

THE PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF DEVELOPING SEXUALITY  
IN MIDDLE CHILDHOOD

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Dedication

*To Alan and Keenan with love, appreciation, and tremendous pride  
in what we've accomplished.*

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the personal experience of developing *sexuality in middle childhood*. Subjects were twenty-four children, twelve boys and twelve girls, between the of ages 6 and 9 obtained through community youth groups in three middle class white suburbs of a major midwest metropolitan area.

Children were interviewed using a schedule of open-ended questions developed in pilot studies to elicit their perceptions and descriptions of their inner experiences related to sexual growth and development. Interviews were audio-taped and transcribed.

Data analysis consisted of identifying data-generated categories and classification of data according to domains and component dimensions of person-environment interaction developed by the North American Nursing Diagnosis Association (NANDA): physical (exchanging, perceiving, moving), behavioral (choosing, communicating, relating), and inner experience (valuing, feeling, knowing).

Results showed the experience of developing sexuality in this population to be wholistic with developmental trends consistent with cognitive and psychosocial theories. Patterns identified suggest the personal experience of developing sexuality in this age period can be usefully characterized by the domains of physical, behavioral and inner experience person-environment interaction. The predominance, specific manifestations and meanings of interactions differed across this period beginning with primary emphasis on the physical domain, progressing to the behavioral domain and showing evidence of a shift to an inner experience focus during the latter part of this period. Other domains and component dimensions were best understood in relationship to the prominent domain.

An age-related trend emerged in which the meaning of personal experience shifted from immediate reality to awareness of other perspectives, weighing of one's own situation in relation to other possibilities, and emerging sensitivity to the entire range of implications

of being an individual who is also a boy or a girl. Individual differences such as personality factors markedly influenced how events and relationships were experienced and expressed. It appears likely that skills developed during this period will have an impact on adolescent and adult sexual development and functioning by influencing the negotiation of meanings.

## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

#### Research Question

What is the personal experience of developing sexuality in middle childhood? This study investigated the development of sexuality in middle childhood from the child's perspective using a qualitative methodology to elicit children's perceptions and descriptions of this aspect of their own experience.

#### Orientation to Area of Study

##### Significance

The National Council to Evaluate Basic Research on Middle Childhood (1984) found research on this population limited and uneven across areas. One area identified as being in particular need of study was the personal experience of children in this age group. It has been suggested that this information might provide clues as to the nature of sexual development in this period which is increasingly viewed as crucial to adolescent and adult sexual development and functioning.

The *ANA Code for Nurses with Interpretive Statements and Social Policy Statement* describe nurses as being concerned with the health needs of the public, health promotion, and personal responsibility for health which is described as "a dynamic state of being in which the developmental and behavioral potential of an individual is realized to the fullest extent possible" (ANA, 1980, p. 5). Psychosexual development, a perspective concerned with the relationship of psychological and sexual phenomena, is an example of a developmental perspective of interest to nursing. Nancy Fugate Woods notes that

sexuality pervades human beings and influences their self-images, feelings and relationships, stating, "sexuality encompasses biologic, psychologic, sociologic, spiritual and cultural aspects of life" (Woods,1984, p.3). It is this multi-faceted nature of sexuality that underscores the importance of sexual learning and development.

Nursing's *Social Policy Statement* (ANA, 1980) lists human responses that are the focus for nursing intervention. The list, with minor modifications to reflect intervention to support normal developmental processes, provides an overview of how nursing might be involved in investigating and supporting various aspects of the development of sexuality in middle childhood:

- Development of self-care ability;
- Emotions related to life experiences;
- Symbolic functions reflected in interpersonal and intellectual processes;
- Development of decision making skills;
- Self-image;
- Perceptual orientations to sexual health;
- Adjustment to life processes such as growth and development;
- Affiliative relationships.

Nurses have access to children in a variety of health care and community settings and are thus in a unique position to contribute to knowledge development and to assist children to integrate their sexuality as they increase their mastery of the self and the social world. A view of sexuality which encompasses physical, cognitive and affective dimensions of personal and social being and expression has implications for health in this as well as later life periods.

### Overview of Psychosexual Development

Sexuality begins prenatally with the determination of chromosomal sex at conception. Gender identity, possessing a male or female body, determines personal pronouns from birth on. Core gender identity, the knowledge of self as boy or girl is established by 18 months to 3 years of age. Gender role identity, the developing sense of masculine/ feminine behaviors begins to emerge once core gender identity is established (Money 1965, 1979,1986).

Studies suggest psychosexual differentiation is an active process of editing and assimilating experiences that derive ultimately from the genital appearance of the body. These experiences include perceptions of one's own sexual organs, personal nouns and pronouns, and gender-specific expectancies and attitudes. This process of psychosexual differentiation can take place in opposition to genetic sex, hormonal sex, gonadal sex (ovarian, testicular or mixed), morphology of the internal reproductive organs or the genitals, or sex of assignment and rearing (Money, 1965, 1979,1986). Money considers the acquisition of gender role and psychosexual identity as human counterparts to imprinting in animals with the critical period in establishing this identity approximately the same as that for the establishment of native language.

Psychosexual differentiation is manifested in full at adolescence and remains relatively stable in adulthood. Biological puberty begins between the ages of 8 and 15 with the onset of the menstrual cycle (menarche), the capacity for ejaculation (polluarche), and the development of secondary sex characteristics (Martinson, 1981). Large numbers of children experience the physical changes of pubescence well before their thirteenth birthday (Collins, 1984) and Borneman (1983) cited the unexpected finding that females can be impregnated before menarche as evidence of the need to challenge and empirically test previously unquestioned tenets of children's sexual physiology. He further stated that *while the process of accelerated growth and earlier puberty has slowed during last decade,*

it is still problematic when considered in conjunction with the longer time needed to achieve mental maturity as human knowledge expands. Borneman identified this growing gap between physiological and psychological maturity as a major source of sexual problems and noted responsible sexual behavior is not governed by generative, but by psychological maturity. Westney, Jenkins, Butts and Williams (1984) found wide variation in maturation (assessed by Tanner staging) for chronological age with a more pronounced variation among girls in 101 black preadolescents, ages 9-11 years. Genital development was significantly related to male but not female sexual behavior.

The development of sexuality in middle childhood has received limited attention, largely as a legacy of Freud's description of this period as a time of quiescent sexual feelings and interest (Freud, 1905/1962). Much sexuality literature, including nursing's, simply reiterates Freud's description although research has strongly challenged the validity of Freud's theory regarding this period. There is currently renewed interest in middle childhood as a key period in sexual development.

#### Overview of Middle Childhood

The National Research Council Panel to Review the Status of Basic Research on School-Age Children investigated research pertaining to development during middle childhood, the years from six to twelve. (Collins, 1984). The panel noted that research was uneven in quality, varied widely in amount of information available from area to area, and was largely from perspectives that were only incidentally concerned with this period of development. The panel identified the most urgent need to be a conviction that the phenomena of middle childhood warrant a commitment of scholarly energies and resources.

Research showed significant continuities as well as considerable change during middle childhood. Three general themes appeared:

1. New capacities clearly emerged around age 6 or 7 in children's skills, thought and behavior. Processes of consolidation, extension, and integration of social and personal knowledge, skills, emotions, and modes of response and interaction appeared to underlie this change.

2. Marked changes in capacities and typical behavior occurred in middle childhood. Major transformations in abilities also appeared to reflect gradual consolidation and extension of abilities. Greater self-regulation of activities and problem-solving skills, more extensive repertoires of skills for tasks and more effective techniques for beginning and maintaining social relationships appeared.

3. The marked individual differences in the course and outcomes of middle childhood development were underscored by the continuity of developmental process.

Development in middle childhood appeared to have considerable significance for behavioral orientations, success, and adjustment in adolescence and adulthood. This period seemed a much more powerful predictor of adult status than early childhood predictors.

During ages 5-7 there was a growing ability to deal systematically with abstract representations of objects and events, increasing capacities for planful organized behavior and ability to monitor one's own activities and mental processes. This coincided with a pronounced increase in opportunity and capacity to acquire information and use knowledge in reasoning, thinking, problem solving, and action.

School was the main formal vehicle for the transmission of knowledge, cultural norms and values but informal learning about social systems, conventions and relationships increased dramatically in middle childhood. During this period, children developed concepts of health, illness and behavioral norms for various settings.

Understanding of conception increased markedly. Children in this period were increasingly responsible for evolving life-style issues with implications for physical and mental well-being and had increased opportunities to acquire social scripts and concepts through exposure to more varied social models and settings.

Crucial achievements were made in the area of concepts of self with major advances in stability and comprehensiveness of self-knowledge, refining understanding of the social world, and in developing standards and expectations for one's own behavior. A transition occurred in middle childhood toward descriptions of self in terms of abstract dispositional qualities rather than purely physical descriptors.

Family relationships moved toward assisting the child to develop internal controls. Notions about the qualities essential to successful peer relationships became more sophisticated but the capacity for maintaining and extending intimate relationships over time was not apparent until late middle childhood (10-12). These dimensions of peer relationships are known to affect interactions with peers in adolescence. The Council noted that the emotional components of peer experiences and influences needed study (Collins,1984).

Individual children negotiated developmental sequences at different rates and along somewhat different trajectories. The Council recommended that individual differences in children ages 6-12 be studied as well as the implications of development in this period for smooth transitions into adolescent and adult roles. It was noted that a conceptual framework is needed to capture the nature of external forces on the developing child which give meaning to stimulation. Suggestions for further research included studies of mundane events as well as pivotal transitions in a child's life, children's views of common experiences, and subjectively held expectations and cultural beliefs about the behavior of children ages 6-12. It was noted that attention needs to be given to social relationships and settings along with their functions and linkages. There was fragmentary evidence that consistency between salient social contexts facilitated optimal functioning of children.

beneficial. The Council stated that research is needed to determine how children perceive discrepancies in expectations in different settings and how family, peers, and other social systems may influence development between ages 6-12. The Council identified a need for research on emotional understanding and expression and its interrelationships with other domains of functioning (Collins, 1984).

### **Theoretical Perspective**

This study is grounded in the relational paradigm which views persons and phenomena in a wholistic manner, asserting that reducing them to component parts destroys or distorts the integrity of the whole (Flynn, 1980). Newman describes the relational paradigm as “patterned, unitary, intuitive, qualitative and innovative” (Newman, 1986, pp. 17-18). Within this perspective patterns are viewed as information, sketches of the underlying pattern of the whole. Although patterns are time specific they contain information enfolded from the past and information which will unfold in the future. Whatever is manifested at a given point in time reflects the underlying pattern (Newman, 1987). Pattern recognition makes possible an understanding of the meaning of all relationships at once.

Newman considers pattern to be the essence of a wholistic view of health and is developing an experiential methodology to facilitate pattern identification. (Newman, 1987). Pattern identification is facilitated by the use of broad, open-ended questions which allow the subject to describe personally relevant material. Newman identifies the assessment framework developed by the North American Nursing Diagnosis Association (NANDA) as appropriate for pattern identification within her theoretical framework, stating, “The dimensions of this assessment framework...are considered to be manifestations of the unitary pattern” (Newman, 1986, pp. 73-74).

### **Definition of Terms**

**Developing Sexuality:** the unfolding of experience pertaining to the condition of being characterized by sex. For this study, developing sexuality was documented by children's responses to interview questions such as, "What is it like to be a boy/girl?" and, "How do you learn about being a boy/girl?"

**Middle Childhood:** the period of life between the ages of 6 and 12. For study purposes, sample was limited to children between the ages of 6 and 9.

**Pattern:** a wholistic view of information which conveys the meaning of all relationships at once. In this study, pattern was documented by the presence of domains and component dimensions of person-environment interaction adapted from Newman's (1990) grouping of NANDA dimensions within levels of reality:

Physical (exchanging, perceiving, moving)

Behavioral (choosing, communicating, relating)

Inner Experience (valuing, feeling, knowing)

## CHAPTER II

### Review of Literature

#### Psychoanalytic Perspective

As early as 1896 Freud emphasized childhood as relevant to the development of adult sexuality. In his 1905 publication, *Three contributions to the theory of sex*, Freud discussed infantile (pre-pubertal) sexuality. Freud identified the difficulties in studying infantile sexuality, noting that the observation of childhood had the disadvantage of treating easily misunderstood material, while "psychoanalysis reaches its conclusions only by great detours." (Freud, 1905/1962, p. 60) Freud's theoretical formulations were based on retrospective reports of neurotic adults. He justified this by saying, "the years of childhood of those who are later neurotics need not necessarily differ from those who are later normal except in intensity and distinctness," (Freud, 1905/1962, p. 38).

