Deeper insights into the construct of sexual communication: Understanding of the role of

individual and relationship factors and the development of a process model

by

Kendra Wasson

A thesis

presented to the University of Waterloo

in fulfillment of the

thesis requirement for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Psychology

Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, 2023

Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including

any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

Successful and fulfilling intimate relationships are an integral part of overall wellbeing, and their success and meaning are determined by many factors, including sexual communication within the relationship (Byers & Demmons, 1999; Rehman et al., 2011). Despite the substantial body of research that explains the impact of sexual communication on relational and sexual functioning, less is known about the process of communicating sexual topics. Sexual communication is a complex process involving the capacity for vulnerability as well as communication and perspective-taking skills (e.g., Buluş et al., 2017). Theoretical models have important utility in both research and clinical practice, but there are few models of sexual communication that capture its multidimensional nature. The goal of the current program of research was to expand on the foundational work by Brown and Weigel (2018) to develop the Process Model of Sexual Communication (PMSC). This model explains the relationships between individual factors, relationship context factors, and the process of sexual communication and their collective impact on outcome variables such as sexual satisfaction.

I conducted two separate two-part studies (total $n = 373$) to explore the relationships between these factors and develop the PMSC using quantitative (Studies 1a and 1b) and mixed-method (Studies 2a and 2b) approaches. The results support the multidimensional nature of sexual communication and highlight the different topics that individuals discuss with their partners. They also highlight the importance of motivations for engaging in sexual communication and how those motivations impact the other components of the model. Using these results, I constructed the PMSC and tested associations between the model components. I discuss implications for research and clinical practice as well as future directions to test the full PMSC.

Acknowledgements

I am proud to be the author of this work and am filled with gratitude for my incredible community of support, without whom this thesis would not have been possible. I am immensely grateful to my supervisor, Dr. Uzma Rehman, who mentored, guided, and supported me in navigating the complexities of this process. I continue to learn so much from her considerable expertise in the area of sexual communication as well as approaches to mentorship and clinical practice. I also am grateful to Drs. Jonathan Oakman and David Moscovitch, who went above and beyond in their role as readers of this thesis to provide thoughtful insights that not only guided the completion of my thesis but will guide the expansion of this work as I continue into my doctoral program of research. Thanks as well to the Relationships Lab members, particularly Jessica Edwards and Anna Zavadskaya, who provided excellent feedback and insight during the final stages of completing the thesis.

To my community outside of academia, there are no words to express my thanks adequately. The past two years have been rewarding yet immensely challenging in unforeseen ways. Your vehement belief in my ability to persevere and succeed is greatly appreciated. To my community in New Brunswick, thank you for continuing to lend me your strength and support. To my new and growing community in Ontario, thank you for your loving and supportive presence during these new chapters of my life. Finally, and ultimately, thank you to my mother, Pam Wasson. This thesis would never have succeeded without your unwavering belief in my ability to overcome hardship and achieve great things. Thank you for your love, sacrifice, and support that not only got me through this degree but has also guided me for the past 30 years.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

General Introduction

Successful and fulfilling intimate relationships are an integral part of overall wellbeing, and their success and meaning are determined by many factors, including sexual communication within the relationship (Byers & Demmons, 1999; Rehman et al., 2011). In order to achieve mutually satisfying sexual activity, effective coordination between intimate partners is critical and requires active communication (e.g., communicating if, when, and how sex will occur; Coffelt & Hess, 2014). It is through sexual communication that individuals build mutually pleasurable sexual repertoires (Coffelt & Hess, 2014). When individuals can communicate openly with their partner about their sexual relationship, including their own sexual preferences, they express more sexual and relationship satisfaction (Rehman et al., 2013). Communicating about sexual topics is related to greater sexual satisfaction in long-term relationships, even above and beyond the effects of nonsexual disclosure (MacNeil & Byers, 2009; Mark & Jozkowski, 2013).

Sexual and Nonsexual Communication

Communicating about sexual topics and nonsexual communication have many similarities, and both are strongly related to sexual and relationship satisfaction (Byers & Demmons, 1999). Both types of communication can also occur verbally or nonverbally and in many different settings and situations (Babin, 2013; Derlega et al., 2008). All communication, particularly self-disclosure, involves the willingness to engage in vulnerable exchanges and requires the necessary communication skills to engage in an interpersonal exchange, which is influenced by a variety of individual (Givertz & Safford, 2011; McNeil et al., 2018) and interpersonal (Mark & Jozkowski, 2013) factors. Due to the interpersonal nature of communication, there is inherent uncertainty in the exchange because the responses and

1

contributions of the other person are beyond the individual's control, and successful discourse depends on understanding and coordination between all individuals (De Freitas et al., 2019).

There are also inherent similarities between nonsexual and sexual self-disclosure (i.e., the process and content of sharing thoughts and feelings; Derlega et al., 2008). Though self-disclosure can occur either voluntarily or involuntarily (e.g., through body language), I will focus on deliberate self-disclosure. Both sexual and nonsexual self-disclosure are multidimensional interpersonal processes that occur between two or more people in which an individual (i.e., "discloser") communicates information about the self to another individual (i.e., "disclosure recipient"; Derlega et al., 2008). Both the content and process of the communication vary depending on the nature of the relationship (Brown & Weigel, 2018; Derlega et al., 2008). They also both facilitate the development of relationships, particularly the level of closeness or intimacy attained within a relationship (Derlega et al., 2008; Rehman et al., 2017).

Despite the similarity, there are also important distinctions between communicating about sexual topics compared to nonsexual topics. Sexual communication is avoided more than nonsexual communication for many reasons (Rehman et al., 2019). There are additional complexities specific to communicating sexual topics, including the increased vulnerability and potential threat to identity that naturally accompany these highly personal topics and opinions (Rehman et al., 2019). Dyadic observational research has also shown that individuals report greater anxiety in advance of discussing sexual issues in their relationship, as compared to nonsexual relationship issues (Rehman et al., 2017). Individuals also perceive the impact of sexual communication differently than nonsexual communication (Rehman et al., 2017), and it is, therefore, necessary to understand the unique barriers to effective sexual communication.

Barriers to Effective Sexual Communication

Sexual preferences are considered more closely related to self-identity and permanent aspects of the self, and discussions of sexual topics can evoke fears of being misunderstood by their partner or revealing underlying incompatibilities in the partnership (Rehman et al., 2019). Any actual or perceived rejection of sexual preferences can feel like a rejection of the self, eliciting greater feelings of rejection, guilt, shame, and embarrassment (Rehman et al., 2019). There can also be fears of revealing preferences that expose inherent underlying incompatibilities with sexual partners and could threaten the relationship (Rehman et al., 2019). The fear of revealing incompatibilities can exacerbate the limitations inherent to monogamous relationship structures, which characterize most couples in many cultures, including the Western world (Moors et al., 2023). For example, in a nonmonogamous relationship, if one partner has a different preference for a particular activity that an individual enjoys, then there is an option of fulfilling that sexual want, need, or desire with another person. However, in monogamous relationships, such options are less or not at all available for discrepant sexual preferences. These challenges create unique barriers to disclosing sexual topics, above and beyond the difficulties associated with communicating other sensitive topics (Rehman et al., 2017, 2019). When sexual communication is considered threatening, there is a higher likelihood of avoiding communicating sexual topics (e.g., sexual preferences) to an intimate partner (Theiss & Estlein, 2014). These barriers have been associated with poorer communication. People have also been observed to be more cautious, express higher anxiety levels, and share the balance of control within a conversation less effectively when conversing about sexual topics compared to nonsexual topics (Rehman et al., 2017).

Rehman and colleagues (2019) conducted a study in which they categorized barriers to sexual communication as threats to the self, partner, or relationship. The same threats are present

in both sexual and nonsexual communication, though threats to self are more greatly activated

during sexual conversations (Rehman et al., 2019). A threat to self involves individuals' wanting

to protect their own identities and a hesitancy to be vulnerable to the possibility of experiencing

emotions, including shame, guilt, and embarrassment (Rehman et al., 2019). A threat to the

partner centers around the fear that discussing sexual topics could cause their partner to be hurt,

feel shame, or change the dynamic of trust within the relationship (Cupach & Metts, 1991; Metts

& Cupach, 1989). A threat to the relationship involves the fear that engaging in sexual

communication will negatively affect the underlying relationship stability, including revealing

underlying sexual incompatibilities, causing disruption and disagreement within the relationship,

and that sexual topics should be intuitively understood instead of needing to explicitly discuss

them (Metts & Cupach, 1989; Anderson et al., 2011). The increase in self-threat is a likely

mechanism to explain why sexual communication is avoided more than nonsexual

communication within intimate relationships (Byers, 2011; Rehman et al., 2019) and evokes

more experiences of anxiety and perceived heightened potential rejection (Rehman et al., 2011,

2017).

Impact of Sexual Communication

There are notable negative impacts on relationships when sexual communication is poor

(MacNeil & Byers, 2009). Since individuals in monogamous relationships rely on their partners

to meet their sexual needs, when these needs are not met, sexual satisfaction decreases over time

and negatively impacts relationship satisfaction (Fallis et al., 2016). Better sexual

communication is associated with greater sexual functioning, and, as such, the whole relationship

can suffer in multiple and even compounding ways with difficulties with sexual communication

(Mallory et al., 2019). Sexual communication allows individuals to continually negotiate within

their sexual relationship, overcoming common relationship barriers such as differences in sexual preferences, maximizing sexual rewards, and minimizing sexual costs (MacNeil & Byers, 2009). A lack of communication leads to a limited understanding of a partner's sexual preferences. For example, one study found that participants understood only 62% of their partners' sexual likes and 26% of their sexual dislikes, which would impact the pleasure experienced by one or both partners (MacNeil & Byers, 2009).

Deficits in sexual communication have specific impacts on different components of sexual functioning, which Mallory and colleagues (2019) explored in a meta-analysis. First, sexual communication is essential to overall sexual desire (Mark & Lasslo, 2018) and maintaining levels of desire throughout a long-term relationship (Murray et al., 2014). Individuals who experience sexual pain report poorer sexual communication (Smith & Pukall, 2014), though when they can successfully communicate their sexual pain and have responsive partners, both their and their partner's sexual satisfaction increases (Rosen et al., 2014). Finally, women who had difficulty achieving orgasm and men who experienced early ejaculation had more difficulty with sexual communication than those without orgasm-related concerns (Amidu et al., 2010; Kelly et al., 2004). Though deficits in sexual communication do not account for all sexual and relational difficulties, it is an integral part of overcoming difficulties and can improve relationship functioning (Coffelt & Hess, 2014) and is uniquely associated with outcomes such as relationship and sexual satisfaction (Rehman et al., 2013). As such, it is vital to further understand the process of communicating sexual topics.

Conceptual Understanding of Sexual Communication

I will begin by expanding on sexual communication as a construct. Conceptually, there are two terms used in the sexuality literature that are interchangeable: sexual self-disclosure and

sexual communication. For the purposes of my literature review, I gathered studies that use either of these terms. For the purpose of consistency, I will use the term sexual communication throughout my thesis, although I view this term as interchangeable with sexual self-disclosure. The term will be used to refer to disclosures about sexual topics, and the broad context of my work on sexual communication is the intimate relationship between two partners. In the current study, I conceptualize sexual communication as a multidimensional construct, consistent with previous researchers such as Brown and Weigel (2018). All communication processes are complex and involve many factors, including the individual's own verbal and nonverbal communication skills, capacity for vulnerability, and perspective-taking skills (e.g., Buluş et al., 2017). Sexual communication involves additional factors such as the individual's comfort with sexuality and related topics, their understanding of their sexual preferences, and their degree of acceptance of themselves as sexual beings (e.g., gendered socialization; Bennett-Brown & Denes, 2022; Rubinsky, 2022). Taken together, a unidimensional conceptualization of any communication process, but in particular sexual communication, seems inadequate for generating findings that yield meaningful conclusions and elucidate the process of sexual communication. This perspective is consistent with previous theoretical work that conceptualizes sexual communication as a complex process that is situated within and informed by the broader relationship context (Metts & Cupach, 1991), as well as recent empirical developments that take contextual variables into account when measuring the multiple dimensions of sexual communication (Brown & Weigel, 2018).

Although sexual communication is a key mechanism in models of sexual satisfaction and functioning, there are a number of limitations in how sexual communication has been conceptualized and measured in the sexuality literature. From a psychometric perspective,

assessing a construct using different methods is important for validating the construct. When there is a convergence of findings across different methods of measurement, this leads to greater confidence in the construct being assessed and can lead to a more comprehensive understanding of the construct. Thus, the use of different methods is an important part of construct development.

I have two main concerns with extant sexual communication literature. First, the majority of studies on sexual communication have used different methods *across* studies rather than *within* studies, which limits comparison between the different methods. Second, the different methods to assess sexual communication appear to be based on different process components or topics of sexual communication, though conclusions are often extrapolated to the entire process of sexual communication. Researchers often describe and operationalize sexual communication similarly (e.g., communicating about sexual topics; Mallory et al., 2019) based on the specific focus of their work despite the notable differences in the item-level content of their measures. For example, some studies have focused on a specific aspect of the content of sexual topics such as sexual health disclosure (e.g., Widman et al., 2013) or sexual consent communication (e.g., Humphreys, 2007), and have generalized their findings to sexual communication behaviours more broadly. The term sexual communication has also been used to describe specific sexual topics such as sexual values, previous sexual experiences, and sexual attitudes (Snell et al., 1989). However, they are only some of the specific topics that can be discussed with an intimate partner, and as such, the findings may not be generalizable to the process of communicating all sexual topics.

Contextual Model of Sexual Self-Disclosure

There are few existing models of the process of sexual communication, particularly that highlight its multidimensional nature. Brown and Weigel (2018) developed the Contextual Model of Sexual Self-Disclosure to provide a framework in which they purport that the process of sexual self-disclosure in an intimate relationship can be understood as a function of the broader context of the relationship, the context of the sexual communication, and the sexual satisfaction outcome of disclosure (See Figure 1).

