Sexual Self-Concept and Sexual Self-Disclosure: 
Examining the Role of Individual Factors within a Contextual Model of Sexual Self-Disclosure

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Abstract

Communicating about sex is important for romantic relationships because it is instrumental in maintaining sexual satisfaction in both the short and long term. Despite this, talking about sex is not an easy task for many people. This dissertation study extends current contextual understanding of sexual self-disclosure processes by examining individual and disclosure-level factors and their impact on the sexual self-disclosure process. Using a sample of 582 emerging adults, this study examined the relationship between sexual self-concept, importance of impression management goals, perceptions of sexual self-disclosure risk, and sexual self-disclosure efficacy on a person’s likelihood to sexually self-disclose, the depth of sexual self-disclosure, and ultimately, sexual satisfaction. Results suggested that elements of the sexual self-concept are critical predictors of impression management goal importance and sexual self-disclosure risk. Sexual self-disclosure efficacy was predicted by perceptions of risk. The likelihood of sexual self-disclosure was predicted by the confidence one has in their ability to accurately and effectively sexually self-disclose. Sexual satisfaction was not predicted by the perceived likelihood of sexual self-disclosure, but it was predicted by sexual self-esteem, an important element of the sexual self-concept. By looking beyond simply whether someone is communicating about sex with their relationship partner and instead understanding the dynamic influence of various contextual-level factors, the results of this study lend implications for future empirical understanding of sexual self-disclosure processes, considerations for theory development and testing, and applications for therapy and sex education.
Dedication

For my mother, who kept telling me, “no matter what, you’re going to college,” but had no idea I would take that so seriously.
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Chapter I: Introduction

Sex and sexuality have long been seen as an important component of happy and healthy intimate relationships. In fact, couples who report greater satisfaction with the sexual components of their relationships also report greater satisfaction with their relationship and life in general (Brezsnyak & Whisman, 2004; Laumann et al., 2006; Regan, 2000; Sprecher, 2002). Positive sexual experiences have also been associated with greater levels of intimacy and commitment (Sprecher, 2002). There is even evidence that sex is a critical part of relationships after partners have been together for extended periods of time (Byers, 2005; Henderson-King & Veroff, 1994).

While it is clear that sex is a critical component of adult relationships, an interesting paradox exists in that a majority of adults indicate that they have difficulty talking about certain personal sexual issues and topics with their partners. Gaps in communication about sex are important to understand because it is through sexual communication that relationship partners enhance their knowledge of one another’s sexual likes and dislikes (Cupach & Metts, 1991; Hess & Coffelt, 2012; Metts & Spitzberg, 1996). This sexual knowledge can result in more positive sexual interactions and enhanced relationship experiences as well (Larson, Anderson, Holman, & Niemann, 1998). However, recent research has suggested that many people struggle with talking about different sexual topics. Specifically, researchers have discovered that partners are particularly hesitant about discussing previous sexual experiences (e.g., Anderson, Kunkel, & Dennis, 2011; Brown & Weigel, 2018), interest in some level of consensual non-monogamy (e.g., Brown & Weigel, 2018), and particular sex acts, such as anal
stimulation (e.g., Brown & Weigel, 2018). Avoiding sexual communication can lead to lower levels of satisfaction (Theiss & Estlein, 2014).

In order to understand this paradox we first need to understand the critical elements that enable or inhibit people from talking about sexual topics with their relationship partners. During my time in the Interdisciplinary Social Psychology Ph.D. Program, I have developed a research program that has attempted to illuminate and identify various aspects of this paradox. Specifically, my research has focused on one central question: what factors enable or inhibit people from talking about intimate sexual topics with their relationship partners?

Towards a Comprehensive Contextual Model of Sexual Self-Disclosure

To date, my writing and research has broadly employed an Ecological Systems Theory (EST; Bronfenbrenner, 1977) lens to examine various components of the context in which sexual self-disclosure occurs. Briefly, EST emphasizes the importance of considering contextual variables when examining interpersonal phenomena. EST encourages social scientists to extend their consideration beyond individual characteristics and consider how interpersonal relationships, community factors, cultural and social norms, and various iterations of time impact the phenomena under study. EST served as the organizational lens through which I developed my first publication, a chapter in which I was able to lay out my thinking and explore different levels of contextual influences on sexual self-disclosure through this lens. In this work (Brown & Weigel, 2016), I argued that sexual communication processes do not just occur within the immediate interaction between relationship partners. Instead, sexual self-disclosure occurs between two partners in a romantic relationship that is influenced by the partners’
families, peer networks, social and cultural norms, and historical time period. The goal was to encourage sexual communication researchers, and relationship and sexuality scholars in general, to push the scientific lens further out and view sexual self-disclosure within the full context in which it occurs. This, I argued, would afford a greater, holistic understanding of sexual communication processes.

Accordingly, I designed a research study examining an initial contextual model of sexual self-disclosure and sexual satisfaction. In this paper (Brown & Weigel, 2018), I explored how a relational context and a sexual self-disclosure context predicted sexual satisfaction. Specifically, I suggested that the relationship context was indicated by distal factors such as individual perceptions of how responsive or supportive a person perceived his or her partner to be, how certain a person was about their partner’s involvement in and intention to remain in the relationship, the quality of day-to-day communication, and overall satisfaction with the relationship. The sexual self-disclosure context was comprised of more proximal components, such as the depth of, or the extent to which sexual self-disclosure had actually occurred between the relationship partners, the perceived relationship consequences of talking about one’s sexual likes and dislikes with a relationship partner, and the perceptions of risk associated with talking about different sexual topics. Results of this study suggested that both the relational and sexual self-disclosure contexts were predictive of overall sexual satisfaction.

Based on the results from the first study, a follow-up study was developed to dig deeper into the contexts of sexual self-disclosure (Brown & Weigel, in prep). This second study was intended to replicate the previous findings and explore the role of additional contextual components, such as how commitment, trust, and communication
efficacy inform and extend the relationship and sexual self-disclosure contexts. Additionally, a comprehensive risk and rewards measure was developed that will better explain positive and negative perceptions of sexual self-disclosure. Results from this study are currently being written for publication.

These first two studies served as stepping stones, extending the traditional research focus beyond whether people are engaging in sexual self-disclosure and introducing factors that can predict the environment in which sexual self-disclosure is most likely to occur. Following on the heels of these studies, a third study was designed that introduced an individual context variable, communication goals (Brown, Hullman, & Weigel, forthcoming). In this study, participants were randomly assigned to two conditions: one in which they were faced with the opportunity to approach their romantic partner to discuss a particular sexual topic, and one in which they were approached by their partner with a specific sexual topic. Using Dillard and colleagues’ concept of conversational goals (Dillard, Segrin, & Harden, 1989), the goal of this third study was to examine the importance of different conversational goals when considering sexual self-disclosure with romantic partners. For example, partners might be more inclined to engage in sexual self-disclosure if their goal to discuss the particular topic is very important. On the other hand, partners might be more inclined to avoid sexual self-disclosure if they believe the topic might harm their partner’s perceptions of them or might damage the integrity of the relationship as a whole. Overall, the results of this third study will help illuminate the motivations behind whether or not an individual chooses to engage in or avoid discussion of sexual topics with a romantic partner. To a certain extent, this third study will identify the cognitive and communicative processes
behind the decision to engage in or avoid sexual self-disclosure. Data collection for this study is currently underway.

Lastly, I am currently working as part of a research team focused on parent-child communication about sexuality. In this study, the contextual lens is extended even further to examine how a person’s perceptions of the messages they received from their parents regarding sexuality in turn influence or predict the person’s sexual behaviors and attitudes in late adolescence and early adulthood. In some ways, this study will help illuminate the importance of communication with parents (i.e., the family context) as it relates to communication with future sexual and relationship partners. Data analysis for this project is currently underway.

Given the extensive list of factors called for study by Ecological Systems Theory, it is through a series of studies that I hope to further flesh out the contextual influences of sexual self-disclosure. At present, I remain interested in examining potential predictors of sexual self-disclosure such as perceptions of peer attitudes, sex education, religious doctrine, social and cultural norms, and time period such as length of relationship. Before pulling in these larger contexts, however, in my dissertation I proposed to study a critical component in the individual context that still calls for examination – sexual self-concept.

**Overview of the Dissertation Study**

Despite the progress being made in identifying and explaining sexual self-disclosure, one key element has not been studied – sexual self-concept. Sexual self-concept is important to address because how individuals feel about themselves as sexual beings might have critical effects on their likelihood to engage in sexual self-disclosure.
Mainly, persons with negative sexual self-concepts might perceive greater risk associated with sexual self-disclosure and be more concerned with impression management. Persons with positive sexual self-concepts might perceive less risk stemming from sexual self-disclosure and be more concerned with maintaining the relationship. Therefore, the purpose of this dissertation is to examine how sexual self-concept affects people’s perceptions of sexual self-disclosure risk, the importance of impression management goals, sexual self-disclosure efficacy and, ultimately, likelihood to engage in sexual self-disclosure.

Impression management is used a guiding theory for the current dissertation project. Impression management, also known as face theory, posits that communication is strategic in that it is used to perform and communicate our identities and control the evaluations of others (Goffman, 1959; Metts & Cupach, 2008). For example, people want to appear as competent, attractive relationship partners, so they are motivated to communicate with their partners in ways that will help foster this evaluation. In this study, impression management is seen as central to the sexual self-disclosure process, in that sexual self-perceptions (e.g., sexual self-concept) will influence how important managing one’s impression is, which will ultimately affect perceptions of sexual self-disclosure risk and efficacy. Impression management goals will be revisited in greater detail in chapter two.

Whereas this chapter introduced the overall goals of the dissertation study, the following chapters will describe, in more detail, the study as a whole. Specifically, chapter two reviews the relevant literature on self-disclosure and sexually-specific self-disclosure. Then, each contextual variable included in this study is presented and
reviewed, with discussion of elements of the individual and sexual self-disclosure contexts as they relate to one another. The outcome variables of the dissertation study, likelihood and depth of sexual self-disclosure, are discussed, as well as sexual satisfaction. Chapter two ends with a discussion of study control variables and presentation of research questions and hypotheses. Chapter three describes the sample, procedures, and measurements of the study, as well as the analysis plan used. Chapter four presents the full results of the study. Finally, chapter five discusses the results as they relate to the hypotheses and research questions. Implications for theory, research, and applied settings are discussed, as well as limitations and conclusions.
Chapter II: Literature Review

Given that most partnered sexual behavior occurs within the context of romantic relationships (Impett, Muise, & Peragine, 2014; Willets, Sprecher, & Beck, 2004), it is no surprise that sex and sexuality are important factors in intimate and romantic relationships. Indeed, the people who are most satisfied with their sex lives tend to be the most satisfied with their relationships and life in general (Brezsnyak & Whisman, 2004; Impett et al., 2014; Laumann et al., 2006; Regan, 2000; Sprecher, 2002). The importance of sexuality becomes critical when considering sexual communication processes. Sexual communication is a central part of sexuality and sexual satisfaction in intimate and romantic relationships. In fact, researchers have suggested that great sex is made up of many components, one of which is quality communication (Impett et al., 2014; Kleinplatz et al., 2009). A central part of sexual communication in romantic relationships is self-disclosure. Specifically, general disclosure and sexually-specific disclosure is related to perceptions of risk and rewards (Byers & Demmons, 1999; Impett et al., 2014). People reporting greater sexual rewards also report greater sexual satisfaction (Lawrance & Byers, 1995; Impett et al., 2014). Given the importance of communication in regard to sexual satisfaction, it is unsurprising that sexual self-disclosure is a factor that helps maintain sexual satisfaction throughout long-term relationships (Byers & Demmons, 1999; MacNeil & Byers, 2009; Impett et al., 2014).

My dissertation study builds upon my previous research in that it continues to explore various aspects of a contextual model of sexual self-disclosure and sexual satisfaction. Building off of existing research pointing towards several relationship qualities as indicative of a context within which sexual self-disclosure can occur (e.g.,
Brown & Weigel, 2018), the proposed factors are hypothesized to be contextual influences of people’s willingness to talk about sex with their romantic partner. The proposed dissertation study extends previous research by adding critical factors of the individual context to the model and continuing to examine the sexual self-disclosure context.

Briefly, first I discuss general self-disclosure as it has been presented through a variety of theoretical and conceptual models. Then, I emphasize the importance of sexually-specific disclosures before moving onto the different contexts examined in the present study. In the individual context, I highlight the importance of impression management goals and sexual self-concept. Then, I present perceptions of risk and sexual self-disclosure efficacy as critical components of a sexual self-disclosure context. Following this, I describe the key outcome variables of likelihood to sexually self-disclose, depth of sexual self-disclosure, and sexual satisfaction before proposing several control variables. Finally, I conclude the chapter with a presentation of my research questions and hypotheses.

**Self-Disclosure**

Self-disclosure has been described as the process of deliberately revealing information about oneself to another person (Derlega, Metts, Petronio, & Margulis, 1993; Greene, Derlega, & Mathews, 2006; Sprecher & Hendrick, 2004). It is important to recognize, however, that self-disclosure is not simply an act of revealing information – rather, it has a profound impact on the relationship between the persons involved in the interaction. Derlega and colleagues go on to describe self-disclosure as messages that “transform the nature of the relationship, and the nature of the relationship transforms the
meaning and consequences of the self-disclosure” (p.11; Derlega et al., 1993). This suggests that self-disclosure is inherently relational in that it has the power to change the romantic relationship itself. Further, relationship characteristics can change the perceived meaning and implications stemming from the disclosure. In other words, self-disclosure serves to define the relationship, potentially explaining the observed relation between self-disclosure and relationship satisfaction (e.g., Sprecher & Hendrick, 2004).

To date, a number of scholars have proposed models or theories of general self-disclosure and topic avoidance. One of the first frameworks of self-disclosure is Social Penetration Theory (Altman & Taylor, 1973; for an overview see Solomon & Vangelisti, 2010), which suggests that the sharing of personal information results in increased intimacy. An inherently developmental theory of intimate relationships, Social Penetration Theory posits that individuals reveal more about themselves to others over time. The theory has been associated with the analogy of the onion (e.g. Derlega et al., 1993), whereas individuals become more intimate with one another, they begin peeling back layer by layer of information, disclosing more and more to one another. In romantic relationships, the longer a couple has been together, the more topics they disclose to one another.

Although not specifically focusing on disclosure, Vangelisti examined why families keep secrets and what functions these secrets served. Specifically, Vangelisti found that family secrets fell into broad categories, one of which was taboo secrets (1994; Vangelisti & Caughlin, 1997). Further, people were least likely to reveal their secrets when they were concerned about the evaluations they might receive from family members (Vangelisti & Caughlin, 1997). As a result, most self-disclosure models
following this work take into account whether or not the disclosure topic is seen as taboo and how disclosers perceive others to respond to the disclosure.

Petronio (2002, 2007) presented Communication Privacy Management Theory, designed to understand the tensions between concealing and revealing private information. Specifically, Petronio suggested that individuals own their private information and accordingly have the right to control whether the information is shared with others. Then, individuals decide whether to open different privacy boundaries in order to disclose the information. If individuals choose to open a boundary and share this information with others, they essentially make these people shareholders of the information, requiring them to follow certain privacy rules (i.e., how they are supposed to handle the information they have been trusted with). Then, if shareholders violate these privacy boundaries, turbulence occurs, resulting in a number of negative outcomes such as betrayal, mistrust, and anger. While Communication Privacy Management Theory provides an interesting framework for understanding how and why people disclose, its focus on private information ownership and privacy boundaries are more tangential to the current project. However, a number of other models have examined and incorporated other elements that hint at the contextual grounding of the dissertation study.

Omarzu (2000) proposed a 3-stage Disclosure Decision Model. In the model, situational cues and individual differences determine the salience of social awards (e.g., approval, intimacy, control). Specifically, in stage 1, if disclosure goals are not salient then individuals will not disclose. If a particular goal is salient, however, people will move to stage 2 of the model, which determines whether the target of the disclosure is appropriate and whether actually disclosing is an appropriate strategy to achieve the goal.
If yes, then communicators move to stage 3, where the subjective utility and subjective risk of the disclosure is evaluated. In sum, increased subjective utility of disclosure will lead to a greater amount of specific disclosure, whereas increased risk is associated with less disclosure depth.

In their Disclosure Decision Model, Greene, Derlega, and Mathews (2006) consider background factors such as culture, social network, and individual differences, each of which are key components of EST (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Similar to Omarzu’s (2000) disclosure goals component, potential disclosers weigh reasons for and against disclosure, including self-, other-, and relationship-linked reasons. Then, disclosers consider the current situation and whether it is conducive to disclosure: is the intended target of the disclosure available? Is the discloser able to disclose effectively? How will the target respond to the disclosure? If the current situation is seen as conducive to disclosure, then the individual will proceed to constructing their actual message. This model is exemplary of the effect of different contexts in the disclosure decision-making process, including more distal contexts (e.g., the background factors described above) and more proximal contexts (e.g., the reasons for and against disclosure).

In the Disclosure Decision-Making Model, Greene (2009) narrowed the focus by assessing factors such as assessments of disclosure reciprocity, relational quality, anticipated responses to the disclosure, and disclosure efficacy as predictors of whether or not individuals will choose to disclose health-related information. In this model, Greene also considers information assessments, such as the amount of stigma attached to the information being disclosed and whether the information is relevant to others. Formal tests of the model suggested that anticipated responses, outcomes, and confidence in
these responses were predictors of likelihood of disclosures (Greene, Magsamen-Conrad, Venetis, Checton, Bagdasarov, & Banerjee, 2012).

Afifi and Steuber (2009) presented a Revelation Risk Model. In their model, they begin with the valence of the disclosure: how important is the topic to the individual? Then, they assess the risk along different dimensions such as self, relationship, and other risk. Simultaneously, they consider the individual’s efficacy communicating about the disclosure topic and the willingness to disclose under different conditions (e.g., does the target of the disclosure need to know?). These factors ultimately result in an individual’s decision to reveal or conceal the disclosure topic.

Taken together, a number of common factors are shared across the different disclosure models highlighted here. Specifically, contextual factors such as relational and individual variables (e.g., relationship quality and disclosure-related self-efficacy), perceptions of risk and anticipated outcomes, and eventual decisions to disclose. Thus, the dissertation study proposed here builds upon and incorporates several components of these different models and organizes them into different contextual factors. Ultimately, the dissertation study will examine how these different contextual factors, as indicated by many of the variables noted here, lead to a person’s willingness to engage in sexual self-disclosure with romantic partners. The dissertation study also assesses how these contextual factors influence the depth of sexual self-disclosure and, ultimately, sexual satisfaction. The remainder of this chapter details the different contextual factors examined in the proposed dissertation.

**Sexual Self-Disclosure**
Researchers have extended the definition of self-disclosure to sexually-specific disclosures. Here, sexual self-disclosure is defined as the deliberate self-disclosure of sexual likes and dislikes (Byers & Demmons, 1999; Sprecher, Christopher, & Cate, 2006). Scholars have also described sexual communication as the negotiation of the meaning, function, and effect of sexual activity (Metts & Spitzberg, 1996; La France, 2010). Disclosing sexual desires to sexual partners is critical because such disclosure reveals portions of a person’s sexuality that would otherwise be private (Montesi, Fauber, Gordon, & Heimberg, 2010). Such definitions are logical because they emphasize the sharing of sexual likes and desires with one’s relationship partner. Take, for example, a person who is not sexually satisfied in their relationship. Without disclosing their sexual likes and desires to their partner, they eliminate the chance to address possible deficits in sexual satisfaction, therefore preventing any change in sexual activity from happening.

