

Extending Sex as an Intergroup Arena: Testing the Mediating Role and Management of
Identity Gaps in Sexual Communication on Relational, Sexual, and Health Outcomes in
“Non-Normative” Relationships

A dissertation presented to
the faculty of
the Scripps College of Communication of Ohio University

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy

Valerie Rubinsky

August 2019

© 2019 Valerie Rubinsky. All Rights Reserved.

This dissertation titled
Extending Sex as an Intergroup Arena: Testing the Mediating Role and Management of
Identity Gaps in Sexual Communication on Relational, Sexual, and Health Outcomes in
“Non-Normative” Relationships

by

VALERIE RUBINSKY

has been approved for
the School of Communication Studies
and the Scripps College of Communication by

Angela M. Hosek

Associate Professor of Communication Studies

Scott Titsworth

Dean, Scripps College of Communication

Abstract

RUBINSKY, VALERIE, Ph.D., August 2019, Communication Studies

Extending Sex as an Intergroup Arena: Testing the Mediating Role and Management of Identity Gaps in Sexual Communication on Relational, Sexual, and Health Outcomes in “Non-Normative” Relationships

Director of Dissertation: Angela M. Hosek

Despite sociocultural shifts in sexual politics and perceptions of normativity at the larger cultural levels (Parker, 2010), intergroup communication and interpersonal communication both characterize sexual communication. Intimate interactions are not immune from group-based practices and categorization that filter and influence partnered communication. To address these concerns, this dissertation involved a survey of 689 individuals in intimate relationships for at least three months who believed their relationship was less common or less accepted than other kinds of relationships (i.e., non-normative). Framed through the Communication Theory of Identity (Hecht, 1993), the present study tested the mediating role and management of identity gaps in sexual communication as a vehicle through which to examine the roles of social and personal identity in intimate partner communication. Findings supported the mediating role of identity gaps between communication input variables and satisfaction. In addition, the present study produced a typology of identity gaps in sexual partner communication and describes strategies individuals employ to manage the adverse state of identity gaps in their partner communication. Findings offer support for the contention that sexual partner communication constitutes an intergroup theoretical arena. Practical and scholarly recommendations for future research into this area are outlined. Approaching sexual

communication as an intergroup arena has the potential to generate more informative research, grow interpersonal and intergroup communication theories, and provide useful insights to practitioners working with sexual activity, sexual identity, and sexual health.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge the following people and programs for helping to make this dissertation a possibility. As Leslie Knope says, “No one gets anywhere alone.” Of course, I want to thank all of the 689, anonymous people who took time out of their life and participated in this research project. I am especially grateful for those who took the time to write out their very intimate experiences for the sake of this research.

Next, I would like to thank those who have helped me grow as a professional: My advisor, committee members, mentors, and department. A sincere and heartfelt thank you to my advisor and mentor, Dr. Angela Hosek, who has consistently gone above and beyond for me in the seven years I have known her. I cannot overstate how significantly Dr. Hosek has impacted my life, helped me to grow as a scholar and teacher, and influenced my own philosophy toward mentoring. I would also like to acknowledge my committee members, Dr. Stephanie Tikkanen, Dr. Charee Thompson, and Dr. Gregory Janson, for time, feedback, and support throughout the dissertation process. I have also benefited immensely from the mentorship and support of Dr. Angela Cooke-Jackson along this journey. Finally, thank you to Dr. Claudia Hale and the Research and Creative Activity Incentive Pool in the School of Communication Studies for financially supporting this project.

In addition, I want to acknowledge the people in my personal life who supported and tolerated me while I wrote a dissertation. I would not be who I am or where I am without the consistent, unconditional love and support of my parents, Pamala Rubinsky, R.N. and Dr. Hilly Rubinsky. I also want to acknowledge my partner, Nicole Hudak, M.A., ABD, who wakes up to debating identity theories with me. When we got married,

someone told us that if we can survive writing our dissertations together, we can survive anything. Thank you for filling this time in my life with laughter, love, and more than survival. Finally, I want to thank my best friends, Dani Ross and Meghan White, who listened to me talk about this project for the last six years, shared countless surveys, and never stopped pretending to be interested when I talked about statistics. I love all of you and cannot begin to thank you for your role in making this a reality.

Table of Contents

	Page
Abstract.....	iii
List of Tables.....	ix
List of Figures.....	x
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	2
An Intergroup Perspective within Sexual Communication.....	8
Sexual Communication and Identity.....	12
Conceptual Model Overview.....	15
Chapter 2: Literature Review and Rational.....	19
Intergroup and Interpersonal Communication.....	19
Theoretical Framework: The Communication Theory of Identity.....	27
Sex is Identity-Laden: Sexual Communication and Identity Gaps.....	56
Chapter 3: Methods.....	101
Recruitment Process and Justification.....	101
Data Analysis.....	118
Chapter 4: CFA and SEM Results.....	121
Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results.....	121
Structural Equation Model Analysis Results.....	143
Chapter 5: Expression and Management of Identity Gaps	155
A Typology of Identity Gap in Sexual Communication.....	156
Managing Identity Gaps in Sexual Communication.....	187

Consequences of Sexual Identity Gaps and On-Going Resolutions.....	200
Chapter 6: Discussion	213
Theoretical Contributions: Sex as an Intergroup Arena.....	213
Identity Gap Descriptions and Management Strategies.....	230
Practical Recommendations.....	247
Limitations.....	250
Future Research	255
Conclusion.....	258
References.....	259
Appendix.....	294

List of Tables

Table 1: Sample Demographic Characteristics.....	105
Table 2: Summary of Questionnaire Sections.....	108
Table 3: Open-Ended Questions.....	109
Table 4: Intercorrelations Among Indicator Variables.....	126
Table 5: Parcels for Latent Variable Negative Disclosure.....	135
Table 6: Parcels for Latent Variable Positive/Neutral Disclosure.....	135
Table 7: Latent Variables and Corresponding Indicators.....	138
Table 8: Intercorrelations in Final Structural Model.....	146
Table 9: Structural Parameter Estimates – Direct Effects.....	147
Table 10: Estimates for Latent Indicators and Residual Parameters.....	148
Table 11: Variables Predicting Health Protective Sexual Communication.....	152
Table 12: Typology of Sexual Identity Gaps in Non-Normative Relationships.....	157
Table 13: Resolving Identity Gaps.....	187
Table 14: Consequences of Sexual Identity Gaps.....	201

List of Figures

Figure 1: Conceptual Model.....	16
Figure 2: Intergroup-Interpersonal Communication Quadrants.....	24
Figure 3: Hypothesized Model.....	100
Figure 4: Respecified Hypothesized Model.....	142
Figure 5: Results of Hypothesized Model Testing.....	145

Chapter 1: Introduction

Intimate communication about sex may appear as a conversational domain characterized by the idiosyncratic preferences that emerge in a developed relational culture. In other words, we often assume conversations about sexual activity with a close romantic partner emerge based solely on the unique relational history and personal characteristics of the individuals in those relationships. However, I contend that individual and group-based identities filter even the most intimate interpersonal communication experiences, in particular those about sex between long-term relational partners. Sexual communication implicates personal identity, an individual's sense of self, in its inherent vulnerability (Cupach & Metts, 1994; Noland, 2010), and social group identity in its ability to affirm or challenge the way individuals come to see themselves as members of sexual and gender, among other, social groups, which manifests in partner communication (Greene & Faulkner, 2005; Rubinsky & Cooke-Jackson, 2018; Savin-Williams & Diamond, 2000; Schober, 2001). Important and extensive empirical literature supports the notion that sexual communication relates to sexual, relational, and health outcomes (Byers, 2011). However, deeper investigations suggest that the relationship is not always positive, as sexual communication can be satisfying or unsatisfying, and positively or negatively affect relational and health outcomes (Faulkner & Lannutti, 2010). In this dissertation, I primarily argue that attention to the way that sexual communication affirms or challenges personal and social group identities better explains the relationship between sexual communication and relational quality, sexual satisfaction, and sexual health. To do so, I focus on this problem within what are broadly considered

“non-normative” relationships, or those relationships that are less prevalent and accepted (Emmer-Sommers, 2005) such as LGBTQ relationships, polyamorous relationships, or BDSM relationships, because they represent a relational domain in which the consequences of normative sexual and gender ascriptions may result in expanded cognitive, affective, and behavioral discrepancies that the Communication Theory of Identity (Hecht, 1993) describes as identity gaps. Attention to identity gaps and social identity groups afforded by an intergroup perspective, a theoretical focus that attends to the processes of identification with social identity groups, may reconcile varied findings in the sexual communication literature and better explain sexual communication in close relationships. To test this, I conducted a survey with individuals in non-normative relationships. The purpose of this chapter is to introduce my dissertation topic, provide a statement of the problem under investigation, briefly introduce the theoretical perspective on which I will elaborate in Chapter 2, and introduce the conceptual model. First, I discuss the statement of the problem.

Statement of the Problem

Communication about sex between and among intimate partners has important implications for sexual and overall health, relationship quality, and sexual satisfaction. Poor or ineffective sexual communication is associated with inadequate sexual health behaviors (Sneed, 2009), sexual dissatisfaction (MacNeil & Byers, 2009), and relational dissatisfaction or deterioration (Noland, 2010). Alternatively, constructive sexual communication predicts behaviors that may prevent the spread of sexually transmitted infections (STIs; Allen, Emmer-Sommer, & Crowell, 2002; Sneed, 2008), improve

relational quality (MacNeil & Byers, 2005) and sexual quality (Byers & Demmons, 1999), and increase relational stability (Yeh, Lorenz, Wickrama, Conger, Elder, 2006). Thus, communication about sex with an intimate partner comprises a key factor in sexual health and relational quality. However, sexual communication is challenging, and many intimate partners, even those in long-term relationships, do not engage in it, or do so in an indirect or unproductive manner (Noland, 2010). These problems may be exacerbated for those in non-normative relationships (Kosenko, 2011a, 2011b), or relationships that are less common or less accepted than other kinds of relationships (Emmers-Sommer, 2005). Among the problems associated with communication about sex, sexual health emerges as a frequent concern.

One reason that sexual communication is important is because it affects sexual health issues like STI prevention and recognition of coercive sexual practices. In 2016, more than 2,000,000 new cases of gonorrhea, chlamydia, and syphilis were diagnosed in the United States, setting a record for the highest number ever reported (CDC, 2017). Poor sexual communication is often associated with indirect and unproductive methods of evaluating and requesting sexual health behaviors (Noland, 2010; Sneed, 2008), and constructive sexual communication is the biggest predictor of requesting sexual health protective behaviors like condom use (Noar, Carlyle, & Cole, 2006). Sexual health concerns continue to increase in urgency among numerous populations. For instance, women and gender minorities report high rates of rape, sexual assault, and coercion (“Statistics Rape Treatment Center,” 2016). Further, sexual minority individuals like those in LGBTQ relationships identify communication as especially important in their

sexual health practices, especially because they often do not have relevant examples for safe sexual behavior (Greene, Fisher, Kuper, Andrews, & Mustanski, 2015). Increasing partner sexual communication is a consistent goal of sexual health campaigns, as a culture of silence surrounds sexual activity in the United States (Friedman, Kachur, Noar, & Mcfarlane, 2016). Thus, improvements in partner communication likely improve sexual health behaviors.

In addition to sexual health, sexual communication is a key factor in predicting the overall quality of intimate relationships (Noland, 2010), which in turn is linked to quality of life (Waldinger & Schulz, 2010). Although people in relationships must communicate about many topics, sex is of particular importance (Montesi, Fauber, Gordon, & Heimberg, 2011) given that sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction are believed to have a reciprocal relationship (Noland, 2010). When relational partners perceive their sexual relationship as more satisfying, they reap the reward of a more satisfying overall relationship; similarly, relational partners who worked on the intimacy within their romantic relationships often find those processes also manifest within their sexual relationship (Noland, 2010). Thus, understanding the processes through which individuals achieve satisfying sexual communication has implications for the overall quality of their relationships.

Despite the importance of sexual communication, engaging in this type of dialogue is uniquely challenging, even within committed relationships. For example, in one study, more than half of adolescents had not discussed sex with their current dating partner (Widman, Choukas-Bradley, Helms, Golin, & Prinstein, 2014). Constructive

sexual communication is difficult for even long-term relational partners to engage in because it is face-threatening (Cupach & Metts, 1994; Noland, 2010). Revealing sexual desires, initiating safety discussions, or setting boundaries exposes an individual to feelings of vulnerability and risks rejection from an important other. Further, sexual communication is considered a risky (Petronio, 2002) and taboo topic within relationships (Anderson, Kunkel, & Dennis, 2011; Noland, 2010), and one in which women and gender minorities report receiving little to no information on how to navigate, leaving them often unsure of how to approach conversations with intimate partners as adults (Holman & Koenig Kellas, 2018; Rubinsky & Cooke-Jackson, 2017). In addition, sex implicates social group identities in ways that can result negatively in other- or self-stereotyping or positively in achieving group distinctiveness, even within close relationships (Byers, 2011; Green & Faulkner, 2005). Although discussions about sex between relational partners improve relational quality, sexual quality, and sexual health (Sprecher & Cate, 2004), adults generally feel ill-equipped to discuss sexual desire or sexual health with their relational partners, which can lead to relational problems like conflict (Noland, 2010; Sprecher & Cate, 2004), and reliance on socially-ascribed and often unsatisfying roles in a sexual script (Green & Faulkner, 2005; Impett & Peplau, 2003). As such, explaining the factors underlying constructive sexual communication that account for its face-threatening and identity-laden nature may equip scholars and practitioners to recommend strategies for improving communication about sex.

Sex is an identity-laden communication phenomena across types of relationships, but the consequences of identity salience and identity discrepancies manifest differently

across relationships that deviate from the normative model (Kattari, 2015; Rubinsky & Cooke-Jackson, 2018). Attention to relational type allows for an explication of the identity-laden aspects of sexual communication, including its taboo status and face-threatening nature, while acknowledging that different challenges emerge in the process for non-normative compared to normative relationship types (Pariera, 2016). While constructive sexual communication is difficult within all relationships (Anderson et al., 2011; Cupach & Metts, 1994), it may be more problematic for individuals with “non-normative” sexual or gender identities that manifest within their relationships.

In interpersonal communication, non-normative relationships describe relationships that are less prevalent and/or less broadly accepted (Emmers-Sommer, 2005). This broad definition focuses on the perception of normativity to the individual, but typically includes LGBTQ relationships, interracial relationships, relationships characterized by visible disability, polyamorous relationships, and BDSM relationships, but may also include many other types of relationships (e.g., interfaith, visible age differences). The defining characteristic of a non-normative relationship is that it is perceived as uncommon or unaccepted by either members of the relationship, or ascribed as such by individuals outside the relationship. Although we might wish it did not, normativity exists. Extensive scholarship on heteronormativity, cisnormativity, and mononormativity, among others, persuasively addresses the existence of normative relational models and their consequences on the relational types that deviate from that norm (see Ferrer, 2018; Jackson, 2006; Schilt & Westbrook, 2009, among others). The term *non-normative* itself is important because of its reference to the norm. Norm may

refer to commonality *or* appropriateness/acceptance of a given social group (Emmers-Sommer, 2005), and norm implies a comparative out-group and some degree of social regulation (Pariera, 2016). Although many people deviate from normative models of relationships, perceptions of comparative normative groups still influence individuals whose relationships are cast as deviant. How others ascribe identity as normative or non-normative affirms or challenges salient aspects of individual identity (Pariera, 2016), to which the present study attends. Further, sexual norms, or implicitly agreed upon codes of conduct by groups of people (Pariera, 2016), influence sexual communication, prescribe acceptable sexual behaviors, and affect sexual wellbeing (Lapinski & Rimal, 2005; Pariera, 2016). Thus, focusing on understudied and marginalized relationships also attends to the way that perceptions of normativity manifest in intimate partner communication.

Within non-normative relationships, sexual communication involves potential stigma in addition to face threats, resulting in higher risk sexual disclosures (Petronio, 2002). However, within non-normative relationships, sexual communication may also be less avoidable or more beneficial (Kattari, 2015), and the consequences of disclosure may be more severe (Kosenko, 2011a, 2011b). For example, transgender individuals must negotiate multiple levels of their safety including identity validation and putting themselves at risk for gender-related violence through sexual disclosure (Kosenko, 2011a, 2011b). While sexual health concerns are prevalent within normative relationships, non-normative relationships must negotiate additional identity concerns within their interpersonal sexual health discussions and have less information and fewer

examples to guide their judgments (Rubinsky & Cooke-Jackson, 2017). An emphasis on identity and relational type offers a way to explore the opportunities and challenges faced by individuals in non-normative relationships, which may enhance (Kattari, 2015) or impede (Kosenko, 2011a, 2011b) sexual and relational satisfaction and sexual health outcomes. To address these problems concerning partner sexual communication in non-normative relationships, I employ an intergroup perspective on sexual communication.

An Intergroup Perspective within Sexual Communication

As communication about sex implicates both personal and social identities, this dissertation engages both intergroup and interpersonal communication theory. Intergroup communication occurs when identity or social group membership influences communication interactions for at least one person in the interaction and generally attends to group-based perceptions of socio-structural status (Giles, Reid, & Harwood, 2010). A social group is any group that shares characteristics, histories, interests, goals, or activities (Giles et al., 2010). For example, gender groups, racial groups, or organizational groups like women, Latinx people, or Democrats may comprise social groups. People have multiple social group memberships, and therefore multiple social identities, some of which are more permeable and more salient than others (Giles et al., 2010). Communication may be to a certain extent intergroup, and influenced by social group membership, and to a certain extent interpersonal, whereby communication is marked by the unique relational history among communicators with an understanding of each other as idiosyncratic, unique people (Giles, 2012). Although committed relationships involve a shared, unique relational history, they also involve shared or

separate salient group memberships. An intergroup approach turns attention to cognitive and affective processes of group categorization that occur in communication. I argue that sexual communication in committed relationships is both highly interpersonal and highly intergroup. As this project proposes an intergroup and interpersonal approach to the study of sexual communication, the communication theory of identity (CTI) provides a theoretical framework. Through CTI, I attend to the personal, relational, and social group dimensions of an identity-laden communicative phenomena.

Identity is an important component of sexual communication. This project conceptualizes identity through CTI, which proposes that four interconnected layers coalesce to comprise identity (Hecht, 1993). These four layers include personal, enacted, relational, and communal layers of identity (Hecht, 1993). CTI asserts that identity is inherently a communicative process by conceptualizing communication as a layer of identity rather than simply the vehicle through which identity is formed or expressed. The enacted layer of identity, which involves the transaction of message exchange, the symbolic linkages that include or enact identity, communication rituals, and all of the other ways in which people perform the self (Hecht, Jackson, & Pitts, 2005; Hecht, Warren, Jung, & Krieger, 2005), is the primary distinction CTI offers compared to other identity theories. The enacted layer locates identity within communication: messages, performances, and other forms of expression (Hecht, Jackson, et al., 2005; Hecht, Warren, et al., 2005). Hecht (1993) argues that individuals enact identities in social interaction through communication. Although not all communication is about identity, identity is a part of all communication (Hecht, 1993). Through emphasizing

communication as an aspect of identity, the layered perspective afforded by CTI positions identity formation and management as an ongoing process of communication within the self and communication with others rather than viewing identity formation and management as the product of or basis for producing communication as with approaches to identity that locate identity solely within the self or solely within society (Hecht, 1993; Hecht & Choi, 2012; Hecht, Jackson, & Ribeau, 2003). CTI emphasizes multiple, shifting, and interrelated layers of identity. In addition to the enacted layer, identity loci include personal, relational, and communal frames of identity.

As individuals strive for consistency among their own and others' layers of identity, often identity gaps manifest through contradictions and discrepancies among the four layers of identity (Jung & Hecht, 2004). Identity gaps are unavoidable, and appear to some extent in almost every communication interaction (Wagner, Kunkel, & Compton, 2016). Identity gaps manifest amid discrepancies between how an individual's self-concept, relational or normative ascriptions made by others, and/or how identity occurs in communication or performances. Drawing from the most empirically studied identity gaps, I consider personal-enacted, personal-relational, and enacted-relational identity gaps in the present study. The *personal-relational identity gap* describes the experience of inconsistencies between one's view of the self and how they perceive others' relational appraisals (Hecht & Choi, 2012; Jung & Hecht, 2004). The *personal-enacted identity gap* describes inconsistencies that may emerge between a person's view of themselves and the identity that they express or that emerges in communication (Hecht & Choi, 2012; Jung & Hecht, 2004). The *enacted-relational identity gap* refers to discrepancies between

expression and relational ascriptions (Kam & Hecht, 2009), and are common amid face-threatening communication (Jung, 2013).

Identity gaps predict a number of individual and relational outcomes. Past research has found identity gaps to be highly correlated with conversation inappropriateness and ineffectiveness (Jung & Hecht, 2004), and negative health outcomes (e.g., including depression; Wadsworth, Hecht, & Jung, 2008; and stress; Jung & Hecht, 2008; Jung, Hecht, & Wadsworth, 2007). The personal-enacted identity gap has also been found to be negatively related to education satisfaction, and mediates the relationship between acculturation, discrimination, and education satisfaction in international students (Wadsworth et al., 2008). Personal-enacted identity gaps are negatively related to communication and relationship satisfaction (Kam & Hecht, 2009). Importantly, identity gaps mediate the relationship between a number of communication phenomena and relational and health outcomes (Jung, 2011a).

While CTI is well-suited to study interpersonal contexts, issues of identity, and how they impact relational and health outcomes, it has yet to be applied to sexual communication. The integration of CTI to help explain, describe, and predict issues related to sexual communication is noteworthy because sex is an intergroup arena. Sexual communication is already identity-laden as a taboo and face-threatening topic within normative relationships, and a site for potential stigma within non-normative relationships. Applying CTI to non-normative sexual relationships may more fully explain sexual health, sexual quality, and relational outcomes. Given that identity gaps can emerge in sexual communication, my dissertation explores to what extent identity

gaps manifest in ways that explain the relational, sexual, and health outcomes associated with sexual communication. In addition, I generate a typology of identity gaps that emerge in non-normative sexual communication and investigate strategies for managing identity gaps, which can in turn work to improve sexual communication outcomes for both normative and non-normative relationships.

Because issues of identity are already inherent in sexual communication, an intergroup approach to sexual communication may illuminate additional explanations for how sexual communication affects individual and relational wellbeing. In other words, accounting for the ways that identity and group membership filters, frames, and otherwise affects interpersonal communication may better explain the variance in relational and sexual outcomes, as well as sexual health, that is typically predicted by sexual communication alone.

Sexual Communication and Identity

Sexual communication is challenging but essential to long-term, romantic relationships. Sexual communication, often operationalized as sexual self-disclosure, involves revealing intimate attitudes, feelings, and experiences (Sprecher & Hendrick, 2004). Past research has found that sexual self-disclosure predicts sexual satisfaction (Rehman, Rellini, & Fallis, 2011) and sexual communication satisfaction in heterosexual dating partners (Byers & Demmons, 1999). Reciprocal sexual self-disclosure is associated with relationship satisfaction, which in turn leads to greater sexual satisfaction in heterosexual couples (McNeil & Byers, 2005; Noland, 2010). One partner's sexual self-disclosure may also lead to greater partner understanding of sexual preferences and

more favorable perceptions of sexual costs and rewards, thereby leading to greater sexual satisfaction (McNeil & Byers, 2005). Disclosing sexual likes and dislikes is associated with a more rewarding and less costly sexual script (McNeil & Byers, 2009). In general, self-disclosure in intimate relationships is associated with self-esteem, confidence as a relational partner, responsiveness, relational quality, satisfaction, love, and commitment (Sprecher & Hendrick, 2004). In all, the literature on sexual self-disclosure within normative relationships is extensive and concludes that sexually self-disclosing seems to improve relational quality, relational stability, sexual quality, and sexual health.

However, sexual communication may differ by relational type, as different types of relationships have different sexual and communication needs, especially in matters concerning sexual health. For instance, LGBTQ people, polyamorous people, and BDSM/kink practitioners with disabilities emphasize boundary setting and the influence of identity in sexual communication (Kattari, 2015). Further, people with disabilities who are also LGBTQ, polyamorous, and/or kinky connect the process of coming out as a marginalized sexuality with their interpersonal sexual communication (Kattari, 2015). Identities within marginalized communities according to this research, may actually serve to both support and enhance productive and ethical sexual communication (Kattari, 2015). However, marginalized sexual communities may also suffer from a lack of common language to communicate about their relationships (Ritchie & Barker, 2006) and their bodies (Kosenko 2011a, 2011b). Further, identity may impact sexual communication decisions within certain non-normative relationships. For example, previous research has found that transgender individuals heavily value sexual and

romantic relationships as a form of identity validation. As a result, transgender individuals may be increasingly anxious to upset their partners by asking for sexual safety measures, describing what they want out of sexual behavior, and so on (Kosenko, 2011a, 2011b). In addition, qualitative investigations into sexual communication find that intimate revelations and conversations can be both satisfying and unsatisfying (Faulkner & Lannutti, 2010). Thus, it seems likely that the relationship found in the sexual self-disclosure literature is an oversimplification, and increases in the quantity of intimate revelation does not directly lead to increases in sexual satisfaction, or improvements in relational quality and sexual health.

Although sexual self-disclosure appears to predict positive sexual and relational outcomes, I argue that the relationship may be more fully explained when accounting for identity. Because sexual communication can be intensely face-threatening (Anderson et al., 2011; Cupach & Metts, 1994; Noland, 2010), and implicates group-categorizations (Green & Faulkner, 2005; Rubinsky & Cooke-Jackson, 2018; Wiederman, 2005), I argue that the resulting satisfaction may be mediated by how a relational partner affirms or challenges important aspects of one's personal identity in communication. Thus, CTI may explain the relationship between sexual communication and relational, sexual, and sexual health outcomes. In addition to implicating personal identity, sexual communication implicates social identity, especially sexual and gender identities (Greene & Faulkner, 2005). Thus, attention to salience of social identities may more fully illuminate this phenomenon. CTI offers a conceptual framework to describe how identity emerges and how partners affirm or challenge personal, relational, and social identities in

communication. Applying CTI to sexual communication in non-normative relationships will offer a better theoretical explanation for how sexual communication affects relational and health outcomes. Further, extending CTI into sexual communication makes theoretical contributions to the theory and to the intergroup landscape. Sex is an emerging intergroup arena, and in addition to addressing the problem of how personal and social identities may manifest and be affirmed or challenged in sexual communication and how that reinforcement or threat affects relational, sexual, and sexual health, the present study theoretically extends the intergroup landscape into sex, framing it as a relationally and pragmatically relevant arena.

Conceptual Model Overview

In this dissertation, I explore how individuals in non-normative, long-term relationships communicate about sex with their partners. Specifically, I propose that identity gaps mediate the relationship between sexual communication and relational satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, sexual communication satisfaction, and sexual health. However, I also propose an individual's identity salience with their sexual and gender identity moderates these relationships. Indicators of sexual communication relate to sexual satisfaction, sexual communication satisfaction, relational satisfaction, and sexual health (Byers, 2011; Montesi et al., 2011; Noland, 2010). Identity gaps mediate the relationship between a number of communication phenomenon and relational satisfaction, communication satisfaction, and health outcomes (Jung, 2011, 2013; Jung & Hecht, 2004, 2008; Kam & Hecht, 2009; Wadsworth et al., 2007). Consistent with past CTI research, identity gaps likely manifest in sexual communication; thus, I hypothesize

that, to some extent, identity gaps mediate the relationships between sexual communication and relational quality, sexual satisfaction, sexual communication satisfaction, and health. Since identity gaps attend to personal, enacted, and ascribed identities, I also hypothesize that the salience of identification with group-based identities moderates the relationship between sexual communication and relational, sexual, and health outcomes.

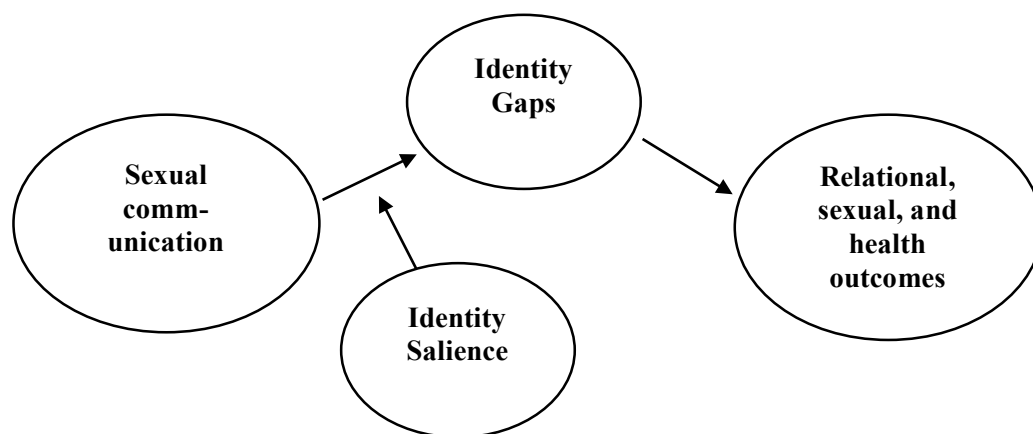


Figure 1: Conceptual model of sexual communication’s effect on relational, sexual, and health outcomes mediated by identity gaps and moderated by identity salience.

Conceptually, I depict this in Figure 1. In all, I argue that how identity emerges within this process is an important question to explore because sexual communication affects sexual health, sexual satisfaction, and relational quality. Therefore, more fully understanding the processes by which successful sexual communication occurs warrants investigation. In addition to investigating what identity gaps are doing in communication,

I aim to more inductively explore how identity gaps are discursively managed in sexual communication.

To summarize this chapter, sexual communication, despite being consequential in improving relational quality and sexual health, is challenging because it can threaten or affirm personal and social identities. Although sexual communication seems to improve relational satisfaction and sexual health, several studies suggest the outcomes of sexual communication can also be negative, harming relationships and identities. Thus, I argue that attention to identity(ies) better explains the relationship between sexual communication and relational and health outcomes, and offers more thorough insight into strategies for improving sexual communication to facilitate more constructive health and relational outcomes. I attend to this problem within non-normative relationships, as these relationships highlight the identity-laden nature of sexual communication.

In Chapter 2, I first elaborate on my theoretical perspective introduced here, including theoretically defining the intergroup perspective, and my theoretical framework of CTI. Then, I review the literature on CTI and identity gaps. Next, I explore interpersonal theoretical constructs that inform the perspective on personal identity within CTI, primarily facework. Finally, I review the empirical literature on sexual communication as it relates to relational, sexual, and sexual health outcomes. I conclude my literature review and rationale with the hypothesized model. In Chapter 3, I describe and justify my survey methodological approach, the measures to be included in the present study, and my data analysis procedures. In addition, I present the demographic characteristics of my sample. In Chapters 4 and 5, I present the results of testing the

structural model and the research question. In Chapter 6, I discuss the findings from Chapters 4 and 5 in light of the theoretical and empirical arguments presented in Chapter 2, summarize my theoretical contributions, and make recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Rationale

Sexual communication comprises a consequential but challenging aspect of partner communication that influences relational satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, and sexual health. Identity-laden and intergroup processes characterize the nature of sexual communication. These processes may vary in sexual and gender identity salience, which, given their deviation from the norm and subsequent stigma, may be more salient for individuals in what are broadly considered non-normative relationships. This chapter describes the theoretical perspective and relevant literature on sexual communication and non-normative relationships. First, I describe the overarching theoretical perspective of intergroup communication, followed by a description of the communication theory of identity (CTI; Hecht, 1993), the specific theory employed for the proposed study. Next, I argue for a view of sex as an intergroup arena informed by the literature on interpersonal sexual communication. Then, I review the intergroup processes within general sexual communication scholarship. Finally, I propose the hypothesized model that illustrates the ways in which identity gaps mediate the effects of sexual communication on relational quality, sexual satisfaction and sexual communication satisfaction, and sexual health.

Intergroup and Interpersonal Communication

Traditionally, scholarship attending to intimate partner communication grounds its rationale on the influence of sexual communication on health behaviors, framing sex as a risk behavior and sexual communication as a preventative behavior (Manning, 2014; Noar, Carlyle, & Cole, 2006). Although sexual communication is highly consequential to improving sexual health outcomes, which is a part of the present study, in framing sex as

strictly a risk behavior, sexual communication scholarship often lacks adequate attention to both identity and relational processes (Manning, 2014). I argue that attention to these processes more fully describes the structural relationship between intimate partner communication and relational quality and sexual health. Attending to this problem in the proposed project, I engage both intergroup and interpersonal communication. To do so, I first describe the intergroup approach, as I argue that sex is an intergroup arena, then I will describe the theoretical continuum of intergroup and interpersonal communication.

Intergroup communication occurs when identity or social group membership influences communication interactions for at least one person in the communication episode (Giles et al., 2010). Social identity salience or ascription to others marks nearly every communication encounter to some extent (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). In intergroup communication, a group refers to a social identity group. A social group is any group that shares characteristics, histories, interests, goals, or activities (Giles et al., 2010). Examples of common social groups include groups based in gender, race, ethnicity, religion, age groups, sexual orientations, and other salient organizational memberships, for example Democrats, or members of a teacher's union. People have multiple social group memberships at any given time, and therefore multiple social identities, some of which are more permeable and more salient than others (Giles et al., 2010). For instance, age is a relatively permeable social identity group, as individuals typically move through multiple age groups within their lifetime (Garstka, Branscombe, & Hummert, 1997). Alternatively, race comprises a less permeable social identity group. Although individuals may identify with more than one racial group, the group or groups with which

they identify or to which they others ascribe their identity tend to be relatively consistent throughout the lifespan. We identify people as a member or non-member of our various social groups, thus placing them as an in-group member or out-group member (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). For example, two women might place themselves in the in-group of women, but if they belong to different racial groups, they may see each other as out-group members for that social identity.

In addition to social group categories varying in permeability, identity salience also varies in permeability. Identity salience refers to how central an aspect of social identity is to an individual's self-concept (Garstka, Schmitt, Branscombe, & Hummert, 2004). For example, a Latinx woman who comes from a predominantly Spanish-speaking area in Southern California may experience her racial identity in a moderate degree of salience, but when she moves to a predominantly white college in New England where her accent is more noticeable, the identity may be made more salient. Alternatively, keeping company with people who are like her and with whom she shares a common social identity while growing up may have resulted in a heightened racial identity salience; or, she may feel her Latinx identity is less central to who she is when she is around people who are different. Thus, there are a number of circumstances that could result in her racial identity becoming more or less salient to her. Although her identity may be more or less salient to her, the degree of identity salience to other members of each communication episode also identifies the encounter as to some degree intergroup (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). For instance, even if she personally feels her Latinx identity is less salient when she is the only Latinx person in the room, it is likely her appearance as a

member of a different cultural group results in that aspect of her identity emerging as salient for one of her white college peers. Intergroup communication thus attends to both the group-based categorization and the salience of those identities to individuals in the interaction.

Communication may be to a certain extent intergroup, and influenced by social group membership, and to a certain extent interpersonal, whereby communication is marked by the unique relational history among communicators with an understanding of each other as idiosyncratic, unique people (Giles, 2012). Although there are multiple perspectives on how to define interpersonal communication, an intergroup approach assumes an interpersonal perspective characterized by the “interpersonalness” of an interaction (Giles, 2012; Knapp & Daly, 2011). Close relationships involve the overlapping of two unique selves. Thus, I take the perspective that interpersonal communication, in contrast to intergroup communication, requires a deep knowledge of another on a personal level (Stewart, 2002). For example, one member of an intimate couple may know their partner loves garlic, hates Mondays, and finds the evolution of dolphins extremely fascinating. These preferences are unlikely to be obtained through group-based categorization like the partner’s race, gender, or age. Communication filtered through unique relational histories that contains such idiosyncratic knowledge and experiences is interpersonal communication (Giles, 2012). This occurs on a continuum, with one end of the continuum representing extremely impersonal communication, and the other end resulting in extremely interpersonal communication in which the communication can be characterized by unique knowledge the individuals have

of each other (Stewart, 2002). Highly interpersonal communication is meaningful to the communicative interactants because it speaks to them as individual people with a unique relational history.

Intergroup communication also occurs along a continuum (see Figure 2), but instead of concerning the unique relational history between two individuals, intergroup communication invokes how the individuals view each other as members of social groups (Giles et al., 2010). In order for intergroup communication to occur, at least one member of the interaction's communication must be filtered through, affected by, or reflected in social group membership (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). For example, stereotypic interactions, a prime example of intergroup communication, occur because communication is filtered through group membership. Extreme cases of stereotyping (e.g., hate speech) represent extremely intergroup, and extremely impersonal, communication because the communication is filtered purely through group-membership and not personal characteristics or a personal relational history (Haas, 2012).

Intergroup and interpersonal communication occur along intersecting continua, making all dyadic communication to some extent intergroup and to some extent interpersonal (Giles, 2012). Figure 2 visually depicts the four potential communication quadrants on the intergroup-interpersonal spectrum.

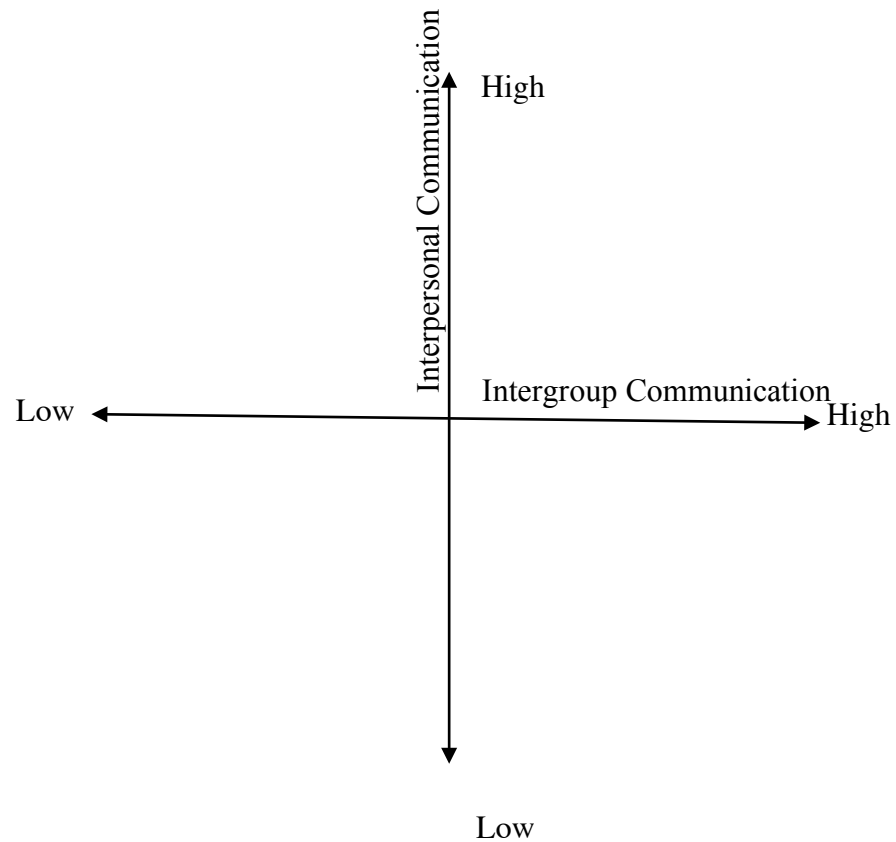


Figure 2: Intergroup-Interpersonal Communication Quadrants

Communication lower in both interpersonal and intergroup dimensions (bottom left) occurs when members of the communicative episode have neither a shared relational history, nor salient group memberships in the interaction (Giles, 2012). For example, an exchange between a customer and a cashier who do not have any visible markers of salient social identity out-groups, nor any shared relational history. Communication extremely low in intergroup dimensions is uncommon, however, as even shared in-group memberships filter communication experiences to some extent (Giles, 2012).

Communication low in interpersonal, but high in intergroup communication (bottom right), would consist of communication between people with no relational history who are communicating purely based on group membership (Giles, 2012). For example, an interaction between people who do not know each other personally but who are members of different religious groups in which communication may rely on hateful stereotypes, and would thus be an extreme end of high intergroup, low interpersonal communication (Haas, 2012). Communication can be high in interpersonal and low in intergroup (top left) when group memberships are not salient, but the relational history and idiosyncratic knowledge of the other is salient (Giles, 2012). For example, close friends of similar in-groups, when those shared in-groups are not salient in particular communication episodes, may be communicating more in that quadrant. Lastly, communication may be high in both intergroup and interpersonal communication (top right) (Giles, 2012).

I situate the present study in the high intergroup and high interpersonal communication quadrant. Doing so assumes that communication in intimate relationships, especially for non-normative relationships, is inherently intergroup regardless of the depth of relational history because intergroup processes are consistently made salient in sexual communication. For example, a heterosexual, opposite-gender couple who has been together for five years has developed a unique, close relational history through which they are able to communicate. However, they may still rely on gendered stereotypes to guide particular communicative episodes (e.g., who should do certain chores, who should pay for dinner, or initiate sex; Young, Wallace, & Polachek, 2015), indicating a degree of intergroup communication. For non-normative

relationships, if aspects of their sexual or gender identities are salient, that intergroup dimension may be more influential in contrast to the previous example with a more heteronormative couple. For instance, lesbian couples experience more egalitarian households, but as a result of *deliberate* avoidance of traditional gender roles (Brewster, 2017), thus emphasizing a shared social identity group as lesbians.

Even within more normative relationships, intergroup identification filters sexual communication, but these processes may be more salient in non-normative relationships (Rubinsky & Cooke-Jackson, 2018). Although all committed relationships involve a shared, unique relational history, they also involve shared or separate salient group memberships. For example, a lesbian woman and bisexual woman may be in a relationship together, and share group memberships of “women” or “LGBTQ umbrella,” but deviate with regard to their specific sexual identities. This may manifest in sex talk as each partner’s communication is filtered through these shared and separate social groups. For instance, when the bisexual woman discusses her past sexual experiences, her lesbian partner may recall that these experiences involved both men and women. The memory of past partners’ genders may make salient different sexual orientation group memberships (i.e., lesbian and bisexual). Although they may also recall shared relational histories, idiosyncratic information about the other, if those identity groups are also made salient (i.e., that their sexual orientation is different and that resulted in different past sexual experiences), the communication is both interpersonal and intergroup. I argue that sexual communication in committed relationships is both highly interpersonal, and importantly, highly intergroup communication. A focus on identity in sexual communication attends

to cognitive, affective, and behavioral processes that manifest in and influence this experience.

A plethora of intergroup theories address dimensions of identity salience in communicative encounters, but one theory attends to how both social group and relational identities manifest in communication with close others. As I propose an intergroup and interpersonal approach to the study of sexual communication, the communication theory of identity, an intergroup and interpersonal theory, provides an appropriate theoretical framework.

Theoretical Framework: The Communication Theory of Identity

My dissertation conceptualizes identity through the communication theory of identity (CTI), which proposes that four interconnected layers coalesce to comprise identity (Hecht, 1993). These four layers include personal, enacted, relational, and communal layers of identity (Hecht, 1993). CTI emphasizes multiple, shifting, and interrelated layers of identity. The interpenetration of relational layers is typically operationalized through identity gaps. Identity gaps are cognitive, affective, and behavioral discrepancies among layers of identity (Jung & Hecht, 2004, 2008). They are inevitable and emerge in nearly every communicative interaction to some extent (Jung & Hecht, 2004, 2008). This section explains CTI, reviews previous scholarship framed through CTI, and argues for a CTI approach for the present study by contrasting it to other identity theories.

First, CTI asserts that identity is inherently a communicative process by conceptualizing communication as a layer of identity rather than simply the vehicle

through which identity is formed or expressed (Hecht, 1993). For example, disclosing an LGBTQ identity through other identity perspectives might describe the disclosure as the vehicle through which the internalized LGBTQ identity is expressed. In CTI, that disclosure is itself a component of one's identity. The enacted layer of identity, which involves the transaction of message exchange, the symbolic linkages that include or enact identity, communication rituals, and all of the other ways in which people perform the self (Hecht, Jackson et al., 2005; Hecht, Warren et al., 2005), is the primary distinction CTI offers compared to other identity theories. The enacted layer locates identity within communication: messages, performances, and other forms of expression (Hecht, Jackson et al., 2005; Hecht, Warren et al., 2005). Hecht (1993) argued that identities are enacted in social interaction through communication. Through emphasizing communication as an aspect of identity, the layered perspective afforded by CTI positions identity formation and management as an ongoing process of communication within the self and communication with others rather than viewing identity formation and management as the product of or basis for producing communication as with approaches to identity that locate identity solely within the self or solely within society (Hecht, 1993; Hecht & Choi, 2012; Hecht, Jackson, & Ribeau, 2003). For example, Goffman's dramaturgical approaches (1959) and silencing the self theory (Jack, 1999) attend to the notion of the self in communication, but CTI furthers this notion by addressing both active and passive versions of self-expression (Hecht, 1993), and emphasizing that it is communication itself that is the site of identity (Jung & Hecht, 2004).

In addition to the enacted layer, identity loci include personal, relational, and communal frames of identity. The personal frame includes self-concept, spiritual sense of self, and self-images (Hecht, 1993; Hecht et al., 2003). For example, a view of the self as kind, regardless of how that kindness is performed (enacted identity), is an example of the personal layer of identity. The personal identity may also include elements of social identity groups. Social constructions of larger identity groups refer to the communal layer (Jung & Hecht, 2004), which describes identification with the larger social group (e.g., women, Democrats). However, the personal self-image as womanly or progressive refers to the personal layer.

According to CTI, the relational layer has four levels. First, ascribed relational identity occurs as a result of an individual's internalization of others' views (Jung & Hecht, 2004). For instance, an individual may incorporate beliefs about their work ethic into their identity as a result of colleagues' praise. On a larger scale, ascribed relational identity also describes the way in which we learn about our multiple group memberships (i.e., communal identity) through relationally ascribed roles (relational identity). For example, a young girl may learn differences about the gender she is ascribed based on a parent telling her she needs to wear a top to go swimming, when her brother is allowed to swim without a shirt, thus learning a part of her gender through relational ascriptions made to her body (Rubinsky & Cooke-Jackson, 2018). The next level of the relational layer occurs because individuals identify through relational units (e.g., as a couple; Jung & Hecht, 2004, 2008). Next, individuals identify through their relationships with other people (Jung & Hecht, 2004, 2008). For example, someone may identify as a romantic

partner, as a daughter, or a friend. Finally, those individual relational identities exist in relation to other relational as well as communal identities (Jung & Hecht, 2004). An individual can be both a wife and a mother, a college professor and a Republican, or a church-goer and a friend.

Lastly, the communal layer of identity occurs as the group-level (Hecht, 1993; Jung, 2013). Examples of communal identity include Japanese-American, Democrat, LGBTQ, or Jewish (Faulkner & Hecht, 2011). Communal representations of group-based identities, reflections of group identity in collective consciousness, and representations of groups (e.g., in media) comprise elements of communal identity (Hecht et al., 2002). How we socially construct gender, race, or religious affiliations further comprise elements of one's communal identity (Drummond & Orbe, 2009).

Although I address each layer of identity separately, CTI frames identity as interconnected among the four layers. Layering is a central theoretical concept to CTI (Hecht, 1993). In CTI, layering refers to the multiple, interconnected layers of identity that sometimes result in discrepancies or tensions between them (Hecht, 1993; Jung & Hecht, 2004, 2008). Each frame of identity can be taken two, three, or four at a time. Frames are best understood together, to explore their layering, interpenetration, and dialectical tensions (Hecht, 1993). For example, sexual orientation would need to be understood through CTI in light of one's personal identity (i.e., sense of themselves as a sexual person, internal identification with a sexual orientation), enacted identity (i.e., disclosing sexual identity, enacting preferential or non-preferential sex acts, communicating with a partner), relational identity (i.e., where other people ascribe sexual

orientations, affirm sense of selves, or reject a particular sexual identity), and communal identity (i.e., larger social groups like the LGBTQ community, the processes of social construction of sexuality). Sexual identity then is not just a person's identification with a group, but a layered account of the way they personally identify, how they perform their sexuality, how others reinforce, complement, or ascribe sexuality to them, and the larger communal understandings of sexual identity groups at any given sociopolitical moment.

As individuals strive for consistency among their own and others' layers of identity, often identity gaps manifest through contradictions and discrepancies among the four layers of identity (Jung & Hecht, 2004, 2008). Identity gaps are unavoidable, and appear to some extent in almost every communication interaction (Jung & Hecht, 2004, 2008; Wagner et al., 2016). The two most empirically studied identity gaps are the personal-enacted and personal-relational identity gaps (Hecht & Choi, 2012), and to a lesser extent enacted-relational identity gaps (Jung, 2011, 2013; Kam & Hecht, 2009). The personal-relational identity gap describes the experience of inconsistencies between one's view of the self and how they perceive others view them (Hecht & Choi, 2012; Jung & Hecht, 2004, 2008). The personal-enacted identity gap describes inconsistencies that may emerge between a person's view of themselves and the identity that they express or that emerges in communication (Hecht & Choi, 2012; Jung & Hecht, 2004, 2008). For example, polyamorous individuals highly value ethical standards for communication (Wosick-Correa, 2010). If an individual who strongly identifies as an ethical person (personal layer) as an aspect of their communal identity as polyamorous, engages in a communication practice that fails to meet their community's standards for ethics

(communal layer), such as failing to be transparent (enacted layer), violating a negotiated agreement with a partner (enacted layer), or not disclosing enough to their partner (enacted layer), they may experience a personal-enacted or enacted-communal identity gap. Similarly, if their partner does not appear to view them as an ethical person (relational layer), if they make comments that question their character (relational layer), or simply fail to make comments that affirm their self-image as ethical (relational layer), they may experience a personal-relational or enacted-relational identity gap.

Identity gaps and relational quality. In the sexual communication context, identity gaps are important because they explain and predict outcomes that indicate relational quality. Initial investigations into the operationalization and nature of identity gaps find them to be negatively correlated with desirable communication outcomes, such as conversation appropriateness and effectiveness, feeling understood, and communication satisfaction (Jung & Hecht, 2004). Relationally, identity gaps emerge in communication about jealousy among polyamorous partners, and explain significant variance in relational and communication satisfaction (Rubinsky, 2018c). In grand-parent grand-child relationships, personal-enacted identity gaps are negatively related to communication and relationship satisfaction (Kam & Hecht, 2009). Further, personal-relational identity gaps have also been found to be predictive of student communication satisfaction and general affect (Murray & Kennedy-Lightsey, 2013).

In addition, personal-enacted, personal-relational, and enacted-relational identity gaps have been found to mediate relational outcomes. The personal-relational identity gap significantly mediated the effects for intercultural communication competence on

perceptions of relational hierarchy for Korean immigrants (Jung & Hecht, 2008). The personal-enacted identity gap has also been found to be related to education satisfaction, and mediates the relationship between acculturation, discrimination, and education satisfaction in international students (Wadsworth et al., 2008). Personal-enacted and relational-communal identity gaps mediate the association between family communication pattern orientation and relational intention (Phillips, Ledbetter, Soliz, & Bergquist, 2018). Further, the personal-enacted identity gap directly mediates the effects of assertiveness and communication apprehension on communication satisfaction (Jung, 2011). Personal-relational and enacted-relational identity gaps indirectly mediate the effects of assertiveness and communication apprehension on communication satisfaction, via personal-enacted identity gaps (Jung, 2011). Thus, personal-enacted, personal-relational, and enacted-relational identity gaps are important in understanding variation in relational and communication satisfaction, as well as other indicators of relational quality.

Nature of identity gaps. Although personal-enacted, personal-relational, and enacted-relational identity gaps predict a multitude of outcomes indicating relational quality, personal-enacted identity gaps appear to provide the strongest, and most consistent predictor compared to personal-relational and enacted-relational identity gaps. Personal-enacted identity gaps appear to precede personal-relational identity gaps in some path analyses (Jung & Hecht, 2004, 2008). Jung and Hecht (2004, 2008) suggest this is because personal-enacted identity gaps emerge in the instance of communication, and personal-relational identity gaps may be a cause of the communication outcome.

Jung and Hecht (2008) call for more research into the nature of these relationships, to which the present study attends.