Freud postulated a latency period (beginning around age 6 and continuing until puberty), in which sexual energy is diverted to other aims and stated that since procreation is not possible in this period, sexual feelings would be perverse and therefore able to evoke only feelings of displeasure. A number of investigators have tested aspects of Freud's theory. Montagu's (1945) naturalistic study of three children from birth to 14 months, 7 and 10 years, showed no support of major points of Freud's theory, including a latency period. Conn's (1947) data indicated concrete events and situations rather than the hypothetical sex instinct postulated by Freud stimulated or hindered the growth of sex curiosity in childhood and the scope of these interests increased with age. Kohlberg (1966) cited an unpublished study by Bernick which found a similar level of heterosexual interest at each age from five to sixteen. Sutton-Smith and Abrams (1976) found psychosexual material (references to romantic, sexual or tabooed behavior) in fantasy narratives of children 5-11 and increasing taboo violation with age.

Martinson (1981) studied 3,200 United States K-6 school children, ages 5-12, analyzing essays and picture drawings for overt and covert sexual material related to sexual identity, gender identity, and sexual activity. The study design allowed children to reveal what they knew while denying they had any right to know it, thus avoiding conflict with the child's value system. Overt sexual interest and knowledge was continuous and there was progressive expansion of social awareness and activities. Martinson interpreted this as the cultural elimination of the latency period by factors such as the sexual revolution, the media, and the integration of cultural subgroups within school systems. Goldman and Goldman (1982) examined varying aspects of sexuality which impinge upon children's experience. Subjects were 838 children ages 5-15 from Australia, North America, England, and Sweden. The existence of Freud's latency period was entirely refuted.

Borneman (1983) taped the "forbidden" riddles, songs and verses of 4,367 children and juveniles. Borneman stressed that children's sexual activities must be understood as a search for identity and not as quests for genital satisfaction and reported that during the previous decade a marked tendency toward sex role reversal had been observed in children's play behavior, bosom envy was frequently noted, and boys of school age displayed jealousy of girls' ability to bear and nurse children. Verses conveyed outright genital themes both before and after puberty. It appears clear that Freud's view of middle childhood as a time of sexual disinterest is not substantiated.

#### Cognitive-Developmental Perspective

In contrast to Freud's instinctual theory, Kohlberg's (1966) cognitive- developmental theory of children's sex-role concepts and attitudes is based on Piaget's stage theory of cognitive growth. Within this perspective, qualitative differences in modes of thinking lead to transformed perceptions of the self and the social world. Kohlberg maintains that sexual attitudes are patterned by the child's organization of his world along sex-role dimensions and social-role concepts are organized around physical dimensions of

male/female differences. Kohlberg stresses the active nature of the child's thought as he organizes his role perceptions and learnings around basic conceptions of his body and the world. This process is selective and internally organized by relational schemata such as concepts of the body, the physical and social world, and general categories of relationship like causality, quantity, time, and space.

Research shows that children develop a conception of themselves as having an unchangeable sexual identity at the same age and through the same processes they develop conceptions of the invariable identity of physical objects (Kohlberg, 1966). An assumption of Kohlberg's theory is that cognitive learning of sex-role concepts leads to the development of new values and attitudes. Neither socializing pressures nor direct motive teaching is necessary. Kohlberg postulated five mechanisms by which the development of sex-role concepts lead to the development of masculine-feminine values:

1. The tendency to schematize interests and respond to new interests that are consistent with old ones;
2. The tendency to make value judgments consistent with a self-conceptual identity;
3. The tendency for prestige, competence, or goodness values to be closely and intrinsically associated with sex-role stereotypes;
4. The tendency to view basic conformity to one's own role as moral, part of conformity to a general socio-moral order;
5. The tendency to imitate or model persons who are valued because of prestige and competence, and who are perceived as like the self.

All of these mechanisms of value generation rest on the assumption that the child is a valuing and value-seeking organism.

Kohlberg stated that imitation does not depend upon a prior relationship of dependency (as does Freud's process of identification), but when modeling tendencies develop, emotional attachment almost inevitably follows. The desire to model leads, in

turn, to the desire to be near the model and obtain approval.

The early research by Conn (1939) examined the development of sexual awareness and attitudes using information directly supplied by children as well as information about them. A play interview was used to obtain relevant information despite children's awareness of societal restrictions on the discussion of certain topics, mention or display of certain body parts, and discussing sexual topics. Data indicated children become sensitized to and avoid using words with sexual significance at an early age although they are able to make factual, descriptive statements of anatomical differences (men have a long one, women don't). Age was found to be a factor in the development of sexual knowledge and attitudes. Mutual body inspection was found to occur in average children and experimentation with interpersonal relationships (during the ages 7-9) contributed to the abandonment of many earlier beliefs. Children were found to defer to the conceptions of older children and displayed interest in collecting sexual information as a means of proving grown-up status. During this phase of socialization dreams of the opposite sex occurred and concepts of love and marriage appeared. Children in this age period became aware of the presence of genital sensations described as tickling, tingling, itching or stinging and reported these sensations as gratifying, causing their attention to be repeatedly directed to this area. Boys of 10 or 12 were beginning to think in terms of genital contact. Conn concluded that children assimilate and synthesize their sexual experiences as they do other aspects of everyday living.

Conn (1947) later reported on a series of studies dealing with various phases of the development of sex awareness and sex attitudes of children. A doll play interview format was used with 100 children (61 boys, 39 girls) 4-11 years of age to investigate aspects of development of sex awareness of the individual child. Data were used to assess factors such as situational and personality factors, children's spontaneous questions as indicators of level of interest and understanding, how sex data are used and transformed and how and at what age sex information begins to be synthesized into adult conceptions of sexual

functions and processes. A gradual development of concept of origins and process of birth was noted. The period of socialization and logical thinking described by Piaget was found to correspond to the age interval during which the child begins to discuss sex topics with playmates and first learns of the existence of some form of genital contact. At nine to eleven years the sex act was thought of in terms of bringing together the male and female excretory organs and children appeared to be puzzled as to why this should result in a baby.

Kohlberg and Ullian (1966) studied the development of psychosexual concepts and attitudes using an interview format with 70 children in the even ages from 6-18 years. The study examined the nature of sex-typed concepts at various ages and identified some dimensions on which change occurs, looking at descriptive (perceptions of male and female differences) and prescriptive (how men and women *ought* to be) cognitions and their relationship to each other. Preliminary data showed that at the earliest level, sex-role differences are based on observable physical criteria, such as size, strength, and material status. What children wanted to be at this stage was limited by physical characteristics associated with their gender identity. A conventional level of development followed in which differences in sex roles defined social duties. Males and females were seen as occupying a particular role within a larger social system. At this stage, what children wanted to be in terms of roles was largely defined by conformity to existing sex roles. At the third level, sex-role characteristics were personally chosen from a conception of what the individual wanted to be. The choice was based on a need for mutuality and equality of individuals in sexual relationships. It was found that by age 6, the physical concepts of sex role were complete. Next the child redefined roles in terms of their place in a moral order called society. Kohlberg and Ullian stated that, for the child, stages in the development of psychosexual concepts are an organizing focus in the development of attitudes toward love, work and parenthood; main themes of adult life.

Bernstein and Cowan (1975) studied children's concepts of how people get babies

using a cognitive developmental framework. Children ages 3-4, 7-8, and 11-12 were interviewed with questions focusing on concepts of how people get babies and Piaget-type tasks. A Piagetian developmental sequence found. Qualitative analysis revealed six levels of cognitive development with formal operations a possible prerequisite for the last level. A developmental lag was noted in the area of the origin of babies. Findings indicated sex information was both taken in (accommodated) and radically transformed (assimilated) to the child's cognitive level. Much apparent misinformation appeared to be a product of assimilative processes at work on materials too complex for the child to understand. It was suggested that sexual information, like moral development concepts, may be assimilable if one level beyond the child's original stage of functioning but distorted or not comprehended beyond this.

Bernstein (1975) explored Piaget's assertion that the child works at making his universe intelligible. Children's understanding of procreation was assessed using the sophistication of the child's response rather than its correctness as the indicator of level of understanding. Concepts of procreation fell into age-related levels briefly described as:

1. Geography (the baby is from some place and has always existed);
2. Manufacturing (babies are built out of hair, skin, bones);
3. Transitional (mixes technology and physiology and may be aware that these explanations don't quite add up);
4. Concrete physiology (mostly 8 years old, initially embarrassed by questions about sex, disclaim knowledge then state babies come from the union of sperm and egg or sexual intercourse);
5. Preformation (the child's own sex did not determine whether the egg or the sperm was perceived as the place where the baby existed before union);
6. Physical causality (accurate perceptions of reproductive process, around 12 years).

An interesting finding related to parents' perceptions of their children's knowledge. Most

parents expected a greater degree of information than the children possessed and none anticipated the distortions.

Goldman and Goldman (1982) found non-sexual, transitional sexual and fully sexual stages of cognition paralleling Piaget's pre-operational, concrete and formal operational cognitive developmental stages. On a total Piagetian Scale (where sexual facts may be wrong but the logic used may be of a high level), North American children ranked highest among North American, British, Australian and Swedish children. It was hypothesized that this finding may reflect earlier social maturing among North American children. The investigators concluded that children are capable of understanding complex biological concepts much earlier than previously thought and identified the need for a conceptual structure for children's sexual thinking to guide educational planning.

### **Social Learning Perspective**

Social learning theory relies on observable antecedent events rather than inferred mental activities to predict and interpret behavior. Cognitive mediating processes are acknowledged but not seen as causal. Behavior is predicted on the basis of relevant social-learning history, specific stimulus situations and contingencies in which the predicted behavior occurs (Maccoby, 1966). This perspective views sexual differences in behavior as an acquisition process in which the child first learns to discriminate sex differences, then generalizes these differences and finally performs in accordance with perceived differences (Maccoby 1966).

Social learning theory postulates that human behavior is transmitted, deliberately or inadvertently, largely through exposure to social models (Bandura, 1971) and assumes that modeling influences operate through symbolic representations of modeled events. Modeling phenomena are governed by interrelated subprocesses:

Attentional processes: The people with whom one regularly associates delimit the types of behavior that one will repeatedly observe and learn most thoroughly.

Retention processes: Observers function as active agents who transform, classify, and organize modeling stimuli into easily remembered schemes. This subprocess relates to response patterns that are retained over extended periods and activated only when the individual reaches an age or social status at which the activity is considered appropriate.

Reinforcement and motivational processes: Learning is rarely activated into overt performance if there are negative sanctions while positive incentives change observational learning into action. Reinforcement variables regulate the overt expression of modeled behavior and can also affect observational learning by exerting selective control over the types of modeled events to which people attend.

Goldman and Goldman (1982) conducted a study to estimate the extent of children's sexual knowledge, sexual understanding at various ages, processes of thought used in trying to explain biological functions, their own growing bodies and varying aspects of sexuality which impinge upon their experience. Subjects were 838 children ages 5, 7, 9, 11, 13 and 15 from Australia, North America, England, and Sweden. An interview format using open-ended questions assessed areas of perceptions of marriage, sex roles of parents, self choice of sexual identity, sex differences at birth and puberty, origin of babies, gestation and birth processes, sex determination, coitus, birth control and abortion, sex education, clothes and nakedness plus a list of ten sexual words to assess an understanding of sexual vocabulary.

The vast majority of children in the Goldman and Goldman study viewed sex education as necessary. Home (usually the mother) was most often cited as the major source of sex information with teachers and the media following. In the absence of adequate sex instruction children invented their own explanations for biological and sexual processes. On a biological realism scale, North American children scored lowest with a statistically significant two year retardation. The same trends were also evident in understanding of 10 sexual words: pregnancy, conception, stripping or nudity, rape, venereal diseases, uterus, puberty, virgin, contraception and abortion. This result was

presumed to be related to North American children's possession of the least and longest delayed sex education of the groups studied. Social and cultural factors such as inadequate communication and use of incorrect terminology and descriptions are also hypothesized to contribute to retardation in sexual thinking. Children in the study used over 60 euphemisms for penis, over 50 for vagina. Correct physiological terms, rarely used, were described as "dirty." North American children appeared to be the most inhibited in this area.

Borneman (1983) reported on the latest findings of a research team that has investigated aspects of children's sexuality for forty years. Findings indicated the child has no natural sense of "obscenity" or "shame" but derives this knowledge from other children or adults' nonverbal messages. Borneman felt this was facilitated by children's retention of elements of an innate understanding of body language.

### Summary

The National Research Council Panel's report on basic research on school-age children concluded that priority should be given to focusing scholarly energies and resources to investigate the phenomena of middle childhood. Development in this period appeared to be highly significant for adjustment in adolescence and adulthood. Research has shown that children develop concepts of health and behavioral norms during middle childhood and are increasingly responsible for evolving life-style issues with implications for physical and mental well-being (Collins, 1984). Sexual interest and knowledge was evident during this period (Bernstein, 1975; Borneman, 1983; Conn, 1939; Conn, 1947; Goldman and Goldman, 1982; Kohlberg and Ullian, 1974; Martinson and Constantine, 1981; Westney, Jenkins & Butts, 1984). Children's growing ability to monitor their own activities and mental processes should facilitate investigation of sexual thinking and attitudes (Collins, 1984).