Figure 1

Brown and Weigel's (2018) Contextual Model of Sexual Self-Disclosure
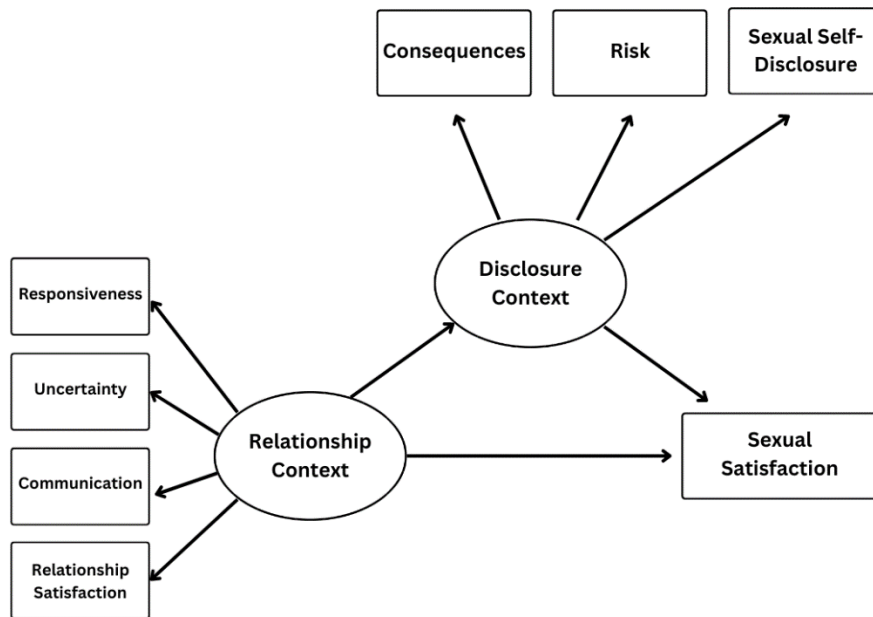
They described the relationship context factors as what "set the stage" for sexual communication (Brown & Weigel, 2018 p. 203) by examining four aspects of the relationship: relationship responsiveness (i.e., how much a partner is perceived to be attentive and supportive), relationship uncertainty (i.e., lack of confidence and security in some aspect of self, partner, or relationship), relationship communication quality (i.e., general quality of the dyadic communication), and relationship satisfaction (i.e., overall satisfaction with the relationship). In

further considering these constructs, I hypothesized that the degree to which someone is uncertain in their relationship might be more indicative of their own individual factors, such as attachment security, that could then be managed or exacerbated by the context of the relationship (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2013). As such, I wanted to develop and test a model of sexual communication that also included the role of individual factors, which I expect also play a role in both setting the stage and facilitating sexual communication.

Brown and Weigel (2018) also considered factors that were important to the "immediate context" in which sexual communication occurs, which work together to either facilitate or inhibit disclosure (p. 204). They include three components of the process of sexual communication in the model: perceived consequences (i.e., the degree to which participants perceived positive or negative consequences of disclosing specific sexual topics), perceived risk (i.e., the degree to which participants perceived specific risks to the self, partner, or relationship), and the depth of disclosure (i.e., how fully participants had disclosed sexual topics to their partner; Brown & Weigel, 2018). Perceived consequences and perceived risks are similar constructs in that the former indicates how threatening or beneficial a sexual topic might be to disclosure, while the perceived risk indicates what the participant believes the negative outcome of disclosure might be to themselves (e.g., "I worry that my partner would no longer like me if we discussed my sexual preferences") or their relationship (e.g., "revealing my sexual preferences would create big problems for my relationship"). Despite these differences, I consider these constructs redundant for the purposes of the current program of research and chose to exclude perceived risk in the interest of developing a concise battery of questionnaires. In addition to the perceived consequences and depth of disclosure, I also thought the perceived importance of a given sexual topic as pertinent to the process of sexual communication. The

importance of a sexual topic is an indication of its personal relevance to an individual and could inform how necessary they consider the disclosure for their sexual satisfaction (Hullman et al., 2022). For example, if a participant indicates that they perceive negative consequences to disclosing a sexual topic and report low depth of disclosure, a researcher may conclude that the person is engaging in avoidance (i.e., low disclosure) because of the consequences they perceive (i.e., negative). However, the sexual topic itself could not be important to the individual. For example, if someone is ambivalent about a sexual topic (e.g., oral sex), it might not feel important to engage in disclosure if it is not initiated by a sexual partner, particularly if they perceive a negative consequence (e.g., a negative reaction) from their partner. As such, at the conceptual level, the perceived importance of each topic to the individual is an essential part of the communication process and could help clarify the overall process of sexual communication.

Though Brown and Weigel (2018) discuss the components in their model as factors that contribute to individuals deciding whether or not to engage in sexual communication, which I consider akin to behavioural motivations, they do not directly incorporate motivations into their model. Motivations for engaging in activity have been studied and strongly linked to why people have sex (Meston & Buss, 2007) and even why people engage in specific sexual behaviours, such as kissing (Thompson et al., 2019). In their work, Meston and Buss (2007) made notable advances in expanding the understanding of motivations individuals have for engaging in sexual activity that move beyond assuming primarily evolutionary-based motivations. They identified four broad reasons for engaging in sexual activity: physical (e.g., pleasure), goal attainment (e.g., social status), emotional (e.g., love), and reasons related to insecurity (e.g., self-esteem boost; Meston & Buss, 2007). While these contributions help solidify both the complexity and importance of motivations to engage in sexual activity, there has been a dearth of research

exploring the role and motivations for engaging in sexual communication. Using the information from studies such as Brown and Weigel (2018), which identified complex reasons for engaging or not engaging in disclosure, I also wanted to explore the type, role, and importance of motivations for sexual communication.

Research Goals

There are few available models of multidimensional sexual communication. I wanted to develop a model that could be used as a framework to inform both research and clinical practice. The multidimensional Process Model of Sexual Communication proposed in my research is based on and extends the findings of Brown and Weigel (2018) in an ongoing, iterative manner. Even with my proposed changes to the existing model (Brown & Weigel, 2018), I do not purport to have exhaustively included all relevant components of sexual communication. My overall goal for my MA thesis was to develop and test a model of sexual communication by clarifying which factors relate to sexual communication and understanding their relative importance.

In order to address that research goal, I conducted two separate studies (i.e., Study 1 and Study 2), both with two parts (i.e., 1a and 1b, 2a and 2b). It is important to note that the same sample was used for Studies 1a and 2a, and a separate sample was used for both Studies 1b and 2b. Studies 1a and 1b contributed to the overall program of research in two ways: 1) to determine if there is adequate specificity in the questionnaire measures to distinguish between the dimensions of sexual communication and 2) to explore the importance and role of individual factors. Measuring nuanced constructs using questionnaire methods can be difficult due to the limitations in the format of the questions and the set response options. In order to validly measure multiple dimensions of sexual communication, participants would need to distinguish between similar questions to appropriately answer the specific questions (e.g., barriers to

11

communication) and distinguish it from questions on similar sexual communication topics (e.g., perceived consequences of disclosure). To ensure that participants were able to appropriately distinguish their responses, the dimensions simultaneously to ensure they all accounted for unique variance in the models. Additionally, since I used a questionnaire that asked participants to think about the perceived consequences, perceived importance, and depth of disclosure of the same list of sexual topics (See Studies 1a and 1b), I wanted to ensure there was sufficient variability in the responses to support the validity of the different dimensions. Second, the Brown and Weigel (2018) model did not include individual factors, though they described relationship context factors that I believe would be related to individual factors (e.g., insecure attachment). These conceptual reasons, as well as the existing research to support the role of individual factors on sexual communication (Bennett-Brown & Denes, 2022), I wanted to determine if individual factors, specifically insecure attachment, related to sexual communication.

Building on these findings, in Studies 2a and 2b, I used open-response questions to understand how participants describe the process of sexual communication, particularly what they consider before disclosing a sexual preference to an intimate partner (i.e., motivation). I used these qualitative responses to adapt the Brown and Weigel (2018) model in Study 2a and tested the associations between components in the adapted version of the model in Study 2b. The findings and implications of the proposed model are discussed in the final part of the thesis, along with a critical evaluation of my program of research.

Study 1a Introduction

Discussing sexual topics with intimate partners, such as sexual preferences (Brown & Weigel, 2018), sexual consent (Humphreys, 2007), and sexual health (Noar et al., 2006), is vital to promoting sexual and relationship satisfaction (Byers & Demmons, 1999; Rehman et al., 2011). These communication behaviours are all possible content areas of sexual communication. Through open sexual communication, partners create mutually pleasurable sexual repertoires, develop relational safety, and establish boundaries around their sexual preferences (Coffelt & Hess, 2014; MacNeil & Byers, 2005, 2009). When sexual communication is open and frequent, there are corresponding increases in sexual wellbeing; conversely, when sexual communication is avoided in a relationship, there are notable negative impacts on sexual wellbeing (MacNeil & Byers, 2009). Specifically, sexual communication is an integral component of overall sexual health (Sheeran et al., 1999) as it is the mechanism through which individuals share sexual health history, communicate contraception preferences, if applicable, and negotiate the use of barrier methods to prevent sexually transmitted infections and blood-borne infections (STBBIs; Widman et al., 2013). Sexual communication is also the process by which individuals communicate boundaries and negotiate sexual aspects of their relationship (Harris et al., 2014). The risks of not engaging in sexual communication, therefore, have notable implications for personal health and safety. Due to its importance to sexual functioning and overall satisfaction, the measurement of sexual communication must be reliable, valid, and consistent.

Overall Research Goals

Although sexual communication is a critical mechanism in models of sexual satisfaction and functioning, there are a number of key limitations in how sexual communication has been conceptualized and measured in the sexuality literature. The current research aims to address

these limitations in three separate research goals. First, to identify some of the important methodological and conceptual issues hampering research progress in the study of sexual communication and to identify how such limitations are being addressed in the current research. Second, to build upon the work by Brown and Weigel (2018) by developing a Process Model of Sexual Communication that integrates their findings and allows researchers to continue to construct validation of sexual communication. The third overarching goal of the current study is to investigate how our modified measure of sexual communication relates to theoretically relevant variables. I begin by discussing the different methods that have been taken to the study of sexual communication and noting the strengths and limitations of each method.

Methods to Study Sexual Communication

The different methods to study sexual communication include lab-based observational studies, interview studies, and questionnaire studies, all of which have methodological advantages and disadvantages. Observational studies are considered the most robust as they allow researchers to observe actual conversations between intimate partners, coding for theoretically relevant behaviours (e.g., Rehman et al., 2017). The advantage of this approach is that it allows for dynamic observation of conversations as they unfold. This method is also not biased by an individual's own perception, memory, and self-reflection skill. It is necessary to keep in mind that perceptions of communication are an important variable in their own right and are best investigated through self-report methods. The disadvantages are that these studies require an immense amount of resources at all stages of the research process. For example, recruitment is often a multi-stage process (e.g., initial contact, screening and information interview). The data collection itself also takes longer to conduct and requires more resources

(e.g., often in-person space required, more participant compensation). Finally, coding observational data is an intensive process, often involving a team of researchers.

Second, interview studies have been used much less frequently in the sexual communication literature but involve asking participants questions based on their experiences of sexual communication (e.g., Allen, 2023). The advantages of the interview approach are that you are able to follow up on participants' answers to gain a richer understanding of their experiences compared to self-report answers. The disadvantages are similar to those for observational studies in that it requires more resources. Finally, questionnaire measures of sexual communication have dominated the extant literature (e.g., Bennett-Brown & Denes, 2022; Merwin & Rosen, 2020) for many obvious reasons. These questionnaire-based measures are easily added to studies and can be completed and analyzed quickly. The disadvantages, however, are notable and contribute to a less robust understanding of the many important aspects of sexual communication. Specifically, there are concerns with the natural constraints of the breadth and depth of the data gathered (e.g., a limited number of previously selected topics without an opportunity for probing follow-up questions to understand participants' answers better). I discuss these limitations in more detail below.

In the current study, I focus on using questionnaire measures; I discuss some of the critical methodological limitations of past research using these measures and identify how some of these limitations can be addressed. Despite their limitations, I focus on questionnaire methods because, as noted above, they are the most widely used methods to study sexual communication. Given their ubiquity and popularity, it is worthwhile to investigate if and how we can develop self-report questionnaires that can capture the complexity of the construct in a psychometrically

valid manner. Below, I identify the key limitations of past work on sexual communication using questionnaire measures.

Variability in Sexual Communication Topics

From a psychometric perspective, assessing a construct using different methods is important for validating the construct. A convergence of findings across different methods of measurement leads to greater confidence in the construct being assessed and can lead to a more comprehensive understanding of the construct. Thus, the use of different methods is an important part of construct development.

I have two main concerns with extant sexual communication literature. First, the majority of studies on sexual communication have used different methods *across* studies rather than *within* studies, which limits comparison between the different methods. Second, the different methods to assess sexual communication appear to be based on different process components (e.g., perceived consequences of communication, communication during sexual behaviour) or topics (e.g., sexual consent, sexual health screening) of sexual communication, though conclusions are often extrapolated to the entire process of sexual communication. Researchers often describe and operationalize sexual communication similarly (e.g., communicating about sexual topics; Mallory et al., 2019) based on the specific focus of their work despite the notable differences in the item-level content of their measures. For example, some studies have focused on a specific aspect of the content of sexual topics such as sexual health disclosure (e.g., Widman et al., 2013) or sexual consent communication (e.g., Humphreys, 2007), and have generalized their findings to sexual communication behaviours more broadly. The term sexual communication has also been used to describe specific sexual topics such as sexual values, previous sexual experiences, and sexual attitudes (Snell et al., 1989). However, they are only

some of the specific topics that can be discussed with an intimate partner, and, as such, the findings may not be generalizable to the process of communicating all sexual topics.

There are a myriad of self-report questionnaires that measure sexual communication, and the Handbook of Sexuality-Related Measures outlines many of the most popular (last updated in 2020; Milhausen et al., 2020). Even within the chapter devoted to measures of sexual communication, the complexity of measuring sexual communication is clear. The chapter includes measures that specifically examine dyadic communication, communicating sexual preferences, communicating health and risk factors, general levels of comfort talking about sexual topics, sexual communication between parents and adolescents, communication during sexual activity, self-efficacy with sexual communication, and verbal and nonverbal aspects of sexual communication (Milhausen et al., 2020). Some of these measures clearly state the scope of the scale measurement (e.g., *Weighted Topics Measure of Family Sexual Communication* (WTM) states that it measures "the amount of communication about sexuality that has occurred between parents and their adolescent children"; Catania et al., 1989, p. 222). Others are less clear and, subsequently, are more likely to lead to misunderstanding in the interpretation and use of the measure (e.g., the *Dyadic Sexual Communication Scale* (DSC) states that it assesses "respondents' perceptions of the communication process encompassing sexual relationships"; Milhausen et al., 2020, p. 212). The high content variability indicates significant differences in conceptualizing the construct, as discussed below.

Conceptualization of Sexual Communication as a Unidimensional versus Multidimensional Construct

To illustrate the different conceptualization of sexual communication across different measures, I will describe three measures that address specific aspects of sexual communication.

First, the DSC measures the dyadic nature of sexual communication (Catania et al., 1989). This measure is widely used because it captures perceived partner responsiveness and other important factors to the dyadic process (e.g., Mallory, 2022) but does not address aspects of the communication itself, such as depth of disclosure or frequency. Second, the *Barriers to Communication Questionnaire* has the potential to offer important insights into what gets in the way of people communicating both aspects of their sexual likes and sexual dislikes and recognizes that different factors may be implicated in disclosing sexual preferences (Rehman et al., 2019). Though aptly named, this scale only captures the barriers to communication. Finally, newer scales that have not yet been widely implemented were developed to improve identified errors in previous scales, such as gendered language. For example, the *Sexual Communication Scales* (SeCS) is an adapted version of the *Female Partner's Communication During Sexual Activity Scale*, which was refined to capture the experiences of people of all genders; however, the items only capture communication behaviours during sexual activity even though the process of sexual communication extends beyond those occurrences (Moazami et al., 2023).