People are motivated to disclose their true selves to partners who are positively involved with the relationship and who accurately understand the disclosure (Prager & Roberts, 2004). Previous research has provided strong evidence that sexually-specific communication between romantic partners is instrumental in achieving and maintaining relationship and sexual satisfaction. Specifically, sexual self-disclosure is related to increased sexual and relationship satisfaction (Byers & Demmons, 1999; Coffelt & Hess, 2014; Cupach & Metts, 1991; Faulkner & Lannutti, 2010; Hess & Coffelt, 2012; Montesi et al., 2010), more satisfying and positive sexual encounters (Byers & Demmons, 1999; Cupach & Metts, 1991; Faulkner & Lannutti, 2010), increased desire for sex (Faulkner & Lannutti, 2010), and greater closeness with relationship partners (Coffelt & Hess, 2014; Hess & Coffelt, 2012). While we know that sexual self-disclosure is related to a variety
of positive relational and sexual outcomes, little is known about what facilitates sexual self-disclosure. Disclosing can open the door to affirmation and validation from one’s relationship partner, but it can also lead to attacks and criticism (Prager & Roberts, 2004), further emphasizing the importance in understanding why people do or do not engage in sexual self-disclosure. Thus far, my research has attempted to address this gap in knowledge by exploring various factors that lead to the engagement in or avoidance of sexual self-disclosure.

Drawing upon the self-disclosure literature and theory described earlier, over the past three years I have begun developing an empirical, contextual model of sexual self-disclosure. My first study (Brown & Weigel, 2018) suggested that a positive relationship context (e.g., responsive, certain, satisfying, and good quality general communication) and a positive sexual self-disclosure context (e.g., perceptions of positive consequences and lower risk resulting from sexual self-disclosure, greater depth of sexual self-disclosure) are predictive of greater levels of sexual satisfaction. Preliminary analyses from my second study (Brown & Weigel, in prep) suggest that the willingness to disclose sexual topics is positively associated with topic importance and the ability to communicate about sex effectively. Additionally, the willingness to engage in sexual self-disclosure was associated with positive relationship context variables (e.g., satisfaction, trust, and commitment), and negatively associated with perceptions of risk (e.g., relationship risk, privacy, and betrayal of trust). Finally, I expect that my third study (Brown, Hullman, & Weigel, forthcoming) will support the hypothesis that individuals who place greater importance on maintaining positive evaluations from their partners and avoiding conflict will see sexual self-disclosure as more risky. Throughout
these studies, I have attempted to address and explore the impact of different contextual predictors of sexual self-disclosure in the individual, relational, and disclosure contexts. Data from the first two studies suggests that sexual topics carrying the greatest risk include previous sexual experiences, anal sex, pornography use, and extradyadic sex (Brown & Weigel, 2018; in prep).

The contextual model under development fits within a general EST framework because it expands our knowledge beyond the relationship in which disclosure is occurring and incorporates different contextual factors that may impact a person’s decision to engage in sexual self-disclosure. Notably, my existing studies have branched beyond the relational context (made up of variables such as relationship satisfaction, uncertainty, general communication quality, trust, and commitment) by including the sexual self-disclosure context (as indicated by variables such as perceptions of consequences, risk, and depth of actual sexual self-disclosure in the relationship). My third study addresses the focal point of EST by introducing variables within the individual context (conversational goals and communication efficacy). Each of these studies has served to continuously and iteratively refine and improve the contextual model of sexual self-disclosure. Such an iterative process for refinement and revision runs parallel with arguments for a continuous, iterative process of measurement improvement (Gordon, 2015; 2016; Davidson, Crowder, Gordon, Domitrovich, Brown, & Hayes, 2017). In much the same way, the purpose of this dissertation was to further refine my contextual model of sexual self-disclosure by incorporating a critical component of the individual context: sexual self-concept.

Towards a Contextual Understanding of Sexual Self-Disclosure
Briefly, the dissertation study expands my contextual model of sexual self-disclosure. In order to determine whether a person will be likely to sexually self-disclose with their relationship partners, the depth of the disclosure, and the resulting sexual satisfaction, the present study called for a more in-depth examination of two contextual predictors: the individual context and sexual self-disclosure context. In this study, the individual context was represented by impression management communication goals and sexual self-concept. The disclosure context was represented with perceived sexual self-disclosure risks and efficacy. Finally, the relational context was controlled for with a proxy variable, non-sexual self-disclosure. The full conceptual model is presented in Figure 1, with SSD noting sexual self-disclosure. In sum, it was expected that a positive sexual self-concept would be associated with greater impression management goals and less perceived sexual self-disclosure risk. Disclosure risk and impression management goals would be correlated, in that greater risk would result in greater impression management importance, whereas less impression management importance will result in less risk. Further, disclosure efficacy would mediate the association between impression management, disclosure risk, and the outcomes, in that greater efficacy would result in greater likelihood and depth of disclosure, ultimately resulting in greater sexual satisfaction. The remainder of this chapter discusses each of these contexts in detail before ending with research questions and hypotheses relevant to the current project.

**Individual Context**

The individual context is the most immediate context involved in the likelihood to engage in sexual self-disclosure. The individual context contains evaluations that a person brings into an interaction, such as specific goals for the interaction or self-
evaluations relevant to the interaction or the interaction partner. The dissertation study examines two key factors within the individual context: impression management goals and sexual self-concept.

**Impression Management Goals**

Prominent conceptualizations of communication goals are based around the idea that communication is purposeful, in that people communicate with others in order to achieve a desired outcome from the interaction (Berger, 2010; Caughlin, 2010). Accordingly, communication scholars have been able to use communication goals and the concurrent messages produced in order to explain why individuals say what they do during their interpersonal interactions (Wilson & Feng, 2010). The study of communication goals is perhaps best illustrated through multiple goals of communication theories, which are effectively variations of the Goals-Plans-Actions (GPA) Theory of interpersonal communication.

The GPA theory defines communication goals as future states that an individual is committed to reaching or maintaining (Dillard, 1990). In this sense, having a goal provides the motivation for an individual to initiate a particular line of conversation. Further, the GPA theory suggests that these goals lead to plans, which determine the behaviors, or specific actions, that are necessary to achieve the particular goal (Dillard, 1990). Thus, communication goals are important to understanding the communication process as it is the goals that determine how a person will go about communicating. The final stage of the GPA model is actions, or behaviors enacted in order to achieve a desired goal (Dillard, 1990). This last stage is perhaps most important when describing how a conversation will turn out once the interaction has already begun. Dillard suggests
that the action stage is contingent on approach-avoidance dynamics (1990), or the assessment of how the conversation partner will respond to the communication (Wilson & Feng, 2010). In this sense, a person can abandon their conversational goal if they perceive a negative evaluation from the interaction partner.

In his work on multiple goals theories of communication, Caughlin (2010) describes communication as “purposeful, that individuals commonly pursue multiple goals simultaneously, and that various communication goals frequently conflict” (p. 825). Goals theorists have differentiated between a number of goals that people may simultaneously have (for a review see Caughlin, 2010; Clark & Delia, 1979; Dillard et al., 1989). Of most interest to the current study are communication goals that are concerned with impression management. In this study, impression management goals are defined as communication goals concerned with social appropriateness, in which the communicator wants to manage her or his own impression successfully (Caughlin, 2010; Dillard et al., 1989).

In his work on self-presentation, Goffman (1959) describes the “self” as a character we create, referring to the dramatization of the self as a performance: we behave so that others will perceive us in a favorable manner. Thus, when pursuing interaction goals, we are seeking to achieve the goal of positive evaluations from our interaction partners, also referred to as face-work. By definition, face-work refers to the balance between two basic face needs: to be approved of and to be unhindered (Brown & Levinson, 1978; Shimanoff, 1987). This is particularly important when looking at communication with close others: we want to be approved of or positively evaluated by our relationship partners, and we want to be unhindered and able to freely express our
desires to our partners. Researchers have talked about goals as changing based on the evaluation of the ongoing conversation (e.g., Caughlin, 2010; Wilson & Feng, 2010), but perhaps it is also a function of initial evaluations as well. For example, people might express importance in communicating about a sexual topic with their partners, but if they view the communication as potentially risky they might avoid the topic in order to pacify their desire for positive evaluations. Given this, I expected that impression management goals would be correlated with perceived sexual self-disclosure risk.

Goffman spoke to this in his work (1959), where he posited that people are motivated to achieve positive evaluations from others and adjust their behavior in an attempt to achieve these positive evaluations (Arroyo & Segrin, 2011; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Kim, Sorsoli, Collins, Zylbergold, Schooler, & Tolman, 2007). In this vein, people might be more likely to engage in sexual self-disclosure if they believe it will satisfy their goal of maintaining a healthy relationship and encourage positive evaluations from their partner. On the other hand, if sexual self-disclosure is seen as particularly threatening, people might avoid sexual self-disclosure in order to satisfy these same goals. Accordingly, I expected that the importance of impression management goals would affect a person’s perceived efficacy of engaging in sexual self-disclosure with their relationship partner and, ultimately, their likelihood of sexually self-disclosing.

**Sexual Self-Concept**

When interacting with others, humans are motivated to present themselves in a manner that can help them achieve particular goals, display self-consistency, and demonstrate conformity to social norms and rules (Rosenberg, 1979). While communication goals help explain why disclosure or avoidance is preferable to an
individual, the sexual self-concept is indicative of how people feel about themselves as a sexual being. The self-concept has strong ties with impression management. Specifically, reflected appraisals and social comparisons serve as a barometer of how well a person is matching his or her ideal self. For example, if people have the goal of being a good relationship partner, they will use their perceptions of their partner’s evaluation of them to direct their future behavior. Additionally, they will compare themselves to someone else who they believe is a good partner and adjust their behavior to be more reflective of that person. In this vein, I proposed that a person’s sexual self-concept, specifically, would influence the importance of impression management goals and his or her perceptions of risk associated with sexual self-disclosure. Before discussing sexual self-concept in particular, it is necessary to briefly discuss the self-concept literature at large, which I now turn attention to.

Originally defined by Rosenberg as the “totality of the individual’s thoughts and feelings having reference to himself as an object” (1979, pg. 7), researchers have described the self-concept as the product of multiple representations of the self (Markus & Wurf, 1987). By this, it is suggested that the self-concept is made up of the way a person thinks and feels about his or herself as a whole person, as a son or daughter, a student, romantic partner, and, most notably for the dissertation study, a sexual being. The self-concept has been described as one of the many factors that influence human behavior (Markus & Wurf, 1987; Swann, 1983, 1996). Scholars have argued that the self-concept is the product of four principles (Rosenberg, 1979; Owens, 2006). The first principle suggests that the self-concept is determined in part by reflected appraisals, or a person’s perceptions of other people’s attitudes toward the self. Second, the self-concept
is determined based upon the social comparisons one makes, comparing the self with others on a specific trait. The third principle refers to self-attributions, or the conclusions people draw about themselves based on their behaviors and the outcomes of these behaviors. Lastly, the self is a complex system in which various identities are organized hierarchically by importance, a concept referred to as psychological centrality.

The self-concept develops as people interact with others (Oyserman, Elmore, & Smith, 2012; Rosenberg, 1979). People learn about themselves by way of social comparisons within interactions, particularly in terms of how well they match with others in terms of their needs, motives, and values (Markus & Wurf, 1987). The self-concept starts to develop in early adolescence, when adolescents develop self-consciousness, or an awareness of what others think of them (Rosenberg, 1979). Accordingly, self-concepts become increasingly negative if individuals view themselves unfavorably when compared to others (Rosenberg, 1979). The quality of self-perceptions is critical for disclosure processes because it is the self-concept that determines the frequency and depth of intimate relating, with positive self-concepts encouraging more intimate relating (Prager & Roberts, 2004). Likewise, it is important to consider domain-specific self-concepts (Oyserman, et al., 2012). As such, the current study focuses on the sexual self-concept as a reflection of how people think about themselves as a sexual person (Deutsch, Hoffman, & Wilcox, 2014).

Sexual self-concept has been defined as a “multidimensional construct comprised of affective and cognitive evaluations regarding how individuals feel about themselves as sexual beings” (Deutsch et al., 2014, p. 94). Overall, sexual self-concept refers to a person’s positive and negative appraisals of cognitive, affective, interpersonal,
behavioral, and physiological qualities of their self as a sexual person (Buzwell & Rosenthal, 1996; Deutsch et al., 2014; O’Sullivan, Meyer-Bahlburg, & McKeague, 2006; Rostosky, Dekhtyar, Cupp, & Anderman, 2008). The sexual self-concept develops from sexual behavior and goes on to influence future sexual behavior (Hensel, Fortenberry, O’Sullivan, & Orr, 2011). What is particularly important is the relation of the sexual self-concept with social comparisons. While the sexual self-concept is a critical component of intimate sexual interactions (Prager & Roberts, 2004), it is problematic because personal sexual beliefs often do not conform to social norms (Deutsch et al., 2014). Further, social norms have been shown to encourage or discourage sexual communication and behaviors because people want to be positively evaluated by others, and going against social proscriptions might lead to negative evaluations (Arroyo & Segrin, 2011; Kim et al., 2007). Thus, a positive sexual self-concept is likely reflective of positive social comparisons and related to an individual context that is conducive to sexual self-disclosure.

In their conceptualization, Buzwell and Rosenthal (1996) present three components of the sexual self-concept: sexual self-image, sexual self-efficacy, and sexual self-esteem. These three components align nicely with Rosenberg’s (1979) four principles of the self-concept, particularly in that they speak to self-perceptions as compared to others and competence as a sexual being. The first component is sexual self-image, described as how one views the self sexually (Buzwell & Rosenthal, 1996). In this sense, sexual self-image is the result of a variety of sexual self-perceptions, including sexual anxiety, exploration, arousal, and commitment (Deutsch et al., 2014). Each of these domains were found to influence initiation of sexual activity and sexual
risk-taking (Goggin, 1989; as cited in Buzwell & Rosenthal, 1996). For instance, less sexual anxiety has been associated with greater comfort with sexual behavior (Hensel et al., 2011) while negative sexual affect has been associated with greater avoidance of sexual behavior (O’Sullivan et al., 2006). Thus, a more positive sexual self-image should be indicative of an overall positive sexual self-concept.

The second component, sexual self-efficacy, refers to the perception of one’s ability to be sexual (Buzwell & Rosenthal, 1996). Perceptions of self-efficacy are vital in that they lead to expectations of success or failure (Bandura, 1977). Further, people with lower self-efficacy for a particular task are more likely to avoid that task and view it as exhibiting greater risk (Bandura, 1993). Researchers have found that greater sexual self-efficacy is associated with higher sexual self-esteem (Rostosky et al., 2008). Thus, greater sexual self-efficacy (e.g., the perceived ability to be sexual) should be indicative of a positive sexual self-concept.

The final component, sexual self-esteem, is defined as a person’s perception of their worth as a sexual being (Buzwell & Rosenthal, 1996). Self-esteem is critical because it is easily damaged from negative social comparisons such as when people see themselves as unfavorable in comparison to others or when their interests are different from the interests of those around them (Rosenberg, 1979). This is particularly relevant in the case of sexuality, as being unfavorable sexually could lead to perceptions of greater risk of rejection or judgment from one’s relationship partner. Similarly, seeing one’s sexual interests as contrary to the sexual norms of others could increase this risk. Sexual self-esteem has been found to be a mediator of sexual risk-taking knowledge (Rostosky et al., 2008), in that feeling positive about oneself mediates the relationship between
knowledge of sexual risks and sexual self-efficacy. Higher levels of sexual self-esteem are related to increased engagement in sexual behaviors, suggesting that sexual experience is an important contributor to sexual self-esteem (Maas & Lefkowitz, 2015). Accordingly, greater levels of sexual self-esteem (e.g., higher worth as a sexual person), should be indicative of an overall positive sexual self-concept.

In sum, the individual context in this study consisted of sexual self-concept and impression management goals. It was hypothesized that a positive sexual self-concept would lead to lower importance of impression management goals and lower perceptions of sexual self-disclosure risk, a key component of the disclosure context. I now turn attention to the disclosure context, which focuses on immediate evaluations of the topic under study: sexual self-disclosure.

**Sexual Self-Disclosure Context**

The sexual self-disclosure context contains variables assessing the sexual self-disclosure itself. In the proposed dissertation study, the disclosure context was comprised of perceptions of sexual self-disclosure risk and sexual self-disclosure efficacy. Briefly, lower risk perceptions and greater beliefs that one can communicate effectively about a sexual topic would be indicative of a positive sexual self-disclosure context. It was expected that an overall positive sexual self-disclosure context would be associated with an increased likelihood to disclose and greater depth of sexual self-disclosure.

**Sexual Self-Disclosure Risk**

The concept of relationship risk and topic avoidance has become popular among communication and relationship scientists. Such prominence is evident in the models developed in recent years to explain why individuals avoid particular topics when
communicating with their relationship partners (e.g., Afifi & Steuber, 2009; Solomon & Knobloch, 2004). Specifically, people are concerned with risks of rejection or betrayal from their partners following the communication (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Omarzu, 2000). Further, people are more likely to conceal information that is seen as taboo or stigmatized, in violation of different rules, or generally considered inappropriate for discussion (Vangelisti, 1994; Vangelisti & Caughlin, 1997). Researchers have emphasized the importance of perceptions of threat, or risk, when determining whether to engage in conversation or avoid conversation about different topics with one’s relational partner.

Researchers have demonstrated that the most commonly avoided topics are taboo topics, as they are often viewed as violating social rules of appropriate conversation (Guerrero & Afifi, 1995; Vangelisti, 1994). Given the taboos surrounding sexual topics (e.g., Anderson et al., 2011; Baxter & Wilmot, 1985), it is not surprising that sexual topics are perceived as carrying greater risk (Vrij, Nunkoosing, Paterson, Oosterwegel, & Soukara, 2002). Yet, this taboo does not explain why such evaluations are relevant to sexual communication in relationships.

Knobloch and Carpenter-Theune (2004) described the relationship of perceptions of risk and topic avoidance well: “Not only do people expect that such communication will damage their self-image, but they also believe that it will jeopardize the well-being of their relationship” (p. 194). Continuing with this logic, it makes sense that sexual topics could be seen as more threatening to the way the communicator is perceived by his or her partner as well as the quality of the relationship (see Montesi, Conner, Gordon, Fauber, Kim, & Heimberg, 2013; Vangelisti, 1994; Vrij et al., 2002). Recent research
supports this notion, finding that greater perceptions of threat are related to greater avoidance of sexual topics (Theiss & Estlein, 2014) and that the sexual topics carrying the most risk include past sexual experiences, anal sex, and pornography use (Brown & Weigel, 2018). It is important to note that a topic being perceived as risky does not automatically mean someone will avoid discussing it. Researchers have demonstrated that people are more likely to see a topic as risky or threatening and thus avoid a topic when they are uncertain about how their partner will respond to the topic (Solomon & Knobloch, 2004; Theiss & Estlein, 2014). Thus, a taboo topic such as sexuality is seen as even more risky if a person cannot predict how his or her partner will respond to the sexual communication.

Perceived risk and topic avoidance is critical to the sexual self-disclosure context because of its weighted evaluation of the topic under discussion. My previous work has demonstrated that greater risk is associated with less depth of sexual self-disclosure (Brown & Weigel, 2018). Further, perceptions of risk are particularly useful when it comes to issues surrounding the self-concept and goals for the communication. For example, if people have a negative sexual self-concept, they may see sexual self-disclosure as inherently threatening. Further, if an individual places impression management-related goals as more important than actually communicating about the topic, they might perceive sexual self-disclosure as more risky. In the present study, it was expected that greater perceptions of risk would be associated with decreased sexual self-disclosure efficacy, ultimately leading to a lower likelihood to engage in and depth of sexual self-disclosure.

**Sexual Self-Disclosure Efficacy**
The second component of the disclosure context was being able to communicate effectively. Communication efficacy refers to people’s belief in their ability to communicate information to another person (Bandura, 1977; Afifi & Steuber, 2009). If people believe they have the ability to talk about a particular topic, they will be more willing to talk about it (Afifi & Steuber, 2009), suggesting that communication efficacy is a critical component in determining whether or not a person will engage in sexual self-disclosure. This critical importance is evidenced by the inclusion of communication efficacy in previous models of disclosure (e.g., Afifi & Steuber, 2009; Greene et al., 2006; Greene, 2009).