Piagetian sequences were found in children's sexual thinking with stages which parallel other cognitive changes (Bernstein, 1975; Conn, 1947; Goldman and Goldman, 1982; Kohlberg and Ullian, 1974). Assimilation and accommodation of sexual information was apparent and distortions of information appeared to be the result of this assimilative process on materials too complex for the child's current level of understanding. A developmental lag was noted in North American children's acquisition of sexual concepts and vocabulary and was hypothesized to be related to cultural factors including limited and delayed sex education (Bernstein, 1975; Goldman and Goldman, 1982).

Martinson (1981), described sex and sexuality as essential phenomena of childhood. He attributed the lack of recognition of children as fully sexual beings to the sexual restrictiveness of our society. Martinson suggested children's sexuality and sexual experiences may be as significant as those of adults and identified a need for research in which children speak for themselves about their sexual feelings and experiences. The confusion and pain expressed by many children prompted Martinson to stress the need for adult acknowledgment of children's sexual awareness.

Many of the studies cited demonstrate that creative methodologies which take into account the sensitive nature of investigating childhood sexuality can, indeed, produce significant data. This data, in turn, can be used to develop or refine theoretical frameworks and provide guidelines to nurture the cognitive, affective and social development of this aspect of human potential.

## CHAPTER III

### Methodology

Exploration of possible approaches to knowledge development in this area led to the conclusion that nursing's current knowledge base was severely limited and a descriptive, exploratory study would be most appropriate. The wholistic nature of sexuality suggested that a qualitative framework which springs from the wholistic, relational paradigm would best capture the complexity of the sexual dimension of being. A study was designed to investigate sexual development in middle childhood by addressing the question, "What is the child's personal experience of developing sexuality?" The objectives of the study were to:

1. Obtain descriptions of the personal experience of developing sexuality in middle childhood;
2. Identify themes that emerge from the child's description of his/her experience
3. Identify themes that emerge among children;
4. Relate themes and descriptions to a pattern perspective;
5. Identify implications for nursing theory, practice and research.

#### Pilot Interviews

Pilot work to develop the interview schedule was begun during winter, 1988 as part of a course-related investigation of a variety of theoretical and methodological approaches to sexuality. An interview to explore the personal experience of sexuality was conducted with a 10-year-old boy using a modification of Newman's pattern identification methodology. Newman elicits relevant data by asking subjects to identify the most meaningful persons or events in their lives (Newman, 1986). The question, "Tell me about you," was substituted as

more likely to elicit relevant responses from a child. After the child had fully responded to this initial question, the researcher tried to determine whether keying in to more specific areas would elicit additional data more clearly related to sexuality than that elicited by the more general question. It was known, for instance, that this child had a newborn brother. Questions about the new baby's arrival elicited responses describing relating and responsibilities but not reproduction. This suggested that the personal experience of sexuality in this age group might be very different than that of the adolescent or adult, with physiological and reproductive aspects of little importance.

A decision was made to limit subjects to children between the ages of 6 and 9 to minimize the influence of pubertal changes. Data from the interview with the 10-year-old boy were used to develop a tentative list of interview questions to guide pilot interviews until a suitable interview schedule was developed. During summer, 1989, a pilot study was conducted with four children, one boy and three girls, ages 6, 7, 8 and 9. After the completion of these interviews, a schedule of six questions was determined to elicit relevant responses from children of all ages included in the study. The University Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects recommended the addition of contingent probes to the interview schedule. This final version of the interview schedule appears in Appendix A.

### Subjects

Subjects were twenty-four healthy children, twelve boys and twelve girls, between the ages of 6 and 9. Three children of each sex were included for each of the age cohorts. Subjects were obtained through community youth groups in three middle class white suburbs of a major midwest metropolitan area. Subjects included three sibling pairs identified by parents as meeting study criteria. All pairs were same sex siblings, 6- and 9-year-old boy and girl pairs and 8- and 9-year old boys. Since the focus of the study was the

personal experience of developing sexuality in this population and paradigmatic assumptions state that any individual's experience is relevant, inclusion of these pairs was not considered problematic.

Recruitment of subjects began with the investigator contacting the headquarters of two community youth groups regarding the possibility of group members participating in the study. In two instances youth groups or subgroups expressed some reservations about providing access to members. In both instances this was explained as pertaining to issues related to group history which prompted a guarded approach to access to members rather than objection to the study itself. In each case the provision of additional information and flexibility in how parents were contacted resolved these issues and access to members was achieved.

The first youth group provided adult leader contacts. Based on the recommendation of adult leaders, phone calls or group presentations were made until the eleven of the desired twelve subjects from this group were obtained. In order to fill the final slot without adding a fourth location, the twelfth subject was chosen at random from a list of former students who met study criteria provided by an elementary teacher in the third (unfilled) location. The first parent contacted gave permission for participation, completing this portion of the sample.

The second youth group preferred to assume the responsibility for initial contacts. Parents from this group were contacted by phone by a youth group staff person assigned to this task. This individual presented a brief summary of the study purpose and methods developed in collaboration with the investigator. Names and phone numbers of parents who expressed interest in having their child participate were given to the investigator who then contacted parents to arrange an interview time and location.

Parents received initial study information in three ways: hearing a scripted presentation by a youth group leader at a youth group meeting, hearing a scripted presentation by a youth group staff person by phone; or hearing a non-scripted presentation

by the investigator by phone. Parents were told that a doctoral student in nursing at a local university was conducting a study of healthy children between the ages of 6 and 9 to learn how children experience aspects of their own development that pertain to sexuality. Their child was being invited to participate because she or he was a member of a community youth group who fit the study criteria. Participation would involve a ten to twenty minute interview in which the child would be asked six questions and a brief follow-up call in which the investigator would summarize what the child had said in the interview and ask the child to say whether they had been correctly understood or what needed to be changed to make it right. Children would also be given the opportunity to add anything at this point if they wished. Interview questions were available to be shown or read to parents who wished to know them when making a decision regarding their child's participation. Parents who did choose to view questions were asked that questions not be discussed with their child before the interview. Parents were advised that other information about the interview process could be shared with the child as the parent saw fit. A few parents provided specific information about their children to clarify whether or not they would be appropriate candidates for the study. In one instance this related to the expected arrival of a new baby which the parent thought might have given the child some atypical information regarding sexuality issues; in the other cases parents stated their child was shy and might not say much. Parents were assured that these issues were not problematic in view of the study's purpose and parental decisions should be based on whether or not they felt the child might be interested in participating in the study. Only three parents contacted by the investigator stated they were not interested in having their child participate. In two of these cases mothers expressed initial interest but fathers did not want their son or daughter to participate.

### The Interview

All interviews were conducted by the nurse researcher between October and

December, 1989. Parents were given the option of having the interview conducted in their homes or other community location convenient for them. One interview was conducted in a school immediately after a youth group activity. All other interviews were conducted in homes with the investigator and child in the living room (child holding the tape recorder) or dining room or kitchen (recorder on the table near the child). It was explained that this arrangement was used because adult voices pick up better on tape than children's voices. Occasionally children who held the tape recorder inadvertently covered the built-in microphone. This was easy for the researcher to monitor unobtrusively and correct promptly by simply stating, "Oh, that's the microphone, we need to keep that uncovered."

The family was allowed to determine whether other family members were in the room at the time of the child's interview. Many families negotiated this with the child, asking if she or he would be more comfortable one way or the other. Having a parent present or in an adjoining room was initially reassuring to the younger children and they quickly became absorbed in the interview. In other instances presence of family members seemed to relate more to family interest or space than the child's need for reassurance. Presence of family members did not appear to have any significant effect on the interviews regardless of the circumstances. Again, the child's absorption in the interview situation seemed to make the presence of others unnoticed by or irrelevant to the child.

Children were asked each of the interview questions and contingent probes as appropriate. Time was allowed for the child to answer each question as fully as possible before going on to the next question or probe. Children who did not appear to know how to proceed were asked a question that seemed to match their nonverbal communication such as, "Don't know, huh?" for the child whose widened eyes or slight shrug suggested inability to answer a question or, "Are those pretty much the main things you like?" for the child whose sideways glance, expression of concentration and trailed, "...and..., uh..." suggested the child felt she or he must continue answering indefinitely. Child-researcher interactions overall were relaxed and as enjoyable for the researcher as they appeared to be for the child.

At the completion of the interview the follow-up call was explained to the child. Parents and child were consulted for convenient times during the upcoming week for this call.

Researcher impressions regarding the child and the interview were recorded immediately upon leaving the interview site. These descriptions and the corresponding interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researcher within twenty-four hours of the interview. This time frame maximized recall of the interaction which facilitated accurate transcription, particularly when enunciation, lack of volume, or background noise would have made the child's responses difficult to decipher from the recording. This also enhanced recall of child and researcher affect. Information pertaining to nonverbal behaviors accompanying responses was noted in parentheses at appropriate points in the transcript.

Individual transcripts were reviewed and summarized by the researcher and a follow-up call was made to the child within one week of the initial interview. At the time of the call, the researcher stated she would read what she thought had been main things the child had said in the interview and the child should say whether she had it right or what needed to be changed. After specifying the information was correct, children were asked if they wished to add anything.

### Validity and Reliability

Development and documentation of methods to address validity and reliability issues relevant to qualitative methodologies is of growing interest to qualitative researchers (Miles and Huberman, 1987; Kirk and Miller, 1988; Sandelowski, 1986; Swanson-Kauffman 1986). Creativity is often needed in determining how these issues relate to the design and purpose of specific studies. The current study is based on a patterning modification of phenomenology with the aim of accurately presenting a coherent description of subjects' lived experiences and identifying patterns within and among subjects. Comparability across

subjects was achieved by development of a brief interview protocol to guide child-researcher interaction.

Children provided indications of the validity of their self-reports by specifying the limits of their knowledge, providing information about their behavior or emotions even when these were negative, and spontaneously self-correcting information they provided when they felt they had overstated the truth. Further evidence of the interviews as valid expressions of the child's perspective came from three parents who heard interviews and verified that responses were very characteristic of their children. Responses of one sibling pair was heard by both parents providing cross-validation of these assessments.

Sandelowski (1986) and Miles and Huberman (1987) identify obtaining validation from the subjects themselves as a strategy for ensuring truth value and applicability in qualitative studies. This type of validation was sought in two ways in the current study. At the completion of the interview, children were asked whether anything important about them had been missed. This provided a measure of the child's sense of the completeness of the earlier description of his or her experience as well as an opportunity to add information as desired. Over two-thirds of the children felt the interview had provided complete information regarding important aspects of themselves and their experiences. The remaining children specified that this information was complete after they had listed one to three additional responses to previous questions or, in the case of one child, to an upcoming event not elicited by interview questions. The second validation from subjects was obtained in a follow-up call made to the child within one week of the initial interview. Children had been advised at the completion of their interview that this call would take place and they would be asked to let the researcher know, when she described what she thought they had been saying, whether she "got it right" or what needed to be changed to make it right. All children agreed with the researcher's summary of what they had said, many verifying each segment of the summary even if the researcher did not pause for verification. One subject's tone of voice indicated pleasure and enthusiasm as she verified the researcher's perception

and reflection of what she had tried to convey.

Intra-coder reliability was calculated since all data were collected and analyzed by a single researcher. Miles and Huberman (1987) state that initial double coding by the same researcher should be about 80% with a goal of reaching the 90% range. Coding was done using domains of person-environment interaction with and without component dimensions. A 90% code-recode reliability coefficient was achieved for pilot data using the domains of person-environment interaction with component dimensions.

Coding times were one month apart which is significantly longer than Miles and Huberman's suggestion of a few days. It is likely this coefficient would have been higher using the shorter interval. A 93% code-recode reliability coefficient after one week was obtained using one-third of the study transcripts coded for domains without component dimensions.

Inter-coder reliability was addressed by an independent audit of the researcher's decision trail conducted by a nurse researcher familiar with the experiential methodology used. The auditor was given data analysis information and one transcript representing each age extreme in the study and was asked to respond to questions regarding the clarity of the decision trail and the appropriateness of categorizations related to patterns identified (Appendix B). The auditor suggested minor wording changes but agreed the decision trail was clear. All auditor responses to categorizations were congruent with researcher categorizations.

### Ethical Considerations

The study proposal was reviewed and approved by the University Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects. When parents were initially approached regarding their child's participation, study purpose and methods were described and interview questions were available to parents who wished to know them before making a consent decision.

Written consent was obtained from the child and a parent or guardian at the time of the interview (Appendix C). Audio tapes of interviews were erased after completion of the study. Transcripts were coded for age, sex and subject number and letter to facilitate tracking of data while maintaining confidentiality. Research reports identify children only by age and sex or pseudonym.

### Procedure for Data Analysis

Interviews and researcher impressions regarding interviews were audio-taped and transcribed within twenty-four hours. Age, sex and subject codes were entered on each page of the transcript. Transcribed interviews were read and summarized. A follow-up call to verify the accuracy of the researcher's understanding of the child's expression of his or her personal experience was made within one week of the initial interview. Children were asked at this time if they wished to add anything. The summary and all child input at the time of the follow-up call were recorded on the original transcript.