Given the breadth of the construct of sexual communication, the specificity of these measures is a strength. The concern, however, is that without a theory of how these different aspects of sexual communication relate to each other, it is difficult to understand how the different measures are conceptually linked. Most studies have only used one measure of sexual communication, not allowing for comparison between the different methods and measures. Different dimensions of sexual communication are rarely measured in the same study, thus preventing the comparison between dimensions in the same study and limiting the understanding of sexual communication as a construct. This limited approach does not accurately describe what is being measured and can lead to misunderstanding the communication process. This limitation

is concerning for many reasons, including possible misdirection of future research studies and clinical practice due to the lack of specificity in the conceptualization of sexual communication.

In the current study, I conceptualize sexual communication as a multidimensional construct. All communication processes are complex and involve many factors, including the individual's own verbal and nonverbal communication skills, capacity for vulnerability, and perspective-taking skills (e.g., Buluş et al., 2017). Specific to sexual communication, there are additional factors such as the individual's comfort with sexuality and related topics, their understanding of their sexual preferences, and their degree of acceptance of themselves as sexual beings (e.g., gendered socialization; Bennett-Brown & Denes, 2022; Rubinsky, 2022). Taken together and consistent with extant support for the multidimensional nature of sexual communication (e.g., Brown & Weigel, 2018), it does not appear that a unidimensional conceptualization is adequate for generating findings that yield meaningful conclusions and elucidate the process of sexual communication. This perspective is consistent with previous theoretical work that conceptualizes sexual communication as a complex process that is situated within and informed by the broader relationship context (Metts & Cupach, 1991), as well as recent empirical developments that take contextual variables into account when measuring sexual communication (Brown & Weigel, 2018).

In the recently developed multidimensional Sexual Disclosure Scales (SDS; Brown & Weigel, 2018), participants rate their perceived consequences of disclosure as well as the actual depth of disclosure for different sexual topics they deemed to be important to sexual communication (e.g., sexual preferences, anal sex). The SDS has not yet been widely incorporated into the sexual communication literature, so little is known about its psychometric properties and how it relates to other theoretically relevant variables. Brown and Weigel (2018)

chose 18 sexual topics by evaluating lists of commonly avoided sexual topics identified in previous research and adapting them to what they believed to be relevant sexual topics for an undergraduate university population. As such, it is necessary to ensure the relevance of these items to a broader sample of adults.

I wanted to build on the foundational work done by Brown and Weigel (2018), as outlined by the three research goals of the current program of research. The multidimensional theoretical model of sexual communication proposed in this research includes and extends the findings of Brown and Weigel (2018) in an ongoing, iterative manner. I thought it was important to examine the components of the proposed model further to contribute to existing work to validate the construct of sexual communication at the item and dimension-levels. Additionally, I changed the Brown and Weigel (2018) measure by including a process dimension of sexual communication that was not included in their original measure. Lastly, I investigated how the SDS is related to theoretically meaningful variables. I elaborate on each of these points in the following sections.

I conceptualize sexual communication as a multidimensional construct with (at minimum) the two overarching dimensions of *content* and *process* (Brown & Weigel, 2018; Mallory, 2022)**.** The *content* relates to what is being discussed. Sexual self-disclosure is an integral component of the content of sexual communication and involves sharing sexual preferences (e.g., sexual likes, dislikes, and enjoyable behaviours in which one would like to engage) as well as discussions of sexual health behaviours, sexual history, contraceptive use, (Santos-Iglesias & Byers, 2020) and sexual consent (Humphreys, 2007). In addition to the content of sexual communication, or "what" is being discussed, the process of communication, or "how" communication occurs, is of vital importance. While the content of sexual

20

communication is perhaps more intuitive, the process, or the "how" of communication, is more complex and also less defined in the extant literature.

There are different ways of categorizing the process of communication. Brown and Weigel (2018) focused on two *process* dimensions of sexual communication related to the depth in which personal preferences, views, and attitudes are shared, as well as the perceived consequences of the disclosure of the topic being discussed. There are, however, many other aspects of the process of sexual communication that are important such as when it occurs (i.e., during a sexual encounter or not; Denes et al., 2020) and the nature of the communication (e.g., verbally or nonverbally; Séguin, 2022). The frequency of sexual communication is also important to the overall experience of disclosure within an intimate relationship (Coffelt & Hess, 2014). Finally, the outcomes of sexual communication, including satisfaction with the communication (MacNeil & Byers, 2009) and perceived partner responsiveness (Merwin & Rosen, 2020), are important in that they can impact personal feelings of validation (Rubinsky, 2022) and likelihood to engage in future communication behaviours and overall sexual functioning (Rehman et al., 2011).

I planned to test the two process dimensions proposed by Brown and Weigel (2018) and test the utility of an additional dimension that was not assessed in their initial measure. The importance of each sexual topic to the individual is not assessed in the original SDS, which could be a weakness of this measure. Indeed, in another study conducted by these researchers, they suggested that future research should identify the personal relevance of sexual topics to strengthen the understanding and utility of the SDS (Hullman et al., 2022). The importance of a sexual topic is an indication of its personal relevance to an individual and could inform how necessary they consider the disclosure for their sexual satisfaction. For example, if a participant

indicates that they perceive negative consequences to disclosing a sexual topic and report low depth of disclosure, a researcher may conclude that the person is engaging in avoidance (i.e., low disclosure) because of the consequences they perceive (i.e., negative). However, the sexual topic itself could not be important to the individual. For example, if someone is ambivalent about a sexual topic (e.g., oral sex), it might not feel important to engage in disclosure if it is not initiated by a sexual partner, particularly if they perceive a negative consequence (e.g., a negative reaction) from their partner. As such, at the conceptual level, the perceived importance of each topic to the individual is an essential part of the communication process and could help clarify the overall process of sexual communication. With these considerations in mind, it is important to explore and, if necessary, refine the SDS at the item and process levels to check and improve the validity of this measure.

Proposed Conceptual Model

To better understand how our conceptual process model aims to build upon the work of Brown and Weigel (2018), consider Figures 2a, 2b, and 3.

Figure 2

Original and Working Model of Brown and Weigel Contextual Model of Sexual Communication

(a)

```
                    Consequences    Risk    Sexual Self-
                                            Disclosure


                            Disclosure
   Responsiveness           Context

   Uncertainty
                  Relationship                    Sexual
                  Context                         Satisfaction
   Communication


   Relationship
   Satisfaction
```

(b)

```
              Disclosure  ←→  Disclosure
              Process          Content


                    Sexual
                    Communication


  Communication      Relationship              Sexual
                     Context                   Satisfaction

  Relationship
  Satisfaction
```
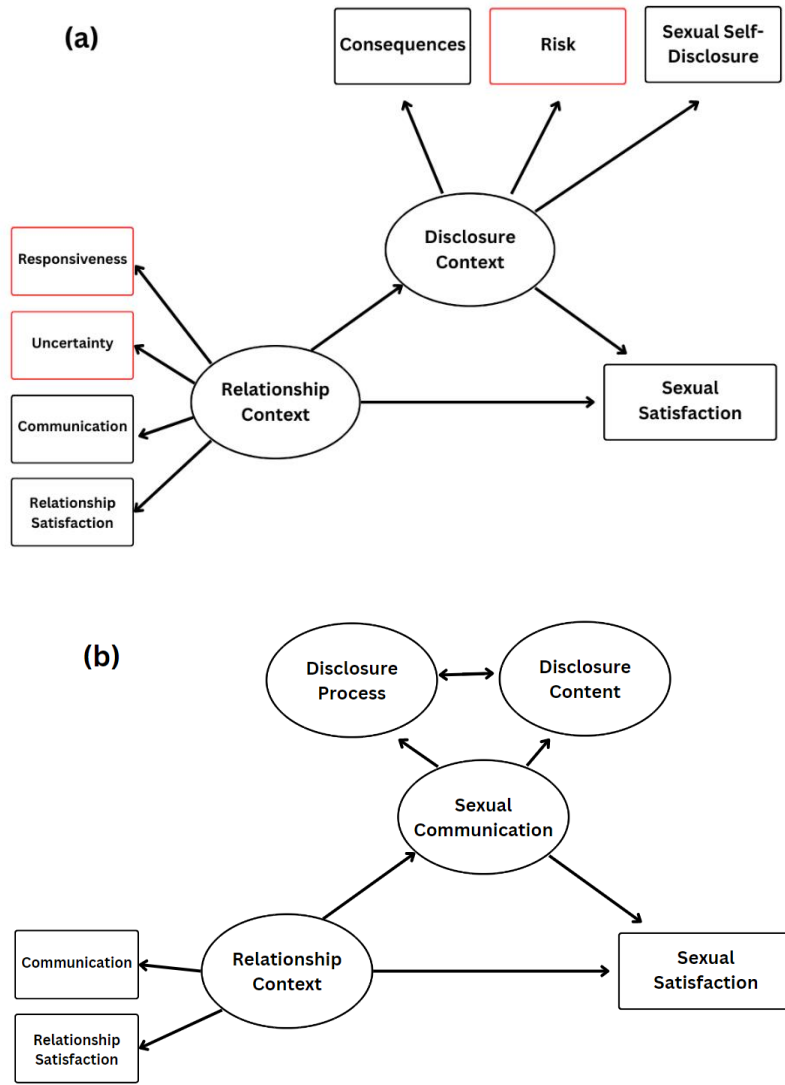
Note. Figure 2 (a) is the original model proposed by Brown and Weigel (2018). The constructs outlined in red were excluded from the current program of research. Figure 2 (b) includes the adapted working model for this program of research.

There are some key differences between the Brown and Weigel (2018) model and the proposed model for these studies. I excluded three constructs included in the original model from this program of research (constructs outlined in red in Figure 2a). Perceived partner responsiveness has been previously associated with sexual communication behaviours but is also highly associated with relationship satisfaction (Merwin & Rosen, 2020). In the interest of containing the battery of questionnaires, it was omitted from the current study since I am measuring relationship satisfaction as an indicator of the quality of the relationship context. Relationship uncertainty was also included as part of the relationship context to assess the degree to which participants felt generally uncertain about their own or their partner's involvement in the relationship (Brown & Weigel, 2018). However, I conceptualize relationship uncertainty as being possibly more related to a general sense of anxious apprehension or fear or rejection, similar to anxious attachment (Mikulincer & Nachshon, 1991). As such, I consider this variable to be more like an individual-level factor and I omitted the measurement of this specific variable from the study, and I will discuss the measurement of attachment insecurity as a relevant individual factor in a subsequent section. The Brown and Weigel (2018) model also measured the perceived risk of sexual disclosure. However, this variable is conceptually very similar to the perceived consequences of disclosure. As such, I omitted it from the current study. I also altered the original model by adding a process component of sexual communication, the perceived importance of the sexual topic. Brown and Weigel (2018) included "sexual self-disclosure" in the model to describe the depth of disclosure that participants report; however, I will refer to this aspect of sexual communication as "depth of disclosure."

Brown and Weigel (2018) used sexual satisfaction as an outcome variable, though they noted that relationship satisfaction has also been identified as an important outcome variable in sexual communication research (Byers, 2005; Coffelt & Hess, 2014). They conceptualized relationship satisfaction as a component of the overall relationship context. I chose to test both sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction as outcome variables in this program of research in order to compare them and determine if one outcome variable is more appropriate in this model. The ultimate goal was to test the proposed role of each construct in the Brown and Weigel model to see if sexual satisfaction is the most appropriate outcome variable with relationship satisfaction contributing as a predictor to the relationship context.

Finally, I propose that the "disclosure context" variable be expanded to "disclosure content" and "disclosure process." I illustrated the hypothesized correlational associations between content and process in Figure 3. This figure illustrates that I consider several content areas integral parts of sexual communication based on previous research, including sexual consent (Humphreys, 2007), sexual preferences (MacNeil & Byers, 2009), sexual health behaviours (Noar et al., 2006), and sexual scripts (i.e., a cognitive schema for sexual behaviours included in sexual activity; Coffelt & Hess, 2014). I hypothesize that all process variables relate to each of these content areas (the perceived consequences of the discussion, how in-depth the discussion is, and the specific topic's perceived importance). I reason that researchers are measuring both the content and process of communication when assessing sexual communication. I believe that a foundational step to advance the field of sexual communication research is to clarify the different process features that play a role in specific communication topics.

Figure 3

Conceptual Working Model of the Correlational Relationships Between the Process Dimensions

and Content Areas of Sexual Communication
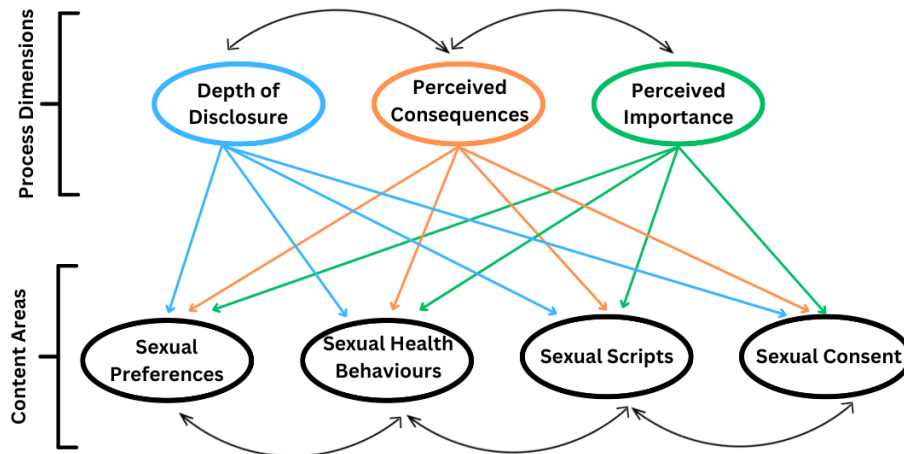
The working model for the current research with all the aforementioned changes is depicted on the right of Figure 2b. I do not purport to have exhaustively assessed all process variables in the current study. Instead, I hope that if the data from the current study support the proposed model, this model will serve as the foundation for: 1) testing the relevance of additional process features, 2) identifying additional content, and 3) determining which process variables may be particularly important for certain types of content.

Validation of the Proposed Model

The third overarching goal of the current study was to investigate the construct validity of the proposed conceptual process model by testing its association with theoretically relevant variables. Few studies have examined how individual factors impact sexual communication. Those that have incorporated individual factors (e.g., trait affection) did find that they predicted sexual communication behaviours (Bennett-Brown & Denes, 2022)**.** Since sexual communication is an integral predictor of important outcome variables like sexual health

(Sheeran et al., 1999), sexual satisfaction, and relationship satisfaction (Mallory, 2022), it is necessary to understand what individual factors play a role in predicting sexual communication. In fact, Byers and Rehman (2014) stated that sexual communication can be considered a mediating factor that explains the relationship between individual factors and sexual outcome variables. Understanding the role of individual factors in sexual communication has implications for individuals (e.g., self-understanding) and clinicians (e.g., target of therapeutic approaches) to understand better how people with certain individual factors are more likely to have their relationships affected by poor sexual communication. The specific individual factors that impact sexual communication have not been studied extensively. Further research would facilitate the practical application of these findings.

