as the most common source of sex-related information for adolescents compared to other family members, community members, or peers [30, 31]. The results characterized (a) mothers' childhood experiences with parent-child sex conversations and (b) how that shaped families' current experiences with sex conversations.

### Characterizing Mothers' Childhood Experiences with Parent-Teen Sex Conversation

Mothers characterized the nature of their childhood experiences with parent-teen sex conversation as: (a) forbidden or no experiences or (b) messages characterized by verbal

warnings and punitive discipline. Most mothers reported seldom engaging in sex conversations in their youth. Mothers' reported cultural views of sex conversations as taboo, forbidden, or avoided which were characterized as negative or existential influences on sex conversations. Haitian mothers linked their parents' failure to engage in sex conversations to taboo cultural beliefs, an association seen in previous literature [14]. Haitian and Jamaican sexual beliefs are known to be deeply rooted in Christian values [16, 32, 33]. For mothers, these beliefs may have restricted their families' openness towards sexual discussions. Similarly, Jamaican families' avoidance of sexual discussions may also be associated with religious beliefs but also highlight potential low sex communication self-efficacy. However, some mothers believed younger generations were more open to sex conversations compared to previous generations. These findings may suggest that younger parents may be responsive to interventions aimed at improving their sex communication self-efficacy. Mothers who engaged in some form of sexual discussions during their formative years often categorized them as warning messages sometimes accompanied by harsh physical punishment. Overall, both Haitian and Jamaican mothers described limited sex dialogues during their youth that left them unprepared for sexual discussions with their children.

Mothers who did engage in conversations, reported messages with religious undertones encouraging abstinence and viewing pre-marital sex as sinful. In addition, some mothers reported that limited childhood discussions and high-conflict interactions with their parents led to unsafe sexual behaviors sometimes resulting in pregnancy. This corroborates reports that uninformed and high-conflict parent-teen



sex conversations result in high-risk sex behaviors for teens [27]. To overcome these adverse outcomes, mothers reported several strategies that enabled better communicate with their teens about sex. These included: (a) self-motivation; (b) sexual education; and (c) coaching. These results show the potential benefits of counseling strategies, education and skill development that may address the negatively internalized messages about sex that affected mothers' sexual attitudes and ability to discuss sex with their children.

### Characterizing Current Parent–Teen Sex Conversations and Their Influence on Adolescents

Five themes characterized current sex conversations: (a) Feelings associated with sex conversations; (b) Content and context; (c) Gender-related differences; (d) No or limited engagement in sex conversations; and (e) Influences on teens' sexual attitudes and behaviors. Findings illustrated that mothers' childhood experiences and culture and gender norms all influenced the current nature of parent–child sex conversations. Teens characterized sex conversations as *uncomfortable* meanwhile mothers rarely expressed discomfort with sexual discussions. However, family–sex conversations may be more parent dominated limiting open dialogue and creating discomfort for teens [34, 35]. Although no studies to our knowledge have compared sex conversations between African American, Haitian, and Jamaican families, one study showed Jamaican mothers expressing comfort discussing sex. While another found Haitian mothers less comfortable discussing sex than African–American mothers [18, 36]. Our results also show that some mothers shared with their teens the fear-based messages they first received in their childhood.

As anticipated, common discussions topics were abstinence, STIs, pregnancy, and safe sex practices with most emphasis on abstinence. Comparatively this differs from African Americans as they most commonly emphasized pregnancy prevention [4, 30]. Dyads seldom reported discussing resisting sexual pressure, sexual consent, or contraceptives. Parents often avoid these topics if they lacked the necessary sexual health knowledge [37–39]. They also may hold negative views of sex conversations or lack important enablers that encourage such discussions. Discordant dyadic responses indicated that some mothers would report engaging in sex conversations while their teens reported no such conversations. This finding corroborates previous research suggesting that parents and teens may have incongruent perceptions of engaging in sex conversations [22]. These findings have adverse implications for adolescents as discordant perspectives have been linked to risky sexual behaviors [30, 40] and failure to recognize and internalize parents messages. Therefore, parents need to possess the skills to communicate with adolescents in

a manner that is both engaging and informative. Relevant to the person construct of the cultural identity domain, the child's gender influenced sex conversation comfort and content. Parents messages reinforced traditional Caribbean constructions of sexuality by emphasizing abstinence for girls [15, 41]. Messages to sons emphasized Caribbean constructions of masculinity by highlighting the financial responsibility of fatherhood [15]. Incorporating the social ramifications of early and unprotected sex has been more successful in reducing Black teens' sexual risk than messages on sole health consequences [39]. Further, mothers expressed more ease talking to daughters and some difficulty discussing sex with sons. Findings are similar to a study showing African–American mothers as more commonly discussing sex with daughters than sons [30]. There is also potential relevance for cross-gender, single-parent interventions to assist parents with sexual discussions.

### Limitations

Despite the significant findings, the study has some limitations. Using a purposive sample of English speaking participants in Miami, FL may limit the generalizability of findings to other Haitians and Jamaicans across the U.S. This sample may also report a higher level of education than non-participants limiting generalizability. Finally, no fathers were willing to be interviewed, limiting results to the experiences of mother–teen dyads.

### Novel Contribution

The study is the first to our knowledge that explores the nature of mothers' childhood experiences with sex conversations and how that influences current sex conversations in Haitian and Jamaican families. Results show that some Afro-Caribbean mothers lack the skills to engage in sex conversations with their teens effectively. Mothers' deficiency stems in part from their childhood experiences with sex conversations. Study findings support the need for health educators and family counselors to provide resources that strengthen Afro-Caribbean mothers' communication self-efficacy, sexual health knowledge, and comfort with sex conversations.

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### Compliance with Ethical Standards

**Conflict of interest** Dr. Kemesha Gabbidon and Dr. Mary Shaw-Ridley declares that they have conflict of interest to report.

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