Transcripts were again read and meaningful chunks of data were coded according to domains using component dimensions of person-environment interaction: physical (exchanging, perceiving, moving), behavioral (choosing, communicating, relating), and inner experience (valuing, feeling, knowing). Difficulty was encountered regarding the need to be consistent in the use of coding while remaining sensitive to the nuances of individual expressions. Meaning of a term or phrase seemed to vary greatly in different contexts. "Learning," for instance, appeared at times to be physical (an exchange of information), behavioral (communicating), and an inner experience (knowing). This initial coding attempt was very successful in sensitizing the researcher to the need to be clear about what each domain and dimension included and to carefully scrutinize data to see if the categories were genuinely appropriate. In an effort to resolve this dilemma, multiple coding of chunks

was attempted. It was hoped that this would permit recognition of relative emphasis by a particular child while remaining cognizant of additional secondary meanings and linkages. This process soon became cumbersome and was judged to obscure rather than clarify patterns.

Analysis of transcripts by NANDA codes was temporarily abandoned to determine whether more appropriate themes or categories might emerge from within the data themselves. Edited transcripts were created by removing researcher encouraging statements and prompts from uncoded transcripts. Orienting information was provided in parentheses to clarify responses that referred directly to researcher input such as, "Yes (all girls are like my sister)."

A variety of displays (arrays to permit visualization of data such as lists, charts, etc.) were created to aid consideration of possible organizing perspectives for data analysis. New edited transcripts coded by subject number only were examined on a question-by-question basis. By cutting edited transcripts it was possible to separate questions within a transcript and pull out multiple types of responses for single questions. It became evident that children's responses to contingent probes and the spontaneous provision of a class of information related to the question but not specifically sought formed subsets which needed to be pulled out. Contingent probes and information spontaneously added by three or more children were judged to constitute a "subset" and were separated out accordingly. This method of manipulating transcript segments permitted counting as well as visual verification or refutation of researcher impressions regarding prevalence of types of responses.

Tentative categories of responses were identified by question and subquestion. All categories were then reviewed and it became clear that some categories crossed questions. Removal of questions as boundaries for these categories resulted in refinement of categories through expansion or collapse as combined data clarified emerging patterns. Color codes for sex and symbol codes for age were developed. These codes were entered individually then together to determine whether patterns emerged based on any combination of factors. The

combination of color and symbol codes permitted easy visualization of age, sex, or age plus sex responses and greatly facilitated rechecks on researcher impressions as data analysis progressed. Displays were developed showing question, subquestion and all responses to each by category, age, sex, and age with sex. Similar displays were developed for age (all responses, then all responses by sex) and sex (all responses, then all responses by age).

A condensed display was developed that portrayed age, sex, subject number, and individual responses (or representative responses in the case of very lengthy transcripts) by question. This final display proved most helpful in validating or refuting researcher impressions of emerging patterns. Patterns identified by this theme-oriented approach appeared similar to the broad domains of person-environment interaction. To validate this impression, fresh copies of edited transcripts were coded for NANDA domains only and were reviewed for evidence of patterns. Patterns similar to those which had emerged from the data were identified. The edited transcripts coded by domain were compared to transcripts coded earlier by NANDA dimensions. A statement or phrase summarizing the personal experience of developing sexuality was derived for each child in the study. Classification of these statements was used to further clarify patterns among children.

## CHAPTER IV

### *Findings*

#### Introduction

This chapter will present and discuss study findings in light of the research question, "What is the personal experience of developing sexuality in middle childhood?" Children's statements will be presented in quotes throughout the chapter to illustrate various points. A description of subjects will be followed by findings related to the interview experience, descriptions of self, and descriptions of various aspects of being a girl or a boy. Age related findings will be presented next. A discussion of findings will complete this chapter.

#### Presentation of Findings

##### Subjects

Subjects were healthy children obtained through community youth groups in three middle class white suburbs of a large upper midwest metropolitan area. Twenty-four children completed the study. One additional child participated in the initial interview, was unavailable for the follow-up call, and was dropped from the study. A child matched for age and sex was substituted to achieve the desired N=24.

Three children of each sex from each of the age cohorts 6, 7, 8, and 9 years were interviewed. Three same sex sibling pairs participated in the study. These pairs were boys ages 6 and 9 and 8 and 9 and girls ages 6 and 9. Parents of siblings were asked to arrange interviews so that each child would be hearing the questions for the first time when interviewed. Twenty-three of the interviews took place in the child's home, one interview was conducted in a school after an evening youth group activity. Follow-up calls were made

within a week of the interview, after the tape of the interview had been transcribed. All children responded to all questions although responses included “I don’t know,” or a nonverbal equivalent such as shrugging the shoulders.

### The Interview Experience

All children were cooperative and generally seemed to enjoy the interview experience. Investigator notes recorded immediately after leaving interview sites included comments such as “*very* enthusiastic about the possibility of being in the study,” “seemed genuinely interested in the idea of being in the study or answering the questions,” “fun to interview, she seemed to be having a really good time,” and “seemed to find doing the questions interesting.”

Children took their role in the study seriously. An 8-year-old girl’s mother handed her the consent form and a pen along with a brief explanation of the form’s content. The girl read the entire document and asked her mother to clarify the meaning of “participate” before signing. Another child sought to clarify his responsibilities early in the interview.

“I like playing with C\_\_, ...going to school. How many words do I have to do?” (6-year-old boy)

The same child checked for investigator understanding at a later point in the interview.

“Do you know what I mean?” (6-year-old boy)

Many children took an active role in the interview situation by clearly stating when they had completed their answer to a specific question.

“And I think that’s it.” (6-year-old boy)

“I guess that’s all!” (8-year-old girl)

Parents and children were informed that the study was about the child’s experience. Many answers indicate the child clearly understood this focus. An 8-year-old boy stated girls do not play a particular video game, then revised his statement to explain that his experience of girls did not include their involvement in this activity.

"I've never heard of people playing it, that I've heard." (8-year-old boy)

A 7-year-old girl stated the distinction between important and unimportant boy/girl differences was whether one thinks about them a lot or not. She, too, went on to clarify how this pertained to her own experience.

"I don't really think about the not important ones." (7-year-old girl)

Five children, including one from each age group, responded with tentative questions in response to some inquiries.

"Playing with my dolls?" (6-year-old girl)

"By looking at yourself in the mirror?" (7-year-old girl)

"You could learn...maybe at school?" (8-year-old boy)

"There's usually more boys than girls that I like?" (9-year-old boy)

Children appeared to convey information as honestly as possible. Thirteen found one or more places where the limits of their knowledge had been reached. Statements, tone of voice and nonverbal behavior such as facial expressions or shrugging shoulders made these limits clear.

"I really don't know." (9-year-old boy)

"I'm not sure." (9-year-old girl)

Two children proudly describing accomplishments further demonstrated a desire to be accurate.

"I know how to read. Half." (6-year-old girl)

"I can tell time. Sort of." (7-year-old girl)

Individual differences among children were clearly evident. Children ranged from very shy to very outgoing, contemplative to highly verbal, relaxed to highly kinesthetic. Two girls, ages 6 and 9, shrugged and slightly shook their heads in response to questions they could not answer. A 7-year-old girl launched into a detailed discussion of her life, friends and interests in response to the first question. An 8-year-old boy would silently mouth the questions during pauses of greater than a minute as he tried to formulate his responses. A 7-

year-old girl was in constant motion during her interview, crouching and twisting in her chair as she spoke. A 7-year-old boy sat quietly and showed only facial movement and slight shrugging of shoulders to accentuate his responses.

### Descriptions of Self

The interview began with the investigator asking the child to "Tell me about you." Children's responses varied widely in both type and amount of information given. One particularly verbal girl spent several minutes describing multiple aspects of her world. In contrast, an 8-year-old girl's answer was limited to a brief physical description.

"I have brown hair, I have brown eyes, mostly brown." (8-year-old girl)

Generally children responded with information from two or three general categories pertaining to themselves or their experience. Table 4.1 shows categories of children's responses and number of children giving responses in each category.

Table 4.1

### Descriptions of Self

Category	Number
Likes/Dislikes	12
Activities	11
Relationships	11
School	5
Age	5
Pets	4
Feelings	3
Events	2
Physical Description	2
Possessions	2

Of the eleven children who described relationships, seven spoke of friends, five

mentioned family, and one child mentioned both. Children spoke of current and former pets and recent or upcoming events.

Fifteen children provided information during their interviews that showed appreciation of their abilities and pride in their accomplishments.

“(I know) how to spell Mississippi.” (6-year-old boy)

“I’m a good reader.” (8-year-old girl)

“I used to, um, draw real good and then I keep practicing ‘cause I want to be an artist.” (9-year-old girl)

“I was in a play and I was Pigpen.” (9-year-old boy)

Since half of the children listed likes in response to the first question, it is not surprising that there was some overlap in responses to the second question, “What do you like?” Table 4.2 presents categories and frequency of responses.

Table 4.2

**Descriptions of Likes**

Category	Boys	Girls	Total
Activities	12	12	24
Possessions	5	4	9
Home/Family	4	4	8
Friends	5	3	8
Foods	3	4	7
Nature/Natural Phenomena	4	2	6
School/School Activities	3	2	5

When describing themselves and their likes, activities were frequently listed by children. Responses included football, baseball, hockey, soccer, gymnastics, swimming, roller skating, biking, skateboarding, water sports, riding horses, outdoor/snow play, jump rope, dancing, jumping, climbing, running, building, playing instruments, arts, crafts,

puzzles, toys, dolls, community group activities, playing with friends, computer or video games and movies.

Five boys and one girl listed team sports as things they liked. Eleven boys described activities suggesting moderate to high levels of movement. A few of these boys clearly preferred activities in the highest range of movement.

“N, man, if it’s a big wave you go rrrrrrryow and you fall off...you just go rrryow and you fall right in and you just go pssshhhewww! in the water.”  
(6-year-old boy)

“In football in practices you get to run like run a mile...and tackling in football, I like, too, kind of.” (7-year-old boy)

“Football...because it’s active and you can hurt people sometimes and it’s sort of fun to make touchdowns and tackle kids.” (8-year-old boy)

Seven girls described likes that included moderate to high levels of activity.

“I like jump ropes...and I have muscles.” (7-year-old girl)

“I like ...doing *wilder* things also like sports.” (8-year-old girl)

“I like gymnastics, and I like soccer and football...” (9-year-old girl)

Only one boy seemed to clearly prefer quieter or lower movement activities. This 9-year-old’s list included movies, tv, video games, and books. The five girls who preferred quieter activities listed piano, dolls, art, foods, reading and computer games. All children who listed quieter activities also describe relational activities with family, friends or pets.

“I like my pets...my mom and dad and sister.” (7-year-old girl)

“I like my *cat*...and I like my brother.” (8-year-old girl)

“I’ve got a lot of friends.” (9-year-old girl)

“I like my rabbit over there... and I like J\_\_\_, the kid that’s here.”  
(9-year-old boy)

Possessions such as household items, computers, toys, and books were mentioned by nine children. Eight children, four of each sex, listed home or family among things liked.

"I like playing with my baby sister." (7-year-old girl)

"I like to go places with my family." (9-year-old boy)

Children also noted liking friends, foods, school or school activities and nature and natural phenomena.

"I like the *winter*." (6-year-old girl)

"I like, um, flowers...and...the loon I saw with little babies...I love rocks."

(7-year-old girl)

"(I like) the Earth. Because I study space." (9-year-old boy)

Children provided a variety of reasons for liking the things they listed. Table 4.3 shows categories of responses broken down by age and sex.

Table 4.3

Reasons for Liking Things Listed

	Age 6		Age 7		Age 8		Age 9	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Action/Skill	x x	x x	x x	x x	x		x x x	x x
Sensory/Aesthetic		x	x	x x	x	x	x	x
Relating				x	x	x	x	x
Nice/Fun	x			x			x	
Don't know		x	x					

Three children explained all their likes as simply being because people or things mentioned were "nice" or "fun." Among children who gave more specific answers, reasons involving action or skill development were cited most often. Thirteen children included this component in their responses.

"(I like) baseball because it's easy to hit a home run sometimes." (8-year-old boy)

"I like to dance...I make up my own and I just like to do stuff like move

around.” (8-year-old girl)

“I like playing some games...It’s really a challenge.” (9-year-old boy)

Sensory or aesthetic pleasure was another common explanation for likes. Eight children stated one or more likes were based on this factor.

“I like those things because they’re just pretty to look at and stuff.”

(7- year-old girl)

“I like the color of our carpet. Nice looking...I like my new boots. Ah, warm.” (7-year-old boy)

“(Reading) *relaxes* me when I’m...wound up or something.” (8-year-old girl)

“I like food ‘cause my tummy likes it.” (9-year-old boy)

One girl gave reasons for many of her likes, but found it difficult to be specific in terms of school.