One individual factor that has strong conceptual and theoretical relevance to intimate relationships is attachment insecurity. Attachment theory posits that seeking support and building attachments with others, particularly primary caregivers, is an innate and evolutionarily adaptive drive to ensure survival (Bowlby, 1982; Mikulincer & Nachshon, 1991; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2020). When caregivers consistently and appropriately respond to an individual's needs, they are more likely to develop secure attachments and have a greater sense of security in relationships throughout their lives (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2013). When individuals have caregivers who do not consistently respond to their needs or create environments where emotional expression is discouraged or criticized, they are more likely to develop insecure attachments that continue to impact them through life and into adulthood (Chen et al., 2015; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007; Ross et al., 2016). In adulthood, intimate partners become the primary attachment bond for individuals and interactions with intimate partners can shape their working models of attachment (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2013). Attachment styles are used to capture an individual's presenting

pattern of how they approach relationships in terms of their expectations of relationships as well as their emotional and behavioural experiences that are based on the working models for attachment developed in childhood (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). These styles are determined by the degree to which someone is anxious (e.g., worrying their partner will not be consistent and available support for them, often due to low self-esteem and self-worth) and avoidant (e.g., maintaining behavioural and emotional distance from others due to an inherent distrust of positive intentions and expectations of support; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2013). When someone is low on both anxious and avoidant attachment, they are said to have a secure attachment; if they are high on one or both dimensions, they have insecure attachment and are likely to have difficulties in their relationships (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2018).

Concerning communication within intimate relationships, anxious and avoidant attachment styles can interfere with important aspects of forming and maintaining close relationships in adulthood (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2013). For example, those with an anxious attachment may be prone to over-disclose in an attempt to secure and maintain intimacy, even if their partner is not ready for that level of intimacy and disclosure (Mikulincer & Nachshon, 1991). Those with avoidant attachment are more likely to avoid self-disclosure in relationships in an attempt to maintain emotional distance and barriers that help them avoid intimacy and feel safer in their connections (Sandberg et al., 2017). When self-disclosure is avoided, individuals are perceived to be less honest, and partners are less likely to trust them (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2013). Both patterns of insecure attachment can create notable disruptions to intimate relationships through their impact on relational processes such as communication; however, there is also support that avoidant attachment affects sexual communication more than anxious attachment (McNeil et al., 2018). It is reasonable to assume that communication about self-

disclosure of sexual topics would likewise be affected, but there are conceptual reasons why

sexual communication may be even more affected than nonsexual communication (e.g.,

increased vulnerability; Rehman et al., 2011). Because of the unique nature of sexual

communication, it is important to understand how sexual communication is affected when

individuals are high in anxious or avoidant attachment.

Overview of Studies 1a and 1b

In Study 1a, my analyses were limited by an underpowered sample based on suggested

sample sizes for exploratory factor analyses (EFA; Sakaluk & Short, 2017), so I was unable to

explore the content areas of the Sexual Disclosure Scales (SDS; Brown & Weigel, 2018). As

such, the findings were focused on the process dimensions of the SDS to answer research

questions 2-4. In Study 1b, I was able to replicate these findings with regard to the process

dimensions and expand them by identifying and, subsequently, testing models that included both

the content areas and process dimensions of the SDS to answer RQs 1-4.

Study-Specific Research Questions

To address the three research goals, I identified four research questions (RQs) that were

addressed in two studies, Study 1a and Study 1b. First, I wanted to examine the factor structure

of the SDS to determine if there are distinct patterns of content in the items (RQ1). I hypothesize

that there were multiple distinct factors that would align with the measured content areas

(outlined in Figure 3). Second, to examine the psychometric properties of the SDS, I wanted to

1) determine the reliability of the dimensions and 2) establish the validity of this measure, and I

investigated the association between the SDS and measures that are theoretically linked to sexual

communication, relationship satisfaction and sexual satisfaction (RQ2). I hypothesized that each

dimension of the SDS would be reliable and valid, as well as account for unique variance in the

outcome variables. I also wanted to understand how the SDS, a newer measure of sexual

communication, relates to an existing measure of sexual communication, specifically the

Barriers to Communication Questionnaire (RQ3). I hypothesized that both measures of sexual

communication would be strongly correlated and that perceived barriers to communicating

sexual preferences would predict the process dimensions of the SDS. Finally, I wanted to explore

the impact of attachment insecurity, an important individual factor, on sexual self-disclosure

(RQ4). I hypothesized that attachment insecurity would predict both outcome variables.

Study 1a Method

Study 1a Participants

I collected a sample of 204 participants from the United States using Amazon Mechanical Turk Prime. Participants completed an online survey with self-report quantitative measures. To be eligible for the study, participants had to be over the age of 18 and currently in a relationship. There were numerous steps taken to ensure the quality of the data. First, there were five attention checks throughout the study (e.g., "Please select "4" if you are paying attention"). If participants failed more than two of the checks, their data were omitted from subsequent analyses ($n = 5$). I also asked participants, "*Should I use your data in our analysis*?" explaining that if they were tired or distracted when responding, the accuracy of their responses could have been affected. I also encouraged them to answer honestly (i.e., "*Please be honest. There is no penalty for answering "No." However, I will not use your responses for this research project*"). Ten participants indicated that their responses should not be used. Prior to launching the study, the survey was completed by lab members to determine the survey length. The average time for completion was 60 minutes. As such, as an a priori criterion, I decided that it would take longer than 20 minutes to complete the study in a careful and attentive manner. I excluded participants who completed the survey in less than 20 minutes as an indication of careless responding ($n = 41$). Before removing the fast responders, the average completion time was 52.38 minutes (SD = 82.34 minutes), and after removing them, the average completion time was 62.10 minutes (SD = 89.55 minutes). Finally, there were three qualitative questions (the responses of which are analyzed in Studies 2a and 2b), and I carefully examined the qualitative responses to identify identical responses, indicating that the participants had completed the study multiple times. I identified 19 identical respondents and removed them from the data. Finally, I assessed the data

for multivariate outliers. Two participants had extreme combinations of the measured variables (p < .001), and I removed them from the dataset. The final sample consisted of 132 participants.

Full participant demographic information is outlined in Table 1. These participants ranged in age from 19 to 70 years old (M = 37.31 years; SD = 10.14 years). On average, they were in a relationship for 10.38 years (SD = 8.60 years) and had 14.34 years of education (SD = 3.60 years).

Study 1a Measures

See Table 2 for the descriptive statistics and internal consistency scores for each of the following self-report measures. All self-report measures had acceptable reliability, as measured by Cronbach's alpha (αs ≥ .81).

Background Questionnaire

This questionnaire was designed to gather background information specific to the current study. It included questions about the participants' demographic information (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity, education and employment history) and the history of their current relationship (e.g., type of relationship, relationship length).

Sexual Self-Disclosure

To assess sexual self-disclosure, participants completed the Sexual Disclosure Scales (SDS; Brown & Weigel, 2018). This scale was originally developed to measure two dimensions of sexual self-disclosure, 1) the perceived consequence of disclosing a topic to an intimate partner and 2) the actual level of depth in which they had disclosed that item in a current relationship. Each of the dimensions used the same 18 sexual topics that are frequently discussed with a sexual partner (e.g., "oral sex"; "my sexual satisfaction"; "sexual problems or difficulties I might have").

The question for the Perceived Consequences of disclosure scale was, "Please select the response that best reflects what you believe would happen if you were to talk to your partner about each of the following topics." The 5-point Likert scale for this dimension ranged from 1 (negative relationship effect) to 3 (no relationship effect) and 5 (positive relationship effect), with higher total scores indicating greater perceived positive consequences of disclosure. The internal consistency for the perceived consequences scale was excellent ($\alpha = .91$).

The question for the depth of disclosure scale was, "Please select the response that best reflects what you have actually disclosed to your current primary romantic partner." The depth of disclosure 5-point Likert scale ranged from 1 (I have avoided talking to my partner about this topic) to 5 (I have talked openly and completely to my partner about this topic), with higher total scores indicating greater depth of disclosure with their partners across the presented sexual topics. The internal consistency for the depth of disclosure scale was excellent ($\alpha = .91$).

I added a third dimension that was designed to capture the perceived importance of each item. The question for the perceived importance of disclosure scale was, "How important do you think it is to disclose this to your current primary romantic partner?" The 5-point Likert scale for this dimension ranged from 1 (I do not think this is important to discuss with my partner) to 5 (I think this is very important to discuss with my partner), with higher total scores indicating greater perceived importance of the item within the context of disclosing to an intimate partner. The internal consistency for the perceived importance scale was excellent ($\alpha = .90$).

Barriers to Sexual Communication

I used the Barriers to Communication Questionnaire (BCQ; Rehman et al., 2019) to assess participants' perceptions of barriers to communicating sexual likes and sexual dislikes. The instructions for these two scales prompt participants to think about a sexual like and then, in

a separate scale, a sexual dislike and consider the extent to which they believe the 20 items would apply to their discussion on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all true) to 5 (very true). Items include "the discussion will embarrass my partner," "the discussion will make me feel that I am not normal," and "the discussion will reveal core differences between us." Separate scores are generated for barriers to communicating sexual likes and sexual dislikes. Higher total scores indicate more perceived barriers to sexual communication. The internal consistency for both scales was excellent in the current study (αs = .97).

Relationship Satisfaction

Relationship satisfaction was measured with the 4-item Couples Satisfaction Index (CSI-4; Funk & Rogge, 2007), which examines the happiness (i.e., "Please indicate the degree of happiness, all things considered, of your relationship"), comfort (i.e., "I have a warm and comfortable relationship with my partner"), reward (i.e., "How rewarding is your relationship with your partner?"), and satisfaction (i.e., "In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?") on a 6-point scale from "not at all true" to "completely true," with higher total scores indicating more relationship satisfaction. The scale's internal consistency was good in the current study (α = .89).

Sexual Satisfaction

The 5-item Global Measure of Sexual Satisfaction (GMSEX; Lawrance & Byers, 1998) examined sexual satisfaction by asking participants to answer "How would you describe your sexual relationship with your partner?" using five 7-point bipolar scales: good-bad, pleasant-unpleasant, positive-negative, satisfying-unsatisfying, valuable-worthless. The items are summed with total scores ranging from 7 to 35, with higher scores indicating great sexual satisfaction. The scale's internal consistency was excellent in the current study (α = .97).

Attachment Security

I used the nine-item Experiences in Close Relationships – Relationship Structures (ECR-RS) to measure attachment insecurity along the two measured dimensions of avoidant attachment (e.g., "I'm afraid that my partner may abandon me") and anxious attachment (e.g., "I don't feel comfortable opening up to my partner") on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) (Fraley et al., 2011). Higher average scores on both dimensions indicate responses consistent with more insecure attachment. The internal consistencies for both avoidant ($\alpha = .81$) and anxious ($\alpha = .94$) attachment were acceptable.

Study 1a Procedure

The study, including all procedures and measures, was reviewed and approved by the University of Waterloo Office of Research Ethics (#43439). Participants completed the online survey hosted on the Qualtrics platform and received 6.00 USD deposited into their Amazon Mechanical Turk Prime accounts as remuneration for their time. Participants were first presented with a letter outlining the details of the study in order for them to provide informed consent to participate. They were then asked to complete two screening questions to ensure they were over 18 years of age and were currently in an intimate relationship. Next, participants were asked to complete the background questionnaire. I wanted participants to focus on one specific partner throughout the survey (e.g., for participants with multiple partners) and asked them to provide the initial of their partner's first name, which was inserted into subsequent survey questions (e.g., "Please respond to the following questions thinking about your partner, A").

Participants then completed the battery of self-report questions (described above). Participants also completed some additional measures that were not relevant to the current study (e.g., measures of personality, self-esteem, trait anxiety, and sexual distress). Validity checks

35

were included sporadically throughout the self-report scales as an indicator of careless response patterns. Since discussing sexuality and intimacy can be difficult or uncomfortable for some individuals, there were two mood-boosting questions at the end of the survey (i.e., "What is the thing you have enjoyed most this year?" and "Share a memory of something that has made you laugh in the past month"). Finally, participants were asked questions relating to the quality of their data, including if they completed their responses in one sitting and if their data should be included in our analyses. There were clear instructions provided that their responses to the data quality questions would not impact their receiving the remuneration for completing the study.

Study 1a Statistical Analysis

I analyzed all research questions in Study 1a using bivariate correlations and multiple regressions. The description of the analyses and the findings are included in the following results section.

Study 1a Results

Overall, I had many challenges with the data collected for Study 1a, including inattentive responses and duplicate responses from the same participant. I attribute the difficulties primarily to the increasingly common difficulties with recruitment on online survey websites, especially Amazon Turk Prime (e.g., Peer et al., 2022), which has minimal screening for their participants, duplicate participant tracking, and low rates of remuneration. I was not able to answer RQ1, though the foundational understanding of how the SDS variables related to the other measured variables provided a framework from which to build Study 1b.

Study 1a Research Question 1 Results

I was not able to conduct the planned Exploratory Factor Analysis to determine the unique content areas that exist in the SDS. There was an inadequate sample size based on commonly recommended sample sizes (e.g., 200-250; Sakaluk & Short, 2017) after removing the participants who had incomplete, inattentive, or duplicate responses. However, I was able to examine the face validity of the SDS by subjectively assessing the relevance of the topics to the construct of sexual self-disclosure. I identified some concerns that, in consultation with my supervisor, led to adding an additional 19th item to the scale for use in subsequent studies (including Study 1b). I hypothesized that the item "what I enjoy most about sex" would load strongly as an item, though there was no corresponding item to address sexual dislikes apart from items examining sexual problems (e.g., "sexual problems or difficulties I might have" and "what about sex makes me anxious"). As such, an additional item was created to address this gap to be used in Study 1b: "What I dislike sexually (e.g., 'turn offs'). One item (i.e.., "my views on sexual morality") was conceptually unclear, and I hypothesize that it would not have a strong or consistent factor loading in an EFA. I also noted some items that, at the content level, were

highly similar and noted that they should be further reviewed in the EFA for Study 1b. Two

notable pairings were: 1) "sexual problems or difficulties I might have" and "what about sex

makes me anxious" and 2) "what I enjoy most about sex" and "sexual preferences (e.g.,

techniques or behaviours I find or would find pleasurable). I flagged these as potential item-level

concerns to explore through EFA in Study 1b.

Study 1a Research Question 2 Results

To answer my second research question, I conducted two sets of analyses. First, I

examined the reliability and construct validity of the dimension that I added to the SDS, the

perceived importance dimension. The scale used the same 18 items as the perceived

consequences and depth of disclosure dimensions. The reliability for all three process dimensions

was excellent (alphas above .90), with an alpha of .90 for perceived importance. All dimensions

were strongly correlated (See Table 3).