While most work has explored the personal-enacted, personal-relational, and enacted-relational identity gaps, other research has explored relational-relational identity gaps (Colaner, Halliwell, & Guignon, 2014), couple identity gaps (Merrill & Afifi, 2017), and communal identity (Phillips et al., 2018; Wagner, 2017; Warren, Hecht, Jung, Kvasny, & Henderson, 2010). Although these additional identity gaps are informative, the present study focuses on the most empirically tested identity gaps: personal-enacted, personal-relational, and enacted-relational in order to further clarify the nature of these identity gaps and to explore their predictive power in explaining the effects of sexual communication on relational and health outcomes. Sexual activity is an important relational and communicative avenue that CTI research has yet to explore. Sexual activity is an identity-laden arena in which identity gaps are likely to emerge because identity is implicated in all sexual communication (Manning, 2014; Rubinsky & Cooke-Jackson, 2018). Exploring the nature of identity gaps in sexual communication both expands the theory by extending it into a new communicative arena, advances the analytic utility of identity gaps by further clarifying the nature of identity gaps, and offers avenues to better explain the processes by which intimate communication affects individual wellbeing and relational quality.

Managing identity gaps. Although deductive research strongly suggests identity gaps may be a powerful mediator for relational and health outcomes in close relationships (Jung 2011, 2013; Phillips et al., 2018), inductive research on CTI also informs the

present study. In addition to utilizing CTI to explore the relationships between communication variables and relational, sexual, and sexual health outcomes, CTI also offers avenues to more inductively address discursive strategies for managing those identity gaps (Stanley & Pitts, 2018). The present study predicts that identity gaps mediate the relationship between sexual communication and relational quality, sexual quality, and sexual health. Thus, how individuals successfully or unsuccessfully manage those identity gaps also warrants investigation. CTI is an inherently multi-method theory (Hecht, 1993), and thus well-suited to engage both aspects of this exploration.

Inductive CTI scholarship often addresses the emergence of identity gaps and how (if at all) individuals discursively manage those gaps. For instance, transgender individuals may experience personal-enacted, personal-relational, and enacted-relational identity gaps (Nuru, 2012; Wagner et al., 2016), and engage in several discursive strategies to manage those identity gaps, including closeted enactment, passing, disengagement, and label changing (Nuru, 2012) as well as hyper engagement (Wagner et al., 2016). For transgender adults, identity gaps may emerge as a result of gendered ascriptions (relational identity) or expectations (communal identity) that differ from internal feelings of one's gender (personal identity) or one's gender performance as masculine, feminine, both, or neither (e.g., enacted identity; Nuru, 2012; Wagner et al., 2016). Thus, identity gaps emerge amid these experiences. Nuru (2012) and Wagner and colleagues (2016) found that not only do these gaps occur for transgender adults, but that they discursively manage them by passing, disengaging, or talking about their identity differently (Nuru, 2012), or hyper-engaging by taking on the roles of educator or activist

(Wagner et al., 2016). For another example, Maeda and Hecht (2012) investigated the emergent identity gaps of always-single women in Japan, which is considered a non-normative relational practice in that cultural context. Self-acceptance, and thus minimization of several identity gaps, are associated with positive outcomes for managing identity challenges for this population (Maeda & Hecht, 2012). Further, emphasis on family identity and re-establishing what normative relationships mean to them emerged as discursive strategies for managing the experience of identity gaps associated with what is perceived as a non-normative relationship practice (Maeda & Hecht, 2012). These studies emphasize that individuals whose identities or relationships are considered non-normative experience identity gaps and develop discursive strategies for mitigating the experience of those identity gaps.

Further, scholarship has usefully applied CTI to understanding collective notions of Jewish identity through the communal layer of identity (Hecht et al., 2002), and the negotiation of multiple closetable (i.e., LGBTQ and Jewish) identities (Faulkner & Hecht, 2011). These works emphasize the disclosable nature of an identity often accompanies the potential for identity gaps. A number of non-normative sexual identities may be invisible unless disclosed. The act of disclosing or not disclosing may create or mitigate identity gaps. For example, imagine in an otherwise normative relationship (i.e., heterosexual, same-race, able-bodied, monogamous, etc.), where one partner desires to practice sexual behaviors that fall broadly under the kink or BDSM umbrellas (e.g., want to use handcuffs). They may choose not to disclose this desire to their partner, thus performing a different sexual behavior than what they truly want, resulting, to some

extent, in a personal-enacted identity gap. Alternatively, they could disclose this desire to their partner in an effort to mitigate that gap, but in the process cause tension in their sexual or overall relationship, possibly resulting in personal-relational or enacted-relational identity gaps. Still plausible, the partner could confess they had a similar desire, thus the communication could minimize the identity gaps for both members of the couple. Any communication choice in this scenario would, to some extent, influence the experience of identity gaps. In addition to that identity gap mediating the relationship between the sexual communication and relational outcome, the individual likely does something to manage the experience of the gap (e.g., downplaying their desire if met with disapproval, laughing to relieve tension). Because identity gaps negatively predict relational quality and overall wellbeing, how individuals successfully or unsuccessfully manage identity gaps that emerge in sexual communication also warrants further investigation.

Further, more inductive CTI scholarship has examined intergroup communication experiences in a variety of conversational contexts. For example, CTI has been applied to explore how students view themselves relative to others and perceptions of identity work in intergroup conversations (Brooks & Pitts, 2016). In addition, for sexual minorities in the workplace who may experience mixed organizational messages, gaps between the communal frame (organizational policy) and relational frame (coworker communication) required discursive management (Compton, 2016). CTI has also revealed how coach-athlete communication for female athletes may affect their perceptions of their body image and health behaviors (Beckner & Record, 2016), discursive strategies for

managing identity gaps that emerge for male fitness identities (Wagner, 2017), and what conditions may be necessary for satisfying communication to occur in difficult situations that require negotiating intergroup ethnic differences (Drummond & Orbe, 2010). Scholarship extending CTI has even addressed how male serial killers discursively manage their stigmatized identity (Henson & Olson, 2010). Thus, extended identity management as well as intergroup conversations influence the emergence and nature of identity gaps, which require discursive management. What that discursive management looks like in sexual relationships may produce insights that both extend the utility of CTI, and have practical implications for health and relationship scholars and practitioners. Thus, I pose the following research question to explore what individuals do in communication to minimize the experience or problematic effects of identity gaps:

RQ1: What, if any, discursive strategies do individuals in non-normative relationships engage to manage identity gaps that occur in their sexual communication?

While CTI is well-suited to study interpersonal contexts, issues of identity, and how they impact relational and wellbeing outcomes, it has yet to be applied to sexual communication. The integration of CTI to help explain, describe, and predict issues related to sexual communication is noteworthy as sex is an intergroup arena because individuals engage intergroup processes like stereotyping and in- or out-group identity salience when conceptualizing sex and communicating about sex to partners, parents, and friends (Rubinsky & Cooke-Jackson, 2018). Sexual communication is already identity-laden as a taboo and face-threatening topic within normative relationships (Cupach & Metts, 1994; Noland, 2010), and a site for potential stigma within non-normative

relationships (Petronio, 2002). For instance, in studies investigating how transgender adults communicate about sex and sexual safety, transgender individuals sometimes forgo requests for sexual safety measures because they seek gender identity validation from their sexual partners (Kosenko, 2011a, 2011b). Through the lens of CTI, the identity validation motivation that occurs in these relationships can be described as a motivation to avoid an identity gap. The need for congruity between personal-enacted, personal-relational, and enacted-relational identities for transgender people resulted in communicative consequences. For example, this motivation influenced whether or not they were willing to engage in certain necessary sexual conversations with a partner, sometimes jeopardizing safety or sexual satisfaction for identity validation (Kosenko, 2011a). Applying CTI to non-normative sexual relationships may more fully explain sexual and relational outcomes for stigmatized relational identities. Given that identity gaps can emerge in sexual communication, my dissertation will explore to what extent identity gaps manifest in ways that explain the relational and sexual outcomes associated with sexual communication. In addition, I will investigate strategies for managing identity gaps, which can in turn work to improve sexual communication outcomes such as relational satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, and sexual health for both normative and non-normative relationships.

Communal identity: The role of social identity theory. Although this study will not consider communal identity in terms of identity gaps, through identity salience, I still account for the communal layer of identity. In addition, attention to communal identity may be a focus of discursive management of identity gaps. An important theoretical

driver for communal identity are Social Identity Theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and Self-Categorization Theory (SCT; Turner & Oakes, 1986) because they attend to the processes of social group based categorization in communication. First, I will describe the basic tenets of SIT and SCT. Next, I will describe where SIT and CTI work together, and where they diverge, as theoretical perspectives. Finally, I will argue why CTI is the appropriate theoretical perspective, compared to other intergroup theories, for this project.

SIT emerged out of social psychology to explain intergroup differences, particularly with an eye toward conflict. The theory argues that human beings have a need for a positive sense of self-worth and social belonging, which they achieve through positive perceptions of their personal and social identities (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Thus, SIT contends that individuals derive an aspect of their self-worth through social group memberships. Group-based identities require maintenance in order to preserve positive distinctiveness, for which individuals and entire groups engage in specific strategies to achieve (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Specifically, if an individual's in-group, or social identity group to which they identify or to which others ascribe them, is perceived as negative, they may engage in individual mobility, social creativity, or social competition, in order to achieve positive distinctiveness for their social identity group (Turner, Brown, & Tajfel, 1979). Individual mobility occurs when individuals attempt to leave or disassociate from a particular identity group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). For example, if someone belongs to a lower socio-economic class, and perceives that is a negative social identity, they may attempt to disassociate from that identity by wearing symbols of

wealth like an expensive watch or outfit. Social creativity involves creatively reframing the identity group to reposition a perceived negative trait as positive, or by changing the comparative out-group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). For example, the *Black is Beautiful* campaign engaged in social creativity by reframing the beauty standards that had previously resulted in a non-distinctive in-group. For another example, rather than comparing the gay community to the straight community, they may compare to the transgender community. Changing the comparative out-group is also a social creativity strategy to result in enhanced positive distinctiveness (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Social creativity strategies are more likely to be used in cases where group boundaries are less permeable (Jackson, Sullivan, Harnish, & Hodge, 1996). Lastly, social competition occurs in instances of direct competition with an out-group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), such as attempting to alter legislation.

The process of internalization of group-based identity is consequential to communication, relational, and health outcomes. Scholarship has found a relationship between social identity and health-related norms and behavior, social support, coping, and even clinical and symptomatic outcomes (Haslam, Jetten, Postmes, & Haslam, 2009). Efforts toward achieving positive distinctiveness shape in-group relations for members of the gay and lesbian community (Hons & Gallois, 1996) and the negotiation of aging in the gay male community (Hajek, 2014). Perceptions of positive distinctiveness for group-based identities also affect wellbeing and group identification. For instance, there is a negative relationship between perceived age discrimination and wellbeing for older adults (Garstka et al., 2004). These processes, despite referring to cognitive phenomena, are

interactive and created, maintained, or challenged in communication. For example, the professional identity of nurse involves training, enculturation, and interactional or social activity (Willettts & Clarke, 2013), thus implicating communicative processes in cognitive and affective identification.

Self-categorization theory. Building off of SIT, SCT assumes that group categorization and membership influences individual values and attitudes (Turner & Oakes, 1986). SCT contends that people place themselves and others into group-based categories, which results in varying levels of abstraction (Turner & Oakes, 1986). The higher level of abstraction, the more the individual identifies with the group, particularly in comparison to the salient out-group (Turner, Reynolds, Haslam, & Veenstra, 2006). According to SCT, social group categories give meaning to the world around us by easing the ability to make predictions about people, which is achieved through accentuating similarities or differences between different social groups. Accentuation is sensitive to the comparative context between or among social groups (Haslam & Turner, 1992). Similarly, SCT states that individuals also place themselves into social groups, which can result in depersonalization, deindividuation, or self-stereotyping. According to SCT, self-stereotyping is associated with increases in following the norms associated with the given social role (Turner & Oakes, 1986). Deindividuation can also contribute to in-group cohesiveness and emotional empathy (Reicher & Haslam, 2011).

Identity salience. In addition to positing the importance of positive group distinctiveness, SIT and SCT offer the notion of identity salience. In this study, I argue that identity salience of social group identities (i.e., gender and sexuality) constitutes the

salience of the communal frame of identity per CTI, since communal identity refers to more intergroup communication (Jung, 2013). Thus, although identity salience is described through the theoretical language of SIT, it is compatible with the tenets of CTI. Identity salience describes the extent to which a particular facet of identity is perceived as important or central to the individual or ascribed as salient by a communication partner (Garstka et al., 1997; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In the case of the present study, I focus on the identity salience of aspects of communal identity that emerge in the sexual communication literature as influential group memberships, namely gender and sexual identity. Identity salience is found to influence the degree to which an individual incorporates traits associated with a given group into their sense of self (Jetten, Postmes, & McAuliffe, 2002). Individuals who are highly identified with a group, or who have a high degree of group identity salience, are unlikely to disassociate from a group even in the face of identity threats to that group or to changes in status or hierarchy of a given social identity group (Doosje, Spears, & Ellemers, 2002). SCT argues that the degree to which group members identify with a given group identity (i.e., identity salience), the more group norms will guide their behaviors (Pool, Schwegler, Theodore, & Fuchs, 2007).

Identity salience as a moderator. Identity salience is often considered as a moderator, attenuating the effects of stereotyping, discrimination, or other intergroup communication processes on relational quality and individual wellbeing. For example, identity salience, or the degree to which that particular social group membership is central to a person's overall identity, is found to moderate the relationship between age-

discrimination and wellbeing (Garstka et al., 2004). In addition to influencing relational and overall wellbeing, identity salience affects intergroup processes. For instance, identity salience also influences the extent of individual response to threats to in-group distinctiveness (Doosje et al., 2002). An individual is more likely to generate a shared stereotype about an in-group to which they belong to the extent of their identity salience with that group; heightened social identity salience influenced both the content of self-categorizations, and led to an enhanced stereotype consensus to be more positively distinct in experimental manipulations (Haslam, Oakes, Reynolds, & Turner, 1999). In addition, family identity salience moderates the mediation effect of personal-enacted and relational-communal identity gaps on relational outcomes (Phillips et al., 2018). Further, the strength of in-group identity salience moderates the effects of intergroup anxiety compared to perceived realistic and symbolic threats to an in-group on quantity and quality of intergroup contact and attitudes (Tausch, Tam, Hewstone, Kenworthy, & Cairns, 2007). As I argue that sexual communication comprises an intergroup phenomenon influenced by identity gaps, I highlight particular group-based categories that may moderate these experiences. First, I briefly preview the focus on gender and sexual identity.

Gender identity salience. Even within normative relationships, gender identity, gender stereotypes, and gender identity salience influence sexual communication. For example, women are more likely than men to focus on love or affection within sexual relationships (Impett & Peplau, 2006), in adherence to gendered roles within the sexual script (Cupach & Metts, 1994; Wiederman, 2005). Gender identity salience is defined as

the importance an individual places on gender identity in their sense of who they are. Salience of traditional gender role identification also predicts sexual compliance, or engaging in consensual but unwanted sex (Impett & Peplau, 2006). Gender identity salience has also been found to moderate the relationship between gender and social dominance orientation. Social dominance orientation is consistently found to be higher for men than women, but when gender identity salience is considered, increasing group identification is associated with increasing social dominance orientation scores for men, and decreasing social dominance scores for women, suggesting it is identification with a gender identity, rather than gender alone, that influences even a relatively invariant personality trait (Wilson & Liu, 2003). Gender identity salience also moderates the relationship between gender and pain tolerance (Pool et al., 2007). Further, adolescent boys are more likely to engage in sexual bullying of adolescent girls when gender identity is salient for the boy as perpetrator (Page, Shute, & McLachlan, 2015). Gender identity salience was in fact a stronger predictor of this bullying than masculine sex role attitudes, and pro-bullying attitude is only predictive of sexual bullying when social contexts result in reductions in gender identity salience (Page et al., 2015). Thus, gender identity salience is often a moderator between gendered communication processes and relational and wellbeing outcomes.

Sexual identity salience. Distinct but strongly related to gender identity is sexual identity (McCarn & Fassinger, 1996). Sexual identity salience refers to the strength of identification with one's sexual identity group, and it varies by given members of a sexual identity group (Galupo, Davis, Gryniewicz, & Mitchell, 2014). Sexual identity

salience influences the degree to which an individual identifies with and is willing to participate in larger social movements (Vernd et al., 1998), coming out choices (McKenna & Bargh, 1998), and uncertainty and minority stress (Dyar, Feinstein, & London, 2015). Sexual identity salience may also moderate the extent to which negative stereotypes are internalized for members of concealable sexual identities, and influence mental health outcomes (Quinn et al., 2014). Although sexual communication scholarship more readily examines sexual identity in terms of stable categorization (i.e., comparing sexual minority to heterosexual communication experiences), it has largely ignored extent of identification with one's sexual identity as a potential variable. Given the influence of gender identity salience in sexual communication and sexual identity salience moderating the effects of other intergroup communication experiences on health outcomes like stress and depression (Dyar et al., 2015; Quinn et al., 2014), I argue sexual identity salience also moderates the relationship between sexual communication and identity gaps.

Taken together, these works demonstrate that identity salience can be a moderator between communication, and the emergent cognitive and affective processes, relational satisfaction, and sexual satisfaction. The present study assumes the extent to which relevant communal layers of identity are salient may influence the strength of relationship between sexual communication and identity gaps. Thus, I pose the following hypothesis:

H1a: (1) Gender and (2) sexual identity salience moderates the relationship between sexual communication and personal-enacted identity gaps.

H1b: (1) Gender and (2) sexual identity salience moderates the relationship between sexual communication and personal-relational identity gaps.

H1c: (1) Gender and (2) sexual identity salience moderates the relationship between sexual communication and enacted-relational identity gaps.

Identity salience and communal identity. Through CTI, the communal identity refers to identity at the site of the group (Hecht, 1993; Jung, 2013). Scholarship exploring communal identity has attended to the nature of identity salience, or identification with that group. For example, for first-generation college students, CTI scholarship finds that salience varies, may be more important for co-cultural group members, and first-generation college students may lack a significant sense of communal identity (Orbe, 2004). CTI has also been applied to investigate how Arabic women manage their enacted and communal identities in talk before and after September 11, 2001 (Witteborn, 2004). Witteborn (2004) found that following the events of September 11, 2001, Arabic women expanded the symbolic meaning of family to include social relationships from their community as a means of enacting communal identity in the face of a collective identity threat. Thus, attention to identity salience via CTI attends to the communal layer of identity and offers a powerful moderator for intergroup communication input variables and relational and health outcome variables. In addition, attention to identity salience may also occur as a means of coping with identity gaps.

Although SIT and SCT certainly value the role of communication in the process of learning, enacting, and evaluating social identity, CTI asserts that communication is itself a facet of identity (Hecht, 1993), rather than the vehicle through which a cognitive sense of self is performed to an audience. In this way, CTI diverges from SIT and SCT. However, SIT and SCT still significantly inform CTI as a theory, and the present study. In addition, SCT and SIT attend in greater detail to the cognitive processes of social

identification and stereotyping, in ways that have analytic utility for advancing knowledge of interpersonal communication processes. However, CTI incorporates cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects of intergroup communication processes that are important in explaining how sexual communication affects relational and health outcomes, and how individuals manage identity discrepancies in that process.

Identity salience and “non-normative” relationships. Although I contend the existing empirical research on sexual communication demonstrates that sex is an intergroup arena and that sexual communication is an identity-laden phenomenon regardless of relational context, the consequences of identity salience as a moderator may be of greater significance to relational types that are broadly positioned as deviating from the normative model of relationships. Non-normative relationships in interpersonal communication are described as relationships that are less prevalent and/or less accepted (Emmers-Sommer, 2005). This broad definition could include anything from LGBTQ relationships, interracial relationships, relationships characterized by visible disability, polyamorous relationships, BDSM relationships, and many others. The defining characteristic of a non-normative relationship is that it is perceived as uncommon or unaccepted by either members of the relationship, or ascribed as such by individuals outside the relationship. The term “non-normative” itself is important due to its reference to the norm. Norm may refer to commonality *or* appropriateness/acceptance of a given social group (Emmers-Sommer, 2005). The norm implies a comparative group and some degree of social regulation, which although we might wish did not, exists, as extensive work on heteronormativity, cisnormativity, and mononormativity, among others,

persuasively demonstrates (see Ferrer, 2018; Jackson, 2006; Schilt & Westbrook, 2009, among others). Further, sexual norms, defined as implicitly agreed upon codes of conduct by groups of people, exist and prescribe accepted sexual behaviors that vary by social role and influence sexual communication and sexual wellbeing (Lapinski & Rimal, 2005; Pariera, 2016). Thus, through the intergroup context, non-normative relationships include those that could identify a comparative normative out-group. It would be impossible to account for every variety of non-normative relationship, but this section will briefly discuss the more-represented categories of non-normative relationships in the sexual communication literature as they relate to those I will explore in the present study. I will conclude by arguing for the present focus on non-normative rather than normative relationships. Although I discuss each relational type in isolation from other social groups for coherence, they are certainly not mutually exclusive categories. For example, an individual can be both LGBTQ and a member of an interracial relationship, or polyamorous and practice BDSM, or belong to all four groups and others.

LGBTQ relationships. The lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) acronym describes a diverse group of individuals who identify as sexual or gender minorities. Of the non-normative relational types addressed in this study, the research on LGBTQ sexual communication comprises the most expansive category, as may be evidenced in examples throughout the following section. However, LGBTQ relationships still warrant further attention in their sexual communication because features of their relational type serve to both enhance and impede sexual communication in ways that I argue may be more fully explained by accounting for identity gaps and

identity salience. I will first describe what sexual activity means in the LGBTQ community and how that may differ from cisgender, heterosexual understandings of the term.

Elsewhere, I have argued that one of the foundational reasons that sex is an intergroup arena is that an individual's understanding of the term "sex" is tied to sexual and gender group memberships (Rubinsky & Cooke-Jackson, 2018). In that study, we found that for LGBTQ individuals, the process of learning their sexual or gender identity, exposure to the LGTBQ community, and shifting representations of LGBTQ people altered their understanding of what *counts* as sexual activity (Rubinsky & Cooke-Jackson, 2018). In that same study, heterosexual women also articulated that exposure to LGBTQ people, or intergroup communication experiences, complicated their own understanding of sexual activity (Rubinsky & Cooke-Jackson, 2018). Ambiguity characterizes understandings of what counts as sexual activity across relational types for women (McPhillips, Braun, & Gavey, 2001; Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2007), but lesbian women consider a wider range of sex acts to qualify as "sex" compared to heterosexual women (Horowitz & Spicer, 2013). Similarly, Sewell, McGarrity, and Strassberg (2016) have found no clear standard of what *having sex* means to sexual minority women, although sexual minority men may have a more established script. Thus, identification with sexual and gender groups may be impactful in how individuals understand what sexual activity is in the first place.

How someone defines sexual activity is consequential to how they communicate about it. The gendered nature of the sexual script may complicate these processes for

sexual and gender minority individuals, whose experiences rarely fit neatly into scripted roles (Kosenko, 2011a; Rubinsky & Cooke-Jackson, 2016; Rubinsky & Hosek, 2018). The extent to which individuals incorporate scripted definitions of sex into their sexual self-concept also impacts talk surrounding sexual activity. For example, understandings of sexual activity that position it as a masculine activity can result in decreased comfort talking about pleasure or negotiating sexual safety for people who do not identify as men (Montemurro, Bartasavich, & Wintermute, 2009).

A less structured understanding of what counts as “sex” can be beneficial or problematic for sexual and gender minority individuals. Adherence to sexual scripts and common cultural understandings of the term sex prompt a common language from which to draw when managing an uncomfortable and face-threatening aspect of communication. Neatly following a script may reduce identity gaps, particularly if individuals identify strongly with the roles in the script, since scripts reduce uncertainty and adherence to scripts is less face-threatening than other forms of communication (Simon & Gagnon, 1986). However, negotiating a mutually beneficial sexual script is associated with positive relational outcomes (Byers, 2011). When there is no script from which to draw for a given relational type, the only option is to negotiate a new one. I argue that this can result in increasingly personal relational scripts that better meet the needs of the individuals in the relationship, thereby minimizing identity gaps and increasing positive relational and sexual outcomes. For instance, Kattari (2015) finds that LGBTQ individuals note that the process of coming out results in an increased linguistic toolkit through which to discuss sexuality. This allows members of LGBTQ relationships to

negotiate sexual desire and health in a productive way that can facilitate positive relational and sexual outcomes. For another example, journalist Peggy Orenstein (2016) interviewed 70 young women about their sexual experiences. One of the lesbian women who Orenstein interviewed noted that lacking a cultural script for sexual behavior was freeing; because there was nothing she and her girlfriend were *supposed* to do, they were free to create a sexual script that worked in their relationship. Thus, the absence of a cultural script that depicted their identity group resulted in a more readily negotiated interpersonal script.

Alternatively, individuals in LGBTQ relationships, particularly individuals who fall under the transgender or gender non-conforming umbrellas, may incur difficulty in discussing their bodies. Coming out can result in an increased vocabulary for discussing sexuality, but there are limits to the language of gender (Kattari, 2015; Kosenko, 2011a, 2011b). There are a plethora of instances of social creativity in the LGBTQ community in reference to reframing and creating language to describe gendered experiences (e.g., Harrison, Grant, & Herman, 2012). However, whether or not that has been successfully engaged in the bedroom is yet to be seen. For example, Kosenko (2011a, 2011b) finds that transgender adults struggle to find a language to talk about their bodies with sexual partners. In addition, because partnered sexual activity can be so identity-confirming to transgender adults, they may forego requesting safety or pleasure out of fear of losing a partner (Kosenko, 2011a; 2011b). Thus, LGBTQ relationships are an important site to study the nature of identity gaps as mediating the effects of sexual communication on

relational and sexual outcomes because the salience of LGBTQ identity may influence the strength of this relationship.

Polyamorous relationships. Although LGBTQ relationships are becoming more accepted and more visible (Harwood, Rittenour, & Lin, 2013), much less visibility occurs for the polyamorous community. Polyamory is a non-normative relational type, despite becoming more common (Sheff, 2014), because it is not accepted or even allowed for in the normative relational model, which is grounded on coupledness and fidelity (Dixon, 2016; Barker, 2005). Polyamory is a romantic identity that describes an exportation of or allowance for multiple partners, with an emphasis on openness and honesty (Dixon, 2016). Similar to LGBTQ individuals, the language of coupledness resulted in the need for polyamorous individuals to create language to describe their experiences (Ritchie & Barker, 2006), which may impact their sexual communication (Dixon, 2016).

Theoretical work on sex in the polyamorous community argues that identity-work is needed on the part of the polyamorous individuals to discursively justify their relationships to individuals outside the relationship (Dixon, 2016). Although less empirical work investigates sexual behavior or sexual communication *within* these relationships, the sexual communication of polyamorous individuals in long-term committed relationships warrants inclusion in a non-normative model of sexual communication. The communal orientation of polyamory emphasizes communication, honesty, and ethical relational practices (Barker, 2005). In addition, the community emphasizes pro-social relational strategies (Wosick-Correa, 2010). The communal orientation toward productive, open, and ethical partner communication may result in

positive relational talk about sex. However, if individuals in the relationships are unable to engage in sex talk that meets this ideal, they may experience not only the negative relational, sexual, and health outcomes that occur as a result of unproductive sex talk (Noland, 2010), but an increased identity gap because they have also deviated from a group-based identity (communal layer) expectation. Thus, the salience for this relational identity may be especially important in understanding the effects of sex talk in these types of relationships.

BDSM relationships. Bondage, discipline/domination, and submission/sadomasochism (BDSM) is a stigmatized sexual practice and identity (Beres & MacDonald, 2015). Like polyamorous individuals, people who practice BDSM are often viewed as deviant, or sometimes even abusive, and often have to defend or conceal their practice to those outside the relationship (Tripodi, 2017). BDSM is a communicative identity and practice, which is often a talk-oriented activity (Beres & MacDonald, 2015). Communication and negotiation are pivotal aspects of BDSM. The community emphasizes standards for consent, and encourages boundary-setting and open sexual communication (Beres & MacDonald, 2015; Kattari, 2015; Pitagora, 2013). LGBTQ individuals with disabilities have described BDSM and kink more generally as a method for communicating sexual needs with their partners (Kattari, 2015). Sexual communication in BDSM relationships typically involve a bargaining process or negotiation, or establishing a code of conduct, either at the start of a relationship or at the beginning of a particular play scene (Baumeister, 1988; Kattari, 2015). Typically, BDSM play or scenes, a common term for a role-based interaction, first sets aside time to

specifically discuss and negotiate safety, sexual history, health concerns, content, length, and time of the play, any boundaries, triggers, allergies, etc. (Faccio, Casini, & Cipolletta, 2014; Rubinsky, 2018c).

Although it seems possible that people who practice BDSM are more likely enacting sexual fantasies they desire than the non-BDSM population, empirical work finds that even practitioners of BDSM are rarely engaging in the sex acts in which they are the most interested (Pascoal, Cardoso, & Henriques, 2015). Thus, even people who practice BDSM may not have fully revealed their desires to their partner, or may not be met fully with a desirable response. Thus, identity gaps may be mitigated or aggravated by sex talk in BDSM relationships.

To summarize, a focus on intergroup processes, specifically identity salience and identity gaps, in relationships that may experience increased sexual identity saliences, warrant attention to their sexual communication practices. In the next section I argue for an identity-focus on sex. Although existing scholarship on sexual communication does not explicitly invoke intergroup theory, it does implicitly acknowledge layered identity concerns that emerge in sexual communication. Thus, the next areas of this literature review address aspects of interpersonal sexual communication theories and empirical findings that reveal the identity-laden nature of this communication phenomena. First, I discuss this through the lens of face and face-threatening communication. Next, I turn to the literature on uncertainty and relational maintenance to situate sexual communication in the intergroup-interpersonal theoretical perspective. Finally, I discuss the broad and interdisciplinary literature on sexual communication, and explore where CTI can be

employed to better explain relational and sexual outcomes related to sexual communication.

Sex is Identity-Laden: Sexual Communication and Identity Gaps

Having explained the theoretical and conceptual framework, I next explore intergroup processes in the context of intimate partner communication about sexual activity. Sexual activity is an identity-laden construct and sexual communication is an intergroup arena because cognitive and affective processes like stereotyping and identity salience manifest in sexual communication, which to a certain extent either affirms or challenges aspects of one's identity. Sexual communication is especially difficult for partners because it threatens personal, relational, and communal identities. The literature on face-threatening communication addresses how sexual communication threatens personal identities and can result in personal-enacted, personal-relational, and enacted-relational identity gaps. A multiple goals perspective that addresses personal and relational needs, including managing uncertainty and maintaining relationships, explores where sexual communication can be relationally threatening. Attention to the site of enacted identity, sexual communication, through disclosure and negotiation further attends to social group processes (i.e., communal identity). Thus, this section argues for a focus on identity and intergroup communication processes in sexual communication because sexual activity is identity laden. First, I address face needs and sexual activity as a face-threatening communication topic.

Personal, enacted, and relational layers and gaps: Face and face threats. In this section, I overview the relevant literature on face and face-threats, which are

important concepts in sexual communication. In Politeness Theory, face refers to the positive, public self-image people want to claim for themselves (Goldsmith & Normand, 2015). Although face needs and face management heavily relate to politeness rules, as people get to know each other and they progress their relationships from public relationships, characterized by politeness rules (Goldsmith & Normand, 2015), to private relationships characterized by idiosyncratic relational cultures, face needs linger (Cupach & Metts, 1994). Through CTI, face would occur at the personal layer because face attends to personal identity and at the enacted and relational layer as face is presented in communication and attends to the presentational needs of the self and others (Cupach & Metts, 1994). Thus, the extensive theoretical and empirical literature on face may extend to what CTI conceptualizes as the personal and enacted layers of identity.

Face Management Theory, which extends Goffman's (1955) politeness and facework theories into committed relationships, defines face as the "conception of self that each person displays in particular interaction with others" (Cupach & Metts, 1994, p. 3). The relationally and socially situated conception of the self can be lost, saved, and managed. Relationally, individuals have positive and negative face needs, which can be threatened. Positive face refers to an individual's need or desire for approval, to be liked and respected by important others. Positive face threats occur when individuals devalue a person's fellowship or abilities, and positive face is supported when people communicate value for the things a person values, or communicates their competence, or solidarity (Cupach & Metts, 1994). Negative face refers to the need or desire to be free from constraint/imposition. Negative face threats occur when people do things that are

perceived as interfering with desired actions or imposing on a person's autonomy, and negative face is supported when messages respect another's autonomy (Cupach & Metts, 1994). In sexual communication, positive and negative face can be threatened or supported (Noland, 2010). For example, conversations about sexual activity that are met with partner approval and facilitate relational cohesion may support one's positive face needs. However, if an individual feels their partner asks for something they do not want to engage in, they may feel their negative face has been threatened; or, rejection by a partner may be face threatening for both parties, threatening the recipient's positive face and the rejecter's negative face. Communicatively managing these tensions requires facework, which engages the enacted and relational layer of identity in CTI.

Facework refers to all of the communication that counteracts face threats, including preventative and corrective facework (Cupach & Metts, 1994). Through CTI, facework might be thought of as occurring on the relational layer, or among the enacted-relational, personal-enacted, and personal-relational layers. Responses to face-threatening acts exist along a continuum of aggravation to mitigation (Cupach & Metts, 1994). Appropriate face needs and face threat management comprise an important aspect of communication competence, which influences interpersonal relationships. Facework may be especially important in relationships when "embarrassing predicaments" occur. Cupach and Metts (1994) describe embarrassing predicaments as awkward or difficult social situations that may be problematic and threaten face. Different strategies exist for managing these predicaments for different communicative and relational situations. In established relationships, certain types of problematic episodes necessitate facework,

including complaints and disagreements, social support, and relational transgressions (e.g., infidelity; Cupach & Metts, 1994).

Interpersonal disclosure is risky. Although disclosing private information is always risky, the extent to which it is risky and the potential costs incurred by the discloser (or confidant), vary. According to Communication Privacy Management Theory (CPM), one criteria for private revelation is evaluation of a risk/benefit ratio. Petronio (2002) identifies several broad categories of risk that disclosures involve: security, face, relational, stigma, and role. Face risks are inherent with disclosures that may cause embarrassment, embarrass members of a social group, or otherwise threaten face (Cupach & Metts, 1994; Petronio, 2002). Relational risks occur in disclosures that can also threaten some aspect of a relationship (Petronio, 2002). Sexual disclosures always present a face and relational risk because they are a potentially embarrassing and sensitive topic (Cupach & Metts, 1994). Stigma risks present a threat to an individual's inner self or self-identity, or fear that the disclosure is discrediting (Petronio, 2002). Disclosing a stigmatized sexual identity or desire involves a stigma risk in addition to face or relational risk (Manning, 2015; Petronio, 2002).

The distinction between stigma and face risks is especially relevant to the present study. Although sexual communication almost always presents a relational risk and face risk, certain types of relationships or disclosures may impact the severity of identity gaps that emerge in sexual communication. Specifically, if a sexual disclosure involves stigma risks, the stakes associated with the conversation increase. For example, for transgender individuals, disclosing aspects of their sexual preferences that may reveal their gender

identity or assigned sex (Kosenko, 2011a) presents a stigmatized risk because they are disclosing a stigmatized identity. This disclosure is also risky to their relationship, and their own face, but the stigma risk layers on the communicative consequences of being a part of a non-normative social group. A face- or relational-risking disclosure may become a stigmatized disclosure depending on the social climate surrounding it. For example, an individual telling their partner they have had previous partners is not inherently a stigmatized disclosure, since that is a taken-for-granted assumption in many adult relationships (Holman & Sillars, 2012). However, if the relationship is in a culture that highly values and assumes abstinence or virginity, that disclosure would be a stigmatized disclosure (Cooke-Jackson, Orbe, Johnson, & Kauffman, 2015).

Vulnerability, a characteristic of close relationships (Petronio, 2002), can also be face-threatening. Close relationships must engage in facework to manage vulnerability, and increasingly intimate relationships manage these face threats in different ways (Cupach & Metts, 1994), with stigmatized relationships managing increased vulnerability compared to non-stigmatized relationships (e.g., LGBTQ relationships; Petronio, 2002). Many vulnerable topics can risk a partner's rejection, which can damage one's own as well as the relationship-specific face (Cupach & Metts, 1994). The remainder of this section will explore the reasons why sex is an especially face-threatening topic for close relationships to discuss, the consequences of that conversational inhibition, and what that means theoretically through an intergroup framework.

Sex is a taboo topic. Although intimate revelations grow relationships, individuals navigate tensions between privacy and disclosure (Petronio, 2002). Relational

partners often declare certain topics off-limits or taboo to discuss within their relationships. Taboo topics in close relationships traditionally include the state of the relationship, extra-relational activity, relational norms, prior relationships, and negatively-valenced self-disclosure (Baxter & Wilmot, 1985). Sex is a taboo topic within close relationships. Anderson and colleagues argue that topics considered taboo or off-limits for couples “are likely to reside at the primary intersections of opposing desires regarding self-expression and privacy” (2011, p. 381). Past relationships and past sexual-encounters specifically comprise frequently taboo relational topics (Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004). Nearly half of relational partners do not disclose information about past sexual encounters or past sexual partners to present sexual partners (Anderson et al., 2011), especially if their past sexual behavior includes stigmatized practices like having multiple partners (Desiderato & Crawford, 1995). Revealing any private information is risky to some degree (Petronio, 2002), but discussing sexual topics can result in relational loss or deterioration. These issues are heightened if discussion follows intentional avoidance of the topic (Anderson et al., 2011; Golish, 2000). However, openness about sexual history can also harm relationships (Lucchetti, 1999), so topic avoidance may be strategic.

Anderson and colleagues (2011) studied reasons individuals avoid discussing past sexual experiences with their present partners. Because prior relationships and sexual activity both comprise taboo topics, discussing past sexual relationships enhances the taboo nature of sexual discussion. Individuals may avoid discussing past sexual experiences because of a belief that the past is the past, identity concerns, perceived

relational threats, and emotionally upsetting feelings (Anderson et al., 2011). Although all of these findings emphasize the taboo and risky nature of sexual communication, the identity and relational threat findings are especially relevant to the present study. Identity threats refer to threats to personal identity (Anderson et al., 2011), or threats to the personal layer of identity. Individuals may be concerned about comparison between past partners, as well as initiating feelings of inadequacy for their own or their partner's sexual ability (Anderson et al., 2011), which extends personal identity threats to relational identity threats. Sexual experience levels, feelings of insecurity, and discomfort about measuring up linger as personal and relational identity threats from discussions of past sexual experiences (Anderson et al., 2011). Similarly, relational threats take the threat from the personal layer of identity to the relational layer. These threats suggest that discussions of past sexual activity may result in feeling like the relationship is less special, which might imply lingering feelings or involvement with a past relationship (Anderson et al., 2011; Noland, 2010), thus, through CTI, resulting in a personal-relational identity gap. Avoiding sexual communication and its relegation to taboo status within a relationship may be perceived by relational partners as protecting personal and relational identities, thus engaging in relationship protecting behaviors (Anderson et al., 2011). This behavior is both protective of the relationship status itself, and protective of the relationship's identity, thus emphasizing the identity-laden nature of sexual communication.

Sexual communication also comprises a taboo topic because it is embedded with a high degree of emotional risk, and is not always a positive experience. Unsatisfying

conversations about sex highlight that individuals avoid topics about sex because they are afraid of hurting a relational partner's feelings (Faulkner & Lannutti, 2010), which emphasizes the face-threatening nature of sex talk. Sexual communication and involvement are face-threatening acts in both close and developing romantic relationships (Cupach & Metts, 1994; Noland, 2010). Cupach and Metts (1994) argued that sex is a unique arena of vulnerability:

Even some spouses who have had intercourse hundreds of times find it extremely difficult to discuss sexual matters with each other. Aside from the fact that we are socialized to believe that sex talk is taboo, it is also the case that sex talk is emotionally dangerous. Sex talk involves disclosure that has implications for how one's identity is judged (e.g., frigid, promiscuous, aggressive, deviant). It is therefore acutely associated with the face-threatening feelings of shame, guilt, and embarrassment (p.44).

Thus, the unique vulnerability of sexual communication makes it especially risky, but also emphasizes the identity-laden nature of this communicative arena.

Coping with face-threatening sexual communication. As a result of the face-threatening nature of sexual communication, many couples navigate these discussions by communicating in a way that is less direct. A social contribution to this method of face-work is what Noland (2010) describes as the spontaneity myth: social scripts encourage couples to view sex as heated and passionate, something that occurs in the moment, leaving less room for adequate everyday communication about desires, boundaries, or health. Indirect sexual communication or lack of sexual communication results in decreases in sexual and relational satisfaction, as well as an increase in risk-taking sexual health behaviors, and harmful sexual health outcomes (Holman & Sillars, 2012; Noar et al., 2006).

Reliance on the overall sexual script may be a consequence of coping with the face-threatening nature of sexual communication. In addition to engaging the spontaneity myth, the sexual script is normative and gendered (Manning, 2014), with men playing the role of initiator of sexual behavior and women serving as sexual gatekeepers, drawing the line of how far to go in a sexual interaction (Cupach & Metts, 1994; Simon & Gagnon, 1986). Scripting underlies motivations ascribed to sexual initiation, which may influence decisions to comply or not comply. Overtly resisting sexual invitations, especially if the request was ambiguous as it often is, risks face (Cupach & Metts, 1994). Further, non-normative sexual and gender identities may deviate from the sexual script by their very existence (Kattari, 2015). In addition, deviating from the roles prescribed to the sexual script results in a need for facework, as complying with the prescribed roles mitigates face threats (Metts & Spitzberg, 1996). However, the facework that individuals engage to manage the identity-gaps that sexual communication triggers in their relationships requires further exploration. From past scholarship, we know that identity- and face-threats are inherent in navigating taboo and risky relational discussions like those about sex. In addition, we know that facework often results in indirect or unproductive sexual communication (Noland, 2010), or sexual compliance and conflict (Sprecher & Cate, 2004). We know far less about if and how individuals are able to productively manage these challenges.

A Multiple Goals Perspective for Sexual Communication

Consistent with past sexual communication scholarship (e.g., Kosenko, 2011b), the present study assumes that when individuals communicate with romantic partners

about sexual activity, they have multiple goals. A multiple goals perspective of sexual communication attends to layered (i.e., communal, personal, relational) goals within the enacted site of identity. Multiple theories within and outside of the communication discipline carry the label of a multiple goals theory (Berger, 2004; Wilson & Feng, 2007), but they share a series of assumptions (Caughlin, 2010). Multiple goals theories broadly assume (1) communication is purposeful, (2) individuals in communication have multiple simultaneous goals, and (3) those goals are sometimes in conflict (Caughlin, 2010).

A multiple goals perspective conceives of communication as broadly strategic and purposeful in enacting instrumental, identity, and relational needs (Caughlin, 2010).

Relational goals refer to “communicating in ways that reflect and promote the type of relationship one has, or wishes to have, with a partner” (Caughlin, 2010, p. 827).

Relationally, we communicate to build close relationships (Caughlin, 2010; Delia, Clark, & Switzer, 1979), escalate close relationships (Mongeau, Jacobsen, & Donnerstein, 2007; Mongeau, Serewicz, & Therrien, 2004), and maintain relationships (Dainton, 2000).

Instrumentally, we communicate to achieve some task (Caughlin, 2010), such as providing comfort (Burlison & Goldsmith, 1998), sharing advice and guidance (Caughlin, 2010; Goldsmith & Fitch, 1997), seeking information (Afifi, Dillow, & Morse, 2004), and influencing each other (Wilson, 2002). Communication also attends to identity needs, as the past section describes we attend to our own and others’ face needs in conversation, striving to maintain a positive social value for ourselves and others. This may include protecting ourselves and others from embarrassment, disapproval, or shame

through topic avoidance (Afifi, Caughlin, & Afifi, 2009) or secret keeping (Caughlin, 2010).

Although the multiple goals perspective assumes communication is purposeful and strategic, therein it implies specific end-states for relational and communicative encounters (Berger, 2004; Caughlin, 2010). However, this desired end-state does not necessarily imply complete intentionality in communicative interactions because communication is sometimes automatic and thoughtless (Caughlin, 2010; Kellermann, 1992). Multiple goals scholars argue, and empirical findings support, that individuals can engage in goal-oriented communication without full consciousness of that process. For example, a primary goal in sexual communication with an individual and their sexual partner may be that they desire to try a new sexual position, but a subconscious or automatic secondary goal may also be to be perceived as a likeable partner, to have their social identity group (e.g., woman) perceived positively, or to further relational closeness with their partner. Goals may be activated outside of conscious awareness of their activation (Bargh & Chartrand, 1999; Caughlin, 2010; Custers & Aarts, 2005). One such goal individuals may not be able to articulate in the moment is the goal for congruence among their identity layers.

Because identity gaps are inevitable and occur to some extent in all communicative interactions (Hecht, 1993; Jung & Hecht, 2004, 2008), identity gaps also emerge to some extent in sexual communication. Thus, people have multiple goals in their partnered sexual communication for achieving relational and sexual outcomes, as well as for mitigating the extent to which they experience discrepancies between and

among their identity layers. The multiple goals perspective also assumes that we often simultaneously experience and enact these goals in communication (Caughlin, 2010). People's goals can conflict, within or across interactions, and sometimes individuals have multiple goals that are themselves in conflict (Caughlin, 2010). Because a multiple goals perspective assumes that individual goals affect message production, evaluation, and perceptions of others, these perceptions affect relationship and communication satisfaction. Although this study does not explicitly measure goals, I assume that goals are reflected in enacted communication and emergent identity gaps. Goals are relational and identity-laden. In addition, the extent to which individuals aim to achieve and maintain equilibrium between and among the four layers of identity is in and of itself an expression of balancing multiple goals in communication. Sexual communication involves a number of identity-laden goals. For example, minimizing face threats and coping with face threats may comprise personal, relational, and identity goals. Additional relational goals of sexual communication include uncertainty reduction and relational maintenance. First, I discuss the goal of uncertainty reduction.

Relational layer: Uncertainty. One underlying goal in relational communication is to reduce uncertainty (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). Partner information-seeking behaviors characterize early interactions (Vangelisti, 2011), but even among more stabilized relationships (Knobloch & Donovan-Kicken, 2006), uncertainty management characterizes communication (Afifi & Robbins, 2015). Relational uncertainty relates to an individual's ability to process relationship-related information (Knobloch & Solomon, 2005). Knobloch and Solomon (2005) define relational uncertainty as the degree of

confidence an individual has in their perception of involvement within their interpersonal associations or relationships, which can emerge from self, partner, or relational sources. Uncertainty affects desire for the relationship, evaluation of the relationship's worth, and goals for relational development (Knobloch & Solomon, 2005).

Theiss (2011) modeled the dyadic effects within associations between indirect communication about sexual intimacy, relational uncertainty, sexual communication, and sexual satisfaction for mixed-sex marital partners. Relational uncertainty was found to be positively associated with indirect communication about sexual intimacy; indirect sexual communication was negatively associated with both partners' own sexual satisfaction; both partners' sexual satisfaction and indirectness about sexually intimate topics were positively related; and indirect communication about sexual intimacy was negatively associated with a partner's spouse's sexual satisfaction (Theiss, 2011). Thus, indirect communication about intimacy or sexual topics, although minimizing face-threats (Noland, 2010), increases relational uncertainty, even if done strategically, which can result in less satisfying sexual relationships (Theiss, 2011).

Relationship uncertainty lowers an individual's ability to understand communication within or about the relationship. Knobloch and Solomon (2005) contend that relational uncertainty results in interference with a person's ability to develop coherent schemas for social situations and behavior because it hinders an individual's ability to identify appropriate relational schemas for interpreting communicative interactions, filters the expectations for acceptable prototypical interactional behavior, and obstructs an individual's capacity to read relational messages. In conversation with

CTI, relationship uncertainty thus influences how an individual would construct, enact, and interpret enactment relevant to the relational-layer of identity. As an emotionally tumultuous and identity-threatening communication arena within even close relationships, sex is riddled with uncertainty (Theiss, 2011). The heightened uncertainty associated with sexual communication may cloud the ability to accurately decode relational messages, increasing turbulence within relationships. This uncertainty may be heightened for individuals who lack a coherent sexual script to schematically guide sexual interaction, like those in non-normative relationships. Another relational goal of sexual communication is relational maintenance.

Relational layer: Sexual activity and sexual communication as relational maintenance. Relational maintenance refers to all of the communicative activities a couple must enact to maintain a particular type of relationship (Dainton, 2000). Relational maintenance scholarship draws on the principles of social exchange theory, equity theory, and interdependence theory (Dainton, 2000). All of these theories assume that people seek relationships with a higher reward-to-cost ratio, and use relational maintenance strategies to the extent that their relationships are more rewarding than costly. The extent to which one's expectations for maintenance are fulfilled may affect relational satisfaction (Dainton, 2000). For instance, interdependence theory contends that relational quality outcomes are dependent upon the cost-rewards each relational partner experiences, in comparison to the expectations an individual has for what they deserved, or a comparison level (Dainton, 2000). Thus, relational satisfaction may be higher to the extent the discrepancy between expectations and experiences is smaller.

Through the language of CTI, maintenance expectations may be an element of the personal or relational layer whether the expectation is conceived as a component of self-concept (personal layer) or the identity as a relational partner such as a boyfriend or girlfriend (relational layer), with the actual experiences comprising an aspect of the relational layer (as others ascribe identity to us) or the enacted layer (communication). Thus, maintenance discrepancies may result in personal-enacted or personal-relational identity gaps, or even within-layer relational identity gaps.

Dainton (2000) found a positive association between perceived fulfillment of expectations for relational maintenance behaviors and relationship satisfaction; despite this, a second study presented in the same article found that expectancy fulfillment was not as salient a predictor as the mere frequency of maintenance behaviors in predicting relationship satisfaction. Although Dainton (2000) discussed these findings in the context of interdependence theory, an intergroup perspective may shed additional light on the mixed findings concerning the relationship between standards and fulfillment. It may be that rather than a uniform expectation-fulfillment discrepancy, the salience of those relational expectations within how one sees themselves as a person (i.e., as someone deserving of positivity, openness, etc.), or how one envisions their relationship (i.e., as a relationship characterized by openness, positivity, etc.), actually explains the discrepancy. For example, within polyamorous relationships, individuals may incur an added layer of relational expectation that serves or undermines their communal layer. Specifically, the polyamorous community maintains explicit standards for how they should “do” their relationships with positivity and openness (Sheff, 2014). Discrepancies between enacted

maintenance behaviors and communal or personal perceptions of relational ideals may then emerge to the extent that an individual experiences that part of their identity as salient.

As I have argued throughout this section, relationships, despite being a highly interpersonal context, are also characterized by intergroup communication. On the most surface level, maintenance behaviors differ by gender and relational-type expectations (Dainton & Stafford, 1993). Individuals are socialized into a series of roles associated with the gender they are ascribed (i.e., communal and relational layers), and the extent to which they identify or disassociate from gender group influences interpersonal communication processes and relational outcomes. For example, gender roles, a social identity group, actually serve as a better predictor of maintenance behaviors than biological sex, particularly identification with femininity (Stafford, Dainton, & Haas, 2000). In addition, gender influences how people perceive the fairness of their relational division of labor, with interpersonal consequences for relational satisfaction (Impett & Peplau, 2006).

One behavior couples engage in as an aspect of maintaining a romantic relationship is sexual activity (Noland, 2010). One reason why sexual activity constitutes a salient intergroup context within romantic relationships is found in the gendered nature of relational maintenance behaviors and priorities (Impett & Peplau, 2006). Even within normative relationships, gender identity, gender identity salience, and gender stereotypes influence sexual communication. For instance, women are more likely than men to focus on the love or affectionate aspects of sex in relationships (Impett & Peplau, 2006).

Gender groups also differ in their erotic plasticity, or the extent to which one's sexual beliefs are shaped by cultural, social, and situational factors, with women having higher erotic plasticity compared to men (Impett & Peplau, 2006). Women and men also fill different social roles according to the traditional sexual script (Cupach & Metts, 1994; Wiederman, 2005). In addition, from a maintenance perspective, gender role socialization explains sexual compliance in heterosexual relationships, as sexual compliance speaks to a broader pattern of sacrifice in committed relationships (Impett & Peplau, 2003). Sexual compliance refers to willing but unwanted sexual behavior, which appears to be a common maintenance strategy in heterosexual relationships (Impett & Peplau, 2003). Research on sexual and dating behavior in adolescents finds that adolescents often engage in unwanted sexual behavior to preserve the relationships, and may employ sexual self-silencing, which is a predictor of depressive symptoms for that population (Little, Welsh, Darling, & Holmes, 2011). The asymmetrical nature of opposite-sex relationships contributes to the increased likelihood that women will be the sexually compliant partner (Impett & Peplau, 2003). Although both men and women are likely to engage in sexual behavior for a variety of motivations outside of sexual desire or desire for sexual satisfaction (Impett & Peplau, 2003) because we have multiple goals in communication, where maintenance fits as a goal may impact the extent to which identity gaps influence sexual or relational outcomes. In spaces where sexual satisfaction might be low, relational satisfaction might still be high if the primary goal of relational maintenance was achieved, thus identity gaps that minimize relational discrepancies may differently affect relational quality and sexual satisfaction. Thus, one salient reason that

sex comprises an intergroup arena is because motivational differences for sexual communication and sexual activity, as well as resultant differences in satisfaction, occur in part because of identification with and ascription to social identity groups like gender.