“I don’t know why, I just *like* it.” (8-year-old girl)

### The Experience of Being a Boy or a Girl

After describing themselves and their likes, children were asked, “What’s it like to be a boy/girl?” Table 4.4 summarizes children’s responses to this question.

Table 4.4

#### Descriptions of Being a Boy or a Girl

	Age 6		Age 7		Age 8		Age 9	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Fun/Wonderful	x x x	x x	x x	x x	x x x	x x	x	x
Don't Know		x	x				x	
Relationships							x	x
Qualified						x		x
Abilities		x						

Sixteen subjects described the experience of being a boy or a girl as fun, great or wonderful. Two additional girls gave qualified answers.

“Well, sometimes it’s really nice, but sometimes it’s *hard*. It seems like girls are more mature than boys and...know a lot more. But sometimes I think that girls are more sensitive than boys.” (9-year-old girl)

“It’s alright, but it seems like they kick us out of the...boy stuff...(they) do much more things than (we) do.” (8-year-old girl)

Two boys and one girl stated they did not know what it was like to be a boy or girl. Two subjects described relationships.

“There’s usually more boys than girls that I like?” (9-year-old boy)

“I get teased by my brother.” (9-year-old girl)

Children’s reasons for enjoying being a boy or a girl were based mainly on activities and same-sex relationships. Table 4.5 shows the predominance of these factors.

Table 4.5

**Reasons for Enjoying Being a Boy or Girl**

	Age 6		Age 7		Age 8		Age 9	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Activities/Abilities	x x	x	x	x	x x x	x x	x x	
Boys/Girls/Groups	x x x	x	x x		x	x	x	x
Don't know				x			x	
Appearance				x				
Relationship with dad		x						

Eight boys and four girls listed activities and abilities as reasons for enjoying being a boy or girl.

“You can run fast.” (8-year-old boy)

“Usually you have fun with animals. Lots of girls like animals really well. And so do I.” (8-year-old girl)

Another 8-year-old girl listed the limitations placed on her activities because she is a girl as something she disliked. One boy and girl each claimed members of their own sex had greater abilities.

“You can do many things when you’re a girl, more than boys can.”

(7-year-old girl)

“Boys can do more, a little bit more than girls.” (6-year-old boy)

Ten children identified other boys, girls, or groups as the reason they enjoyed being a boy or girl.

“There’s lots of other boys you can play with.” (8-year-old boy)

“I like being a girl because there’s a lot of girls, girlfriends to have around,” (9-year-old girl)

The 9-year-old girl further explained, “most boys don’t like girls.”

One girl identified appearance and adornment as a positive part of being a girl.

“You getta wear dresses and you have long hair...and you can wear nail polish and lipstick and wear ballet skirts.” (7-year-old girl)

A 6-year-old specified that girls “get *special* dads,” whereas boys “get a nice mom.” She explained her observation:

“Your ma has to spank you if you be bad or do som’n wrong (if you’re a girl.” (6-year-old girl)

**Perceptions of Differences**

Answers to “Would it be different if you were a girl/boy?” ranged from “I don’t know,” (6-year-old girl), “Not much/a little” (two girls, 8 and 9) to a positive continuum of a simple nod to an emphatic “Way different!” (twenty-one children). The most emphatic responses came from two 6-year-old boys and three 7-year-olds, one boy and two girls.

Table 4.6 shows types and distribution of perceived differences.

Table 4.6

**Perceptions of Differences if Opposite Sex**

	Age 6		Age 7		Age 8		Age 9	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Activities	x x		x	x	x	x x x	x	x
Appearance	x	x	x	x x				
Relationships	x	x			x			x x

Two boys and three girls envisioned appearance as a way things would be different if they were of the opposite sex.

“You’d wear different clothes.” (6-year-old girl)

“You’d have to dress up a lot.” (8-year-old boy)

“Usually boys don’t wear earrings in both ears, don’t put lipstick on, they don’t wear dresses, usually. Boys usually have short hair.” (7-year-old girl)

Five boys and five girls specified activity differences or preferences.

“I prob’ly would enjoy...other things than I like now...maybe like hockey...maybe some other sports...like running. (8-year-old girl)

“You would always play with *dolls* and you’d like sit in a room just

reading for days 'n days. And they do all this *cleaning* stuff; they do the dishes...they like plants, they like watering it and all that." (8-year-old boy)

Girls displayed a variety of attitudes toward typical boy/girl activities. One girl viewed some distinctions as valid.

"Some things are just better, that boys can do better than girls." (9-year-old girl)

Another girl felt limited by perceptions of others.

"I don't like being treated just like a girl. I like being, doing wilder things also like sports, more sports than just regular girls do." (8-year-old girl)

A third girl revealed a flexible outlook.

"Girls wouldn't wrestle as much, but I do." (8-year-old girl)

Five children thought relationships would be different if they were of the opposite sex. Two boys thought their companions would be different.

"You would have to play with lots of *girls*." (6-year-old boy)

"You wouldn't be playing with other boys." (8-year-old boy)

A 6-year-old girl stated she would get a nice mom and described an alternate family to accompany the hypothetical change of sex. A 9-year-old girl laughingly said she'd get to tease girls if she was a boy, and another 9-year-old girl saw getting into fights with friends as a possible consequence of being a boy.

Table 4.7 shows children's responses when asked if the differences they described were important.

Table 4.7

**Perceptions of Importance of Differences if Opposite Sex**

	Age 6		Age 7		Age 8		Age 9	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Yes	x x	x	x	x	x	x	x x x	x
No	x	x			x x	x x		x
Some Are				x				
Don't Know			x					x

Two children did not know if the differences they described were important, seven did not feel that differences were important. A 7-year-old girl stated that some differences are important but others are not.

“The not important ones you don't really think about that much. The important ones you can think about a lot...boys usually...don't wear like headbands in their hair much (a not important difference). That they wear lipstick and jewelry (is an important one). (7-year-old girl)

Eleven children felt the differences they envisioned were important. Table 4.8 presents their reasons for this evaluation.

Table 4.8

**Reasons for Evaluating Differences as Important**

	Age 6		Age 7		Age 8		Age 9	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Practical	x	x		x				
Individuality							x x	x
Personal dislikes	x x		x					
General interests					x			
Don't know							x	

One boy stated reversal would be boring for either sex and three boys described a dislike for activities they perceived as typical of girls.

“I don’t like...girl stuff.” (7-year-old boy)

“You have to play with Barbies.” (6-year-old boy)

Two girls and one boy gave vague but practical answers:

“One’s about nature, ‘cause you should learn about nature and animals...and the other is I think, about learning about things most of all...if ya skip second grade, third grade, fourth grade, fifth grade, sixth grade...then you won’t have any experience.” (7-year-old girl)

“Cause boys’ houses might be closer.” (6-year-old boy)

“Your ma has to spank you if you be bad or do som’n wrong.” (6-year-old girl)

Three 9-year-olds, two boys and a girl, commented on the importance of individuality.

“If it wasn’t important, it would just be no one’s important.” (9-year-old girl)

“You don’t want to be like anybody else, you want to have your own differences.” (9-year-old boy)

#### **Learning About Being a Boy or a Girl**

Children were asked, “How do you learn about being a boy/girl?” Children were encouraged to list as many ways as they could, then were asked, “If you couldn’t learn from those ways, is there any other way you could learn?” Table 4.9 presents children’s responses regarding how they do or could learn about being a boy or girl.

Table 4.9

**Sources of Learning About Being a Boy or a Girl**

	Age 6		Age 7		Age 8		Age 9	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Home/Family	x			x x x	x x x	x x x	x	x
Friends	x x		x	x	x x x	x x x	x	x
School/Teachers	x			x x x	x x x	x x		
Work/Play/Trying	x x		x		x	x	x	
Self	x			x			x	
Community Groups			x			x		
Grandma & Grandpa				x				x
Reading					x	x		
Cousin, Uncle	x							
Don't learn this							x	x
Computer					x			
Doing Research						x		

Seven children were unable to identify how they learn about being a boy or a girl. Two 9-year-olds expressed the view that much, or all, of being a boy or a girl is not learned at all.

“Oh, I don't know! It's just like, you're born a girl, and that's how you learn to be one!” (9-year-old girl)

“I didn't learn how to be a boy. I knew how to be a boy.” (9-year-old boy)

Home and family were mentioned by twelve children as ways they learn about being a boy or a girl. Girls listed family, mom, parents or home.

“Well, your mother shows you, sort of.” (7-year-old girl)

“Well, as we grow up the teachers tell us. And our parents tell us. And that's what my mom and dad and teacher did to me.” (7-year-old girl)

“Well, ...I was *taught*. My mom and my family and things.” (8-year-old girl)

“My mom when... she tells me some of her stories.” (8-year-old girl)

Boys listed mom, dad, or parents as ways of learning about being a boy.

“Our mom teaching us.” (8-year-old boy)

“I learn from my dad.” (8-year-old boy)

“I kind of follow what my dad did...and learn from him.” (9-year-old boy)

Two girls included grandma and grandpa as possible ways to learn about being a girl and a 6-year-old boy mentioned a cousin and an uncle.

Twelve children, seven boys and five girls, listed friends or watching “other people” as ways they learn about being a boy or a girl.

“Playing with other boys.” (7-year-old boy)

“Sometimes you actually learn from other kids.” (8-year-old girl)

“By watching other people.” (8-year-old boy)

“Follow my friends.” (8-year-old girl)

“Sometimes your friends, mostly your *older* friends.” (8-year-old boy)

“Just looking at the other girls, see what they’re doing.” (8-year-old girl)

A 7-year-old boy and an 8-year-old girl specifically listed community youth groups as places they learn about being a boy or a girl.

Four boys and five girls listed school or teachers as ways they do or could learn about being a boy or girl. An 8-year-old boy placed this at the end of a diverse list of possibilities.

“When you’re in school, and the teacher asks different questions, and she asks you what it’s like, and people raise their hand and tell, are some...of the ways I get it.” (8-year-old boy)

Five boys and one girl described trying things, work or playing as ways they learn.

“You do more work.” (6-year-old boy)

“Playing different things.” (8-year-old girl)

“Trying some things you don’t know how to do, and then you wipe out.”

(8-year-old boy)

Learning from oneself was listed as a possibility by three children.

“Sometimes you can tell because you wear dresses.” (7-year-old girl)

“I could do things on my own.” (9-year-old boy)

Two children mentioned reading as a way to learn, one suggested using a computer, and another suggested doing research on it might be a good way to learn.

When given the opportunity at the end of the interview experience to add anything important about themselves that might have been missed in answering the earlier questions, eight children provided additional information. Six of these responses related to previous questions. Two boys (6 and 9) and one girl (9) listed additional likes. An 8-year-old boy noted that helping his parents was an additional way he learned about being a boy. A girl and a boy each listed additional personal characteristics:

“I’m helpful. I have nice clothes. I don’t waste my money.” (7-year-old boy)

“I’m a good reader. I’m nice to people.” (8-year-old girl)

A 6-year-old boy described an upcoming event, and an 8-year-old girl seemed reluctant to end the interview:

“Not anything important, but I have eight teeth out, and...I think I should play with my friends and...we’ve got a big toy that’s at school...”  
(8-year-old girl)

All children verified the accuracy of the researcher’s summary of the interview at the time of the follow-up call. Two children provided additional information at this time.

“Camp and by your dad (are other ways you learn about being a boy).”  
(7-year-old boy)

“On that last question. I think I’m nice and I like animals.” (8-year-old boy)

An 8-year-old girl responded enthusiastically to a part of the summary in which the researcher made a tentative interpretation of one of her statements. Her pleasure appeared to be related to having made herself clear or having the suggested interpretation “click” with something she had not completely formulated until that moment.

### Age-Related Findings

Younger children were likely to take cues from the environment, surveying their surroundings as they answered interview questions.

“I have a bed, a record player, tv, stove...a light above our table...”

(7-year-old girl)

“I like the color of our carpet...I like to jump off our stairs...my new boots...” (7-year-old boy)

When asked how they learn about being a boy or a girl, the youngest children tended to describe *what* is learned instead. Children in other age groups sometimes volunteered this information in addition to how they learn. Descriptions often revealed a lack of clarity regarding general childhood instructions as opposed to boy/girl instructions.

“You learn to be rude by going a lot to school. Not to leave a mess.”

(6-year-old boy)

“You shouldn’t be bad...shouldn’t be mean to other people.” (7-year-old girl)

“Ya, um know how to camp and respect other boys. And other boys help other boys.” (7-year-old boy)

“We learn about how girls live...and how to become a good person...just to learn how to grow up and be good.” (8-year-old girl)

### Six-year-olds.

When confronted with aspects of questions with which they could not deal, 6-year-olds were likely to simply change the subject to something personally interesting.