I next regressed two important sexual outcome variables, sexual satisfaction and

relationship satisfaction, onto two models: 1) perceived importance separately and 2) the three

process dimensions in a simultaneous multiple regression (See Table 4). In individual models,

perceived importance was regressed on sexual satisfaction (model 1a) and relationship

satisfaction (model 2a), and it significantly predicted both outcomes, such that individuals who

rated the perceived importance of different sexual topics as higher were more likely to report

higher relationship and sexual satisfaction ($ps < .001$). The simultaneous model predicting sexual

satisfaction (model 1b) and relationship satisfaction (model 2b) using the three process

dimensions was significant, though only perceived consequences was a significant positive

predictor ($ps < .001$) and both depth of disclosure and perceived importance showed no unique

relationship to the outcome variables ($ps > .15$). Though not significant, the direction of the

predictive relationship between perceived importance and the outcome variables changed in the simultaneous model compared to the bivariate model, which suggests suppression. The multicollinearity, as measured by the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), ranged from 3.87 to 6.24, which is high though not indicative of serious concern according to many guidelines for multicollinearity (e.g., Vittingoff et al., 2005).

Due to the strong correlations between the process dimensions and suggested suppression in the simultaneous model, I also wanted to calculate the unique and overlapping variance of each predictor variable as well as examine the models for suppression using the Cohen and Cohen (1975) Ballentine procedure. I conducted seven multiple regressions with different permutations of the variables in order to calculate the unique variance that each variable accounted for in the simultaneous model and the degree to which the variables overlapped in variance in the outcome variable. Figure 4 shows a detailed breakdown of the variances between the three process dimensions for the outcomes of sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction. The figures are not drawn to scale, though they visually highlight the overlap between these variables. Perceived consequences accounted for the most unique variance compared to the other two dimensions (8% of the total 29% variance in the sexual satisfaction model; 8% of the total 26% variance in the relationship satisfaction model). Most of the variance in the simultaneous models was accounted for in overlapping variance between the process dimensions, specifically, 18% of the total 29% variance in the sexual satisfaction model and 14% of the total 26% variance in the relationship satisfaction model. In both models, there was also evidence of suppression in the overlapping variance between the depth of disclosure and the other two process dimensions, as evident by the negative shared variance.

Figure 4

Study 1a Ballentine Figure Decomposing Variance in Sexual Satisfaction (1) and Relationship Satisfaction (2) by Process Dimensions of the SDS
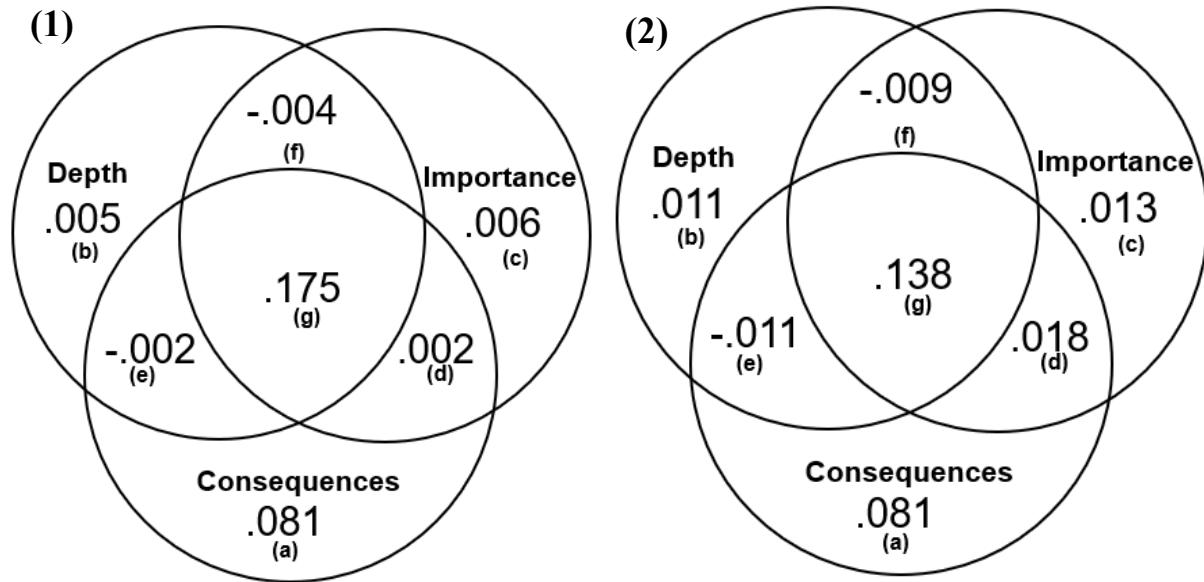
Note. Ballentine figures showing the decomposition of variance between depth of disclosure (IV1), perceived consequences of disclosure (IV2) and perceived importance of disclosure (IV3) and sexual satisfaction (1) and relationship satisfaction (2) (DV). Area (a) = unique variance explained in DV sexual satisfaction by IV1. Area (b) = unique variance explained in DV by IV2. Area (c) = unique variance explained in DV by IV3. Area (d) = the shared variance between IV1 and IV3. Area (e) = the shared variance between IV1 and IV2. Area (f) = the shared variance between IV2 and IV3. Area (g) = the shared variance between IV1, IV2, and IV3. *Variances in areas (f) and (e) were slightly negative, suggesting suppression in these models.

Study 1a Research Question 3 Results

To explore the third research question, I examined the relationships between the SDS and another sexual communication scale, the BCQ. All the process dimensions were significantly

negatively correlated with perceived barriers to communicating both sexual likes and sexual dislikes, though with small magnitude (See Table 3). Higher barriers to communicating both sexual likes and sexual dislikes were related to more negative perceived consequences of disclosure, less depth of disclosure, and lower perceived importance of disclosure ($ps < .01$).

Study 1a Research Question 4 Results

The fourth research question explored the relationship between attachment insecurity and the dimensions of sexual self-disclosure. Avoidant attachment was significantly moderately negatively related to all three dimensions ($ps < .01$) based on the zero-order correlations (See Table 3). Anxious attachment was not significantly related to any of the dimensions.

Study 1a Discussion

This study, despite the methodological challenges, provided some important preliminary insights into the construct of sexual self-disclosure and its relationships to other theoretically relevant predictor and outcome variables.

Study 1a Research Question 1 Discussion

I was not able to answer RQ1, given the underpowered sample for suggested guidelines for EFAs (Sakaluk & Short, 2017). After subjectively assessing the content (i.e., face) validity of the measure, I added an item to measure sexual dislikes to be used in subsequent studies. I also noted an item that was conceptually unclear and two dyads of items that appeared highly conceptually related for further review in the EFAs in Study 1b.

Study 1a Research Question 2 Discussion

The construct validity of the SDS was supported in that the dimensions related to each other and the common sexuality outcomes of relationship satisfaction and sexual satisfaction in expected ways. The bivariate correlations between the dimensions were large (ranging from .83 and .90, all significant at the $p < .01$ level). Particularly because all three dimensions use the same items, the degree and direction of these correlations are not surprising. Despite these strong correlations, there are theoretical reasons these dimensions are related though distinct constructs.

Perceived consequences of disclosure was the only dimension that accounted for unique variance above and beyond the other two dimensions when assessed simultaneously. Perceived consequences was the dimension that accounted for the most unique variance in both outcome variables. Due to the methodological concerns with these data, it is unclear whether these findings are indicative of a relatively greater importance of perceived consequences compared to

the other two dimensions or if there were methodological concerns driving these findings (e.g., sample concerns, the wording of the new perceived importance dimension question).

When assessing the unique variance of each process dimension, it is clear that there is a notable overlap between these variables. There was also suppression evident in the models between the depth of disclosure and the two other process dimensions. If these results are replicated, they have important implications for seeing the depth of disclosure as a process variable that differs from perceived consequences and importance.

Study 1a Research Question 3 Discussion

The dimensions of the SDS are related as expected to an existing measure of sexual communication, further supporting the measure's validity. When participants perceived more barriers to communicating both sexual likes and sexual dislikes, they had less robust sexual self-disclosure (i.e., more negative perceived consequences, less depth of disclosure, less perceived importance of disclosing sexual topics).

Study 1a Research Question 4 Discussion

Avoidant attachment was negatively related to all three process dimensions, though there were no significant relationships observed for anxious attachment. These results support that attachment security is an important individual factor to sexual communication, and that avoidant attachment is more strongly related to poorer sexual communication, consistent with previous findings (McNeil et al., 2018).

Study 1b Introduction

I conducted a second study to address the methodological concerns of the first round of data collection to attempt to replicate and expand the findings. First, after consulting with colleagues and exploring available crowdsourcing website options, I identified the Prolific platform as having more rigorous procedures for identifying duplicate responses and other difficulties with crowdsourcing websites (e.g., AI or bot participants). Despite the methodological challenges I encountered in Study 1a, I kept the perceived importance dimension of SDS in Study 1b to more readily identify whether the sample or the construct and measurement was driving the high overlap between the different process dimensions.

Avoidant attachment emerged as a significant predictor of all three process dimensions of sexual self-disclosure in Study 1a. Attachment styles are interpreted as working models developed from responses from caregivers early in life that subsequently shape various aspects of the individual, such as personality, coping behaviours, and relational abilities (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2013). As a research construct, an individual's attachment style can be difficult to access directly, especially through self-report measures (Justo-Núñez et al., 2022). In terms of clinical implications, attachment style can also be difficult to target directly in therapy since it is so deeply ingrained in the individual (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2013). Particularly since avoidance as an insecure attachment orientation was most related to sexual communication, I wanted to include a more proximal measure of avoidance in Study 1b to assess its relationship to sexual communication in hopes of producing findings with more direct research and clinical implications. I added a measure of experiential avoidance to facilitate these new research goals. As a construct, experiential avoidance relates to a general unwillingness to experience strong negative emotions or painful emotional experiences and taking actions to avoid or lessen those

experiences (Hayes et al., 1996). Experiential avoidance is considered a mechanistic process through which attachment insecurity impacts aspects of the self that are disruptive to forming and maintaining relationships (Ross et al., 2016). Avoidantly attached people are more likely to perceive emotional vulnerability, which is necessary for successful sexual communication, as a painful, aversive experience and are more likely to avoid those experiences (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2013). It is, therefore, important to understand the degree to which experiential avoidance is related to sexual communication and sexual intimacy.

I used the same study-specific research questions as Study 1a in Study 1b with one change. For RQ4, I wanted to explore the individual factor of experiential avoidance along with attachment insecurity, which I conceptualize as related though distinct constructs. Additionally, I wanted to determine if there is an interaction between experiential avoidance and sexual communication when predicting sexual outcome variables. Brown and Weigel (2018) used sexual satisfaction as the outcome variable in their model and participants described the impact that sexual communication had on their sexual and relationship satisfaction. In their qualitative responses, participants also described how avoidance impacted their sexual communication. Building on these findings, I expect that experiential avoidance will moderate the relationship between sexual communication (i.e., SDS) and both relationship satisfaction and sexual satisfaction, such that higher experiential avoidance will lead to a less positive relationship between sexual communication and the outcome variables.

Study 1b Method

Study 1b Participants

I collected a second unique sample of 270 participants from Canada and the United States using Prolific in February 2023. Participants completed a similar questionnaire to Study 1a (i.e., self-report and open-response questions) with some additional measures to expand on the first study's findings.

To be eligible for the study, participants had to be over the age of 18 and currently in a relationship. There were numerous steps taken to ensure the quality of the data. First, I asked the same five attention checks throughout the study (e.g., *"Please select "4" if you are paying attention"*). If participants failed more than two of the checks, their data were omitted from subsequent analyses ($n = 1$). I again used a question about the quality of the participants' responses (i.e., "*Should I use your data in our analysis?*"), explaining that if they were tired or distracted when responding, their accuracy of responses could have been affected. I also encouraged them to answer honestly (i.e., "*Please be honest. There is no penalty for answering "No". However, I will not use your responses for this research project*"). Two participants indicated that their responses should not be used and were removed from the sample. Similarly to Study 1a, due to the similar survey length, I, again, decided that to complete the study in a careful and attentive manner, it would take longer than 20 minutes as an a priori criterion; participants who completed the survey in less than 20 minutes were excluded from the analyses as an indication of careless responding ($n = 17$). Before removing the fast responders, the average completion time was 50.73 minutes (SD = 27.50 minutes), and after removing the 17 fast responders, the average completion time was 53.62 minutes (SD = 25.92 minutes). I assessed the data for multivariate outliers. I identified four participants who had extreme combinations of

the measured variables ($p < .001$) and removed them from the dataset. Finally, I carefully examined the qualitative responses for identical responses, and all participants appeared to have unique submissions. The final sample consisted of 241 participants.

The participants had comparable demographics to the data collection for Study 1a (listed in Table 1). These participants ranged in age from 19 to 78 years old ($M = 37.87$ years; $SD = 12.20$ years). On average, they were in a relationship for 10.61 years ($SD = 10.00$ years) and had 15.73 years of education ($SD = 2.70$ years).

Study 1b Measures

The measures included in Study 1b were similar to Study 1a, with the addition of a measure of experiential avoidance and one change to the SDS items (described below). The inferential statistics and internal consistency scores for all measures used in both Study 1a and Study 1b are available in Table 2. All self-report measures had acceptable reliability, as measured by Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha s \geq .86$).

Sexual Self-Disclosure

To assess sexual self-disclosure, participants again completed the three dimensions of the SDS (Brown & Weigel, date), though I added an item to the list of sexual topics for Study 1b. I made this decision after subjectively examining the face validity of the SDS items in Study 1a (RQ1). The final measures for Study 1b, therefore, contained the original 18 items with one additional item: "*What I dislike sexually (e.g., "turn offs").* The final list of 19 items was used for all analyses involving the SDS. When compared to the original 18-item scale, the 19 items related similarly across all statistical models.

Experiential Avoidance

I used the Acceptance and Action Questionnaire (AAQ-2) to assess participants'
experiential avoidance and psychological inflexibility (Bond et al., 2011). The scale asked
participants to rate the seven items on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Never true) to 7
(Always true), with higher total scores indicating more experiential avoidance and psychological
inflexibility (e.g., "I worry about not being able to control my worries and feelings"). The scale's
internal consistency was excellent in the current study ($\alpha = .92$).

Study 1b Procedure

I submitted an amended ethics application, which was reviewed and approved by the
University of Waterloo Office of Research Ethics (#43439). The procedure for Study 1b was
identical to Study 1a, with three notable exceptions. The first is that the study was hosted on the
Prolific platform. The framework for remuneration on this platform differs from that of the
Amazon Turk Prime platform used in study 1a, so the participants were compensated in
accordance with the Prolific regulations at a rate of 6.5 pounds per hour (approximately $11
CAD) for their time in completing the 60-minute survey. The last difference was an added
measure of validity. Due to the repetitive nature of the sexual self-disclosure measures, I also
needed to ensure that participants could attend to questions with appropriate care and attention to
detail in order to differentiate what the questions were asking. I created a sample question about
an unrelated topic (i.e., going on vacation with your partner) that copied the same structure as the
SDS questions and then asked participants to indicate how the responses were different. Most
participants ($n = 222$, 92%) successfully identified the differences in responses, further
supporting the quality of the data. After reviewing the quality of the responses to attention checks
and the open-ended responses, I chose to retain all participants in the dataset, even the 8% who
responded to the questions incorrectly.