Sexual Communication as Enacted Identity

Sexual script theory. The site of the enacted identity in the present study is what actually occurs in sexual communication between long-term relational partners. Sexual communication is challenging but essential to long-term romantic relationships (Anderson et al., 2011; Noland, 2010). While group membership and perceptions of face and stigma risks filter communicative experiences, a dominant framework for the study of intimate partner communication, sexual script theory (SST), also highlights the intergroup processes underlying sexual negotiation. SST invokes cultural, interpersonal, and intrapsychic scripts (Simon & Gagnon, 1986). Sexual scripts exist to reduce uncertainty in offering instruction for how to behave in social situations (Wiederman, 2005).

Cultural scripts invoke general guides to sexual behavior at the group level (Hynie, Lydon, Cote, & Wiener, 1998). Cultural scenarios occur at collective levels of meaning-making (Simon & Gagnon, 1986). Examples of understandings that emerge from cultural scripts include at what age sexual behavior becomes acceptable, whether involvement in sexual behavior should precede or follow marriage or long-term commitment, and if sexual activity should result in child conception (Sprecher & Cate, 2004). Different cultural groups possess different cultural sexual scripts. For example, the sexual script for hookup culture among American college students emphasizes non-

relationship sex, spontaneity, and alcohol, resulting in an inherently risky script (Holman & Sillars, 2012). The emphasis on spontaneity infiltrates even long-term sexual scripts, resulting in a sense of shame or embarrassment over ideas of “planned” sex (Noland, 2010). Noland (2010) notes this often results in longer-term couples engaging in sex less frequently than desired or not at all.

Simon and Gagnon (1986) define interpersonal scripts as the application of cultural scenarios in specific, interpersonal contexts. Interpersonal scripts also involve interpersonal interpretation of the larger cultural scripts (Hynie et al., 1998). Interpersonal scripts occur following partner disclosures of sexual likes, dislikes, fears, and fantasies and may be more mutually pleasurable than strict reliance on cultural scripts (Byers, 2005). However, even in the presence of an interpersonal script, SST finds that cultural scripts influence and filter interpersonal scripts (Sprecher & Cate, 2004). Still, individuals can develop their own sexual script unique to their relational culture (Byers, 2011; Greene & Faulkner, 2005).

Intrapsychic scripts involve the internal management of desires experienced by the individual (Simon & Gagnon, 1986). Intrapsychic scripts occur at the personal layer of identity, where we see images of ourselves as sexual beings, as well as the relational layer where sexual others elicit and sustain arousal. Individual personal experiences and social learning, as well cultural influence, impact intrapsychic sexual scripts (Wiederman, 2005). Interpersonal scripts facilitate the occurrence of sexual behavior, as they involve the ordered representations of one’s self and others as sexual beings (Simon & Gagnon, 1986). Like CTI, the scripts are layered, and interpersonal and intrapsychic scripts are

filtered through cultural scripts (Hynie et al., 1998).

Early in relationships, individuals are likely to rely more heavily on the shared cultural script, however, as a relationship develops, they may develop a more idiosyncratic, interpersonal sexual script (Wiederman, 2005). Sprecher and Cate (2004) suggest that through a SST perspective, sexual satisfaction is likely to occur when individuals perceive their partner possesses a similar sexual script, and is adequately enacting the preferred shared script. Thus, congruity between enacted and relational layers of identity per CTI would result in increased sexual satisfaction. However, SST acknowledges that larger cultural scripts filter the communicative process of negotiating an interpersonal sexual script, and thus are present even in established relationships.

Gender stereotypes and gendered roles also characterize sexual scripts. Some of these gender roles include the roles of independence, assertiveness, and exploration for men (Lippa, 2001; Weiderman, 2005). Acceptance of assertiveness and bodily exploration results in a sexual script for men that is goal-oriented and geared toward bodily pleasure (Wiederman, 2005). Women are taught sexual restraint, and receive messages about sexual activity, sexuality, and sexual health aimed at self-protection (Wiederman, 2005), and that position sex as dangerous and scary (Holman & Koenig-Kellas, 2018; Rubinsky & Cooke-Jackson, 2017). In addition, the bodily experience for people classed as young women is not geared toward exploration or encouragement. For instance, Wiederman argues:

Anatomically, boys have the benefit (or curse) of genitals that are more easily viewed and handled by their owners. The young boy is taught to hold onto his penis to urinate and to handle it for purposes of washing. Conversely, the young girl is not taught to touch her clitoris. She is taught to wipe carefully after

urination so as not to contract an infection by transferring bacteria from her rectum to her vagina. The end result? Boys and girls are given two subtly different sets of messages regarding their own genitals. Boys readily discover that their genitals feel good when handled and are not necessarily any “dirtier” than other parts of their body that they can see. Girls readily learn that their genitals are difficult, if not impossible, for them to see and that there are “dirty” aspects that require appropriate precautionary measures (2005, p. 497).

Thus, men and women learn differences about their bodies and sexualities. The heterosexual sexual script for women positions them as sexual gatekeepers, drawing the line for how far to go in a sexual interaction (Wiederman, 2005). Instead of a focus on bodily pleasure, women in the sexual script see sexual activity as relationally-centered. Deviation from the sexual script of male-aggressor or female-gatekeeper positions the individual as deviant. Men who are not bodily-oriented initiators may be perceived as weak or less masculine, and women who seem too sexually interested are labeled as “sluts” (Wiederman, 2005); these ascriptions as deviating from a scripted role may also result in identity gaps.

Because scripting involves the cognitive processes of categorization and identification, a related intergroup theory, SCT, may add additional insight into the vehicles through which stereotyping influences sexual communication. To reiterate, SCT argues that people organize themselves and others into social groups, and adopt the behaviors associated with that group (Reid & Anderson, 2010). If an individual adopts the norms, beliefs, and behaviors of a social group, they may also engage in conformity, depersonalization, and stereotyping (Levine & Hogg, 2010). According to SCT, an individual will engage in various levels of abstraction in connection to how they see themselves as an individual or in terms of their social group membership, which can

range between personal and social (Turner, 1999). Scripts are normative and heteronormative (Manning, 2014), and people use stereotypes to guide their understanding and interpretation of partner preferences, often more frequently than they rely on interpersonal discussion and revealed knowledge (Byers, 2011). For example, Green and Faulkner (2005) investigate the sexual double standard in the heterosexual sexual script. Belief in the sexual double standard affects sexual communication, particularly for women (Green & Faulkner, 2005). Adherence to a cultural script that positions women as passive and receptive to a heterosexual male partner was negatively related to sexual assertiveness (Green & Faulkner, 2005). This may be a result of self- and other- categorization processes that further emphasize the intergroup nature of sexual communication.

The normative sexual script influences behavior even amongst those who do not follow it, with real consequences. Because the sexual script excludes women in same-sex relationships, with dangers associated with sex limited to penile penetration, lesbians and bisexual women who have sex with other women often feel at low-risk for STIs, STDs, and the human papillomavirus (HPV), despite growing evidence that they are still at risk for these conditions (Power, McNair, & Carr, 2009). In a qualitative study examining how lesbian and bisexual women perceive and manage their risk for sexual and reproductive health concerns, Power and colleagues (2009) found that women who identified as lesbian or bisexual manage their sexual health in relation to their lesbian or bisexual identities, and feel those identities are excluded from the dominant sexual scripts. Sexual scripts characterize sexual pleasure and sexual safety negotiation (Green

& Faulkner, 2005; Power et al., 2009), and exclude a plethora of relational and sexual identities that do not adhere to it (Power et al., 2009). Lack of a coherent script for negotiating sexual safety also limited transgender women's ability to negotiate condom use with a male partner (Kosenko, 2011a).

In addition to emphasizing heterosexual sex acts in which men and women adhere to gendered stereotypes, the Western sexual script is also predominantly white. Racialized socialization strongly influences sexual attitudes (Davidson et al., 2008). Sexual script research has advanced sexual scripts that describe how black women manage racialized sexual scripts that invoke both gender norms and racial norms (Stephens & Phillips, 2003). For instance, Stokes (2007) found that black American adolescent girls learn how to construct their sexual self-definitions and engage in sexual exploration often through mediated contact. For black adolescent women, hip hop culture influences stereotyped roles within the sexual script that position them differently from the restraint-recipient stereotype (Stokes, 2007; Wiederman, 2005) associated with white women within the heterosexual script. Although many black girls resist these stereotypes, and attempt to engage their sexuality in opposition to the dominant script (Stokes, 2007), stereotypic processes still guide sexual negotiation within their interpersonal relationships. Thus, in addition to gender stereotypes guiding the cognitive and communicative processes of sexual negotiation, racial stereotypes also filter interpersonal sexual communication among intra- and intergroup sexual relationships.

Some scholars argue that the rapid shifts in sexuality politics offer a reinvention of sexual and intimate relational self- and cultural understandings across social settings,

reflecting a political point of shift in the cultural sexual script (Parker, 2010). Certainly, cultural scripts are changing as racial, gender, and sexuality activism infiltrates political life. However, mounting evidence suggests larger liberatory projects may not reflect equality when it comes to the bedroom. Sexual stereotypes rooted in gender, sexuality, race, ability, and religion still infiltrate our most intimate interpersonal relationships. For example, one problematic communicative result of sexual negotiation as a result of the sexual script occur in sexual conflict and sexual compliance (Impett & Peplau, 2003). Adherence to the sexual script is sometimes so intense that it results in unwanted, but consensual sex, or sexual compliance as described earlier in this chapter (O'Sullivan & Allgeier, 1998). The sexual script makes outright sexual refusal face-threatening for women, which can result in sexual compliance more often among women (Cupach & Metts, 1994; Sprecher & Cate, 2004). Women may engage in sexual compliance because of investment in gender norms, specifically compared to heterosexual women who do not report engaging in sexual compliance, sexually compliant heterosexual women report greater investment in idealized ideas of womanhood (Katz & Tirone, 2009). Thus, salience of a traditional gender role identity seems to relate to engagement in unwanted but consensual sexual activity that is consistent with the gendered role within the traditional sexual script.

A CTI perspective affords us the ability to examine the vehicles through which salient group identification results in stereotypical sexual negotiation patterns and choices, as well as a method to acknowledge the identity-laden feelings of internalized discrepancy that accompany absence of or deviation from salient sexual scripts. Sexual

scripts influence every layer of identity. They accompany the learning of sexual self-definitions (personal), they guide sexual negotiation and disclosure (enacted), and interpretation of and identification with partner sexual negotiation behaviors (relational), and are rooted heavily in social group membership roles (communal). Next, I discuss how the present study operationalizes sexual communication: sexual disclosure.

Disclosure. Sexual communication literature largely emphasizes the importance of disclosure as an aspect of this communication process. Altman and Taylor (1973) argue that increasingly high levels of self-disclosure characterize relationship development. An onion metaphor describes the process of revealing increasingly intimate information about ourselves to relational partners per social penetration theory (SPT; Altman & Taylor, 1973; Taylor & Altman, 1987). According to SPT, we feel the closest to people with whom our relationships have high depth, breadth, and frequency of disclosures (Altman & Taylor, 1973). From the perspective of SPT, self-disclosure is key in the progression of increasingly intimate relationships. However, disclosure is complicated and relational. Another theoretical perspective on disclosure draws from CPM (Petronio, 2002). CPM uses a boundary metaphor to describe the borders that mark ownership and co-ownership around our own and others' private information (Petronio, 2002). Once a disclosure occurs, we have integrated another person into our privacy boundary, which requires coordination. Boundary coordination is guided by a rule-based management system (Petronio, 2002). Privacy rules develop occurring to cultural criteria, gendered criteria, motivational criteria, contextual criteria, and risk-benefit ratio criteria (Petronio, 2002).

Productively, Petronio (2002) adopts a cultural perspective on gender and the development of gendered rules for privacy management relevant to sexual disclosures. This perspective is especially useful in understanding how gender and disclosure interact and interplay. However, as a result of this perspective, the line between culture and gender as rule criteria via CPM blur. An intergroup-interpersonal perspective would collapse these criteria into an assumption that group membership impacts communication with even close others. In addition to gender and race, group memberships such as age, religion, sexual orientation, or even organizational membership may impact privacy management. CPM's rich empirical, theoretical, and applied history already validates this perspective, despite not engaging that particular language. A salient example Petronio (2002) offers involves how individuals with a disability make rules about disclosure in an attempt to center their person-identity above their disability-identity (i.e., a communal identity). For another example, studies on transgender safer sex communication adopt CPM as a sensitizing theory (Kosenko, 2011b). Kosenko (2011b) concludes that her findings contribute to the gendered criteria for privacy rule development initially proposed by CPM. Expanding Petronio's (2002) gender-culture interplay, Kosenko (2011b) furthers this to transgender individuals. Because Kosenko's (2011b) participants complicate the man-woman dynamic assumed in "gendered" rules, but still clearly present gendered rules for managing their private sexual information, Kosenko's findings support Petronio's (2002) gender as culture argument, and extend the group assumptions to another gendered group: transgender individuals. Thus, adopting a group-rule as an umbrella category facilitates the inclusion of culture and culture-gender, as well as an

expansion to a number of salient group memberships that influence privacy rules. Because group membership filters enacted identity, or communication, even in close relationships, even highly interpersonal encounters still involve intergroup communication.

The language of disclosure (Petronio, 2002), self-disclosure (Altman & Taylor, 1973), or interpersonal disclosure (Manning, 2015) is consequential to a theoretical understanding of the site of enacted identity. Petronio (2002) and Manning (2015) position disclosure as inherently relational in nature, counter to a focus on self-disclosure (Altman & Taylor, 1973) in which the individual is the site of enacted identity. A perspective that views close communication as inherently intergroup, following the theoretical guidance of CTI would position the self as both cognitive and individual, and social and relational, as identity occurs at multiple sites. Enacted identity, thus, via disclosure, fits more closely with the relational perspective afforded by CPM. However, as CPM applies to a variety of relational types, this study adopts the perspective of Manning (2015) in describing sexual disclosure as an interpersonal disclosure. The language of interpersonal disclosure emphasizes both the enacted identity of disclosure and the relational risks inherent in disclosing intimate information within close relationships.

Although disclosure and intimacy are *intimately* related, they are not synonymous and their relationship is a complicated one. Petronio (2002) distinguishes between disclosure and intimacy, arguing that private disclosure and self-disclosure may lead to or contribute to intimacy, but are not the same as intimacy. Intimacy reflects many aspects

of a close relationship not encompassed in verbal disclosure. In addition, disclosures sometimes reduce or minimize intimacy, depending on their content (Petronio, 2002). For example, disclosing existing sexual dissatisfaction to a partner might reduce the relational intimacy and satisfaction if the conversation does not produce a positive resolution (Faulkner & Lannutti, 2010).

Sexual disclosure consists of the process of revealing likes, dislikes, fears, fantasies, history, health information, and any other sexual information someone would not otherwise know (Herold & Way, 1988; Noland, 2010). It involves revealing intimate attitudes, feelings, and experiences (Sprecher & Hendrick, 2004). In general, disclosure in intimate relationships is associated with self-esteem, confidence as a relational partner, responsiveness, relational quality, satisfaction, love, and commitment (Sprecher & Hendrick, 2004). In all, the literature on sexual self-disclosure within normative relationships is extensive and concludes that sexually self-disclosing seems to improve relational quality, relational stability, sexual quality, and wellbeing. One reason disclosure is typically associated with favorable relational and sexual outcomes is because disclosing sexual likes and dislikes is associated with a more rewarding and less costly sexual script (Byers, 2011). However, sexual communication may differ by relational type, as different types of relationships have different sexual and communication needs, especially in matters concerning sexual health. For instance, LGBTQ people, polyamorous people, and BDSM/kink practitioners with disabilities emphasize boundary setting and the influence of identity in sexual communication (Kattari, 2015). Identities within marginalized communities, according to this research,

may actually serve to both support and enhance productive and ethical sexual communication because they have a larger sexual vocabulary and range of sexual identity experiences (Kattari, 2015). However, marginalized sexual communities may also suffer from a lack of common language to communicate about their relationships (Ritchie & Barker, 2006) and their bodies (Kosenko 2011a, 2011b), which are often not reflected in larger cultural dialogue about bodies, sexual activity, and health, and are absent from the sexual script (Kattari, 2015; Wiederman, 2005).

Although disclosure is consequential, it is not always sincere. More than half of participants in a study on sexual communication, honesty, safety, and deception had at some point communicated deceptively to their partner about sex (Horan, 2016).

Deceptively disclosing or omitting the number of previous partners accounts for some differences in sexual safety behaviors, and individuals who omit these details from a current partner are less comfortable with safer sex communication in general (Horan, 2016).

Further, passion and sexual satisfaction often decline in longer-term relationships (Frederick, Lever, Gillespie, & Garcia, 2017). In a large study of more than 38,000 individuals, Frederick and colleagues (2017) identified what attitudes and behaviors varied among sexually satisfied compared to sexually dissatisfied men and women in relationships of three years or longer. Within the first six months, most people were more satisfied in their relationships, but the satisfaction curve becomes a little more bimodal after that. People with higher sexual satisfaction engaged in sexual activity more often, received oral sex more, experienced more consistent orgasms, varied in the sex acts in

which they engaged, as well as incorporated increased mood setting, and, importantly, sexual communication (Frederick et al., 2017).

Although sexual disclosure appears to predict positive sexual and relational outcomes, and the absence of disclosure seems problematic for relationships, these associations may be more fully explained when accounting for identity. Because sexual communication can be intensely face-threatening, the resulting influence on relational quality and sexual satisfaction may be mediated by how one's identity is affirmed or challenged in that communication. CTI offers a conceptual framework to describe how identity emerges and can be affirmed or challenged in communication. Further, in adopting CTI as a theoretical framework, the present study addresses Manning's (2014) call for a holistic communicology of sexuality. Manning proposes a holistic communicology of sexuality to address the absence of attendance to issues of "sexual pleasure, sex talk in relationships, or even what sex means to personal identity" (p.263, 2014) from sex and sexuality research.

A plethora of literature describes the unique importance of communicating about sexual activity as opposed to the number of other topics about which couples must communicate. Increased sexual disclosure generally is associated with higher relationship satisfaction, which is associated with higher sexual satisfaction (e.g., Cupach & Comstock, 1990; Lawrance & Byers, 1995). Sexual disclosure is related to relationship satisfaction and sexual satisfaction (MacNeil & Byers, 2005; MacNeil & Byers, 2009). Montesi and colleagues (2011) describe the specific importance of communicating about sex to couples' sexual and overall relationship quality. They primarily investigate the

idea that sexual communication, through improving sexual satisfaction, also improves overall relationship satisfaction (i.e., being able to tolerate these risky, uncomfortable conversations improves overall intimacy, and sexual satisfaction also improves relational satisfaction). They argue:

We believe that the private and sensitive nature of sexuality (e.g., preferences, dislikes, fantasies, etc.) makes communication about sexual matters qualitatively different from communication about non-sexual issues, which does not always require the same level of intimacy, transparency, and interpersonal risk. Although self-disclosure in the sexual realm requires one to tolerate being vulnerable and exposed to rejection and discomfort, being open in this area also carries the promise of great reward (Montesi et al., 2011, p. 593).

Sexual communication is thus uniquely important because of its inherent vulnerability and risk to personal, relational, and communal identities. In addition, sexual communication affects relational and sexual satisfaction, and sexual health.

Relational quality, sexual satisfaction, and sexual health. Sexual communication impacts relational and sexual outcomes. In a study of the content and outcomes of young adults' satisfying and unsatisfying conversations about sex, Faulkner and Lannutti (2010) identify that sexual conversations are often about decision-making, sexual pleasure, relationship issues, attitudes/values, past experiences, and sexual health. These themes occur in both satisfying and unsatisfying conversations, demonstrating that it may not be content of sexual communication as much as partner response that enhances or impedes relational and sexual outcomes within intimate relationships. Conversations about sex for young adults with their intimate partners that led to a conflict, dissolution, or avoidance result in feelings of dissatisfaction; conversations that led to relational cohesion, more pleasurable sex, and increased relational closeness led to feelings of

satisfaction (Faulker & Lannutti, 2010). Further, Byers (2005) longitudinally studied the association between relationship satisfaction and sexual satisfaction, which is typically said to be reciprocal. She found only limited evidence that changes in relationship satisfaction led to changes in sexual satisfaction or vice versa, but the two forms of satisfaction did concurrently change (Byers, 2005). The quality of intimate communication accounted for part of this relationship (Byers, 2005). Thus, the quality of intimate communication and its attendance to partner cohesion and closeness appears to improve both sexual and relational quality.

Much of the literature on sexual disclosure in predicting sexual and relational outcomes is grounded in the interpersonal exchange model of sexual satisfaction (Byers, 2011; Lawrence & Byers, 1995). Past research suggests that overall relational quality affects sexual satisfaction, however alternative lines of work suggest that sexual satisfaction may influence affective evaluation of the overall relationships (Byers, 2005; Byers, 2011). Relationship satisfaction is also more highly correlated with sexual satisfaction in earlier than later stages of relationships (Byers, 1999). Byers (2005) suggests that intimate communication explains a good bit of the concurrent relationship between relationship and sexual satisfaction.

MacNeil and Byers (2005) overview a dyadic assessment of sexual disclosure and sexual satisfaction within heterosexual dating couples and contend there are two possible pathways between sexual self-disclosure and sexual satisfaction: the expressive pathway and the instrumental pathway. The expressive pathway proposes that reciprocal sexual disclosure contributes to greater relationship satisfaction, which in turn leads to sexual

satisfaction (Cupach & Comstock, 1990, Lawrance & Byers, 1995). Relationship satisfaction may mediate the relationship between sexual disclosure and sexual satisfaction (Byers & Demmons, 1999), which may suggest that sexual disclosure increases sexual satisfaction because it increases relational satisfaction (MacNeil & Byers, 2005). The instrumental pathway suggests that one's own sexual self-disclosure increases a partner's understandings of sexual likes and dislikes, which then leads to a better balance of rewards/costs associated with sexual activity, thus increasing sexual satisfaction (MacNeil & Byers, 2005). For individuals in long-term relationships, greater disclosure of sexual likes and dislikes relates to greater sexual satisfaction beyond the contribution of nonsexual disclosure, suggesting that sexual disclosure provides a relational function independent of other forms of communication (MacNeil & Byers, 1997; Montesi et al., 2011). Byers and Demmons (1999) also found experiencing higher sexual rewards in dating relationships mediates the relationship between sexual disclosure and sexual satisfaction. Through the instrumental pathway, MacNeil and Byers (2005) argued that people who tell their partner about their sexual likes/dislikes are more sexually satisfied in part because their partner now knows those preferences and engages in more activities that are the types of activities the partner desires. MacNeil and Byers' (2005) results suggest that the instrumental pathway seems to hold up for men and women, but the expressive pathway only holds up completely for women. However, for men, the expressive pathway between disclosure generally (i.e., non-sexual topics) and sexual satisfaction seems to apply. For women, the path suggests that sexual and non-sexual disclosure leads to greater intimacy, which in turn leads to greater sexual

satisfaction (MacNeil & Byers, 2005). Thus, sexual disclosure appears to serve a more unique role in relational and sexual satisfaction for women than it does for men in this study (MacNeil & Byers, 2005). MacNeil and Byers continued to explicate the role of sexual disclosure in predicting sexual satisfaction of long-term heterosexual couples in testing the expressive compared to instrumental pathways in another study, where the instrumental pathway held up for both men and women (MacNeil & Byers, 2009). They found partial support for the expressive pathway, with one's own sexual self-disclosure relating to a partner non-sexual disclosure, and for a male partner's sexual satisfaction, as well as between one's own non-sexual disclosure and women's sexual satisfaction. This varies from their past findings (MacNeil & Byers, 2005), as in this study (MacNeil & Byers, 2009), the expressive pathway was only confirmed for women for non-sexual disclosure and sexual satisfaction.

In another study, open sexual communication explained variance in sexual and overall relationship satisfaction, but general communication effectiveness only accounted for relationship not sexual satisfaction (Montesi et al., 2011). The relationship between sexual communication and sexual satisfaction was stronger for couples who had been together longer (Montesi et al., 2011). In contrast to other lines of sexual disclosure research (Byers, 2011), Montesi and colleagues (2011) found that sexual satisfaction mediated the relationship between open sexual communication and overall satisfaction (instead of relationship satisfaction mediating the relationship between sexual communication and sexual satisfaction; see Byers & Demmons, 1999). Montesi and colleagues emphasize the unique importance of communicating about sex to explaining

relational outcomes:

Our results are consistent with the notion that the communicating openly about sexual matters has the power to enhance relationship satisfaction in a way that is not simply accounted for by the effectiveness of partners' communication about general relationship matters. On the other hand, when it comes to sexual satisfaction, open sexual communication between couples is critical, whereas effective general communication may not offer any unique gains over and above the contribution of open sexual communication. As such, open sexual communication is not merely a component of overall communication effectiveness but rather, makes a separate and unique contribution to couples' happiness with the sexual relationship. Among a number of potential explanations for this unique effect of open sexual communication on relationship satisfaction are that discussing sexual aspects of the relationship (1) requires more inherent vulnerability and exposure than communication about non-sexual topics, and (2) may lead more directly to changes and improvements in an important area of relationships—sexual satisfaction (2011, p. 604).

This conclusion offers a strong warrant for investigating how the vulnerability is managed in sexual communication negotiation specifically by accounting for why we feel that vulnerability beyond risk of rejection. Vulnerability in this sense at minimum presents a risk to personal identity. It may also risk relational identity (i.e., in cases in which the relationship itself feels threatened as a result of the sexual communication). Further, if the disclosure invokes a stigmatized practice, it may threaten aspects of communal identity as well. For example, if a woman discloses desiring a more dominant sexual role, that disclosure counters communal gender roles for women, and may thus threaten communal identity as well. However, it is the same features of the identity-laden nature of sexual communication that makes it risky and challenging that makes it uniquely powerful in positively impacting intimate relationships.

For instance, Cohen, Byers, and Walsh (2008) look at what factors influence the sexual relationships of lesbian women and gay men, specifically examining what

qualifies as sexual rewards and sexual costs for LG people. Rewards included emotional and physical intimacy, feeling accepted and supported, communication, and a positive self-view (i.e., when sex enhances personal identity) (Cohen et al., 2008). To a lesser extent, sexual rewards also included sexual compatibility, sharing, feeling desired, complementarity, and equality. They identified sexual costs to include feelings of vulnerability (to rejection/loss), and negative social and cultural attitudes toward same-sex relationships from society at large, and family, friends, and acquaintances. To a lesser extent, participants also noted loss of independence/personal freedom, communication problems, not being able to show affection in public, time constraints, the sexual script, discrepancies between sexual likes and dislikes, and concerns over STIs, and inequality (only for gay men) as sexual costs (Cohen et al., 2008). Relationship factors, sexual factors, and sexual minority factors comprise the sexual costs/reward clusters that emerged in this study that extend heterosexual sexual costs/rewards. Specifically, the factors related to being a sexual minority include issues related to the gay/lesbian community, one's own and their partner's acceptance and self-acceptance as an LG person, as well as their "outness," comfort in engaging in same-sex sexual activity, how similar partner views are on showing affection in public, and lack of social and cultural recognition (Cohen et al., 2008). These findings highlight the intergroup nature of gay and lesbian sexual relationships, since their LG group identity heavily influenced their communication in and conceptualization of their sexual relationships, as well as sources of rewards or costs within them.

Sprecher and Cate (2004) define sexual satisfaction as the degree to which an

individual is satisfied or happy with the sexual aspects of their relationship. Sprecher and Cate (2004) suggest that the relationship between overall relationship satisfaction and sexual satisfaction in the literature should be interpreted with caution, since they are not causal studies claiming direction. They also review the literature on sexual satisfaction and relationship stability and commitment. Sexual dissatisfaction is related to relational dissolution and divorce among married couples. A study by Sprecher (2002) found that sexual satisfaction was only a significant predictor of stability for men, in contrast to stability being predicted by relationship satisfaction for women. These findings are compatible with a CTI perspective because women are more likely to connect the overall relationship with their personal desires (Cupach & Metts, 1994). Hence, satisfaction with the overall relationship may reduce identity gaps more for women as long as the relational identity was strongly affirmed, whereas men are socialized to invest less of their personal identity in their relationships and the extent to which that identity is salient may moderate relational outcomes for that group.

Sprecher and Cate (2004) also identify sexual expression as a predictor of sexual satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, and relationship stability. Sexual communication increases satisfaction with both sexual and nonsexual aspects of the relationship, and the quality of sexual communication is positively associated with both sexual and nonsexual aspects of relationship satisfaction (Sprecher & Cate, 2004). Sprecher and Cate (2004) describe sexual disclosure as fulfilling one of the functions of sexual communication, which is for partners to be able to tell each other what they do and do not like concerning sexual interaction, which would increase the possibility for rewarding sexual interactions.

Early sexuality work by Masters and Johnson on subjective quality of sexual interaction suggest gay couples rate their sex higher than heterosexual couples, which they attribute to more extensive sexual disclosure of likes and dislikes *during* sexual interaction within same-sex relationships. The self-report tests by Byers (2011) that more directly link sexual self-disclosure with sexual satisfaction support the idea that sexual self-disclosure is positively related to sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction, as well as relationship commitment. However, self-report data comparing mixed-sex to same-sex relationships in terms of sexual communication and satisfaction did not differ dramatically by couple type, but, there are differences in sexual communication, desire, and satisfaction from different types of sexual activities by gender (Holmberg & Blair, 2009).

The extensive research agenda on sexual communication in relationships and sexual satisfaction (Byers, 2011) demonstrates that sexual communication affects relational and sexual satisfaction to some extent. In addition, sexual communication predicts changes in the overall relationship satisfaction above and beyond what might be contributed by overall relational communication (Montesti et al., 2011). However, the sexual communication literature contains several important limitations. First, the sexual communication literature is largely atheoretical and descriptive (Sprecher & Cate, 2004). Attention to theoretical explanations for sexual communication in addition to adding coherence for future research aids in the pragmatic function of sexual communication research. Understanding why something is happening, rather than just that it is happening, expands the utility of sexual communication research for intervention,

prevention, and education efforts. Second, existing theoretical explanations are rooted largely in a limited exchange perspective. Third, studies frequently find conflicting results, or fail to replicate findings across different samples as described throughout the previous section. Thus, in the present study, rather than approaching communication and relational outcomes through the lens of costs and rewards, I look to the ways that it affirms or challenges salient parts of our identity. In doing so, I integrate the assumptions of exchange models (i.e., identity gaps are costly, minimizing them is rewarding) and offer a more nuanced look at what *is* costly or rewarding. For example, simple receipt of the sex act an individual desires, or even more significantly, increased intimacy, are certainly types of rewards, but the extent to which that is salient for how that individual conceptualizes their relationship, or how it affirms an important part of their personal or communal identity, is a different class of reward. Further, the extensive program of research on sexual self-disclosure suggests a complicated relationship between disclosure and overall and sexual satisfaction (Byers, 2011) that necessitates a more sophisticated theoretical explanation. A systematic review of the variables impacting sexual satisfaction suggests a lack of theoretical models that combine how relational and intimacy variables as well as demographic factors and cultural backgrounds explain variation in sexual satisfaction (Sánchez-Fuentes, Santos-Iglesias, & Sierra, 2014). The intergroup perspective attends to the primary concerns of the exchange models, and extends that explanation for behavior by accounting for relational and identity risks and management that underlie the communication processes involved in sexual communication. Thus, because sexual communication implicates intergroup processes

where identity gaps are likely to emerge and mediate the relationship between sexual communication and relational quality and sexual outcomes, I pose the following hypotheses:

H2: Personal-enacted, personal-relational, and enacted-relational identity gaps mediate the relationship between sexual disclosure and relational satisfaction.

H3a: Personal-enacted, personal-relational, and enacted-relational identity gaps mediate the relationship between sexual disclosure and sexual satisfaction.

H3b: Personal-enacted, personal-relational, and enacted-relational identity gaps mediate the relationship between sexual disclosure and sexual communication satisfaction.

Sexual communication is also important to study because it affects sexual health.

Constructive sexual communication predicts behaviors that may prevent the spread of sexually transmitted infections (Emmer-Sommers & Crowell, 2002; Sneed, 2008). A majority of sex research in, fact, frames sexual activity as a risk behavior and sexual communication as a health protective behavior. In a meta-analysis of safer sex communication and condom use, Noar, Carlyle, and Cole (2006) found a moderate effect size across 55 studies for the impact of safer sex communication (specifically about condom use) on condom use, as well as talking about sexual history on condom use, and a smaller but still significant effect size on general safer sex communication on condom use. However, the longer people are together, the less likely they are to use condoms (Greene & Faulkner, 2005). For example, only about one fourth of people having penile penetrative vaginal sex use a condom (Herbenick et al., 2010; Manning, 2014).

Manning (2014) argues, “As both the medical and critical approaches to sexual health research suggest, relationships are a core part of understanding sexual practices”

(p. 269). He suggests that relationships, sexual activity, and health are linked, and although some work has investigated relating sexual and relational quality and communication about sex to health outcomes, the nature of these links is not fully understood (Manning, 2014). Framing sex in a relational context is productive from a health perspective as well. What sexual acts and sex communication do to perceptions of the relationship and quality of talk may impact both relational and health outcomes (Manning, 2014).

The relational focus is essential because although interpersonal communication is the biggest predictor of behaviors intended to protect against STIs, sexual health is also hard to talk about. Partners experience embarrassment navigating sexual health conversations and requests (Cline, Johnson, & Freeman, 1992). Health professionals recommend HIV prevention programs emphasize sexual safety negotiation skills, conflict resolution, and refusal skills (Wingood, Hunter-Gamble, & DiClemente, 1993). Recommendations include efforts to increase sexual negotiation and contraceptive decision-making skills among young adults (Stone & Ingham, 2002). Scripts impact contraceptive behaviors, especially in terms of internalized norms (Hynie et al., 1998). Thus, because sexual communication and identity gaps influence health behaviors (Jung, 2011, 2013; Wadsworth et al., 2008; and stress; Jung & Hecht, 2008; Jung, Hecht, & Wadsworth, 2007), identity gaps likely mediate the relationship between sexual communication and sexual health. I then pose the following hypothesis:

H4: Personal-enacted, personal-relational, and enacted-relational identity gaps mediate the relationship between sexual communication and sexual health.

To summarize, although I argue the proposed model would apply to normative (i.e., types of relationships that are both common and accepted) relationships, as sex is an intergroup arena regardless of the particular social identity group (Rubinsky & Cooke-Jackson, 2018), non-normative relationships layer additional identity concerns that are frequently ever-present in ways related to sexual activity that they may not be in normative relationships. For instance, the influences of gender and gender identity salience occur across all relationship types; yet, LGBTQ relationships may manage in- or out-group relations among assigned sex, gender identity, *and* sexual orientation. For example, lesbian women note the ability to talk to same-sex partners about menstruation through a shared bodily experience (Ussher & Perz, 2008), thus highlighting the intergroup nature of their shared sexual identity. The added layers of non-normative identity groups result in processes that can impede or enhance sexual communication. Sexual communication may differ by relational type, as different types of relationships have different needs.

In addition to the relationships themselves making a difference in the identity-laden experience of sexual communication by adding layers of group-orientation and identification to the interpersonal behavior, identity salience by group may further moderate these relationships. That is, because the experience of being a member of a non-normative relationship in some capacity, sexual talk is complicated at the onset in some way. How one manages, successfully or unsuccessfully, this complication affects the strength the relationship between sexual communication and identity gaps. I argue that the quantitative similarities among non-normative relational, sexual, and gender identities

will emerge in a comparative pattern of the intergroup nature of sexual communication such that the effects of sexual communication will be mediated by identity gaps in explaining variation in relational quality and sexual outcomes. In addition, the relationship between sexual communication and identity gaps is likely moderated by sexual and gender identity saliences. Qualitative differences among types of non-normative relationship may emerge because of varying communal orientations toward sex talk and sex identities. Further, discursive management of identity gaps may emerge strategically among identity-groups in which the collective has prescribed a response to a given sexual problem.

Thus, I propose the following hypothesized model presented in Figure 3. Labels in the hypothesized model include p-e (personal-enacted identity gap), p-r (personal-relational identity gap), e-r (enacted-relational identity gap), GIS (gender identity salience), SIS (sexual identity salience), RS (relational satisfaction), SS (sexual satisfaction) SC (sexual communication satisfaction), and SH (sexual health). The hypothesized model depicts personal-enacted, personal-relational, and enacted-relational identity gaps mediating the effects of sexual disclosure on relational satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, sexual communication satisfaction, and sexual health. Sexual disclosure is indicated by the dimensions of the revised sexual self-disclosure scale, which include (1) sexual behaviors, (2) sexual sensations, (3) sexual fantasies, (4) sexual preferences, (5) meaning of sex, (6) sexual accountability, (7) distressing sex, (8) sexual dishonesty, (9) sexual delay preferences, (10) pregnancy, (11) health, (12) sexual morality, (13) sexual satisfaction, (14) sexual guilt, (15) sexual calmness, (16) sexual depression, (17) sexual

jealousy, and (18) sexual anxiety. In addition, the model depicts sexual and gender identity saliences moderating the path between sexual disclosure and personal-enacted, personal-relational, and enacted-relational identity gaps. In the next chapter, I describe the methods employed in the present study to address the research question and test the hypotheses.

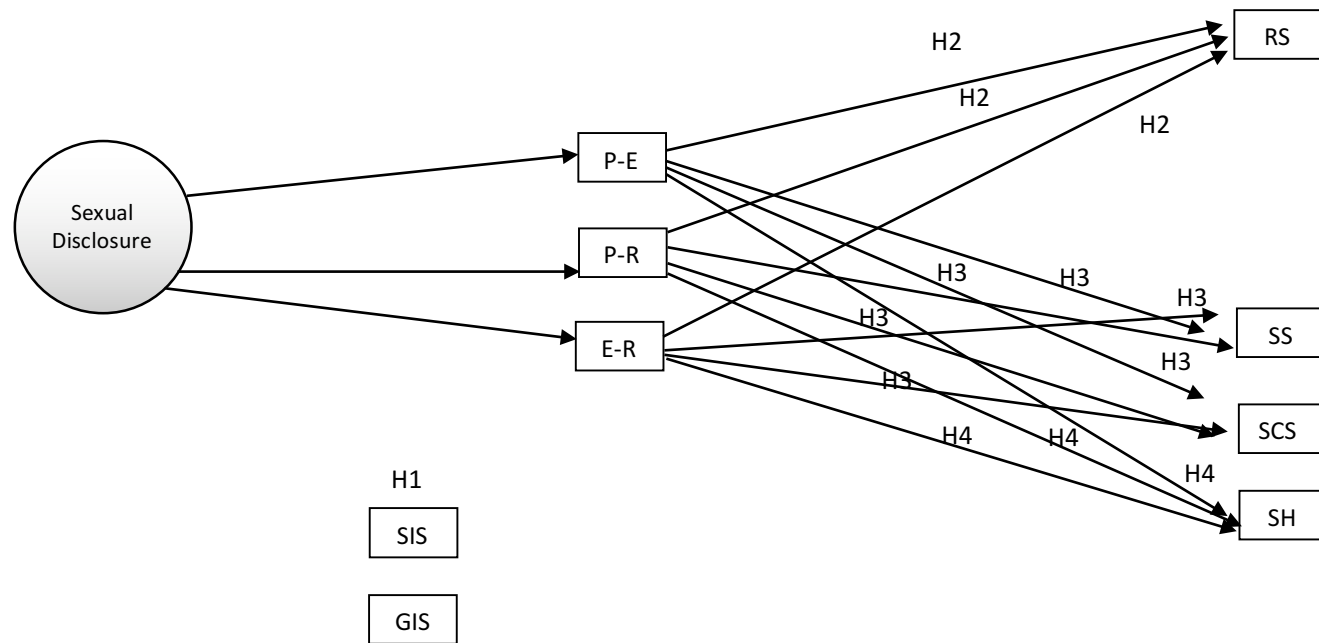


Figure 3: Hypothesized Model

Acronyms in the model include: P-E (personal-enacted identity gaps), P-R (personal-relational identity gaps), E-R (enacted-relational identity gaps), SIS (sexual identity salience), GIS (gender identity salience), RS (relationship satisfaction), SS (sexual satisfaction), SCS (sexual communication satisfaction), and SH (sexual health).

Chapter 3: Method

Layering theories, methods, and ways of knowing characterizes CTI. CTI serves as both a predictive and sensitizing theory, with multiple calls for mixed methods research (Hecht, 1993; Jung & Hecht, 2008). Hecht (1993) argued that the tendency to separate realms of knowledge in the name of theoretical consistency often results in incomplete ways of understanding communication. Thus, layering theories, methods, and ways of knowing also characterizes CTI. Therefore, a mixed method's approach both best answers the hypotheses and research question posed in the previous chapter and appropriately adheres to a CTI framework. This section will describe the recruitment process and justification, questionnaire procedures, and data analysis.

Recruitment Process and Justification

First, I will describe criteria for participation in the present study, which included individuals in non-normative relationships at least one year in length who were at least 18 years old, and were from the United States. As I argued in the Chapter 2, while sex is most generally an intergroup arena (Rubinsky & Cooke-Jackson, 2018), the identities of individuals in non-normative relationships may be challenged or affirmed in ways that members of normative relationships either do not face in their sexual communication or face with different consequences (e.g., Cohen et al., 2008; Kattari, 2015; Kosenko, 2011a, 2011b; Mohr & Daly, 2008; Rubinsky & Cooke-Jackson, 2016; Rubinsky & Hosek, 2018, among others). Thus, the population of interest to the present study are individuals in non-normative relationships. Presently, a number of types of relationships may be considered non-normative, as reviewed in the last chapter (e.g., LGBTQ

relationships, relationships with individuals who are transgender or gender non-conforming, individuals in BDSM relationships). Because the characteristic under investigation is the perception of normativity to the individual, as identity salience will be assessed at the individual level, the present study employs Emmer-Sommers' (2004) definition of non-normative relationship, as a relationship that is less prevalent and/or less accepted. Thus, to be eligible to participate in the present study, participants identified that they believe their relationship is "less common and/or less accepted than other kinds of relationships." Because this definition is open to personal interpretation, it may include relational types that are less represented in the non-normative relationship literature (e.g., interfaith relationships, relationships with substantial age differences). Ultimately, a more inclusive approach focuses on the individual perception of normativity. Since what is normative changes with time and geographic location (Honeycutt & Cantrill, 2001; Yanowitz, 2006), focusing recruitment criteria on the individual's perception of their relationship's normativity will better address attention to stigma and identity salience, rather than the specific relational type. However, as I will describe next, recruitment will target relational types that are more common in the recent non-normative relationship literature (i.e., LGBTQ relationships, polyamorous relationships, and interracial relationships).

The recruitment script also specifies relational length. Because sexual communication differs in short-term and long-term relationships and the consequences of sexual communication vary by relational length (Fielder & Carey, 2010; MacNeil & Byers, 2009; Noland, 2010), specifying a relational length will increase the utility of the

data collected. The present study focuses on long-term relationships, as long-term relationships are less likely to engage in sexual safety behaviors (Greene & Faulkner, 2005), and experience an increased face-threat due to the severity of relational risk increasing when the relationship is one in which commitment is valued (Cupach & Metts, 1994; Noland, 2010). Thus, recruitment was limited to individuals in long-term relationships, defined as having been with at least one relational partner for at least three months. For individuals who are in multiple relationships, instructions were asked to focus on one specific relationship that otherwise meets recruitment criteria (i.e., at least three months in length, non-normative), for coherence, when addressing scale questions, and refer to multiple partners with “Partner A,” “Partner B,” and so on when addressing open-ended questions to preserve anonymity.

Lastly, participants needed to be at least 18 years of age. The present study is about sexual communication, and sexual behavior of minors in addition to being qualitatively different given different life experiences, is illegal in many parts of the country (Mosher, Chandra, & Jones, 2005), and thus addressing a different aspect of the identity-laden nature of sexual communication. Therefore, participants needed to be at least 18 years of age. There was no maximum age placed on the present study because relationships with substantial age differences may be considered non-normative. Thus, recruitment criteria include perception of relational non-normativity (i.e., the participant must believe their relationship type is uncommon and/or unaccepted), a relational length of at least one year, and the participant must be at least 18 years old.

To determine a needed number of participants for the hypothesized model, a power analysis was conducted. A power analysis to detect a medium effect size with a statistical power of .80 (Cohen, 1992) and an alpha level of .05 suggests the current hypothesized model recommends a sample size of 947 participants to detect an effect, although only 288 as a minimum sample size for the model structure. The less conservative approach to SEM of 20 participants per parameter (Jackson, 2011), would indicate a required sample size of approximately 660 participants. The present study obtained 689 participants, thus enough participants to adequately test the proposed model.

Study sample. Participants ($n = 689$) in the present study included individuals who identified that they considered their intimate relationship of at least three months in length to be less common or less accepted than other kinds of relationships. Relational lengths ranged from three months to 684 months (57 years), with the average length of approximately three years ($M = 37.52$, $SD = 54.82$). Participants ranged in age from 18 to 75 ($M = 26.55$, $SD = 8.97$). The majority of the participants were white, cisgender identified and female, with approximately a quarter identifying as a cisgender man and approximately a quarter identifying broadly under the transgender, non-binary, and gender non-conforming umbrellas. Approximately half of the participants identified under the LGBQ umbrella, with the remainder identifying as heterosexual. Approximately a quarter of the participants identified as polyamorous, and approximately a quarter identified as a member of the BDSM community. A breakdown of the demographic characteristics in terms of race, religion, sexual orientation, assigned sex,

gender identity, and relationship characteristics is described in Table 1. Because demographic questions were placed on the last page of the questionnaire to minimize priming effects, there is a higher number of total participants than those who provided demographic information.

Table 1: Sample Demographic Characteristics

	N	Percent
Race		
White/Caucasian	420	82.8%
Black or African American	19	3.7%
Asian or Pacific Islander	21	4.1%
American Indian	2	.4%
Hispanic or Latinx	11	2.2%
Two or more races	26	5.1%
Racial identity outside of provided categorization*	8	1.6%
Religion		
Protestant	54	10.7%
Catholic	87	17.3%
Jewish	6	1.2%
Muslim	4	.8%
Hindu	5	1%
Buddhist	11	2.2%
Atheist	123	24.4%
Agnostic	106	21%
Religious identity outside of provided categorization	108	21.4%
Assigned Sex		
Female	358	71%
Male	142	28.2%
Nonbinary or outside of the provided categorization	3	.3%
Gender Identity		
Cisgender woman	272	55.9%
Transgender woman	17	3.5%
Cisgender man	104	21.4%
Transgender man	17	3.5%
Genderqueer	15	3.1%
Genderfluid	8	1.6%
Nonbinary	22	4.5%
Gender identity outside of the provided categorization	32	6.6%

Table 1 Continued

Sexual Orientation		
Gay	22	4.1%
Lesbian	35	6.6%
Bisexual	108	20.3%
Pansexual	61	11.5%
Asexual spectrum	20	3.8%
Straight or heterosexual	247	46.4%
Sexual orientation outside of provided categorization	39	7.3%
Cohabitation		
Living with their partner	226	44.6%
Not living with their partner	281	55.4%
Distance		
Long distance relationship	135	26.6%
Geographically close relationship	372	73.4%
Polyamory		
Identifies as polyamorous	111	22%
Does not identify as polyamorous	393	78%
BDSM		
Identifies as a member of the BDSM community	190	37.5%
Does not identify as a member of the BDSM community	316	62.5%

*Individuals wrote-in racial identities ($n=1$ for each): American, Ashkenazi, Asian/White, Central European, Jewish, South Asian, White and Jewish.

Note: Demographic questions were placed on the last page of the questionnaire to minimize priming effects for various social identity groups. As a result, the total participant number ($n=689$) is higher than the total number of individuals who provided demographic information.

Questionnaire Procedures

Survey method design and questionnaire administration justification. A

survey method was appropriate to address all hypotheses and the research question as well as to research a geographically diverse population and preserve anonymity (Gosling, Vazire, Srivastava, & John, 2004). An online survey, hosted on Qualtrics.com, was utilized in the present study. The survey method allowed for me to ask both open-ended questions to address the qualitative research question, and include scale items to test the

hypothesized model. The survey was online, rather than paper-and-pencil, to reach a wider audience and better preserve anonymity, especially when asking sensitive questions about sexual activity and stigmatized identities (Gosling et al., 2004).

Informed consent procedure. Prior to completing the online survey, participants were taken to an informed consent page once approved by our Institutional Review Board. Informed consent explained participants' rights as participants, and include contact information for me, my advisor, and the university's IRB contact. The questionnaire was anonymous, but asked sensitive questions about sex and identity.

Funding and anonymity preservation. The present study received \$750 in funding from the Ohio University School of Communication Studies Research and Creative Activity Incentive Pool. Seventy-five participants, randomly chosen using a random number generator, were offered \$10 Amazon giftcards for participating in the research. To preserve anonymity, a separate Qualtrics.com link collected identifying information (i.e., names, mailing addresses, and email addresses) to send gift card winners their compensation. Because the link recorded information in a separate survey, participant responses were not associated with any identifying information at any stage in the research process.

Questionnaire format and measures. The questionnaire included five sections outlined in Table 2 and the open-ended questions described in Table 3. Unless noted otherwise, all scale response formats are measured on a seven-point, Likert-type scale (one=lowest levels of the construct; seven=highest levels of the construct) after any reverse coding. Individuals with multiple partners were asked to think of one partner

(with whom their relationship otherwise meets the recruitment criteria) throughout their participation for quantitative measures. In order to minimize priming effects due to social identity groups, demographic questions were placed on the last page of the questionnaire (Goodwin & Goodwin, 2016). A copy of the questionnaire is located in the Appendix.

Table 2: Summary of Questionnaire Sections

Section Label	Measure(s)
I: Demographics and Identity Saliency	
<i>Demographics</i>	Age, length of relationship(s), cohabitation status, gender, assigned sex at birth, sexual orientation, religion, race/ethnicity, polyamorous and BDSM group members
<i>Identity Saliency</i>	Gender and sexual identity saliency
II: Sexual disclosure	
	Revised Sexual Self-Disclosure Scale 20 dimensions: Sexual behaviors, sexual sensations, sexual fantasies, sexual preferences, meanings of sex, sexual accountability, distressing sex, sexual dishonesty, sexual delay preferences, sexual safety, sexual guilt, sexual calmness, sexual depression, sexual jealousy, sexual apathy, sexual anxiety, sexual happiness, sexual fear, sexual anger
III. Identity gaps	
	Personal-relational identity gap Personal-enacted identity gap Enacted-relational identity gap
IV. Outcomes	
<i>Relational quality</i>	Relational satisfaction
<i>Sexual Outcomes</i>	Sexual satisfaction Sexual communication satisfaction

Table 2 Continued

<i>Sexual Health</i>	Health protective sexual communication behavior
V. Open-Ended Questions	Open-ended questions

Table 3: Open-Ended Questions

Research Question	Questionnaire Question(s)
RQ1: Strategies for managing identity gaps in sexual communication	<p>An “identity gap” is a feeling like you act differently than you really feel, or that other people treat you differently than you really feel, or that you act, or others treat you, in a way that is different with some important aspect of your identity.</p> <p>Can you describe an instance where you think you have experienced an identity gap within or as a result of sexual activity or sexual communication with your partner?</p> <p>How, if at all, did you address this tension with your partner?</p> <p>What, if anything, did you do as a result of this feeling of tension?</p>

Sexual disclosure. In past literature, sexual communication has broadly included what individuals do in talk with their sexual partners during sex (MacNeil & Byers, 2005; Sprecher & Cate, 2004), sexual activity itself (Manning, 2014), sexual health discussions (Catania, 2011; Noar et al, 2006; Sneed, 2008), and discussion or disclosure about sex outside of sexual activity (Byers, 2011). In quantitative literature, sexual communication

is most often operationalized as sexual self-disclosure. The Revised Sexual Self-Disclosure Scale (SSDS-R) consists initially of 72-items measuring people's willingness to discuss the following sexual topics with an intimate partner: Sexual behaviors, sexual sensations, sexual fantasies, sexual preferences, meaning of sex, sexual accountability, distressing sex, sexual dishonesty, sexual delay preferences, abortion and pregnancy, homosexuality, rape, AIDS, sexual morality, sexual satisfaction, sexual guilt, sexual calmness, sexual depression, sexual jealousy, sexual apathy, sexual anxiety, sexual happiness (Snell, Belk, Papini, & Clark, 1989). The response format ranges from (1) "I am not at all willing to discuss this topic with my partner" to (5) "I am totally willing to discuss this topic with my partner." Higher scores indicate a higher willingness to sexually self-disclose. The average reliability of fairly extensive testing for this measure is a Cronbach alpha of .81 (scores have ranged from .59 to .91; Snell, 2011). This version of the survey focuses only on communication with an intimate partner (compared to previous versions that extended to communication about sex with parents and friends as well as intimate partners). Participants are instructed to respond thinking about the extent to which they have discussed each topic about sexuality with their intimate partner.