“You have to play with Barbies. And not like...I wanna, I wanna show you all the money I got.” (6-year-old boy)

“That you could cook real good, or...and a *special* thing about me is, that I’m 6!” (6-year-old girl)

One 6-year-old was unable to describe what it is like to be a girl but the remaining children in this age group agreed it was fun to be a boy or a girl. Their explanations often reflected an inability to differentiate age-, sex-, and physically-based characteristics.

“Cause sometimes when the girls are younger and the boys are way older. Then you get to tease ‘em...my sister can’t climb a tree. And I can be. ‘Cause I’m less weight than her.” (6-year-old boy)

“You get to go on the roof!” (6-year-old girl)

The child who could not describe what it was like to be a girl was unable to judge whether it would be different if she was a boy. All other 6-year-olds stated it would be different if they were of the opposite sex. Again, confusion regarding contingencies was evident.

“You would get a nice mom. You would have a dog! And...you’d get two big brothers. One sister. And that’s it.” (6-year-old girl)

“Cause I wouldn’t have much fun. ‘Cause my sister only, um, plays games and she doesn’t even play with her toys...if I was a girl, I would be, I would have stupid friends ‘cause my sister does.” (6-year-old boy)

Six-year-olds generally were unable to state how they learn about being a boy or girl. Two girls were unable to formulate any answer, the remaining four children gave limited or confused answers.

“That you learn to be rude. By going a lot to school. Not to leave a mess. And to lift weights...to be mean to girls.” (6-year-old boy)

“Um, you do more work.” (6-year-old boy)

“Cause you play with toys ‘n play with boys.” (6-year-old boy)

“That you could cook real good or..and a *special* thing about me is, that I’m 6! And I’m in first grade...uh, I don’t know how...today on the spelling test I got *five* words wrong.” (6-year-old girl)

Six-year-old girls were the only group to add nothing when asked if anything

important about them had been missed in the interview.

### Seven-year-olds.

Seven-year-olds showed less evidence of confusion regarding questions, although three boys and one girl responded, "I don't know," to one or more questions. Often this was a conclusion reached by the child after an initial attempt to answer a question.

"Ah...in...I don't know." (7-year-old boy)

"Because, you get to uh,...I don't know." (7-year-old girl)

Two of the girls displayed some shyness or embarrassment when discussing aspects of being a girl that were not present in other parts of the interview. One girl introduced the following as part of a lengthy answer to the question, "What do you like?"

"So today we did a dance and we, we hadda pick a man, a boy to do it,  
and since it was embarrassing 'cause it was like da da, we were dancing."

(7-year-old girl)

Another talkative 7-year-old girl lowered her voice and eyes when she explained that one of the things that is fun about being a girl is that

"...you can wear nail polish and lipstick." (7-year-old girl)

Seven-year-olds tended to be enthusiastic in their evaluations of being a boy or girl, although one boy stated he did not know what it was like to be a boy and one girl did not see it as a simple question.

"Oh-ho. Well...what's it like? (laughs) Um, (laughs) I don't like that  
question. That's a hard question. It's like, um, I don't like this question,  
it's like you can do many things when you're a girl, more than boys can."

(7-year-old girl)

All boys in this group mentioned at least one sport in their list of likes, although there was wide variation in emphasis with one listing sports as the only interest and a second including sports as one of a wide range of interests.

All 7-year-olds thought it would be different if they were of the opposite sex, half of them were emphatic about this.

“Definitely!” (7-year-old boy)

“Ohhhh, yes, *very* different!” (7-year-old girl)

Children in this age group varied in their ability to envision what those differences might be. One boy and one girl were unable to state how it would be different. Another boy who had stated there definitely would be differences was aware of the limits of his knowledge and experience.

“Longer hair. Make-up. I don’t know. ‘Cause I’m not a girl.” (7-year-old boy)

Two 7-year-old girls expressed shadings of differences and tied these to personal or individual preferences.

“If you had a face like a boy, then if you grew your hair...I don’t like it like that...it looks ugly. And you have to wear boy tennis shoes but I like boy boots because they’re more,...more warm and stuff and girls’ ones leak.”  
(7-year-old girl)

“Usually boys don’t wear earrings in both ears, don’t put lipstick on, they don’t wear dresses, usually. Boys usually have short hair.” (7-year-old girl)

All 7-year-old girls identified mother, parent or home and teacher or school as sources of learning about being a girl. Two boys were unable to identify how they learn. The third boy identified a community youth group, doing things, and playing with other boys as ways he learns about being a boy.

### Eight-year-olds.

All 8-year-old boys and two girls stated that being a boy or girl was fun and identified activities or abilities as part of the reason for this. Another girl stated being a girl was “alright” but identified limitations placed on her activities as a source of dissatisfaction.

All 8-year-olds all felt things would be at least a little different if they were of the

opposite sex although perceived types of differences varied. One boy and two girls described differences in activity preference. One boy noted he wouldn't be playing with other boys if he was a girl. Another boy cited changes in dress and hair style. One girl felt she would miss some privileges and touched on a meaning difference.

"If I was a boy I probably would like the same things but I probably wouldn't get all the things that a girl has, and I like the things that girls get...And a *dancer* is different than being a boy dancer. (8-year-old girl)

Five of the 8-year-olds felt these differences were not really important. The sixth maintained the differences were "sorta" important because

"If you're a boy and you did all that stuff it'd be boring. If you're a girl and you did the boy stuff, it would get sorta boring for them."

(8-year-old boy)

Parents were mentioned by all 8-year-olds as a way they do or could learn about being a boy or girl. One boy listed dad, one listed mom, and one listed both dad and mom. Two girls specified mom, with one later listing family. One girl listed parents. Friends, girlfriends or "other people" were identified by all 8-year-olds as ways they learn. One boy specified older friends as especially important in this kind of learning. School or teachers were mentioned by all boys and two girls.

### Nine-year-olds.

Nine-year-olds tended to give the most personal answers to "Tell me about you," describing accomplishments or revealing feelings.

"Sometimes I have a lotta hard times." (9-year-old boy)

"I used to have a dog but she had to go away because she was doing so bad, so I was always praying for her." (9-year-old girl)

"I was in a play." (9-year-old boy)

Nine-year-old girls showed a great deal of variation in their answers, especially to the

question, "What's it like to be a girl?"

"Sometimes it's really nice, but sometimes it's...hard..." (9-year-old girl)

"Well, it's fun..." (9-year-old girl)

"I get teased by my brother." (9-year-old girl)

All 9-year-olds felt that things would be different if they were of the opposite sex, although one girl stated there would be "not much" difference.

"Girls probably never get in fights except with their sister or brother, and boys mostly get in fights with their other friends that they don't like any more." (9-year-old girl)

All boys and one girl in this age group stated that the differences would be important, and three of these related to an appreciation of individuality.

"I'd probably have a different brain...usually everybody has a different thinking ability...You don't want to be like anybody else, you want to have your own differences and you want to be the same in some ways."  
(9-year-old boy)

"Well, if they weren't important, it wouldn't tell you if it's a girl; if it wasn't important, it would just be no one's important." (9-year-old girl)

"You're different from everybody else." (9-year-old boy)

Two 9-year-olds stated they did not know how they learned to be girls. Other responses suggest that children in this age group have internalized being a boy or a girl to an extent that it is not easily or appropriately separated from other aspects of their development.

"I didn't learn how to be a boy. I knew how to be a boy." (9-year-old boy)

"Oh, I don't know! It's just like, you're born a girl, and that's how you learn to be one!" (9-year-old girl)

"Cause I know I could study harder. And I could play rough. I could build more things. I could do things on my own, I can make more ideas...I could help my brothers. And I could also help other people."

(9-year-old boy)

Some 9-year-olds provided answers that suggest a new sensitivity to physical changes and relationships.

“Sometimes I have a lotta hard times...when I play rough, like football or soccer...I kinda get sweaty.” (9-year-old boy)

“I like spending time with my family...spending time with my friends...I like spending a lot of time with my relatives, ‘cause I don’t see ‘em that much.”

(9-year-old girl)

### Discussion of Findings

Findings show that children in this age group do have pertinent information regarding their own experiences and are both willing and able to share this information. Children described a variety of interests, preferences, feelings and opinions. They were not only willing to talk but were often eager and appeared to enjoy sharing information about themselves. The experience of being asked questions and responding appeared to stimulate thought as evidenced by additional information provided in response to contingent probes such as, “Are there any other ways you could learn?” The final interview question, “Is there anything important about you that we missed?” and the conclusion of the follow-up call, “Is there anything you want to add?” also elicited expansions on previous responses. One child specified that his addition during the follow-up call referred to “that last question” in the interview, indicating ongoing reflection since the time of the interview.

The wide range of personalities was noticeable in the way children assumed responsibility for interview. Some children spontaneously announced when they had reached the end of their response to the first question and continued to do so for subsequent questions. Others, after being asked, “Is that all?” for one of their earliest responses took this

as a cue or permission to similarly end future responses themselves. Still other children seemed as if they would have talked, contemplated or felt stuck indefinitely if the researcher had not imposed limits. Children's nonverbal communication suggested differences in how they viewed their inability to answer questions. Tone of voice and physical demeanor accompanying "I don't know," responses ranged from matter-of-fact to surprised, disinterested to mild exasperation that the question (presumably pointless to the child ) was posed, simple honesty to almost apologetic.

Three children responded, "I don't know," to questions and then proceeded to give an answer. It is possible this is an initial denial of knowledge, as noted by Bernstein (1975), or may simply be a manner of speech in which, "I don't know," is equivalent to "um," until a response can be formulated. The rapidity with which children proceeded to answer suggests the latter may be a more accurate interpretation.

Children's apparent desire to honestly convey their experiences increases confidence in the validity of findings. Children monitored themselves, spontaneously providing corrected information when they felt they had overstated reality. The girls who said they could "sort of" tell time or "read, half," suggest that providing accurate information is important to children in this age group. Children stated the limits of their own experience when they felt it was appropriate. A 7-year-old girl stated that some women have beards but she had never seen any. An 8-year-old boy stated girls do not play a particular video game, then amended his statement with, "Not that I know of."

One-third of the subjects added information when given the opportunity to do so at the end of the interview experience and two others did so at the time of the follow-up call. This suggests that they found the experience meaningful and wished to complete what they felt was an accurate portrayal of themselves.

Children's answers generally indicated an understanding that the focus of the study was their own experiences. It was not clear in the context of this study what significance to give to responses of the five children who answered a question with a question. Two of the

youngest children who responded this way were somewhat or very shy. One of the remaining children was very verbal and outgoing. Two other children were older and appeared somewhat or very serious as they contemplated answers to questions. It is possible that these responses were attempts to determine whether the child had correctly understood the nature of the question. Alternatively, it is possible that children felt there were right or wrong answers to questions and sought to determine if the given response was correct. While either explanation is plausible, if the latter is true it suggests that children may doubt their own experiences in the presence of authority figures such as adults. This has important implications for parents and professionals who work with children in this age group. A conceptual framework is needed which specifically addresses the personal experience dimension of sexuality in middle childhood since it appears to be very different than adolescent or adult sexuality and children appear to be uncertain at times whether their perceptions and experiences are valid and when accessing outside authority is appropriate.

Children in the study had widely varying levels of self-awareness and this, as much as personality factors, seemed to affect ability to provide comprehensive answers to interview questions. Girls seem to become most able to express their personal experiences at age 7 or 8, with reappearance of difficulty for some girls at age 9. Boys appear to be more likely to delay this ability until age 8 and also show some evidence of difficulty reappearing at age 9.

Table 4.10 shows how children's responses can be grouped within domains of *person-environment interaction*.

Table 4.10

Comparison of Emergent Categories to Domains of Person-Environment Interaction

Emergent Categories	Person-Environment Interaction Domains
Activities	Physical
Appearance	
Doing/Trying	
Events	
Nature	
Playing	
Reading	
School	
Skill Development	
Animals	
Home	
Family	
Friends	
Groups	
Help Others	
Relationships	
Aesthetics	Inner Experience
Boring	
Born/Knew	
Food	
Fun	
Individuality	
Likes/Dislikes	
Possessions	

A statement or phrase summarizing the personal experience of developing sexuality was derived for each child in the study. These individual summary statements show an age-related progression of the nature of the personal experience of developing sexuality during this period. In the earliest phase, the meaning of personal experience is immediate reality.

Sketchy sense of being a boy.

Sketchy sense of being a girl, but it's fun.

Sketchy sense of being a girl, likes friends.

I'm important!

Being a girl is fun.

Being a boy is good because that's what I know how to be.

In the next phase, children became aware of other perspectives.

Boys are better because I'm a boy.

There are boy groups and girl groups.

It's great being a boy. I don't know a lot about girls because I'm not a girl.

Girls usually do more fancy appearance things that I like.

Children in the next phase weighed their own situation in relation to other possibilities

Enjoying a broad range of experiences is fun and girls can't join some.

Meeting challenges is fun. It would be boring for anybody to do opposite sex stuff.

Being a boy is fun. I like what I can do and I like playing with other boys.

I'm a boy with lots of interests, and girls usually hate some of those activities.