Study 1b Statistical Analyses

To answer the four research questions, I employed a variety of pertinent statistical analyses. For RQ1, I employed Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). For RQ2, I used hierarchical multiple regressions to determine the unique contributions of each content area and process dimension of sexual satisfaction to the variance of two sexual wellbeing outcome variables, sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction. For RQ3, I assessed bivariate correlations to determine how the SDS related to another self-report measure of sexual communication. Finally, for RQ4, there were two steps to the analyses. I first examined the correlations to understand the relationships between the individual factors (i.e., attachment insecurity, experiential avoidance) and the sexual outcome variables (i.e., sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction). I then conducted moderation analyses to examine whether experiential avoidance moderates the relationship between the SDS content areas and process dimensions and the two sexual outcome variables (in separate models).

Study 1b Results

Study 1b Research Question 1 Results

To answer research question 1, I repeated EFAs for each of the three process dimensions of sexual self-disclosure (i.e., perceived consequences, depth, and perceived importance) to determine whether the latent constructs (further referred to as content areas) were similar across the three dimensions.

I first examined the item-level statistics to explore whether the assumptions necessary for EFA were met with these data. The item-level means, standard deviations, ranges, skewness, and kurtosis were calculated for all three process scales (See Table 5). All variables met the criteria for univariate normality, using the Kline guidelines (2005; i.e., (|skew| < 3, |kurtosis| < 10). I conducted an initial set of three EFAs to extract new dimensions to explain the inter-item correlations using PCA extraction (See Tables 6-8). The items mostly met the cutoff guideline of .20 (Tabachnik & Fidell, 2013), though there were also items with lower correlations on all three scales (i.e., perceived consequences range of .17-.62; depth of disclosure .12-.66 scales; and perceived importance range of .08-.58). I proceeded with the EFA approach despite the low inter-correlation between some of the items as the goal of this exploratory approach is to determine whether the items used in the measure are necessary to measure the emergent constructs, and the low correlations could be reflective of unnecessary items. This decision was supported by the significant Bartlett's Test of Sphericity for all three dimensions ($ps < .001$) that indicates there is adequate redundancy between the items to be able to extract meaningful latent factors by compressing the data, determined by comparing the identity matrix and the correlation matrix (Tabachnik & Fidell, 2013). The sampling adequacy as measured by the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sample Adequacy (KMO) was also in an acceptable range for conducting EFAs,

following the guidelines of .8-1 (Tabachnik & Fidell, 2013) for all three dimensions (perceived

consequences KMO = .92, depth of disclosure KMO = .92, perceived importance KMO = .89).

The Scree Plots for perceived consequences and depth of disclosure suggested a three-factor

solution (See Figures 5 and 6). The Scree Plot for perceived importance does suggest a possible

four-factor solution, though, as discussed below, I decided a consistent three-factor solution best

fit the data (See Figure 7).

Figure 5
Scree Plot Illustrating the Number of Factors in the Exploratory Factor Analysis (x-axis) and

Eigenvalues (y-axis) of the Perceived Consequences Dimension of the SDS
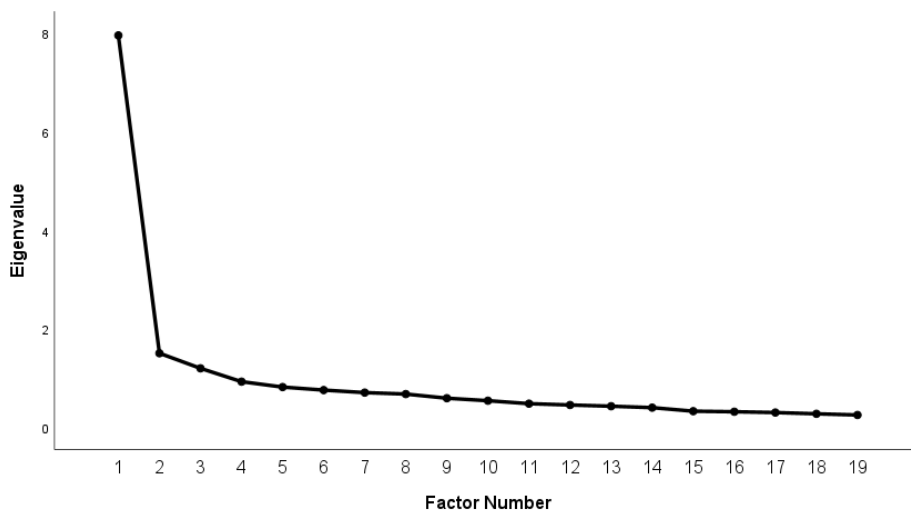
Figure 6

Scree Plot Illustrating the Number of Factors in the Exploratory Factor Analysis (x-axis) and

Eigenvalues (y-axis) of the Depth of Disclosure Dimension of the SDS
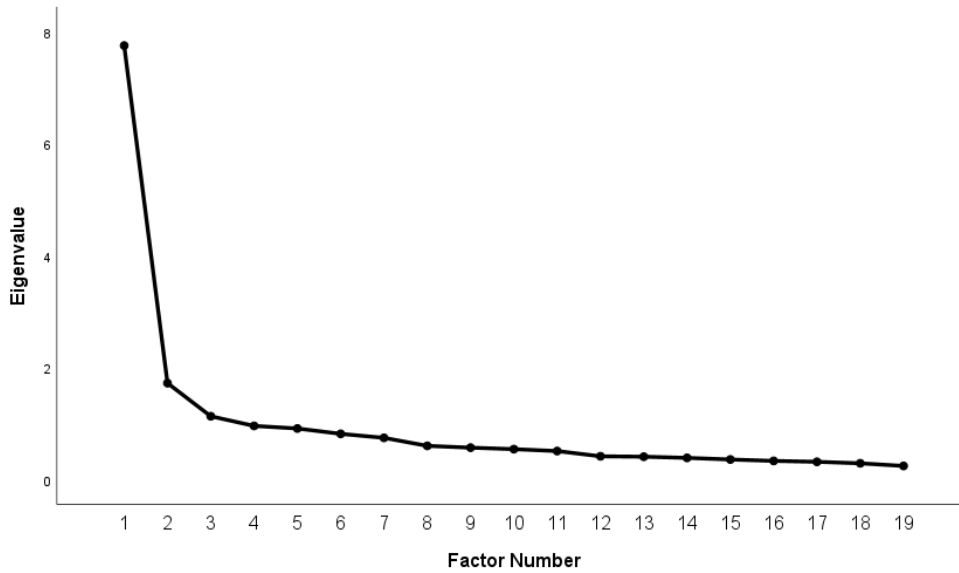
Figure 7

Scree Plot Illustrating the Number of Factors in the Exploratory Factor Analysis (x-axis) and

Eigenvalues (y-axis) of the Perceived Importance Dimension of the SDS
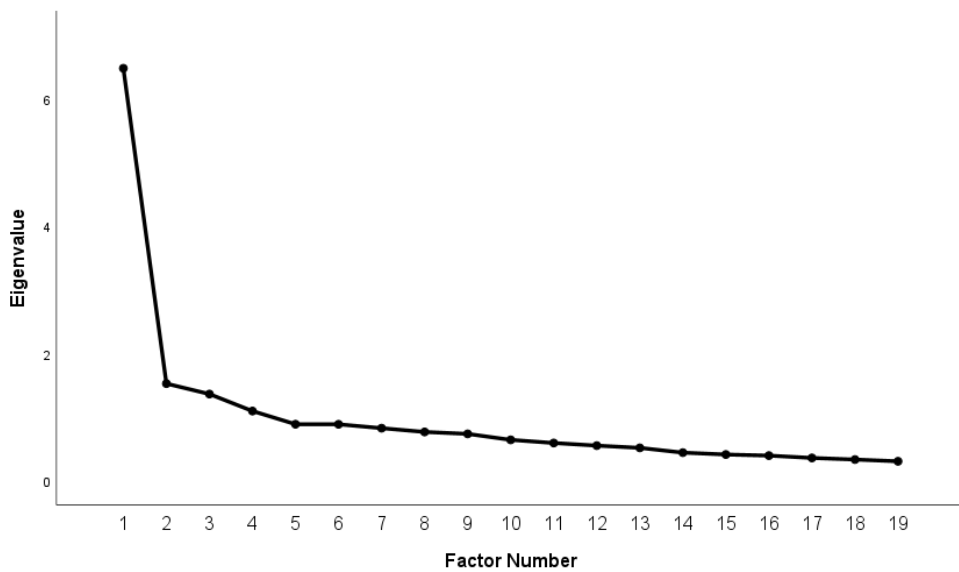
I used the maximum likelihood factor extraction approach due to its robustness and

additional goodness of fit test that is included in the model. There were no contraindications

52

from the data as they met the requirements for univariate and multivariate normality (Sakaluk & Short, 2017). Despite the range of inter-item correlations falling outside of the recommended cutoff of .20 (See Tables 8-10), I used an oblique (direct oblimin) rotation to capture the expected strong correlations between most items across the three dimensions. Extraction was based on Eigenvalues greater than 1, a guideline which has often been used in EFAs though research has found that it can over-extract factors (e.g., Sakaluk & Short, 2017). I will discuss the EFA results for each dimension separately before describing consistencies and item-related decisions (See Table 9).

The EFA for the perceived consequences dimension yielded a three-factor solution that together accounted for 48.15% of the cumulative variance with a significant goodness of fit for the solution, X^2 (117, 241) = 219.09, p < .001. *Disclosure about sexual preferences* accounted for 39.18% of the variance, with *disclosure about sexual health* accounting for 5.40% and *disclosure about sexual behaviours* accounting for 3.57% of the variance. Most items (18) loaded onto one of the factors with loadings greater than .30 though one factor had a loading of .25 (item 6). There were two items that had cross-loadings greater than .30 (items 8 and 10) but were considered in the factor where they loaded most strongly.

The EFA for the depth of disclosure dimension also yielded a three-factor solution that accounted for 48.33% of the cumulative variance with a significant goodness of fit for the solution, X^2 (117, 241) = 216.35, p < .001. *Disclosure about sexual preferences* accounted for 37.95% of the variance, with *disclosure about sexual health* accounting for 5.90% and *disclosure about sexual behaviours* accounting for 4.49% of the variance. All factors loaded onto one of the factors with loadings greater than .30 with no cross-loadings greater than .30.

Finally, the EFA for the perceived importance dimension initially yielded a four-factor solution that accounted for 44.01% of the cumulative variance with significant goodness of fit for the solution (X^2 (101, 241) = 154.77, p < .001. Of the total variance, *disclosure about sexual preferences* accounted for 31.06% (Eigenvalue 6.48), *disclosure about sexual health* accounted for 4.98% (Eigenvalue 1.52), *disclosure about sexual behaviours* accounted for 4.43% (Eigenvalue 1.36), and Factor 4 accounted for 3.04% (Eigenvalue 1.09). Upon examining the pattern matrix, only three items loaded onto the fourth factor, one of which was a cross loading on an item with a higher loading to another factor. As such, and upon examining the Scree Plot (See Figure 7), I made the decision to force a three-factor solution onto the perceived importance dimension. In the forced three-factor solution, the cumulative variance accounted for by the model was 40.48%, with the same percentage of variance scores and a significant goodness of fit for the solution, X^2 (117, 241) = 211.94, p < .001. Most items (18) loaded onto one of the factors with loadings greater than .30, and one factor had a loading of .29 (item 7). There were no cross-loadings greater than .30.

Taken together, these results support a three-factor model for all three process dimensions, though with some variability between models and slight differences in factor loadings. The inter-factor correlations were all strong and also consistent across the three process dimensions (ranging from .47 to .61; See Tables 8-10). Since most of the items loaded onto the same factor regardless of the dimension, I wanted to develop a parsimonious item-list that would appropriately capture how these items related to the different dimensions of sexual self-disclosure. Since the items loaded consistently onto the same factors across the different EFA analyses, one list of factors and corresponding items was developed for all three dimensions. The descriptive statistics are listed in Table 10, the internal consistency statistics are listed in Table 2,

and the bivariate correlations with the other measures are listed in Table 3. I made decisions regarding any discrepancies between the factor loadings with my supervisor to determine the best conceptual fit considering the identified themes in the factors. The final three-factor structure had seven items in Factor 1, six items in Factor 2, and four items in Factor 3. Factor 1 included items related to topics that were associated with establishing pleasurable sexual repertoires by communicating sexual preferences. I named this factor "*disclosure about sexual preferences*" ($\alpha = .94$). Factor 2 included items related to topics concerning risk and personal health disclosure. I named this factor "*disclosure about sexual health*" ($\alpha = .90$). Finally, Factor 3 related to sexual behaviours, which I named "*disclosure about sexual behaviours*" ($\alpha = .90$). I used these factors as subscales of sexual topics of the SDS in subsequent analyses.

Study 1b Research Question 2 Results

The second research question focused on how both the content (EFA extracted factors) and process dimensions (perceived consequences, depth of disclosure, and perceived importance) relate to sexual outcome variables. Specifically, I wanted to know if they each accounted for unique variance in theoretically relevant outcome variables, sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction. I first examined the bivariate correlations (See Table 3). All the content areas (rs ranging from .64 to .67, ps < .01; created by summing the items that load onto the factors) and process dimensions (rs ranging from .68 to .83, ps < .01) were significantly strongly correlated. I also examined the internal consistency of the three content area variables, which I created using the EFA findings (RQ1). All three showed acceptable reliability (See Table 2).

I used a series of hierarchical regression analyses to determine if the model significantly improves when each a) content area and b) process dimension is entered into the model in progressive steps (See Table 11; models 3-6). My objective was to determine if there was

redundancy in the variance accounted for by the various predictor variables, so I decided to enter them sequentially in separate steps starting with those that were most highly correlated to the outcome variable for each model.

I first examined how the content areas related to the two outcome variables. *Disclosure about sexual preferences* was most correlated to both sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction, followed by *disclosure about sexual health* and *disclosure about sexual behaviours*, and they were entered into the hierarchical regression model in separate steps in that order. In the first model predicting sexual satisfaction, Step 1 was significant and accounted for 37% of the variance in sexual satisfaction ($p < .001$). Step 2 and Step 3 both did not significantly improve the model ($ps > .05$), with the final model accounting for 38% of the total outcome variance ($p < .001$). Only *disclosure about sexual preferences* was a significant positive predictor in the final model ($b = .29, p < .001$). In the relationship satisfaction model, Step 1 was, again, significant and accounted for 17% of the total outcome variance ($p < .001$). Step 2 was not significant. Step 3 was significant ($p = .004$) and accounted for an additional 3% of the variance, resulting in a final model that accounted for 20% of the total variance in relationship satisfaction ($p < .001$). *Disclosure about sexual preferences* was a significant positive predictor ($b = .15, p < .001$), and *disclosure about sexual behaviours* was a significant negative predictor ($b = -.10, p = .004$).