In addition to feeling confident in their ability to disclose particular information, people must also feel confident in their ability to produce the desired result of the disclosure (Afifi, Olson, & Armstrong, 2005; Afifi & Steuber, 2009). As such, it is not enough to be able to communicate about a sexual topic alone. Rather, people must be confident that they can communicate about a sexual topic and achieve a desired outcome from the disclosure (e.g., relationship closeness, maintain a positive impression, etc.). Researchers have found evidence that greater perceptions of communication efficacy are associated with greater depth, likelihood, and willingness of disclosure (Afifi & Steuber, 2009; Greene et al., 2012). Accordingly, in the present study, I expected that greater perceptions of sexual self-disclosure efficacy would be indicative of an overall supportive disclosure context and would be associated with increased likelihood of disclosure as well as greater depth of sexual self-disclosure.

**Contextual Outcomes**
The individual and disclosure contexts have focused on variables leading to the outcomes central to this study. Namely, the dissertation study examined three main outcomes to the contextual predictors of sexual self-disclosure: likelihood to sexually self-disclose, depth of sexual self-disclosure, and sexual satisfaction. Briefly, these outcomes were selected because they evaluate the decision to disclose, the quality of the disclosure, and then the effect of the disclosure.

**Likelihood of Sexual Self-Disclosure**

The first contextual outcome of the proposed dissertation study is the likelihood of engagement in sexual self-disclosure. Most existing disclosure models have used various elements incorporated in the present framework to predict a person’s decision to disclose or not (e.g., Afifi & Steuber, 2009; Greene et al., 2006; Greene, 2009; Omarzu, 2000). Indeed, scholars have discussed the willingness or likelihood of communicating as a product of a person’s comfort with communicating (Auter, 2007). When it comes to sexual self-disclosure in particular, it is likely that the likelihood of disclosure is predicted by a number of variables under study in the proposed dissertation. The willingness to communicate has been predicted by communication efficacy, or perceptions of competence (Donovan & MacIntyre, 2004; MacIntyre, 1994). Indeed, comfort with sexual topics leads to the likelihood of discussion of sexual topics (Harris & Hays, 2008). Scholars have also suggested that anticipated response to a disclosure predicts both the likelihood and the depth of the disclosure (Greene et al., 2012). In the current study, it was expected that a positive individual and disclosure context would be associated with a greater likelihood to sexually self-disclose with a relationship partner.

**Depth of Sexual Self-Disclosure**
Not only is it important to evaluate a person’s willingness and likelihood to disclose, but also the depth of prior disclosures. Depth of disclosure refers to the level of intimacy of the disclosure, which is considered greater when a disclosure contains potentially embarrassing or negative information (Howell & Conway, 1990; Omarzu, 2000). Given that sexual topics are already inherently intimate, it is likely more informative to look at the depth of disclosure about a particular sexual topic (e.g., whether people have disclosed completely or little to none about the topic). Resulting from the embarrassing or negative information contained in disclosures, depth of disclosure is highly related to risk (Omarzu, 2000). Thus, greater risk determines how much information is disclosed, such as depth and willingness of disclosure, with greater risk expected to decrease the depth of the disclosure (Afifi & Steuber, 2009; Omarzu, 2000). Similarly, anticipated responses to the disclosure that are more supportive, or less risky, have been associated with greater depth of disclosure (Greene, 2009; Greene et al., 2012). Accordingly, it was expected that greater depth of sexual self-disclosure would be associated with an overall positive disclosure context as well as positive individual context variables.

**Sexual Satisfaction**

The final contextual outcome was sexual satisfaction, defined as “the degree to which an individual is satisfied or happy with the sexual aspect of his or her relationship” (Sprecher & Cate, 2004, p. 236). Sexual satisfaction has been studied by many scholars due to its association with a variety of characteristics of positive relationships such as relationship satisfaction, love, commitment, and stability (Sprecher, 2002). Of particular interest, researchers have found a substantial link between sexual self-disclosure and
sexual satisfaction (Byers & Demmons, 1999; MacNeil & Byers, 1997; 2009). Specifically, researchers have found that sexual satisfaction increases as sexual self-disclosure increases (Byers & Demmons, 1999; MacNeil & Byers, 2009) while the avoidance of sexual self-disclosure is negatively related to sexual satisfaction (Theiss & Estlein, 2014). In my own work, I have found that sexual satisfaction was predicted by both a disclosure-supportive relationship and disclosure context (Brown & Weigel, 2018). Following in this vein, I expected that greater levels of sexual satisfaction would result from more disclosure-conducive individual and disclosure contexts.

**Control Variables**

In the proposed model I controlled for a handful of variables that, although not central to the dissertation study, have been found to be associated with sexual self-disclosure in previous studies. First, the relational context is an important component of relationship processes such as sexual communication. A relational context that is supportive can provide a safe environment within which relationship partners can disclose their sexual desires and needs with one another. On the other hand, an unsupportive relational context might inhibit the extent to which people engage in sexual self-disclosure. Given that the relationship context has been examined in great detail in my previous studies (Brown & Weigel, 2018; in prep; Brown et al., in prep), I chose to use a particularly robust indicator as proxy for the relationship context in the dissertation study: non-sexual self-disclosure.

Given that communication is where the relationship is defined and a shared understanding is created (Burgoon & Hale, 1984; Burleson, Metts, & Kirch, 2000), it is no surprise that general disclosure patterns are an important consideration for the
romantic relationship as a whole. Specifically, self-revealing behaviors and achieving a shared understanding of each other and the relationship are necessary conditions for successful intimate partnerships (Prager & Roberts, 2004). Previous research has supported the idea that generally disclosing relationships enhance relationship satisfaction and contribute to sexual satisfaction (Larson et al., 1998; Litzinger & Gordon, 2005; MacNeil & Byers, 2009). Lastly, good communicators have been shown to be more likely to report increased relationship and sexual satisfaction (Byers, 2005).

In addition to non-sexual self-disclosure, variables assessing the sexual context of the relationship were also included. Scholars have found evidence that people report greater satisfaction with their sex lives when they have more frequent sexual encounters and incorporate a variety of different sexual acts (Frederick, Lever, Gillespie, & Garcia, 2017). As such, satisfaction with the frequency of sex and satisfaction with sexual variety were assessed.

Finally, differences based on gender were examined. Some previous work has suggested that sexual satisfaction plays out differently for men and women, with relationship factors being more important for women and sexual factors more important for men (Impett et al., 2014; Impett & Peplau, 2006; Peplau, 2003; Regan & Berscheid, 1996). Yet, other studies have not found evidence for gender differences in sexual self-disclosure (Brown & Weigel, 2018). As such, gender differences were explored in the proposed study.

**Research Questions and Hypotheses**

Given the reviewed literature, the following research questions and hypotheses will be explored and tested in the dissertation study. Following along with Figure 1, a
positive individual context (i.e., sexual self-concept and impression management goals) and disclosure context (i.e., sexual self-disclosure risk and efficacy) will result in a greater likelihood of sexual self-disclosure as well as increased depth of sexual self-disclosure. Ultimately, greater likelihood and depth will result in higher levels of sexual satisfaction. My hypotheses are as follows:

H1: Sexual self-concept will be related to lower importance of impression management goals (path a).

H2: Sexual self-concept will be related to lower perceptions of sexual self-disclosure risk (path b).

H3: Disclosure risk will correlate with impression management goals in that greater risk will be associated with greater importance of impression management goals and vice versa (path c).

H4: Impression management goals will be related to lower perceptions of sexual self-disclosure efficacy (path d).

H5: Sexual self-disclosure risk will be related to lower perceptions of sexual self-disclosure efficacy (path e).

H6: Sexual self-disclosure efficacy will be related to an increased likelihood of sexual self-disclosure (path f).

H7: Sexual self-disclosure efficacy will be related to an increased depth of sexual self-disclosure (path g).

H8: Sexual self-disclosure efficacy will mediate the effect of impression management goals and disclosure risk on the likelihood and depth of disclosure.

Specifically:
H8a: Sexual self-disclosure efficacy will mediate the effect of impression management goals on likelihood of sexual self-disclosure (path df).

H8b: Sexual self-disclosure efficacy will mediate the effect of disclosure risk on likelihood of sexual self-disclosure (path ef).

H8c: Sexual self-disclosure efficacy will mediate the effect of impression management goals on depth of sexual self-disclosure (path dg).

H8d: Sexual self-disclosure efficacy will mediate the effect of disclosure risk on depth of sexual self-disclosure (path eg).

H9: Greater likelihood of sexual self-disclosure will be associated with higher levels of sexual satisfaction (path h).

H10: Greater depth of sexual self-disclosure will be associated with higher levels of sexual satisfaction (path i).

RQ1: Do the hypothesized associations hold when controlling for the effect of non-sexual self-disclosure, sexual frequency, and sexual variety on sexual satisfaction?

RQ2: Does the hypothesized model hold for both men and women?
Chapter III: Method

Participants were recruited for an online study of sexuality and relationships. The sampling frame was students at the University of Nevada, Reno ages 18 to 25, who were in an exclusive, sexually active romantic relationship. A university sample was ideal because emerging adults are often entering committed romantic and sexual partnerships for the first time and are less experienced in discussing and navigating relational and sexual issues (Arnett, 2000). Because they are less experienced, emerging adults likely engage in more sexual self-concept development behaviors and place a greater importance on impression management goals. Impression management is likely more important because of the stigmas surrounding being sexually inexperienced (Gesselman, Webster, & Garcia, 2017). In this sense, emerging adults want to give off the impression that they are sexually competent to their partners. Sexual self-concept is perhaps more malleable and relevant for emerging adults than the general adult population because of the unique experiences relevant when entering into romantic and sexual relationships for the first times, as well as learning how to discuss sexual issues as they come up. While adults are likely to experience some of these same concerns, emerging adults likely experience them to a stronger extent because of their lack of experience in comparison.

Participants and Procedures

My sample consisted of 582 participants recruited from the University of Nevada, Reno campus. The sample was 62.2% female (n = 362) and 37.1% male (n = 216), with two participants indicating they preferred to self-describe their gender (e.g., gender fluid). Two participants did not report their gender. Participants were predominantly non-Hispanic White (68.2%, n = 397), straight/heterosexual (80.2%, n = 467), and were 20
years old on average \( (M = 20.08, SD = 1.72) \). Participants were relatively equally
distributed across grade levels, reporting being freshmen (23.2%, \( n = 135 \)), sophomores
(19.8%, \( n = 115 \)), juniors (27.3%, \( n = 159 \)), or seniors (29.6%, \( n = 172 \)). A little more
than a quarter of participants were eligible for the Pell grant (27.5%, \( n = 160 \)), with
nearly half indicating they did not know their eligibility status (46.7%, \( n = 272 \)). Most of
the sample reported their parent(s)’ or guardian(s)’ social class to be middle class (78.7%,
\( n = 458 \)). Further, the majority of participants reported having the same social class as
their parent(s) or guardian(s) (76.1%, \( n = 443 \)).

All participants indicated being in a romantic relationship that was sexually
active. On average, participants had been in their current relationships for a little over a
year and a half \( (M = 20.85, SD = 18.81) \). Most participants reported their current
romantic partner as being of the opposite sex (93.6%, \( n = 545 \)). Participants classified
their current relationships as “dating one person exclusively but not living together”
(73.9%, \( n = 430 \)), “dating one person exclusively, living together” (22.3%, \( n = 130 \)),
“married/domestic partnership” (2.4%, \( n = 14 \)), or “engaged” (1.4%, \( n = 8 \)). Nearly a
third of participants indicated that their current relationship was with their first sexual
partner (30.1%, \( n = 175 \)). 16.7% (\( n = 97 \)) of participants reported having no romantic
relationships prior to their current relationship, about half reported having one or two
previous romantic relationships (49.3%, \( n = 287 \)), and about a third reported having three
or more previous romantic relationships (33.9%, \( n = 198 \)). Of those who had been in
previous relationships, most participants indicated those relationships as lasting less than
six months (29.9%, \( n = 146 \)), between 6 months and 1 year (26.0%, \( n = 127 \)), or between
one and two years (23.6%, \( n = 115 \)). About a third of participants indicated having had
no sexual partners prior to their current relationships (30.1%, $n = 175$). Of those who did report having previous sexual partners, participants had four previous sexual partners on average ($M = 4.88$, $SD = 4.22$).

A records request was submitted to the Office of Student Persistence Research for the email addresses of all students, ages 18 to 25, who were enrolled in classes for the Fall 2017 semester. An a priori power analysis suggested a minimum sample size of 223 was required to provide power of $b = .80$ at an alpha level of .05 (effect size = .20, latent variables = 2, observed variables = 9; Soper, 2017). To account for missing data, 500 participants were recruited. Following best practices (Dillman, Smith, & Christian, 2009), a reminder email was sent to participants who did not complete the survey after 1 week, and again after 10 days.

In order to attempt to recruit relatively equal numbers of female and male participants to test for gender differences in research question 2, two surveys were created: one for females and one for males. Once email addresses were obtained, students were emailed through Qualtrics, inviting them to participate in a study on sexuality and relationships. Participants were informed that, if they qualified, they were eligible to participate in the survey and, upon completion, would be able to enter their name and email address in order to receive an electronic gift card to Amazon.com. Participants were informed that if they were one of the first 250 participants (per survey, so 250 females and 250 males), they would receive one $5.00 e-gift card to Amazon.com for their participation in the study. In addition, they would be entered into a drawing to win one of five $50.00 Amazon.com gift cards. All participants were entered into the
drawing, regardless of whether or not they were one of the first 250 participants per survey.

In order to qualify for the survey, participants responded to three screening questions. Participants had to answer “yes” to two questions: “Are you presently in a romantic relationship [i.e., some form of dating (seeing someone for at least one month) or marital relationship]?” and “Is your relationship sexually active (e.g., you engage in sexual activities such as oral, vaginal, or anal sex)?”. In addition, participants had to respond to a third question, “How would you classify your relationship” as either “married/domestic partnership”, “engaged”, “dating one person exclusively, living together”, or “dating one person exclusively but not living together.” Participants who responded as “dating more than one person” or who were not in a romantic and sexually active relationship did not qualify for the study.

A total of 13,895 individuals were contacted for participation in this study. From that, 1,870 (13.46%) participants engaged with the survey, meaning they responded to at least one question. Of those, 1,008 participants (53.90%) qualified for the study, 693 participants (37.06%) did not qualify for the study, and 169 participants (9.04%) had missing data for the screening questions. The main reason individuals did not qualify was because they were not presently in a romantic relationship (75.04%, n = 520). Of qualifying participants, 187 cases (18.55%) were removed for substantial missing data. Another 239 cases (23.71%) were removed because participants did not list a valid disclosure topic (e.g., reported “N/A/” or indicated no avoidance of a topic; left topic field blank; described a topic they had previously avoided but talked openly about at the
time of the study). The full sampling frame is presented and broken down by gender in Table 1.

Measures

The survey consisted of several measures aimed at assessing the variables included in the contextual model of sexual self-disclosure shown in Figure 1. Several of the scales have been used and validated in prior research (i.e., disclosure efficacy, sexual satisfaction, depth of sexual self-disclosure). A few of the scales were either created for this study or had limited use in prior research (i.e., sexual self-concept, impression management goals, sexual self-disclosure risk). For the latter three scales, my goal was to create unidimensional scales for the variables due to concerns with statistical power when testing the proposed model in the dissertation. In future work with this data, I hope to explore the potential multidimensional properties of these measures, however, that is beyond the scope of this dissertation. I used exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to identify a unidimensional set of items for each scale. When conducting the EFAs, I ran solutions in which the number of factors was constrained to one in order to see if I could identify a viable unidimensional measure that matched the operational definitions used in this study. Specifically, I first chose only items with .50 or higher loadings on the unidimensional factor, then compared each remaining item to the definition used in this study for each construct. For comparison, EFAs were also run where the number of factors were allowed to vary. All EFAs were conducted using principal components extraction and Varimax rotation. Means, standard deviations, and alpha coefficients for each of the variables are presented in Table 2.
**Impression management goals.** Impression management goals was assessed using a combination of scales in order to form an overall impression management scale. Participants responded to each question using the stem, “In my relationship,…” First was a 4-item subscale from Dillard’s original framework of multiple interaction goals (Dillard et al., 1989; as adapted by Hullett, 2004, and Brown et al., forthcoming), including: “I am concerned with maintaining a good impression,” “I would be careful to avoid saying things which are socially inappropriate,” “I am concerned with putting myself in a ‘bad light,’” and “I don’t want to look stupid.” Next was a 6-item scale (adapted from Canevello & Crocker, 2010), with items including, “I want to avoid showing my weaknesses,” “I want to avoid being blamed or criticized,” and “I want to avoid revealing my shortcomings or vulnerabilities.” Last was a 2-item subscale (adapted from Kim, 1994), with the items: “It is very important that my partner does not see me in a negative light” and “It is very important that my message does not cause my partner to dislike me.” Participants responded on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree), to 7 (Strongly agree).

The unidimensional EFA revealed that all but 2 items (“I want to convince my partner that I am right” and “I want to get my partner to do things my way”) had factor loadings > .50. These 2 items were dropped from the scale. The final 10-item measure displayed high reliability (α = .85). An EFA was run on all impression management items where the number of factors was allowed to vary, revealing three factors with eigenvalues > 1.0. The first factor accounted for 38.15% of the variance, however, the factors did not conceptually make sense and a number of items loaded onto multiple
factors. All items retained in the final impression management goals scale loaded on the first factor in the unconstrained EFA with loadings > .50.

**Sexual self-concept.** Participants responded to three different scales, each targeting a different subcomponent of sexual self-concept. Each of these scales are from Buzwell and Rosenthal’s 1996 study, and were adapted from the version presented by Deutsch (2012).

**Sexual self-image.** Sexual self-image was assessed with a scale originally developed by Goggin (1989) as presented by Deutsch (2012). Participants responded to 40 items using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*), to 5 (*Strongly agree*). Items included, “Sexual fulfillment is very important to me,” “I have a lot of sexual energy,” and “I have very strong sexual desires.” Negatively-worded items were reverse-coded prior to analysis (e.g., “I don’t need sex at all”).

An EFA was conducted where the number of factors was constrained to one, and a total of 14 items loaded with factor loadings > .50. These 14 items were then compared with the conceptual definition of sexual self-image (i.e., how one views the self sexually, Buzwell & Rosenthal, 1996). Six items were dropped from the scale because they did not match the conceptual definition (“I would like an adventurous sexual partner,” “I would be too worried to have sex with someone I just met.” “I would like to experiment when it comes to sex,” “I don’t think I could enjoy sex with someone I just met,” “There needs to be commitment before I would have sex with someone,” and “Group sex might be fun”). The final sexual self-image scale, containing eight items, displayed good reliability (α = .86).
For comparison, an EFA was run on all 40 items included in the sexual self-image scale. The first EFA, where the number of factors was not constrained, revealed eight factors (e.g., with eigenvalues > 1.0), with the first factor explaining the largest portion of the variance (20.68%). This first factor fit best with the conceptual definition of sexual self-image compared to the other factors, which represented constructs such as commitment and worry. This first factor contained nine items, eight of which loaded onto the unidimensional EFA and made up the final sexual self-image scale. In this case, the unidimensional EFA and the first factor in the unconstrained EFA resulted in the same scale, once items were matched with the conceptual definition of sexual self-image.

*Sexual self-efficacy.* Sexual self-efficacy was measured with a modified version of the original scale (Buzwell & Rosenthal, 1996; Deutsch, 2012; Deutsch et al., 2014). In previous studies, participants first indicated whether or not they could perform each item and then they responded with their degree of confidence only to those items for which they felt they could carry out. In this study, I only asked participants to rate their confidence performing each activity, assuming that they would mark any activity or behavior they were not comfortable carrying out as uncertain. Participants responded to 20 items on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Very uncertain*) to 5 (*Very certain*). Items included, “Refuse a sexual advance by your partner,” “Choose when and with whom to have sex,” and “Ask your partner to provide the type and amount of sexual stimulation required.”