I like girl things except when the boy version is more practical.

I don't like being treated like just a girl if boys get to do more activities.

Boys tease girls.

Boys and girls are different but I do some of the boy things.

Finally, there is an emerging sensitivity to the entire range of implications of being an individual who is also a boy or a girl.

I like being an individual with my abilities.

Everything I do is part of being boy and growing into a man.

It's fun to find out about being a girl. Being a boy is different and I like what I have and what I do.

The differences between boys and girls makes some things hard, but they are part of what makes people important.

Relationships are important to me. Boys relate to people differently.

Being a boy is fun and I'd need to think a long time to best say why and how.

The experience of sexuality in this age group appears to be wholistic, with a developmental progression emerging in the focus of person-environment interactions. The predominance, specific manifestations, and meaning of these interactions appears to differ across this period of development. At age 6, the physical domain appears to predominate. Children take cues from their surroundings, action is the key to evaluations of self and others and movement is a prominent dimension. Relational statements are tied to action as much as interaction. The next developmental step shifts focus to the behavioral domain of person-environment interaction. The relating dimension becomes increasingly important and statements pertaining to group membership increase. Family and friends begin to be valued with a growing appreciation of similarities and differences as part of what makes individuals unique and interesting. During the latter part of this period, children show evidence of beginning to shift to an inner experience focus. Emotional responses (feeling dimension) to physiological and life events begin to be discussed as with the 9-year-old boy who described having a hard time regarding sweating and the girl of the same age who described the loss of a pet with sadness and stated she was always praying for the absent pet. This was in contrast to two younger girls who also described the loss of pets in matter-of-fact or indignant tones. The older children appear to have increased reflective ability regarding their inner experiences which the younger children lack. This is consistent with findings of the National Council to Review Research on Middle Childhood (Collins, 1984). It may be

that the ability to reflect on and convey information pertaining to this domain develops later than the ability to perform similar operations on the physical and behavioral domains.

Children's obvious pride in their abilities and accomplishments is consistent with Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development which states that the developmental task of this period is the attainment of a sense of industry vs inferiority (Erikson, 1963, 1980). Children's narratives suggest that developing sexuality can validly be considered as part of the child's growing sense of mastery of his or her world. Children sometimes appeared to consider what boys and girls do different simply because activities commonly occur in sex segregated groups. This appears to limit direct social learning. If learning is also limited in other contexts, distortions may occur. For example, three boys, ages 6, 8 and 9 identified doll play as characteristic of girls and something they would probably be compelled to do if they were girls, yet only one 6-year-old girl mentioned this activity. A 6-year-old boy stated he would be a brat because his sister is. When asked if all girls were like his sister, he promptly agreed they were. An 8-year-old girl's general impression of her life as a boy was that she would like the same things but be denied some of the things that girls get. It is possible that these distortions cause difficulties in establishing and maintaining adolescent and adult relationships when unarticulated and unquestioned assumptions impair communication.

Activities are clearly the primary focus for this age group with all children including them in their descriptions of themselves and their likes. The cumulative list provides a picture of rich action and interaction in this age group: football, baseball, hockey, soccer, gymnastics, swimming, roller skating, biking, skateboarding, water sports, riding horses, outdoor/snow play, jump rope, dancing, jumping, climbing, running, building, playing instruments, arts, crafts, puzzles, toys, dolls, community group activities, playing with friends, computer or video games, movies.

A possible socialization shift occurs around age 8 when activities become less prominent. Only one 8-year-old boy (as opposed to two children of each sex for other ages)

gave action (generally identified by younger children) or skill development (identified by older children) as a reason for likes. A trend was noted which suggests movement during the ages 6-9 from the environment to friends to individuals as the child's primary focus. This finding suggests age-related strategies might be developed to investigate and enhance the development of sexuality in this population using these foci as guides.

Home, friends, and possessions were each mentioned as things liked by about one-third of the children. Over half of the children gave action or skill development as a reason for liking the things they identified and a third of the children gave reasons that suggest aesthetic or sensory pleasure.

Nearly all children were enthusiastic about being a boy or a girl. One child who expressed limited satisfaction clearly indicated that the problem was being treated as "just" a girl with accompanying limits on activities and opportunities as opposed to being a girl *per se*. Children who stated they did not know what it was like to be a boy or girl were generally young and somewhat shy. Overall, boys exhibited more uniform satisfaction in being a boy and a stronger tendency to identify associating with other children of their sex as important.

Children's reasons for liking being a boy or a girl were mainly activities, abilities and other children of their sex. One-third of the boys and one-sixth of the girls listed activities or abilities as a reason for enjoying being a boy or a girl. The emphasis on activities and abilities again relates to Erikson's psychosocial task for this period, the development of a sense of industry. Over half of the boys and one fourth of the girls listed other boys, girls, or groups as one of the reasons they enjoyed being a boy or girl. This is consistent with Money's (1979, 1986) description of the consolidation of gender identity in same sex groups during middle childhood.

Children were quite definite in their feelings there would be differences if they were of the opposite sex. Five of the younger children were especially emphatic in their assertions of differences. Only one shy 6-year-old girl did not know if there would be differences and two older girls envisioned little difference. Perceived differences were most often tied to

activities. Appearance and relationships were also noted. One child stated girls have long hair. The fact that her own hair was only chin length shows subjective perceptions can vary widely and need to be articulated to give clear meaning to the expression of personal experience to others.

Nearly half of the children felt the differences they envisioned if they were of the opposite sex were important, over one-fourth of the children felt they were not. Boys were somewhat more likely to view these differences as important. Both boys and girls identified activity preference as a difference; two young boys stated a dislike for girls' activities. Other children gave reasons that spoke of mutual concerns (opposite sex activities boring for boys and girls), practical considerations or the value of individuality. Taken together, children's responses generally reflect an appreciation of their own experiences more than a devaluing of the experiences of the opposite sex. An age-related trend emerged in which the meaning of personal experience shifts from immediate reality to awareness of other perspectives, weighing of one's own situation in relation to other possibilities, and emerging sensitivity to the entire range of implications of being an individual who is also a boy or a girl.

Learning about being a boy or a girl, or at least the ability to identify sources of learning, markedly peaks at 7 and 8 years for girls and 8 years for boys. Two-thirds of the children readily identified sources of learning about being a boy or girl. Family, friends and school emerged as the main sources of learning. Half of the children identified family as a source, with girls specifying this more often than boys. It is interesting to note that girls listed mom alone or parents but not just dad, while boys listed mom alone, dad alone, or parents together. The reason for this is unclear. Friends were also identified by half of the children as a source of learning with boys specifying this source more frequently than girls. This peer learning peaks at 8 years. School, noted in nine responses, appears to be a significant but slightly less prevalent source of learning. These findings contrast somewhat with the Goldman and Goldman (1982) finding that home (usually the mother) with teachers and the media following are primary sources of sex information. Although the

questions children were asked differed, it is interesting to note that no child in this study mentioned the media as a source of learning about being a boy or a girl. The remaining sources of learning were identified by smaller percentages of children and appear to reflect personal circumstances and possible learning style preference. Work, play, or trying things was mentioned as a source of learning by one-fourth of the children. Boys were more likely than girls to identify such experiential learning. This active, trial-and-error learning might be a mode that carries through into adolescence with implications for risk-taking behaviors.

Children's choice of words suggest that much of their learning about being a boy or a girl is informal in nature. Children spoke of following friends or parents, learning from mom's stories, helping parents and younger siblings. The informal nature of this learning may partially explain the finding that over one-fourth of the children were unable to identify any ways they learn about being a girl or a boy. Twice as many girls responded in this way with older girls accounting for the difference. Possibly some children do not know what constitutes learning about being a boy or a girl and were thus unable to identify how this kind of learning occurs. Since some elements of this learning such as gender identity and gender role begin in infancy and early childhood (Money, 1979, 1986), learning about being a boy or a girl is a long-established process whose mechanisms may be difficult for some children to discern. The 9-year-old boy who stated he didn't learn how to be a boy, he knew how to be one reflects the perception that knowing how to be a boy is innate as opposed to a learning process. Identifying ways of learning appears to be particularly difficult in the youngest children who speak more in terms of events than processes and in the older girls who appear to be moving into a stage of reevaluating the meaning of being a girl. This reevaluation could make this a more difficult question as new perspectives are considered. The question implicitly suggests some notion of being a girl and the existence of identifiable sources of this notion. Grappling with the meaning of being a girl might be expected to confuse the issue as multiple perspectives compete. Since children who could identify ways they had learned could generally come up with at least one additional possible source when

asked how they might learn if they could not learn in the ways they had listed, it seems that once an initial awareness of this dimension is acquired it is easy to mentally extend the process to potential as well as actual sources of learning.

Little can be concluded about sibling pairs since the study did not attempt to specifically explore sibling status. One pair of siblings exhibited a similar frowning expression when concentrating to formulate responses to interview questions. Responses of another pair indicated a high family focus. The sibling pair of 6- and 9-year-old girls was strikingly different in age-related development and personality. Researcher notes describe the 6-year-old as "a bundle of energy, shifting around in her chair...a very energetic, kinesthetic kid." At one point during her interview she looked in her dad's direction with a little bit of glee or defiance as she described an activity which was apparently prohibited. The 9-year-old was described as "very thoughtful, insightful, very poised, quiet girl." Both of these girls mentioned a former pet in their initial statements about themselves. The 9-year-old said they had to get rid of the pet because she was doing so badly. She responded to this loss by praying for the pet. The 6-year-old thought the loss was due to a parent's apparent dislike of a pet who was being "nice." Her response was to state that she used to like the dog but now she liked herself. These observations suggest that while it may be assumed there are some shared events in the lives of siblings, the personal meanings of those events can differ significantly.

During the data collection and analysis process some children were so comfortable and confident that negotiation of future developmental stages pose no foreseeable difficulties. A few children, however, displayed such special sensitivities when describing their inner experiences it seems likely some parts of development might be puzzling or painful. The girl who so valued seeing relatives because doesn't get to see them that much spoke in wistful tones that suggested a sensitivity to both relationships and loss that was perhaps painful. For this child, the developmental loss of childhood status coinciding with the search for identity and changing peer relationships during adolescence might be more

distressing than for children less attuned to these areas.

All children appear to be sorting out boy/girl, child/adult, individual/group distinctions. One young boy shared information in a confidential tone about a secret club only for boys. His conspiratorial tone indicated that the female researcher was not considered a girl and suggests adult status is more significant than sex at this age. A girl of the same age spoke of boys having beards, and another girl spoke of having to choose a man as a dance partner, although the context suggested she was speaking of male peers.

Study findings showed developmental tendencies consistent with cognitive and psychosocial developmental theories. A progressive ability to understand questions and provide answers which increasingly take other viewpoints into account was apparent. Six-year-olds tended to simply change the subject when confronted with a question they could not answer. This inability to differentiate factors pertaining to being a boy or girl from age-related or physical characteristics is typical of children who have not yet completed the transition to concrete operations and cannot consider multiple aspects of an entity at the same time. Some evidence of this continued in some 7-year-olds as did a tendency to take cues from the environment. These children also displayed confusion regarding questions or contingencies. Six-year-olds felt it was fun to be boy or girl but displayed marked confusion regarding characteristics or experiences specifically related to being a boy or a girl. Children in this age group generally couldn't describe how they learn about being a boy or a girl. None of the girls in this age group provided additional comments at end of interview, suggesting limited self knowledge.

Seven-year-olds showed some progress in self awareness, attempting to answer questions before concluding they did not know the answer. Selective shyness and momentary embarrassment exhibited by two girls also reflect emerging self awareness. One girl who had been quite verbal and confident during her interview lowered her voice and eyes as she spoke shyly of girls wearing cosmetics. Another girl said having to choose a dance partner at school was embarrassing. The fact that the topic was introduced by the child

herself highlights its significance in terms of self awareness and ability to share self knowledge. Seven-year-olds were mostly enthusiastic about being a boy or a girl. Boys in this age group listed sports as something they like with emphasis varying from this being the only interest or one of many interests. All children in this age group felt it would be different if they were of the opposite sex, and half were emphatic about this. At this age a beginning appreciation of one's own perspective as one among many emerges. When asked to specify what the differences would be if they were of the opposite sex, two children's answers reflected shadings of preferences among individuals. A third child identified differences in appearance then added he did not know what else would be different because he was not a girl. All girls in this age group stated they learn about being a girl from family and school. Two of the boys did not know how they learn about being a boy. The remaining boy identified individual and group activities as how he learns.

Eight-year-olds generally thought being a boy or a girl was fun, although one girl disliked limitations placed on her activities and the narrower range of activities she observed when she compared girl groups to boy groups. All children in this age group thought it would be different if they were of the opposite sex. Half thought activity preferences would be different, others thought companions, appearance or privileges would be different.