I next examined how the process dimensions related to the two outcome variables. Perceived consequences was the most correlated to both sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction, followed by depth of disclosure and perceived importance, and they were entered into the hierarchical regression model in separate steps in that order. All steps were significant, Step 1 accounted for 33% of the variance in sexual satisfaction ($p < .001$), Step 2 accounted for an additional 2% ($p = .004$), and Step 3 accounted for another 3% of the variance $(p < .001)$,

resulting in a final model that accounted for 38% of the variance in sexual satisfaction $(p < .001)$. All predictors were significant in the final model: perceived consequences ($b = .25, p < .001$), depth of disclosure, ($b = .22, p < .001$), and perceived importance, ($b = -.20, p < .001$). The second model predicting relationship satisfaction had a significant Step 1, accounting for 20% of the outcome variance ($p < .001$). Step 2 was not significant. Step 3 significantly improved the model fit, and the final model accounted for 28% of the variance ($p < .001$). All predictors were significant in the final model: perceived consequences ($b = .19, p < .001$), depth of disclosure, ($b = .10, p = .003$), and perceived importance, ($b = -.20, p < .001$).

In summary, *disclosure about sexual preferences* was the only content area that uniquely positively predicted both sexual and relationship satisfaction. When looking at the process dimension models, both perceived consequences and depth of disclosure were significant positive predictors. Unexpectedly, perceived importance was a significant negative predictor for both sexual and relationship satisfaction, meaning that the higher perceived importance participants reported, the lower their sexual and relationship satisfaction. When predicting relationship satisfaction, *disclosure about sexual behaviours* also showed a negative relationship, which was not consistent with the zero-order relationship. The change in directionality of the relationships in the simultaneous models may be due to highly partialled variables.

Similar to Study 1a, I wanted to use the Ballentine procedure (Cohen & Cohen, 1975) to calculate the unique and overlapping variance in the process dimensions as well as the content areas when predicting sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction. I used the same procedure by conducting seven separate multiple regressions for each aspect of the SDS for both outcome variables, resulting in four Ballentine figures (Figure 8). The figures are not drawn to scale, though they visually highlight the overlap between these variables. Most of the variance in the

simultaneous models was accounted for by the unique variance of the perceived consequences dimension of the SDS. Specifically, for the process dimensions Ballentine figures, perceived consequences accounted for 11% of the total 38% variance in sexual satisfaction and 15% of the total 28% variance in relationship satisfaction. For the content areas Ballentine figures, perceived consequences accounted for 17% of the total 38% variance in sexual satisfaction and 11% of the total 20% variance in relationship satisfaction. In all models, there was also evidence of suppression in the overlapping variance between the depth of disclosure and one or both of the other two processes (noted from the negative shared variance). The models for Figure 8 assessing the relationship satisfaction by process dimensions also showed suppression in the overlapping variance between the three process dimensions.

Figure 8

Study 1b Ballentine Figure Decomposing Variance in Sexual Satisfaction (1, 3) and Relationship Satisfaction (2, 4) by Process Dimensions and Content Areas of the SDS

(1)

-.043
(f)

Depth
.056
(b)

Importance
.034
(c)

.080
(g)

-.034
(e)

.107
(d)

Consequences
.106
(a)

(2)

-.026
(f)

Depth
.028
(b)

Importance
.081
(c)

.002
(g)

.014
(e)

.025
(d)

Consequences
.154
(a)

(3)

-.001
(f)

Factor 2
.003
(b)

Factor 3
.002
(c)

.131
(g)

.018
(e)

.056
(d)

Factor 1
.166
(a)

(4)

-.009
(f)

Factor 2
.011
(b)

Factor 3
.029
(c)

.035
(g)

-.010
(e)

.037
(d)

Factor 1
.105
(a)
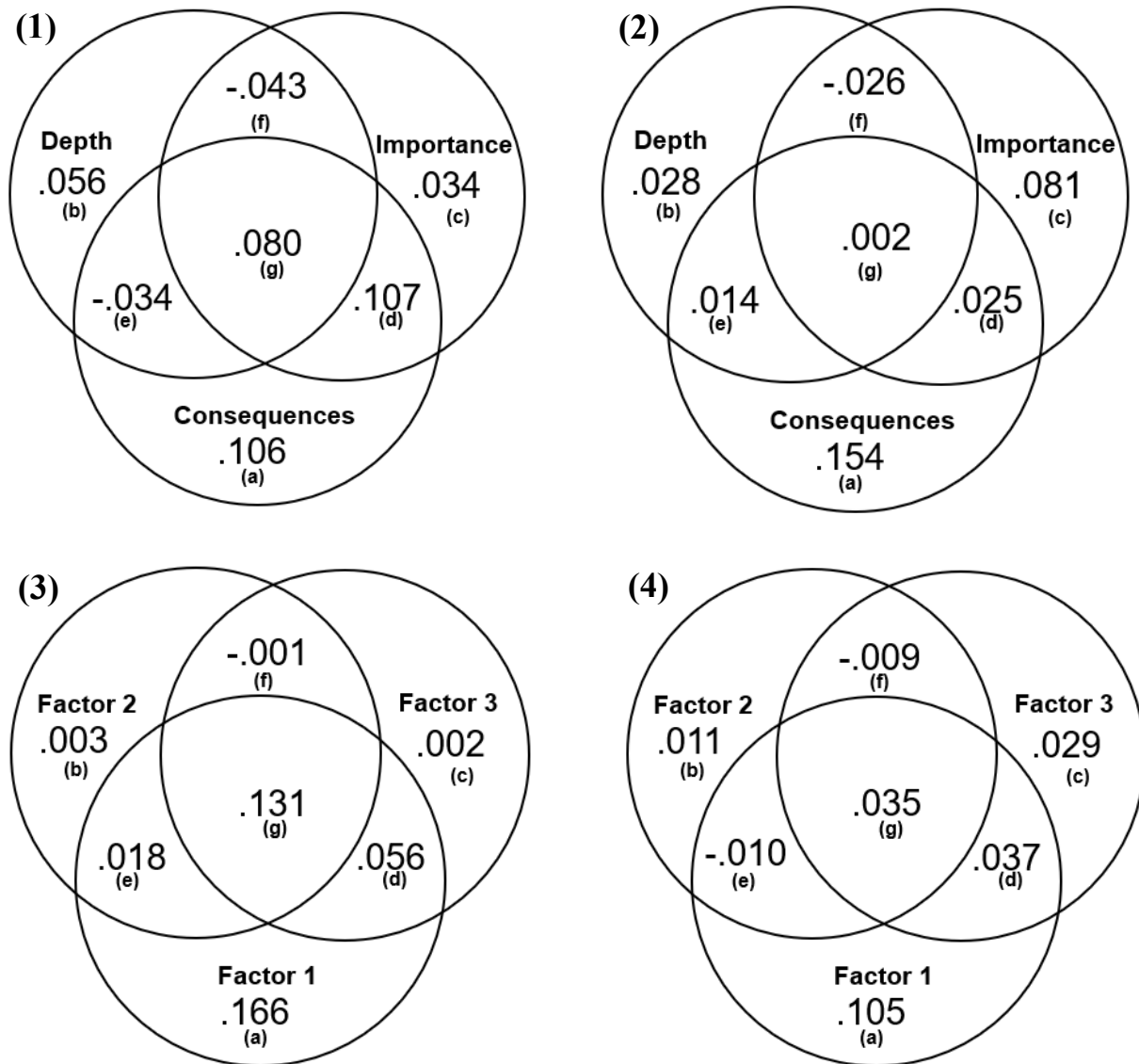
Note. Ballentine figures (1) and (2) show the decomposition of variance between depth of disclosure (IV1), perceived consequences of disclosure (IV2) and perceived importance of disclosure (IV3) and sexual satisfaction (1) and relationship satisfaction (2) (DV). Ballentine figure showing the decomposition of variance between *disclosure about sexual preferences*,

(IV1), *disclosure about sexual health* (IV2) and *disclosure about sexual behaviours* (IV3) and

sexual satisfaction (3) and relationship satisfaction (4) (DV). Area (a) = unique variance

explained in DV by IV1. Area (b) = unique variance explained in DV by IV2. Area (c) = unique

variance explained in DV by IV3. Area (d) = the shared variance between IV1 and IV3. Area (e)

= the shared variance between IV1 and IV2. Area (f) = the shared variance between IV2 and IV3.

Area (g) = the shared variance between IV1, IV2, and IV3. *Some variances in areas (f) and (e)

were slightly negative, suggesting suppression in these models.

Study 1b Research Question 3 Results

An identical approach of examining the correlations between SDS related to another

measure of sexual communication (See Table 3). All the dimensions were significantly

moderately negatively correlated with perceived barriers to communicating both sexual likes and

sexual dislikes. Higher barriers to communicating both sexual likes and sexual dislikes were

related to more negative perceived consequences of disclosure, less depth of disclosure, and

lower perceived importance of disclosure ($ps < .01$).

Study 1b Research Question 4 Results

The purpose of the fourth research question was to examine the relationship between

individual difference factors, specifically insecure attachment and experiential avoidance, and

the content areas and process dimensions of sexual self-disclosure.

First, I examined the correlations to explore each individual factor related to each of the

components of the SDS (See Table 3). Experiential avoidance did not meaningfully relate to any

of the content or process dimensions ($ps > .05$). Avoidant attachment was significantly

moderately negatively related to all content areas and process dimensions ($ps \leq .01$). Anxious

attachment was significantly weakly negatively related to only perceived consequences of

disclosure and sexual preferences ($ps \leq .05$). In summary, experiential avoidance did not have a direct relationship with predicting any of the content areas or process dimensions. In terms of insecure attachment dimensions, avoidant attachment was the most strongly related predictor and negatively predicted all content areas and process dimensions.

Second, I conducted moderation analyses to test whether experiential avoidance moderates the relationship between the SDS content areas (three models) and process dimensions (three models) and the two sexual outcome variables in 12 separate models (See Table 12; models 7-18). I used Hayes' Process Macro 4.0 for SPSS to conduct the moderation analyses with centred variables. In the first-order models, experiential avoidance negatively predicted sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction ($ps \leq .006$), though it only accounted for a small amount of total variance in the outcome variables (3% and 10%, respectively) while the SDS sexual communication variables positively predicted both outcome variables ($ps \leq .042$) and also only accounted for a small amount of the total variance in the outcome variables (ranging from 2%-4% across SDS variables). Four models showed significant moderation (i.e., models 8, 12, 14, 16), and four models had weak evidence for the moderating effect (i.e., models 7, 10, 11, 15). Figures 9-12 depict graphs of significant moderation models. Though I cannot interpret the nonsignificant models, experiential avoidance had the same pattern of moderating relationships in all the models. Specifically, when experiential avoidance was higher, there was an enhancement effect such that a stronger positive relationship existed between the sexual communication (i.e., SDS) content areas and process dimensions and the sexual outcome variables (i.e., relationship and sexual satisfaction). For example, if someone had higher levels of experiential avoidance, they engaged in higher levels of sexual self-disclosure and there was a more positive relationship between their sexual self-disclosure and the sexual outcomes.

61

Figure 9

Relationship Satisfaction as a Function of Disclosure about Sexual Preferences SDS Content

Area and Experiential Avoidance (p = .017) Model 8
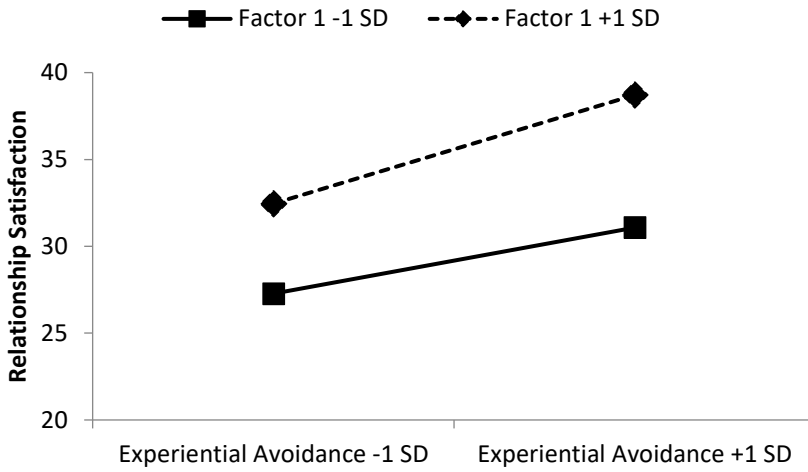
Figure 10

Relationship Satisfaction as a Function of Disclosure about Sexual Behaviours SDS Content

Area and Experiential Avoidance (p = .045) Model 12
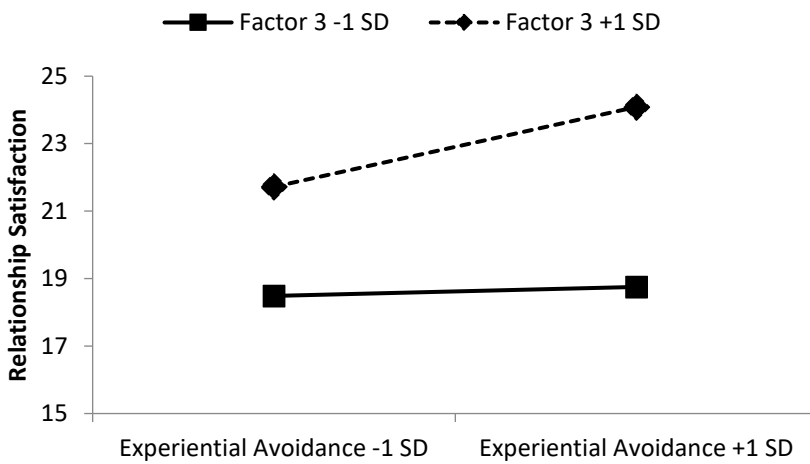
Figure 11

Relationship Satisfaction as a Function of Perceived Consequences SDS Process Dimension and Experiential Avoidance (p = .008) Model 14
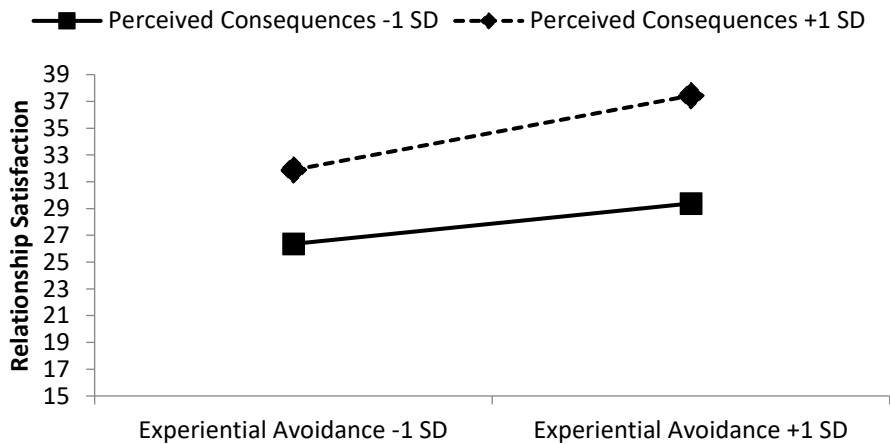
Figure 12

Relationship Satisfaction as a Function of Depth of Disclosure SDS Process Dimension and Experiential Avoidance (p = .033) Model 16
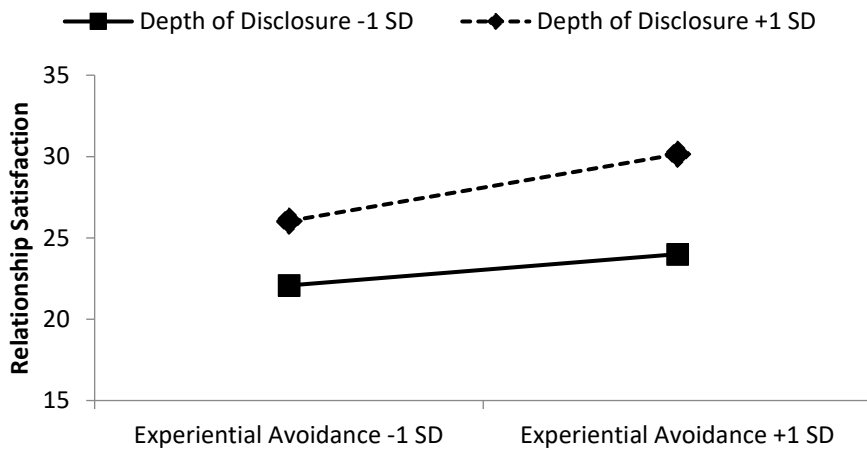
In terms of the specific moderation models, experiential avoidance significantly moderated the *disclosure about sexual preferences* and relationship satisfaction model ($p = .017$) and was approaching significance in the sexual satisfaction model ($p = .067$), did not moderate

either model with *disclosure about sexual health*, and only significantly moderated the *disclosure about sexual behaviours* relationship satisfaction model ($p = .045$). Regarding the process dimension models, experiential avoidance moderated the relationship between perceived consequences and relationship satisfaction ($p = .008$) as well as depth of disclosure and relationship satisfaction ($p = .033$) and approached significance in the sexual satisfaction model ($p = .059$), though did not moderate either perceived importance model. All significant models accounted for a much larger portion of the variance in the outcome variables, ranging from 30-40% of the variance of sexual satisfaction and 15-31% of relationship satisfaction.