An EFA where the scale was constrained to a single factor revealed 12 items loading strongly (> .50) onto a single factor. Most of these items fit conceptually with
the definition of sexual self-efficacy (i.e., the perception of one’s ability to be sexual, Buzwell & Rosenthal, 1996). Three items were dropped from the scale because they did not match the conceptual definition used in this study (”Discuss with your partner the use of condoms for HIV protection if you (or your partner) are already using a different type of contraception,” “Discuss the use of condoms and/or contraceptives with a potential sex partner,” and “Ask someone to wait for sex if not protected at the time (for example, if you do not have a condom”). The final nine-item scale displayed good reliability (α = .86).

An EFA where the number of factors was allowed to vary was conducted on all 20 sexual self-efficacy items. EFA results revealed four factors, with the first factor explaining 31.62% of the variance. This first factor contained eight items, seven of which matched the unidimensional EFA and were retained in the final sexual self-efficacy scale. The two retained items that did not load onto the first factor, but which loaded onto the unidimensional EFA, were “Choose when and with whom to have sex” and “Reject an unwanted sexual advance from someone other than your partner.”

Sexual self-esteem. Lastly, sexual self-esteem was measured with a 24-item scale (Buzwell & Rosenthal, 1996; Deutsch, 2012; Deutsch et al., 2014). Participants responded to items centered around various components of sexual self-esteem such as, “I feel good about my sexual behavior,” “I like my body,” and “I am confident that I can have a sexual relationship.” Negatively-worded items were reverse-coded prior to analysis, such as “I frequently feel ugly and unattractive,” “I don’t know how (or would not know how) to behave with a sexual partner”, and “Most of my friends are (or would) feel more comfortable sexually with their partners than I do.” Participants responded to a
5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree), to 5 (Strongly agree). An EFA constraining the number of factors to one revealed 17 items loading strongly (> .50). The items matched the conceptual definition of sexual self-esteem used in this study (i.e., a person’s perception of their worth as a sexual being, Buzwell & Rosenthal, 1996). The final sexual self-esteem factor displayed good reliability (α = .89). An unconstrained EFA on all 24 items revealed a total of five factors (e.g., with eigenvalues > 1.0). The first factor accounted for 31.19% of the variance and consisted of six items dealing with physical attractiveness. The second factor accounted for 9.43% of the variance and four items centered around comfort with sexual interactions. The remaining factors were not very clear-cut, however, as some items deviated conceptually from the others in the groupings and multiple items loaded onto multiple factors.

**Sexual topic.** In order to ensure that participants kept in mind a sexual topic that was relevant to them, they were asked to respond to an open-ended question describing a sexual topic they had avoided talking about with their partner. In previous studies (Brown & Weigel, in prep; Brown et al., forthcoming), this item served to orient participants to a specific sexual topic. Further, this item has allowed us to remove individuals from the sample who did not indicate withholding a particular sexual topic with their relationship partner. My previous studies have found that past sexual experiences, anal sex, and extradyadic sex (e.g., threesomes) are among the most frequently avoided sexual topics listed (Brown & Weigel, in prep; Brown et al., forthcoming).

**Sexual self-disclosure risk.** Participants responded to a 30-item scale (Brown & Weigel, in prep) assessing perceptions of risk in talking about sexual topics with a
relationship partner. The scale is made up of seven factors: face/relationship threat, efficacy, privacy, obligation/catharsis, education, relationship relevance, and trust. For the dissertation study, only factors that focused deliberately on risk were used (face/relationship threat, privacy, and trust), leaving those focused more on rationalization out. These three factors comprised 13 items, including “I worry that my partner will no longer care about me if he/she knows about my opinions and feelings about this sexual topic,” “My partner would probably tell people about my opinions and feelings about this sexual topic,” and “I’m not sure I trust my partner enough to tell him/her.” Participants responded to a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree), to 7 (Strongly agree). Negatively worded items were reverse coded prior to analysis. An EFA in which the number of factors was constrained to one revealed that all items loaded strongly (e.g., > .50) onto a unidimensional scale. An unconstrained EFA conducted on these 13 items revealed two factors (e.g., with eigenvalues > 1.0). The first factor accounted for 47.54% of the variance and contained six items assessing partner reactions. The second factor accounted for 11.89% of the variance and contained four items assessing privacy and trust. Three items loaded onto both factors. Given the goal of maintaining statistical power, the unidimensional scale was used for this study. The unidimensional scale displayed strong reliability ($\alpha = .91$).

Sexual self-disclosure efficacy. Sexual self-disclosure efficacy was assessed using a six-item measure (Afifi & Caughlin, 2006; Afifi & Steuber, 2009; as adapted in Brown & Weigel, in prep). Participants responded using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree). Items included, “I wouldn’t know what to say if I tried to tell him/her my opinions and feelings about the topic,” “I can’t think of
any way to tell him/her the information,” and “If my partner brought up the topic, it would be very easy for me to talk about.” Negatively worded items were reverse coded prior to analysis (e.g., “I wouldn’t know what to say if I tried to tell him/her my opinions and feelings about the topic”). The scale demonstrated good reliability ($\alpha = .85$).

Likelihood to sexually self-disclose. Given that there is significant conceptual overlap between willingness and likelihood of disclosure, the intent was to come up with a single measure of likelihood and willingness. Participants responded to six items (Vangelisti, Caughlin, & Timmerman, 2001; as adapted in Brown & Weigel, in prep), including “How willing are you to disclose your opinions and feelings about this sexual topic to your partner in the near future?,” “How likely are you to reveal your opinions and feelings about this sexual topic to your partner in the near future?,” and “How certain are you about your likelihood to talk about this sexual topic with your partner?”. An EFA was conducted in which the number of factors was constrained to one, and all six items loaded $> .70$. An unconstrained EFA only extracted one factor, again with all items loading $> .70$. Thus, the willingness and likelihood items were combined to form an overall likelihood measure. This scale exhibited high reliability ($\alpha = .90$).

Depth of sexual self-disclosure. Participants responded to an 18-item scale assessing the depth of prior sexual self-disclosures with their relationship partners (Brown & Weigel, 2018). Participants were asked to report the depth of prior disclosures for a variety of sexual topics, including “My sexual thoughts or fantasies,” “Masturbation,” and “My past sexual experiences.” Response options ranged from 1 (I have avoided talking to my partner about this topic) to 7 (I have talked openly and completely with my partner about this topic). Previously, the scale demonstrated high
reliability ($\alpha = .94$, Brown & Weigel, 2018; Brown & Weigel, in prep; Brown et al., forthcoming). This scale demonstrated high reliability ($\alpha = .92$) in the present study.

**Sexual satisfaction.** Sexual satisfaction was assessed using a five-item semantic differential scale (MacNeil & Byers, 2009). Participants responded to the stem, “In general, how would you describe your sexual relationship with your partner?” using the following bipolar options, ranging from 1 to 7: pleasant-unpleasant, positive-negative, worthless-valuable, satisfying-unsatisfying, bad-good. Three items were reverse-coded prior to analysis (pleasant-unpleasant, positive-negative, satisfying-unsatisfying). This scale demonstrated high reliability ($\alpha = .95$).

**Non-sexual self-disclosure.** Non-sexual self-disclosure was assessed using items from a 14-item scale (MacNeil & Byers, 2009; as modified by Brown et al., forthcoming). Items included “My thoughts about the future of our relationship,” “The things about myself that I am most proud of,” and “The things in life I am most afraid of.” Participants responded using a 7-point Likert scale, 1 (I have avoided talking to my partner about this topic) to 7 (I have talked openly and completely with my partner about this topic). This scale demonstrated good reliability ($\alpha = .88$).

**Sexual frequency.** To control for the frequency of sexual activity, participants responded to a single item adapted from Orbuch, Veroff, Hassan, and Horrocks (2002), “All in all, how satisfied are you with the frequency of sex in your relationship?” Participants responded to a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Very dissatisfied) to 7 (Very satisfied).

**Sexual variety.** Participants responded to a single item, adapted from Orbuch and colleagues (2002), assessing their satisfaction with the variety in their sex life: “All
in all, how satisfied are you with the variety of sex (e.g., different positions, techniques, etc.) in your relationship?” Participants responded to a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Very dissatisfied) to 7 (Very satisfied).

**Demographics.** Lastly, participants were asked to respond to a series of demographic variables. Participants indicated their gender, age, ethnicity, grade in college, pell grant status, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, relationship length, and relationship type (e.g., dating one person exclusively, dating more than one person, married/domestic partnership, etc.). Participants were also asked to indicate whether their current relationship involves sexual activity and to what extent, as well as how many prior relationship and sexual partners they have had.

**Analysis Plan**

Prior to primary analyses, data were examined and cleaned. For example, negatively-worded items were reverse-scored and open-ended responses were coded. Participants who indicated they did not avoid particular sexual topics with their partners (e.g., “talk openly about everything,” “haven’t avoided anything”, “N/A”, etc.) were dropped from the analysis. Then, EFAs were conducted on scales that were created for this study or had limited use in prior research (see next chapter). Items were averaged into scales or subscales, and reliability analyses (e.g., Cronbach’s α) were calculated. Descriptive statistics (e.g., means and standard deviations) and correlations were calculated on the variables of interest. Finally, t-tests were conducted on all variables of interest to examine whether there were differences based on gender.

Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used for the primary analyses. SEM analyses were conducted using the lavaan package (version 0.5-23.1097; Rosseel, 2012)
in R (version 3.4.4; R Core Team, 2018). Prior to SEM analysis, data was screened to ensure they did not violate the assumptions of SEM procedures to ensure linear relations among variables, lack of collinearity, lack of multivariate outliers, univariate and multivariate normality, homoscedasticity, the relative size of predictors is not too disparate, missing data, and a positive-definite covariance matrix (e.g., Kline, 2011). Necessary modifications were made in order to ensure data met the assumptions (e.g., use of Robust Maximum Likelihood and Full Information Maximum Likelihood; MLR and FIML; Kline, 2011). Then, the primary SEM analyses were conducted to address hypotheses 1 through 10 and research question 1. Research question 2, which asked whether the hypothesized model holds for both men and women, was examined using SEM treating women and men as separate groups in the same analysis. This analysis determined whether the path structure was different for women and men.
Chapter IV: Results

Preliminary Analyses

Preliminary analyses were conducted prior to testing the hypotheses and research questions. First, a correlation matrix was generated (see Table 3) for all variables of interest. In general, all correlations were in the expected directions and most were small to medium strength, suggesting that there is no strong conceptual overlap between variables. In particular, the likelihood of sexual self-disclosure was positively associated with sexual self-esteem, sexual self-efficacy, and sexual self-disclosure efficacy. The likelihood of sexual self-disclosure was negatively associated with impression management goals and perceptions of risk of sexual self-disclosure. Likelihood and depth of sexual self-disclosure were significantly positively associated. Depth of sexual self-disclosure and sexual satisfaction were associated with the predictor variables in the same ways. Finally, sexual satisfaction was positively associated with depth of sexual self-disclosure but was not associated with the likelihood of sexual self-disclosure.

Correlations between the control variables and primary variables were also examined. Non-sexual self-disclosure was positively correlated with sexual self-image \((r = .10, p < .05)\), sexual self-esteem \((r = .24, p < .001)\), sexual self-efficacy \((r = .43, p < .001)\), sexual self-disclosure efficacy \((r = .18, p < .001)\), likelihood of sexual self-disclosure \((r = .18, p < .001)\), depth of sexual self-disclosure \((r = .63, p < .001)\), and sexual satisfaction \((r = .12, p < .001)\). Non-sexual self-disclosure was negatively correlated with impression management goals \((r = -.26, p < .001)\) and sexual self-disclosure risk \((r = -.29, p < .001)\). Sexual frequency was positively associated with sexual self-esteem \((r = .22, p < .001)\), sexual self-efficacy \((r = .22, p < .001)\), sexual self-
disclosure efficacy \((r = .18, p < .001)\), likelihood of sexual self-disclosure \((r = .20, p < .001)\), depth of sexual self-disclosure \((r = .26, p < .001)\), and sexual satisfaction \((r = .18, p < .001)\). Sexual frequency was negatively associated with sexual self-disclosure risk \((r = -.09, p < .05)\). Finally, sexual variety was positively associated with sexual self-esteem \((r = .28, p < .001)\), sexual self-efficacy \((r = .24, p < .001)\), sexual self-disclosure efficacy \((r = .19, p < .001)\), likelihood of sexual self-disclosure \((r = .20, p < .001)\), depth of sexual self-disclosure \((r = .32, p < .001)\), and sexual satisfaction \((r = .18, p < .001)\). Sexual variety was negatively associated with impression management goals \((r = -.14, p < .001)\) and risk of sexual self-disclosure \((r = -.15, p < .001)\).

A series of \(t\)-tests were run in order to determine whether females and males varied significantly on the study variables (see Table 2). Because multiple \(t\)-tests were conducted, a Bonferroni correction was applied in order to control for the familywise error rate (e.g., an increased likelihood of making a Type I error). Bonferroni corrections are calculated by dividing the Type I error rate \((\alpha)\) by the number of comparisons being made (13 in this case; Field, 2009; Mertler & Vannatta, 2013). The Bonferroni correction suggests that a \(p\)-value of .004 or less would indicate statistical significance for gender differences, as \(.05/13 = .003846\). At this threshold, all originally significant \(t\)-tests remained significant. Results indicated that sexual self-image varied significantly based on gender, with males \((M = 3.88, SD = .66)\) reporting higher sexual self-image than females \((M = 3.62, SD = .85)\). Females reported higher sexual self-efficacy \((M = 4.31, SD = .68)\) than males \((M = 4.03, SD = .75)\). Males also reported greater importance of impression management goals \((M = 3.35, SD = .81)\) as compared to females \((M = 3.11, SD = .86)\). Perceptions of risk associated with sexual self-disclosure was greater for
males ($M = 2.27, SD = .81$) than it was for females ($M = 1.74, SD = .71$). Finally, non-sexual self-disclosure was reported as more frequent by females ($M = 4.33, SD = .58$) than males ($M = 4.17, SD = .61$).

Lastly, the open-ended response options for sexual self-disclosure topics were coded and examined for trends. Out of a total of 582 responses, anal sex/stimulation was the most referenced topic ($n = 105, 18.04\%$). Second was previous sexual partners/experiences ($n = 68, 11.68\%$) followed by sexual pleasure, satisfaction, and desire ($n = 61, 10.48\%$), extradyadic sex/threesomes ($n = 57, 9.79\%$) and kinks and fetishes ($n = 51, 8.76\%$). These account for the five most commonly listed topics that participants have purposefully avoided talking about with their current relationship partner.

**Primary Analyses**

SEM was used to test the hypothesized model in Figure 1. In order to interpret the results of SEM with confidence, a model must demonstrate good fit. In order to be considered as having good fit, a model must have fit indices within the following thresholds: comparative fit index (CFI) $\geq .95$, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) $\leq .08$, and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) $\leq .08$ (Bollen & Long, 1993; Byrne, 2001; Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2011). With these criteria in mind, I initially started by testing the hypothesized model (see Figure 2). Although several of the proposed paths included in the hypothesized model were significant and in the expected direction, the overall model exhibited poor fit, $\chi^2 (24) = 307.34, p < .001$, CFI = .65, RMSEA = .14 90% CI [.13, .16], SRMR = .12. Thus, the results cannot be interpreted with confidence. Closer examination of the latent factor loadings from the
hypothesized model showed that only sexual self-esteem loaded highly onto the latent construct \( (b = .89, p < .001) \). The acceptable threshold for indicator variable loadings onto a latent construct is ≥ .70 and, similarly, indicator variables correlated with one another ≥ .70 (Kline, 2011; Y. Yang, personal correspondence, March 13, 2018). As evidenced in Table 3, none of the correlations of the indicator variables met this threshold. Further, sexual self-image and sexual self-efficacy were not significantly correlated. The low factor loadings and correlations between the sexual self-concept indicators were concerning, as this could have meant that the latent sexual self-concept factor was not viable. As such, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA; Kline, 2011) was run in order to determine if the sexual self-concept latent factor was adequately measured. However, the CFA solution failed to run, likely as a result of the low loadings and correlations (Y. Yang, personal correspondence, March 13, 2018). Given this, it appears that the three sexual self-concept indicators were not adequately measuring the proposed latent construct of sexual self-concept. As such, in the current study, the three sexual self-concept indicator variables should be treated as observed variables instead of indicators of the latent sexual self-concept construct (Y. Yang, personal correspondence, March 13, 2018).

Given that the hypothesized model did not fit with the data, alternative models were tested which treated the three sexual self-concept indicators as observed variables in the model (see Table 4 for a summary of model fit for main models tested). That is, direct pathways were added from the individual observed variables of sexual self-image, sexual self-esteem, and sexual self-efficacy to both impression management goals and sexual self-disclosure risk. This is essentially the hypothesized model, with the only
difference being that the three observed sexual self-concept variables were treated separately rather than as indicators of a latent sexual self-concept variable. This model (Model A; Figure 3) also did not exhibit acceptable model fit, $\chi^2 (20) = 234.62, p < .001$, CFI = .69, RMSEA = .14 90% CI [.12, .15], SRMR = .11.

Given the central focus of this study was on predictors of sexual self-disclosure, separate models were run with likelihood of sexual self-disclosure and depth of sexual self-disclosure as sole dependent variables.

**Likelihood of sexual self-disclosure.** A model was run in which depth of sexual self-disclosure was removed from the model, so the only pathway to sexual satisfaction was from the likelihood of sexual self-disclosure. This model (Model B; Figure 4) did not demonstrate acceptable fit, $\chi^2 (14) = 71.44, p < .001$, CFI = .88, RMSEA = .08 90% CI [.07, .10], SRMR = .07, although it was an improvement over model A.

Modification indices were consulted to explore possible problems with this model. Modification indices suggested adding a direct pathway from sexual self-esteem to sexual satisfaction. Recall that sexual self-esteem was defined in this study as a measure of someone’s worth as a sexual being (e.g., Buzwell & Rosenthal, 1996). Adding this pathway is logical, as in order to be open to sexual satisfaction, one likely has to feel high levels of sexual self-worth. This model (Model B1; Figure 5) demonstrated improved fit, $\chi^2 (13) = 50.97, p < .001$, CFI = .92, RMSEA = .07 90% CI [.05, .09], SRMR = .05, although CFI was still below the criterion cutoff.

Modification indices also suggested adding a pathway from sexual self-esteem to sexual self-disclosure efficacy. Recall that sexual self-disclosure efficacy includes being able to effectively communicate about a sexual topic while also achieving the desired
result (e.g., Afifi et al., 2005; Afifi & Steuber, 2009; Bandura, 1977). Thus, it is plausible that sexual self-esteem is predictive of sexual self-disclosure efficacy, in that if people are confident about themselves as a sexual being, they will be able to more accurately and directly communicate their thoughts about a particular sexual topic, resulting in greater ability to effectively sexually self-disclose. Thus, this pathway makes conceptual sense to add to the model. However, there is no conceptual reason to predict that only sexual self-esteem would predict sexual self-disclosure efficacy, as compared to the other two sexual self-concept variables. It could be equally plausible that sexual self-image and sexual self-efficacy are also predictive of sexual self-disclosure efficacy. Specifically, individuals with a positive sexual self-image are likely more confident talking about sexual topics with romantic partners. Further, it is logical that individuals with greater sexual self-efficacy are also likely to be able to talk about specific sexual topics. Thus, a model was tested in which direct pathways were added from each of the sexual self-concept variables (i.e., sexual self-image, sexual self-efficacy, and sexual self-esteem) to sexual self-disclosure efficacy. This model (Model B2; Figure 6) achieved acceptable fit, $\chi^2 (10) = 30.11, p < .01, \text{CFI} = .96, \text{RMSEA} = .06 \text{ 90\% CI [.04, .08]}, \text{SRMR} = .04$. Thus, model B2 was retained.