The only child who thought these were important differences based his opinion on the belief that reversal would be boring for either sex due to different activity preferences. All 8-year-olds identified parents as one way they learn about being a boy or a girl. Boys listed dad, mom or both; girls listed mom or parents. Friends were also identified as a source of learning by all children in this age group, with one boy noting that older friends are especially important as sources of learning. If older friends are, in fact, a significant source of learning about being a boy or girl, it is possible that this is one factor in the downward trend in age for beginning sexual activity. School or teachers were mentioned by all boys and two girls in this age group. Overall, the period around eight years appears to be particularly significant in terms of emerging personal awareness and learning about aspects of developing

sexuality.

Nine-year-olds gave the most personal answers to questions. The most variation in answers to the question, "What's it like to be a girl?" appeared in this age group. All children agreed it would be different if they were of the opposite sex, although one girl thought the difference would be slight. Her note of boys' fighting with former friends while girls tend to only fight with siblings may suggest different rules for boy and girl behavior or different ways of relating, with boys again resorting to a physical form of communication girls do not use in peer relationships. All boys and one girl said the differences they identified were important. Three of these responses related to the value of individuality. Sources of learning about being a boy or girl were not apparent to children in this age group. Two 9-year-old girls did not know how they learn about being a girl and one boy stated he did not learn, he knew. Another boy gave a detailed list of personal activities and goals which seemed to indicate that learning to be a boy, to him, was essentially synonymous with his aspirations and responsibilities. Children in this age group began to display a new sensitivity to physical changes and relationships. Pubertal changes might be occurring in some of these children, or it is possible that this awareness precedes the onset of puberty.

If the latter is true, this, also might be a type of learning that is influenced by older friends who are undergoing pubertal changes.

The range of activities and experiences described by children in this sample suggest middle childhood is a time of developing awareness, skills and attitudes to enhance future sexual development. Sexuality, in a wholistic perspective, involves physical, emotional and relational aspects. Middle childhood is clearly a time of rich action and interaction. The skill development focus of this period suggest great strides may be made in enhancing or limiting the potential for adolescent and adult sexuality. Baseball, gymnastics, swimming, biking, dancing, jumping, climbing and running are all activities which provide kinesthetic experience, enhance physical development and have tremendous body awareness and pleasure appreciation potential. Many of these are, in fact, the reasons the children

themselves gave for liking the activities.

Some of the less strenuous activities such as playing instruments and art have the potential to nurture aesthetic appreciation. Friends, family and school can all contribute to relational development through interaction, information sharing and the opportunity to learn and practice role taking in a safe setting. Books, movies and television have the potential to expand the child's sense of possibilities (real and fantasy) by providing information, presenting new perspectives, and evoking emotions. Foods, mentioned by over a fourth of the children, have an obvious sensory or pleasure component. Preferences exist and choices (informed or not) are made.

Children's descriptions of their experiences clearly reflect the physical, behavioral and inner experience domains of person-environment interaction. Specific domains are more clearly associated with segments of this period of development and become a focal point, shifting the meaning and relationships of other domains and their dimensions. The younger child's focus on the physical is evident even when discussing relationships. Individual children also exhibited different emphasis on domains. It is possible that some of the high movement activities such as team sports constitute a type of physical relating as opposed to the more verbal or feelings oriented relating. Tackling another child or passing a ball or puck may be considered a form of relating and communicating as well as the obvious physical activity. If this form of relating and communicating is learned very well and to the exclusion of other types of relating, difficulties might again be anticipated as relationships are attempted with persons who have more exclusively verbal interpersonal skills. This premise is consistent with the finding that males tend to have a more physical focus than females during the adolescent period of sexual development. Skills developed during middle childhood quite probably assist in negotiating meanings during the adolescent and adult years of sexual development and functioning.

## CHAPTER V

### Summary and Recommendations

#### Summary

The personal experience of developing sexuality in middle childhood was investigated using Newman's experiential methodology of patterning. Interviews were conducted with twenty-four children, ages 6 to 9. Findings showed children have and are willing and able to share information relating to their personal experiences in this area.

The experience of developing sexuality in this age group appears to be wholistic, with a developmental progression emerging in the focus of person-environment interactions. The predominance, specific manifestations, and meaning of these interactions appear to *differ across this period beginning with the movement dimension of the physical domain and progressing to behavioral domain as the relating dimension becomes increasingly important. During the latter part of this period children show evidence of beginning to shift to an inner experience focus and the feeling dimension with sharing of emotional responses to physiological and life events.*

*Developmental trends consistent with cognitive and psychosocial developmental theories were noted suggesting that developing sexuality can validly be considered part of the child's growing sense of mastery of his or her world. As age increased, children became increasingly able to handle questions which required simultaneous consideration of multiple aspects of persons or relationships and take alternate viewpoints into account. Group membership became increasingly important with family, friends and school identified as key sources of learning about being a boy or a girl. Much of this learning was informal in nature.*

At about the midpoint of this period, there was a growing appreciation of similarities and differences as part of what makes individuals unique and interesting. Children were

enthusiastic about the experience of being a boy or a girl. Reasons were mainly related to activities, abilities and other children of their sex, consistent with Money's (1979, 1986) description of the consolidation of gender identity in same sex groups during middle childhood. Children's appreciation of their own experience did not necessarily involve a devaluing of the experience of the opposite sex.

All children appeared to be sorting out boy/girl, child/adult, individual/group distinctions. An age-related trend emerged in which the meaning of personal experience shifted from immediate reality to awareness of other perspectives, weighing of one's own situation in relation to other possibilities, and emerging sensitivity to the entire range of implications of being an individual who is also a boy or a girl.

Individual differences such as personality factors markedly influenced how events and relationships were experienced and expressed. It appears likely that skills developed during this period will have an impact on adolescent and adult sexual development and functioning by influencing the negotiation of meanings.

#### Recommendations for Future Research

Further studies are needed on all aspects of developing sexuality in middle childhood. The current study suggests that the meaning of sexuality in this period is radically different than adolescent or adult meanings. In order to gain an accurate picture of this phenomenon without imposing inappropriate meanings or prematurely advancing theory, additional qualitative studies are needed. Replication of the current study and the experiential investigation of children representing other geographic, ethnic, and social class groupings are needed to determine whether similar patterns emerge.

Sample selection that closely matches children for age by years-plus-months might clarify emergent patterns. The combined consideration of years-plus-months and grade in

school would probably provide the clearest patterns.

The current and previous studies suggest family constellation might influence the experience of developing sexuality by providing differing arrays of relational and informal learning experiences. Studies which consider sibling and parental status as a demographic variable or more specifically explore this facet of personal experience would provide valuable insights regarding its importance.

The possible use of different study designs to best tap the experiences of children of different ages and/or personalities should be explored. Observational strategies might provide valuable insights on the physical domain of person-environment interaction as it relates to developing sexuality in this period and could be particularly appropriate for the youngest children in this group or individuals at any part of this period who display a personal pattern of high action or movement. Drawing or journaling techniques might be useful in assisting shy or less articulate children express their personal experiences. Journaling might also enhance the expression of the inner experience domain for children in the latter part of middle childhood. Methodologies that investigate experiences, perceptions and meanings among pairs or groups have the potential to elicit additional dimensions of the behavioral domain.

The current study and patterning theory suggest individual patterns are important in understanding and describing the specificity of personal experience. Understanding of the relationship of sexuality in middle childhood to adult and adolescent sexuality will be advanced by the investigation of patterns over time. Sequential pattern analyses can address questions regarding individually preferred modes of interaction identified in middle childhood. Do these modes continue, strengthen, weaken, or drop out? Are other modes added? At what times and by what mechanisms? How do these modes affect sexual development and functioning in later periods?

Combined methodologies and interdisciplinary studies which seek to illuminate the connections of sexuality in this age group to other kinds of experiences could significantly

advance a wholistic understanding of sexuality. Those which investigate parental, educational, or religious/spiritual aspects of how sexuality develops and is viewed are particularly relevant. Religious or spiritual views, for example, often influence adult perspectives on sexuality. Studies which look at children with specific religious affiliation or lack of affiliation could provide valuable insights into how sexual and religious meanings are conveyed to and integrated by the child during a formative period. Interdisciplinary studies might also lead to the discovery of new ways to view nursing's potential as a participant in a variety of wellness settings concerned with sexuality as an aspect of child development.

As the knowledge base of sexuality in middle childhood expands, there will be an increasing need for quantitative studies. The development of instruments which incorporate findings of qualitative studies for use in large scale quantitative studies will be an important step in extending findings with the eventual goal of using research to guide policy development and funding for programs related to sexual development, education and health in middle childhood.

#### Recommendations for Theory Development

A conceptual framework is needed which specifically addresses the personal experience dimension of sexuality in middle childhood since it appears to be very different than adolescent or adult sexuality. The fruitfulness of Newman's patterning methodology using domains and dimensions of person-environment interaction in this study suggests her theory of health as expanding consciousness may be appropriate to guide development of nursing theory related to sexuality in middle childhood as well as other life periods.

### Recommendations for Nursing Practice

Nurses in practice settings can contribute to the unfolding of sexuality in this period by an appreciation of sexuality as an important aspect of a wholistic view of persons in all life stages. The non-reproductive nature of sexuality in middle childhood requires particular sensitivity to aspects of children's experience with implications for sexual development and functioning. Sexual development needs to be added to physical, cognitive, and psychosocial development as a foundational perspective when assessing and intervening with this population. Pattern analysis, using identification of prominent domains of person-environment interaction for groups and individuals, should provide a useful guide for nurses by presenting a framework for organizing data. This information can be used to identify ways to nurture the child's expanding awareness of her or his body, interactions and reflections while affirming the child's present experience.

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## Appendix A

### Interview Schedule

Tell me about you.

Probes: Encouraging responses such as: Oh? Uh-huh. Can you tell me more about that?

What do you like?

Probes: Why do you like that?

What else do you like?

What is it like to be a boy/girl? (asked in terms of child's own gender)

Probes: What is (use child's term) about being a boy/girl?

Would it be different if you were a girl/boy? (asked reverse of child's gender)

Probes: How would it be different? (for positive response)

Is that important? (for identified difference)

How is it important? (for positive response)

How do you learn about being a boy/girl?

Probes: Do you learn any other ways?

How could you learn if you couldn't learn from (ways child lists)?

Is there anything else important about you we missed?

Probes: What did we miss? (for positive response)

Can you tell me about that? (for listed response(s))

## **Appendix B**

### **Audit Information**

Qualitative researchers have found “audits” of their data analysis useful in establishing reliability of their findings. In this audit you are asked to assess the clarity of the researcher’s decision trail and answer questions related to the appropriateness of patterns identified.

Please read the Data Analysis and Reduction information and answer the following questions.

Are the individual steps of data analysis clearly presented?

If not, please specify what is not clear.

Is the purpose of each step clear? If not, please specify what is not clear.

Is the outcome of each step clear (e.g. unproductive, patterns identified, verified or revised)?

If not, please specify what is not clear.

Please read the two study transcripts and answer the following questions which pertain to patterns identified by the researcher.

Do you see similarities or contrasts in the ability to understand the questions?

Where?

Do you see similarities or contrasts in the ability to provide answers which take other viewpoints into account? Where?

Which domains do you see exhibited in each of the transcripts?

*Physical domain:* focus on physical reality or activity, cues from surroundings, action is the key to evaluations of self and others.

Relational statements are tied to action as much as interaction.

*Behavioral domain:* focus on relating, group membership.

*Inner experience domain:* focus on meanings and emotional responses to inner experience such as physiological and life events.

Which of the following do you see as the most appropriate description(s) of the personal experience of developing sexuality expressed by this child?

Immediate reality

Awareness of other perspectives

Weighing of one's own situation in relation to other possibilities

Emerging sensitivity to the entire range of implications of being an individual who is also a boy or girl.

## Appendix C

### Consent Form

Your child is invited to participate in a study of middle childhood. I hope to learn how children experience aspects of their own development that pertain to sexuality. Your child was selected as a possible participant in this study because he or she is between the ages of six and nine and is or has been involved in a community group for children.

If you decide to allow your child to participate, I will interview him/her at a location convenient for you for approximately fifteen minutes. A limited number of broad questions will be asked to allow your child to express what is important to him or her about being a boy or girl. The interview will be tape recorded so that it can be transcribed for coding. A follow-up phone call will be made to summarize my impressions and verify whether the ideas I gained from the initial interview match those your child was trying to convey. At this time your child will also be asked if he/she wishes to add anything.

Tapes of interviews will be erased when the study is completed. In any written reports or publications, children will be identified only by age and gender, and pseudonyms will be used if excerpts from interviews are used as illustrations.

If you decide to allow your child to participate, he or she is free to discontinue participation at any time.

If you have any questions about the research and/or research subjects' rights, please call

Marie Winn (Investigator) or Dr. Patricia Crisham (Advisor)

You will be offered a copy of this form to keep.

You are making a decision whether or not to allow your child to participate. Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided to allow your child to participate. Your child may withdraw at any time without prejudice after signing this form should you or your child decide to discontinue participation in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Parent or Guardian

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Child (✓ for verbal assent if unable to sign)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date