The present study employed the SSDS-R with minor adaptations (i.e., removing questions pertaining to homosexuality due to overlap with aspects of identity salience). The present study's version of the SSDS-R included 20 sub-scales for sexual disclosure. Sexual behaviors consist of three items (e.g., "My past sexual experience") and was reliable, with a Cronbach's alpha of .805 ($M = 3.97$, $SD = 1.06$). Sexual sensations consist of three items (e.g., "The kinds of touching that sexually arouse me") and was

reliable, Cronbach's alpha = .90 ($M = 4.04$, $SD = 1.04$). Sexual fantasies consist of three items (e.g., "My private sexual fantasies"), and was reliable, Cronbach's alpha = .90 ($M = 3.46$, $SD = 1.26$). Sexual preferences also consist of three items (e.g., "The sexual preferences that I have") and was reliable, Cronbach's alpha = .87 ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 1.08$). Meanings of sex consist of three items ("What sex in an intimate relationship means to me"), and was reliable, Cronbach's alpha = .86 ($M = 3.96$, $SD = 1.12$). Attitudes toward sexual accountability consists of three items (e.g., "My private beliefs about sexual responsibility"), and was reliable, Cronbach's alpha = .86 ($M = 3.86$, $SD = 1.21$). Distressing sexual experiences consists of three items (e.g., "Times when sex was distressing for me"), and was reliable, Cronbach's alpha = .81 ($M = 3.35$, $SD = 1.30$). Sexual dishonesty consists of three items (e.g., "The times I have pretended to enjoy sex"), and was reliable, Cronbach's alpha = .74 ($M = 3.14$, $SD = 1.26$). Sexual delay preferences consist of three items (e.g., "Times when I prefer to refrain from sexual activity"), and was reliable, Cronbach's alpha = .88 ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 1.28$). Safer sex beliefs, an adaptation from the previous "AIDS beliefs" in the SSDS-R, consist of two items (e.g., "My beliefs about safe sex"), and was reliable, Cronbach's alpha = .83 ($M = 4.11$, $SD = 1.17$). Sexual satisfaction consists of three items (e.g., "How satisfied I feel about the sexual aspects of my life") was reliable, Cronbach's alpha = .88 ($M = 3.83$, $SD = 1.18$). Sexual guilt consists of three items (e.g., "How guilty I feel about the sexual aspects of my life"), and was reliable, Cronbach's alpha = .85 ($M = 2.82$, $SD = 1.18$). Sexual calmness consists of three items (e.g., "How calm I feel about the sexual aspects of my life"), and was reliable, Cronbach's alpha = .87 ($M = .87$, $SD = 1.37$). Sexual

depression consists of three items (e.g., “How depressed I feel about the sexual aspects of my life), and was reliable, Cronbach’s alpha = .90 ($M = 2.62$, $SD = 1.47$). Sexual jealousy consists of three items (e.g., “How jealous I feel about the sexual aspects of my life”), was reliable, Cronbach’s alpha = .83 ($M = 2.72$, $SD = 1.42$). Sexual apathy consists of three items (e.g., “How apathetic I feel about the sexual aspects of my life”), and was reliable, Cronbach’s alpha = .89 ($M = 2.55$, $SD = 1.45$). Sexual anxiety consists of three items (e.g., “How anxious I feel about the sexual aspects of my life”), and was reliable, Cronbach’s alpha = .87 ($M = 2.80$, $SD = 1.41$). Sexual happiness consists of three items (e.g., “How cheerful I feel about the sexual aspects of my life”), and was reliable, Cronbach’s alpha = .91 ($M = 3.72$, $SD = 1.29$). Sexual anger consists of three items (e.g., “How mad I feel about the sexual aspects of my life”) and was reliable, Cronbach’s alpha = .93 ($M = 2.49$, $SD = 1.53$). Sexual fear consists of three items (e.g., “How fearful I feel about the sexual aspects of my life”), was reliable, Cronbach’s alpha = .92 ($M = 2.69$, $SD = 1.50$). Sexual disclosure is considered a latent variable in the present study, with each dimension indicating the associated aspect of sexual disclosure. Results of the confirmatory factor analysis for sexual disclosure as a latent variable are presented in Chapter 4.

Identity gaps. Kam and Hecht (2009) examined whether or not personal-enacted, personal-relational, and enacted-relational identity gaps should be conceptualized as indicators of a singular (latent) identity gap construct. Through a series of CFAs, Kam and Hecht (2009) concluded that each identity gap is a conceptually, operationally, and empirically distinct construct. Following their recommendation, I initially treat each

identity gap as its own construct, rather than as indicators of a larger identity gap latent variable.

Personal-enacted identity gaps. Personal-enacted identity gaps are discrepancies between the personal frame of identity in CTI (i.e., sense of self), and the enacted frame of identity (i.e., the self in communication) (Jung & Hecht, 2004, 2008). There is a short (six-items with four reverse coded-item) and long (11-item scale with five reverse-coded items) version of the scale. Both are valid and reliable, but the short-version is more parsimonious and has been validated more frequently (Jung, 2011, 2013; Jung & Hecht, 2008; Jung et al., 2007). Previous reliabilities include Cronbach's alphas of .81 (Jung, Hecht, & Wadsworth, 2007), .79 (Jung & Hecht, 2008), .81 (Wadsworth, Jung, & Hecht, 2008), and .81 (Jung, 2011). Example items include, "I feel there are differences between the 'real me' and the impressions I give my partner," and "I often hide some aspects of myself in communication with my partner." Identity gaps are not considered latent variables (Kam & Hecht, 2009). Identity gaps are measured on 5-item scales (1=strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree), with larger scores representing larger identity gaps. In the present study, personal-enacted identity gaps were reliable, Cronbach's alpha = .84 ($M = 1.77$, $SD = .76$).

Personal-relational identity gaps. Personal-relational identity gaps are discrepancies between the personal frame of identity in CTI and the ascribed relational layer (Jung & Hecht, 2004, 2008). Like personal-enacted identity gaps, there is a long (11-items, five reverse-coded items) and short version (seven-items, 5 reverse-coded items) of this scale. Again, both long and short versions appear reliable and valid, but the

short-version has been validated more frequently and is more parsimonious, thus it will be employed in the present study. Previous reliabilities for the short-version scale include Cronbach alphas of .80 (Wadsworth et al., 2008) and .85 (Jung, 2013). Example items include, “I feel there are differences between who I think I am and who my partner thinks I am,” and “I feel that my partner stereotypes me.” Identity gaps are measured on 5-item scales (1=strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree), with larger scores representing larger identity gaps. In the present study, personal-relational identity gaps were reliable, with a Cronbach’s alpha of .82 ($M = 2.03$, $SD = .71$).

Enacted-relational identity gaps. Although validated less frequently than personal-enacted and personal-relational identity gaps, there have been efforts to improve the operationalization of enacted-relational identity gaps with success (Kam & Hecht, 2009; Jung, 2011, 2013). Enacted-relational identity gaps describe discrepancies between ascribed relational identity and the self in communication (Jung, 2011). Enacted-relational identity gaps are measured with a six-item scale, with two items reverse-coded. Previous reliabilities for enacted-relational identity gaps include Cronbach’s alphas of .82 (Jung, 2013). Example questions include, “I often feel that my partner portrays me not based on the information I provide, but instead, on the information from other sources,” and “I often wonder why my partner has different images of me from what I tried to give them.” Identity gaps are measured on 5-item scales (1=strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree), with larger scores representing larger identity gaps. In the present study, enacted-relational identity gaps were reliable, with a Cronbach’s alpha of .85 ($M = 1.97$, $SD = .85$).

Identity salience. Identity salience was evaluated with Hosek (2011)'s adaptation of the Garstka, Branscombe, and Hummert, (1997) Age Group Identification (AGIS) Scale. It is considered separately for each dimension of identity (i.e., gender and sexual identity). Two-items for each dimension of identity ask participants on a 7-point Likert type scale how important that identity is to who they are, and if that identity is central to who they are. For example, participants are instructed to consider for their gender identity to describe their agreement with the statements, "My gender is an important part of who I am," and "My gender is central to who I am." For gender identity salience, Cronbach's alpha = .83 ($M = 5.25$, $SD = 1.52$). For sexual identity salience, Cronbach's alpha = .84 ($M = 5.26$, $SD = 1.51$).

Relational satisfaction. Relational satisfaction was measured with Byers and Lawrence's (1998) Global Measure of Relational Satisfaction (GMRS). This scale using a seven-point bipolar scale, to assess overall satisfaction with the relationship. Participants respond to the question, "In general, how would you describe your **overall** relationship with your partner?" (emphasis in original measure). Bipolar adjectives include good-bad, pleasant-unpleasant, positive-negative, satisfying-unsatisfying, valuable-worthless. After reverse-coding, higher scores indicate higher relational satisfaction. Higher scores reflect greater relationship satisfaction. Previous reliabilities include a Cronbach's alpha of .93 (Byers & Demmons, 1999). Relational satisfaction is positioned as an indicator for the latent variable of relational quality in the present study. Although a number of scales for relationship satisfaction exist, the GMRS is used most frequently in the sexual communication scholarship and is the most parsimonious (Byers,

2011). In the present study, relational satisfaction was reliable, with Cronbach's alpha = .929 ($M = 6.26$, $SD = 1.04$).

Sexual satisfaction. Sexual satisfaction was measured with the New Sexual Satisfaction Scale Short Form (NSSS-S; Štulhofer, Buško, & Landripet, 2010; Štulhofer et al., 2007), which is a 12-item, composite measure of sexual satisfaction. Although there are a number of measures for sexual satisfaction, which vary throughout the sexual communication literature (e.g., Byers, 2011; Montesi et al., 2011), the NSSS-S attends to multiple dimensions of sexual satisfaction, and is thus more comprehensive (Štulhofer, Buško, & Brouillard, 2011). In addition, unlike previous iterations, this measure has been validated across multiple cultures and is not gender or sexual orientation specific (Štulhofer et al., 2011). It includes dimensions of sexual sensations, sexual presence and awareness, sexual exchange, emotional connection and closeness, and satisfaction with sexual activities. Previous reliabilities range from Cronbach alphas of .72 to .84 (Štulhofer et al., 2011). The response format ranges from (1) not at all satisfied to (5) extremely satisfied, with higher scores reflecting greater sexual satisfaction. Participants are instructed to think about their sex life during the last month with their current partner when describing their satisfaction with each item. Sample items include, "My focus/concentration on sexual activity," and "The way I sexually react to my partner." For the present study, sexual satisfaction was reliable, Cronbach's alpha = .91 ($M = 3.80$, $SD = .86$).

Sexual communication satisfaction. The Global Measure of Sexual Communication Satisfaction measures the overall satisfaction with *sexual communication*

within a relationship (Byers & Demmons, 1999). It follows the same seven-point bipolar scale as Byers and Lawrence (1998)'s Global Measure of Relational Satisfaction. Participants are asked to consider all the sexual activities about which they and their partner might communicate, and to address the question "Overall, how would you describe your sexual communication in your relationship with your partner?" Bipolar adjectives include good-bad, pleasant-unpleasant, positive-negative, satisfying-unsatisfying, valuable-worthless. After reverse-coding, higher scores indicate more sexual communication satisfaction. Previous reliabilities include a Cronbach's alpha of .88 (Byers & Demmons, 1999). In the present study, sexual communication satisfaction was reliable, Cronbach's alpha = .95 ($M = 5.97$, $SD = 1.32$).

Sexual health. Sexual health is assessed with the Health Protective Sexual Communication Scale (Catania, 2011), which measures how individuals engage health protective communication and behaviors with their partners. It is a 10-item, 4-point response scale. This scale is intended to assess how often participants talk about health protective topics while interacting with a sexual partner, specifically related to safer sex, sexual histories, and contraceptive use (Catania, 2011). Previous reliabilities include a Cronbach's alpha of .84 (Catania, 2011). The original scale specifies between new and existing partners, but that language was removed for the current adaption, as only long-term partners are considered in the present study. Options for questions that may not be relevant to the way a given participant engages in sex (i.e., condom use may not be a relevant sexual safety behavior in all relationships), are considered by adding a "N/A" option for each question. Additional sexual safety behaviors (i.e., use of dental dams, sex

toy cleaning) are added as well. The response format ranges from (1) “never” – (4) “Always.” Sample questions include “I asked my partner about the number of past partners they had,” and “I asked my partner how they felt about condoms before we had intercourse.” Higher scores reflect greater sexual health behaviors and communication. Health protective sexual communication was reliable in the present study, with a Cronbach’s alpha of .849 ($M = 3.40$, $SD = 1.12$).

Data Analysis

Testing the mediating role of identity gaps. The proposed, hypothesized model (Figure 3) is tested using structural equation modeling (SEM) with IBM SPSS AMOS. Structural equation modeling is an analytic technique to describe directional paths relating latent and measured variables (Meyers, Gamst, & Guarino, 2017). Because the hypothesized model includes one latent variable (i.e., *sexual disclosure* as indicated by the dimensions of the revised sexual self-disclosure scale), a confirmatory factor analysis will also be necessary to assess the extent to which those measured variables indicate the hypothesized latent variables and test the measurement model (Meyers et al., 2017). Standard model fit indices (Iacobucci, 2010) will be used to assess and revise the hypothesized model, presented in the next chapter.

Assessing discursive management of identity gaps. To address the open-ended research question, I engage in qualitative coding. Specifically, I employ pattern-coding (Saldaña, 2015) and typographic analysis (Manning, 2013). First order coding identifies broad themes within the data using the participants’ language. Pattern coding is a second-order coding method that attempts to identify parsimonious units of analysis from the

first-order codes that can be assigned a numeric descriptor. Pattern-coding is considered an appropriate method to analyze open-ended survey data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013), and is well-suited for mixed-methods research or research to be paired with quantitative data (Saldaña, 2015). Typographic analysis is also a second-order data analytic method well suited to generating classificatory systems of communication behaviors (Manning, 2013). Although there are a number of qualitative data analysis procedures that may be suitable to open-ended survey data, given the high volume of participants in the present study, pattern-coding and typographic analysis allows me to speak to broad patterns in the data, rather than in-depth themes that may be better suited to other qualitative methodologies like interviewing. Because the goal of the present study is to describe the mediating role of identity gaps in explaining the impact of sexual communication on relational and sexual outcomes, as well as to identify how individuals discursively cope with those identity gaps, in-depth analysis of particular cases is outside the scope of the present project. Instead, the goal is to assess an overall pattern of the nature of cognitive, affective, and behavioral discrepancies within sexual communication practices for individuals in non-normative relationships. Pattern-coding and typographic analysis both can attend to both nuances that may escape quantitative measures through participant excerpts and allowance for exploration of different kinds of non-normative relationships (e.g., how might identity gaps emerge differently in asexual compared to polyamorous relationships despite quantitative similarities in accounting for variance in relational or overall wellbeing?), as well as a description of broader patterns for discursively managing identity gaps (e.g., Wagner et al. [2016]’s hyper engagement

strategy for managing identity gaps in transgender identity management). Results of the qualitative analysis are presented in Chapter 5.

In summary, in this chapter I described the methodology employed in the present study. Specifically, I described the quantitative and qualitative procedures utilized to address my research question and test my hypotheses, including descriptions of the measures and questionnaire design. In addition, I described the procedures employed in recruitment and the characteristics of my sample. In the next chapter, I test the hypotheses posed in Chapter 2 using structural equation modeling.

Chapter 4: Confirmatory Factor Analysis & Structural Equation Model

This study examines the way that aspects of identity gaps mediate and social identity saliencies moderate the relationships between sexual communication input variables and relational, sexual, and sexual health outcome variables. In addition, this study examines how individuals in non-normative relationships discursively manage or attempt to mitigate emergent identity gaps. I address these issues in two parts. For coherence, I separate the results of this study into two chapters. In the current chapter, I present the results of a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to test the measurement model, and then modify and test the hypothesized model using Structural Equation Modeling in SPSS AMOS. Quantitative results are presented in this chapter. In Chapter 5, I explore the open-ended survey data and address the research questions regarding communicative management of identity gaps. First, I discuss the results of my confirmatory factor analysis.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results

Purpose of confirmatory factor analysis in SEM. Confirmatory factor analysis is a statistical technique that tests a hypothesized factor structure (Meyers et al., 2011). Confirmatory analysis is often embedded in structural equation modeling when the goal is to predictively relate one or more latent variables to other latent variables (Meyers et al., 2011). A confirmatory factor analysis allows us to test a measurement model that assesses the quality of the factors based on the measured data specified in the model (Meyers et al., 2011; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). The measurement model refers to the relationships between observed measures (e.g., indicators) and the latent variables or

factors (Brown & Moore, 2012). Although there are other kinds of factor analysis (e.g., exploratory factor analysis), measurement model testing through confirmatory factor analysis establishes a more parsimonious explanation of the covariation among indicators and models the nature of relationships among unique indicator variances (Brown & Moore, 2012). A good fitting measurement model does not necessarily indicate that the structural model will perform well, but a poor fitting measurement model can cause the structural model to poorly perform (Meyers et al., 2011; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).

In structural equation modeling, confirmatory factor analysis is a necessary step to test the proposed measurement model, as well as to provide evidence of convergent and discriminant validity (Brown & Moore, 2012). Convergent validity states that different indicators of theoretically similar constructs should be strongly interrelated, and discriminant validity should show that indicators of theoretically separate constructs are not closely related (Brown & Moore, 2012; Meyers et al., 2011). Confirmatory factor analyses should be run as a precursor to testing a structural model, because structural equation modeling consists of both the measurement model, which is tested through a confirmatory factor analysis, and the structural model that specifies the directional relationships among factors (Brown & Moore, 2012). In structural equation modeling, the confirmatory factor analysis is not the central analysis, however, an acceptable measurement model is a necessary precursor to testing and interpreting the estimation of the structural relationships in the model (Brown & Moore, 2012).

A number of problems can occur in testing the measurement model (Brown & Moore, 2012). Upon an initially poor fitting model, it is common to respecify the

measurement model (Meyers et al., 2011). However, these changes must be made in consistency with the pre-specified theoretical framework (Brown & Moore, 2012; Meyers et al., 2011). Thus, as I tested my measurement model described in the next section, I respecified in order to improve the fit of the model. However, all respecifications were consistent with the theoretical framework laid out in Chapter 2 and driven by theory.

Model Identification

Before determining if the hypothesized model for the latent variable of sexual disclosure fits the collected data, a necessary condition is that the model must be over-identified (Bollen, 1989; Meyers et al., 2011). Overidentification entails the model having a positive value for its degrees of freedom (Meyers et al., 2011). To calculate this, I subtracted the number of unknown parameters from the number of known parameters (Bentler & Chou, 1987; Meyers et al., 2011). Following the formula set out by Raykov and Marcoulides (2006), the formula to assess the number of known elements is as follows: $(V*(V+1)/2)$ where V is equal to the total number of measured or indicator variables in the analysis (Meyers et al., 2011; Raykov & Marcoulides, 2006).

In the present study, the latent variable of sexual disclosure was hypothesized to include 20 indicator variables as dimensions of an established scale (Snell et al., 1989): sexual anger disclosure, sexual fear disclosure, sexual happiness disclosure, sexual anxiety disclosure, sexual jealousy disclosure, sexual fantasies disclosure, sexual behavior disclosure, sexual depression disclosure, sexual sensations disclosure, sexual preferences disclosure, meanings of sex disclosure, attitudes toward sexual accountability

disclosure, distressing sexual experiences disclosure, sexual dishonesty disclosure, sexual apathy disclosure, sexual delay preferences disclosure, sexual safety disclosure, sexual satisfaction disclosure, sexual guilt disclosure, and sexual calmness disclosure (Snell et al., 1989). Each of these dimensions was measured in the present study and was found to be reliable (reliabilities presented in Chapter 3). In addition, three identity gaps were measured, four outcome variables (i.e., relational satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, sexual communication satisfaction, and sexual health), and two moderator variables, thus resulting in 29 indicator variables. To calculate the model identification, 29 was substituted into the above formula for V . The formula then yields a value of 435 for the number of known or nonredundant elements in the present study. To assess the number of unknown elements at the start of a confirmatory factor analysis, Meyers et al. (2011) recommend including: unconstrained pattern coefficients on the paths from the latent variables to the associated indicator variables, and the variance of each latent variable factor and each latent error variable. In addition, they recommend including correlation coefficients that relate latent variables to each other, but because the confirmatory factor analysis model in the present study only includes one indicator variable, this step is unnecessary. The present model contains 20 pattern coefficients that link the latent variable to its indicators, as well as 9 other indicator variables with associated error variances. After constraining appropriate paths to scale the latent variables to the measured variables, there are 72 unknown parameters.

To calculate the degrees of freedom (Meyers et al., 2011), I subtracted the total number of unknown elements (i.e., 72) from the total number of known elements (i.e.,

435), resulting in 363 degrees of freedom. Because this is a positive number (Meyers et al., 2011), I determine that the model is identified, and thus requires no additional constraints for an initial analysis. Thus, I can estimate the initial model.

Table 4 Continued

13. Sexual Pref. Dis	-.315**	-.406**	-.295**	.007	.095*	.340**	.507**	.494**	.291**	.652**	.849**	.831**	--	--	--	--
14. Meaning Dis.	-.328**	-.400**	-.329**	.041	.140**	.407**	.483**	.485**	.332**	.531**	.671**	.618**	.710**	--	--	--
15. Sexual Acc. Dis	-.264**	-.340**	-.271**	.008	.123**	.339**	.421**	.378**	.441**	.551**	.618**	.558**	.640**	.740**	--	--
16. Distress Sex Dis	-.247**	-.292**	-.254**	.005	.093*	.294**	.382**	.354**	.383**	.558**	.520**	.524**	.569**	.658**	.690**	--
17. Dishonest Dis	-.202**	-.265**	-.237**	-.034	.055	.281**	.336**	.342**	.368**	.540**	.473**	.509**	.534**	.601**	.649**	.811**
18. Delay Pref Dis	-.297**	-.340**	-.273**	-.010	.106**	.332**	.397**	.338**	.382**	.500**	.541**	.493**	.586**	.712**	.738**	.783**
19. Safety Dis.	-.159**	-.247**	-.162**	-.016	.091*	.222**	.331**	.292**	.483**	.438**	.523**	.431**	.502**	.552**	.633**	.515**
20. Sex Sat Dis	-.326**	-.416**	-.333**	.059	.161**	.402**	.534**	.535**	.382**	.546**	.711**	.654**	.705**	.749**	.681**	.601**
21. Sex Guilt Dis	-.084*	-.184**	-.152**	.042	.134**	.189**	.272**	.246**	.340**	.412**	.373**	.418**	.383**	.479**	.534**	.607**
22. Sex Calm Dis	-.268**	-.356**	-.310**	.074	.163**	.340**	.460**	.482**	.352**	.491**	.593**	.564**	.591**	.678**	.635**	.629**
23. Sex Depress Dis	-.063	-.161**	-.134**	.045	.144**	.168**	.233**	.170**	.321**	.373**	.342**	.395**	.356**	.451**	.473**	.601**
24. Sexual Jeal. Dis	-.060	-.175**	-.137**	.073	.157**	.166**	.254**	.272**	.319**	.388**	.409**	.448**	.421**	.469**	.505**	.561**

Table 4 Continued

25. Sex	-.035	-.126**	-.110**	.043	.146**	.146**	.225**	.184**	.300**	.343**	.320**	.377**	.342**	.426**	.460**	.555**
Apathy Dis																
26. Sexual	-.044	-.158**	-.124**	.031	.139**	.174**	.243**	.162**	.304**	.383**	.331**	.376**	.356**	.438**	.482**	.583**
Anx. Dis																
27. Sex Happy	-.302**	-.372**	-.322**	.047	.158**	.388**	.517**	.527**	.354**	.491**	.645**	.623**	.662**	.708**	.629**	.575**
Dis																
28. Sexual	-.072	-.179**	-.135**	.037	.139**	.194**	.278**	.191**	.299**	.373**	.324**	.369**	.346**	.449**	.478**	.602**
Fear Dis																
29. Sex Anger	-.041	-.149**	-.139**	.051	.144**	.145**	.220**	.190**	.322**	.371**	.341**	.386**	.346**	.424**	.467**	.558**
Dis																

Table 4 Continued

	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29
17. Dishonesty Dis	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
18. Delay Dis	.720**	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
19. Safety Dis	.473**	.548**	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
20. Satisfaction Dis	.574**	.635**	.572**	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
21. Guilt Dis	.624**	.550**	.396**	.533**	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
22. Calmness Dis	.608**	.622**	.520**	.830**	.619**	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
23. Depression Dis	.619**	.541**	.354**	.485**	.849**	.594**	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
24. Jealousy Dis	.598**	.520**	.372**	.549**	.807**	.643**	.828**	--	--	--	--	--	--
25. Apathy Dis	.592**	.505**	.332**	.450**	.797**	.596**	.857**	.842**	--	--	--	--	--

Table 4 Continued

26. Anxiety Dis	.592**	.538**	.324**	.465**	.852**	.554**	.892**	.820**	.852**	--	--	--	--
27. Happiness Dis	.565**	.587**	.513**	.906**	.548**	.840**	.491**	.578**	.496**	.489**	--	--	--
28. Fear Dis	.585**	.535**	.332**	.466**	.848**	.562**	.854**	.800**	.810**	.906**	.494**	--	--
29. Anger Dis	.593**	.481**	.331**	.469**	.800**	.587**	.879**	.853**	.863**	.855**	.501**	.849**	--

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Preliminary results of initial confirmatory factor analysis. The initial hypothesized structure for disclosure based on the established multidimensional Revised Sexual Self-Disclosure Scale (Snell et al., 1989), posited disclosure as a latent variable with each dimension of the scale as one of 20 indicator variables. In the hypothesized model, each identity gap mediates the relationship between self-disclosure and each outcome variable, and gender and sexual identity salience are positioned between disclosure and the identity gaps. To test this measurement model, I ran a confirmatory factor analysis in SPSS AMOS using the recommended Maximum Likelihood Procedure (Meyers et al., 2011; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Results of the initial model estimation suggest poor fit, Chi-square=6966.65, $p < .000$, CFI=.552, SRMR=.185, RMSEA=.186. Following an examination of the intercorrelations among indicator variables (Table 4), modification indices, and theoretical context, I describe several changes to the initial model and present a respecified model and revised hypotheses. Based on my examination of these outputs, I determine the poor fit of the initial hypothesized model was due primarily to threats to discriminant and convergent validity, which are described in the next section along with the resulting modifications.

Hypothesized model modifications. Due to threats to convergent and discriminant validity (Brown & Moore, 2012), I made several modifications to the hypothesized model. Discriminant validity, or divergent validity, refers to concepts being measured that are not supposed to be related to other concepts are actually unrelated (Campbell & Fiske, 1959). Alternatively, convergent validity tests if two concepts that should be related are in fact related (Campbell & Fiske, 1959). Very strong correlations

(i.e., $r > .80$) may pose threats to validity by suggesting a lack of distinction between constructs that should be distinct. Similarly, constructs that should be strongly correlated but are weakly or not correlated pose a threat to convergent validity. To summarize, upon considering the intercorrelations among indicators of sexual disclosure and the literature on self-disclosure, I separated disclosure into two separate latent variables: positive sexual disclosure and negative sexual disclosure. Given very high correlations, particularly among negative aspects of sexual disclosure (i.e., over .85), I followed recommendations (Matsunaga, 2008) to parcel the indicator variables for both negative sexual disclosure and positive sexual disclosure into three parcels each. In addition, upon examinations of the intercorrelations of variables and modification indices provided by SPSS AMOS, I chose to treat both identity gaps and satisfaction as latent variables, indicated by the three measures of identity gaps and the three measures of satisfaction originally hypothesized as indicator variables. In addition, I removed health protective sexual communication from the model. Lastly, I removed identity saliences from the model. I elaborate on my rationale for these changes below.

Importantly, these changes do not affect the hypothesized direction of the model presented in Chapter 2, are supported by the theoretical rationale provided in that chapter, and maintain the initial contention that aspects of personal and social identity affect the relationship between sexual communication and relational and sexual outcomes. In addition to proposing a more theoretically meaningful model, these changes make the model less complex and addressed threats to divergent and convergent validity that the initial model posed.

Modifications to sexual disclosure. The initial model posed significant threats to convergent and discriminant validity with highly correlated negative items for sexual disclosure and very weak correlations among the positive and negative items. Ultimately, this may suggest that negative disclosure and positive/neutral disclosure reference separate theoretical concepts. Theoretically, this argument is supported. Negative disclosures are inherently riskier (Petronio, 2002), and pose more significant threats to both personal and social identities (Cupach & Metts, 1994; Petronio, 2002). Initially, I chose to test disclosure as a single latent variable by virtue of its establishment as a reliable measure (Snell et al., 1989). However, given the threats to validity and consistency with previous communication theory (Petronio, 2002) and empirical scholarship on positive compared to negative disclosures (McCarthy, Wood, & Holmes, 2017; Utz, 2015; among others), especially in the context of sexual communication as newer research suggests (Brown & Weigel, 2018), I separate the construct into two latent variables in the revised hypothesized model. Thus, the first step in respecifying the model includes testing disclosure as two separate latent variables: positive sexual disclosure and negative sexual disclosure. Negative disclosure consisted of items related to negatively valenced disclosures (i.e., all emotionally negative disclosure items: anger, jealousy, anxiety, fear, depression guilt, apathy). Positive and neutral disclosures included items related to positive and/or neutral disclosure (i.e., sensations, satisfaction, fantasy, behavior, accountability). Items that did not fit those categories were dropped because they are less theoretically meaningful upon reframing the variable in terms of valence and because they speak less to the literature on sexual disclosure discussed in Chapter 2. In

addition, because more positive disclosures may more directly affect satisfaction when it comes to sexual activity (Brown & Weigel, 2018), and the argument posed in Chapter 2 highlights the identity-laden nature of more threatening or more negative disclosures, I added a direct path from positive/neutral disclosures to satisfaction outcomes in addition to the mediated path to maintain theoretical consistency.

In addition to separating positive and negative disclosure, threats to divergent validity necessitate addressing the high intercorrelations among indicators, especially for negative disclosure. An examination of the modification indices recommends correlating error variables. However, correlations of error variables, a contested choice in structural equation modeling and confirmatory factor analysis (Meyers et al., 2011), almost always result in an improved model fit, but at the cost of validity and interpretability of results (Meyers et al., 2011). As a result, I chose not to correlate any error variables in the respecified model. Instead, I attempted to resolve this problem by parceling the indicator variables for positive and negative disclosure.

Parceling, or aggregating indicator items and using those aggregates in place of indicators for the hypothesized latent constructs (Kishton & Widaman, 1994; Matsunaga, 2008), is one recommended practice for addressing these concerns (Little, Cunningham, Shahar, & Widaman, 2002; Matsunaga, 2008). The initial hypothesized model conceptualized disclosure through an item-based approach, using the items in the initial scale as indicators. As a result, it may be appropriate to employ a subset-item parcel approach to my model for respecification (Soliz & Harwood, 2006). In this approach, some number of parcels may be created by aggregating randomly grouped items within

the scale (Matsunaga, 2008). Per the recommendation of a thorough review by Matsunaga (2008), I chose three parcels per factor. This approach may safeguard against estimation bias by including multiple parcels, but still keeps the number of parcels per factor to a minimum to improve model fit (Matsunaga, 2008). There are a number of algorithms used to build parcels. Matsunaga (2008) suggests a random algorithm, and so items to the associated parcels were randomly assigned from the associated dimensions identified earlier. Each parcel was tested for reliability, and was found to be reliable. Reliabilities and parcel descriptions for both positive and negative disclosure can be found in Tables 5 and 6.

There are both risks and benefits associated with parceling, and a number of ways to form parcels. Parceling may be beneficial by alleviating several psychometric problems present in initial analyses using individual items, minimizing the number of factors to make more manageable models, producing more normal data, and generally improving model fit by improving estimation stability (Matsunaga, 2008). Alternatively, parceling can produce estimation biases (Marsh, Hau, Balla, & Grayson, 1998), but some research indicates that parceling actually reduces estimation bias (Bandalos, 2002), and these issues are less significant with larger sample sizes, and thus do not pose a significant concern in either direction for the present study. More importantly, parceling can erase meaningful differences in the dimensions of a given construct. By parceling negative emotional disclosure, I am unable to examine the differences between jealousy or anger sexual disclosures, for example. However, given the benefits of doing so, and risks of not doing so, I determined that the positives outweigh this particular limitation.

Regardless, erasing dimensionality of measurement is a real limitation of parceling, and will be discussed in more detail in the limitations section of Chapter 6.

Table 5: Parcels for Latent Variable Negative Disclosure

Variable	Parcel	Items
Negative Sexual Disclosure	NPar1	Item 35 (Jealousy)
		Item 36 (Apathy)
		Item 32 (Guilt)
		Item 41 (Anger)
		Item 37 (Anxiety)
	Item 39 (Fear)	
	NPar2	Item 45 (Jealousy)
		Item 42 (Guilt)
		Item 49 (Anger)
		Item 50 (Fear)
		Item 46 (Anxiety)
	Item 47 (Apathy)	
	NPar3	Item 52 (Guilt)
		Item 59 (Anger)
		Item 55 (Jealousy)
Item 56 (Apathy)		
Item 57 (Anxiety)		
Item 60 (Fear)		

Table 6: Parcels for Latent Variable Positive Disclosure

Variable	Parcel	Items
Positive and Neutral Sexual Disclosure	PPar1	Item 1 (Sexual behavior)
		Item 2 (Sexual sensations)
		Item 37 (Sexual satisfaction)
		Item 14 (Sexual accountability)
		Item 3 (Sexual fantasy)

Table 6 Continued

PPar2	Item 6 (Sexual sensations) Item 5 (Sexual behavior) Item 7 (Sexual fantasy) Item 19 (Sexual accountability) Item 40 (Sexual satisfaction)
PPar3	Item 51 (Sexual satisfaction) Item 11 (Sexual fantasy) Item 10 (Sexual behavior) Item 9 (Sexual sensations) Item 24 (Sexual accountability)

Modifications to identity gaps. Identity gaps are a theoretically related construct that describe a possible 11 combinations between four layers of identity (Hecht, 1993). However, empirically, researchers tend to focus on enacted-relational, personal-enacted, and personal-relational identity gaps (Jung, 2013). Relatedly, Kam and Hecht (2009) argued that identity gaps do not constitute a latent construct after running a series of CFAs, but rather comprise unique constructs. As a result, I initially hypothesized that each identity gap would indicate its own latent construct. However, identity gaps are highly correlated with each other and their error variables were also highly correlated. As a result, I considered that they may represent a singular latent construct. Although diverging from Jung (2011, 2013), this is consistent with theoretical representations of identity gaps. Identity gaps constitute a cognitive, affective, and behavioral discrepancy between or among layers of identities. While different kinds of identity gaps may comprise theoretically meaningful dimensions of the larger construct, the cognitive, affective, or behavioral experience of identity discrepancy may be relatively similar.

Thus, in the respecified model, I proposed that identity gaps constitute a latent construct, indicated by the different kinds of measured identity gaps (i.e., enacted-relational, personal-enacted, and personal-relational).

Modifications to satisfaction. Similarly, relational satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, and sexual communication satisfaction were highly correlated, which may suggest they measure the same overall construct (Kenny, 2014). Whether or not satisfaction is treated as an overarching construct varies in previous literature (see Braithwaite, Selby, & Fincham, 2011; Jung, 2011, 2013 for varied examples), however it is consistent with the theoretical rationale posed in Chapter 2 that sexual satisfaction, relational satisfaction, and sexual communication satisfaction may present dimensions of the same overall construct. Previous research often examines whether sexual satisfaction may predict relational satisfaction, or relational satisfaction predicts sexual satisfaction (Byers, 2011). However, findings almost always point to sexual disclosure and the quality of sexual communication as predicting both desirable relational outcomes (Byers, 2011). Thus, to address threats to validity, I propose that satisfaction is a latent construct with three indicators of relational satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, and sexual communication satisfaction.

Removal of sexual health outcomes. Sexual health, although an important outcome of sexual communication, was measured through health protective sexual communication behaviors (i.e., whether or not people talk to their partners about health protective behaviors like condom use). Upon an examination of the intercorrelations among indicator variables, it was evident that sexual health did not strongly correlate

with the other outcome or mediator variables in the study. I concluded that this may be due to a measurement problem. Instead of measuring sexual health outcomes (e.g., STI status), the sexual health variable measures perceptions of healthy communication behaviors. Although a desirable outcome of sexual communication may be increased comfort in engaging these behaviors, it may pose a theoretically different construct than sexual health outcomes, which was argued for in Chapter 2, and would require a different direction in the hypothesis. In addition, the comfort and quality of sexual communication related to health outcomes is already accounted for in sexual communication satisfaction, absorbed into the latent variable of satisfaction. Modification indices produced by SPSS AMOS recommended correlating the error variables with sexual communication satisfaction and health protective sexual communication. Rather than correlate error variables, or make data-driven choices about placement of sexual health in the model, to address these problems and pose a simpler and more theoretically consistent model, I chose to remove sexual health in the stage of model respecification.

Table 7: Latent Variables and Corresponding Indicators for Hypothesized Model

Latent Construct	Indicators
Positive and Neutral Sexual Disclosure	Positive and Neutral Parcels 1, 2, 3
Negative Sexual Disclosure	Negative Parcels 1, 2, 3
Identity Gaps	Personal-Enacted Identity Gaps Personal-Relational Identity Gaps Enacted-Relational Identity Gaps
Satisfaction	Relational Satisfaction Sexual Satisfaction Sexual Communication Satisfaction

Removal of moderators. In the initial hypothesized model presented in Chapter 2, I proposed that sexual and gender identity salience may moderate the relationships between sexual disclosures and associated identity gaps. The presence of this variable caused several problems in the initial model, and they were not correlated with either the disclosure variables or the identity gap variables. Identity salience is not directly considered in CTI literature, generally referring to aspects of communal identity in terms of ascriptions and stereotypes rather than an individual's salience of identification with a dimension of their identity (Hecht, 1993). I hypothesized that identity salience may account for the dimensions of social identity referred to in communal identity, but Jung (2011) suggests that ultimately communal identity when paired with personal, enacted, and relational identity warrants a different level of measurement, and Hecht (2003) suggests it requires a specific group-based identification, neither of which was included in the present study. In addition, social identity is still accounted for in enacted and relational identities (e.g., feeling that a partner stereotypes you or treats you as a member of a group rather than through personal identity characteristics) (Jung & Hecht, 2004), thus the proposed moderator may already be reflected in the variable it is trying to moderate, posing a threat to convergent validity as well. Modification indices suggested correlating the errors between sexual and gender identity salience, however, to simplify the model and address these problems, I chose to remove gender and identity salience from the respecified model.

Summary of respecified hypothesized model. As a result of these changes, I have revised my hypotheses as follows:

H1: Identity gaps, indicated by personal-enacted, personal-relational, and enacted-relational identity gaps, mediate the relationship between positive and neutral sexual disclosure and satisfaction, indicated by relational satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, and sexual communication satisfaction.

H2: Identity gaps, indicated by personal-enacted, personal-relational, and enacted-relational identity gaps, mediate the relationship between negative sexual disclosure and satisfaction, indicated by relational satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, and sexual communication satisfaction.

H3: Positive and neutral sexual disclosure predicts satisfaction, indicated by relational satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, and sexual communication satisfaction.

To summarize, the initial hypothesized model demonstrated poor fit. Upon an examination of theoretical context, intercorrelations of variables, and modification indices presented by SPSS AMOS, I concluded that threats to convergent and discriminant validity resulted in problems for the model. I respecified the model to separate positive and negative disclosure, supported primarily by theoretical differences between positive and negative disclosure and a difference in how identity may alter their relationship with satisfaction. In addition, I treated the indicators for disclosure as parcels to address threats to validity. Further, I chose to treat identity gaps and satisfaction as latent rather than indicator variables to address threats to convergent validity, simplify the model, and to produce a more theoretically meaningful model. Lastly, I removed health protective sexual communication and identity salience due to threats to validity, poor loadings and intercorrelations among variables, and the possibility of overlapping theoretical concepts.

Upon estimating the respecified model in SPSS AMOS, model fit indices suggest good fit with the data ($df=48$), Chi-Square=196.581, $p<.001$, CFI=.980, SRMR=.040,

RMSEA=.066. Thus, with a measurement model of acceptable fit, I next tested the structural paths. I describe the results of the structural analysis in the next section.

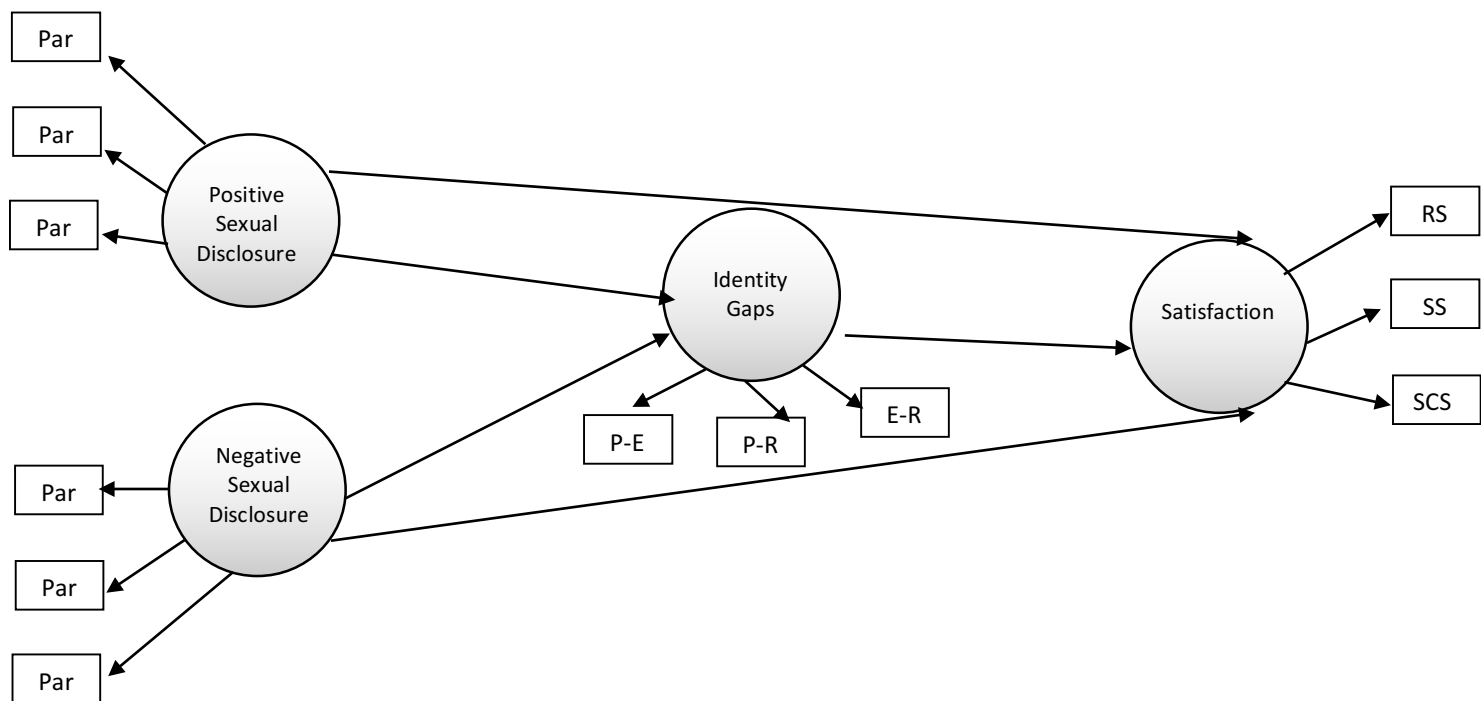


Figure 4: Respecified Hypothesized Model

Note: Correlations among exogenous variables are not depicted in the above model for ease of viewing, but were included in the measurement model and in testing the structural model. Endogenous and indicator variables' error terms are also not depicted in the above hypothesized model, but were included in the measurement model and tested in the structural model.

Structural Equation Model Analysis Results

In order to test the role of personal and social identity in the relationship between sexual communication and sexual and relational outcomes, I hypothesized a structural model that predicted that identity gaps would mediate and identity saliences would moderate the relationship between sexual communication input variables and relational and sexual outcome variables. Upon testing the measurement model, I hypothesized that identity gaps and relational and sexual outcomes might constitute latent constructs, and that sexual communication disclosures should be separated between negatively and positively valenced disclosures. In addition, I removed the moderator variables due to threats to convergent validity. Despite these changes to the measurement model, the theoretical contention remains the same: I hypothesize that personal and social identities explain some of the existing relationship between extent or quantity of sexual communication and relational and sexual outcomes. To test these hypotheses, I conducted a structural equation model analysis following recommendations from Kline (2005). In this section, I present the results of the structural analysis including all direct and indirect paths between variables and review the findings for hypotheses 1-3.

Structural model fit. Testing the structural model in SPSS AMOS, model fit indices suggest good fit with the data ($df=48$), Chi-Square=196.581, $p<.001$, CFI=.980, SRMR=.040, RMSEA=.066. The model accounts for significant variance in both of the endogenous variables, identity gaps and satisfaction. The model configuration accounts for approximately 61% of the variance in satisfaction ($R^2 = .61$ for the latent variable; R^2

for sexual satisfaction = .51, for sexual communication satisfaction $R^2 = .78$, and for relational satisfaction $R^2 = .60$). The model

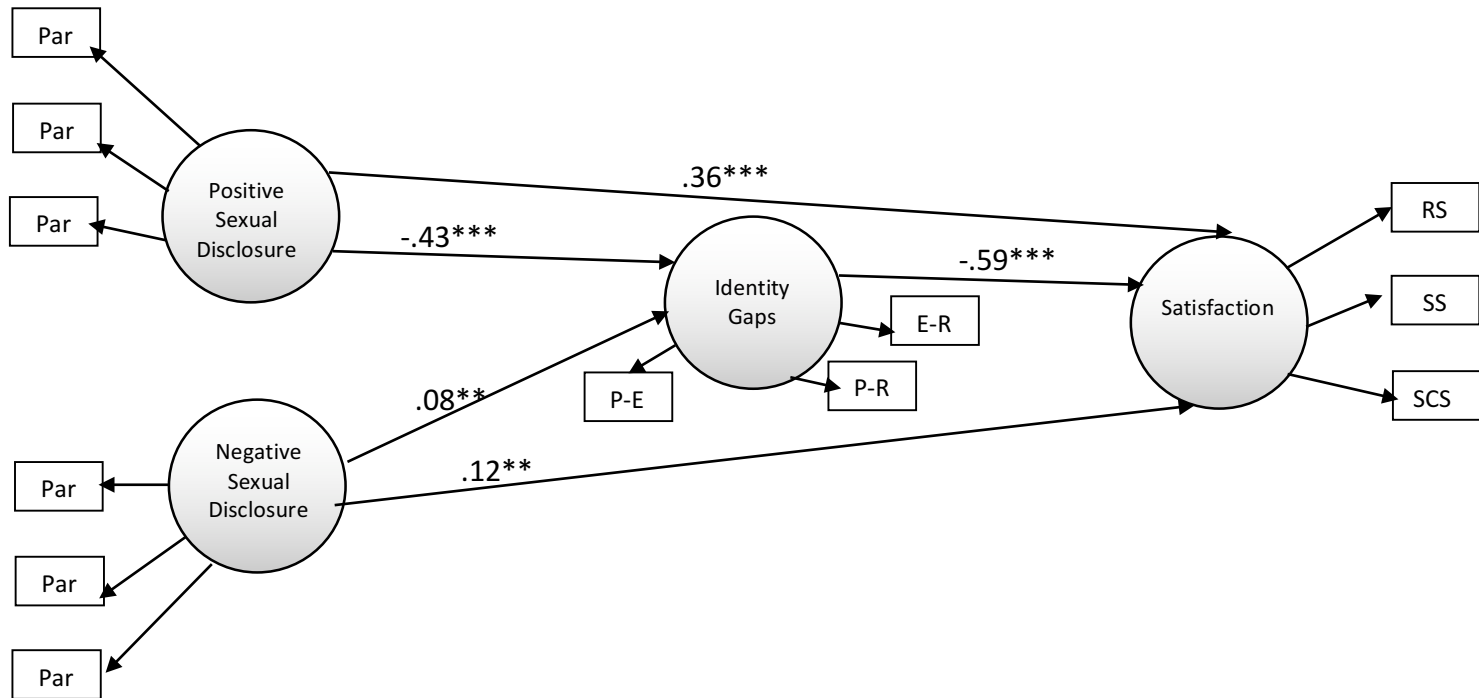


Figure 5: Results of Hypothesized Model Testing

Note: Correlations among exogenous variables are not depicted in the above model for ease of viewing, but were included in the measurement model and in testing the structural model (covariance between positive sexual disclosure and negative sexual disclosure = $.22^{***}$). The direct path from negative disclosure to satisfaction = $.12^{**}$. Endogenous and indicator variables' error terms are also not depicted in the above results. Estimates for residuals are included in Table 10.

$^{***}=p<.001$

$^{**}=p.<.01$

Table 8: Intercorrelations Among Indicator Variables in Final Structural Model

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
ER ID Gaps	1	.683**	.685**	-.499**	-.461**	-.388**	-.039	-.078*	-.054	-.313**	-.347**	-.269**
PE ID Gaps	.683**	1	.625**	-.507**	-.518**	-.402**	-.170**	-.173**	-.161**	-.398**	-.446**	-.389**
PR ID Gaps	.685**	.625**	1	-.517**	-.461**	-.398**	-.123**	-.164**	-.125**	-.308**	-.342**	-.295**
Rel Sat	-.499**	-.507**	-.517**	1	.697**	.515**	.174**	.188**	.163**	.374**	.407**	.369**
Comm Sat	-.461**	-.518**	-.461**	.697**	1	.632**	.265**	.265**	.243**	.517**	.543**	.504**
Sex Sat	-.388**	-.402**	-.398**	.515**	.632**	1	.218**	.231**	.194**	.475**	.531**	.499**
NDParcel1	-.039	-.170**	-.123**	.174**	.265**	.218**	1	.893**	.864**	.518**	.532**	.543**
NDParcel2	-.078*	-.173**	-.164**	.188**	.265**	.231**	.893**	1	.922**	.478**	.496**	.518**
NDParcel3	-.054	-.161**	-.125**	.163**	.243**	.194**	.864**	.922**	1	.450**	.463**	.490**
PDParcel1	-.313**	-.398**	-.308**	.374**	.517**	.475**	.518**	.478**	.450**	1	.899**	.858**
PDParcel2	-.347**	-.446**	-.342**	.407**	.543**	.531**	.532**	.496**	.463**	.899**	1	.888**
PDParcel3	-.269**	-.389**	-.295**	.369**	.504**	.499**	.543**	.518**	.490**	.858**	.888**	1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

ND = Negative Disclosure; PD=Positive Disclosure

configuration also accounts for 22% of the variance explained by the latent variable of identity gaps ($R^2 = .22$ for identity gaps, $R^2 = .63$ for personal-relational identity gaps, $.66$ for personal-enacted identity gaps, and $.71$ for enacted-relational). Thus, the model configuration explains a significant portion of the variance in these outcomes.

Unstandardized path coefficients are presented in Figure 5. All predicted direct paths were significant at $p < .01$. Intercorrelations among all indicator variables included in the final structural model are depicted in Table 8. Table 9 describes the direct effects and standard errors for the structural parameter estimates. Table 10 identifies the estimates for the latent indicators and residual parameters. Next, I describe the results of testing the hypothesized mediation effects through examining the direct and indirect paths.