As can be seen in Figure 6, the hypotheses were partially supported. Though H1 and H2 were technically not supported since the latent sexual self-concept variable was not used, the pathways from each of the sexual self-concept indicators are worth mentioning. In line with H1 and H2, both sexual self-esteem and sexual self-efficacy were related to lower importance of impression management goals and lower perceptions of sexual self-disclosure risk. Sexual self-image, however, was positively associated with
the importance of impression management goals and was not associated with sexual self-disclosure risk. The added paths from each sexual self-concept variable to sexual self-disclosure efficacy were only significant for sexual self-esteem, which was associated with greater sexual self-disclosure efficacy. H3 was fully supported, in that sexual self-disclosure risk and impression management goals were positively correlated.

H4, which predicted that impression management goals would be related to lower perceptions of sexual self-disclosure efficacy, was not supported. H5 was supported, where it was predicted that sexual self-disclosure risk would be related to lower perceptions of sexual self-disclosure efficacy. Support was also found for H6, in that sexual self-disclosure efficacy was related to an increased likelihood of sexual self-disclosure. Since depth of sexual self-disclosure was not included in this model, H7 was not tested.

H8 was partially supported. H8a predicted that disclosure efficacy would mediate the effect of impression management goals on the likelihood of sexual self-disclosure. Efficacy did not mediate the effect of impression management on likelihood (path $df, b = -0.03, p > 0.05$). H8b predicted that disclosure efficacy would mediate the effect of disclosure risk on the likelihood of sexual self-disclosure. This hypothesis was supported (path $ef, b = -0.17, p < 0.001$). Hypotheses H8c and H8d were not tested, since depth of sexual self-disclosure was not included in this model.

Finally, H9 was not supported, in that likelihood of sexual self-disclosure was not predictive of sexual satisfaction. H10 was not tested, given that depth of sexual self-disclosure was not included in the current model. The added pathway from sexual self-
esteem to sexual satisfaction was significant, in that sexual self-esteem was predictive of
greater sexual satisfaction.

Because it demonstrated good fit, and therefore the results could be interpreted
with confidence, model B2 was retained for testing research questions 1 and 2. Recall
that RQ1 asked whether the model held while controlling for relational and sexual
variables that might influence sexual satisfaction, such as non-sexual self-disclosure,
sexual frequency, and sexual variety. When direct pathways were added from these
variables onto sexual satisfaction, the model exhibited marginal fit, with the CFI value
dropping further below the specified threshold, $\chi^2 (22) = 69.24, p < .001, CFI = .91,$
RMSEA = .06 90% CI [.05, .08], SRMR = .05. As such, the following results should be
interpreted with caution. Non-sexual self-disclosure and sexual variety were not
significant predictors of sexual satisfaction. Sexual satisfaction was significantly
predicted by sexual frequency ($b = .10, p < .05$). The strength of the effect from sexual
self-esteem on sexual satisfaction was slightly weakened ($b = .15, p < .01$) and the effect
of likelihood of sexual self-disclosure on sexual satisfaction remained insignificant.
Given that the model fit dropped below acceptable thresholds, it appears that, though
only sexual frequency was predictive of sexual satisfaction, this model does not hold
when controlling for these variables. Since sexual frequency was the only control
variable that significantly predicted sexual satisfaction, I also explored the possibility of
whether the model would fit if sexual frequency was the only control variable in the
model. This did not substantially help model fit, $\chi^2 (14) = 42.17, p < .001, CFI = .94,$
RMSEA = .06 90% CI [.04, .08], SRMR = .04.
Finally, in order to test RQ2, which asked whether the model held for both women and men, SEM analyses were conducted in which women and men were treated as separate groups in order to determine if the path structure was equivalent based on gender. First, model B2 was run in which the paths were constrained to be equal across gender (i.e., no gender differences), $\chi^2 (35) = 73.12, p < .001$, CFI = .92, RMSEA = .06 90% CI [.04, .08], SRMR = .06. Next, model B2 was run in which the pathways were free to vary based on gender (i.e., gender differences), $\chi^2 (20) = 51.44, p < .001$, CFI = .94, RMSEA = .07 90% CI [.05, .10], SRMR = .05. The constrained model did not demonstrate significant improvement over the unconstrained model ($\Delta \chi^2 (15) = 21.68, p > .05$), suggesting that the model structure did not vary based on gender.

**Depth of sexual self-disclosure.** I replicated the process I used testing the models with likelihood of sexual self-disclosure with models using depth of sexual self-disclosure. That is, I ran a model where likelihood of sexual self-disclosure was dropped from model A, so the only pathway to sexual satisfaction was from depth of sexual self-disclosure. This model (Model C; Figure 7) did not demonstrate acceptable fit, $\chi^2 (14) = 208.93, p < .001$, CFI = .62, RMSEA = .16 90% CI [.14, .17], SRMR = .12. I then added a pathway from sexual self-esteem to sexual satisfaction (Model C1; Figure 8), which also exhibited poor fit, $\chi^2 (13) = 196.01, p < .001$, CFI = .64, RMSEA = .16 90% CI [.14, .17], SRMR = .11. Then, I added pathways from the sexual self-concept variables to sexual self-disclosure efficacy (Model C2; Figure 9), however this model also exhibited poor fit, $\chi^2 (10) = 173.18, p < .001$, CFI = .68, RMSEA = .17 90% CI [.15, .19], SRMR = .10.
Although none of the models achieved acceptable fit, it is interesting to note that sexual self-disclosure efficacy was predictive of the depth of sexual self-disclosure \((b = .27, p < .001; \text{H7})\) and depth of sexual self-disclosure was associated with greater sexual satisfaction \((b = .15, p < .001; \text{H10})\). Sexual self-disclosure efficacy did not mediate the effect of impression management goals on sexual self-disclosure depth \((b = -.01, p > .05; \text{H8c})\), but it did mediate the effect of sexual self-disclosure risk on sexual self-disclosure depth \((b = -.09, p < .001)\). These findings should be interpreted with caution, however, since the overall models did not fit. Also, the lack of model fit means that I was unable to answer RQ1 and RQ2 for depth of sexual self-disclosure. Thus, the role of depth of sexual self-disclosure in linking the individual and disclosure contexts with sexual satisfaction may be better predicted by variables other than those included in this study.

**Alternative Model Exploration.** In addition to the models tested above, a series of alternative models were tested. First, a model was run in which sexual satisfaction served as a predictor instead of an outcome. The intent was to explore whether sexual satisfaction might help determine the contexts in which people are likely to sexually self-disclose. For example, it could be that lower levels of sexual satisfaction lead to greater importance of impression management goals, greater perceptions of sexual self-disclosure risk, and lower perceptions of sexual self-disclosure efficacy. This model (Model Alt1; Figure 10) exhibited good fit, \(\chi^2 (6) = 18.71, p < .01, \text{CFI} = .97, \text{RMSEA} = .06, 90\% \text{CI} [.03, .09], \text{SRMR} = .03\). However, none of the pathways from sexual satisfaction were significant, suggesting that sexual satisfaction is not a meaningful predictor.
Second, a model was run in which the retained model (Model B2; Figure 6) was modified so that non-sexual self-disclosure was used in place of likelihood of sexual self-disclosure. This model was explored because non-sexual self-disclosures have been shown to enhance sexual satisfaction (e.g., Byers, 2005; Larson et al., 1998; Litzinger & Gordon, 2005; MacNeil & Byers, 2009). This model (Model Alt2; Figure 11) exhibited poor fit, $\chi^2 (10) = 132.20, p < .001, \text{CFI} = .73, \text{RMSEA} = .15 90\% \text{CI} [.13, .17], \text{SRMR} = .09$.

Third, a model was run in which the retained model (Model B2) was modified, in that non-sexual self-disclosure was added as a predictor of the disclosure context variables (sexual self-disclosure risk, sexual self-disclosure efficacy, and likelihood of sexual self-disclosure). This model was tested because, in addition to non-sexual self-disclosure impacting sexual satisfaction, researchers have found that sexual self-disclosure is likely to occur in a relationship that is already disclosing (Byers & Demmons, 1999; Montesi et al., 2010). This model (Model Alt3; Figure 12) exhibited marginal but close fit, with only CFI dropping slightly below the threshold, $\chi^2 (12) = 41.06, p < .001, \text{CFI} = .94, \text{RMSEA} = .07 90\% \text{CI} [.05, .09], \text{SRMR} = .04$. Because of the model fit, these results should be interpreted with caution. Non-sexual self-disclosure was positively predictive of the likelihood of sexual self-disclosure and negatively predictive of sexual self-disclosure risk. Non-sexual self-disclosure was not predictive of sexual self-disclosure efficacy.

Finally, in order to examine whether impression management goals impact the efficacy of sexual self-disclosure indirectly through risk of sexual self-disclosure, I modified Model B2 and changed the correlation between impression management goals
and risk (path c in Figure 6) into a direct pathway from impression management to risk. This model (Model Alt4; Figure 13) exhibited good fit ($\chi^2 (10) = 30.11, p < .01, CFI = .96, RMSEA = .06 90\% CI [.04, .08], SRMR = .04$). Impression management goal importance predicted increased risk ($b = .23, p < .001$) and results suggested that impression management goals do have a significant negative indirect effect on sexual self-disclosure efficacy through risk ($b = -.08, p < .001$).
Chapter V: Discussion

This dissertation adds to the study of sexual self-disclosure and sexual communication processes within romantic relationships by identifying several links between variables in the individual and disclosure contexts, and how they relate or do not relate to sexual satisfaction. First, sexual self-concept variables such as sexual self-image, sexual self-efficacy, and sexual self-esteem played various roles in predicting impression management goal importance and sexual self-disclosure risk. Second, impression management goals and sexual self-disclosure risk were significantly associated with one another. Third, perceptions of sexual self-disclosure risk predicted lower perceptions of sexual self-disclosure efficacy, which mediated this effect on likelihood of sexual self-disclosure. Fourth, sexual self-disclosure efficacy was related to a higher likelihood of sexual self-disclosure. Fifth, sexual self-esteem was associated with increased levels of sexual satisfaction. Interestingly, impression management goals were not predictive of sexual self-disclosure efficacy, nor was the likelihood of sexual self-disclosure predictive of sexual satisfaction. Further, frequency of sex was a critical predictor of sexual satisfaction, while sexual variety and non-sexual self-disclosure were not. The model including likelihood of sexual self-disclosure did not vary by gender, despite gender differences being found on a number of individual variables included in the model. Finally, all models with depth of sexual self-disclosure failed to meet requirements of model fit, calling into question the results of those models. Each of these findings will be discussed as they relate to the predicted associations presented earlier in this dissertation. Then, implications for theory, research, and applied concentrations will be discussed.
Finally, a review of the limitations of the study will be discussed, along with directions for future research on sexual communication processes.

**Hypothesis Testing**

Recall that hypotheses 1 and 2 predicted that sexual self-concept would be related to lower importance of impression management goals and lower sexual self-disclosure risk, respectively. In its full form, this hypothesis was not supported because sexual self-concept did not work as a latent variable in this study. However, partial support was found for similar path directions between the three indicators of sexual self-concept and impression management goals and sexual self-disclosure risk. Specifically, sexual self-esteem and sexual self-efficacy were both predictive of lower importance of impression management goals and lower perceptions of sexual self-disclosure risk, in line with what was predicted in H1 and H2. These findings suggest that positive sexual self-concept, as demonstrated by positive components of sexual self-esteem and sexual self-efficacy, reduce the importance of impression management goals and perceptions of risk. In other words, feeling as though one has high value as a sexual being and is confident in their ability to be sexual will result in less concern over how one will be evaluated by their partner. Further, it is likely that this confidence in one’s sexual self-concept also results in lower perceived risk, as participants see themselves as being effective and worthy sexual beings. This finding corresponds with the broader literature on self-concept and impression management, in that reflected appraisals and social comparisons are key indicators of the self-concept (Rosenberg, 1979; Owens, 2006). People compare themselves with ideal others and adjust their behavior accordingly (Markus & Wurf, 1987; Rosenberg, 1979). In the present scenario, if individuals feel as though they do
align with ideal others in terms of their sexual selves (e.g., are not attractive enough, are not sexually adventurous enough), they will not be as concerned with adjusting their behavior in order to give off the impression that they match the ideal proscription of a sexual being. Similarly, if people view themselves as more in line with this idealized sexual self, they will see less risk in interactions centered around sexuality, as they will not be trying to control others’ perceptions of them.

Surprisingly, sexual self-image was predictive of greater importance of impression management goals, which is the opposite of what was predicted. This latter finding could be explained by the fact that the definitions of sexual self-image and impression management goals are closely related to one another. Sexual self-image is defined as how one views the self as a sexual person (Buzwell & Rosenthal, 1996), whereas impression management goals deal with social appropriateness and the management of one’s self-image (Caughlin, 2010; Dillard et al., 1989). Because both of these variables deal with perceptions of the self and the management of these perceptions, it makes sense that the perceptions of the self as a sexual being would map onto the management of perceptions (e.g., if I view myself as a positive sexual being, I will want to ensure that others view me in a similar light).

Hypothesis 3 predicted that sexual self-disclosure risk would be positively correlated with impression management goals. The results fully supported this hypothesis, with the two variables being moderately and positively correlated with one another. This finding suggests that sexual self-disclosure risk and impression management goals are mutually influential, in that greater risk is associated with greater importance of impression management goals and lower importance of impression
management goals is associated with lower risk. This result is supportive of previous theoretical assertions of impression management goals, such that people are concerned with achieving positive evaluations from others, and they are motivated to adjust their behavior in order to achieve these positive evaluations (e.g., Arroyo & Segrin, 2011; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Goffman, 1959; Kim et al., 2007). If people view the discussion of a sexual topic as risky and perhaps leading to negative evaluations from their partners, they will be more concerned with maintaining positive evaluations.

Results did not support hypothesis 4, in that impression management goals were not related to lower perceptions of sexual self-disclosure efficacy. This was surprising, as it was expected that being concerned with the management of one’s impression (e.g., seeming competent, being perceived in a positive manner) would relate to one’s ability to communicate their thoughts about sexual topics they had purposefully avoided discussing. In other words, greater importance of impression management goals would be associated with less perceived ability to effectively communicate one’s thoughts without harming their partner’s impressions of themselves. Given that impression management goals and sexual self-disclosure risk were positively correlated (see hypothesis 3), it is possible that rather than being a direct predictor of sexual self-disclosure efficacy, the effect of impression management goals on sexual self-disclosure efficacy is mediated by risk. Specifically, greater importance of impression management goals might lead to greater perceptions of risk, and in this sense impression management goals might have an indirect effect on sexual self-disclosure efficacy. If an individual feels that it is important to manage the impressions their partners have of them, they might see talking about a sexual topic as more risky, in that it has a greater potential to
harm the impression. Thus, higher importance of impression management goals likely result in increased risk, whereas lower importance of impression management goals likely reduces perceptions of risk. This was explored in Model Alt4 (Figure 13, see results section), and the results suggest that impression management does play a role in predicting sexual self-disclosure efficacy, although it is indirect. Future research should examine this indirect relationship in more detail. These results will be discussed in the implications, with a specific focus on what these results mean for impression management theory.

Hypothesis 5, which predicted that sexual self-disclosure risk would be related to lower perceptions of sexual self-disclosure efficacy, was supported. Recall that communication that is potentially damaging or stigmatizing is evaluated as having considerable risk (Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004; Vangelisti, 1994; Vangelisti & Caughlin, 1997). Previous research has suggested that people are hesitant to communicate information that might damage their relationship or lead to rejection from their partner (e.g., Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004; Omarzu, 2000; Theiss & Estlein, 2014). Communicating effectively requires a person to be able to accurately communicate their thoughts on a topic and achieve a desired result from the communication (e.g., Afifi et al., 2005; Afifi & Steuber, 2009). Together, the results from previous studies and from this study suggest that people who perceive sexual topics as more threatening are going have less confidence in their ability to accurately and effectively disclose their thoughts about a particular sexual topic.

Hypothesis 6 was supported, in that sexual self-disclosure efficacy predicted an increased likelihood of sexual self-disclosure. This finding lends support to many earlier
findings, suggesting that greater perceptions of communication efficacy lead to a greater likelihood of communication (Afifi & Steuber, 2009; Auter, 2007; Donovan & MacIntyre, 2004; Greene et al., 2012; MacIntyre, 1994). Indeed, this study suggests that people are more likely to talk about a specific sexual topic when they believe they have the ability to effectively communicate their thoughts about that topic. Hypothesis 7, which involved depth of sexual self-disclosure, will be discussed at the end of this section.

Hypothesis 8 predicted that sexual self-disclosure efficacy would mediate the effect of impression management goals and disclosure risk on the likelihood and depth of sexual self-disclosure. Partial support was found for this hypothesis. While sexual self-disclosure efficacy did not mediate the effect of impression management goals on likelihood of sexual self-disclosure (H8a), it did negatively mediate the effect of sexual self-disclosure risk on the likelihood of sexual self-disclosure (H8b). This suggests that risk is a more powerful determinant of efficacy than concerns about impression management, and that greater perceived risk results in lower sexual self-disclosure efficacy and, ultimately, lower likelihood of sexual self-disclosure. This finding lends support to the relationship between perceptions of risk and perceptions of communication efficacy. Recall that, alongside feelings of confidence in accurately communicating one’s thoughts about a topic, disclosure efficacy also includes confidence in one’s ability to achieve a desired result from the disclosure (Afifi et al., 2005; Afifi & Steuber, 2009). Similarly, disclosing is seen as more risky when people are uncertain about how the respondent will respond to the disclosure (Solomon & Knobloch, 2004; Theiss & Estlein, 2014). Given this, perceptions of risk directly map onto people’s perception of their
ability to effectively disclose and achieve a desired result in that if people view the sexual topic as risky and are unable to predict how their partner will respond to the sexual topic, they will also perceive themselves as having less efficacy at disclosing that topic and thus controlling the communication interaction. Hypotheses 8c and 8d will be discussed along with the models including depth of sexual self-disclosure at the end of this section.

Finally, hypothesis 9 stated that sexual satisfaction would be positively predicted by likelihood of sexual self-disclosure. This hypothesis was not supported by the present study. Previous research has suggested that there is a substantive relationship between sexual satisfaction and sexual self-disclosure (e.g., Byers & Demmons, 1999; MacNeil & Byers, 2009; Theiss & Estlein, 2014). In my own research, I previously found that a positive disclosure context, consisting of perceptions of risk, consequences, and depth of sexual self-disclosure, resulted in higher sexual satisfaction (Brown & Weigel, 2018).

One possible explanation is that sexual satisfaction may be dependent upon actual sexual communication, rather than sexual communication that may or may not occur in the future, as was assessed with the likelihood variable. Recall that sexual communication is associated with greater sexual rewards and satisfaction (Byers & Demmons, 1999; Lawrance & Byers, 1995; MacNeil & Byers, 2009). As such, in order to be sexually satisfied, people need to talk openly about their sexual wants and desires. While research shows that people who intend to engage in a particular behavior tend to follow through with their intentions (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2005), the likelihood of sexual self-disclosure stops short of this by asking participants to produce their intent to perform the behavior. Depth of sexual self-disclosure, however, does ask about sexual communication that has
already happened. The relationship between depth of sexual self-disclosure and sexual satisfaction will be discussed at the end of this section.

Research question 1 asked whether the proposed model held while controlling for non-sexual self-disclosure, sexual frequency, and sexual variety. Results provided evidence that these three control variables were significantly correlated with many of the variables included in the main model, affirming the importance of examining the effects of these control variables. Results suggested that sexual frequency was a positive predictor of sexual satisfaction, whereas non-sexual self-disclosure and sexual variety were not predictive of sexual satisfaction. In other words, satisfaction with the amount of sex one is having is related to overall sexual satisfaction levels, in line with previous and recent findings reporting that couples who have sex more frequently are also the most sexually satisfied (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Frederick et al., 2017). The frequency of sexual activity tends to be higher earlier on in relationships, with many people reporting drops in frequency over time (Sprecher et al., 2006). Given that the average relationship length of the current sample was about one and a half years, it makes sense that frequency of sex was predictive of overall sexual satisfaction. However, this study did not lend support to the assertion that sexual satisfaction is also associated with a greater variety of sex acts (Frederick et al., 2017) or that non-sexual communication is associated with sexual satisfaction (e.g., Byers, 2005). It is possible that sexual variety is less important to sexual satisfaction early on in a relationship, and that variety becomes more crucial once sexual satisfaction starts decreasing, as a means of addressing this decrease. Indeed, a recent study recommended that sexual variety is an important tool for couples to use in order to promote long-term sexual satisfaction (Frederick et al., 2017).
Similarly, it could be that sexually-specific communication is more important for sexual satisfaction at the early stages of relationships, when couples are negotiating and defining sexual activity. Non-sexual communication, on the other hand, might become more impactful to sexual satisfaction as the relationship matures, perhaps as a component of an overall satisfying relationship, which has been found to predict sexual satisfaction (Brown & Weigel, 2018). The developmental implications of sexual communication as relationships mature will be addressed in more detail in the limitations section.

