

# Not Your Mother's Sex Ed: Neoliberal Influence on Mother-Daughter Sexuality Education

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## Research Question

What visions do mothers have about their daughters' sexual futures? What factors influence these visions?

### Theoretical Framework

Mother-Daughter Dyad  
Constructing Sexual Projects  
Neoliberal Mothering and Sex Education

### Methods

Qualitative coding of interviews

### Data

#### 9 Interviews

- Mothers from Chicagoland area
- Daughters between the ages of 10-14; Youngest in 6th grade, oldest entering high school

## Major Themes

### Autonomy in conflict with individual risk

- "I tell her, you can say that you need me to respect your personal space. And I might not pay attention to you, but it's only because I'm your mom"

### Constructing self-worth + the role of religion

- "What I hope I can do is avoid what happened with my mother, which was that she was so determined to pretend that nothing was happening that I felt a lot of shame and guilt and I don't think that that's necessary."

### Sharing responsibility with schools

- "I feel like the kids need to hear [about the risks of sex] not from a parent because they won't listen to a parent, as opposed to being in school where they'll be like, 'wait, what? What does that do?'"

## Conclusions

By examining the mother daughter relationship, this research traces the influence of neoliberal values have persisted in the transition from the moralistic abstinence-only education of the 1980s to the evidence-focused comprehensive sex education of today. However, this research also found the possibility of a relational model, where mothers make their daughters aware of the importance of outsiders and the greater community's perspectives, but so is the individual's perception of their self-worth and respect. Even mothers who expressed their desire for their daughters to be abstinent shared their desire for their daughters to experience positive, wanted sexual encounters- albeit in the future. Their concerns about the risks of youth sexuality reflected concerns about stigma and access to care: *Will this prevent my daughter from going to school? Will this mean she will never be financially stable? Will this mean she will struggle the way I did?* The mothers' fears are perhaps more indicative of the lack of social support for young girls who decide to have sex, not of the moral implications of the act itself. With this lack of social welfare to support mothers, they instead carefully construct and control their daughters' sexual futures in order to protect them, while also using religion, self-worth, and autonomy to subvert and empower their daughters.