Table 9: Hypothesized Model: Structural Parameter Estimates – Direct Effects

	Estimate	S.E.
<i>Structural Parameters Direct Effects</i>		
Positive Disclosure → Identity Gaps	-.427***	.039
Negative Disclosure → Identity Gaps	.075**	.026
Identity Gaps → Satisfaction	-.588***	.048
Positive Disclosure → Satisfaction	.355***	.034

***= $p < .001$, **= $p < .01$

Table 10: Hypothesized Model: Estimates for Latent Indicators and Residual Parameters

Parameter	Standardized Estimate
<i>Latent Indicator Parameters</i>	
Satisfaction – Sexual Satisfaction	.511
Satisfaction – Sexual Communication Satisfaction	.777
Satisfaction – Relationship Satisfaction	.602
Identity Gaps – Personal-Relational	.630
Identity Gaps – Personal-Enacted	.659
Identity Gaps – Enacted-Relational	.710
Positive Disclosure – Parcel 1	.866

Table 10 Continued

Positive Disclosure – Parcel 2	.931
Positive Disclosure – Parcel 3	.849
Negative Disclosure – Parcel 1	.843
Negative Disclosure – Parcel 2	.949
Negative Disclosure – Parcel 3	.891
<i>Residual Parameters</i>	
Positive Disclosure – Parcel 1	.121
Positive Disclosure – Parcel 2	.069
Positive Disclosure – Parcel 3	.172
Negative Disclosure – Parcel 1	.296
Negative Disclosure – Parcel 2	.100
Negative Disclosure – Parcel 3	.216
Identity Gaps	.398
Personal – Enacted Identity Gaps	.197
Personal – Relational Identity Gaps	.188
Enacted – Relational Identity Gaps	.209
Satisfaction	.253
Sexual Satisfaction	.357
Sexual Communication Satisfaction	.387
Relational Satisfaction	.430

Hypotheses Results

The first hypothesis predicted that identity gaps, indicated by personal-enacted, personal-relational, and enacted-relational identity gaps, would mediate the relationship between positive and neutral sexual disclosure and satisfaction, indicated by relational satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, and sexual communication satisfaction. To test this hypothesized structure, I examine the direct and indirect effects of positive sexual disclosure on identity gaps and satisfaction. The direct paths among all latent variables in the structural model were statistically significant. As predicted, the paths from positive and neutral disclosure to identity gaps $B=-.43$ (S.E.=.039), positive and neutral disclosure

to satisfaction $B=.36$ (S.E.=.034), and identity gaps to satisfaction $B=-.59$ (S.E.=.048) are all statistically significant at $p<.001$.

To assess the indirect effects, I follow recommendations from Meyers and colleagues (2011) who recommend first verifying that the indirect paths in the full model are statistically significant to determine the possibility of mediation. To do this, I apply the Aroian test (Aroian, 1994, 1947), a Sobel-family test, using Quantpsy.org, an online calculator for Sobel-family tests recommended by Meyers and colleagues (2011) and Preacher (2018). The results of the Aroian test reveal $z=8.15$ (S.E.=.03), $p<.001$, thus raising the possibility of mediation effects.

To explore the strength of the mediated effect, I examine the standardized indirect and direct effects using the following formula from Meyers and colleagues (2011). The strength of the mediated effect is determined by computing the product of the standardized regression coefficients comprising the effects (i.e., β for positive and neutral disclosure on identity gaps, and identity gaps on satisfaction), to the direct, standardized path coefficient in an unmediated model between positive and neutral disclosure and satisfaction. The result of this is $.276 (-.529 \times -.522) / .35 = .79$.

Thus, in a standalone evaluation of this mediation structure, approximately 79% of the effect of positive and neutral sexual disclosure on satisfaction is mediated by identity gaps. Thus, the first hypothesis is supported for a partial mediation structure, but not a full mediation structure. In addition, the direction of the relationship is changed by the presence of identity gaps. Positive sexual disclosure positively predicts satisfaction, but when mediated through identity gaps it becomes a negative relationship. In other

words, as predicted, identity gaps negatively predict satisfaction and account for some of the variance initially attributed to disclosure. In addition, the third hypothesis is supported, suggesting some direct relationship between positive and neutral disclosure and satisfaction.

The second hypothesis predicts that identity gaps, indicated by personal-enacted, personal-relational, and enacted-relational identity gaps, will mediate the relationship between negative sexual disclosure and satisfaction, indicated by relational satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, and sexual communication satisfaction. To test this hypothesized structure, I examine the direct and indirect effects of negative sexual disclosure on identity gaps and satisfaction. The direct paths among all latent variables in the structural model were statistically significant. As predicted, the paths from negative disclosure to identity gaps $B=-.08$ (S.E.=.026), $p<.01$, and identity gaps to satisfaction $B=-.59$ (S.E.=.048), $p<.001$ are all statistically significant.

To assess the indirect effects, I again follow recommendations from Meyers and colleagues (2011) who recommend first verifying that the indirect paths in the full model are statistically significant to determine the possibility of mediation. To do this, I once again apply the Aroian test (Aroian, 1994, 1947), a Sobel-family test, using Quantpsy.org. The results of the Aroian test reveal $z=-2.80$ (S.E.=.016), $p<.01$, thus raising the possibility of mediation effects.

To examine the strength of the mediated effect, I examine the standardized indirect and direct effects using the same formula from Meyers and colleagues (2011). The strength of the mediated effect is once again determined by computing the product of

the standardized regression coefficients comprising the effects (i.e., β for negative disclosure on identity gaps, and identity gaps on satisfaction), to the direct, standardized path coefficient in an unmediated model between negative disclosure and satisfaction. The result of this is $.07 (.133 \times -.522) / .12 = .58$. Thus, in a standalone evaluation of this mediation structure, approximately 58% of the effect of negative sexual disclosure on satisfaction is mediated by identity gaps. Thus, the second hypothesis is supported for a partial but not full mediation.

In summary, the results of testing the hypothesized model reveal a good model fit with statistically significant direct effects from negative and positive sexual disclosure to identity gaps, and positive sexual disclosure and identity gaps to satisfaction. Thus, both negative and positive/neutral disclosure predict identity gaps, and both positive/neutral disclosure and identity gaps explain satisfaction. In addition, identity gaps appear to partially mediate the relationships between both negative and positive sexual disclosure and satisfaction for individuals in non-normative relationships. Identity gaps mediate more of the association between positive and neutral disclosure and satisfaction than negative disclosure and satisfaction. For positive and neutral disclosure, the presence of identity gaps changes the direction of the relationship from positive to negative. Therefore, as predicted, the presence of identity gaps appears to reduce the satisfaction typically attributed to positive or negative sexual disclosures.

Post Hoc Analyses

Although sexual health protective behaviors and sexual and gender identity saliences were removed from the hypothesized model to address threats to validity and

create a more theoretically meaningful model, they are still important constructs to consider in the overall discussion of identity and sexual communication in non-normative relationships. Thus, I examine the relationships between these variables, sexual communication, identity gaps, and satisfaction in post hoc analyses using linear regression to explore how identity gaps, identity saliences, and sexual communication account for variance in both satisfaction and health protective sexual behaviors.

To analyze if the variables in the model predict health protective behaviors, I ran a linear regression with health protective sexual communication as the dependent variable, and the three negative disclosure parcels, three positive/neutral disclosure parcels, and the three identity gaps (enacted-relational, personal-enacted, and personal-relational) as predictor variables. Overall, the model significantly explains variation in health protective sexual behaviors $R=.449$, $R^2=.201$, $F(9, 680)=19.04$, $p<.001$. An examination of the regression coefficients predicting health protective sexual behaviors (Table 11) reveals that no individual variable in the model significantly predicts health protective sexual behaviors despite collectively accounting for approximately 20% of the variance in health protective sexual communication.

Table 11: Variables Predicting Health Protective Sexual Communication

Model	<i>B</i>	Std. Error	Beta	<i>t</i>	Sig.
(Constant)	1.304	.253		5.156	.000
NDParcel1	-.029	.066	-.037	-.446	.656
NDParcel2	.066	.081	.084	.818	.414
NDParcel3	.074	.072	.095	1.041	.298

Table 11 Continued

PDParcel1	.187	.096	.161	1.955	.051
PDParcel2	.095	.104	.086	.920	.358
PDParcel3	.149	.083	.144	1.802	.072
Enacted- Relational Identity Gaps	.122	.070	.094	1.743	.082
Personal-Enacted Identity Gaps	.031	.075	.021	.410	.682
Personal- Relational Identity Gaps	-.066	.077	-.043	-.859	.391

In addition, I ran three linear regression analyses to explore if sexual and gender identity saliences predict sexual satisfaction, relational satisfaction, and sexual communication satisfaction. First, I tested whether sexual and gender identity salience predict relational satisfaction. Results of the regression analysis reveal that gender and sexual identity saliences do not account for significant variation in relational satisfaction, $R=.08$, $F(2, 687)=1.98$, $p=.138$.

Next, I tested whether sexual and gender identity saliences predict sexual satisfaction. Sexual and gender identity saliences do explain significant variation in sexual satisfaction, $R=.10$, $R^2=.01$, $F(2, 687)=3.64$, $p=.027$. Although sexual identity salience as an individual predictor is approaching significance in this model, neither gender nor sexual identity salience significantly individually contribute to predicting sexual satisfaction, despite together explaining approximately 1% of the variance in sexual satisfaction.

Lastly, I tested if sexual and gender identity saliences predict sexual communication satisfaction. Results of this regression analysis revealed that sexual and gender identity salience do explain significant variation in sexual communication satisfaction, $R=.14$, $R^2=.02$, $F(2, 687)=6.39$, $p=.002$. In this model, sexual identity salience significantly contributes to the model, $\beta=.134$ (S.E.=.042), $p=.005$. Thus, sexual and gender identity saliences significantly predict sexual communication satisfaction, with sexual identity salience appearing to be a more important predictor. However, this result should be interpreted in light of the small effect size, explaining only about 2% of the variance in sexual communication satisfaction.

To summarize, in this chapter, I tested the hypotheses posed in Chapter 2. To do so, I first conducted a confirmatory factor analysis to test the measurement model. After making theoretically-based changes to the model, I tested the structural paths and mediation effects. In addition, I described several post-hoc analyses that I conducted with variables removed from the initial model. In the next chapter, I address the open-ended research question.

Chapter 5: Discursive Expression and Management of Identity Gaps in Non-Normative Sexual Communication

In the previous chapter, I described the results of the statistical analyses to address the hypotheses presented in Chapter 2. In addition to using quantitative analyses to demonstrate how identity gaps appear to explain some of the relationship between sexual communication and satisfaction in non-normative relationships, I asked how, if at all, are identity gaps discursively managed in sexual communication within non-normative relationships. To address this question, I asked three open-ended questions that yielded 1,230 responses, ranging in length from a few words to a few paragraphs and totaling 26,453 words of data analyzed using the pattern coding and typographic approaches described in Chapter 3. To reiterate, pattern-coding is a second-order coding technique that involves synthesizing patterns among the in-vivo codes generated in first-order coding (Saldaña, 2015). A common approach to pattern coding involves assigning codes a numeric identifier. I chose to utilize this approach for several reasons. First, given the breadth of data obtained, numeric descriptions of the quantity of each pattern may provide additional insight and help address the research question by offering more specific descriptions of each pattern that includes magnitude. Second, counting can keep researchers analytically honest and provide a more precise frame of reference when discussing conceptual ideas especially in terms of size (Saldaña, 2015). In addition to pattern coding, I analyzed the descriptions of participants' identity gaps using typographic analysis (Manning, 2013). Typographic analysis may be employed to generate classificatory systems of communication behaviors (Manning, 2013). Similar to

pattern coding, typographic analysis can be well suited to open-ended survey data that yields a breadth of responses (Rubinsky, 2018a). Although in-vivo codes for both pattern and typographic coding preserved participant language, the final patterns and typographies utilized the theoretical language of CTI, as identity gaps are the theoretical construct under investigation. In this chapter, I first present a typology of sexual communication-based identity gaps that emerged in non-normative relationships. Second, I describe the patterns of management or mitigation of identity gaps and consequences that emerged as a result of both the presence of the identity gap and the communication strategy for managing it. I summarize the findings for each section in Tables 12-14.

A Typology of Sexual Identity Gaps in Non-Normative Partner Communication

Before describing the strategies that participants employed for managing or mitigating the presence of sexual identity gaps, I first describe the types of sexual identity gaps participants experienced. Three major categories describe the types of sexual identity gaps that participants in the present study described experiencing in their partnered sexual communication. Although not mutually exclusive, the first pattern consists of (1) gaps with personal identity. These include sexual compliance and sex as relational maintenance, “faking it,” disclosing fantasies to sexual partners, traumatic sexual histories, sexual jealousy, insecurity and body image, and sexual safety. The second category (2) consists of gaps with communal identity. These include race play or racial fetishization, sex as identity confirmation or invalidation for sexual and gender identities, ability identity, and religion and sexual morality. Third, (3) about one third of the participants identified that they had not experienced the provided definition of

identity gaps at all, or the problem was minimal in their relationship because of shared social identity experiences or open and empathetic communication. Lastly, 24 participants (4.8%) provided responses that I coded under “other” because the singular responses did not constitute a larger pattern. I describe each of these categories in turn.

Table 12: Typology of Sexual Identity Gaps in Non-Normative Relationships

Identity Gap	Description	<i>n</i>	%
Gaps with Personal Identity			
Sex as Relational Maintenance	Engaging in unwanted, consensual sexual activity as relational maintenance.	57	11.4
“Faking it”	Performing enthusiasm for a sexual activity or pretending to have an orgasm.	25	5
Fantasy Disclosure or Avoidance	Participants disclosed sexual fantasies to their partner(s) and it did not go well, or they avoided disclosing a sexual fantasy to a partner.	44	8.8
Traumatic Histories	A history of rape, sexual assault, or abuse resulted in lasting sexual identity gaps that manifested in current relationships.	10	2
Sexual Jealousy	Participants’ sexual jealousy associated with a partner cheating or polyamorous relational dynamics result in identity gaps.	17	3.4
Insecurity	A negative sense of self that conflicted with a partners’ positive ascriptions or behaviors result in identity gaps.	17	3.4
Sexual Safety	Different perspectives on sexual safety behaviors cause identity gaps.	5	1
Gaps with Communal Identity			
Sex as Identity Invalidation or Validation	Sexual communication challenged or affirmed salient sexual or gender identities, including bisexual identity, transgender or gender	103	20.5

Table 12 Continued

	nonconforming identities, or challenging perceptions of a cisgender partner of a transgender person's identity. In addition, participants noted stereotypes about women, role switching (dominant/submissive), and communal-identity based sexual compliance.		
Race Play and Racism	Identity gaps as a result of race play, racialized sexual language, or experiences of racial discrimination in sexual activity.	8	1.6
Ability Identity	Identity gaps as a result of relational or external ascriptions related to ability.	13	2.6
Religion & Sexual Morality	Identity gaps result from discrepancies between religious identities and sexual behavior.	9	1.8
No Identity Gaps			
No experience of identity gaps	Participants said they had not experienced identity gaps or not applicable.	130	25.8
No because...	Participants identified that they did not experience identity gaps or had resolved identity gaps because of an open communication climate, knowing each other, or shared identities.	42	8.3

Note: Some responses were associated with multiple patterns because they referred to multiple partners with different identity gap experiences. Twenty-four responses (4.8%) were coded as "other."

Gaps with personal identity. Primarily consisting of personal-enacted and personal-relational identity gaps, participants described engaging in sexual behavior as relational maintenance either through complying with unwanted sex acts, by engaging in sex more frequently than desired, or by identifying a problem in their partner's frequency

of sexual behavior. In addition, participants identified faking sexual enthusiasm, and faking an orgasm specifically. Participants discussed wanting to reveal sexual fantasies or desires to their partners but being uncomfortable doing so due to the stigmatized nature of the desire, fear of their partner's reaction, or their own discomfort communicating about sex. Some participants described having spoken to their partners about their fantasies, but indicated that conversation not producing a desirable outcome. Moreover, some participants experienced identity gaps with their personal identities because of a traumatic sexual history (i.e., rape, abuse), sexual jealousies, their own insecurities, and sexual safety. While most of these categories may be considered personal-enacted identity gaps in which the individual describes a discrepancy between their self in communication and their sense of self, or personal-relational in which they experience a discrepancy between their sense of self and how a relational partner ascribes identity to them, some of these responses also implicate personal-communal identity gaps. First, I discuss participants' identity gaps as a result of participating in sexual activity as relational maintenance.

Sex as relational maintenance. Participants experienced a series of identity gaps as a result of their own or their partner(s)' treatment of sexual activity as relational maintenance ($n=57$, 11.4%). Specifically, participants engaged in sexual compliance by participating in consensual but unwanted sex ($n=19$, 3.8%), or by engaging in sexual activity more frequently than they desired to appease a partner ($n=19$, 3.8%). Importantly, the sexually compliant behaviors associated with identity gaps described in this section refer only to those resulting from personal identity gap discrepancies. Sexually compliant

behaviors that describe complying with a communal identity (e.g., a transgender woman performing a masculine sex role) rather than a specific sex act (e.g., engaging in oral sex when one would prefer not to), implicates communal rather than personal identity in the discrepancy by invoking group-based identities (e.g., gender identity). Thus, this section only describes situations in which sexual compliance resulted in identity gaps with personal identity. Alternatively, 14 participants (2.8%) identified a relational standard was unmet because they were engaging in sexual activity, or their desired sex acts, less frequently than they wanted. In addition to having sex as relational maintenance, participants identified performing insincere enthusiasm during sexual activity ($n=25$, 5%), specifically “faking orgasms” with a relational partner ($n=20$, 4%). First, I describe sexual compliance.

Sexual compliance. Sexual compliance, or the participation in consensual but unwanted sexual activity, is a form of a relational maintenance (Impett & Peplau, 2006). Participants in the present study identified sexually compliant communication behaviors as producing identity gaps in which they did not feel like their authentic selves. For example, “Engaging in sexual intercourse when I really didn’t feel like it. I didn’t want to but I didn’t want to disappoint my partner and felt like I needed to make them happy¹” (Participant 353). As this response suggests, individuals sometimes participate in sexual compliance because they feel like it will please a relational partner. For another example:

I have acted as if I was more interested in having sexual intercourse than I was because I felt embarrassed to say I didn’t want to all that much, so even though I wasn’t very interested in having sex, I acted like I was (Participant 199).

¹ All participant responses are inserted word-for-word from their typed response. I did not correct spelling, grammar, or capitalization.

Sometimes, participants identified sexual compliance as a relatively harmless aspect of relational maintenance for their own part, but suggest that this process can cause identity gaps because it results in relational conflict or upsets their partner. For example:

80% of the time I'm really indifferent to sex, so often times I pleasure my partner without being really "into" it. I don't mind doing it but my partner is really bothered by the idea that I might not be enjoying myself and he tends to get mad at me for not speaking up and saying that I'm not into it, whereas I feel like it's a bonding experience whether I'm aroused or not, and I'm happy to pleasure my partner without being aroused or excited at all (Participant 23)

As this example suggests, participants sometimes experience identity gaps as a result of sexual compliance because of the reaction from their relational partner, rather than the act of sexually compliant behavior itself.

Alternatively, sometimes sexually compliant behavior can cause identity gaps and result in upset feelings for the participant. For example, "I don't like performing this specific activity. It seems to be the only way that my partner is aroused and always initiate. It became an expectation and I hated it" (Participant 354). Thus, sexually compliant behaviors may cause identity gaps as a result of feeling inauthentic (i.e., personal-enacted identity gaps), as a result of disliking the activity and subsequent relational expectation (i.e., personal-relational, enacted-relational identity gaps), or due to the resultant relational tensions that arise from the experience (i.e., personal-relational identity gaps). In addition to sexually compliant behaviors producing identity gaps, individuals noted discrepant standards for sexual frequency in their relationships.

Discrepancies in sexual frequency. Discrepancies in the frequency of received or enacted sexual activity in a romantic relationship are a frequent source of tension and

conflict for long-term romantic couples (Sprecher & Cate, 2004). Therefore, it is consistent with previous research that participants identified engaging in sexual activity with their partner less frequently than desired as an identity gap they experienced in their partnered sexual communication. Often, participants indicated that this was a result of disparate levels of sex drive between partners, or because of busy schedules and exhaustion. For examples:

My partner has a lower sex drive than I do, which results in us not being sexually active often. This often will bring up conversations where he thinks that it will be a deal breaker for me, or that it will cause me to stray, and I usually have a hard time getting him to believe that I am okay and that I understand and that sex isn't the most important thing to me (Participant 189).

My partner and I have had a decrease in sexual activity in the last year because of new jobs and conflicting schedules. This has led to a larger sexual desire on my part and a much weaker sexual desire on their's. I often times act as if this does not bother me or spike my insecurities even though there are days in which it severely affects my anxiety and emotional/mental well-being (Participant 205).

Thus, participants may experience identity gaps as a result of participating in unwanted sex, or their partners not participating in unwanted sex.

Faking it. Relatedly, participants identified performing insincere enthusiasm for a sex act or sexual activity generally with their partner, or specifically faking an orgasm. One participant identified trying to talk to their partner about orgasm-specific sexual problems, but did not actually “fake it.” However, most participants who discussed orgasms did so in reference to pretending to have one for several reasons, all of which produced identity gaps to some extent.

Most frequently, participants identified “faking it” to make their partner happy or as an aspect of maintaining an amicable relationship, or to avoid making their partner

unhappy or hurt their feelings. For example, “I have faked liking a sexual activity in order to appease my partner” (Participant 128).

Although most participants who discussed faking orgasms or enthusiasm implied relatively little harm came of it, some participants expressed more severe identity gaps as a result of performing inauthentic enthusiasm, especially when paired with other life circumstances. For example:

When feeling stressed/overwhelmed by issues in my personal life and still having sex with my partner, I feel like I am showing that I enjoy the sex more than I really do. I feel guilty about engaging in this activity while there are other serious issues going on in with my family and so I cannot enjoy the sex as much. It almost makes me feel slutty (Participant 375).

In addition, some participants identified that performing pleasure when they do not experience it leads to frustration and other relational problems. For example:

I find it difficult to allow myself to relax and fully orgasm with my partner. I'm female and in a hetero relationship. I usually feel like it takes too long for me to orgasm so I rarely ever let my partner fully try. So I may act like I'm satisfied enough at the time even though I'm frustrated (Participant 372).

Thus, participants sometimes experienced identity gaps as a result of performing satisfaction during sexual activity when they did not in fact experience it. Some participants described these gaps as harmless or infrequent, but others indicated that they were part of a relational pattern that resulted in frequent sex-related identity gaps.

Thus, participants engaged in a number of discursive behaviors in their partnered sexual activity and communication in an effort to maintain their relationship, avoid conflict or hurting a partner, or to appease their partner or make them happy that in turn produced identity gaps. Sexual compliance, false performances of enthusiasm or “faking it,” and discrepancies in preferred sexual frequency all resulted in identity gaps.

Fantasy disclosure. In addition to identity gaps produced as a result of the treatment of sexual behavior as relational maintenance, participants described personal identity gaps surrounding fantasy or desire disclosure to a partner ($n=44$, 8.8%). Specifically, participants indicated that they were often nervous or anxious to tell their partner their desire ($n=14$, 2.8%), or they had tried to disclose a specific desire or fantasy to a partner and it did not go well ($n=20$, 4%).

Afraid to disclose. Some participants identified that they experienced sexual identity gaps because they had not disclosed a particular fantasy or desire to their sexual partner, often leading them to perform sexual activities they did not find as gratifying or authentic to how they see themselves as a sexual person. Participants noted that they had not disclosed these desires to their partner(s) because they were afraid it might make the partner(s) feel bad, damage their relationship, or they were just personally not comfortable disclosing the fantasy often due to the stigmatized nature of the desire. For examples, “I feel nervous telling my current partner (Partner A) about sexual fantasies” (Participant 19), as well as, “During sex I’m not comfortable asking for what I really want” (Participant 173).

While most participants discussed their anxiety around disclosing their sexual desires or fantasies in terms of their own desire and identity, some participants framed it as a relational problem that both parties needed to address. In addition, certain desires were painted as more stigmatized than others, resulting in an increased difficulty in disclosure and incurring more risk. The following example highlights both of these issues:

My wife and I have hard times communicating what truly pleasures us during sex. I have wanted her to do things such as using an anal vibrator plug on me or use a strap on. I felt that it was to homosexual and have not asked her to do so (Participant 342).

In addition, some participants identified identity gaps may be what caused their discomfort communicating about their desires. For example, “With a previous partner I felt that he seemed to think of me as more prudish and awkward than I really am, I think I held back a lot of desires and things I wanted to express to him” (Participant 228). As this example demonstrates, the existence of a personal-relational identity gap (i.e., this participant’s partner believing they are prudish and awkward when that is not how they see themselves), results in the participant not wanting to express a particular sexual desire to their partner.

Negative reactions to fantasy disclosure. In addition to participants who chose to conceal their fantasies and desires from a partner, some participants identified identity gaps as a result of the disclosure. That is, some participants disclosed the fantasy or desire to a partner and it resulted in a negative reaction either in the form of their partner not being open to it or not sharing the fantasy, or the desire leading to conflict.

Some participants indicated that the expression of the desire did not lead to a relational change, and therefore left them still experiencing identity gaps at the state of their sexual relationship. For example:

I have felt a sexual identity gap since the first time I had sex with my current partner of 2.5 years. I always experienced sex as something tantric, passionate or exciting. My partner is someone I experience sex with him in means of love and taking care of each others needs. We both orgasm and we both enjoy it. I have never got thrill from our sex life. We are very comfortable with each other to explore different things, but still no "steam" is felt for me and we I day dream about sex, it is always with someone else from my past sex life. I don't feel the

need to be who I was in bed with others with him because, essentially I feel like he doesn't experience things that way because he has never expressed the yearning that my other partners have in regards to wanting sex with me. We have sex most of the time but it isn't something he has to have. This is something I find genuine and that I love about him but the side effects, so to say, kind of sucks for me (Participant 335).

For another example:

I am only sexually satisfied with kinky sex, specifically power exchange. My partner of four years engages in vanilla sex. Although I would orgasm because the sex was adequate, I would not feel satisfied or fulfilled. Just empty and pissed off because my sex life gave me no life (Participant 427).

In addition, some participants identified that their partner had disclosed a desire to them that they did not feel comfortable enacting, resulting in an identity gap as well. For example:

I'm sexually dominate but I feel like my girlfriend sees me as more dominate than I'm willing to let myself be. For example, she'll want me to hit her during sex and although I like spanking her I feel no pleasure smacking her face (consensually) (Participant 407).

Alternatively, some participants indicated that after revealing their fantasy to their partner, other consequences emerged in their relationship. For example, "I discussed my enjoyment of kinky activities with my partner, and now they seem to think I'm bored if sex is not kinky" (Participant 33). Thus, in mitigating one identity gap, another might emerge in sexual communication. To summarize, fantasy disclosure or avoiding disclosure produces identity gaps sometimes as a result of not experiencing the desired fantasy or partner response to the disclosure.

Traumatic histories. Although fewer ($n=10$, 2%), some participants identified personal identity gaps in their partnered sexual communication because of their own or

their partner(s)' history with sexual abuse, rape, abusive relationships, or childhood abuse. For example,

I was sexually abused as a child. My partners knows this, but it's sometimes still hard for me to talk about it when something comes up in our relationship that reminds me of the abuse. That means that I'll sometimes try to hide it, which can lead to me acting in one way while feeling increasingly anxious about it (Participant 41).

As well as:

My past partner raped me and used me for sex so that has had a lot of effects on me and my current partner. I find it hard to communicate for fear of not being loved or being left alone. While I have been working for planned parenthood and have been working towards bettering myself, I still find it hard to reclaim my own sexual pleasures and goals (Participant 127).

Some participants told their partner(s) about these experiences in an effort to mitigate the identity gap or work together toward reclaiming a sexual identity, but other participants chose not to disclose their traumatic sexual history to current partners. For example:

With sexual partner A, I didn't really know if I wanted to have sex but I did. It was a way of me overcoming my rape. I thought it would empower me but it really didn't. I never told them that though (Participant 337).

Traumatic sexual histories result in both feelings of disconnect and identity gaps in present sexual relationships.

Sexual jealousy. Participants also experienced personal identity gaps as result of sexual jealousy ($n=17$, 3.4%), generally, as a result of a partner cheating or expressing interest in an old romantic partner, or as a result of polyamorous relational dynamics. Participants in otherwise monogamous relationships indicated relational insecurity as a result of a partner having extradyadic relations, leaving them feeling identity gaps. For

example, “He cheated on me once and I turned to alcohol resulting in a very ugly version of myself that I did not know existed. I had never been insecure about sex while it was occurring till that incident” (Participant 119).

Participants who identified polyamorous relational dynamics producing jealousy also often implicated personal-communal and communal-relational identity gaps, as their group-based polyamorous identity was a part of the experience of identity gap surrounding their sexual jealousy. For examples:

Partner A, my primary, is very openly affectionate with his secondary partners among friends. Partner B, my secondary, is generally closeted in regards to our polyamorous relationship. This leads to situations where in a group situation like a party, Partner A is affectionate with his girlfriend, Partner B is affectionate with his primary, and I feel left out (Participant 20).

I feel like my partner purposefully makes me jealous of the other partners she has, when in reality I know I don't really care and I do the same thing, but she manipulates things to get that feeling of jealousy out of me (Participant 259).

These examples demonstrate the experience of sexual jealousy that results in identity gaps within polyamorous relational dynamics. The distinction may be important because the introduction of polyamorous identity into discussions of jealousy may produce more substantial identity gaps as a result of communal discourses of jealousy in polyamorous relationships (Rubinsky, 2018a, 2018b). In addition to jealousy resulting in feelings of insecurity associated with identity gaps, participants indicated that their own personal insecurity was the root of identity gaps in their sexual relationships.

Insecurity. A number of participants ($n=17$, 3.4%) also noted they experienced identity gaps as a result of their own insecurity, low self-esteem, or poor body image. Frequently, these participants indicated that their identity gaps resulted from their partner

acting as though they were more attractive than they saw themselves as (i.e., personal-relational identity gaps). For example, “I feel like I'm perceived as the more passive partner, because that's how I behave outwardly, but it's not how I feel inside. My lack of communication feeds into this, and it comes from a place of fear/shame/unworthiness” (Participant 380), as well as, “My partner thinks I am a lot more attractive than I feel like I am” (Participant 401). In addition:

My partner describes me as being beautiful, though he is obviously aware of my obesity issues. Sometimes I feel like he is describing and/or having sex with a more physically fit woman, because the enthusiasm he has for my body doesn't match my idea of myself (Participant 434).

These examples describe identity gaps that result from personal insecurities or a negative self-image (personal identity) in tension with a partner's more positive treatment. In addition, participants described “faking it” related to their personal insecurities and body image. For example:

Pretending I'm enjoying sex to please my partner when I feel depressed and disgusting and miserable with myself and my body because I am a fat cow with a body of a 12 year old boy but he thinks im sexy so I have to put on a show (Participant 393).

Thus, participants experienced identity gaps associated with personal insecurities and a negative self-image.

Sexual safety. Lastly, participants identified personal identity gaps as a result of discrepant approaches to sexual safety or being uncomfortable asking their partner(s) for measures of sexual safety ($n=5$, 1%). Sexual safety was often a source of personal-communal identity gaps and implicate most layers of identity. Participants discussed issues of gender stereotypes and dysphoria in discussions of sexual safety. For example,

“Some partners don’t think girls are comfortable talking about being std tested so they wouldn’t ask if I had been tested” (Participant 133). In addition, this participant described how sexual safety decisions following sexual activity reminded them of dysphoric sexual assignments associated with certain body parts. For example, “When my partner cums inside of me & I am reminded of the functions of my body, & how I have to be aware & take responsibility for my actions” (Participant 206).

In addition, participants discussed differing preferences among polyamorous partners for sexual safety behaviors, for example, “Discussed protection, as Partner A had different preferences than Partner B” (Participant 395). Although this does not necessarily implicate communal identity in and of itself, the relational identities involved may also result in relational-relational identity gaps.

Thus, sexual communication may result in a number of identity gaps with the personal layer of identity that stem from feelings about the self, personal behavior, and partner behavior and include sex as relational maintenance, fantasy disclosure or avoidance, sexual safety, sexual jealousy, traumatic histories, and insecurity. In addition to sexual communication and sexual experience producing identity gaps with the personal layer of identity, individuals in non-normative relationships identified multiple communal identity gaps.

Gaps with communal identity. The communal layer of identity refers to identity at the site of the group, for example race or political affiliation (Hecht, 1993). Participants identified communal-enacted, communal-relational, and communal-personal identity gaps as a result of their sexual communication. The largest category of these fell

under the pattern of sex as identity confirmation or invalidation of sexual or gender identities ($n=98$, 19.5%), under which I discuss bisexual stereotypes, erasure, passing, gender and transitioning identities, stereotypes about women, role-switching, polyamorous perceptions of promiscuity, and communal identity sexual compliance. In addition, participants addressed race play and racial fetishes, ability identity, and religion and sexual morality.

Sex as sexual and gender identity confirmation or invalidation. Participants described identity gaps that resulted from aspects of their sexual and gender communal or social identities' primarily being invalidated, although some participants also described partners' attempts to affirm their identities ($n=98$, 19.5%). Specifically, participants describe bisexual stereotypes, erasure, and passing as causing an identity gap ($n=18$, 3.6%), gender and transitioning identities ($n=42$, 8.3%), stereotypic expectations of women ($n=10$, 2%), role switching ($n=18$, 3.6%), polyamorous perceptions of promiscuity ($n=5$, 1%), and gender or sexual identity-based sexual compliance ($n=7$, 1.4%). Although sexual and gender identities are separate categories of communal identity, gender identity and sexual orientation are related constructs as sexual orientation refers to the gender(s) one is attracted to in relation to one's own gender. In addition, issues of gender and sexual orientation overlap in participants' discussions of their identity gaps. Thus, I identify gender and sexual orientation as a part of the same pattern of identity gaps with the communal layer of identity.

Identity gaps with bisexuality. In terms of sexual identity, participants most often identified identity gaps associated with non-monosexuality (i.e., bi- or pansexuality in

which they identify attraction to multiple genders). These identity gaps generally took the form of stereotyping by their partner, messages that erase bisexual identity, or attempts to pass or remain closeted. For example, this participant describes a sexual partner engaging in bisexual erasure as prompting an identity gap:

My partner, after sex, commented that she couldn't believe I ever thought I was straight. This is complicated because as someone who is bisexual, the comment felt like it missed that even though I enjoy women, I also--still--enjoy men (Participant 419).

Bisexual erasure is a common source of sexuality messages (Rubinsky & Cooke-Jackson, 2016) and occurs when an individual acts as though monosexuality (i.e., attraction to only one gender) is the only option for sexual identity. Participants experiencing bisexual erasure identify communal-relational identity gaps because their partners ascribe an identity to them that is different than their own perception of their communal identity.

In addition, some participants identified communal-enacted identity gaps as a result of passing or choosing not to disclose their non-monosexuality to important others. For example, “I’m a bisexual man and my wife is straight. For over 15 years I hid the attractions I have towards different genders from her” (Participant 67). This may prompt a communal-enacted identity gap because they are enacting or communicating an identity that is different than how they actually identify their communal identity.

Similarly, some participants noted that they might have disclosed their non-monosexuality to a partner, but their negative reaction made them feel as though they had to hide it, resulting in both communal-enacted and communal-relational identity gaps. For example:

At one point in time my partner was mildly put off by the idea of my having been with members of another gender. It made me feel I had to repress my identity in order to conform to how my partner wanted to view me (Participant 91).

Participants also identified their partners' stereotypic statements, behaviors, and ascriptions to their non-monosexuality as prompting identity gaps. For example, "I think a previous partner made a lot of assumptions about my promiscuousness because I'm bi. They considered me a slut because I went both ways" (Participant 229). Perceptions about promiscuity are often stereotypically associated with bisexuality (Klesse, 2006). Thus, feeling as though a partner stereotyped them based on a communal identity may result in communal-relational as well as personal-relational identity gaps. Further, participants identified partners behaving in stereotypical ways toward their bisexuality as prompting identity gaps. For example:

My partner and I have discussed the fact that I may be bisexual. I have only ever been with men but one time I made out with one of my best (female) friends at a party. Then she admitted she'd been in love with me for a while and it almost went to further activities, but things never progressed. My partner was there and essentially "egged on" the kissing (Participant 140).

Sexualizing bisexual women constitutes a stereotype (Harper, 2010) that can prompt identity gaps when verbalized by a partner.

Lastly, although less common, a few participants did identify that it was a partner's bisexuality rather than their own that prompted an identity gap. For example, this participant notes:

My partner is bisexual and shows significant attraction to the same sex at times. I don't have a problem with it but low key feel as if what if I'm just not good enough because I can't provide the same thing a woman can do for her sometimes. Makes me feel as she might [not] fully like me (Participant 239).

As this example demonstrates, a partner's communal identity may prompt feelings of a personal-relational identity gap even in the absence of direct verbal communication on the subject.

Gender and transitioning identities. Participants identified that gender identity confirmation or disconfirmation, and gender dysphoria, prompt identity gaps in their partnered sexual communication. Gender and transitioning identities constituted the largest pattern ($n=42$, 8.3%) in terms of types of communal identity gaps.

Importantly, in addition to a transgender or gender non-conforming participant identifying the role of sex in affirming or challenging their gender identity, cisgender participants with a transgender or gender non-conforming partner explained that their partner(s)' transitioning gender identity produced an identity gap as a result of it spurring questions about their own sexual identity. For example:

My partner has recently began to transition from female to male. We have been struggling to find both of our identities in this new part of our relationship. What it means to go from being a lesbian couple to being a straight couple. Using pronouns and pet names. How to continue to be sexual (Participant 383).

Thus, this participant exemplifies an identity gap produced as a result of her partner's transition, rather than her own.

In addition, participants identified a plethora of identity gaps related to their own gender identity, gender expression, and their partner's affirmation or invalidation of that gender identity through sexual activity and sexual communication. In some instances, participants identified that their partners' attempts to affirm or validate their gender identity through sexual activity and sexual communication can still produce or exacerbate identity gaps because of a reminder of their own bodily functions. For example:

Partner A treats me like a good man, which is great emotionally, but, since I haven't had a rhinoplasty and haven't mastered or found comfort with a strap on, didn't work for me sexually. She sees me as a sexual being and gets aroused and wants either oral sex or penetrating from me, but the thought makes me feel inadequate as a man and depressed and unable to give her what she needs (Participant 399).

Alternatively, more participants identified their partners' either intentionally or unintentionally triggering feelings of dysphoria, or identity gaps with their communal idea of gender identity or personal sense of self as a particular gender. Some participants identified this as the result of sex acts that trigger awareness of an anatomy associated with a gender with which they do not identify. For example:

Feeling guilt and gender dysphoria when I felt like I was taking on the role of "the woman" as is typical in heteronormative sex, as I am genderfluid and often feel social and body dysphoria related to a feeling of being or need to be seen as "male" (in terms of anatomy) and/or like a man or another non-binary gender. Having the type of sexual activity we were doing at the time, I was hyper-aware of parts of my "female" physical anatomy, causing this disconnect (Participant 82).

In addition, participants identified sometimes perceiving their partner's sexual communication or sexual behavior as creating an identity gap either intentionally or at least without consideration for what it would mean for their gender identity. For example, "A partner insisted on my acting as my assigned at birth gender when we were intimate" (Participant 382). For another example:

I am a transgender woman and my partner is cisgender. We sometimes have PiV sex, and while I often enjoy it, sometimes it triggers dysphoric feelings in me where I worry that my partner may be perceiving me as a man. This is compounded by the fact that sometimes I feel that she really wants to have this kind of sex at times that I do not (Participant 70).

Communal identity gaps surrounding feelings of gender dysphoria are complicated by relational histories and feelings of obligation an individual has toward their sexual partner. For example:

I'm trans, however my partner is cis and likes to involve my penis in sex. I am frustrated by this sometimes because she likes to involve it more than before I had decided to transition with HRT, so I sometimes feel invalidated. However I love her and feel guilty for robbing her of her husband and I feel like I owe it to her (Participant 289).

As this example demonstrates, some participants feel invalidated or dysphoric as a result of sexual activity that does not affirm their gender identity, but may also feel an obligation to a romantic partner.

Stereotypes about women. Although most participants discussing gender referred to transgender or gender non-conforming identities, 10 participants did refer to gendered stereotypes about cisgender women producing identity gaps in their sexual communication. For example, “When I don’t try things that he thinks every girl does” (Participant 193), or “Feeling like you have to act and look like a porn star and be super feminine and weak” (Participant 241). These participants identified stereotypes about cisgender women influencing their sexual communication and producing identity gaps.

In addition, participants identified experiences of sexism or gender-based discrimination affecting their sexual relationship outside of sexual communication still producing sexual identity gaps. For example:

I felt as though because I am a woman, my partner gives me less credibility in day to day life on a minimal scale. My gender has minimally effected my relationship, but it’s still enough to bother me every day. For example, I identify as a feminist and my partner finds that to be annoying or obnoxious even though I do not make a spectacle about it. It does not affect him one way or another what I identify as,

and he enjoys making extremely sexist comments as “jokes” quite frequently. This is the main problem in our communication (Participant 175).

These instances produce communal identity gaps associated with the identity of women.

Role switching. In addition, individuals experienced sexual or gender identity confirmation or invalidation through switching, desiring to switch, or discussing switching roles with their sexual partner ($n=18$, 3.6%). Roles usually referred to BDSM positions as more dominant or more submissive, but several participants also identified switching sexual positions (i.e., top, bottom). For example, “Eventually she started seeing me as a ‘pillow princess’ when in reality I would love to top sometimes” (Participant 408). Pillow princess is a negative term used primarily by women who have sex with women to describe an individual who is exclusively a recipient in a sexual dynamic (e.g., oral sex) (Wilson, 2009). For another example:

I often feel restricted to a soft femme role in sexual activity even though I would like to take on a more dominating hard femme role from time to time, it doesn't seem to be something my partner is into (Participant 433).

Whether by perception or through conversations about the subject, these participants identify feeling as though they are not enacting their preferred roles in every sexual encounter, thus producing identity gaps.

In addition, some participants identified having attempted switching roles with their partner, and performing a role with which they were uncomfortable, producing an identity gap. For example, “Sexually speaking, I am submissive. There was one time with a partner that I took the dominant position and I felt uncomfortable. I didn't feel like myself” (Participant 410). In addition:

As a gay man with a long term partner, the only times I have felt what I would describe as an identity [gap] would be with the roles my partner and I play during sex. Often times this is in the area of who "tops" and who "bottoms" at any given time. I would prefer a versatile relationship with both of us willing to play both roles, however I often end up on bottom during sex. This is sometimes out of a desire too but also sometimes out of necessity. My partner often has difficulty bottoming which I am willing to accommodate. However this tends to transfer into an identity gap where my partner views me as the submissive individual during sex and while I am willing to fill this role occasionally, other times I wish that he would still see us as equals or be willing to fill that role himself. After all, I am only filling that role as I am the only one that can fill that role. Often this causes a feeling of emasculation whether intended by my partner or not. While my masculinity is not important to my identity, I still do not enjoy being treated as the lesser individual during sex (Participant 103).

As with this example, participants also view sexual roles as related to their gender identity, finding certain roles to affirm or undermine aspects of gender role identity (e.g., masculinity).

Polyamorous perceptions of promiscuity. Participants also identified stereotypes about polyamorous people being promiscuous as causing identity gaps in their sexual relationships ($n=5$, 1%). For example, "At the beginning of a relationship I think Partner A thought I was more sexually experienced or promiscuous than I felt I was" (Participant 76). In addition:

I have experienced a gap between who I believe that I am and how my partner perceives what I am communicating about who I am. This has been especially true around my identity as a non-monogamous person. I have difficulty getting beyond the myths or assumptions made about non-monogamous persons, such as wanting a life-long, committed, and deeply intimate relationship when the assumption is that non-monogamous persons are unable to commit or to keep long-term commitments (Participant 32).

As these examples demonstrate, the stereotype of polyamorous people as promiscuous (Klesse, 2006) can produce identity gaps for polyamorous individuals' sexual relationships.

Communal identity sexual compliance. In addition to participants who described sexually compliant behavior producing identity gaps, some participants ($n=7$, 1.4%) indicated that the sexually compliant behavior they engaged in involved consenting to invalidate an aspect of their communal identity. For examples:

I'm on the asexual spectrum but I am grey/demi and have a healthy sexual relationship with my boyfriend. He has a low maintenance drive (doesn't need much, but can have a lot) but isn't asexual. We've done things like sexting and that always feels disconnected from my identity. Although I enjoy it, I have trouble seeing myself as a sexual person a lot of the time (Participant 13).

When we initially began trying to have sex, we tried having my partner penetrate me. I'm ftm and at the time wasn't on testosterone, but we tried for a few months to have penetrational sex and it just felt wrong and not good and really got no enjoyment out of it.. I pretty much just gritted my teeth and if it was a good one, it didn't hurt much, but I really got no pleasure out of our sex for 4 or 5 months and it just wasn't really what I wanted as a guy (Participant 122).

These examples demonstrate that in addition to complying with sexual activity they might not have wanted, these participants complied with a sexual or gender identity with which they did not identify for the motivation of pleasing a partner.

Sexual communication and behavior in the context of close relationships can provide a source of validation or invalidation to an individual's gender or sexual identity. Participants noted instances when their sexual or gender identity was dismissed or erased either intentionally or unintentionally by their partner's behavior. Further, some participants describe complying with an identity with which they do not actually identify to make a partner happy. In addition to communal identity gaps concerning gender and sexuality, some participants identified sexual identity gaps associated with racial identity.

Race. Although the majority of participants described personal identity gaps or communal identity gaps associated with sexual and gender identities, some participants

described communal identity gaps associated with other salient markers of identity.

Importantly, some participants discussed race place, race fetishes, and racism as prompting the experiences of sexual identity gaps ($n=8$, 1.6%).

Race play, a kink in the BDSM community that involves racialized sexual roles, sometimes triggered feelings of identity gaps (Bauer, 2008). For example:

My partner and I are different races. Once we had all spur of the moment sexual roleplay that was racially charged. Afterward I felt a bit uncomfortable with some of the things that were said. While the sex was hot I felt some guilt for using our races' (Black and White) complex history for something sordid (Participant 153).

Relatedly, some participants identified feeling an identity gap as a result of racialized language used within the BDSM community. For example, this participant who identified as a black person said, "Using the term 'slave' when engaging in BDSM during sex" (Participant 75) triggered an identity gap. As well as, "I'm Hispanic and I have had white sexual partners use racial slurs in attempts to dirty talk during sex." Thus, intergroup race relations may influence the experience of identity gaps during sexual activity and sexual communication, particularly for those in the BDSM community. Importantly, participants identified both consensual race play (in which both parties consent to the racialized language and roles) and non-consensual racial language used during sex to prompt identity gaps. Similarly, some participants noted that they felt their racial identities were fetishized during sex. For example, "Never with Partner A, but with Partner B I felt as though my racial identity was fetishized and stereotyped, and with Partner C, my gender identity was fetishized" (Participant 134).

In addition, participants identified racial stereotypes experienced with sexual partners as prompting identity gaps. For example, "I've had people only hook up with

[me] because I'm black and expect a certain level of aggressiveness from me because of that" (Participant 216). Thus, racial stereotypes may also influence sexual communication and produce identity gaps with one's communal identity.

Further, participants identified partner(s) not understanding a racial experience as producing identity gaps, especially when layered with other aspects of communal identity like gender and sexual orientation. For example:

Being in a polyamorous relationship my primary partner does not understand the lack of attention I receive for being an Asian male within the bear community, while he, as a cisgender white male, receives a lot of attention. This causes strife in my own self worth, one in which he cannot fully comprehend (Participant 103).

As this participant exemplifies, a white partner not understanding his experience as an Asian man identifying as a bear can cause relational tensions and personal-communal and personal-relational identity gaps. Although comprising a smaller pattern, communal identity gaps involving racial identity emerged in partnered sexual communication. These identity gaps often highlight multiple social identity categories, which are sometimes in tension with one another. In addition to race, ability identity was also implicated in sexual identity gaps involving communal identity.

Ability identity. Participants also identified that their ability-related identities are sometimes implicated during sexual activity and sexual communication and can produce identity gaps ($n=13$, 2.6%). This included stereotypes about people with visible disabilities, experiences with taking medication and engaging in sexual activity, and mental and emotional health and ability concerns during sexual activity. For examples, participants noted that taking medication that alters sex drive can produce identity gaps and other relational conflicts:

Both myself and my partner have very busy lives that get in the way of sexual activity. In addition, we are both on medications that lower our sexual desire. We have had minimal communication about this because everytime I bring it up, she gets upset and feels like she is doing something wrong (Participant 396).

Partner A was confused about my emotions. I have depression and anxiety and he did not understand that I physically cannot orgasm while on my medication. He was just asking me to stop taking it (Participant 116).

Relatedly, participants also indicated that a partner's ability might affect their sex drive, and thus produces an identity gap from the other perspective. For example:

I have always had a higher sex drive than my partner, but since he became clinically depressed his sex drive is almost nonexistent. There are many times I have been turned on and just don't bring it up because I don't want him to feel bad about not reciprocating (Par 426).

Participants also identified experiencing identity gaps because their health or ability altered their partner's behavior. For example:

I guess sometimes because of my illness sometimes he sees me as more fragile than I really am and that can be frustrating. I used to be really athletic and healthy when we first started dating and I have missed emotions about him treating me like a hospital patient at times (Participant 428).

Alternatively, some participants noted attempts to counter negative stereotypes about people with disabilities through sexual activity. For example:

Daily life is an identity gap for me. I am a bisexual cisgendered woman with a physical disability. I really feel strong, confident & on fire in my relationship with Partner A. The woman is incredible! But since my disability is visible, I'm often infantilized in public (people pat me on the hand, talk down to me, ask real weird questions, pray on me, etc). So there's definitely a gap between how I feel with Partner A and how I'm made to feel in day-to-day living. I don't know how to describe the slippage. Sometimes Partner A wants to reconcile the day-to-day ways that we (she is disabled too) are made to feel ashamed of ourselves. But I can't really do that with her. I'm way too invested in having fun & not letting the outside world & their perceptions of our bodies get any of our hot play time (Participant 31).

Although this participant does not attribute the experience of the identity gap to her partner, but rather about general treatment as a person with a disability compared to how they actually feel, she does note discrepant perceptions between partners on how to best address these tensions.

In addition, participants describe engaging in sexual activity despite feeling depressed or dealing with mental health problems. For example, “I engaged with sexual activity with partner B while I was in a depressive state but I acted like everything was normal” (Participant 213), as well as:

With my partner I feel like I have to act as if I do not deal with a lot of my problems that I have. I feel I have to act as if my mental state is not where it is to make them happy even though it is something I can not control since it is apart of who I am (Participant 147).

Thus, both ability identity and the manifestation of ability emerge in sexual communication and may produce identity gaps both within and outside of a sexual relationship. In addition to sexuality, gender, race, and ability, religion emerged as communal identity implicated by sexual communication.

Religion and sexual morality. Lastly, participants experienced communal identity gaps as a result of their religion and associated sexual morality ($n=9$, 1.8%). Sometimes, these were direct, for example, “During sexual activity I sometimes do not feel like I’m a Christian” (Participant 346). In addition:

My issue is always with my religious identity, as I am a Christian and sexual activity before marriage is considered “sinful”. This makes enjoying sex difficult because there’s always the thought in the back of my mind that I am not fulfilling my Christian life effectively (Participant 184).

Others identified tensions with their religious upbringing or family and how they live their life as a sexual person. For example:

Sexually speaking, sometimes the influence of my Christian family and peers interfere with intimacy with my boyfriend. I was a lot calmer when I lived on a university campus, but now living with family can be tough mentally when shame is distilled into my intimate part of my life. Without religious pressure from family would our sexual intimacy be better and can improve my self to know that it is okay to be sexually active with proper protection than persecution from religious dogma (Participant 47).

Lastly, some participants identified that their partner(s) stereotyped them based on their religious identity, producing a communal identity gap. For example:

My partner frequently makes assumptions about me based off what he perceives as constructs of the groups I identify with. For example, he suggests that we couldn't get married to each other because we are from different religions and have different racial identities. He repeatedly and frustratingly says that my parents would forbid this relationship. I respond by telling him that he doesn't know my parents, and that my parents would not only be comfortable, but accepting of the relationship. I imagine this is based on his perception of my beliefs and culture, not from what I've expressed, but from what he's learned in his own partners experiences, which includes dating others who belong to my religious/racial group (Participant 101).

Thus, religious identity and associated sexual morality sometimes result in feelings of identity gaps in sexual relationships.