Research question 2 asked whether the hypothesized model held for both women and men. Since the hypothesized model did not demonstrate acceptable fit, research question 2 was only tested on the retained model focused on the likelihood of sexual self-disclosure and sexual satisfaction. Results suggested that this model did not vary based on participant gender, lending support to previous research that did not find gender differences in a model of sexual self-disclosure processes (Brown & Weigel, 2018). It is important to note, however, that significant differences were evident on individual variables, such as sexual self-image, sexual self-efficacy, importance of impression management goals, and risk of sexual self-disclosure. While these differences may not have been enough to cause the model to operate differently based on gender, it is important for researchers to examine differences based on individual variables. For example, in this study men, compared to women, reported higher perceptions of sexual self-disclosure risk and higher importance of impression management goals. This could mean that the interplay of these variables on sexual self-disclosure processes might play out differently for men and women, given that men are more concerned with maintaining a positive impression from their partner and see sexual communication as more risky.
Given that researchers have found evidence that sexual communication processes play out differently based on gender (Impett et al., 2014), it is important for future research to examine the interplay of these variables in different sexual self-disclosure models. Gender will be revisited in the section on implications.

It is important to note that hypotheses 7, 8c, 8d, and 10 were not reliably tested because all models including depth of sexual self-disclosure failed to demonstrate acceptable model fit. However, the examination of individual pathways in those models suggested that depth of sexual self-disclosure is predicted by efficacy and is predictive of sexual satisfaction. This might suggest that depth of sexual self-disclosure is in fact a critical component of sexual self-disclosure processes, however, it might be better predicted by variables that were not included in this study. Important to note, for example, is that depth of sexual self-disclosure was measured based on previous sexual self-disclosures in a relationship, in that participants were asked to report the depth to which they have talked about a variety of sexual topics with their relationship partners. It could be that the topic-specific sexual self-disclosure variables (i.e., risk, efficacy, and likelihood) included in this study do not map onto depth of sexual self-disclosure, but rather more general variables do, such as the general risk of talking about sex, rather than the risk of talking about a specific sexual topic. Similarly, neither research question was tested using the depth of sexual self-disclosure models and should be examined in future studies.

Lastly, it is important to comment on the alternative models explored in this study. Model Alt4 was discussed previously and will not be discussed again here. Recall that an alternative model was run where sexual satisfaction was a predictor of impression
management goals, sexual self-disclosure efficacy, and sexual self-disclosure risk (Model Alt1; Figure 10). Sexual satisfaction did not predict either of these variables, suggesting that it operates best as an outcome variable in the current study. An alternative model was also run in which likelihood of sexual self-disclosure was replaced with non-sexual self-disclosure (Model Alt2; Figure 11). This model did not fit the data, suggesting that non-sexual self-disclosure is not a meaningful substitute for likelihood of sexual self-disclosure in this model. An alternative model was also run in which non-sexual self-disclosure predicted sexual self-disclosure risk, sexual self-disclosure efficacy, and likelihood of sexual self-disclosure. This model exhibited marginal but close fit, meaning that the results must be interpreted with caution. However, two small effects were revealed, in that non-sexual self-disclosure was positively predictive of the likelihood of sexual self-disclosure and negatively predictive of sexual self-disclosure risk. This suggests that general communication patterns might play a role in determining whether or not someone is likely to communicate about sexual topics, as well as their perceptions of risk. Given that this model exhibited close fit, it still appears that Model B2 is the most viable model. However, the results of Model Alt2 do suggest that including non-sexual self-disclosure is an important variable to include in models of sexual self-disclosure.

Indeed, previous studies have included non-sexual self-disclosure as an indicator of a relationship context (Brown & Weigel, 2018; in prep). The inclusion of non-sexual self-disclosure, particularly as an indicator of overall communication patterns in relationships, will be revisited in the section on limitations and future directions.

Implications
The results of this study offer implications for theory, research, and application. Recall that the broad organizational framework for this study was Ecological Systems Theory (EST). The main tenets of EST call for the empirical consideration of various contexts when examining sexual communication in relationships (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Brown & Weigel, 2016; Jones, Meneses da Silva, & Soloski, 2011). Previous research on sexual disclosure and sexual communication has looked at the relational and disclosure contexts (Brown & Weigel, 2018). This dissertation attempted to further examine the contribution of individual context components such as the importance of impression management goals and components of the sexual self-concept, sexual self-image, sexual self-efficacy, and sexual self-esteem. This study examined these individual context factors in terms of their relation to sexual self-disclosure context factors, such as disclosure risk, efficacy, and likelihood. Ultimately, this study builds upon previous work (Brown & Weigel, 2018) by also examining how these factors affect sexual satisfaction. The results of this study suggest that individual context factors, particularly the components of sexual self-concept, are critical in predicting portions of the disclosure context comprised of perceived risk and efficacy. These results lend support to the use of EST as an overall organizational framework with which to examine various contextual influences on sexual self-disclosure processes.

In terms of a contextual model of sexual self-disclosure, the current study suggests that sexual self-image, sexual self-efficacy, sexual self-esteem, and impression management goals are important individual context variables. Similarly, disclosure risk and efficacy are important disclosure context variables. Less clear is the positioning of likelihood of sexual self-disclosure and depth of sexual self-disclosure. Likelihood of
sexual self-disclosure was the only variable that did not correlate with sexual satisfaction. While depth of sexual self-disclosure was correlated with all study variables, the models that included depth did not fit, raising questions as to the best placement of depth of sexual self-disclosure in the contextual model. As such, the exact role of likelihood and depth of sexual self-disclosure should be thoroughly explored in future studies examining the contextual influences of sexual self-disclosure and sexual satisfaction. For example, it is possible that likelihood and depth of sexual self-disclosure are both indicators of an overall latent disclosure context. Indeed, depth of sexual self-disclosure, perceptions of sexual self-disclosure risk, and perceptions of sexual self-disclosure consequences were indicators of a latent sexual disclosure context in a previous study (Brown & Weigel, 2018). Likelihood of sexual self-disclosure, along with sexual disclosure efficacy, might be additional indicators of a latent sexual self-disclosure context.

For theory, it appears that impression management is not impactful on sexual self-disclosure processes in the expected manner. Impression management was chosen as the theoretical framework for the dissertation study because of its position as an individual-level factor that carries a lot of power in communication research. When people communicate, they do so with particular outcomes in mind (Berger, 2010; Caughlin, 2010). Often, one of these outcomes is the positive evaluation from the people one is communicating with (e.g., Brown & Levinson, 1978; Goffman, 1959; Shimanoff, 1987). Impression management should, therefore, be determined by evaluations of the self, in that if people view themselves as inadequate, they are going to want to hide this from others so that they come across in a positive light. Similarly, if one is concerned with the impressions they foster from significant others, and they see themselves as not exhibiting
such impressions, they will feel less effective at communicating about a topic in a way that affords a positive impression.

The importance of impression management was negatively predicted by sexual self-esteem and sexual self-efficacy, in that positive sexual self-esteem and positive sexual self-efficacy led to lower importance of impression management goals. As was previously discussed, the finding was in the opposite direction for sexual self-image, in that positive sexual self-image was related to greater importance of impression management goals. Impression management goal importance did not predict sexual self-disclosure efficacy, however, it was positively correlated with perceptions of risk. This suggests that impression management goals are closely related to perceptions of risk, in that impression management goals can lead to higher risk perceptions, however impression management goals do not directly affect perceptions of efficacy in communicating about specific sexual topics. Rather, an exploratory analysis found evidence that the effect of impression management goals on sexual self-disclosure efficacy was mediated by disclosure risk. Given this, it is likely that when people see a topic as risky, impression management importance is triggered. In other words, when a topic poses a significant threat, people are more worried about the way they are perceived and, as a result of this threat, feel less effective communicating about the topic. Taken together, it appears that impression management goals are impacted by self-perceptions (e.g., sexual self-concept) and are impactful in determining efficacy of disclosure by way of perceptions of risk.

Given that impression management goal importance is associated with sexual self-disclosure risk, and the evidence of the mediation effect involving the two variables,
it is also important to consider theories and models of disclosure risk as potentially informing the contextual understanding of sexual communication processes. As mentioned previously, Omarzu (2000) and Afifi and Steuber (2009) found that risk perceptions are associated with less disclosure. Greene and colleagues (Greene, 2009; Greene et al., 2006; 2012) also consider risk as important, particularly in terms of how a respondent will respond to a particular disclosure. The present study offers evidence for researchers to continue using risk in models of sexual self-disclosure. Additionally, as previously discussed, Vangelisti (1994; Vangelisti & Caughlin, 1997) found that people are least likely to reveal information when they are worried about the way people will evaluate them. The present study provides evidence for this association given the correlation and mediation between impression management goals and risk. As such, the results of this study also encourage future empirical examination of a potential integration of impression management and risk theories and models as they pertain to sexual communication.

Although the models including depth of sexual self-disclosure did not meet acceptable fit thresholds for structural equation models, examination of the individual pathways suggested that sexual self-disclosure efficacy was predictive of the depth of sexual self-disclosure and that depth was predictive of sexual satisfaction. As mentioned earlier, while depth of sexual self-disclosure did not play out in the present model, this does not mean that it is not a valuable variable in sexual self-disclosure processes. Previous models have provided evidence that depth of disclosure is highly dependent upon perceptions of risk (e.g., Afifi & Steuber, 2009; Omarzu, 2000; Greene, 2009; Greene et al., 2012). A similar model also suggested that a disclosure context, of which
depth of sexual self-disclosure was a strong component, was predicted by a positive relationship context made up of variables such as relationship responsiveness, uncertainty, non-sexual communication, and relationship satisfaction (Brown & Weigel, 2018). Given that depth of sexual self-disclosure appears to play some component in sexual communication processes, future research should closely examine potential predictors of the depth of sexual self-disclosure.

Future research should also examine the role of gender differences in sexual self-disclosure processes. On the one hand, we might expect gender differences in models of sexual self-disclosure because in sexuality research people have found evidence for gender differences in many realms of sexuality, such as sexual satisfaction, masturbation, sexual desire, and sexual attitudes (Derlega et al., 1993; Impett et al., 2014; Impett & Peplau, 2006; Peplau, 2003; Petersen & Hyde, 2010; Regan & Berscheid, 1996). On the other hand, research looking at self-disclosure processes has either not explicitly tested for gender differences, has not found evidence of gender differences, or has found gender differences to be very small at best (Afifi & Steuber, 2009; Brown & Weigel, 2018; Sprecher & Hendrick, 2004; Vangelisti & Caughlin, 2007). Even so, while gender differences in models of disclosure have not provided evidence of gender differences, differences often exist on individual variables of interest (Afifi & Steuber, 2009; Brown & Weigel, 2018; Sprecher & Hendrick, 2004). Such differences were found in the present study. Given that gender is an important component of sexuality, future research should continue incorporating and testing the impact of gender both on individual study variables and on comprehensive models.
This dissertation contributes to the study of sexual self-disclosure and sexual communication in romantic relationships by identifying and highlighting the importance of individual context variables (e.g., sexual self-concept domains and impression management goals) and their relation to disclosure context variables (e.g., sexual self-disclosure risk and efficacy) and, ultimately, how these variables lead to the likelihood of sexual self-disclosure. Earlier, I identified the paradox that exists in which sexually-specific communication is important for relationships and sexual well-being, yet many people find it challenging to talk about sex openly with their partners. The results presented here address this paradox, offering evidence that how one feels about her or himself sexually directly influences how risky they perceive talking about sex to be and, to a certain extent, how effective they think they can communicate about sex. In addition, sexual topics are seen as more risky when one places a greater importance on consistently being evaluated in a positive manner from their relationship partner. Finally, feeling as one is able to effectively communicate about a sexual topic leads to a greater perceived likelihood of communicating about that topic. Taken together, it appears that sexual self-worth and perceptions of risk at least partially contribute to this sexual self-disclosure paradox. Not only is it important to minimize the risks of talking about sex in relationships, but it is also important to boost sexual self-perceptions. Together, these components can help address this paradox and lead to sexual communication that promotes relationship and sexual well-being and health.

In addition to the theoretical and empirical implications discussed above, this study also has applied implications. Namely, this study offers implications for therapy and sex education. For therapy, this study emphasizes the importance of considering
contextual influences when handling sexual or relationship problems. For instance, if an individual or couple seeks treatment because they are sexually dissatisfied, it may come up that the couple is not communicating about their sexual needs. It is important for therapists to not only consider whether or not the couple is not communicating, but why they are not communicating. This question can likely be answered through exploring the contextual influences of sexual communication. Previously, Jones and colleagues (2011) presented sexological systems, a model of sex therapy which emphasizes the role of contextual factors beyond the couple in order to discuss and treat sexual problems. Like the organizational framework for this study, Jones and colleagues apply Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory (1977) to sexuality. At the smallest level, the microsystem, sexological systems suggests that experiences with sexual partners impact a person’s perspectives on sexuality. In the current study, a microsystem-level factor is sexual self-disclosure risk, which relies on one’s perceptions of how her or his partner will react to a disclosure. As discussed earlier, risk is affected by sexual self-perceptions (e.g., sexual self-concept variables). In addition, recall that sexual topics are often avoided because sexuality is stigmatized (Anderson et al., 2011; Baxter & Wilmot, 1985; Guerrero & Afifi, 1995; Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004; Vangelisti, 1994; Vangelisti & Caughlin, 1997; Vrij et al., 2002). Thus, if the reason a couple is not talking about sex is due to risk, it is also important to explore why something is perceived as risky in order to properly deal with the problem. Therapists should consider the larger picture in which sexual communication occurs, as opposed to focusing solely on whether or not sexual communication is occurring.
In addition to implications for therapy, this dissertation also has implications for sex education curricula. Given the stigmas and taboos surrounding sexual topics mentioned earlier, coupled with the perceptions of risk prominent in this study, sex educators would do well to work to normalize talking about sex. Making sex normal to talk about will help alleviate much of the hesitation that comes along with considering sexual topics (e.g., Guerrero & Afifi, 1995; Vangelisti, 1994; Vangelisti & Caughlin, 1997). Additionally, sex education programs would do well to ensure that students walk away with the tools to be able to effectively and accurately talk about sex. Learning how to effectively communicate about sex will result in students being willing to talk about sex (e.g., Afifi & Steuber, 2009). Being able to effectively communicate about sex and sexuality and doing so leads to happier relationships (e.g., Byers & Demmons, 1999; MacNeil & Byers, 2009; Impett et al., 2014; Larson et al., 1998). Teaching students how to talk about sex will help them create and maintain happy and healthy relationships.

**Limitations and Future Directions**

The current study, while offering some insight into sexual communication processes within romantic relationships, does not come without limitations. First, the sample relies on self-selection. While all eligible participants were invited to participate in the study, it is likely that participants who chose to participate in a study on sexuality and relationships were already comfortable talking about sex or were experiencing relationship problems related to sex. Thus, selection bias is a potential limitation of the current study.

Further, while one of the strengths of this dissertation study is the sampling frame, in that individuals were targeted who were in sexually active, exclusive relationships, this
sampling strategy does not come without limits. Of the individuals who did not qualify for the study, over half were not in a current relationship. About 10% were in a relationship that was sexually active but not exclusive, about 15% were in exclusive relationships that were not sexually active, and about 1% were in a relationship that was not exclusive nor sexually active (see Table 1 for more information on the sampling frame). While the scope of the present study was to examine sexual self-disclosure processes in romantic, sexually active relationships, it could be that these patterns play out differently in non-exclusive relationships. For example, negotiating sexual activity among multiple partners, or establishing rules and boundaries, might be key topics for folks to discuss in non-exclusive relationships. These patterns might also play out differently in exclusive relationships that are not sexually active, in that partners must negotiate the extent of their intimacy as they deem appropriate. In the future, researchers might want to examine how sexual self-disclosure processes play out in non-exclusive relationships, as well as those that are not sexually active.

Additionally, nearly a quarter of individuals who qualified for this study were removed from the final sample because they listed an invalid disclosure topic. The majority of these cases involved folks who reported being completely open with their partners about all sexual topics. While most of the measures in this study were oriented around the avoided disclosure topic, it might be useful for researchers to examine how sexual self-disclosure processes play out in relationships where sexual topics have not been actively avoided. For example, future research might want to look into what leads people to disclose about all topics, and the implications that disclosing about everything might have on the relationship. It could be that folks who disclose completely about
everything have more satisfying sex lives, or it could be that they disclose too much and experience decreased satisfaction or higher rates of conflict.

Second, the study sample consisted of individuals in relationships instead of both partners involved in the relationship. Thus, the current study is one-sided in that it only captures one person’s perspective. However, the current sample helped to examine how these variables played out at the individual level, which ultimately paves the way for a stronger, empirically-informed dyadic study of these concepts in the future. Studying sexual self-disclosure processes in dyads could also help address the previous limitation, wherein the match in reported sexual self-disclosure could be examined dyadically. For example, one partner might report that sexual self-disclosure is open and honest, but the other partner might report that sexual self-disclosure is restricted or off-limits. This match or mismatch and its implications for relationship and sexual well-being should be explored.

Third, the current study focused on emerging adult college students with an average relationship length of just over one and a half years. Therefore, the results of this study may not generalize to adults in more long-term relationships. Despite this, an emerging adult sample was beneficial for the present study because emerging adults are likely developing their sexual self-concept and are navigating sexual issues for the first time. It is possible that individuals in their first serious romantic relationships are less likely to disclose potentially stigmatizing sexual information about themselves to their partners due to a lack of experience in discussing sexual issues. Likewise, individuals in early phases of a relationship may experience different concerns than individuals in more established relationships. For example, most couples report declines in sexual activity
over time (Sprecher et al., 2006). To offset this potential decline in sexual activity, couples might want to experiment with different varieties of sexual activity and technique. However, many of the disclosure topics listed (e.g., anal stimulation and extradyadic activity) might be seen as stigmatized or deviant, and talking about them might be more risky for those individuals less certain about their relationships. Similarly, many respondents indicated hesitation discussing previous sexual partners. Previous relationship and sexual experiences could have an impact on how a person approaches their current sexual relationship. For example, a person might learn what is appropriate or inappropriate from previous partners and may carry these assumptions into new relationships, which could create relationship problems if the partners are not aligned on the issue. Communication patterns from previous relationships could also carry over, where people might avoid topics for fear of judgment based on experiences with previous relationship partners, or they might overshare because they assume the topic is safe to discuss. Future research should examine the impact of participant age and relationship maturity and length, as well as the impact of previous relationship experiences on sexual self-concept and sexual self-disclosure processes. In addition, it might be useful for researchers to include histories of sexual or relationship trauma and violence, as these experiences are likely to have a profound impact on how open people are willing to be with their current and future relationship and sexual partners.

Fourth, the present study did not find support for the predicted pathway between likelihood of sexual self-disclosure and sexual satisfaction. As previously discussed, this could be because likelihood is a hypothetical measure. While people are generally good at following through with their intentions (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2005), it might be that
actual disclosure levels are more influential in determining sexual satisfaction. Indeed, previous research has suggested that greater levels of sexual communication satisfaction are associated with greater sexual satisfaction (Byers & Demmons, 1999; MacNeil & Byers, 2009). Further, sexual self-disclosure is a critical facilitator of relationship and sexual well-being. Thus, future research should focus on measures assessing actual levels of sexual self-disclosure and, perhaps, satisfaction with the amount of sexual self-disclosure in the relationship.

