



OPINION

Latino parents avoid the sex talk

When children reach puberty, their parents often approach them to discuss changes in their bodies and answer questions about sex. For many Latino teenagers, this is not the case. According to the National Library of Medicine, Hispanic parents hold back from having conversations about sexual and reproductive health. The sex talk is a cultural taboo.

According to Pew Research, only 39% of Latino parents discuss birth control in their households. Even with 53% of Latino youth reporting having discussed sex at some point, it is not enough to fulfill the need for more sexual education in our homes.

The few conversations I had with my parents where sex was implicitly discussed were mostly warnings to wait until marriage. My parents would only tell me “Take care of yourself” or “Don’t you dare do it.”

With that implicit warning combined with the constant exposure to sexuality on television, movies and music, I could only wonder what the mystery behind sex was, and why we should not talk about it.

I felt as if I was left alone in an educational journey that was overwhelming, especially during my pre-teen years.

According to Pew Research,

77% of Christian Latino parents correlate sex with being impure, sinful and negative.

Contraceptives, sexuality and consent were no-go topics in my inner circle. My curiosity grew, but the only place I could turn to was social media and the internet.

According to the National Center for Biotechnology Information, machismo culture is predominant within the Latino community, and there are disparities between how sex is viewed for men and women.

Erika Guevara-Rosas, Americas director at Amnesty International, said, “Comprehensive sexuality education is a fundamental tool for the defense of human rights ... from gender-based violence and inequality to problems related to sexual and reproductive health.”

Despite living in a conservative environment, male friends and classmates were vocal about their experiences. I had to sit in silence, trying to understand why it was easier for them and not for me.

Young people may look for sexual health information on platforms such as TikTok and YouTube.

Many sex educators are using these platforms to create a safe space for those looking for information. That is not enough to substitute real sex education at home or at school.

The Planned Parenthood website was the only reliable source I had to understand what options



Illustration by Maria Elena Franco

were available for me.

According to the Pan American Health Organization, 15% of pregnancies in Latin America occur in women under the age of

20. This is a clear reflection of the lack of sexual education in schools and homes, and something I was deeply afraid of.

After moving to the U.S., my exposure to sex ed amplified. After 19 years of living in Honduras, where the morning after pill is illegal and contraceptives are not available for women, being

able to access these resources was a breath of fresh air.

At this point, I still never had the sex talk with my parents. Even if we discuss politics, religion and sports, it seems like the line was drawn when I wanted to ask them about birth control.

Concepts such as consent, the use of contraceptives, preventing a pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases are not exempt when discussing reproductive health.

Due to my parents conservative upbringing, these important concepts were never spoken about.

As a daughter of young Latino parents, I understand why they never wanted to discuss my reproductive health and having sex, since they feared

I would eventually continue the generational cycle of having kids at a young age. Even the thought of their daughter beginning her sexual journey seemed unimaginable.

Sex is part of human nature, and as embarrassing as it might feel to have a conversation, it is imperative to protect ourselves from the overwhelming amount of information online.

Not having these conversations at home is harmful, not only for our generation, but for our parents as well.

The generational cycle continues and the stigma around sex is far from broken.

It is better to be safe than sorry, especially when it comes to our reproductive health.

Ways to change your mindset

One’s thoughts can be very powerful. It is easy to believe you may not pass a class because it seems too hard, that someone may not like you because of how you dress or that people just annoy you in general.

Whether these thoughts are fleeting or run like a song on repeat, you can change them. You can start by using these simple tools.

Meditating can be an extremely helpful tool in recognizing negative thoughts and refocusing them to positive ones.

It also helps people relax and cope with stress.

According to the Mayo Clinic website, “Meditation can give you a sense of calm, peace and balance that can benefit both your emotional well-being and your overall health.”

If you own a cell phone and can remain undisturbed for 15 minutes, you have already achieved half the battle. There are hundreds of meditation apps you can use. These apps

will walk you through the process.

Try using affirmations. Positive affirmations are phrases, either spoken or thought, to affirm and build yourself up – especially amid difficult situations, according to the Cleveland Clinic website.

Affirmations combat negative phrases we may often use such as “I can’t,” “I’m not,” “I won’t” or “If only I.” Phrases such as these can keep you second guessing yourself and unfocused on the goal at hand. Instead, use phrases such as “I can,” “I will” and “I am.” Examples of how they are used are as follows: “I can be organized;” “I will pass this class;” “I am smart and beautiful;” “My skills will change the world.” Having these phrases in your arsenal can keep you fueled up, in a positive mindset and ready to take on the day.

Sometimes trying to change the way you think is not as easy as reading an article, trying an app or studying a self-help book.

Sometimes you need an expert such as Katie Neff, a licensed

counselor at Brookhaven Campus, or others in the Counseling and Psychological Services at Brookhaven Campus.

Counselors recognize you as a whole person, not just a student. Whether you are feeling overwhelmed, stressed out or just need emotional support, they are there to help.

Listening to music can be a tool to change your mindset. Especially when it has a positive message behind it.

According to Medical News Today, clinical therapists use the power of music to help their clients better their moods and regulate emotions. When researchers at the Centre for Interdisciplinary Music Research at the University of Jyväskylä, Aalto University in Finland and Aarhus University in Denmark investigated the relationship between mental health, music listening habits and neural responses to music emotions, their results were quite interesting.

Analysis showed anxiety and neuroticism were higher in participants with specific markers who tend to listen to sad or aggressive

music to express negative feelings, especially in males.

Take a look at your playlist and the lyrics from the music you enjoy. If it has a positive message, is calming, relaxing and keeps you in a good mood, you are on the right track. If not, I would encourage you to try out new music. Build a new playlist or podcast playlist of positivity.

Reading and listening to motivational speakers and self-help coaches can be helpful too. People such as Tony Robbins, Oprah Winfrey and Eric Thomas inspire, encourage and can be a wealth of information toward more positive thinking. A few great books that have been helpful for me are “No Matter What!” by Lisa Nichols, “How to win friends and influence people” by Dale Carnegie, “The Magic of Thinking BIG” by David J. Schwartz and “Atomic Habits” by James Clear.

No matter where you are in your life, changing your thoughts from negative to positive can help you live a more meaningful and positive life.



THREE APPS WE RECOMMEND



Calm
Helps people with relaxation, meditation and sleep.

Headspace
Meditation made simple. It teaches you the basic skills of meditation and mindfulness in as little as a few minutes a day.

Ten Percent Happier
Teachers and scientists who help guide you not only in the art of meditation but also sleeping better. One can become more mindful and happy.

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