To summarize, participants experienced identity gaps in their non-normative sexual communication as a result of sexual and gender identity, racial identity, ability, and religion. These gaps sometimes take the form of sexual activity and partnered sexual communication as identity invalidation or affirmation, stereotypic communication, outright discrimination, or external reactions to their relationships. While many participants identified sexual identity gaps with their communal or personal identities,

some participants did not describe an identity gap or noted that their identity gap was quickly resolved.

None or resolved identity gaps. Lastly, approximately one third of the participants ($n=172$, 34.1%) identified that they did not experience identity gaps at all ($n=130$, 25.8%), or explained that their identity gaps were resolved or they did not experience them because of open communication and a shared relational or communal identity ($n=42$, 8.3%).

Participants identified that they did not experience identity gaps because they were on the same page as their partner or because they had gotten to know each other well through open communication, dialogue, and needs communication. For examples:

I don't think I've ever had an instance like that. I always say my partner knows me better than I know myself; she recognizes any anxiety I have around sexual activity or communication, and effectively works to calm me down, whether that means stopping any sexual activity for the time being, pausing any sexual communication, or encouraging me to open up about anything on my mind (Participant 115).

My partner is very good about making sure I don't feel an identity gap during sexual activity or sexual communication. There is always an open dialogue and lots of questions to ensure we are both comfortable with the situation. For example, I identify as Genderfluid so sometimes I feel dysphoria when certain terms are used during sex. We have a conversation about it before we even have sex (every single time) to ensure that I am feeling comfortable and that my partner doesn't have to worry about causing me discomfort. They have slipped up and called me something that made me uncomfortable on accident before though (Participant 372).

I cannot really think of any identity gaps with my current partner. She is very supportive and we have very open communication about our needs and wants. We have had tough moments during or after sex, but they usually involve supporting one another. I don't think she's ever treated me in a way that was different than I know and see myself (Participant 61).

No, on the contrary; after sexual activity, I am usually even more open and honest towards my partner, and my partner cares about my true feelings (will instantly notice when something is off, will ask whether something was okay for me, etc. (Participant 77).

Although several of these examples do in fact identify an identity gap, the salient focus is that their partner was able to resolve that feeling through checking in and emphasizing a feeling of openness in the sexual communication for both personal and communal identity gaps.

In addition, participants identified that they did not experience or had resolved identity gaps because they knew their partners well, or because they shared important personal or communal identities. For example, “Honestly can’t think of one. My partner has been very effective at knowing who I am and listening with empathy” (Participant 137), and “Not really – not much of an identity gap with us. We share our most important identity aspects with regards to gender and sexual orientation” (Participant 367). In addition:

My first ever partner (Partner A) was very closed off and basically was only there for the sex. I felt a strong disconnect of how I truly was as a person and how he perceived me. He was only interested in one aspect and I couldn’t really connect with Partner A. My current partner (Partner B) is open and we have had much dialogue which allows me to truly show who I am to him and I feel more connected. Partner B is getting to know my full identity, not just the sexual side which allows for greater sexual communication and activity to occur (Participant 366).

As these examples demonstrate, feeling as though a partner understands an important part of their experience either through open communication and empathetic listening or shared salient identities mitigates the experience of identity gaps.

Managing Identity Gaps in Sexual Communication

Continuing to address the research question, participants responded to questions that asked them how, if at all, they attempted to resolve the experience of an identity gap that they described in the previous section. Many participants identified not resolving the identity gap by either complying with an undesired sexual activity or ascribed identity, or just not bringing it up because it was hard to talk about. Other participants identified indirectly attempting to resolve the identity gap, or directly attempting to resolve the identity gap by retraining how they think about gendered language, directly expressing discomfort, or introducing a safe word. Some participants indicated that they ended existing relationships or began new ones to resolve identity gaps. Other participants did note that although they attempted to directly address the identity gap, the situation was either unresolved or led to conflict within their relationship. Lastly, some participants indicated that their partner attempted to address the identity gap for them. First, I describe participants' direct attempts at resolution.

Table 13: Resolving Identity Gaps

Resolution Attempt	Description	<i>n</i>	%
Did Not Attempt to Resolve			
Avoiding Hurting Partner	Participants did not want to hurt their partner's feelings so did not address the identity gap.	7	1.4
Too Hard to Talk About	The source of the identity gap was too difficult or challenging to talk about, or they were afraid to talk about it.	15	3

Table 13 Continued

Not a Big Deal	The identity gap was not perceived as a significant stressor and not worth addressing.	11	2.2
No Attempt to Resolve	Did not attempt to resolve the identity gap and did not explain why.	57	11.3
Attempts to Resolve			
Indirect Attempts at Resolution	Addressed the identity gap indirectly through hinting, joking, or trying new sexual activities without explaining why.	17	3.4
Directly Verbally Addressed	Directly addressed the source of the identity gap, verbally, by expressing comfort or discomfort, requesting a new behavior, coming out, introducing a safe word, etc.	135	26.8
Change in Relational Dynamics	Identity gap was resolved by ending a relationship or opening up a relationship to external partners.	13	2.6
Directly Addressed but No Resolution	Participants identified sometimes addressing the source of the identity gap directly but not resolving it.	25	5
Directly Addressed and Conflict	Addressing the source of the identity gap directly resulted in conflict.	9	1.8
Partner Brought it Up	The identity gap was addressed because the participant's sexual partner noticed and addressed it.	12	2.4

Note: Some responses were associated with multiple patterns because they referred to multiple partners with different identity gap experiences. Four responses (.8%) were coded as "other."

Directly resolved or resolving identity gaps. Many participants had attempted to directly address the source of their identity gap with their sexual partner(s) and either resolved or are currently resolving the feeling of identity discrepancy as a result of this tactic. Direct address and resolution took a number of forms, including directly bringing up the issue at hand ($n=138$, 27.2%), and ending secondary/tertiary relationships or opening up a previously monogamous relationship ($n=13$, 2.6%).

Directly addressing identity gaps. Some participants noted that they resolved their identity gap by directly expressing to a partner how they felt. For example, “I’m uncomfortable as a Black person with someone using that word [slave] to refer to me, even in a sexual context. I told my partner how I felt” (Participant 75). In addition, “I explained how that made me feel and why it was hurtful and my partner understood and apologized. They corrected their behavior and accepted the entirety of my identity and past sexual experiences” (Participant 91). Thus, some participants implied that addressing the source of tension resolved the issue.

Some participants noted that addressing the identity gap meant highlighting shifts in communal identity that caused the gap in the first place. For example, in terms of identity gaps associated with gender, this sometimes meant recoding or retraining a partner to think and speak about gender differently. For example, “I asked them about it and we discussed how my partner prefers they/them pronouns. The issue was fixed after a few slip-ups on my part” (Participant 198). Relatedly, some participants identified that they had not yet addressed the issue, but had a specific plan in place to do so. For example:

I haven't addressed it the person I'm currently (Partner B) dating yet, but I will when we start having genital sex. I have a script in my head. I think it starts with the names I use to describe different parts of my body, but mostly involves teaching her how de-gender bodies and sexual interactions. I think that the site of intervention is not in her interactions with me, but in her head, I need her to notice every time she thinks of my body as a woman's body and to actively challenge that I've raised the same thing with a non-binary ex (Partner C). They said they weren't misgendering me. I guess in some ways it helped relieve the sense that they were, but also I'm not sure I fully believe them (Participant 10).

Participants also noted that directly addressing an identity gap sometimes meant “coming out” or disclosing a sexual orientation a partner did not previously know. For example, “Eventually built up the confidence to come out” (Participant 84), as well as:

I came out to her fully a couple of weeks ago. Over the years we would talk about bisexual situations in the bedroom and I would play the "it turns me on because it turns you on" card. It still wasn't easy, but knowing it turned her on made it easier (Participant 67).

In addition, directly addressing identity gaps sometimes meant expressing discomfort and coming up with alternative solutions. For examples, “I worked out a subtle code with Partner B to express a my desire for whatever affection he is comfortable expressing. With Partner A, I expressed a desire to "cut in" if feeling neglected, and he agreed” (Participant 21), as well as, “I explained that I wasn’t entirely comfortable with that and they were accepting. I invited them to do something else we were both okay with” (Participant 244). Coming up with solutions or providing alternatives after describing discomfort was also a way for participants to mitigate the experience of an identity gap with their relational partner’s cooperation.

Participants also came up with solutions with their partners as a means to address the identity gap and prevent the experience or discomfort from recurring. One way participants did this was to introduce safe words. In the BDSM community, a safe word

is a word that one can use during a particular scene that means the activity stops

(Pitagora, 2013). For examples:

We've discussed it pretty thoroughly. We know where our limits - mostly my limits - lie, and I have a safeword which I've used a very small number of times. As I said, my partner can tell so situations in which I needed to safeword, I sometimes didn't before he simply asked if I was okay (Participant 25).

I used a safe word to check in and told my partner I was experiencing the dysphoria, which they already knew I sometimes experience. We decided to do things that commonly alleviate it, like use affirming words to refer to me and my body, and increase attention on non-gendered body parts and activities (Participant 82).

Introduction of a safe word as well as focusing on other activities were ways that participants directly attempted to alleviate their identity gaps.

Although fewer, a handful of participants who directly discussed the identity gap with their partner framed the experience positively because it sparked a positive change, allowed them to try something sexually they both enjoyed, brought them closer as a couple, or added something like aftercare to a more intense sexual routine that they found pleasing and positive. For example, "We talked about it and realized that we were both really into it" (Participant 69), as well as, "The tension was seen more as a positive thing and brought to the interaction" (Participant 303). Thus, participants addressed their identity gaps directly, and sometimes in doing so frame the experience positively because it results in a positive relational change.

Some participants noted that their discussions about their identity gaps with their partner were affected by a shared or different communal identity. For example, "I just asked my partner if he ever experiences these things because he is also a Christian"

(Participant 184). Thus, the shared social identity of religion allowed the participant to ask directly about their own identity gap rooted in religious identity.

Similarly, participants described that the nature of a particular shared identity (e.g., BDSM) mandated addressing identity gaps as they arose. For example:

If you're comfortable with your partner sexually, having these conversations isn't difficult. Having these types of conversations are natural in our relationship, probably because of the things my partner likes. When someone likes to be choked while they're getting fucked these types of conversations are necessary. Plus, since I'm not naturally dominant, I tend to be overly conscious of my partner's limits (Participant 219).

As this participant demonstrates, the nature of a relationship as being a BDSM relationship mandates addressing any discomfort as it arises, relying on the shared BDSM language of “limits” to do so.

Alternatively, some participants attributed their partners’ differing identities to different experiences and subsequently different levels of comfort talking about issues of identity. For example:

I think Partner A is more comfortable talking about identity gaps because she is transmasculine and trans/queer identities are more visible in the news and more accepted as having civil rights than disabled folks. Queer folks have the opportunity to be "seen." Or I've heard her talk about how important it is to be "seen." I don't know a single place in the USA where a physically & visibly disabled woman could be "seen." Too much stigma. Too little inclusion in mainstream culture/media (Participant 31).

Thus, attributing an identity as more stigmatized than a partner’s identity may lead to different levels of comfort directly addressing these discrepancies.

Change in relational dynamics. As a result of directly addressing the identity gap, some participants noted that the resolution involved a change in relational dynamics. For some participants, this involved ending a relationship with a secondary or tertiary

partner because the associated identity gaps caused problems with a primary partner. For example:

I have attempted to explore Partner A's feelings with her, to try and discover why this scenario evokes negative feelings in her. Partner A and I have been together and polyamorous for many years, and have tried for me to have a relationship with Partner B. Ultimately, Partner B and I ended our intimate relationship due to these feelings in Partner A (Participant 49).

Alternatively, some participants noted that the resolution to the identity gap was to open up an otherwise monogamous relationship to allow for additional sexual or romantic partners. For example:

I started dropping hints that I might be attracted to both men and women to see how he might react, then when the reaction was positive, I started being more blunt and open. I would Express my attraction to women we saw and openly discuss it. Then later openly discussed what would be appropriate to open up our sex life that would allow me to have sex with women as well (Participant 50).

Thus, one way that participants managed the experience of identity gaps was to change the relational dynamics.

Directly addressed but unresolved. Rather than resolving the identity gap as a result of directly addressing it, some participants who directly brought up their identity gap to their partner were unable to resolve the issue ($n=25$, 5%), or found that addressing the identity gap led to conflict in their relationship ($n= 9$, 1.8%). Whether or not the identity gap was resolved as a result of their communication strategy is consequential because when the relational layer of identity is implicated in communication, communication strategies for mitigating the experience of an identity gap require multiple parties. Thus, being direct did not guarantee a resolution.

No resolution. First, participants described the issue just not being resolved as a result of bringing it up. For example, “Partner B – we do talk about what we both like/want, it just doesn’t always translate well to actions” (Participant 81). As well as, “I have addressed it and he seemed to listen...but no action?” (Participant 188).

Participants noted that sometimes talking about things provided more context, but did not solve the problem, for example:

I have slightly discussed it with him. I have told him that I don't feel like he really cares one way or the other to have sex. I told him that I know he loves me and that I know it has nothing to do with not being attracted to me, it's just that he doesn't show it in a way that I like or a way that I apparently can receive it. He always reassures me and tries to go right into sex by saying "well lets do it right now!" As if to make up for it and prove something. I always tell him that just makes it feel like pity sex. His reactions and words let me know that he is always genuine about trying to make me feel better and prove me wrong, he just has no idea how to fix it because we simply just don't share the same experiences with sex, so how can he know how to give me what I am asking? Or how can he even understand what I am talking about at all? He knows that I like it rougher than what he does and he apologizes. He tells me that he was raised. (He was raised in a cult like Christian home where he was home schooled and his mother made and wore long sleeve long dresses all year round and sex is bad and you don't touch women until marriage in anyway other than holding a hand.) I let him know that I respect this and that I understand that this is the part I don't love about our sex, but it is the part about the man he is that I love and know is what makes him unique and special to me (Participant 334).

Thus, directly addressing identity gaps did not guarantee the issue would be resolved, but did sometimes provide additional context.

Conflict. In addition to directly addressing identity gaps not always resolving them, sometimes directly bringing them up resulted in relational conflict. For example, “With Partner X, if the tension was ever addressed it was tense and usually resulted in an argument” (Participant 105). In addition:

If I try to address the problem with my partner, he can be defensive. Or he will brush it off and ignore my attempt to talk about the issue. So we usually end up fighting about it because I feel as though I need to scream to be heard, even though we've been together for four years (Participant 176).

As well as:

I don't handle this very well even to this day.. I'll get angry, tell him why I'm angry, he thinks it's ridiculous that I'm angry over it, makes me even more angry, I'll send him paragraphs of why I'm angry or call, he doesn't take it seriously, he stops talking to me so I can relax. And I either am still angry or I apologize. It's the weirdest thing (Participant 223).

Thus, directly addressing identity gaps sometimes results in conflict.

Participants often directly addressed the above described identity gaps by telling their partner about the source of the tension. Directly addressing the gap did not inherently result in a solution, with the identity gaps sometimes remaining unresolved even after partner discussion or leading to conflict. However, some participants noted that directly addressing the identity gap solved the problem, sometimes even framing the identity gap as a positive rather than negative occurrence because it ultimately resulted in a positive relational change. In addition to those who directly addressed their identity gap, some participants attempted to manage the feeling of an identity gap in a more indirect manner.

Indirectly addressed identity gaps. Participants noted attempting to address their sexual identity gap with their partner(s) indirectly rather than directly ($n=17$, 3.4%). This included hinting or joking, trying to change a given activity or implying that they did not like it or would prefer another sexual activity. For example, "I have kind of hinted at how I feel, but reassured her of my attraction to her" (Participant 88), as well as, "Not directly, just by suggesting different things that empowered me and made me feel more

myself” (Participant 241). Further, this participant noted, “Partner A and I usually address it in a joking matter when addressing sexual tensions” (Participant 270). Some participants also indicated that their indirect attempts to resolve identity gaps were more nonverbal than verbal. For example, “I made it clear I was slightly uncomfortable with having sex when I was asked by making a disappointed face” (Participant 199). These examples demonstrate attempts to resolve an identity gap, but without directly verbally addressing the source of the tension. In addition to those who directly or indirectly attempted to resolve their identity gap, some participants noted making no attempt to resolve or manage their identity gap.

No attempt at resolution. Many participants identified that their identity gaps were unresolved because they did not attempt to resolve them. Importantly, the majority of participants who did not attempt to resolve the identity gap with their partner did not provide an explanation for why ($n=57$, 11.3%), but simply said “I didn’t” or “We haven’t talked about it.” However, some participants did explain why they did not attempt to resolve the identity gap. This included participants who identified not wanting to hurt a partner’s feelings or to make a partner happy ($n=7$, 1.4%), those who felt the topic was too hard to talk about or they were afraid to talk about it due to fear of losing a partner ($n=15$, 3%), and those who said they did not address it because they did not perceive it as a significant enough event to warrant address ($n=11$, 2.2%). I discuss each in turn.

Partner motivation. One reason that participants provided for avoiding addressing their identity gaps with their partner(s) was because they wanted to make their partner(s) happy. For example, “I don’t say anything. I want to make him happy, like he wants me

to be happy. And it doesn't bother me, but I can live without it" (Participant 110). The notion of the identity gap not being a serious issue came up as well, which I will address shortly.

Other participants identified that rather than wanting to make a partner happy, they wanted to avoid starting a fight or hurting their partner. For example, "I did not address the tension because I did not want to hurt my partner" (Participant 203). Participants identified being motivated to avoid addressing the topic then to preserve a partner's feelings of happiness or to avoid distress.

Too hard to talk about. In addition, participants avoided disclosing the presence of an identity gap to their partner(s) because they felt the topic was too hard to talk about, too awkward to talk about, or feared it was serious enough that it might disrupt the quality or stability of the relationship. For example, "No, I find it hard to discuss my sexual feelings sometimes due to his lack of confidence and because I find it really hard to discuss anything related to my last abusive partner" (Participant 127). Relatedly:

I don't know why I couldn't get the words out to explain myself but then the moment was already gone. I feel like sometimes he forgets I am a woman and have different needs at different times of my life. I need more foreplay and it feels like his needs are more important than mine (Participant 350).

Thus, participants described the identity gaps being challenging to talk about for a variety of reasons that result in them going unresolved.

Moreover, several participants felt as though if they were to bring an identity gap to their partner(s)' attention, it may result in their partner leaving them. For example, "I did not address this tension with my partner, as I felt unstable in the relationship and feared he would desert me if the topic arose" (Participant 261). For another example:

I did not address the tension with Partner A. I was afraid I would lose him if I did so I walked on egg shells trying to maintain the “fantasy”. Partner B gets all the grimy details of my life so if there is tension, I am more willing to talk about it and we can openly communicate. Partner B, I think, has a way more realistic view of me which makes me more comfortable with my own identity (Participant 366).

As this participant demonstrates, fear of losing a partner prevented them from disclosing the presence of an identity gap. However, their perception that another partner saw them as they see themselves established a more open communication climate for discussing sexual issues.

Not a big deal. Similar to participants who avoided addressing the topic of their identity gap to please a partner, a number of participants noted that they did not address the issue because it was not a serious enough issue to warrant discussion. For example, “I don’t think it’s a big deal, so I didn’t say anything” (Participant 404), as well as, “I didn’t. It’s no big deal, I like making my partner happy” (Participant 411). Thus, some participants made no attempt to resolve or manage their identity gap because they did not consider the gap problematic enough to warrant addressing.

Thus, while many participants attempted to manage or mitigate the experience of an identity gap, indirectly or directly, by addressing it with their partner, some participants made no attempt to resolve the identity gap. Many participants did not explain why they engaged in no attempt to resolve the gap, but some participants identified that making a partner happy was more important to them than minimizing the identity gap, that they felt the experience was too difficult to address, or that it was so minor it was not worth addressing. Alternatively, some participants noted that their partner initiated the discussion about the identity gap, which I describe next.

Partner initiated identity gap discussion. Lastly, fewer participants described situations in which they did not bring up their identity gap or attempt to resolve it, but a partner noticed in some capacity and addressed it ($n=12$, 2.4%). For example, “I didn’t initially address it i got all quiet and he noticed. Then i brought it up because he started to ask” (Participant 243), as well as, “He brought it up to me and told me that he normally likes our sex but that wasn’t what he wanted either” (Participant 291). Thus, in some cases, identity gaps may be addressed by the other party.

Identity gaps, which are traditionally an aversive state that require some management, may be resolved by direct or indirect attempts to communicate them to a partner, or they may be communicated to a partner with no resolution or conflict. In addition, some participants describe just living with the experience of the identity gap and not bringing it to a partner’s attention due to the especially risky nature of the identity gap, or because the identity gap was so minor they did not feel like it warranted address. While some participants described the resolution of the identity gap as a simple conversation that resulted in a change of behavior, thus solving the problem, others noted that resolving an identity gap is an on-going relational challenge. In addition, identity gaps and communication surrounding them may result in a number of other consequences. In the next section, I describe these consequences and ongoing resolution attempts.

Consequences of Sexual Identity Gaps and Ongoing Resolutions

Participants also addressed what they did, if anything, as a result of the experience of a sexual identity gap. Participants described doing nothing either because after the

resolution attempt described above, the issue was over, because they were ignoring it, or because they were lying about it. Participants also described relational changes such as being distant, fighting, or ending a relationship and positive changes such as increasing communication and openness with a partner. In addition, participants described sexual changes including ceasing having sex or stopping initiating sex as well as increasing the amount of sexual activity and affection exchanged in their relationship as a result of introducing a new position or sex act or addressing the initial problem. Participants also described ongoing changes in sexual safety as a result of their identity gap, including the consistent use of safe words and aftercare, as well as increasing accessibility to barrier methods like condoms. Participants also described consequences of identity gaps outside of their immediate relationship, including internally struggling with negative feelings associated with the identity gap, or making external changes such as talking to friends and family, seeing a therapist, or emphasizing a salient identity (e.g., going to a pride parade). I describe each in turn.

Table 14: Consequences of Sexual Identity Gaps

Consequence	Description	<i>n</i>	%
No Perceived Consequence			
“Nothing”	Participants simply said there was no consequence or result from the identity gap.	42	8.3
Resolution attempt resolved issue	The resolution attempted described in the previous section resolved the issue, and there were no further consequences.	18	3.6
Ignored it/Concealed	Participant identified “nothing” but described suppressing the issue, ignoring it, or concealing discontent.	34	6.7
Planning to Address	There was no consequence yet, but they planned to address it.	6	1.2
Relational Changes			
Distance	Identity gap or resolution attempt resulted in distancing behaviors.	14	2.8
Fighting	Attempts to resolve the identity gap resulted in conflict.	12	2.4
Ended a Relationship	Attempts to resolve the identity gap resulted in ending a relationship.	18	3.6
Open communication climate and positive relational changes	Participants described situations in which addressing the identity gaps improved the overall communication climate in the relationship.	89	17.7
Sexual Changes			
Stop having sex	Some participants stopped having sex or stopped initiating sexual activity with their partner due to the identity gap.	11	2.2

Table 14 Continued

Increase in sex/affection	Participants also increased the quantity of their sexual activity or affection exchanged or described their sexual activity as improving as a result of the identity gap resolution process.	25	5
Sexual safety changes	Participants identified changes in sexual safety behaviors like condom use or safe words.	5	1
Self & External Changes			
Internally struggling	Participants described ruminating with negative feelings, and in extreme cases drug use or self-harm.	28	5.6
External changes	Participants consulted friends, family, therapists, or learned to emphasize salient identities outside of the relationship.	12	2.4

Note: Some responses were associated with multiple patterns because they referred to multiple partners with different identity gap experiences. Six responses (1.2%) were coded as “other.”

No Perceived Consequences

Identity gap resolved. Some participants indicated that their previously described resolution was the end of the story. For example, “We talked about it briefly and it was fine” (Participant 62). In addition, “I felt fine about my choices afterward. We both agreed we were consenting adults and playing with racial tensions in sex doesn't have to be wrong” (Participant 153), as well as, “Nothing, we both accepted it as a part of who he is and how he chooses to define himself. Male gendered pronouns are acceptable for him, even if he doesn't feel particularly male. (Participant 362). Thus, some identity gaps were resolved without perceptions of lingering relational or personal consequences. Other

participants identified either ignoring or suppressing the identity gap, or actively lying to their partner about it.

Ignoring it or lying. Alternatively, some participants indicated that although “nothing” had happened, they were deceiving their partner or pretending the identity gap did not bother them when in reality it did. For example, “I tried to ignore it or forget about it” (Participant 336), as well as, “Pretend I’m happy, try to be grateful I’m at least having sex at all” (Participant 157). In addition, “I just do it and get it over with and keep a smile on my face” (Participant 233).

Although most participants described concealing the identity gap from their partner, others indicated that they addressed the identity gap with their partner, but may still experience it because they conceal it from those outside of the relationship. For example, “Pushed the issue and talked about it with him. Otherwise I would have just let everyone continue assuming I am heterosexual because it is simply easy when in a longterm heterosexual relationship” (Participant 50). Thus, the consequences of sexual identity gaps may extend beyond the immediate relational context in which they occur.

Waiting. Other participants indicated that although nothing had happened yet as a result of their identity gap, they still planned to address it, so the issue was unresolved.

For example, “Nothing yet” (Participant 35). In addition:

As of right now, I still feel this tension because I'm worried about being fully accepted sexually by partner A, even though he has given me no indication that he would reject me if he more fully understood my sexuality. I have spent a lot of time thinking about what holds me back from communicating more openly, and I have tried to do so a bit more, but I wouldn't say that I've anywhere near resolving this tension (Participant 35).

Thus, resolution may be ongoing or an individual may be planning to resolve it, but not have attempted it yet. In addition, participants identified positive and negative relational changes as a result of the identity gap.

Relational Changes

Many participants indicated that the result of their sexual identity gap was some change in their relationship, positive or negative. For some, this change was their own resentment or own behavioral or emotional distance ($n=14$, 2.8%). Relatedly, as addressed in the previous section, some indicated the identity gap ended the relationship ($n=18$, 3.6%) or resulted in conflict ($n=12$, 2.4%). Alternatively, some participants indicated that the identity gap resulted in a positive relational change because it enabled them to open a communication climate or solve a problem together with their partner, or that this communication was ongoing and they had not reached a resolution yet, but indicated that the communication changes were positive and headed in the right direction ($n=89$, 17.7%).

Distance and resentment. As a result of sexual identity gaps, participants indicated that they were sometimes distant to or resentful of their partner(s). For example, “I have been distant” (Participant 109), as well as, “I temporarily distanced myself from him” (Participant 245). Generally, these descriptions were negative and indicate a negative change in the relationship. For example, “I distanced myself from him and our relationship went south” (Participant 393).

Other participants described, as a result of compliance or concealing the presence of an identity gap, they grew to resent their partner. For example, “Often times, I

pretended to be another person. And afterwards, was displeased, and unsatisfied and probably even resented my partner for it” (Participant 354). Thus, identity gaps can result in behavioral and emotional changes that negatively affect the overall relationship.

Positive relational changes. Alternatively, many participants noted that as a result of how they addressed their sexual identity gap, usually directly, there were positive changes in their relationship. For example, “We talked it out and the relationship grew stronger” (Participant 222). Sometimes, this was as a result of addressing and resolving the problems, other times this was because their partner made them feel accepted and feel good about themselves, thereby affirming their salient identities and subsequently minimizing the identity gap. For example, “Accepted that both our identities have changed and support each other with the new relationship” (Participant 79), as well as, “I engage in more healthy communication and allows me to review my own personal image” (Participant 113). Thus, identity gaps can spark an opportunity for relationally grounded identity confirmation and support.

In addition, some participants described that through discussing their identity gaps they engaged in problem solving with their partner in an effort to prevent future discomfort and improve the overall quality of the relationship. For example, “I communicated with my partner, and we both adapted new choices in our speech patterns. This didn't solve every hiccup in our relationship, but: it made a huge difference on this issue in particular” (Participant 196). In addition:

I sat down and analyzed why I was feeling so anxious and what exactly I was worried about. Then I brought it up to them a few days later. We discussed it, and they were very patient and understanding, which reduced my anxiety level tenfold! They reiterated that they wanted me to tell them when I was anxious,

especially if it was triggered by something they were or weren't doing, because one of their biggest fears is making me uncomfortable. I've promised myself that when I get anxious in the future, I will do my best to bring it up to them and get it sorted out, so that I'm not stewing in anxiety like our first time sexting. (Participant 163).

As a result of the tension, we fully spent time in discussing the incident. We make sure to avoid making the same mistakes. We are always accountable for each other. Sometimes, we pray for each other. I believe that without prayer and discussing our faith, we would not be in the committed relationship that we are in. We have been together for a long time. We talk about our wedding and future together. We communicate effectively and fully. (Participant 343).

Thus, participants described attempts to address the subject and prevent future identity gaps as growing their relationship(s) in a positive direction. In addition, some participants noted that the experience of resolving the identity gap improved the overall quality of communication in the relationship, which sometimes led to better sex as well as a better overall relationship, which I address next.

Sexual Changes

In addition to describing changes to the quality of the overall relationship, participants described changes to the sexual relationship. Although some participants just described specific sexual changes and did not indicate if the end result was positive or negative or how their partner reacted ($n=9$, 1.8%), participants also described specific consequences for their sexual relationship. Specifically, participants identified that as a result of identity gaps they stopped engaging in or stopped initiating sexual activity with a partner ($n=11$, 2.2%). Alternatively, some participants identified that as a result of addressing the identity gap, their sexual relationship had improved ($n=25$, 5%). Lastly, participants identified changes or attempts in changes in sexual safety as a result of their identity gap.

Stopped having sex. A number of participants described that as a result of their identity gap, they simply stopped initiating sexual activity with their partner or stopped having sex all together. For example, “I became further withdrawn and avoided further sexual encounters” (Participant 161), as well as, “I eventually stopped having sex altogether, as the incidents continued” (Participant 283), and, “Eventually stopped having sex” (Participant 383).

Some participants described specific reasons related to the source of the sexual identity gap that motivated them to stop engaging in sexual activity with their partner(s), such as asexual or religious identity. For example, “My partner and I tried to stop having pre-marital sexual relations in order to be better Christians” (Participant 184), as well as, “I stopped trying to initiate sex so that he wouldn't feel bad for telling me no. I basically just left it up to him to initiate” (Participant 189). Thus, some sexual identity gaps may result in a decrease in sexual activity either to resolve the identity gap by affirming a religious or sexual identity, or out of resentment or disinterest.

Increase or improvement in sexual activity. While some participants stopped having sex as a result of their identity gap, others described that in addressing their sexual identity gap, their sexual relationship had improved or they had increased the frequency with which they engage in sexual activity in a positive way. For example, “I now enjoy sex with the clarity and comfort of who I'm with currently” (Participant 405).

Generally, participants described positive changes in their sexual relationship as a result of either solving a problem that was preventing them from enjoying sex, or having fun introducing new ideas together in an attempt to address their identity gap. For

example, “We discovered a new energy in different positions that is fun to explore” (Participant 69), as well as, “After we started with using a strap on, we started trying many other toys and it got more interesting. It was really mostly experimenting” (Participant 122). Thus, the result of sexual identity gaps could lead to negative sexual or relational outcomes, but they could also result in positive relational and sexual changes that improve the quality of the overall relationship and the sexual relationship, especially when the relational partners engage in open communication or creative problem-solving about the sexual identity gap.

Sexual safety changes. A handful of participants also described changes in sexual safety behaviors ($n=5$, 1%), both physical and mental/emotional safety, as a result of their identity gap. Physical changes in sexual safety behaviors usually involved condom use. Mental and emotional changes in safety behavior described adherence to safe words or increasing aftercare activities. For example, “I always keep condoms around” (Participant 313). Some participants noted this was a positive change that made the encounter safer. For example:

Used a safe word to stop and discuss how I felt, and then continued sexual activity with my feelings now shared and us having agreed to use appropriate language and technique (related to the gender I felt) to make me feel less disconnected to myself (feel less gender dysphoria) and therefore more comfortable (Participant 82).

Alternatively, some participants indicated that even though a change was made, it did not necessarily produce positive results. For example, “mostly just felt frustrated & bought even more condoms to have them as readily available as possible but somehow it still manages to happen” (Participant 207). Therefore, introduction of sexual safety

changes as a result of experiencing a sexual identity gap did not guarantee partner cooperation.

Internalized Distress

While most participants described relational consequences, positive or negative, as a result of their sexual identity gap, other participants described what the experience of the identity gap did to them personally, sometimes even when a partner tried to resolve the issue ($n=28$, 5.6%). These included ruminating or fixating on negative feelings, feelings of anger, rejection, confusion, and stress, and crying. For example, “Felt bad about myself and my ability to feel aroused” (Participant 263), as well as, “Felt very confused for a few weeks, I’m still confused about everything” (Participant 140).

Importantly, internal feelings of anxiety and worry sometimes continue after experiencing a sexual identity gap as a result of external perceptions of a given social group. For example:

We have very different worldviews; they believe labels and the opinions of others don't matter as they have a very strong sense of self and identity that is not affected by these things. Alternately, I worry greatly about the language I use to describe myself and how others perceive this. Their attempts to comfort me and frequent and sincere but my own anxiety often overwhelms me regarding this topic; especially with the gatekeeping in the LGBTQ+ community. (Participant 86).

Thus, participants experienced internal feelings of distress as a result of the experience of sexual identity gaps.

Although less frequent, a few participants did describe more severe and dangerous reactions to internal feelings of distress associated with an identity gap such as self-harm, drug or alcohol use, or suicidal attempts or ideation. For example, “Self harmed, defamed

my interest, openly expressed how I hated it (When I truly did not)” (Participant 114), as well as, “I attempted to take my life twice, and I had a decade long drug and alcohol binge. It didnt dissapte until I came out” (Participant 416). Identity gaps, then, can have severe negative consequences in terms of mental and physical health.

External Changes

In addition, participants described life or behavioral changes as a result of their identity gap external to their relationships with their sexual partner ($n=12$, 2.4%). These involved consulting friends and family, starting therapy, or finding ways to emphasize and connect with salient social identities. In response to sexual identity gaps, some participants discussed their feelings with friends or family members. For example, “Spoke to my best friend for advice regarding the partner juggling and sharing of my opinion on my partners other relationships” (Participant 135).

Alternatively, some participants started seeing a therapist to discuss their sexual identity gaps and related ongoing relational issues. For example, “I go to therapy and try to practice self care. She expects a lot from me, I feel taken for granted. Its an emotional mess” (Participant 100).

Also external to their sexual relationship, participants identified that as a result of their sexual identity gap they sometimes emphasized salient aspects of their social identities through extending social networks, coming out, or addressing the identity issue to others outside the relationship. For example, “I felt that I needed to ‘prove’ that I was interested in her as a person and not due to her race, not only to her but to others around us” (Participant 149).

Most participants who described emphasizing salient social identities in response to a sexual identity gap described sexual orientation or gender identity, usually in terms of coming out to extended networks. For example:

After I came out to my wife and closest friends, my tensions went away. It was like a huge weight was lifted from my entire being. I feel it's only because I was met with love and acceptance from everyone in my close circle. Including my wife and children. I'm a lucky man (Participant 67).

In addition, “Started talking more with my old LGBT friends from high school and buying pride paraphernalia” (Participant 84). Thus, sexual identity gaps may have an impact on the enactment of communal identities outside of the relational context in which they originate. Although many participants describe internal or external consequences to their identity gap experience or ongoing resolution process in their relationship, some participants did note that nothing really occurred as a result of their identity gap or identity gap management.

Nothing

A number of participants responded “nothing” when asked what had happened as a result of the sexual identity gap ($n=42$, 8.3%). Others identified that the resolution they described in the previous answer was the end of the issue ($n=18$, 3.6%). Many others wrote “nothing,” but elaborated that nothing had happened because they were ignoring it, pretending the identity gap was less consequential than it is, or actively lying to their partner about it ($n=34$, 6.7%). A smaller number of participants indicated that nothing had happened yet, or that they were planning to talk to their partner about it in the future ($n=6$, 1.2%).

In summary, both the experience of the sexual identity gap and the process of managing the identity gap within their relationship resulted in a number of attributed consequences. These consequences include positive and negative changes in the overall relationship or sexual relationship including sexual safety changes, internal feelings of distress, and external changes.

Summary

To summarize, in this chapter I described a typology of sexual identity gaps that occurred in non-normative relationships. These identity gaps could broadly be described as occurring in tension with personal identities (i.e., sense of self) or communal identities (i.e., social group memberships like gay, Black, or Christian). Addressing the research question, I described how participants attempted to resolve their identity gaps and the associated consequences with those communication choices. Identity gaps were often unresolved, resolved by directly addressing them, or resolved by indirectly addressing them. In addition, identity gaps were a source of conflict and relational dissolution, as well as a source of positive change in cases where the attempt to resolve the issue was met with affirmation and support and led to changes in communication or sexual behavior that grew the relationship. Thus, the findings of this chapter support the notion that identity gaps emerge frequently in communication and are consequential.

Chapter 6: Discussion

In this study, I sought to extend the intergroup landscape to include sexual communication in non-normative relationships. Specifically, I tested a statistical model to explore the mediating role of identity gaps, produced a typology of identity gaps that occur in non-normative sexual communication, and explored management strategies individuals in non-normative relationships use to manage or mitigate the experience of identity gaps in their sexual relationships. In this section, I will review and discuss the findings from Chapters 4 and 5. First, I discuss the theoretical contributions from the present study. Next, I interpret the findings from the structural model testing. I review the changes made to the final model, and offer explanation and rationale for the significant paths, mediation effects, and results of the post hoc analyses in light of previous research and theory. Next, I review the implications of these findings from the typology and associated management strategies. I then discuss practical implications of these findings and the present study's limitations. Finally, I conclude with recommendations for specific directions for future research.

Theoretical Contributions: Sex as an Intergroup Arena

Among other theoretical contributions that support and extend the body of work surrounding facework, disclosure, and CTI as described throughout the next section, the present study provides both quantitative and qualitative evidence that personal and social identities are consequential in understanding how sexual communication influences relational and health outcomes. The findings support the theoretical contention that sexual communication may be rightly placed in the high-interpersonal/high-intergroup

quadrant of the interpersonal-intergroup communication continuum (Giles, 2012). In addition, the present study offers a useful theoretical framework to the largely atheoretical sexual communication literature (Sprecher & Cate, 2004). This section highlights and expands upon these theoretical contributions.

While the present study contends that sexual communication is an intergroup arena and introduces identity gaps as evidence for this claim, identity gaps are an entry point into this conversation, not a stopping point. The present study grows CTI by introducing new variables into the claim that identity gaps mediate the relationship between communication input and relational outcome variables. In addition, it suggests the positive potential of identity gaps in some cases, and offers several strategies for how to manage or reduce them in ways that can improve relationships, rather than only highlighting the harm they do, although that is also well documented here. Importantly, the intergroup nature of sexual communication also includes nuances within identity gaps and what causes them. One aspect of communication that produces identity gaps highlighted within the present study is stereotyping.

Sexual communication is perhaps the most intimate communication context for close relationships (Noland, 2010), and one seemingly free from larger societal patterns of intergroup bias. However, the present study contends and findings support that this is not the case. Intergroup biases and stereotyping manifest in even the most intimate forms of communication, including that about sexual activity with close relational partners. Findings about race and gender-based stereotypes and even outright hate speech emerged in the data. Stereotyping is also represented in the structural model, as that is a part of

how personal-enacted and personal-relational identity gaps are operationalized (Jung, 2011, 2013). Stereotypes manifest in and from the sexual script, which is gendered and heteronormative (Manning, 2014; Wiederman, 2005). CTI, as predicted, afforded the present study the ability to examine the vehicles through which group identification that occurs in sexual partner communication results in stereotypical sexual negotiation patterns and choices and the identity-laden discrepancies that accompany absence of or deviation from heteronormative sexual scripts.

In addition to stereotyping sexual partners, the present study reveals self-stereotyping in sexual communication. Introduced in Chapter 2, SCT explains the cognitive and linguistic processes through which we place ourselves and others into social groups (Reid & Anderson, 2010). Self-stereotyping is one such process that occurs when group identification is high (Reid & Anderson, 2010). In the present study, individuals noted that they often had to counter their own stereotypical understandings of communal identity (e.g., that women cannot request sexual safety acts). In addition, the presence of group-based sexual compliance emphasizes the personal and relational pressure to conform to perceived group-based normative behavior with a range of described consequences.

Beyond stereotyping, intimate partner communication in non-normative relationships reflects communal intergroup relations. For example, fetishes exist in direct reference to intergroup race or gender relations and result in identity gaps, even when consensually enacted. Sexual roles and preferences exist in relationship to scripted behaviors that are constrained by intergroup ascriptions and biases. Both individuals who

intentionally enact such scripts (e.g., those in BDSM relationships, or individuals who engage in race play) and those who deviate (e.g., individuals who resist gendered ascriptions in sexual partner communication) expressed an awareness of how their behavior reflects or deviates from group-based norms. The cultural scripts present in the sexual script filter interpersonal communication (Wiederman, 2005), which the present study supports and extends. Like cultural rules per CPM (Petronio, 2002), cultural scripts may be more aptly summarized as intergroup scripts that manifest in and filter interpersonal sexual communication. The present study provides empirical evidence for this theoretically grounded contention.

Although the present study addresses these concerns in non-normative relationships, it is likely that an intergroup script also filters normative sexual communication. Future research may specifically test these findings in normative relationships, which are still filtered through gendered and racialized lenses (Rubinsky & Cooke-Jackson, 2018; Wiederman, 2005). Attention to normative processes across relational types may provide a more useful theoretical explanation for what occurs in sexual communication that affects relational and health processes.

To summarize, these findings coalesce in the supported theoretical contention that sexual communication is an intergroup domain. In addition to important relational and cognitive processes that an individual manages in their intimate partner communication, perceptions of and ascriptions to group-based identities filter and interact with interpersonal communication. Stereotyping, outright discrimination like racism, and other intergroup linguistic and cognitive biases characterized sexual communication in which

identity gaps emerged. Those identity gaps were highly consequential, mediating the relationship between sexual communication and satisfaction. Thus, intergroup processes appear to both characterize and impact sexual communication in the non-normative relational context. Next, I elaborate on these theoretical contributions by exploring the study's findings in light of viewing sexual disclosure as enacted identity.

Sexual disclosure as enacted identity. In the present study, I proposed identity gaps from CTI as a method through which to operationalize how personal and social identities manifest in and influence sexual communication. To achieve this, I tested a hypothesized model that positioned identity gaps as a mediator in the relationship between sexual disclosure and relational outcomes. Several changes occurred between the initial hypothesized model and the final respecified model including parceling disclosure and separating it into positive and negative dimensions of the construct, treating identity gaps and satisfaction as latent variables, and removing identity salience and sexual health from the model. These theoretically supported changes described in Chapter 4 addressed concerns about validity and improved model fit. In the respecified model, all predicted paths were significant. Disclosure predicts identity gaps, positive/neutral disclosure negatively predicts identity gaps and positively predicts satisfaction, and identity gaps negatively predict satisfaction. Identity gaps also significantly mediated the relationship between both positive and negative disclosure and satisfaction. The hypotheses introduced in Chapter 2 and the revised hypotheses proposed in Chapter 4 were largely supported. In this section, I explore the implications of these findings, beginning with the role of disclosure.

Sexual disclosure. During the model modification process described in Chapter 4, I chose to separate positive and negative disclosure into two separate variables by the positively and negatively valenced dimensions of the Revised Sexual Self-Disclosure Scale (Snell et al., 1989). Theoretically, I made this decision because negative disclosures prompt more significant risks to both personal and social identities (Cupachs & Metts, 1994; Petronio, 2002). Previous scholarship has thoroughly documented the differences between positive and negative disclosures (Greer, Campione-Barr, & Lindell, 2015; McCarthy, Wood, & Holmes, 2017; Simbayi et al., 2007; Utz, 2015; among others). Particularly when disclosures reference sexual activity or sexual health, negative disclosures pose a significantly greater risk to the individual and the relationship (Brown & Weigel, 2018; Simbayi et al., 2007). Theoretically, this change is consequential to research involving disclosure as an operationalization of sexual communication, which rarely considers the valence of the disclosure in its extensive use in the existing sexual communication literature (Byers, 2011). Specifically, while previous scholarship generally frames sexual disclosure as risky (Montesi et al., 2011), the risk incurred is different, both qualitatively and quantitatively according to my findings, based on valence. Positive/neutral disclosures are theoretically far less risky. In other words, sharing positive feelings or circumstances (e.g., disclosing to a sexual partner that they like something) is generally considered less risky than disclosing negative feelings or negative health statuses (Simbayi et al., 2007). Findings from the present study support the contention that positive and negative disclosure are different, suggesting meaningful differences between sexual disclosure based on valence, which I elaborate on in the next

paragraph. The paths between both positive and negative disclosure and identity gaps were significant, in line with my hypotheses that disclosure predicts identity gaps. Thus, my finding here reinforces previous literature which suggests that identity gaps emerge in communication, and communication behaviors predict identity gaps (Kam & Hecht, 2009; Jung & Hecht, 2004, 2008; Jung, 2011, 2013). Sexual communication implicates personal, relational, and social identities in ways that manifest in discrepancies between and among them. Findings from the present study support this contention, with both positive and negative sexual disclosure predicting identity gaps. This adds sexual communication as a communication context in which identity gaps emerge. However, the strength of the relationships with identity gaps between positive and neutral disclosure and negative disclosure differed. Specifically, positive/neutral disclosure more strongly predicted identity gaps than negative disclosure.

Although I hypothesized that both positive and negative disclosures would result in identity gaps, from the literature on risky disclosures we could infer that the characteristics of such negative disclosures should lead more directly to identity gaps than positive disclosures. Specifically, positive disclosures should still result to some degree in identity gaps as any communication encounter should theoretically produce some degree of identity gaps (Jung & Hecht, 2004, 2008), positive disclosures would seem to incur less risk to personal and relational identities than negative disclosures because they are less risky and less relationally challenging (Petronio, 2002) and less face-threatening (Cupach & Metts, 1994). Negative disclosures are more face-threatening and generally considered higher depth disclosures because they can result in

embarrassment and increased vulnerability (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Petronio, 2002), so it was anticipated that negative disclosure would more directly result in identity gaps than positive. Directionally, this conclusion was supported. However, in terms of strength, the present study found the opposite to be true, with positive and neutral disclosure more strongly related to identity gaps than negative disclosure. Despite predicting otherwise, it is possible that in the context of sexual communication, even positively valenced disclosures may still result in a high degree of risk and likelihood to result in identity gaps based both on how we operationalize sexual self-disclosure and the unique vulnerability of sex as a communication topic in intimate relationships (Montesi et al., 2011). For example, disclosing a stigmatized sexual fantasy would be categorized as a positive disclosure for the person disclosing, according to its operationalization (Snell et al., 1989). However, disclosing sexual fantasies, especially stigmatized sexual fantasies, is risky (Kattari 2015; Rubinsky, 2018c) and may result in identity gaps, as highlighted by the qualitative findings presented in the last chapter. As sexual communication is a uniquely vulnerable communicative space (Cupach & Metts, 1994; Montesi et al., 2011), and both positive and negative sexual disclosures may be classified as stigmatized disclosures (Petronio, 2002), positive disclosures in the sexual context may still incur high degrees of risk. Thus, positively valenced disclosures are still highly identity-laden, and predict identity gaps. This finding supports previous research, and extend it to further clarify the nature of this relationship, which was one of the goals of the present study. Thus, in the context of sexual activity and sexual health, the choice to separate sexual disclosure based on valence of the disclosure is not only theoretically supported, but may

provide a more constructive model for operationalizing sexual disclosure for future research. Further, it is possible that the extent to which identity gaps are mitigated is more consequential than the extent to which they emerge in sexual communication. In addition, the present study's findings complicate assumptions embedded in the way we operationalize sexual disclosure, as findings from the present study suggest dimensional framing by valence rather than content might be more productive, but more research is needed to test this claim.

Positive disclosure also predicts satisfaction. Consistent with previous literature, disclosing likes and fantasies may result directly in changes to the sexual relationship, which is closely tied to overall relational satisfaction (Byers, 2011). Although this is not a new finding, the relational contexts presented in the present study do offer new insights associated with this finding. While positive disclosure may not always be positive, especially in the context of stigmatized sexual fantasies presented in the non-normative relational types represented here, the disclosure still leads to changes in satisfaction with the sexual communication and overall relationship. Thus, even when risky, sexual communication may be directly beneficial. However, the primary argument posed in the present study was that in addition to directly relating to satisfaction, sexual disclosure is mediated through identity gaps, which I will discuss next.

Satisfaction. In addition to disclosure predicting satisfaction, identity gaps, indicated by personal-relational, personal-enacted, and enacted-relational identity gaps, predicted satisfaction. While previous research has treated identity gaps as separate variables (Kam & Hecht, 2009), the present study treated them as indicators of an overall

latent variable. In addition to fitting with the data, identity gaps are highly related constructs. Previous scholars have argued that because certain identity gaps predict different outcomes (e.g., only personal-enacted identity gaps were related to topic avoidance in one study; Kam & Hecht, 2009), and they may operate in a structurally different sequence (e.g., personal-relational identity gaps may precede personal-enacted identity gaps according to another study; Jung, 2013), they may not indicate the same overall construct (Jung & Hecht, 2008). Specifically, two studies have found that international students' personal-enacted identity gaps strongly impact depression level, but personal-relational identity gaps do not have as strong of an impact (Jung & Hecht, 2008; Jung et al., 2008). Thus, previous research suggests that expression of the self (personal-enacted identity gaps) may be more significant in determining mental health status than others' appraisals of the self (personal-relational identity gaps) (Jung et al., 2008). As a result, I initially positioned them as three separate variables and reconsidered this during the measurement model modification process. Despite some evidence to the contrary, other identity gap studies find personal-enacted, personal-relational, and enacted-relational identity gaps to be highly correlated, operate in the same direction with relevant outcome variables (e.g., satisfaction), and predict the same outcomes (Kennedy-Lightsey, Martin, LaBelle, & Weber, 2015; Pusateri, Roaché, & Kam, 2016; Rubinsky, 2018b; among others). Specifically, when concerned with couples and romantic relationships, identity gaps seem to reflect similar constructs (Kennedy-Lightsey et al., 2016; Rubinsky, 2018b). In addition, theoretically, identity gaps describe the cognitive, affective, and behavioral sensation of tension between and among layers of identity

(Hecht, 1993). The only significant difference between the different types of identity gaps is the sites of identity in tension (i.e., in self-expression, relational appraisals, etc.; Hecht, 1993). We occupy multiple sites of personal, enacted, relational, and communal identities (Tajfel & Turner, 1976) that are not always specified in the measures of identity gaps (Jung, 2011, 2013). Thus, the specific site of identity in question may be less consequential than the feeling of tension among parts of the self in explaining relational and communication outcomes, especially in the context of romantic relationships. Although more research is needed to clarify this relationship, theoretical and empirical support provided by the present study suggest a possibility that identity gaps may be a latent variable in the relational context. Further, improvements in measurement techniques warrant revisiting the nature of these variables. The measures for personal-enacted and personal-relational identity gaps are reliable and valid, and have been polished and refined over the last decade (Hosek & Rubinsky, in press). Thus, I suggest this study's ability to make identity gaps work as a latent variable may also reflect an improvement in measurement, rather than any theoretical discrepancy between this study and previous literature. This is an important finding, because one of the goals of the present study was to further clarify the nature of identity gaps in partner communication that differ among previous research.

In addition to testing identity gaps as a latent variable, identity gaps predict satisfaction, indicated by sexual satisfaction, relational satisfaction, and communication satisfaction. Given a plethora of previous research that suggests sexual disclosure predicts satisfaction (Byers, 2011), and identity gaps predict relational and communication

satisfaction (Jung, 2011, 2013; Jung & Hecht, 2004, 2008, among others), it is unsurprising that both positive sexual disclosure and identity gaps predict satisfaction. Revealing sexual fears, fantasies, likes, dislikes, histories, and safety measures may lead directly to changes in the relationship because in addition to reflecting a communication climate in which that type of vulnerability is permitted, it allows the communication partners to make changes in their sexual relationship, which affects the overall quality of the relationship (Byers, 2011; Montesi et al., 2011; Noland, 2010). In addition, cognitive, behavioral, and affective dimensions of discrepancy or tension between parts of the self that occur in communication relate to satisfaction with the relationship and communication because they reflect relational partners' ability to affirm or undermine salient aspects of the self in communication. While this finding was predicted, with the rationale for this prediction described in Chapter 2, it is important to note because the extensive literature on sexual communication and satisfaction proposes multiple pathways through which communication may affect satisfaction with largely atheoretical explanations (Byers, 2011; Sprecher & Cate, 2004). Thus, the present study not only supports previous literature concerning what would happen (i.e., sexual disclosure and identity gaps predict satisfaction), but extends this literature and offers a theoretical explanation, supported by the data, for how communication impacts relational and sexual satisfaction in non-normative relationships through attention to identity.