Fifth, the hypothesized model was unable to be explored further because the latent sexual self-concept variable did not hold together. As mentioned in the results, a confirmatory factor analysis of the sexual self-concept indicators would not run without errors, indicating a lack of correspondence between the data and the CFA model. Further, one of the requirements of latent indicators is that they be highly correlated with one another, which would indicate that they are measuring the same construct. This was not the case, as sexual self-image and sexual self-efficacy were not correlated with one another. One of the goals of this study was to create unidimensional scales for each of the sexual self-concept variables, as well as to explore ways in which the scales could be trimmed in order to ease participant burden. Thus, it is possible that in my efforts to shorten the scales and make them unidimensional, that the measurement of the sexual self-concept indicators did not adequately measure the latent construct any longer. In the future, I intend to develop a multidimensional but brief scale assessing sexual self-concept. Thus, various multi-dimensional iterations will be explored outside of the dissertation study.
Sixth, the instruments used to measure sexual self-concept were selected because they were designed to be used among both women and men. Other sexual self-concept scales have been developed specifically for either women or men (e.g., Andersen & Cyranowski, 1994; Andersen, Cyranowski, & Espindle, 1999; O’Sullivan et al., 2006), whereas this study was interested in examining both genders. As a result, while these three sexual self-concept components (sexual self-image, sexual self-efficacy, and sexual self-esteem) have held up in previous research (Buzwell & Rosenthal, 1996; Deutsch, 2012; Deutsch et al., 2014), it is possible that this scale is not encompassing all relevant components of the sexual self-concept. For example, a recent paper measured sexual self-concept using three components: sexual self-esteem, sexual depression, and sexual preoccupation (Antićević, Jokić-Begić, & Britvić, 2017; Snell & Papini, 1989). Given that only sexual self-esteem overlaps, some ambiguity exists as to what the sexual self-concept is made of. More work on the conceptualization and operationalization of sexual self-concept remains to be done.

Additionally, the measurement of sexual self-concept examined the construct as a trait. For example, participants were asked about their sexual self-image, sexual self-esteem, and sexual self-efficacy in general. This is inconsistent with the other measurements in the study, which were all relationship-specific (e.g., impression management goals, depth of sexual self-disclosure, sexual satisfaction) or specific to the disclosure topic (e.g, sexual self-disclosure risk, sexual self-disclosure efficacy, likelihood of sexual self-disclosure). Future research might also want to examine how sexual self-concept functions as a state, or how participants feel about their sexual self-image, sexual self-esteem, and sexual self-image as it pertains to their current relationship.
with their partner (e.g., items such as “Sexual fulfillment is very important to me \textit{in this relationship}”).

Further, the instruments specific to the sexual self-disclosure topic asked participants about hypothetical rather than actual sexual self-disclosure. As discussed earlier, while asking participants about prospective behavior is often indicative of their true behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2005), it is also possible that participants find it easier to respond to a prospective measure, whereas they may find more difficulty actually disclosing the sexual topic in a real-life setting. Yet, for the time being, prospective studies are perhaps the best tool to assess sexual self-disclosure. Laboratory studies, for example, would yield questionable results if we invited participants to a laboratory and asked them to communicate openly about stigmatic and taboo topics such as sexuality. While the prospective nature of the measurements in this study are in many ways a strength, it is also important for further work to be done, perhaps finding creative ways of examining sexual communication processes in relationships.

The present study focused on individual and sexual self-disclosure context variables, whereas previous research (Brown & Weigel, 2018; in prep) has also included relationship context variables such as relationship satisfaction, uncertainty, trust, and commitment. This research has suggested that positive relationship contexts are critical predictors of the sexual self-disclosure context and sexual satisfaction (Brown & Weigel, 2018). The present study does not evaluate relationship-specific variables besides non-sexual self-disclosure, which was used as a control variable. As previously mentioned, the alternative models in this study suggest that including non-sexual self-disclosure in models of sexual self-disclosure processes is important, particularly because sexual self-
disclosure occurs within relationships where partners are already disclosing about general topics (e.g., Byers & Demmons, 1999; Montesi et al., 2010). Therefore, it is important for future research to incorporate and examine how the relationship context relates to the variables in this study, particularly in terms of the new variables introduced in this study that represent the individual context.

Finally, this dissertation study intended to examine verbal sexual self-disclosures. While verbal sexual communication is important to understand, most relationship partners likely engage in nonverbal sexual communication as well. Nonverbal communication involves the encoding and decoding of different messages through gestures, facial expressions, body movement, gaze, vocal inflection, touch, and time (Burgoon & Bacue, 2003; Burgoon, Guerrero, & Manusov, 2011). Nonverbal signals are used in romantic relationships to communicate attraction, commitment, and relationship maintenance (Burgoon et al., 2011). Indeed, relationship partners might use nonverbal signals in order to communicate sexual initiation, interest in particular sex acts, and intimacy. Understanding both verbal and nonverbal sexual communication might be important for studying sexual consent in relationships. Future research should examine sexual communication between relationship partners both verbally and nonverbally.

Conclusions

In sum, this dissertation study advances the knowledge of sexual self-disclosure processes in romantic relationships. Components of sexual self-concept, such as sexual self-image, sexual self-efficacy, and sexual self-esteem play key roles in predicting impression management goal importance, perceptions of risk of sexual self-disclosure, and sexual self-disclosure efficacy. Sexual self-esteem is important to one’s sexual
satisfaction. Lastly, confidence in one’s ability to effectively talk about a specific sexual topic is directly associated with one’s likelihood of sexually self-disclosing about that topic. Taken together, this study emphasizes the importance of considering a variety of contextual variables when examining sexual communication in romantic relationships.
References


Brown, R. D., & Weigel, D. J. (2016). Beneath the tangled sheets: Examining sexual communication through ecological systems theory. In J. Manning & C. Noland (Eds.), *Contemporary studies of sexuality and communication,* (pp. 47-60). Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hunt.


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(Eds), *Communication and social cognition: Theories and methods* (pp. 71-95).

Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
## Tables

### Table 1

**Sampling Frame**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emails Sent</td>
<td>6,513</td>
<td></td>
<td>7,382</td>
<td></td>
<td>13,895</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagements with Survey(^a)</td>
<td>842</td>
<td>12.93</td>
<td>1,028</td>
<td>13.93</td>
<td>1,870</td>
<td>13.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualifying Participants(^b)</td>
<td>413</td>
<td>49.05</td>
<td>595</td>
<td>57.88</td>
<td>1,008</td>
<td>53.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disqualifying Participants(^b)</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>39.79</td>
<td>358</td>
<td>34.82</td>
<td>693</td>
<td>37.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In a relationship, sexually active, not exclusive(^c)</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>6.87</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>12.29</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>9.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In a relationship, not sexually active, exclusive(^c)</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>14.93</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>13.41</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>14.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In a relationship, not sexually active, not exclusive(^c)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not in a relationship(^c)</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>77.31</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>72.91</td>
<td>520</td>
<td>75.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing Screening Data(^b)</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>11.16</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>7.30</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>9.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Removed for Substantial Missing Data(^d)</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>21.07</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>16.81</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>18.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Removed for Invalid Disclosure Topic(^d)</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>25.18</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>22.69</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>23.71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) denotes percentages calculated based on number of emails sent; \(^b\) denotes percentages calculated based on number of engagements with survey; \(^c\) denotes percentages calculated based on number of disqualifying participants, \(^d\) denotes percentages calculated based on number of qualifying participants.

*Note.* This data was calculated based on prepopulated participant gender. The n sizes reported in the analyses are based on participant self-report in order to honor participant self-expression. Thus, final sample size per gender might be slightly different in this table than in the main analyses; \(^a\) denotes percentages calculated based on number of emails sent; \(^b\) denotes percentages calculated based on number of engagements with survey; \(^c\) denotes percentages calculated based on number of disqualifying participants, \(^d\) denotes percentages calculated based on number of qualifying participants.
Table 2

*Means, Standard Deviations, Alphas, and t-tests for Key Study Variables*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Alpha</th>
<th>Skew</th>
<th>Kurtosis</th>
<th>Gender Differences, t(df)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Self-Concept</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Image</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>-0.64</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>4.05(536.79)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>-1.14</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>-4.67(576)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Esteem</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>-0.46</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>1.47(576)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impression Management Goals</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>-0.26</td>
<td>-0.47</td>
<td>3.34(575)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSD Risk</td>
<td>1.94</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>8.01(407.79)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSD Efficacy</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>-0.45</td>
<td>-0.16(576)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood to SSD</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>-0.23</td>
<td>-0.60</td>
<td>-0.82(576)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depth of SSD</td>
<td>3.99</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>-0.78</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>-1.53(576)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Satisfaction</td>
<td>5.93</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>-1.90</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>-0.38(575)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-SSD</td>
<td>4.27</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>-0.97</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>-3.22(576)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Frequency</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-0.81</td>
<td>-0.55</td>
<td>-0.82(576)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Variety</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-0.83</td>
<td>-0.28</td>
<td>-1.61(416.77)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***p < .001, **p < .01, *p < .05

*Note.* All scales range from 1 to 5 except Sexual Satisfaction; Sexual Frequency and Sexual Variety were single-item measures; SSD represents sexual self-disclosure.
Table 3

*Correlation Matrix for Key Study Variables*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. SSC: Self-Image</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. SSC: Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. SSC: Self-Esteem</td>
<td>.38***</td>
<td>.31***</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Impression Management Goals</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.24***</td>
<td>-.24***</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. SSD Risk</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.34***</td>
<td>-.27***</td>
<td>.33***</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. SSD Efficacy</td>
<td>.11*</td>
<td>.23***</td>
<td>.28***</td>
<td>-.20***</td>
<td>-.40***</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Likelihood to SSD</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.26***</td>
<td>.17***</td>
<td>-.14***</td>
<td>-.30***</td>
<td>.52***</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Depth of SSD</td>
<td>.21***</td>
<td>.50***</td>
<td>.31***</td>
<td>-.29***</td>
<td>-.31***</td>
<td>.27***</td>
<td>.28***</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Sexual Satisfaction</td>
<td>.13***</td>
<td>.18***</td>
<td>.20***</td>
<td>-.11*</td>
<td>-.12***</td>
<td>.10*</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.20***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*** p < .001, ** p < .01, * p < .05

*Note.* SSD represents sexual self-disclosure.
Table 4

### Fit Statistics for Model Testing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>$\chi^2$ (df)</th>
<th>CFI</th>
<th>RMSEA [90% CI]</th>
<th>SRMR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>234.62 (20), $p &lt; .001$</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>.14 [.12, .15]</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>71.44 (14), $p &lt; .001$</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>.08 [.07, .10]</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B1</td>
<td>50.97 (13), $p &lt; .001$</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>.07 [.05, .09]</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B2</td>
<td>30.11 (10), $p &lt; .01$</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>.06 [.04, .08]</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>208.93 (14), $p &lt; .001$</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>.16 [.14, .17]</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C1</td>
<td>196.01 (13), $p &lt; .001$</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>.16 [.14, .17]</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2</td>
<td>173.18 (10), $p &lt; .001$</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>.17 [.15, .19]</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alt1</td>
<td>18.71 (6), $p &lt; .01$</td>
<td>.97</td>
<td>.06 [.03, .09]</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alt2</td>
<td>132.20 (10), $p &lt; .001$</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>.15 [.13, .17]</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alt3</td>
<td>41.06 (12), $p &lt; .001$</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>.07 [.05, .09]</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alt4</td>
<td>30.11 (10), $p &lt; .01$</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>.06 [.04, .08]</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1. Hypothesized Model with Predicted Pathways

Note. SSD represents sexual self-disclosure.
Figure 2. Results of the Hypothesized Model

Note. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$. 
Figure 3. Results of Model A
Note. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$. 
Figure 4. Results of Model B

Note. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$. 
Figure 5. Results of Model B1

Note. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$. 
Figure 6. Results of Model B2

Note. *** p < .001, ** p < .01, * p < .05.
Figure 7. Results of Model C

Note. *** p < .001, ** p < .01, * p < .05.
Figure 8. Results of Model C1

Note. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$. 
Figure 9. Results of Model C2
Note. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$. 
**Figure 10.** Results of Model Alt1

*Note.*** $p < .001$, **$p < .01$, *$p < .05$. 
Figure 11. Results of Model Alt2

Note. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$. 
Figure 12. Results of Model Alt3

Note. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$. 
Figure 13. Results of Model Alt4

Note. *** p < .001, ** p < .01, * p < .05.
Appendices

Appendix A: Information Sheet

University of Nevada, Reno
Information Sheet to Participate in a Research Study Version 10/12/2017

Study Title: A Study of Sexuality and Relationships
Investigators:
Randal D. Brown, MA (775-784-1878)
Daniel J. Weigel, PhD (775-784-4848)
Protocol Number: 1134452-1

Purpose: You are being asked to participate in a research study which asks you about topics you may have communicated about in your relationship. The study also asks about your perceptions of yourself, your partner, and your relationship, as well as how satisfied you are with your relationship. Many of the questions are of a sexual nature.

Participants: You are being asked to participate because you are enrolled in courses at the University of Nevada, Reno during the Fall 2017 semester. You are not obligated to participate in this specific study. You do need to currently be involved in some form of dating (seeing someone for at least one month) or marital relationship that is exclusive and sexually active.

Procedure: If you choose to participate, you will be asked to fill out an online survey, which will take approximately 20 to 30 minutes to complete. The survey consists of a number of multiple-choice questions, and is divided into several sections. You will be asked a variety of questions about your relationship communication, including what topics you have or have not discussed with your partner, your perceptions of your partner and your relationship, and your satisfaction within your relationship. You also will be asked about the current status of your relationship as well as some background questions about yourself. Participants completing at least 80% of the survey (157 questions) will be eligible for a gift card.

First 250 participants: If you are one of the first 250 participants, you will earn one $5 e-gift card to Amazon.com for taking part in this study. After completing the survey, you can enter your email address in order to receive your gift card. If you provide your email address, you will also be entered into a drawing to win one (1) of five (5) $50 Amazon.com gift cards.

Participants After 250 Count: If you are not one of the first 250 participants, you will not receive a $5 Amazon.com gift card, however you can enter into a drawing to win one (1) of five (5) $50 Amazon.com gift cards. After completing the survey, you can provide your email address in order to enter the drawing.
You are not obligated to participate in this particular research study and you are not obligated to explain why you did not participate. You do not need to give a reason if you are unable to participate in this study or choose not to participate at a later time. You will need to complete all sections in one sitting, as you are not allowed to resume at another time from where you left off. While you are participating, your responses will be stored in a temporary holding area as you move through the sections, but they will not be permanently saved until you complete all sections.

**Risks:** There are no known risks to participating in this study.

**Benefits:** There may be no direct benefits to you as the participant except for the experience you gain from participation in a research study. However, the information contributed to the study may aid in the further understanding of romantic relationships as a whole.

**Confidentiality:** No individual will be told of your participation in this exact study. The researcher has set the online survey software (Qualtrics) so that no IP addresses will be collected and stored. Qualtrics may use cookies to recognize visitors and provide personalized content or track their progress through surveys; grant unimpeded access to the website; and track usage behavior and compile data for website improvement purposes. If you are using a personal computer and wish to remove the cookies, obtain instructions for deleting cookies from the help menu or contact your Internet provider. If you are using a computer in a public domain, to limit access to your survey responses, close the Internet browser immediately after completing the survey. All data contained on Qualtrics will only be accessed by the researchers. The data will reside on the Qualtrics website for up to 12 months following the completion of data collection and then the researchers will delete all responses from the survey site. The data on Qualtrics will retain names and email addresses, all data will be stored in a password-protected computer for up to 5 years. Your email address will be used to email you the links for the surveys, to deliver your e-gift cards if you complete the surveys, and to notify the UNR Controller’s Office that you received an e-gift card via the unique ID code.

**Costs/Compensation:** There is no cost to you other than the time you spend completing the survey. If you are one of the first 250 participants, you will receive one $5 Amazon.com e-gift card for participating in this study if you complete at least 80 percent (157 questions) of the survey. In order to receive the gift card, you can input your email address at the end of the survey. If you are not one of the first 250 participants, though you will not receive a $5 Amazon.com gift card, you will be entered into a drawing to win one (1) of five (5) $50 Amazon.com gift cards. Participants who are eligible to receive one of the $5 Amazon.com gift cards will also automatically be entered into the drawing. The $5 Amazon.com gift cards will be emailed within one month of participation. The drawing for the $50 Amazon.com gift cards will be conducted within two weeks of the study closing, and winners will be emailed at that time.

**Right to Withdraw:** You may choose not to answer questions you do not want to answer or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. None of the questions require
answers. If you wish to withdraw, click the link on the top right screen that says “Exit this survey”. You do not need to give any reason for withdrawing from the study.

**Questions:** If you have any questions, please contact Randal Brown, MA at randalb@unr.edu, Dan Weigel, PhD at weigeld@unce.unr.edu. You may ask about your rights as a human subject or you may report (anonymously if you so choose) any comments, concerns, or complaints to the University of Nevada, Reno Social Behavioral Institutional Review Board, telephone number 775-327-2368, or by addressing a letter to the Chair of the Board, c/o Office of Human Research Protection, 205 Ross Hall/331, University of Nevada, Reno; Reno, Nevada 89557.

Please print OR save a copy of this information sheet for your own records.

If you wish to participate in this study click the next button at the bottom of the screen. If you do not wish to participate in this study click the "Exit this survey" button at the top right corner of the screen and you will promptly exit the study.
Appendix B: Dissertation Survey

(R) indicates item was reverse-scored prior to analysis
(D) indicated item was dropped from scale

Screening Questions
First, we’d like to ask you some questions about your romantic relationship.

1. Are you presently in a romantic relationship [i.e., some form of dating (seeing someone for at least one month) or marital relationship]?  
   Yes  
   No

2. How would you classify your relationship?  
   Married/domestic partnership  
   Engaged  
   Dating one person exclusively, living together  
   Dating one person exclusively but not living together  
   Dating more than one person

3. Is your relationship sexually active (e.g., you engage in sexual activities such as oral, vaginal, or anal sex)?  
   Yes  
   No

If no to #1 or #3, and option 5 (“Dating more than one person”) to #2:  
Thank you for your interest in participating in our study! Unfortunately, you do not meet the criteria and your participation has concluded. Have a great day!

If yes to #1 and #3, and options 1-4 (“Married/domestic partnership,” “Engaged,” “Dating one person exclusively, living together,” “Dating one person exclusively but not living together”) to #2:  
Congrats! You qualify for the survey. First, we’d like to ask you some questions about your relationship.

4. How long have you been in the relationship?  
   Number of months (if less than a year) _________  
   OR  
   Number of years (if more than 12 months) _________

5. Your current romantic partner is:  
   Opposite sex  
   Same sex
6. How many romantic relationships (e.g., dating for more than one month or marital) have you had prior to your current relationship?

[drop down menu]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>0</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8 or more</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7. What is the longest relationship you’ve had prior to your current relationship?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Less than 6 months</th>
<th>6 months to 1 year</th>
<th>1 to 2 years</th>
<th>2 to 3 years</th>
<th>3 to 4 years</th>
<th>4 to 5 years</th>
<th>5 or more years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8. How many sexual partners have you had prior to your current relationship (e.g., how many people have you had oral, vaginal, and/or anal sex with)?

[Drop down menu]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>0</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15 or more</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Nonsexual Self-Disclosure Questionnaire (MacNeil & Byers, 2009; as adapted by Brown, Hullman, & Weigel, forthcoming)**

Thinking about your communication in your relationship, to what extent have you and your partner talked about each of the following?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I have avoided talking to my partner about this topic.</td>
<td>I have talked openly and completely with my partner about this topic.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. My thoughts about the future of our relationship.
2. My political views.
3. My feelings toward my parents.
4. My general outlook on life.
5. The things I like least about my partner.
6. My cultural interests (such as books, movies, music).
7. My feelings toward my closest friends of my own sex.
8. The things about myself that I am most proud of.
9. My feelings about my classes or work.
10. The things about myself that I am almost ashamed of.
11. My religious views.
12. The things in life I am most afraid of.
13. My accomplishments at school or at work.
14. The things I like most about my partner.

**Impression Management Goals**
*In my relationship,…*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>Somewhat Agree</td>
<td>Neither Agree nor Disagree</td>
<td>Somewhat Disagree</td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. I am concerned with maintaining a good impression.
2. I would be careful to avoid saying things which are socially inappropriate.
3. I am concerned with putting myself in a "bad light."
4. I don't want to look stupid.
5. I want to avoid showing my weaknesses.
6. I want to avoid showing my shortcomings or vulnerabilities.
7. I want to avoid the possibility of being wrong.
8. I want to convince my partner that I am right. (D)
9. I want to get my partner to do things my way. (D)
10. I want to avoid being blamed or criticized.
11. It is very important that my partner does not see me in a negative light.
12. It is very important that conversations with my partner do not cause her/him to dislike me.

* Note: Items 1-4 are adapted from Hullett, 2004; items 5-10 are adapted from Canevello & Crocker, 2010; and items 11 and 12 are adapted from Kim, 1994.

**Sexual Self-Concept (Buzwell & Rosenthal, 1996)**

*Sexual Self-Image (Goggin, 1989; as cited in Buzwell & Rosenthal, 1996; as adapted in Deutsch, 2012)*

You will now be asked some questions about your personal feelings and thoughts about sexual subjects. Please read each statement carefully and indicate how much you disagree or agree with each statement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Somewhat Disagree</td>
<td>Neither Agree nor Disagree</td>
<td>Somewhat Agree</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. I often feel pressured into having sex. (R) (D)
2. I worry about enjoying sex. (R) (D)
3. I would find it hard to relax while having sex. (R) (D)
4. I have a lot of sexual energy.
5. I don’t need sex at all. (R)
6. I don’t think I could satisfy a partner sexually. (R) (D)
7. Most of the time I am very sexually active.
8. I would feel bad about having sex. (R) (D)
9. Even with condoms I would still worry about getting HIV if I had sex. (R) (D)
10. I often have sex even though I don’t feel like it. (R) (D)
11. I can feel quite frustrated if I don’t have sex often. (D)
12. I would worry about physically hurting my partner if I had sex. (R) (D)
13. Sexual fulfillment is very important to me.
14. I would like to experiment when it comes to sex. (D)
15. I rarely feel that I would want to have sex with someone. (R)
16. I have very strong sexual desires.
17. My sexual desires are less than most peoples’. (R)
18. I would be too worried to have sex with someone I just met. (R) (D)
19. I would worry about physical pain if I had sex. (R) (D)
20. I would worry about showing fear or discomfort if I had sex. (R) (D)
21. If I had sex I would worry about someone finding out. (R) (D)
22. I don’t think I could enjoy sex with someone I just met. (R) (D)
23. It doesn’t matter who you have sex with as long as you enjoy it. (R) (D)
24. I don’t want to be committed to sex with just one person. (R) (D)
25. I could be turned on by watching someone masturbate. (D)
26. I constantly look for new sexual relationships. (D)
27. Group sex might be fun. (D)
28. I would like an adventurous sexual partner. (D)
29. I think it is natural to have many sexual partners in life. (D)
30. Pornography does not excite me. (R) (D)
31. I like to commit myself to a relationship. (D)
32. I am very choosy about my sexual partners. (R) (D)
33. There needs to be commitment before I would have sex with someone. (R) (D)
34. I don’t think I could like oral sex. (R) (D)
35. I would prefer to have one committed relationship than many sexual partners. (R) (D)
36. I would not like to watch other people having sex. (R) (D)
37. When it comes to sex I would try almost anything once. (D)
38. I am easily aroused.
39. Masturbating with someone else could be pleasurable. (D)
40. I think too many sexual partners is risky. (R) (D)

Sexual Self-Efficacy (adapted from Buzwell & Rosenthal, 1996; as presented in Deutsch, 2012)
This section will ask you about your perceived ability to do certain activities or behaviors. Please rate your degree of confidence in your ability to do each of these behaviors.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very Uncertain</th>
<th>Somewhat Uncertain</th>
<th>Neither Certain or Uncertain</th>
<th>Somewhat Certain</th>
<th>Very Certain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

1. Refuse a sexual advance by your partner.
2. Have a sexual encounter without feeling you had to have intercourse. (D)
3. Put a condom on an erect penis. (D)
4. Be the one to start sexual activities. (D)
5. Discuss the use of condoms and/or contraceptives with a potential sex partner. (D)
6. Ask someone to wait for sex if not protected at the time (for example, if you do not have a condom). (D)
7. Carry condoms with you “just in case”. (D)
8. Control your sexual urges under the influence of alcohol or drugs. (D)
9. Discuss with your partner the use of condoms for HIV protection if you (or your partner) are already using a different type of contraception. (D)
10. Choose when and with whom to have sex.
11. Tell your partner how to treat you sexually.
12. Refuse to do something with your sexual partner which you don’t feel comfortable about.
13. Be able to buy condoms in a store. (D)
14. Discuss precautions with a doctor or other health professional. (D)
15. Admit to being sexually inexperienced to your sexually experienced peers. (D)
16. Reject an unwanted sexual advance from someone other than your partner.
17. Ask your partner to provide the type and amount of sexual stimulation required.
18. Tell your partner you don’t want to have sex.
19. Refuse to have sex with your partner even when they really wanted to.
20. Insist your partner respect your sexual needs.

**Sexual Self-Esteem (Buzwell & Rosenthal, 1996; as adapted in Deutsch, 2012)**

Now, we'd like to ask you some questions about your own feelings about sexual subjects. Please indicate how much you **disagree** or **agree** with the following statements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

1. Intimate partners have found (or would find) me sexually satisfying.
2. Most of my friends are better looking than I am. (R)
3. I feel comfortable with my sexuality.
4. I like my body.
5. I try to be healthy. (D)
6. I like to take care of my appearance. (D)
7. It is very hard for me to know how to behave in a sexual situation. (R)
8. I am confident that people find me attractive.
9. I don’t know how (or would not know how) to behave with a sexual partner. (R)
10. I do (or would) enjoy engaging in sex. (D)
11. When other people look at me they must think I have a poorly developed body. (R)
12. I am confident about being able to get a boyfriend/girlfriend.
13. In general, I enjoy (or would enjoy) having my boyfriend/girlfriend look at me when I have no clothes on.
15. Most of my friends are (or would) feel more comfortable sexually with their partners than I do. (R)
16. I frequently feel ugly and unattractive. (R)
17. It is important to me that my body is healthy and in good shape. (D)
18. I don’t think other people find me very interesting. (R)
19. I find it hard to talk to people I’m attracted to. (R) (D)
20. I am comfortable being affectionate with dating partners. (D)
21. I don’t think I could be comfortable in a sexual situation. (R)
22. My desire to be healthy influences a lot of my behavior. (D)
23. People say I am good looking.
24. I am confident that I can have a sexual relationship.

Disclosure of a Sexual Topic (from Brown & Weigel, in prep)
Individuals sometimes avoid communicating with partners about certain sexual topics. For the next series of questions, we would like you to think about a certain sexual topic that you have purposefully avoided talking about with your current romantic partner. This topic should be something you have been at all reluctant to talk about or have even avoided altogether. In the space below, please describe that topic. Again, we have no way of knowing who completed the survey so please be as honest as you can.

Please describe the sexual topic you have avoided talking about with your partner:
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

Sexual Self-Disclosure Efficacy (Afifi & Caughlin, 2006; Afifi & Steuber, 2009; as adapted in Brown & Weigel, in prep)
Keeping the topic you just listed in mind, please indicate the degree to which you disagree or agree with the following statements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

1. I wouldn’t know what to say if I tried to tell him/her my opinions and feelings about the topic. (R)
2. I wouldn’t have a problem talking about this topic with him/her.*
3. I wouldn’t even know how to begin telling him/her my opinions and feelings about the topic. (R)
4. I can’t think of any way to tell him/her the information. (R)
5. If my partner brought up the topic, it would be very easy for me to talk about it.
6. I don’t know how to even approach the issue with him/her. (R)
7. It would be extremely difficult for me to talk about this topic with him/her. (R)

*indicates new item developed for this study

**Sexual Self-Disclosure Risk (from Brown & Weigel, in prep)**

Keeping in mind your opinions and feelings about the specific sexual topic you avoided talking about with your partner, please indicate to what degree you disagree or agree with the following series of statements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Factor 1: Face/relationship threat**
1. I worry that my partner will no longer care about me if he/she knows about my opinions and feelings about this sexual topic.
2. My partner would disapprove if he or she knew about my opinions and feelings about this sexual topic.
3. I worry that my partner would no longer like me if we discussed my opinions and feelings about this sexual topic.
4. My partner might take advantage of me if he or she knew about my opinions and feelings about this sexual topic.
5. I don’t feel my partner would be supportive.
6. My partner might use my opinions and feelings about this sexual topic against me.
7. Revealing my opinions and feelings about this sexual topic would create big problems for my relationship.

**Factor 2: Accuracy/efficacy/competence (D)**
8. I’m not sure what my partner would do if he or she knew my opinions and feelings about this sexual topic.
9. I feel ashamed about my feelings about this sexual topic.
10. I have difficulty accepting my feelings about this sexual topic.
11. I just can’t figure out how to talk about my opinions and feelings about this sexual topic.
12. I don’t know how to put my opinions and feelings about this sexual topic into words.
13. I don’t know how to start telling my partner about my opinions and feelings about this sexual topic.

**Factor 3: Privacy**
14. My partner would probably tell people about my opinions and feelings about this sexual topic.
15. I can’t trust my partner to know my opinions and feelings about this sexual topic.
16. If I tell my partner, he/she might tell others.

**Factor 4: Obligation/Catharsis (D)**
17. My partner has a right to know about my feelings about this sexual topic.
18. I would like to see how my partner would feel about me after I told him/her.
19. I feel a sense of duty to tell my partner.
20. If I tell my partner, I would be able to get my opinions and feelings about this sexual topic off my chest.
21. I feel obligated to tell my partner.

**Factor 5: Education (D)**
22. My goal is to teach my partner more about this sexual topic.
23. I want to educate my partner about the real me.
24. I would like to see how my partner will react when I tell him/her my opinions and feelings about this sexual topic.

**Factor 6: Relationship relevance (D)**
25. My opinions and feelings about this sexual topic aren’t relevant to my relationship.
26. I don’t have to tell my partner if I don’t want to.
27. My opinions and feelings about this sexual topic aren’t relevant to my partner.

**Factor 7: Trust**
28. I’m not sure I trust my partner enough to tell him/her.
29. I keep my opinions and feelings about this sexual topic to myself because my relationship is generally not very open.
30. I trust my partner. (R)

**Willingness to Sexually Self-Disclose (Vangelisti, Caughlin, & Timmerman, 2001; as adapted in Brown & Weigel, in prep)**
1. How **willing** are you to disclose your opinions and feelings about this sexual topic to your partner in the near future?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Very</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unwilling</td>
<td>Unwilling</td>
<td>Willing or Unwilling</td>
<td>Willing</td>
<td>Unwilling</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. How **likely** are you to reveal your opinions and feelings about this sexual topic to your partner in the near future?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Very</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unlikely</td>
<td>Unlikely</td>
<td>Likely or Unlikely</td>
<td>Likely</td>
<td>Unlikely</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Likelihood to Sexually Self-Disclose (Vangelisti, Caughlin, & Timmerman, 2001; as adapted in Brown et al., forthcoming)

1. How certain are you about the likelihood you will talk about this sexual topic with your partner?

   1   2   3   4   5
   Not certain  Completely
   At all      Certain

2. How confident are you about the likelihood you will talk about this sexual topic with your partner?

   1   2   3   4   5
   Not confident  Completely
   At all      Confident

3. How firm are you about the likelihood you will talk about this sexual topic with your partner?

   1   2   3   4   5
   Not firm  Completely
   At all      Firm

4. How comfortable are you about the likelihood you will talk about this sexual topic with your partner?

   1   2   3   4   5
   Not comfortable  Completely
   At all      Comfortable

Depth of Sexual Self-Disclosure (adapted from Brown & Weigel, 2018)

Now, indicate the extent to which you have talked about each of the following items with your relationship partner (e.g., the extent to which you have made your attitudes and/or behaviors known).

   1   2   3   4   5
   I have avoided talking to my partner about this topic.  I have talked openly and completely with my partner about this topic.

1. My personal views on sexual morality.
2. Oral sex.
3. Masturbation.
4. My sexual thoughts or fantasies.
5. Sexual preferences (e.g., techniques I find or would find pleasurable).
6. Use of safe sex practices.
7. Sexual problems or difficulties I might have.
10. My past sexual experiences.
11. My sexual satisfaction.
12. What I enjoy most about sex.
13. What about sex makes me anxious.
14. My concerns about preventing sexually transmitted infections (STIs/STDs).
15. The extent to which I believe sex is an important part of a relationship.
17. My sexual health history.
18. My views concerning sexual exclusivity (e.g., whether or not I or my partner may engage in sexual activity with others).

**Sexual Satisfaction (MacNeil & Byers 2009)**

In general, how would you describe your sexual relationship with your partner?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pleasant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Worthless</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Satisfying</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Unpleasant (R)  Negative (R)  Unsatisfying (R)  Good

**Sexual Frequency (adapted from Orbuch, Veroff, Hassan, & Horrocks, 2002)**

All in all, how satisfied are you with the frequency of sex in your relationship?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Neither</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Very</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissatisfied</td>
<td>dissatisfied</td>
<td>satisfied</td>
<td>satisfied</td>
<td>satisfied</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

or dissatisfied

**Sexual Variety (adapted from Orbuch, Veroff, Hassan, & Horrocks, 2002)**

All in all, how satisfied are you with the variety of sex (e.g., different positions, techniques, etc.) in your relationship?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Neither</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Very</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissatisfied</td>
<td>dissatisfied</td>
<td>satisfied</td>
<td>satisfied</td>
<td>satisfied</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

or dissatisfied

**Demographic Information**

Finally, we have just a few background questions to ask you.
1. What is your age (in years)?
   _____ years old

2. Do you identify as:
   Male
   Female
   Prefer to self-describe ________________________

3. Please select your current grade in school.
   Freshman
   Sophomore
   Junior
   Senior

4. Which of the following best represents your ethnic or racial background?
   White/Non-Hispanic
   Native American/American Indian
   Black/African American
   Pacific Islander
   Asian/Asian American
   Mexican/Hispanic/Latino
   Multi-ethnic/Multi-racial
   Other: __________________

5. How would you describe your sexual orientation?
   Straight/heterosexual
   Bisexual
   Gay/homosexual
   Lesbian/homosexual
   Prefer to self-describe __________

6. How would you classify your parent(s)’/guardian(s)’ social class?
   Lower class
   Working class
   Lower middle class
   Upper middle class
   Upper class

7. Do you identify as having the same social class as your parent(s)/guardian(s)?
   Yes
   No

   If no, how would you classify your current social class?
Lower class  
Working class  
Lower middle class  
Upper middle class  
Upper class

8. Are you eligible for the Pell grant?  
   Yes  
   No  
   I don’t know

Thanks for your help. From this project we hope to develop better ways of understanding relationship and sexual communication.

If you have concerns about your relationships, we encourage you to contact Student Counseling Services at UNR. This counseling service is open to all students at UNR and is located right here on campus.

Student Counseling Services  
Pennington Student Achievement Center, Suite 420  
775.784.4648

To enter your email address in order to receive a gift card to Amazon.com, please continue to the next page.

Thanks for your participation in our survey! Please enter your preferred email address below in order to receive your gift card. Remember, only the first 250 participants will receive a $5 Amazon.com gift card. However, all participants who provide their email addresses will be entered into a drawing to win 1 of 5 $50 Amazon.com gift cards. Note that you must have completed at least 80% of the survey (157) questions in order to be eligible for a gift card.

Please enter your email address: _____________________

Thank you!

$5 Amazon.com gift cards will be emailed within one month from today’s date.

The drawing for the $50 Amazon.com gift cards will occur within two weeks of the study closing, and winners will be notified via email at that time.
Appendix C: Recruitment Emails

*Invitation*

Dear [FIRST NAME],

My name is Randal Brown, and I am a graduate student in the Interdisciplinary Social Psychology PhD Program here at UNR. I am writing to ask for your help with a survey about sexuality and relationships. Eligible undergraduate students could earn a $5 electronic gift card to Amazon.com. Additionally, per the terms and conditions below, all participants will be entered into a drawing to win 1 of 5 $50 Amazon.com gift cards.

The survey should take you approximately 20 to 30 minutes to complete. If you are interested in participating, please click on the survey link below. There, you will find a detailed information sheet about the goals of the study. Then, you will be presented with a series of screening questions. If you meet the criteria for the study, you will be redirected to the rest of the survey. After completing the survey, you will be redirected to a separate survey where you can enter your name and email address in order to receive your gift card. Please be aware that if you do not meet the study criteria, you will not be eligible for a gift card.

First 250 Participants: If you are one of the first 250 participants, you will earn one (1) $5 e-gift card to Amazon.com for taking part in this study. You will also be entered into a drawing to win one (1) of five (5) $50 Amazon.com gift cards.

Participants After 250 Count: If you are not one of the first 250 participants, you will not receive a $5 Amazon.com gift card, however you will be entered into a drawing to win one (1) of five (5) $50 Amazon.com gift cards.

Follow this link to the Survey: [SURVEY LINK]
Or copy and paste the URL below into your internet browser: [SURVEY URL]

Remember that your responses are completely confidential and voluntary. Please feel free to email me with any questions or concerns at randalb@unr.edu.

Thank you in advance for your time and participation,

*Randal Brown, MA*
Doctoral Student
Interdisciplinary Social Psychology PhD Program
University of Nevada, Reno
Reminder Email sent one week after Invitation

Dear [FIRST NAME],

Last week I sent an email asking for your participation in my study on sexuality and relationships.

If you are interested in participating, please click the link below to take the survey by this Friday. At the beginning, you will be presented with a series of screening questions. If you are eligible for the survey, it should only take about 20 to 30 minutes to complete. If you are one of the first 250 eligible participants, you can earn a $5 Amazon.com electronic gift card as a thank you for your participation and be entered into a drawing to win one (1) of five (5) $50 Amazon.com gift cards. If you are not one of the first 250 participants, you will still be entered into the drawing. Please be aware that you will not be eligible for compensation if you do not meet the study criteria.

Follow this link to the Survey: [SURVEY LINK]
Or copy and paste the URL below into your internet browser: [SURVEY URL]

Remember that your responses are completely confidential and voluntary. Please feel free to email me with any questions or concerns at randalb@unr.edu.

Thank you in advance for your time and participation,

Randal Brown, MA
Doctoral Student
Interdisciplinary Social Psychology PhD Program
University of Nevada, Reno
**Final Reminder sent 10 days after Invitation**

Dear [FIRST NAME],

Earlier this week I sent a reminder email asking for your participation in my study on sexuality and relationships. Your responses are extremely valuable to me, and I hope you will complete the survey by Sunday, November 5th.

First, you will be presented with a series of screening questions. If you are eligible for the full survey, it should only take approximately 20 to 30 minutes to complete. If you are one of the first 250 eligible participants, you can earn a $5 Amazon.com electronic gift card as a thank you for your participation and be entered into a drawing to win one (1) of five (5) $50 Amazon.com gift cards. If you are not one of the first 250 participants, you will still be entered into the drawing. Please be aware that you will not be eligible for compensation if you do not meet the study criteria.

Follow this link to the Survey: [SURVEY LINK]
Or copy and paste the URL below into your internet browser: [SURVEY URL]

Remember that your responses are completely confidential and voluntary. Please feel free to email me with any questions or concerns at randalb@unr.edu.

Thank you in advance for your time and participation,

**Randal Brown, MA**
Doctoral Student
Interdisciplinary Social Psychology PhD Program
University of Nevada, Reno