Specifically, identity gaps are proposed as a mediator to explain the relationship between negative disclosure and satisfaction, and a degree of the relationship between positive disclosure and satisfaction. Identity gaps emerge in sexual communication, with

specific examples highlighted in Chapter 5 of what they might look like and how they are managed. Although there is some direct effect between disclosure and satisfaction, a significant portion of the effect is mediated by identity gaps. Sexual communication affirms, validates, dismisses, or challenges important parts of social, personal, and relational identities. According to the present study's findings, the process of identity validation or invalidation may contribute to an individual's satisfaction with their overall and sexual relationship. Personal and social identities are implicated in sexual communication (Kattari, 2015; Kosenko, 2011a, 2011b; Wiederman, 2005). The present study supports this, with identity gaps appearing more highly correlated with each indicator of satisfaction than disclosure even in zero order correlations. Identity gaps are clearly a relevant construct to consider in exploring the process of satisfying sexual partner communication.

Given these findings, identity gaps may be an important component of conceptualizing sexual communication. This may warrant revisiting how we measure sexual communication, since using sexual disclosure alone was less useful than disclosure and identity-based implications. Sexual communication as a uniquely vulnerable site of partner communication (Montesi et al., 2011) is interpersonally (Cupach & Metts, 1994; Noland, 2010) and socially (Kosenko, 2011a, 2011b; Rubinsky & Cooke-Jackson, 2018) risky. The nature of certain disclosures as stigmatized may further the already identity-laden process of sexual communication and make the process of sexual communication as identity affirming or challenging all the more consequential. Further, processes of self- and other- categorization and stereotyping occur in partnered

sexual communication as evidenced by the findings in Chapter 5 and the presence of identity gaps in sexual partner communication, which I described earlier in this chapter.

Thus, my findings support previous research on sexual communication and identity gaps, extend CTI to include sexual satisfaction as an outcome and sexual partner communication as an applicable context in which identity gaps emerge, and offers a useful theoretical lens through which to explain what happens in sexual partner communication that is satisfying or unsatisfying. The practical implications of this finding are discussed later in this chapter. Next, I discuss the findings related to sexual health that, although was removed from the model, the post-hoc analyses offer noteworthy findings.

Sexual health. Unlike satisfaction, the findings for sexual health are less consistent with previous literature. After removing sexual health from the structural model during the modification stages, I ran post-hoc analyses to test if the variables in the model still predict sexual health protective behaviors using linear regression. Although the omnibus test was significant, with sexual disclosure and identity gaps significantly predicting variance in health protective sexual behaviors, no individual variable significantly contributed to predicting health protective sexual behaviors. In the limitations section later in this chapter, I elaborate on some possible measurement-related explanations for this finding alluded to in Chapter 4. Here, I discuss the theoretical implications of this finding.

Theoretically, disclosure and identity gaps should predict health protective sexual behaviors and outcomes as hypothesized in Chapter 2. A relational environment in which

sexual partners feel comfortable disclosing likes, dislikes, fears, fantasies, and safety requests should increase the likeliness of engaging in health protective behaviors according to previous research (Noar et al., 2006; Noland, 2010). Despite enough work having been done on this subject to produce meta-analyses of the effects of communication on safer sex behaviors, relatively few of these studies have examined the phenomenon in non-normative relationships with a few exceptions for gay men and condom negotiation (see Eisenberg, Bauermeister, Pingel, Johns, & Leslie, 2011; Prestage et al., 2006; among others). However, a high percentage of the present study's participants involved LGBTQ women, who according to previous literature are considerably less likely than normative peer populations to engage in sexual safety behaviors (Power et al., 2009), largely attributed to a lack of script for sexual relationships in this populations and myths concerning the inability for cisgender women to transfer STIs or STDs to one another through sexual activity (Power et al., 2009), as well as the lack of risk for pregnancy. Although LGBTQ people assigned female at birth who exclusively engage in sexual activity with people assigned female at birth are at a considerably lower risk for STIs than the general population (Power et al., 2009), they are not at no risk for STIs, and there are still sexual safety measures in which healthcare providers recommend they engage (Power et al., 2009). In addition, many queer women, including bisexual and pansexual women, or transgender lesbian women, may engage in sexual activity with partners of different bodies and different sexual histories. Thus, it is possible that even in satisfying, communicative relationships in which disclosure is high and identity gaps are low, myths about sexual safety drawn from the normative sexual

script (Power et al., 2009) constrict sexual safety behaviors. Future research may further clarify this by attending to specific rather than general non-normative populations, specifically inquiring as to the identity-based sexual communication practices of queer women. Therefore, even without identity gaps specifically predicting sexual safety, sexual safety may still be an intergroup domain through the myth of identity as safety, which is addressed in Chapter 5 as well. Next, I discuss identity salience.

Identity salience. Lastly, after removing identity saliences from the structural model, I ran several post-hoc regression analyses to explore if sexual and gender identity saliences predict sexual satisfaction, relational satisfaction, and sexual communication satisfaction as discussed in Chapter 2. Identity saliences did not account for significant variation in relational satisfaction, and the combined effects do predict sexual satisfaction; yet, individually neither variable was a significant contributor in the model. However, sexual and gender identity salience do predict sexual communication satisfaction, with sexual identity salience appearing to be a more significant predictor. Although I treat satisfaction as a latent variable in the structural model, indicated by sexual satisfaction, relational satisfaction, and sexual communication satisfaction, there may be some meaningful differences in how identity salience impacts different dimensions of satisfaction. As intergroup communication is a communication process, salience of group identification may more directly relate to communication outcomes, rather than relational outcomes by itself. In the limitations section of this chapter, I also address some potential pitfalls with measurement that may have contributed to these findings.

As the findings from Chapter 5 suggest, gender and sexual identity, as well as other social identity groups, matter in sexual partner communication and are the source of a number of identity-based tensions. Paired with the post-hoc analyses that suggest identity saliences may predict sexual communication satisfaction, it is evident that salience of identification with gender and sexual identities is still consequential. However, it is also possible that rather than moderating the relationship between disclosure and identity gaps, identity saliences moderates the relationships between identity gaps and satisfaction. It stands to reason that identity gaps that implicate gender or sexual identities, which a rather large magnitude of the described identity gaps in Chapter 5 did, may be less consequential when salience of identification with gender or sexuality is low, and more consequential when salience of identification with gender or sexuality is high. Future research may attend to this by exploring the moderating role of identity salience between identity gaps and satisfaction rather than communication and identity gaps.

In summary, the findings from my structural model largely support the theoretical rationale provided in Chapter 2. As hypothesized, identity gaps mediate the relationship between sexual disclosure and satisfaction. This supports previous literature, and extends CTI as a theoretical lens through which to further clarify the way that communication affects satisfaction in non-normative relationships. Next, I discuss the findings from Chapter 5.

Identity Gap Descriptions and Management Strategies

In addition to testing the proposed hypotheses, the present study addressed a research question asking how, if at all, do individuals in non-normative relationships cope with or manage their identity gaps that emerge in sexual communication. To do this, I first described a typology of sexual identity gaps that occurred in sexual communication in non-normative relationships. Next, I engaged in pattern analysis to explore patterns of discursive management strategies that occur for minimizing or managing identity gaps. Lastly, I explained the consequences participants attributed to the occurrence of the identity gap and associated management strategy. In this section, I review these findings and discuss them in light of previous literature and in conversation with the findings from Chapter 4. First, I discuss the typology.

Identity gaps in sexual communication. In producing a typology of identity gaps that emerge in non-normative sexual communication, I separately discussed gaps with personal and communal identity. Throughout both personal and communal identity gaps, participants described instances in which sexual communication affirmed or challenged important aspects of the self through interpersonal and intergroup encounters. Gaps with personal identity included sex as relational maintenance, false performances of sexual enthusiasm or “faking it,” fantasy disclosure or avoidance, traumatic histories, sexual jealousy, insecurity, and sexual safety. Gaps with communal identity included sex as gender or sexual identity validation or invalidation, race play and racism, ability identity, and religion and sexual morality. First, I discuss the distinction between personal and communal identity gaps in the findings.

The distinction between personal and communal identity is sometimes complex. Previous scholarship often treats identity gaps with even gender or ethnic identity as a gap with personal identity (e.g., Drummond & Orbe, 2011; Wagner et al., 2016). Communal identity refers to identity at the site of the social group, which is impossible to understand without attention to how an individual personally identifies with that group (i.e., personal identity), how one performs or expresses identity (i.e., enacted identity), how they learned their communal identity through their relationships with members of that community or ascriptions by those outside the group (i.e., relational identity), and societal perceptions of their group (i.e., communal identity). Communal identities arise from associations with social networks, collective memory, communal bonding (Hecht et al., 2003; Urban & Orbe, 2010) and societal perceptions of a social group (Hecht, 1993; Jung & Hecht, 2004). Communal identity refers to communication specifically at the intergroup rather than interpersonal level (Jung, 2013). In the present study, the distinction between personal and communal identity gaps is presented for interpretability, but theoretically, they overlap and interact. Personal identity gaps involve social group memberships and identification with social groups, and communal identity gaps involve interpersonal experience and personal identity. Importantly, communal identity gaps involve either a collective understanding of group membership (e.g., what it means to be a lesbian or involved in the lesbian community), or reference larger intergroup relations (e.g., race relations).

The gaps that occur in tension with personal identity primarily confirm existing interpersonal theory described in Chapter 2. Specifically, sexual communication is risky

and scary; it is challenging to tell a sexual partner positive or negative sexual feelings, and doing so often results in identity gaps, as quantitatively confirmed in Chapter 4. Thus, the experience of identity gaps as a result of disclosure of fantasies, jealousies, safety requests, or negative histories is well documented between these two chapters. However, the largest category in magnitude of personal identity gaps included sex as relational maintenance. In Chapter 2, I briefly discussed sexual compliance as an identity-laden consequence of sexual communication and sexual activity as intergroup arenas. Sexual compliance describes consensual but unwanted sex, and is generally studied from a relational maintenance perspective (Impett & Peplau, 2003, 2006; O'Sullivan & Allgeier, 1998). The sexual script makes sexual refusal face-threatening for women, which can result in sexual compliance more often among women compared to men in heterosexual relationships (Cupach & Metts, 1994; Impett & Peplau, 2003; Sprecher & Cate, 2004).

Previous research on sexual compliance generally confirms the notion that engaging in sexual activity, even if you do not want to, ultimately improves relational outcomes (Impett & Peplau, 2003), a finding the present study complicates. While the quantity of frequency of sexual activity in long-term relationships is a common predictor of passionate love, and maintaining passion in long-term relationships (Sprecher & Cate, 2004), sexual compliance is gendered, with women far more likely to engage in compliant sexual behavior than men (Impett & Peplau, 2006). Much of the scholarship on sexual compliance argues that it is not inherently harmful, as it can operate as a form of relational maintenance that, at times, enhances the overall relationship between partners

by increasing the frequency of enacted sexual activity (Impett & Peplau, 2003). Sexual compliance may relate to relational commitment and longevity, and show investment in sacrifice and relational maintenance (Impett & Peplau, 2003), and those who engage in sexual compliance are often more motivated by increasing relational cohesion than by avoiding conflict or other negative consequence (Katz & Tirone, 2009). However, individually, more than half of women who engage in sexual compliance also report negative outcomes, including emotional and physical discomfort, and relationship tension (Katz & Tirone, 2009; O'Sullivan & Allgeier, 1998). Katz and Tirone (2009) found that compared to non-sexually-compliant women in opposite-sex relationships, sexually compliant women were less satisfied with their overall relationship. In addition, less research examines the consequences of sexual compliance for the individual in terms of what it might be doing to their mental health or wellbeing. The present study extends these concerns, finding that sexually compliant behavior, even when framed as a relational maintenance behavior as a number of participants did, still results in identity gaps, which predict dissatisfying sexual and relational outcomes and may, to some extent, contribute to fewer health protective sexual behaviors. Although some participants noted that their engagement in unwanted sexual activity was not a horrible experience, and they framed it as a bonding activity with their partner, confirming previous research that suggests that is often women's motivation for sexual compliance (Katz & Tirone, 2009), they still described it as a source of identity gaps, which are an aversive state (Hecht, 1993), and negatively predicted satisfaction in the present study.

Despite relationally-oriented motivations, sexual compliance was costly to overall relational satisfaction for women in previous research (Katz & Tirone, 2009). Generally, motivation for sexual activity is consequential in predicting satisfaction. For lesbian and heterosexual women with high degrees of relationship contingency, or deriving self-worth from romantic relationships, those who have sex to facilitate closeness still experience satisfaction, but those who simply engage in sexual activity to appease a partner to maintain the relationship may experience more dissatisfaction (Sanchez, Moss-Racusin, Phelan, & Crocker, 2011). Thus, even though in the discussion of sexual compliance as a maintenance behavior, the present study situates the phenomenon in tension with personal identity, gender-based patterns implicate communal identity as well. Thus, even when they attribute them as relatively harmless, sexual compliance still comprised a source of identity gaps, which are problematic in relationships as evidenced in Chapter 4. Further, some participants did not downplay the difficulty that sexual compliance caused them, positioning it as a more negative experience.

Specifically, some participants who engaged in sexual compliance highlighted that their compliant behavior occurred because they felt a pressure to please their partner, or because they experienced embarrassment due to their own disinterest in sexual activity. Inability to discuss these concerns with their sexual partners may explain to some degree why these identity gaps produce dissatisfying relational outcomes despite research that suggests an increase in sexual activity can produce positive relational outcomes (Impett & Peplau, 2003; Sprecher & Cate, 2004). Specifically, identity gaps signal a discrepancy between aspects of the self. In addition to sexual activity as

relational maintenance existing as a site of a particular identity gap, additional identity gaps likely occur surrounding the feeling or experience that sexually compliant behavior is concealing. For instance, previous research suggests that discrepancies over sex drive are a frequent source of tension in LGBT relationships in particular (Rubinsky & Hosek, 2018) and may be a frequent source of sexual conflict in normative sexual relationships (Byers & Lewis, 1988; Sprecher & Cate, 2004). Difficulties discussing or disclosing aspects of sexual desire like frequency, or feeling pressure to please a partner, may reflect other types of identity gaps (e.g., a personal-enacted identity gap, or enacted-relational identity gap) as well. Thus, the act of sexual compliance may reflect only one of several types of identity gaps that occur and influence relational outcomes amid the multifaceted and identity-laden sexual experience.

Relatedly, sexual compliance also occurred as an identity gap with communal identity or personal identities that involve communal understandings of identity. In addition to engaging in specific sexual acts or sexual activity broadly as relational maintenance, participants performed aspects of their identity (e.g., gender identity or expression) to appease a partner or out of guilt. These gaps may be personal-enacted, personal-relational, personal-communal, or relational-communal when relational ascriptions challenge group-based identification or membership. This performance meets the conditions of sexual compliance as consensual but unwanted sex (Impett & Peplau, 2003), but engages aspects of communal rather than personal identity by performing a social identity with which they did not identify. This was especially common with participants who identified as transgender or asexual. For participants who were

transgender, non-binary, or gender non-conforming, this generally consisted of engaging in a gendered sexual activity (e.g., penetrative sex) that produced feelings of dysphoria out of guilt, or feeling that they “owed” their partner a particular gendered sexual activity. Previous research suggests transgender individuals rely heavily on sexual activity for gender identity validation, and as a result are less likely to request sexual safety measures or disclose preferences (Kosenko, 2011a, 2011b). However, these findings suggest that in addition to motivation to reduce gender-based identity gaps through sexual activity, transgender individuals may sometimes willingly encounter a communal identity gap to reduce a relational one.

A consistent theme across communal and personal identity gaps described in the typology in Chapter 5 includes that sexual activity within long-term relationships is a form of identity validation or invalidation across all four layers of identity. Sexual communication is challenging due to its identity-laden nature as discussed in Chapter 2, but it is also highly consequential to a sense of self, relational security, and affirmation of salient social identity groups according to findings from the present study. In addition, these findings highlight the importance of attending to these processes in non-normative relationships. The personal identity gaps described in the previous chapter would likely exist regardless of relational type as they exist, albeit by other names, in a plethora of previous literature (see Faulkner & Lannutti, 2010; Impett & Peplau, 2003; Noland, 2010; Byers, 2011; among others) and are consistent with interpersonal theory that positions sexual communication as vulnerable (Cupach & Metts, 1994, Noland, 2010, Petronio, 2002). Sexual communication is risky and face-threatening (Cupach & Metts,

1994; Petronio, 2002), it is uniquely vulnerable and risks rejection from close others (Montesi et al., 2011; Noland, 2011). Sexual communication can escalate or mitigate feelings of uncertainty, prompt stigmatized ascriptions, and result in conflict, violence, and relational dissolution (Faulkner & Lannutti, 2010; Kosenko, 2011a, 2011b; Noland, 2010; Theiss, 2011). However, the communal-identity gaps found in this study highlight challenges that occur in specific non-normative relationships that reference social rather than personal identity, group-based identification, and communal or cultural practices. Identity gaps emerge in communication when individuals omit their true feelings or engage in acts of deception, when anxiety or apprehension filter interpersonal communication, and amid stigmatized communication (Faulkner & Hecht, 2010; Jung & Hecht, 2004, 2008). The focus on non-normative relationships enabled the production of a typology that highlighted communal as well as personal identity gaps.

In Chapter 2, I argue that non-normative relationships are an important site of sexual communication because identity salience may vary more or hold more weight in these types of relationships. Although this argument was not supported in the structural model tested in Chapter 4, the findings in Chapter 5 suggest otherwise, and therefore warrant some attention. Approximately one third of my participants described identity gaps that implicated their social identities. Primarily, this consisted of gender and sexual identities as predicted, but other participants noted ability, race, and religion as relevant social identities with which they experienced discrepancies amid sexual partner communication. These identity gaps occur as a result of normative ascriptions and erasure (e.g., assuming heterosexual until proven otherwise), internalized feelings of guilt

associated with communal identity (e.g., having sex before marriage despite religious convictions), and intergroup bias or outright discrimination (e.g., being called a racial slur by a sexual partner). Although communal identity gaps likely occur in normative relationships (Rubinsky & Cooke-Jackson, 2018), for example from the present study those that involved stereotypes against women, the vast majority that participants described specifically invoked conditions that occur as a result of their relationship deviating from normative models, managing a comparative normative group, stigma, or the socio-structural status of their social group. Thus, communal identity gaps highlight the intergroup nature of non-normative sexual communication.

To summarize, I produced a typology of identity gaps that emerge in non-normative sexual communication. A connecting thread throughout the typology of personal and communal identity gaps involves a theme of sexual activity and sexual communication as affirming or challenging to personal and social identities. These challenges highlight the importance of attending to non-normative relationships, and reconcile some of the findings between quantitative and qualitative sexual communication research. Next, I describe how participants manage or cope with identity gaps in sexual communication.

Discursive management of identity gaps. Previous research notes that disclosure does not fulfill all of the functions of sexual communication (Sprecher & Cate, 2004), and self-disclosure as a construct may minimize the interpersonal process by suggesting a one-way stream of talk (Manning, 2014; Petronio, 2002). In investigating how individuals cope with or manage identity gaps, the method employed in the present study

allowed space to more holistically examine how participants frame the negotiation process, which often involves perceptions of a partner's response. Specifically, participants described a continuum of direct, indirect, or passive (no attempt) attempts at resolving or managing their sexual communication identity gaps. Specific discursive strategies that emerged among this continuum included creative problem-solving, conflict, relational dissolution, hinting, disengagement, passing, and closeted enactment. These strategies support and extend previous research in a number of ways, which I describe in this section.

Several studies have examined discursive strategies for managing or mitigating the often-aversive experience of identity gaps for non-normative personal and relational identities (Maeda & Hecht, 2012; Nuru, 2012; Wagner et al., 2016). Some of these strategies include passing, closeted enactment, label changing, disengagement, and hyper engagement (Nuru, 2012; Wagner et al., 2016), self-acceptance, emphasis on family identity, or re-establishing ideas of normative (Maeda & Hecht, 2012). Several of these strategies also emerged in the present study, as well as additional strategies.

First, approximately 18% of participants described passive management strategies for their identity gaps. Specifically, participants indicated that they did not attempt to resolve the identity gap because they were afraid of or meant to avoid hurting a partner, because it was too hard to talk about, because it was not a significant source of tension (i.e., "not a big deal"), or did not explain why but simply indicated they did nothing about the gap. Passive strategies for managing or resolving identity gaps in previous literature include passing (Nuru, 2012; Wagner et al., 2016), or acting as though one is a normative

identity (e.g., allowing someone to assume heterosexual by not correcting them, or performing a gender identity with which one does not identify). Passing also occurred as an active-passive strategy that participants framed as no attempt to resolve the discrepancy, largely indicating a motivation of self- or other- protection. Specifically, participants identified performance of an insincere identity to appease their partner or avoid hurting their partner, or because they themselves were not yet ready to address it. Other discursive strategies that occurred as active-passive in the present study included self-acceptance. Self-acceptance in previous research involves internally reconciling the gap without involving another person (Maeda & Hecht, 2012). Some participants noted that they managed the discrepancy internally, either explicitly to avoid upsetting a partner, or because they did not consider it a significant enough source of tension to involve a relational partner. Thus, the present study found instances of passive and passive-active strategies for managing identity gaps from previous literature in the context of non-normative sexual communication.

In addition to those passive strategies present in previous literature, the present study also found that individuals rely sometimes on scripted sexual roles (i.e., sexual compliance with scripted roles) as a management strategy. Reliance on the sexual script reduces uncertainty (Noland, 2010), and may be a method of coping. However, it could also prove harmful. Refusing to deviate from scripted roles sometimes meant denying one's own existence. This is important because sexual self-silencing may be a predictor of depressive symptoms, especially in young people (Little et al., 2011). Thus, in the context of sexual communication and activity, passing and reliance on scripted roles to

cope with the presence of identity gaps could be problematic. However, self-acceptance may be a positive discursive management strategy to reduce or manage sexual identity gaps. Reliance on a role with which one does not identify also involves a lack of resolution. For example, a transgender woman who performs a traditionally masculine sex role with which she is uncomfortable and experiences an identity gap, who then chooses to not discuss the identity gap with her partner, and instead just complies with a scripted masculine sex role, has not resolved the identity gap and will still experience the associated consequences described in Chapter 4. Alternatively, an asexual person who does not desire sexual activity as frequently as their partner may find that accepting there is a difference in their level of desired sexual activity as a result of their identity may resolve the feeling of an identity gap because the act of accepting one's self can minimize the experience of identity discrepancy.

While some participants identified not engaging in any behavior to manage or cope with their identity gaps, others identified indirect strategies to manage their identity gaps. In previous literature, indirect strategies include label changing or changing the words used to describe one's identity or relationship (Nuru, 2012; Wagner et al., 2016) and emphasizing family identity over relational identities (Maeda & Hecht, 2012). Label changing also emerged in the present study, but generally indirectly, with participants noting that they would change the words or labels used to describe body parts or sex acts, but without explicitly discussing why they did so with their partner(s) or actively correcting their partner(s). In addition, several other indirect discursive strategies emerged to cope with sexual identity gaps, including hinting and changing sexual

positions. Participants identified that they would sometimes provide “hints” to their partners, or joke about their discomfort, to see how it went. Others noted that they would change sexual positions if a particular sex act was the source of the identity gap, but without directly explaining why to their partner.

Indirect approaches to managing identity gaps may be common, since indirect communication is often less face threatening (Cupach & Metts, 1994; Noland, 2010). In the context of sexual communication, indirect efforts to address preferences and even discomfort is well documented, but problematic (Noland, 2010). Noland (2010) notes that indirect communication about sex is related to face needs, but also suggests it may be heightened by the focus on spontaneity as romantic in the sexual script. The sexual script positions sex as heated and in the moment, and thus conversations about sexual activity are sometimes thought of as less “sexy” (Noland, 2010). Therefore, both face and relational needs, as well as normative constraints regarding acceptable sexual communication, make indirect efforts to manage any communication surrounding sexual activity likely, and indirect or passive communication about something negative like an identity gap even more likely. This finding is important because indirect approaches to sexual communication can lead to problematic health and relational outcomes (Holman & Sillars, 2012; Noland, 2010), which may be one of the reasons that identity gaps mediate the relationship between sexual communication and satisfaction in the direction that they do. Specifically, uncertainty escalates during indirect sexual communication, which can result in less satisfying sexual and overall relationships (Theiss, 2011). Indirect approaches to managing identity gaps may be productive in the case of relatively small

incidents prompting identity gaps (e.g., prompting a change in positions may be an effective strategy for an identity gap associated with not enjoying a particular sex act), but in more severe cases (e.g., not having disclosed a salient identity to a partner, or being nervous to request safety measures), indirect efforts are less likely to resolve the discrepancy and may actually serve to heighten uncertainty, thereby decreasing the likelihood of satisfying outcomes.

Lastly, many participants did identify direct discursive strategies for mitigating identity gaps. In previous literature, individuals in non-normative relationships or identities directly coped with their identity gaps by re-establishing of what normative relationships consist (Maeda & Hecht, 2012), through disengagement, closeted enactment (Nuru, 2012; Wagner et al., 2016), or through hyper engagement (Wagner et al., 2016). The present study found each of these strategies as direct discursive approaches to managing identity gaps that emerge in sexual communication, supporting previous research, and adding *partner engagement* as a common form of direct management in this study. Closeted enactment refers to enacting a stigmatized identity practice in private or specific designated spaces (Nuru, 2012; Wagner et al., 2016). Although less common in this sample, some participants did indicate that although they resolved the discrepancy within their relational space, external ascriptions still resulted in feelings of identity gaps. In addition, disengagement in previous literature occurs when the identity gap may be too difficult to navigate, and so the individual removes themselves from the situation (Nuru, 2012; Wagner et al., 2016). In the present study, disengagement occurred more as a consequence of the management strategy rather than as a strategy in and of itself. A

number of participants did indicate that they left their relationships as a result of the identity gap. Relational dissolution may be a form of disengagement in situations in which identity gaps are too difficult to manage or cannot be adequately resolved.

In addition to these and other discursive strategies for mitigating the experience of identity gaps that have occurred in previous literature, the present study adds partner engagement. Individuals in the present study noted that sometimes it was their partner who addressed the discrepancy, but they would not have brought it up themselves. For example, participants identified that their partner noticed if something was wrong, or asked them directly if something made them uncomfortable. This emphasizes that identity gaps are a relational phenomenon (Hecht, 1993), and discursive strategies for mitigating them may involve another person beyond the individual directly experiencing the identity gap. Because sexual communication identity gaps always emerge in the context of an intimate relationship, partner engagement may be a common strategy for managing identity gaps. The consequences of partner engagement as a potential strategy for managing identity gaps warrants further exploration in other relational contexts in which one member of the relationship may be better equipped to address feelings of identity discrepancy in the other. For example, partner engagement may emerge in parent-child communication, particularly for younger children in which the parent would presumably have more advanced communication and emotional resources to help their children navigate and cope with the experience of an identity gap.

As a result of the experience or management strategy of the identity gap, participants attributed a number of consequences to these personal and relational

experiences. These consequences included negative relational changes like physical or emotional distance, conflict, relational dissolution, or positive relational changes, sexual changes including disengaging in sexual activity, increases in sexual or affectionate activity, or sexual safety changes, internal changes including emotionally struggling with the identity gap, and external changes like coming out to friends or family or more directly engaging with one's communal network. These descriptions demonstrated that the process of experiencing and managing an identity gap is both individually and relationally consequential. In extreme cases, participants noted struggling to a point of turning to substance abuse, or more serious mental health challenges. Others described ending important relationships, or making meaningful community connections (e.g., with the LGBTQ community), as a result of this process.

Importantly, about 23% of participants described direct positive relational or sexual changes due to the experience and management of the sexual identity gap. A number of these participants framed the identity gap as an opportunity for creative problem-solving with their partner. They approached the problem relationally, and treated and described being treated by their partner in an identity-affirming capacity throughout the process. In the present study, participants attribute the end result of this team-based approach to managing an identity gap as personal and relational growth. Some noted this occurred on a small scale, with their problem-solving involving some bedroom play, and the process ended up being "fun." In these cases, participants were able to figure out with their partner what they liked best and what did the least harm, and it was at minimum an enjoyable process. Others described the positive consequence in more serious terms,

noting that they overcame a more serious obstacle with their partner, and felt closer and more bonded with them through the process. This may be similar to how some relational partners can benefit from conflict when regard and empathy are high and conflict is solved together (Cramer, 2003; Ubinger, Handal, & Massura, 2013). While we find conflict (Impett, Peplau, & Gable, 2005; Ubinger et al., 2013) and identity gaps (Jung & Hecht, 2004, 2008) aversive, there is a positive potential when solved relationally in an affirming way, which can ultimately grow relationships. With identity gaps, this may due to larger identity gaps resulting in less satisfying relationships, and thus reducing identity gaps may result in more satisfying relationships. However, this also theoretically extends CTI. Identity gaps themselves may be aversive, but the experience can ultimately be framed as a positive relational event when managed in an affirming way, and can even grow relationships.

In addition to this theoretical extension to CTI, these findings support a multiple goals perspective (Caughlin, 2010). Individuals in sexual communication do not just manage the identity gap itself, but their relationship, their own and relational partners' identity needs, and the situational goals. In the present study, sometimes these goals were in conflict. For example, pleasing a partner was sometimes framed as in conflict with personal or communal authenticity. The finding of sex as relational maintenance and both personal and communal sexual compliance highlight this contention. These goals are consequential in sexual communication because individuals often avoid sexual discussions because of fear of harming the relationship or the self (Anderson et al., 2011).

The present study finds that managing identity gaps are among these goals, but relationship- or self-protection goals may sometimes supersede identity gap reduction.

In summary, the present study produced a typology of sexual identity gaps and revealed direct and indirect strategies for managing or mitigating a variety of identity gaps produced in non-normative sexual communication. The present study draws attention to both the positive and negative potentials of identity gaps in non-normative sexual communication. Identity gaps are consequential and discursive strategies identified in the present study for managing them support and extend previous CTI literature and further the case for the study of sex as an intergroup arena. In the next section, I describe the practical contributions of the present study and for positioning the study of sexual communication as an intergroup arena.

Practical Recommendations

Sexual activity is a consequential relational and health situation for intimate partners. Sexual communication predicts positive relational, sexual, and health outcomes (Byers, 2011; Noar et al., 2006). Therefore, theoretically understanding how sexual communication impacts relational and health outcomes is a practical effort. The present study finds that approached through attention to salience of identification with or ascription to group membership, status of and comparison to an out-group, and personal identity, operationalized through identity gaps, more completely explains what is occurring in the process of sexual communication that may affect relational and health outcomes.

Practically, this may provide insights into avenues for intervention in problematic patterns of partner communication. Specifically, constructive sexual communication needs to be both personally and socially identity affirming. In doing so, individuals might minimize the experience of identity gaps that occurs in communication. Findings from the present study suggests specific strategies for achieving this. Specifically, these strategies should include where possible emphasizing shared identities (e.g., gender or sexual orientation), and engaging in supportive and affirming communication within a larger pattern of relational communication characterized by empathy and regard. In relationships where patterns of communication are already positive and empathetic, it is easier to address relational problems. Communication about sexual activity is especially challenging because people fear losing, upsetting, or embarrassing a close relational partner (Cupach & Metts, 1994; Noland, 2010), and it comprises the most common source of conflict in close relationships (Sprecher & Cate, 2004). Identity gaps, a generally negative experience associated with sexual communication, then, may be even more difficult to address with a partner because of fear of losing a partner, and in some cases losing a source of identity validation associated with partner affirmation and sexual activity (Kosenko, 2011a, 2011b). Thus, building relational climates that reduce fear about engaging in vulnerable and risky communication, and frequent affirmation and validation of salient personal and social identities, may increase ease in addressing experiences of identity discrepancy in sexual partner communication.

In addition, when identity gaps are experienced in relationships, findings from the present study suggest that they may be effectively managed by directly addressing the

gap and framing it as an opportunity to creatively find a solution to reduce the identity gap together. The relational approach was particularly effective in the present study. Participants described framing the identity gap as a problem they could solve with their partner, rather than as a personal problem they were having, as an effective way to manage the identity gaps that could result in positive consequences for their overall relationship. Specifically, couples or other relational partners may benefit from viewing identity gaps as opportunity, rather than a challenge. Similar to approaches to creative problem solving in conflict (Ubinger et al., 2013), participants suggested that identity gaps do not have to be a negative occurrence in a relationship. Managing identity gaps can grow and improve sexual relationships, relational communication, and overall intimacy, and even provide an enjoyable relational experience. Several participants noted that they had “fun” working through their identity gap with their partner because it allowed them to explore their sexuality or their partner’s sexuality in new and exciting ways. Unresolved identity gaps are problematic in relationships, as the present study demonstrates, but resolving them can be a positive opportunity. Thus, framing and existing communicative patterns matter when it comes to identity gaps.

In addition, health professionals and scholars may benefit from insight into the management of sexual trauma as an identity discrepancy in close relationships. Sexual trauma is an increasingly common part of people’s sexual histories (Muehlenhard, Peterson, Humphreys, & Jozkowski, 2017), especially women, other gender minorities, and individuals in non-normative relationships (see López & Yeater, 2018; Ray, Tyler, & Gordon Simons, 2018 for recent assessments). Individuals may not disclose traumatic

sexual histories to current relational partners for a variety of reasons, but the present study finds that this experience often results in an identity gap, which has particular relational and communication consequences. Identity gaps associated with sexual trauma may prompt more severe strategies for management (e.g., substance abuse, self-harm) that warrant monitoring.

Further, the present study identified sexual health discussions as a potential source of identity gaps. Specifically, group-based, scripted roles may limit effective communication about sexual safety or prevent comprehensive discussions about past sexual histories. Understanding the roles of personal and social identity as challenges to these relational conversations may offer additional avenues for health communication scholars and practitioners intervening in sexual safety issues for these populations. Next, I address the limitations of the present study's design and implementation in addressing my research question and hypotheses as well as further areas of future research that may better address these limitations.

Limitations

Although the present study makes significant contributions by theoretically extending the intergroup landscape to sexual communication, the study design and analysis include several limitations that warrant discussion. These limitations include the cross-sectional nature of the study, handling missing data, and measuring sexual health and communal identity. I discuss these limitations in this section, and make recommendations for future research which may better address these limitations.

First, this cross-sectional study did not attend to differences in time points within relationships. Several participants indicated that the identity gap under discussion had already been resolved; but the design of the study did not allow for assessing differences across the resolution process, which may be informative and meaningful. Future research should attend to this limitation by assessing sexual identity gaps at multiple time points within a relationship. In addition, the design of the study was not experimental. Thus, the direction of the structural model is theoretically supported and fits the data, but the study design prohibits claims of causal directions. Results should be interpreted in light of this limitation. Future research may address this limitation by, when possible, furthering this line of research with experimental designs.

Further, participants who were in multiple-partner relationships were asked to focus on one relational partner who met the participation requirements while answering all scale items for the sake of interpretability of the data. While this resulted in being able to meaningfully examine that data along with monogamous relationships, it may minimize the important effects one relationship has on others within a multiple-partner relationship, or ask people with multiple partners to prioritize one relationship over another. Future research should center on multiple partner relationships intentionally, and provide measurement options for each relationship in order to control for or compare the effects of one relationship on another within these consensually non-monogamous dynamics.

Relatedly, because demographic questions were placed on the last page of the survey to minimize priming effects, fewer participants filled out demographic

information compared to responding to the measures included in the structural model. Thus, I was unable to control for relational length or relational type without significantly shrinking the sample size. The length of a relationship may influence a number of relational and communication outcomes (Sprecher & Cate, 2004), thus the inability to control for it poses a limitation worth addressing. The minimum relational length for survey participation was three months, which eliminates the possibility of participants in extremely new relationships. Future research should consider relational length as a control to attend to this limitation.

In addition, two limitations pertain to measurement issues encountered throughout the study. First, measuring sexual health proved challenging without access to biophysical data or medical information. A common sexual health measure includes health protective sexual behaviors (i.e., likelihood to engage in condom negotiation, ask for sexual safety measures). While some research treats this variable as an outcome (Noar et al., 2006), given its operationalization and overlap with disclosive communication behaviors (Snell et al., 1989), it may have been more accurately treated as a predictor in the present study. A more constructive self-report measure of sexual health might include likelihood to engage in health protective sexual behaviors, as well as a subjective evaluation of overall sexual wellbeing.

Lastly, similar to sexual health, measuring communal identity posed a difficulty. While identity salience measures were reliable, the findings suggest they may not reflect a constructive measure for communal identity as initially suggested. Communal identity involves both salience of identification with, socialization into, and collective

understanding of social group memberships (Hecht, 1993). While there are measures for identity salience (Garstka et al., 2004), identity salience ultimately may comprise only one component of communal identity, posing challenges in modeling communal identity along with other more established measures for identity gaps, as encountered in the present study.

More importantly, a lack of measurement for gaps with communal identity poses a significant limitation to CTI research broadly, as well as the present study. In articulating the significance of the study of sexual communication and intimate health communication as intergroup arenas, the most group-based aspect of identity within CTI was broadly neglected. Although personal-enacted and personal-relational identity gaps involve intergroup communication processes (i.e., stereotyping, social group ascription, etc.), they do not capture the group-based identities as completely as communal identity. Further research is needed to attend to measurement in communal identity and gaps with communal identity. Measuring communal identity has historically posed challenges to CTI research (Hecht, 1993; Jung, 2011, 2013) because of the intergroup rather than interpersonal site of measurement. Specifically, because communal identity refers to a specific communal identity (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation), it could result in supposedly different communal identity measures per study depending on what communal identity was under consideration in a given project. One potential solution to this dilemma that emerges from the current study is to consider broadly the ways that communal identity is validated or undermined in communication (i.e., enacted-communal and relational-communal identity gaps). For instance, a potential item might include “I

feel like my communication partner dismissed my social identity in this interaction,” or “I feel like my communication partner supported my social identity in this interaction.”

More work is needed to explicate and test the validity and utility of such a measure.

However, attention to measurement in communal identity would further the theoretical and analytic utility of CTI, and allow future CTI research to more fully test the theory’s propositions and expand its use.

In addition, as is common in relationship research, there was some positive skew on relationship satisfaction and sexual satisfaction. Although the distribution of both variables was relatively normal, enough to have not violated the assumptions embedded in structural equation modeling (Meyers et al., 2017), it is worth noting as regression-based analyses are sensitive to non-normality in distribution (Meyers et al., 2017).

Results of the present study should be interpreted in light of this limitation. Relatedly, for individuals in stigmatized relationships like many of those encountered in this study (i.e., LGBTQ, transgender/gender non-conforming, interracial, polyamorous, BDSM), three year relational lengths are no easy task. It is possible that because the average relational length was three years, and many participants were in their relationships for even longer, they had to do a lot of discursive work to maintain that relationship. Thus, these relationships may be more satisfying than the comparative normative population, or the comparative casual relationship population in non-normative relationships. In addition, the present study did not account for relationships that might have ended. As a number of participants in polyamorous relational dynamics noted ending a secondary or tertiary relationship as an identity gap management strategy, exploring how identity gaps may

relate to or impact relational dissolution or how they are managed in relationships that have ended would be worthwhile, but is not accounted for by the present study.

Lastly, while the demographics represented in the present study were intentionally diverse to represent a range of relational types that deviate from normative models, there was less racial diversity than desired. This may be due to recruiting from spaces in which the polyamorous community is highly present, which is a largely white community (Sheff & Hammers, 2011). Thus, while this may represent the population of interest, future research should attend to racial minorities within non-normative sexual communities where intergroup relations may manifest in important ways. Next, I describe recommendations for future research based on the findings of the present study.

Future Research

Furthering these theoretical and practical contributions, I recommend a number of intergroup approaches to managing identity discrepancies in the context of intimate communication. An intergroup framework may be especially constructive in how individuals manage tensions in sexual relationships, trauma, and even just bad sex. I recommend three specific avenues for future research that could test and extend these theoretical claims.

First, in line with previous research, a number of participants highlighted sexual trauma as a source of or occurrence within sexual identity gaps. Rape, sexual assault, abuse, and other forms of intimate partner violence are unfortunately extremely common in both normative and non-normative relationships (López & Yeater, 2018; Ray et al., 2018). However, within non-normative relationships, individuals highlight cultural norms

and group-based practices for managing identity gaps that may reveal avenues for healing from sexual trauma. In the present study, participants noted that introducing safe words or boundary-setting, BDSM and polyamorous-community practices (Pitagora, 2017; Rubinsky, 2018a; Rubinsky, 2018b), provided a means of coping with the identity gaps previous sexual trauma instilled. While in and of itself, these are useful findings, future research may further this inquiry by investigating non-normative practices that can facilitate healing after sexual trauma. As sexual victimization is extremely prevalent (CDC, 2017), research that can offer recommendations for facilitating recovery from sexual trauma may be both practically and theoretically appropriate.

Second, sexual relationships can increase affinity for out-groups, as any close relationship can increase affinity for an outgroup (Allport, 1954; Cao & Lin, 2017), but the present study found that the affinity did not inherently reduce an intergroup bias. For example, fetishes exist that emphasize and exaggerate intergroup biases, for example, raceplay. This leaves the question: What does this mean for intergroup theorizing? In addition to sustained, positive interaction, a reduction in intergroup biases often requires some positively sanctioned authority or cooperative activity (Allport, 1954). While sexual activity could certainly maintain a space as a cooperative activity (Kukla, 2018), authority-sanctioned activity is another story. Most BDSM-related sexual activities are considered stigmatized (Dunkley & Brotto, 2018), with some even facing statutes that question their legality (Mincer, 2018). Raceplay is not an isolated example of sexual fetishes that exist in the face of negative intergroup relations. Consensual non-consent, age-play, gender-based power dynamics, and even ability-related kinks are well

documented (Holt, 2018). While critical works describe larger societal consequences (Holt, 2018; Kukla, 2018), less work has examined what is happening at the level of the relationship and the individual in their partner communication. Intergroup communication research is well suited to address possible opportunities and consequences for this phenomenon that highlights the intergroup nature of sexual partner communication.

Lastly, sexual compliance is an intergroup and interpersonal phenomenon, as highlighted by the findings in the present study. The current framework for studying sexual compliance is in the context of relational maintenance (Impett & Peplau, 2003, 2006), despite a plethora of findings that support group-based communication patterns, especially with regards to gender (Katz & Thorone, 2009). Further research could clarify the individual and relational consequences of this process by considering (A) the consequences of sexual compliance on an individual's wellbeing beyond the relational outcomes, and (B) if identity gaps mediate or change the direction within the relationship between sexual compliance and satisfaction.

To summarize, the present study theoretically contends that sexual partner activity including communication and sexual activity are intergroup communication arenas constructively addressed with attention to personal and social identity, identity gaps, and specifically stereotyping, and other manifestations of intergroup bias. The findings from the study result in several practical recommendations for scholars and practitioners concerned with partnered sexual activity. In addition, I recommend several areas for future research based on the findings of the present study.

Conclusion

This dissertation sought to test the role and management of identity gaps in sexual partner communication within non-normative relationships. Despite the study's limitations, the key contentions introduced in Chapter 2 were largely supported. These findings extend the intergroup theoretical landscape to sexual communication in a way that is both theoretically and practically constructive. Identity gaps offer an entry point into a conversation about how intergroup communication influences and filters sexual partner communication. In addition to extending the intergroup theoretical landscape, the present study supports and extends research on sexual communication and CTI.

Despite sociocultural shifts in sexual politics and perceptions of normativity at the larger cultural levels (Parker, 2010), intergroup communication and interpersonal communication both characterize sexual communication. Intimate areas like the bedroom are not immune from group-based practices and categorization that filter and influence partnered communication. The present study offers support for this contention and outlines practical and scholarly recommendations for future research into this area. Approaching sexual communication as an intergroup arena has the potential to generate more informative research, grow interpersonal and intergroup communication theories, and provide useful insights to practitioners working with sexual activity, sexual identity, and sexual health.

References

- Afifi, T. D., Caughlin, J. P., & Afifi, W. A. (2009). The dark side (and light side) of avoidance and secrets. In B. H. Spitzberg & W. R. Cupach (Eds.), *The dark side of interpersonal communication* (Second, pp. 61–92). Mahwah, New Jersey: Erlbaum.
- Afifi, W. A., Dillow, M., & Morse, C. (2004). Examining predictors and consequences of information seeking in close relationships. *Personal Relationships, 11*(4), 429–449. doi:10.1111/j.1475-6811.2004.00091.x
- Afifi, W. A., & Robbins, S. (2015). Theory of Motivated Information Management: Struggles with Uncertainty and its Outcomes. In D. O. Braithwaite & P. Schrodt (Eds.), *Engaging Theories in Interpersonal Communication* (pp. 143–156). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Allen, M., Emmers-Sommer, T. M., & Crowell, T. L. (2002). Couples negotiating safer sex behaviors: A meta-analysis of the impact of conversation and gender. In M. Allen, B. Preiss, M. Gayle, & N. Burrell (Eds.), *Interpersonal communication research: Advances through meta-analysis* (pp. 263–279). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Altman, I., & Taylor, D. (1973). *Social penetration: The development of interpersonal relationships*. Oxford: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston.
- Anderson, M., Kunkel, A., & Dennis, M. R. (2011). “Let’s (not) talk about that”: bridging the past sexual experiences taboo to build healthy romantic relationships. *The Journal of Sex Research, 48*(4), 381–391. doi:10.1080/00224499.2010.482215

- Aroian, L. A. (1944/1947). The probability function of the product of two normally distributed variables. *Annals of Mathematical Statistics*, *18*, 265-271. Retrieved from https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/2235783.pdf?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents
- Bargh, J. A., & Chartrand, T. L. (1999). The unbearable automaticity of being. *American Psychologist*, *54*(7), 462–479. doi:10.1037/0003-066X.54.7.462
- Bandalos, D. L. (2002). The effects of item parceling on goodness-of-fit and parameter estimate bias in structural equation modeling. *Structural Equation Modeling*, *9*(1), 78-102. doi:10.1207/S15328007SEM0901_5
- Barker, M. (2005). This is my partner, and this is my ... partner's partner: constructing a polyamorous identity in a monogamous world. *Journal of Constructivist Psychology*, *18*(1), 75–88. doi:10.1080/10720530590523107
- Baumeister, R. F. (1988). Masochism as escape from self. *Journal of Sex Research*, *25*(1), 28-59. doi:10.1080/00224498809551444
- Bauer, R. (2008). Transgressive and transformative gendered sexual practices and white privileges: The case of the dyke/trans BDSM communities. *Women's Studies Quarterly*, *36*(3/4), 233-253. Retrieved from https://www.jstor.org/stable/27649798?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents
- Baxter, L. A., & Wilmot, W. W. (1985). Taboo Topics in Close Relationships. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, *2*(3), 253–269. doi:10.1177/0265407585023002

- Beckner, B. N., & Record, R. A. (2016). Navigating the thin-ideal in an athletic world: influence of coach communication on female athletes' body image and health choices. *Health Communication, 31*(3), 364–373.
doi:10.1080/10410236.2014.957998
- Beres, M. A., & MacDonald, J. E. C. (2015). Talking about sexual consent. *Australian Feminist Studies, 30*(86), 418–432. doi:10.1080/08164649.2016.1158692
- Berger, Charles R., & Calabrese, R. J. (1975). Some explorations in initial interaction and beyond: toward a developmental theory of interpersonal communication. *Human Communication Research, 1*(2), 99–112. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2958.1975.tb00258.x
- Berger, C.R. (2004). Communication: A goal-directed, plan-guided process. In D. R. Roskos-Ewoldsen & J. L. Monahan (Eds.), *Communication and social cognition: Theories and methods* (pp. 47–70). Mahwah, New Jersey: Erlbaum.
- Bollen, K. A. (1989). A new incremental fit index for general structural equation models. *Sociological Methods & Research, 17*(3), 303-316.
doi:10.1177/0049124189017003004
- Braithwaite, S. R., Selby, E. A., & Fincham, F. D. (2011). Forgiveness and relationship satisfaction: Mediating mechanisms. *Journal of Family Psychology, 25*(4), 551.
doi:10.1037/a0024526
- Brewster, M. E. (2017). Lesbian women and household labor division: A systematic review of scholarly research from 2000 to 2015. *Journal of Lesbian Studies, 21*(1), 47–69. doi:10.1080/10894160.2016.1142350

- Brooks, C. F., & Pitts, M. J. (2016). Communication and identity management in a globally-connected classroom: An online international and intercultural learning experience. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, 9(1), 52–68. doi:10.1080/17513057.2016.1120849
- Brown, T. A., & Moore, M. T. (2012). Confirmatory factor analysis. In R. H. Hoyle (Ed.), *Handbook of Structural Equation Modeling* (pp. 361-379). New York, NY: The Guilford Press.
- Brown, R. D., & Weigel, D. J. (2018). Exploring a contextual model of sexual self-disclosure and sexual satisfaction. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 55(2), 202–213. doi:10.1080/00224499.2017.1295299
- Burleson, B., & Goldsmith, D. (1998). How the comforting process works: Alleviating emotional distress through conversationally induced reappraisals. In P. Andersen & L. Guerrero (Eds.), *Handbook of Communication and Emotion* (pp. 246–281). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.
- Byers, E. S. (2011). Beyond the birds and the bees and was it good for you?: Thirty years of research on sexual communication. *Canadian Psychology/Psychologie Canadienne*, 52(1), 20–28. doi:10.1037/a0022048
- Byers, E. S., & Demmons, S. (1999). Sexual satisfaction and sexual self-disclosure within dating relationships. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 36(2), 180–189. doi:10.1080/00224499909551983

- Byers, E. S., & Lewis, K. (1988). Dating couples' disagreements over the desired level of sexual intimacy. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 24(1), 15–29.
doi:10.1080/00224498809551395
- Cao, B., & Lin, W.-Y. (2017). Revisiting the contact hypothesis: Effects of different modes of computer-mediated communication on intergroup relationships. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 58, 23–30.
doi:10.1016/j.ijintrel.2017.03.003
- Catania, J. A. (2011). Health protective sexual communication scale. In T. D. Fisher, C. M. Davis, W. L. Yarber, & S. L. Davis (Eds.), *Handbook of Sexuality Related Measures* (pp. 591-593). New York, NY: Sage.
- Caughlin, J. P. (2010). Invited Review Article: A multiple goals theory of personal relationships: Conceptual integration and program overview. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 27(6), 824–848. doi:10.1177/0265407510373262
- Cline, R. J. W., Johnson, S. J., & Freeman, K. E. (1992). Talk Among Sexual Partners About AIDS: Interpersonal Communication for Risk Reduction or Risk Enhancement? *Health Communication*, 4(1), 39–56.
doi:10.1207/s15327027hc0401_4
- Cohen, J. (1992). Statistical Power Analysis. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 1(3), 98–101. doi:10.1111/1467-8721.ep10768783
- Cohen, J. N., Byers, E. S., & Walsh, L. P. (2008). Factors influencing the sexual relationships of lesbians and gay men. *International Journal of Sexual Health*, 20(3), 162–176. doi:10.1080/19317610802240105

- Colaner, C. W., Halliwell, D., & Guignon, P. (2014). "What do you say to your mother when your mother's standing beside you?" birth and adoptive family contributions to adoptive identity via relational identity and relational-relational identity gaps. *Communication Monographs*, *81*(4), 469–494.
doi:10.1080/03637751.2014.955808
- Compton, C. A. (2016). Managing mixed messages: Sexual identity management in a changing U.S. workplace. *Management Communication Quarterly*, *30*(4), 415–440. doi:10.1177/0893318916641215
- Cooke-Jackson, A., Orbe, M. P., Johnson, A. L., & Kauffman, L. (2015). Abstinence memorable message narratives: A new exploratory research study into young adult sexual narratives. *Health Communication*, *30*(12), 1201–1212.
doi:10.1080/10410236.2014.924045
- Cramer, D. (2003). Facilitativeness, conflict, demand for approval, self-esteem, and satisfaction with romantic relationships. *The Journal of Psychology*, *137*(1), 85–98. doi:10.1080/00223980309600601
- Cupach, W., & Metts, S. (1994). *Facework* (Vol. 7). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Custers, R., & Aarts, H. (2005). Beyond priming effects: The role of positive affect and discrepancies in implicit processes of motivation and goal pursuit. *European Review of Social Psychology*, *16*(1), 257–300. doi:10.1080/10463280500435919
- Dainton, M. (2000). Maintenance behaviors, expectations for maintenance, and satisfaction: linking comparison levels to relational maintenance strategies.

Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 17(6), 827–842.

doi:10.1177/0265407500176007

Dainton, M., & Stafford, L. (1993). Routine maintenance behaviors: A comparison of relationship type, partner similarity and sex differences. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 10(2), 255–271. doi:10.1177/026540759301000206

Delia, J. G., Clark, R. A., & Switzer, D. E. (1979). The content of informal conversations as a function of interactants' interpersonal cognitive complexity. *Communication Monographs*, 46(4), 274–281. doi:10.1080/03637757909376012

Desiderato, L. L., & Crawford, H. J. (1995). Risky sexual behavior in college students: Relationships between number of sexual partners, disclosure of previous risky behavior, and alcohol use. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 24(1), 55–68. doi:10.1007/BF01537560

Dixon, J. (2016). Polyamory, sex, and the communication of commitment. In J. Manning & C. M. Noland (Eds.), *Contemporary Studies of Sexuality & Communication: Theoretical & Applied Perspectives* (pp. 143–151). Dubuque, IA: Kendall-Hunt.

Doosje, B., Spears, R., & Ellemers, N. (2002). Social identity as both cause and effect: The development of group identification in response to anticipated and actual changes in the intergroup status hierarchy. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 41(1), 57–76. doi:10.1348/014466602165054

Drummond, D., & Orbe, M. (2009). “Who are you trying to be?”: Identity gaps within intraracial encounters. *Qualitative Research Reports in Communication*, 10(1), 81–87. doi:10.1080/17459430903236098

- Dunkley, C. R., & Brotto, L. A. (2018). Clinical considerations in treating BDSM practitioners: A review. *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy*, Advance online publication. doi:10.1080/0092623X.2018.1451792
- Dyar, C., Feinstein, B., & London, B. (2015). Mediators of differences between lesbians and bisexual women in sexual identity and minority stress. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, 2(1), 43–51. doi:10.1037/sgd0000090
- Eisenberg, A., Bauermeister, J. A., Pingel, E., Johns, M. M., & Leslie, M. (2011). Achieving safety: Safer sex, communication, and desire among young gay men. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 26(5), 645–669. doi:10.1177/0743558411402342
- Emmers-Sommer, T. M. (2005). Non-normative relationships: Is there a norm of (non)normativity?: *Western Journal of Communication*, 69, 1–4. doi:10.1080/10570310500033909
- Faccio, E., Casini, C., & Cipolletta, S. (2014). Forbidden games: the construction of sexuality and sexual pleasure by BDSM ‘players.’ *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 16(7), 752–764. doi:10.1080/13691058.2014.909531
- Faulkner, S. L., & Hecht, M. L. (2011). The negotiation of closetable identities: A narrative analysis of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered queer Jewish identity. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 28(6), 829–847. doi:10.1177/0265407510391338
- Faulkner, S. L., & Lannutti, P. J. (2010). Examining the content and outcomes of young adults’ satisfying and unsatisfying conversations about sex. *Qualitative Health Research*, 20(3), 375–385. doi:10.1177/1049732309354274

- Ferrer, J. N. (2018). Mononormativity, polypride, and the “Mono–Poly Wars.” *Sexuality & Culture*. Advance online publication. doi:10.1007/s12119-017-9494-y
- Fielder, R. L., & Carey, M. P. (2010). Predictors and consequences of sexual “hookups” among college students: A short-term prospective study. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 39*(5), 1105–1119. doi:10.1007/s10508-008-9448-4
- Frederick, D. A., Lever, J., Gillespie, B. J., & Garcia, J. R. (2017). What keeps passion alive? Sexual satisfaction is associated with sexual communication, mood setting, sexual variety, oral sex, orgasm, and sex frequency in a national U.S. study. *The Journal of Sex Research, 54*(2), 186–201. doi:10.1080/00224499.2015.1137854
- Friedman, A., Kachur, R., Noar, S., & Mcfarlane, M. (2016). Health communication and social marketing campaigns for sexually transmitted diseases. *Sexually Transmitted Diseases, 43*, 83–101. doi:10.1097/OLQ.0000000000000286
- Galupo, M. P., Davis, K. S., Grynkiewicz, A. L., & Mitchell, R. C. (2014). Conceptualization of sexual orientation identity among sexual minorities: Patterns across sexual and gender identity. *Journal of Bisexuality, 14*(3–4), 433–456. doi:10.1080/15299716.2014.933466
- Garstka, T. A., Schmitt, M. T., Branscombe, N. R., & Hummert, M. L. (2004). How young and older adults differ in their responses to perceived age discrimination. *Psychology and Aging, 19*(2), 326–335. doi:10.1037/0882-7974.19.2.326
- Garstka, T., Branscombe, N., & Hummert, M. (1997). Age group identification across the lifespan. *Presented at the American Psychological Society, Washington, D.C.*

- Giles, H. (2012). Principles of intergroup communication. In H. Giles (Ed.), *The Handbook of Intergroup Communication* (pp. 3–16). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Giles, H., Reid, S. A., & Harwood, J. (2010). Introducing the dynamics of intergroup communication. In H. Giles (Ed.), *The dynamics of intergroup communication* (pp. 1–14). New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Goldsmith, D. J., & Fitch, K. (1997). The normative context of advice as social support. *Human Communication Research*, 23(4), 454–476. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2958.1997.tb00406.x
- Goldsmith, D., & Normand, E. L. (2015). Politeness Theory: How We Use Language to Save Face. In D. O. Braithwaite & P. Schrodt (Eds.), *Engaging Theories in Interpersonal Communication: Multiple Perspectives* (Second). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Golish, T. D. (2000). Is openness always better?: Exploring the role of topic avoidance, satisfaction, and parenting styles of stepparents. *Communication Quarterly*, 48(2), 137-158. doi:10.1080/01463370009385587
- Goodwin, C. J., & Goodwin, K. A. (2016). *Research In Psychology Methods and Design*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.
- Gosling, S. D., Vazire, S., Srivastava, S., & John, O. P. (2004). Should we trust web-based studies? A comparative analysis of six preconceptions about internet questionnaires. *American Psychologist*, 59(2), 93–104. doi:10.1037/0003-066X.59.2.93

- Greene, G. J., Fisher, K. A., Kuper, L., Andrews, R., & Mustanski, B. (2015). "Is this normal? Is this not normal? There is no set example": Sexual health intervention preferences of LGBT youth in romantic relationships. *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*, 12(1), 1–14. doi:10.1007/s13178-014-0169-2
- Greene, K., & Faulkner, S. L. (2005). Gender, belief in the sexual double standard, and sexual talk in heterosexual dating relationships. *Sex Roles*, 53(3–4), 239–251. doi:10.1007/s11199-005-5682-6
- Greer, K. B., Campione-Barr, N., & Lindell, A. K. (2015). Body talk: Siblings' use of positive and negative body self-disclosure and associations with sibling relationship quality and body-esteem. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 44(8), 1567–1579. doi:10.1007/s10964-014-0180-1
- Haas, J. (2012). Hate speech and stereotypic talk. In H. Giles (Ed.), *The Handbook of Intergroup Communication* (pp. 128–140). New York: Routledge.
- Hajek, C. (2014). Gay men at midlife: A grounded theory of social identity management through linguistic labeling and intra- and intergenerational talk. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 33(6), 606–631. doi:10.1177/0261927X14545344
- Harper, S. (2010). "All cool women should be bisexual": Female bisexual identity in an American NeoPagan community. *Journal of Bisexuality*, 10(1-2), 79-107. doi:10.1080/15299711003609724
- Harrison, J., Grant, J., & Herman, J. L. (2012). A gender not listed here: Genderqueers, gender rebels, and otherwise. *The National Transgender Discrimination Survey*,

2(1), 13. Retrieved from

<https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/research/transgender-issues/a-gender-not-listed-here-genderqueers-gender-rebels-and-otherwise-in-the-national-transgender-discrimination-survey/>

- Haslam, S. A., Jetten, J., Postmes, T., & Haslam, C. (2009). Social identity, health and well-being: an emerging agenda for applied psychology. *Applied Psychology, 58*(1), 1–23. doi:10.1111/j.1464-0597.2008.00379.x
- Haslam, S. A., Oakes, P. J., Reynolds, K. J., & Turner, J. C. (1999). Social identity salience and the emergence of stereotype consensus. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 25*, 809–818. doi:10.1177/0146167299025007004
- Haslam, S. A., & Turner, J. C. (1992). Context-dependent variation in social stereotyping 2: The relationship between frame of reference, self-categorization and accentuation. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 22*(3), 251–277. doi:10.1002/ejsp.2420220305
- Hecht, M. L. (1993). 2002—a research odyssey: Toward the development of a communication theory of identity. *Communication Monographs, 60*(1), 76–82. doi:10.1080/03637759309376297
- Hecht, M. L., Faulkner, S. L., Meyer, C. R., Niles, T., Golden, D., & Cutler, M. (2002). Looking through northern exposure at Jewish American identity and the communication theory of identity. *Journal of Communication, 52*(4), 852–869. doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.2002.tb02577.x

- Hecht, M. L., Jackson, R., & Pitts, M. J. (2005). Culture: Intersections of intergroup and identity theories. In J. Harwood & H. Giles (Eds.), *Intergroup Communication: Multiple Perspectives* (pp. 21–42). New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Hecht, M. L., Warren, J. R., Jung, E., & Krieger, J. (2005). The communication theory of identity. In W. Gudykunst (Ed.), *Theorizing about Intercultural Communication* (pp. 257–278). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Henson, J. R., & Olson, L. N. (2010). The monster within: How male serial killers discursively manage their stigmatized identities. *Communication Quarterly*, 58(3), 341–364. doi:10.1080/01463373.2010.503176
- Herbenick, D., Reece, M., Schick, V., Sanders, S. A., Dodge, B., & Fortenberry, J. D. (2010). Sexual behavior in the United States: results from a national probability sample of men and women ages 14–94. *The Journal of Sexual Medicine*, 7, 255–265. doi:10.1111/j.1743-6109.2010.02012.x
- Herold, E. S., & Way, L. (1988). Sexual self-disclosure among university women. *Journal of Sex Research*, 24(1), 1–14. doi:10.1080/00224498809551394
- Holman, A., & Sillars, A. (2012). Talk about “hooking up”: the influence of college student social networks on nonrelationship sex. *Health Communication*, 27(2), 205–216. doi:10.1080/10410236.2011.575540
- Holmberg, D., & Blair, K. L. (2009). Sexual desire, communication, satisfaction, and preferences of men and women in same-sex versus mixed-sex relationships. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 46(1), 57–66. doi:10.1080/00224490802645294

- Holt, K. (2018). An exploration of the experience of harm in the Bondage/Discipline/Sadomasochism community. *Violence and Victims, 33*(4), 663–685. doi:10.1891/0886-6708.VV-D-16-00194
- Honeycutt, J., & Cantrill, J. (2001). *Cognition, communication, and romantic relationships*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Hons, S., & Gallois, C. (1996). Gay and lesbian identity development: *Journal of Homosexuality, 30*(4), 1–30. doi:10.1300/J082v30n04_01
- Horan, S. M. (2016). Further understanding sexual communication: Honesty, deception, safety, and risk. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 33*(4), 449–468. doi:10.1177/0265407515578821
- Horowitz, A. D., & Spicer, L. (2013). “Having Sex” as a graded and hierarchical construct: A comparison of sexual definitions among heterosexual and lesbian emerging adults in the U.K. *The Journal of Sex Research, 50*(2), 139–150. doi:10.1080/00224499.2011.635322
- Hosek, A. M., & Rubinsky, V. (In Press). Measurement issues and trends in intergroup communication. In J. P. Mazer, & E. Graham (Eds.), *Communication Research Measures III: A Sourcebook*.
- Huberman, A. M., Miles, M., & Saldaña, J. (2013). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Hynie, M., Lydon, J., Cote, S., & Wiener, S. (1998). Relational sexual scripts and women’s condom use: The importance of internalized norms. *The Journal of Sex Research, 35*(4), 370–380. doi:10.1080/00224499809551955

- Iacobucci, D. (2010). Structural equations modeling: Fit Indices, sample size, and advanced topics. *Journal of Consumer Psychology, 20*(1), 90–98.
doi:10.1016/j.jcps.2009.09.003
- Impett, E. A., & Peplau, L. A. (2003). Sexual compliance: Gender, motivational, and relationship perspectives. *The Journal of Sex Research, 40*(1), 87–100.
doi:10.1080/00224490309552169
- Impett, E. A., & Peplau, L. A. (2006). “His” and “her” relationships? A review of the empirical evidence. In A. L. Vangelisti and D. Perlman (Eds.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Personal Relationships* (pp. 273–291). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Impett, E. A., Peplau, L. A., & Gable, S. L. (2005). Approach and avoidance sexual motives: Implications for personal and interpersonal well-being. *Personal Relationships, 12*(4), 465–482. doi:10.1111/j.1475-6811.2005.00126.x
- Jackson, L. A., Sullivan, L. A., Harnish, R., & Hodge, C. N. (1996). Achieving positive social identity: Social mobility, social creativity, and permeability of group boundaries. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 70*(2), 241–254.
doi:10.1037/0022-3514.70.2.241
- Jackson, S. (2006). Interchanges: Gender, sexuality and heterosexuality: The complexity (and limits) of heteronormativity. *Feminist Theory, 7*(1), 105–121.
doi:10.1177/1464700106061462

- Jetten, J., Postmes, T., & McAuliffe, B. J. (2002). We're all individuals?: Group norms of individualism and collectivism, levels of identification and identity threat. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 32*(2), 189–207. doi:10.1002/ejsp.65
- Jung, E. (2011a). Identity gap: mediator between communication input and outcome variables. *Communication Quarterly, 59*(3), 315–338.
doi:10.1080/01463373.2011.583501
- Jung, E. (2011b). Identity gap: mediator between communication input and outcome variables. *Communication Quarterly, 59*(3), 315–338.
doi:10.1080/01463373.2011.583501
- Jung, E., & Hecht, M. L. (2004). Elaborating the communication theory of identity: Identity gaps and communication outcomes. *Communication Quarterly, 52*(3), 265–283. doi:10.1080/01463370409370197
- Jung, E., & Hecht, M. L. (2008a). Identity gaps and level of depression among Korean immigrants. *Health Communication, 23*, 313–325.
doi:10.1080/10410230802229688
- Jung, E., & Hecht, M. L. (2008b). Identity gaps and level of depression among Korean immigrants. *Health Communication, 23*(4), 313–325.
doi:10.1080/10410230802229688
- Jung, E., Hecht, M. L., & Wadsworth, B. C. (2007). The role of identity in international students' psychological well-being in the United States: A model of depression level, identity gaps, discrimination, and acculturation. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 31*, 605–624. doi:10.1016/j.ijintrel.2007.04.001

- Kam, J. A., & Hecht, M. L. (2009). Investigating the role of identity gaps among communicative and relational outcomes within the grandparent–grandchild relationship: the young-adult grandchildren’s perspective. *Western Journal of Communication, 73*(4), 456–480. doi:10.1080/10570310903279067
- Kattari, S. K. (2015). “Getting It”: Identity and sexual communication for sexual and gender minorities with physical disabilities. *Sexuality & Culture, 19*(4), 882–899. doi:10.1007/s12119-015-9298-x
- Katz, J., & Tirone, V. (2009). Women’s sexual compliance with male dating partners: Associations with investment in ideal womanhood and romantic well-being. *Sex Roles, 60*(5–6), 347–356. doi:10.1007/s11199-008-9566-4
- Kellermann, K. (1992). Communication: Inherently strategic and primarily automatic. *Communication Monographs, 59*(3), 288–300. doi:10.1080/03637759209376270
- Kennedy-Lightsey, C. D., Martin, M. M., LaBelle, S., & Weber, K. (2015). Attachment, identity gaps, and communication and relational outcomes in marital couples’ public performances. *Journal of Family Communication, 15*(3), 232–248. doi:10.1080/15267431.2015.1043430
- Kishton, J. M., & Widaman, K. F. (1994). Unidimensional versus domain representative parceling of questionnaire items: An empirical example. *Educational and Psychological Measurement, 54*(3), 757–765. doi:10.1177/0013164494054003022
- Klesse, C. (2006). Polyamory and its ‘others’: Contesting the terms of non-monogamy. *Sexualities, 9*(5), 565–583. doi:10.1177/1363460706069986

- Knapp, M. L., & Daly, J. A. (Eds.). (2011). *The SAGE handbook of interpersonal communication*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Knobloch, L. K., & Carpenter-Theune, K. E. (2004). Topic avoidance in developing romantic relationships: Associations with intimacy and relational uncertainty. *Communication Research, 31*(2), 173–205. doi:10.1177/0093650203261516
- Knobloch, L. K., & Donovan-Kicken, E. (2006). Perceived involvement of network members in courtships: A test of the relational turbulence model. *Personal Relationships, 13*(3), 281–302. doi:10.1111/j.1475-6811.2006.00118.x
- Knobloch, L. K., & Solomon, D. H. (2005). Relational uncertainty and relational information processing: questions without answers? *Communication Research, 32*(3), 349–388. doi:10.1177/0093650205275384
- Kosenko, K. A. (2011a). Contextual influences on sexual risk-taking in the transgender community. *The Journal of Sex Research, 48*(2–3), 285–296. doi:10.1080/00224491003721686
- Kosenko, K. A. (2011b). The safer sex communication of transgender adults: Processes and problems. *Journal of Communication, 61*(3), 476–495. doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.2011.01556.x
- Kukla, R. (2018). That's what she said: The language of sexual negotiation. *Ethics, 129*(1), 70–97. doi:10.1086/698733
- Lapinski, M. K., & Rimal, R. N. (2005). An explication of social norms. *Communication Theory, 15*(2), 127–147. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2885.2005.tb00329.x

- Levine, J. M., & Hogg, M. A. (2010). *Encyclopedia of group processes and intergroup relations* (Vol. 1). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lippa, R. A. (2001). On deconstructing and reconstructing masculinity–femininity. *Journal of Research in Personality, 35*(2), 168–207.
doi:10.1006/jrpe.2000.2307
- Little, K. C., Welsh, D. P., Darling, N., & Holmes, R. M. (2011). Brief report: “I can’t talk about it:” Sexuality and self-silencing as interactive predictors of depressive symptoms in adolescent dating couples. *Journal of Adolescence, 34*(4), 789–794.
doi:10.1016/j.adolescence.2010.04.006
- López, G., & Yeater, E. A. (2018). Comparisons of sexual victimization experiences among sexual minority and heterosexual women. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, doi:10.1177/0886260518787202*
- Lucchetti, A. E. (1999). Deception in disclosing one’s sexual history: Safe-sex avoidance or ignorance? *Communication Quarterly, 47*(3), 300–314.
doi:10.1080/01463379909385561
- MacNeil, S., & Byers, E. S. (2005). Dyadic assessment of sexual self-disclosure and sexual satisfaction in heterosexual dating couples. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 22*(2), 169–181. doi:10.1177/0265407505050942
- MacNeil, S., & Byers, E. S. (2009). Role of sexual self-disclosure in the sexual satisfaction of long-term heterosexual couples. *Journal of Sex Research, 46*(1), 3–14. doi:10.1080/00224490802398399

- Maeda, E., & Hecht, M. L. (2012). Identity search: interpersonal relationships and relational identities of always-single Japanese women over time. *Western Journal of Communication*, 76(1), 44–64. doi:10.1080/10570314.2012.637539
- Manning, J. (2013). Developing typologies through qualitative analysis. In J. A. Scarduzio, E. K. Eger, & S. J. Tracy (Eds.), *Qualitative research methods: Collecting evidence, crafting analysis, communicating impact instructor companion* (pp. 1–2). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Manning, J. (2014). Communication and healthy sexual practices: Toward a holistic communicology of sexuality. In M. H. Eaves (Ed.), *Applications in health communication: Emerging trends*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall-Hunt.
- Manning, J. (2015). Positive and negative communicative behaviors in coming-out conversations. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 62(1), 67–97.
doi:10.1080/00918369.2014.957127
- Marsh, H. W., Hau, K.-T., Balla, J. R., & Grayson, D. (1998). Is more ever too much? The number of indicators per factor in confirmatory factor analysis. *Multivariate Behavioral Research*, 33, 181–220. doi:10.1207/s15327906mbr3302_1
- Matsunaga, M. (2008). Item parceling in structural equation modeling: A primer. *Communication Methods and Measures*, 2(4), 260–293.
doi:10.1080/19312450802458935
- McCarn, S. R., & Fassinger, R. E. (1996). Revisioning sexual minority identity formation: A new model of lesbian identity and its implications for counseling

and research. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 24(3), 508–534.

doi:10.1177/0011000096243011

McCarthy, M. H., Wood, J. V., & Holmes, J. G. (2017). Dispositional pathways to trust:

Self-esteem and agreeableness interact to predict trust and negative emotional disclosure. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 113(1), 95–116.

doi:10.1037/pspi0000093

McKenna, Y. A., & Bargh, J. A. (1998). Coming out in the age of the Internet: Identity

“demarginalization” through virtual group participation. *Journal of Personal and Social Psychology*, 75(3), 681–694. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.75.3.681

McPhillips, K., Braun, V., & Gavey, N. (2001). Defining (hetero)sex: How imperative is

the “coital imperative”? *Women’s Studies International Forum*, 24, 229–240.

Merrill, A. F., & Afifi, T. D. (2017). Couple identity gaps, the management of conflict,

and biological and self-reported stress in romantic relationships. *Human*

Communication Research, 43, 363–396. doi:10.1111/hcre.12110

Metts, S., & Spitzberg, B. H. (1996). Sexual communication in interpersonal contexts: A

script-based approach. *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 19(1), 49–92. doi:10.1080/23808985.1996.11678928

Meyers, L. S., Gamst, G., & Guarino, A. J. (2016). *Applied multivariate research: Design and interpretation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Mincer, E. (2018). Fifty shades and fifty states: Is BDSM a fundamental right? A test for

sexual privacy. *William & Mary Bill of Rights Journal*, 26(3), 865-897. Retrieved

from <https://scholarship.law.wm.edu/wmborj/vol26/iss3/9>

- Mohr, J. J., & Daly, C. A. (2008). Sexual minority stress and changes in relationship quality in same-sex couples. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 25*(6), 989–1007. doi:10.1177/0265407508100311
- Mongeau, P. A., Jacobsen, J., & Donnerstein, C. (2007). Defining dates and first date goals: Generalizing from undergraduates to single adults. *Communication Research, 34*(5), 526–547. doi:10.1177/0093650207305235
- Mongeau, P. A., Serewicz, M. C. M., & Therrien, L. F. (2004). Goals for cross-sex first dates: identification, measurement, and the influence of contextual factors. *Communication Monographs, 71*(2), 121–147. doi:10.1080/0363775042331302514
- Montemurro, B., Bartasavich, J., & Wintermute, L. (2015). Let's (not) talk about sex: The gender of sexual discourse. *Sexuality & Culture, 19*, 139–156. doi:10.1007/s12119-014-9250-5
- Montesi, J. L., Fauber, R. L., Gordon, E. A., & Heimberg, R. G. (2011). The specific importance of communicating about sex to couples' sexual and overall relationship satisfaction. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 28*(5), 591–609. doi:10.1177/0265407510386833
- Mosher, W. D., Chandra, A., & Jones, J. (2005). Sexual behavior and selected health measures: men and women 15-44 years of age, United States, 2002. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/16250464>
- Muehlenhard, C. L., Peterson, Z. D., Humphreys, T. P., & Jozkowski, K. N. (2017). Evaluating the one-in-five statistic: Women's risk of sexual assault while in

college. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 54(4–5), 549–576.

doi:10.1080/00224499.2017.1295014

Murray, C. L., & Kennedy-Lightsey, C. D. (2013). Should I stay or go?: Student identity gaps, feelings, and intent to leave. *Communication Research Reports*, 30, 96–105.

doi:10.1080/08824096.2012.762894

Noar, S. M., Carlyle, K., & Cole, C. (2006). Why communication is crucial: Meta-analysis of the relationship between safer sexual communication and condom use.

Journal of Health Communication, 11(4), 365–390.

doi:10.1080/10810730600671862

Noland, C., M. (2010). *Sex talk: The role of communication in intimate relationships*.

Praeger.

Orbe, M. P. (2004). Negotiating multiple identities within multiple frames: an analysis of first-generation college students. *Communication Education*, 53(2), 131–149.

Page, E., Shute, R., & McLachlan, A. (2015). A self-categorization theory perspective on adolescent boys' sexual bullying of girls. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 30,

371–383. doi:10.1177/0886260514535096

Pariera, K. L. (2016). The communication of sexual norms. In J. Manning & C. M.

Noland (Eds.), *Contemporary Studies of Sexuality & Communication: Theoretical & Applied Perspectives* (pp. 15–34). Dubuque, IA: Kendall-Hunt.

Parker, R. (2010). Reinventing sexual scripts: Sexuality and social change in the Twenty-First Century (The 2008 John H. Gagnon Distinguished Lecture on Sexuality,

- Modernity and Change). *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*, 7(1), 58–66.
doi:10.1007/s13178-010-0004-3
- Pascoal, P., Cardoso, D., & Henriques, R. (2015). Sexual satisfaction and distress in sexual functioning in a sample of the BDSM community: A comparison study between BDSM and non-BDSM contexts. *The Journal of Sexual Medicine*, 12(4), 1052–1061. doi:10.1111/jsm.12835
- Peterson, Z. D., & Muehlenhard, C. L. (2007). What is sex and why does it matter? A motivational approach to exploring individuals' definitions of sex. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 44(3), 256–268. doi:10.1080/00224490701443932
- Petronio, S. (2002). *Boundaries of Privacy: Dialectics of Disclosure*. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press.
- Phillips, K. E., Ledbetter, A. M., Soliz, J., & Bergquist, G. (2018). Investigating the interplay between identity gaps and communication patterns in predicting relational intentions in families in the united states. *Journal of Communication*, 68(3), 590–611. doi:10.1093/joc/jqy016
- Pitagora, D. (2017). No pain, no gain?: Therapeutic and relational benefits of subspace in BDSM contexts. *Journal of Positive Sexuality*, 3(3), 391–405.
doi:10.1080/14681994.2016.1156081
- Pool, G. J., Schwegler, A. F., Theodore, B. R., & Fuchs, P. N. (2007). Role of gender norms and group identification on hypothetical and experimental pain tolerance: *Pain*, 129(1), 122–129. doi:10.1016/j.pain.2006.10.008

- Power, J., McNair, R., & Carr, S. (2009). Absent sexual scripts: Lesbian and bisexual women's knowledge, attitudes, and action regarding safer sex and sexual health information. *Culture, Health & Sexuality, 11*(1), 67–81.
doi:10.1080/13691050802541674
- Preacher, K. J. (2018). Calculation for the sobel test. Retrieved from <http://quantpsy.org/sobel/sobel.htm>
- Prestage, G., Mao, L., McGuigan, D., Crawford, J., Kippax, S., Kaldor, J., & Grulich, A. E. (2006). HIV risk and communication between regular partners in a cohort of HIV-negative gay men. *AIDS Care, 18*(2), 166–172.
doi:10.1080/09540120500358951
- Pusateri, K. B., Roaché, D. J., & Kam, J. A. (2016). Grandparents' and young adult grandchildren's identity gaps and perceived caregiving intentions: An actor–partner interdependence model. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 33*(2), 191–216. doi:10.1177/0265407514568750
- Quinn, D. M., Williams, M. K., Quintana, F., Gaskins, J. L., Overstreet, N. M., Pishori, A., ... Chaudoir, S. R. (2014). Examining effects of anticipated stigma, centrality, salience, internalization, and outness on psychological distress for people with concealable stigmatized identities. *Plus One*. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0096977
- Ray, C. M., Tyler, K. A., & Gordon Simons, L. (2018). Risk factors for forced, incapacitated, and coercive sexual victimization among sexual minority and heterosexual male and female college students. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*. Advance online publication. doi:10.1177/0886260518758332

- Raykov, T., & Marcoulides, G. A. (2006). Estimation of generalizability coefficients via a structural equation modeling approach to scale reliability evaluation. *International Journal of Testing*, 6(1), 81-95.
doi:10.1207/s15327574ijt0601_5
- Rehman, U. S., Rellini, A. H., & Fallis, E. (2011). The importance of sexual self-disclosure to sexual satisfaction and functioning in committed relationships. *The Journal of Sexual Medicine*, 8(11), 3108–3115. doi:10.1111/j.1743-6109.2011.02439.x
- Reicher, S., & Haslam, S. A. (2011). After shock? Towards a social identity explanation of the Milgram ‘obedience’ studies: Social identity and the Milgram studies. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 50(1), 163–169. doi:10.1111/j.2044-8309.2010.02015.x
- Reid, S. A., & Anderson, G. (2010). Language, social identity, and stereotypes. In H. Giles, S. Reid, & J. Harwood (Eds.), *The dynamics of intergroup communication* (pp. 91–104). New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Ritchie, A., & Barker, M. (2006). ‘There aren’t words for what we do or how we feel so we have to make them up’: constructing polyamorous languages in a culture of compulsory monogamy. *Sexualities*, 9(5), 584–601.
doi:10.1177/1363460706069987
- Rubinsky, V. (2018a). Bringing up the green-eyed monster: Conceptualizing and communicating jealousy with a partner who has other partners. *The Qualitative*

Report, 23(6), 1441–1455. Retrieved from:

<https://nsuworks.nova.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3297&context=tqr/>

- Rubinsky, V. (2018b). Identity gaps and jealousy as predictors of satisfaction in polyamorous relationships. *Southern Communication Journal*, Advance online publication. doi:10.1080/1041794X.2018.1531916
- Rubinsky, V. (2018c). “Sometimes it’s easier to type things than to say them”: Technology in BDSM sexual partner communication. *Sexuality & Culture*, 22(4), 1412–1431. doi:10.1007/s12119-018-9534-2
- Rubinsky, V., & Cooke-Jackson, A. (2016). “Where is the love?” Expanding and theorizing with LGBTQ memorable messages of sex and sexuality. *Health Communication*, 32, 1472-1480. doi:10.1080/10410236.2016.1230809
- Rubinsky, V., & Cooke-Jackson, A. (2017). “Tell me something other than to use a condom and sex is scary”: memorable messages women and gender minorities wish for and recall about sexual health. *Women’s Studies in Communication*, 40(4), 379–400. doi:10.1080/07491409.2017.1368761
- Rubinsky, V., & Cooke-Jackson, A. (2018). Sex as an intergroup arena: How women and gender minorities conceptualize sex, sexuality, and sexual health. *Communication Studies*, 69(2), 213–234. doi:10.1080/10510974.2018.1437549
- Rubinsky, V., & Hosek, A. M. (2018). “We have to get over it”: Navigating potentially face- threatening sex talk through the lens of sexual communication comfort and sexual self-disclosure in LGBTQ intimate partnerships. *Presented at the Eastern Communication Association Annual Convention, Pittsburgh.*

- Saldaña, J. (2015). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Sanchez, D. T., Moss-Racusin, C. A., Phelan, J. E., & Crocker, J. (2011). Relationship contingency and sexual motivation in women: Implications for sexual satisfaction. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 40*(1), 99–110. doi:10.1007/s10508-009-9593-4
- Sánchez-Fuentes, M. del M., Santos-Iglesias, P., & Sierra, J. C. (2014). A systematic review of sexual satisfaction. *International Journal of Clinical and Health Psychology, 14*(1), 67–75. doi:10.1016/S1697-2600(14)70038-9
- Savin-Williams, R., & Diamond, L. (2000). Sexual identity trajectories among sexual-minority youths: Gender comparisons. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 29*, 607–627. doi:10.1023/A:1002058505138
- Schilt, K., & Westbrook, L. (2009). Doing gender, doing heteronormativity: “Gender normals,” transgender people, and the social maintenance of heterosexuality. *Gender & Society, 23*(4), 440–464. doi:10.1177/0891243209340034
- Schober, J. M. (2001). Sexual behaviors, sexual orientation and gender identity in adult intersexuals: A pilot study. *The Journal of Urology, 165*(6), 2350–2353. doi:10.1016/S0022-5347(05)66201-5
- Sewell, K. K., McGarrity, L. A., & Strassberg, D. S. (2017). Sexual behavior, definitions of sex, and the role of self-partner context among lesbian, gay, and bisexual adults. *The Journal of Sex Research, 54*(7), 825-831. doi:10.1080/00224499.2016.1249331

- Sheff, E. (2014). *The Polyamorists Next Door: Inside Multiple-Partner Relationships and Families*. London: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Sheff, E., & Hammers, C. (2011). The privilege of perversities: Race, class and education among polyamorists and kinksters. *Psychology & Sexuality*, 2(3), 198–223.
doi:10.1080/19419899.2010.537674
- Simbayi, L. C., Kalichman, S. C., Strebel, A., Cloete, A., Henda, N., & Mqeketo, A. (2007). Disclosure of HIV status to sex partners and sexual risk behaviours among HIV-positive men and women, Cape Town, South Africa. *Sexually Transmitted Infections*, 83(1), 29–34. doi:10.1136/sti.2006.019893
- Simon, W., & Gagnon, J. H. (1986). Sexual scripts: Permanence and change. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 15(2), 97–120. doi:10.1007/BF01542219
- Sneed, C. D. (2009). Sexual risk behavior among early initiators of sexual intercourse. *AIDS Care*, 21(11), 1395–1400. doi:10.1080/09540120902893241
- Snell, W. E., Belk, S. S., Papini, D. R., & Clark, S. (1989). Development and validation of the Sexual Self-Disclosure Scale. *Annals of Sex Research*, 2(4), 307–334.
doi:10.1007/BF00849749
- Soliz, J., & Harwood, J. (2006). Shared family identity, age salience, and intergroup contact: Investigation of the grandparent–grandchild relationship. *Communication Monographs*, 73(1), 87–107. doi:10.1080/03637750500534388
- Sprecher, S., & Cate, R. M. (2004). Sexual satisfaction and sexual expression as predictors of relationship satisfaction and stability. In J. H. Harvey, A. Wentzel, &

- S. Sprecher (Eds.), *The handbook of sexuality in close relationships* (pp. 235–256). Mahwah, New Jersey: Erlbaum.
- Sprecher, S., & Hendrick, S. S. (2004). Self-disclosure in intimate relationships: Associations with individual and relationship characteristics over time. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 23*(6), 857–877.
- Stafford, L., Dainton, M., & Haas, S. (2000). Measuring routine and strategic relational maintenance: Scale revision, sex versus gender roles, and the prediction of relational characteristics. *Communication Monographs, 67*(3), 306–323.
doi:10.1080/03637750009376512
- Stanley, S. J., & Pitts, M. J. (2018). “I’m scared of the disappointment”: Young adult smokers’ relational identity gaps and management strategies as sites of communication intervention. *Health Communication*. Advance online publication.
doi:10.1080/10410236.2018.1440507
- Stephens, D., & Phillips, L. (2003). Freaks, gold diggers, divas, and dykes: The sociohistorical development of adolescent African American women’s sexual scripts. *Sexuality & Culture, 7*(1), 3–49. doi:10.1007/BF03159848
- Stokes, C. E. (2007). Representin’ in cyberspace: Sexual scripts, self-definition, and hip hop culture in Black American adolescent girls’ home pages. *Culture, Health & Sexuality, 9*(2), 169–184. doi:10.1080/13691050601017512
- Stone, N., & Ingham, R. (2002). Factors affecting British teenagers’ contraceptive use at first intercourse: The importance of partner communication. *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health, 34*(4), 191–197. doi:10.2307/3097729

- Tabachnick, B. G., Fidell, L. S., & Ullman, J. B. (2007). *Using multivariate statistics* (Vol. 5). Boston, MA: Pearson.
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. (1986). The social identity theory of intergroup behavior. In *Psychology of Intergroup Relations* (pp. 7–24). Chicago: Nelson Hall.
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In M. J. Hatch and M. Schultz (Eds.), *Organizational Identity: A Reader* (pp. 56-65). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Tausch, N., Tam, T., Hewstone, M., Kenworthy, J., & Cairns, E. (2007). Individual-level and group-level mediators of contact effects in Northern Ireland: The moderating role of social identification. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 46*(3), 541–556. doi:10.1348/014466606X155150
- Taylor, D., & Altman, I. (1987). Communication in interpersonal relationships: Social penetration processes. In M. E. Roloff & G. R. Miller (Eds.), *Interpersonal processes: New directions in communication research* (pp. 257–277). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Theiss, J. A. (2011). Modeling dyadic effects in the associations between relational uncertainty, sexual communication, and sexual satisfaction for husbands and wives. *Communication Research, 38*(4), 565–584. doi:10.1177/0093650211402186
- Tripodi, F. (2017). Facts and prejudices on sexuality of people practicing BDSM. *The Journal of Sexual Medicine, 14*(5), e232. doi:10.1016/j.jsxm.2017.04.119

- Turner, J. C., Brown, R. J., & Tajfel, H. (1979). Social comparison and group interest in ingroup favouritism. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, *9*(2), 187–204.
doi:10.1002/ejsp.2420090207
- Turner, J., Reynolds, K. J., Haslam, S. A., & Veenstra, K. E. (2006). Reconceptualizing personality: Producing individuality by defining the personal self. In T. Postmes & J. Jetten (Eds.), *Individuality and the group: Advances in social identity* (pp. 11–36). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Turner, J. C., & Oakes, P. J. (1986). The significance of the social identity concept for social psychology with reference to individualism, interactionism and social influence. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, *25*(3), 237–252.
doi:10.1111/j.2044-8309.1986.tb00732.x
- Ubinger, M. E., Handal, P. J., & Massura, C. E. (2013). Adolescent adjustment: The hazards of conflict avoidance and the benefits of conflict resolution. *Psychology*, *04*(01), 50–58. doi:10.4236/psych.2013.41007
- Urban, E. L., & Orbe, M. P. (2010). Identity gaps of contemporary U.S. immigrants: Acknowledging divergent communicative experiences. *Communication Studies*, *61*(3), 304–320. doi:10.1080/10510971003757147
- Ussher, J. M., & Perz, J. (2008). Empathy, egalitarianism and emotion work in the relational negotiation of PMS: The experience of women in lesbian relationships. *Feminism & Psychology*, *18*(1), 87–111. doi:10.1177/0959353507084954
- Utz, S. (2015). The function of self-disclosure on social network sites: Not only intimate, but also positive and entertaining self-disclosures increase the feeling of

connection. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 45, 1–10.

doi:10.1016/j.chb.2014.11.076

Vangelisti, A. L. (2011). Interpersonal processes in romantic relationships. In M. Knapp L. & J. Daly A. (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Interpersonal Communication* (pp. 597–632). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Vernd, S., Loewy, M., Sturmer, S., Weber, U., Freytag, P., Habig, C., ... Spahlinger, P. (1998). Collective identification and social movement participation. *Journal of Personal and Social Psychology*, 74(3), 646–658. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.74.3.646

Wadsworth, B. C., Hecht, M. L., & Jung, E. (2008). The role of identity gaps, discrimination, and acculturation in international students' educational satisfaction in American classrooms. *Communication Education*, 57(1), 64–87. doi:10.1080/03634520701668407

Wagner, P. E. (2017). Bulking up (identities): A communication framework for male fitness identity. *Communication Quarterly*, 65(5), 580–602. doi:10.1080/01463373.2017.1321027

Wagner, P. E., Kunkel, A., & Compton, B. L. (2016). (Trans)lating identity: Exploring discursive strategies for navigating the tensions of identity gaps. *Communication Quarterly*, 64(3), 251–272. doi:10.1080/01463373.2015.1103286

Waldinger, R. J., & Schulz, M. S. (2010). What's love got to do with it?: Social functioning, perceived health, and daily happiness in married octogenarians. *Psychology and Aging*, 25(2), 422–431. doi:10.1037/a0019087

- Warren, J. R., Hecht, M. L., Jung, E., Kvasny, L., & Henderson, M. G. (2010). African American ethnic and class-based identities on the world wide web: moderating the effects of self-perceived information seeking/finding and web self-efficacy. *Communication Research, 37*(5), 674–702. doi:10.1177/0093650210374005
- Widman, L., Choukas-Bradley, S., Helms, S. W., Golin, C. E., & Prinstein, M. J. (2014). Sexual communication between early adolescents and their dating partners, parents, and best friends. *The Journal of Sex Research, 51*(7), 731–741. doi:10.1080/00224499.2013.843148
- Wiederman, M. W. (2005). The gendered nature of sexual scripts. *The Family Journal, 13*(4), 496–502. doi:10.1177/1066480705278729
- Willetts, G., & Clarke, D. (2013). Constructing nurses' professional identity through social identity theory. *International Journal of Nursing Practice, 20*, 164–169. doi:10.1111/ijn.12108
- Wilson, M. S., & Liu, J. H. (2003). Social dominance orientation and gender: The moderating role of gender identity. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 42*(2), 187–198. doi:10.1348/014466603322127175
- Wilson, S. R. (2002). *Seeking and resisting compliance: What people say what they do when trying to influence others*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Wilson, S. R., & Feng, H. (2007). Interaction goals and message production: Conceptual and methodological developments. In D. R. Roskos-Ewoldsen & J. L. Monahan (Eds.), *Communication and social cognition: Theories and methods* (pp. 71–95). Mahwah, New Jersey: Erlbaum.

- Wingood, G. M., Hunter-Gamble, D., & DiClemente, R. J. (1993). A pilot study of sexual communication and negotiation among young African American women: Implications for HIV prevention. *Journal of Black Psychology, 19*(2), 190–203. doi:10.1177/00957984930192008
- Witteborn, S. (2004). Of being an Arab woman before and after September 11: The enactment of communal identities in talk. *Howard Journal of Communication, 15*, 83–98. doi:10.1080/10646170490448312
- Wosick-Correa, K. (2010). Agreements, rules and agentic fidelity in polyamorous relationships. *Psychology and Sexuality, 1*(1), 44–61. doi:10.1080/19419891003634471
- Yanowitz, K. L. (2006). Influence of gender and experience on college students' stalking schemas. *Violence and Victims, 21*(1), 91–100. doi:10.1891/vivi.21.1.91
- Young, M., Wallace, J. E., & Polachek, A. J. (2015). Gender differences in perceived domestic task equity: A study of professionals. *Journal of Family Issues, 36*(13), 1751–1781. doi:10.1177/0192513X13508403

Appendix: Questionnaire

Personal-Relational Identity Gap Scale

1. I usually agree with what the acquaintances describe about me.

Strongly Agree 1: 2: 3: 4: 5 Strongly Disagree

2. I feel the acquaintances see me as I see myself.

Strongly Agree 1: 2: 3: 4: 5 Strongly Disagree

3. I feel the acquaintances have correct images of me

Strongly Agree 1: 2: 3: 4: 5 Strongly Disagree

4. I feel the acquaintances stereotype me.

Strongly Agree 1: 2: 3: 4: 5 Strongly Disagree

5. I think the acquaintances know what kind of person I am.

Strongly Agree 1: 2: 3: 4: 5 Strongly Disagree

6. I feel there are differences between who I think I am and who the acquaintances think I am.

Strongly Agree 1: 2: 3: 4: 5 Strongly Disagree

7. I feel the acquaintances have correct information about me.

Strongly Agree 1: 2: 3: 4: 5 Strongly Disagree

Personal-Enacted Identity Gap Scale

8. I usually communicate with the acquaintances in the way that is consistent with who I really

am.

Strongly Agree 1: 2: 3: 4: 5 Strongly Disagree

9. I feel I can be myself when communicating with the acquaintances.

Strongly Agree 1: 2: 3: 4: 5 Strongly Disagree

10. I often hide some aspects of myself in communication with the acquaintances.

Strongly Agree 1: 2: 3: 4: 5 Strongly Disagree

11. I feel there are differences between “real me” and the impressions I give the acquaintances.

Strongly Agree 1: 2: 3: 4: 5 Strongly Disagree

12. I speak truthfully to the acquaintances about myself.

Strongly Agree 1: 2: 3: 4: 5 Strongly Disagree

13. I freely express “real me” in communication with the acquaintances.

Strongly Agree 1: 2: 3: 4: 5 Strongly Disagree

Enacted-Relational Identity Gap Scale

14. I feel the acquaintances portray me not based on the information I provide, but, instead,

based on information from other sources.

Strongly Agree 1: 2: 3: 4: 5 Strongly Disagree

15. When I communicate with the acquaintances, I am usually successful in making them get to

know me.

Strongly Agree 1: 2: 3: 4: 5 Strongly Disagree

16. I am usually successful in conveying my intended images to the acquaintances.

Strongly Agree 1: 2: 3: 4: 5 Strongly Disagree

17. I often wonder why the acquaintances have different images of me from what I tried to give

them.

Strongly Agree 1: 2: 3: 4: 5 Strongly Disagree

18. Although I try to show the acquaintances what kind of person I am, they seem **not** to see me

as I show.

Strongly Agree 1: 2: 3: 4: 5 Strongly Disagree

19. I feel there are differences between how I express myself in communication with the acquaintances and how they picture me.

Strongly Agree 1: 2: 3: 4: 5 Strongly Disagree

**Reverse the scores of the underlined items

Health Protective Sexual Communication Scale

Instructions: How often have you discussed each of the following items with your partner?

Response format: 1=Never, 2=Sometimes, 3=Almost always, 4=Always, 6=Don't know

1. Asked your partner how they felt about condoms before you had intercourse.
2. Asked your partner about the number of past sexual partners they had.
3. Told your partner about the number of sexual partners you have had.
4. Told your partner that you would not have sex unless protection was used.
5. Discussed with your partner the need for both of you to have STI testing.
6. Asked your partner if they have ever had some time of STI.
7. Asked your partner if they have ever done drugs.
8. Talked to your partner about birth control.

Revised Sexual Self-Disclosure Scale

Response format: 1=Have not discussed this topic. 2=Have slightly discussed this topic.

3=Have moderately discussed this topic. 4=Have mostly discussed this topic. 5=Have fully discussed this topic.

Instructions: These questions are concerned with the extent to which you have discussed the following topics about sexuality with your intimate partner. To respond, indicate how much you have discussed these topics with an intimate partner.

1. My past sexual experiences.

2. The kinds of touching that sexually arouse me.
3. My private sexual fantasies.
4. The sexual preferences that I have.
5. The types of sexual behaviors I have engaged in.
6. The sensations that are sexually exciting to me.
7. My “juicy” sexual thoughts.
8. What I would desire in a sexual encounter.
9. The sexual positions I have tried.
10. The types of sexual foreplay that feel arousing to me.
11. The sexual episodes that I daydream about.
12. The things I enjoy the most about sex.
13. What sex in an intimate relationship means to me.
14. My private beliefs about sexual responsibility.
15. Times when sex was distressing for me.
16. The times I have pretended to enjoy sex.
17. Times when I prefer to refrain from sexual activity.
18. What it means to me to have sex with my partner.
19. My own ideas about sexual accountability.
20. Times when I was pressured to have sex.
21. The times I have lied about sexual matters.
22. The times when I might not want to have sex.
23. What I think and feel about having sex with my partner.

24. The notion that one is accountable for one's sexual behaviors.
25. The aspects of sex that bother me.
26. How I would feel about sexual dishonesty.
27. My ideas about not having sex unless I want to.
28. How I feel about abortions.
29. My personal views about gay people.
30. My own ideas about why rape occurs.
31. My personal views about people with sexually transmitted diseases.
32. What I consider "proper" sexual behavior.
33. My beliefs about pregnancy prevention.
34. Opinions I have about same-sex relationships.
35. What I really feel about rape.
36. Concerns I have about the disease AIDS.
37. The sexual behaviors that I consider appropriate.
38. How I feel about pregnancy at this time.
39. My reactions to working with a gay person.
40. My reactions to rape.
41. My feelings about working with someone who has AIDS.
42. My personal beliefs about sexual morality.
43. How satisfied I feel about the sexual aspects of my life.
44. How guilty I feel about the sexual aspects of my life.
45. How calm I feel about the sexual aspects of my life.

46. How depressed I feel about the sexual aspects of my life.
47. How jealous I feel about the sexual aspects of my life.
48. How apathetic I feel about the sexual aspects of my life.
49. How anxious I feel about the sexual aspects of my life.
50. How happy I feel about the sexual aspects of my life.
51. How afraid I feel about the sexual aspects of my life.
52. How pleased I feel about the sexual aspects of my life.
53. How angry I feel about the sexual aspects of my life.
54. How shameful I feel about the sexual aspects of my life.
55. How serene I feel about the sexual aspects of my life.
56. How sad I feel about the sexual aspects of my life.
57. How possessive I feel about the sexual aspects of my life.
58. How indifferent I feel about the sexual aspects of my life.
59. How troubled I feel about the sexual aspects of my life.
60. How cheerful I feel about the sexual aspects of my life.
61. How mad I feel about the sexual aspects of my life.
62. How fearful I feel about the sexual aspects of my life.
63. How delighted I feel about the sexual aspects of my life.
64. How embarrassed I feel about the sexual aspects of my life.
65. How relaxed I feel about the sexual aspects of my life.
66. How unhappy I feel about the sexual aspects of my life.
67. How suspicious I feel about the sexual aspects of my life.

68. How detached I feel about the sexual aspects of my life.
69. How worried I feel about the sexual aspects of my life.
70. How joyful I feel about the sexual aspects of my life.
71. How irritated I feel about the sexual aspects of my life.
72. How frightened I feel about the sexual aspects of my life.

Identity Saliences

Instructions: Indicate below the extent to which you agree with the following statements.

Response format: 1=Strongly disagree, 7=Strongly agree

Gender Identity Salience:

1. My gender is an important part of who I am.
2. My gender is central to who I am.

Sexual Identity Salience:

1. My sexual identity is an important part of who I am.
2. My sexual identity is central to who I am.

Global Measure of Relational Satisfaction

Instructions: How would you describe your **overall** relationship with your partner?

Response format: 7-point bipolar.

Good-Bad

Satisfying-Unsatisfying

Valuable-Worthless

Pleasant-Unpleasant

Positive Negative

Sexual Communication Satisfaction

Instructions: How would you describe your **sexual communication** with your partner?

Response format: 7-point bipolar.

Good-Bad

Satisfying-Unsatisfying

Valuable-Worthless

Pleasant-Unpleasant

Positive Negative

New Sexual Satisfaction Short Form

Instructions: Thinking about your sex life during the last six months, please note your satisfaction with the following aspects.

Response format: 1=Not at all Satisfied, 2=A little satisfied, 3=Moderately satisfied, 4=Very satisfied, 5=Extremely satisfied.

1. The quality of my orgasms.
2. My “letting go” and surrender to sexual pleasure during sex.

3. The way I sexually react to my partner.
4. My body's sexual functioning.
5. My mood after sexual activity.
6. The pleasure I provide to my partner.
7. The balance between what I give and receive in sex.
8. My partner's emotional opening up during sex.
9. My partner's ability to orgasm.
10. My partner's sexual creativity.
11. The variety of my sexual activity.
12. The frequency of my sexual activity.

Health Protective Sexual Behaviors Scale

Instructions: To what extent do you feel comfortable or uncomfortable engaging in the following behaviors?

Response format: 1=Strongly uncomfortable, 2=moderately uncomfortable, 3=slightly uncomfortable, 4=slightly comfortable, 5=moderately comfortable, 6=very comfortable, 9=N/A.

1. Speaking with a partner about using birth control (any method).
2. Asking a partner about their past sexual history.
3. Engaging in unprotected (no condom or dental dam) sexual activity with a partner.

Open-Ended Questions

Instructions: An “identity gap” is a feeling like you act differently than you really feel, or that other people treat you differently than you really feel, or that you act, or others treat you, in a way that is different with some important aspect of your identity.

1. Can you describe an instance where you think you have experienced an identity gap within or as a result of sexual activity or sexual communication with your partner?
2. How, if at all, did you address this tension with your partner?
3. What, if anything, did you do as a result of this feeling of tension?

Demographics:

*Above categorization does not describe my identity includes a write-in option.

How would you identify your race?

White/Caucasian, Black or African American, Asian or Pacific Islander, Hispanic or Latinx, American Indian, Two or More Races, the above categorization does not describe my identity*.

How would you identify your religion?

Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Atheist, Agnostic, the above categorization does not describe my identity*.

How would you identify your assigned sex?

Female, male, the above categorization does not describe my identity*.

How would you describe your gender identity?

Woman, man, genderqueer, genderfluid, non-binary, the above categorization does not describe my identity*.

How would you describe your sexual orientation?

Heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, asexual spectrum, the above categorization does not describe my identity*

How old are you (in years)?

How many months have you been in the relationship with the partner about who you answered the earlier questions? ____

Do you live with your partner? [Yes/No]

Would you define your relationship as “long distance?” [Yes/No]

Do you identify as polyamorous?

Do you practice BDSM?



OHIO
UNIVERSITY

Thesis and Dissertation Services