Study 1b Discussion

The findings largely supported the Study 1b research questions and corresponding hypotheses. I identified the three content areas of the SDS and then tested them in subsequent analyses to examine the impact of both the content areas and the process dimensions on theoretically relevant variables. I will further discuss these findings and their implications in the General Discussion in conjunction with my findings from Study 1a.

Study 1b Research Question 1 Discussion

With the adequate power of the Study 1b sample, I was able to examine the item-level characteristics, factor structure, and internal consistency of the three process dimensions of the SDS. I found no item-level concerns that would have been counter-indicative to this methodological approach. The additional item I added in Study 1b relating to communicating sexual dislikes showed adequate item-level loadings and correlations. I removed two items based on conceptual relevance to the scales and the EFA results. Though I had identified two pairs of factors that I suspected to be conceptually overlapped when assessing the face validity of the items (RQ1 in Study 1a), they all loaded strongly and as expected onto the factors, so I left them in the scale 1) "sexual problems or difficulties I might have" and "what about sex makes me anxious" and 2) "what I enjoy most about sex" and "sexual preferences (e.g., techniques or behaviours I find or would find pleasurable). The final item list was 17 items. The results of the exploratory factor analyses suggest that all three process dimensions fit with the same three content areas, each summarizing a different facet of topics related to sexual self-disclosure: *disclosure about sexual preferences* (Subscale 1), *disclosure about sexual health* (Subscale 2), and *disclosure about sexual behaviours* (Subscale 3). I used these factors as subscales of sexual topics of the SDS in subsequent analyses. All three content areas were internally consistent and

related to each other in expected ways. These findings provide initial support for the distinct content areas of the SDS.

Study 1b Research Question 2 Discussion

I expanded the findings from Study 1a by investigating how the content areas of the SDS as well as the three process dimensions related to two important sexual wellbeing outcomes. I first examined the bivariate correlations (See Table 3). All content areas (*r*s ranging from .64 to .67, *p*s < .01) and process dimensions (*r*s ranging from .68 to .84, *p*s < .01) were significantly correlated with each other. Similar to Study 1a, there were large, strong correlations that I hypothesize are driven by the item-level content since all aspects of the SDS are measured using the same list of items.

Disclosure about sexual preferences was the most strongly related content area to both relationship satisfaction and sexual satisfaction and was positively related to both outcomes using multiple regression analyses. The other two subscales did not account for meaningful, unique variation above and beyond *disclosure about sexual preferences*. The three process dimensions were all strong predictors of relationship and sexual satisfaction. With more positive perceived consequences and higher depth of disclosure there was higher relationship and sexual satisfaction, though the opposite relationship emerged for perceived importance; as the perceived importance increased, there were lower reported scores in the outcome variables.

The Ballentine figures supported that there is suppression in both the process dimension and content area models. Perceived consequences was the process dimension that accounted for the most variance in the outcome variables. *disclosure about sexual preferences* was the content area that accounted for the most variance in both outcome variables.

Study 1b Research Question 3 Discussion

The analyses and findings were identical for Study 1b compared to Study 1a. When participants perceived more barriers to communicating both sexual likes and sexual dislikes, similarly to Study 1a, they had less robust sexual self-disclosure (i.e., more negative perceived consequences, less depth of disclosure, less perceived importance of disclosing sexual topics).

Study 1b Research Question 4 Discussion

Compared to experiential avoidance and anxious attachment, avoidant attachment was the most strongly related variable to all content areas and process dimensions of the SDS; the more avoidantly attached someone was, the less sexual self-disclosure they reported for all content areas, and they also perceived less positive consequences of disclosure, reported less disclosure, and lower perceived importance of disclosure. High anxious attachment only corresponded to lower scores on *disclosure about sexual preferences* and less positive perceived consequences of disclosure. Consistent with the Study 1a findings, avoidant attachment was the strongest and most consistent factor related to sexual communication. Experiential avoidance did not have direct relationships to any of the aspects of the SDS, suggesting that the degree to which someone avoids experiences does not directly predict the content or their process of sexual self-disclosure. Conceptually, I consider experiential avoidance to be a proximal expression of the more latent construct of insecure attachment, specifically avoidant attachment. Counter to my hypothesis, experiential avoidance did not directly predict any of the SDS variables. Though a surprising finding, I proceeded to test experiential avoidance as a theoretically relevant predictor variable to sexual self-disclosure and sexual outcomes in interaction models.

In the first-order models, experiential avoidance had a negative impact and the SDS variables had a positive impact on the sexual outcome variables, though none of the models accounted for much outcome variance (< 10%). Despite not all meeting the $p < .05$ significance

threshold, all models showed similar patterns in the impact of experiential avoidance on the relationship between the SDS variables and sexual and relationship satisfaction. In all moderation models, the main effects of experiential avoidance had negative relationships and the SDS variables had positive relationships with relationship and sexual satisfaction. The direction of the moderating effects did not match my hypotheses. I predicted that higher experiential avoidance would lead to a less positive relationship between sexual communication (i.e., SDS) and the sexual outcome variables. However, the findings support a significant enhancing moderating effect with stronger positive relationships between the SDS and sexual outcome variables at higher levels of experiential avoidance. It is possible given these findings that higher experiential avoidance (i.e., higher psychological inflexibility) impacts sexual communication in unexpected ways. For example, if engaging in sexual communication aligned with an individual's beliefs about what was best for them and their relationship, their psychological inflexibility may motivate them to engage in more sexual communication. However, this pattern is counter to my expectation, and it would need to be investigated in future work with a more direct measure of psychological inflexibility.

The moderating effects were more consistent in the models predicting relationship satisfaction than sexual satisfaction. These findings could support the theorized associations between individual factors and relationship context factors as having an important role in the immediate context in which sexual communication occurs, while sexual satisfaction has a different and more latent relationship with the predictor variables, as suggested by Brown and Weigel (2018). The moderating effects were observed in models with both SDS content areas (i.e., *disclosure about sexual preferences* and *disclosure about sexual behaviours*) and process dimensions (i.e., perceived consequences, depth of disclosure). In summary, there was variation

in the strength of the SDS variables as moderators for the relationship between experiential avoidance and sexual wellbeing outcome variables while also demonstrating consistent statistical patterns. Additionally, the effects of how experiential avoidance moderated the relationships were unexpected. There is merit in repeating these results to determine if there would be more consistency with a higher-powered sample.

Study 1 General Discussion

Sexual communication is vital to intimate relationships (Byers & Demmons, 1999; Rehman et al., 2011). Safe and mutually pleasurable sexual repertoires are built by sharing sexual preferences, sexual health history, personal boundaries, and establishing sexual consent (MacNeil & Byers, 2005, 2009). Despite its importance, there is a considerable lack of consistency in what methods are used to assess sexual communication, which is concerning if the different ways of measurement are not honing in on the same construct. There is even inconsistency within specific methodologies, such as self-report measures (e.g., Milhausen et al., 2020), the most commonly used method for measuring sexual communication. There is variability in which aspect of sexual communication the self-report measure is designed to capture (i.e., item level content), as expected, though these findings are generalized broadly to the same latent construct, sexual communication (e.g., generalizing sexual health communication to be indicative of all sexual communication; Widman et al., 2013). I will explain the findings related to the three general research goals for studies 1a and 1b. Generally, the results from the two studies were consistent, with some expansion of the findings in Study 1b.

The first research goal was to identify some of the important methodological and conceptual issues that are hampering research progress in the study of sexual communication. The three identified content areas and the three process dimensions all demonstrated good reliability (i.e., Cronbach's alpha). In terms of validity, I assessed the content (Study 1a) and convergent (Studies 1a and 1b) validity of the SDS. The dimensions showed good face and construct validity. The concerns that I had in my subjective review of the scales were supported by the EFAs, and I removed two conceptually unclear items and added an item addressing sexual dislikes. The convergent validity was supported in that it related in expected ways to existing

measures of sexual communication and other individual factor variables. Overall, these findings support the validity of the SDS.

Broadly, the findings are consistent with the hypothesis that sexual self-disclosure is an important factor for important indicators of sexual wellbeing, namely sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction (MacNeil & Byers, 2009; Rehman et al., 2011; Roels et al., 2022). Further, the multidimensional nature of sexual self-disclosure was supported by the content areas and process dimensions contributing uniquely to many of the tested simultaneous models; however, they were understandably highly correlated and even had evidence of suppression in some models.

The second research goal was to build upon the work by Brown and Weigel (2018) by developing a Process Model of Sexual Communication that integrates their findings and allows researchers to continue to construct validation of sexual communication. I had a specific interest in this measure as it is one of the first scales to capture multiple dimensions of sexual communication, matching my theoretical conceptualization of this construct. The findings of these studies contribute to the model by elucidating the three content areas covered by the items of this model, *disclosure about sexual preferences, disclosure about sexual health*, and *disclosure about sexual behaviours*. There was thematic cohesion within each content area, providing support that the way participants experience the process of sexual communication has good internal consistency across specific topics of sexual self-disclosure.

In terms of the process dimensions, perceived consequences, depth of disclosure, and perceived importance of disclosure emerged as separate aspects of how individuals communicate sexual topics. The consistency in the pattern of the results across the two studies suggests that

multiple dimensions of sexual communication can reliably be measured through self-report scales. However, there were also some measurement concerns that emerged related to the SDS.

Similarly to how the three process dimensions were highly correlated (collapsed across content areas), the content areas (collapsed across process dimensions) showed the same pattern of strong correlations. There was also evidence that the dimensions suppressed the effects of one another. The high correlations are driven, in part, by all the latent constructs (i.e., dimensions and content areas) use of the same items. This is a concern because an individual's opinions about a specific topic likely impact their response to all process dimensions. For example, if someone has strong opinions about a sexual topic (e.g., anal sex), their past experiences and opinion are likely to impact their ratings for the questions related to all three dimensions. Parsing out this item-level variance would allow for a clearer picture of the remaining variance that relates only to the process dimension in question, thus reducing the correlation between the constructs and, subsequently, possibly reducing or eliminating the suppressive effects the variables had on each other. The suppression effects were centred around the depth of disclosure dimension, suggesting that there may be a different type of relationship between it and the other two process dimensions of the SDS. Conceptually, the disclosure someone engages in could be conceptualized as an outcome variable contingent on the other process dimensions of sexual communication. Another interesting finding from examining the overlap between the three process dimensions is that perceived consequences consistently accounted for the most unique variance. This suggests that the decision-making process (i.e., motivations for engaging or not engaging) for sexual communication has an important role in sexual communication. Additionally, all aspects of the SDS were measured using self-report Likert scales with similarly worded questions, which could contribute to the high correlations between the variables. The findings still support that

participants were able to distinguish between the different questions for perceived consequences, depth of disclosure, and perceived importance. Though it is arguably more difficult to measure multidimensional constructs, particularly those related to a nuanced construct such as communication, these findings support that it can be measured meaningfully using self-report methodologies.

There were some consistent methodological concerns with the added perceived importance of disclosure dimension in both Study 1a and 1b. Specifically, this dimension is often related differently as a predictor and outcome variable compared to the other two dimensions. Despite these inconsistencies in the findings, at the conceptual level, the importance of a sexual topic is still a viable aspect of the process of sexual communication. Specifically, there were some models in which each process dimension contributed unique variance to sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction, supporting the conceptually linked though distinct nature of these dimensions.

I have two suggestions for further refining the perceived importance dimension in future studies. First, longitudinal measurement would allow further investigation into how perceived importance is related to the overall process of sexual communication. Second, it would be potentially informative to refine the object of the importance rating. I believe that one of the reasons perceived importance related to other variables in ways that were inconsistent (e.g., negatively predicting sexual and relationship satisfaction in Study 1b RQ2) was because of the way the question was worded (i.e., "*How important do you think it is to disclose this to your current primary romantic partner?*"). Having separate questions about their relationship's importance or importance for self-expression, pleasure, or wellbeing would help identify whether the individual is considering self or other-oriented factors. The way I wrote the question could

introduce variability in its interpretation because it does not specify to what the question is referring. A sexual topic could be important to themselves (e.g., communicating about oral sex is important for their own pleasure or wellbeing) or important to an external factor such as their partner or their relationship (e.g., communicating about relationship exclusivity to establish sustainable boundaries for the relationship). There could be some important implications to exploring the self or other orientation for the individual's focus when reporting the perceived importance of disclosing each sexual topic, such as being able to examine overall motivational factors for sexual communication.

Two different self-report measures of sexual communication were included in this study, the SDS and the BCQ. These measures related to each other in the expected ways, though they emerged as distinct constructs. As such, it is particularly important that researchers are diligent with their choice of self-report measures. Researchers should carefully consider what aspect or dimension of sexual communication is most relevant to their research questions and choose a self-report measure accordingly. For example, selecting different measures if their research question is related to the process of sexual communication (e.g., SDS) or to the barriers people perceive to communicating sexual topics (e.g., BCQ). Researchers can determine an appropriate self-report measure by carefully evaluating the topics covered in the items of the scale. It is also important to carefully evaluate measures that conflate sexual communication with outcome variables such as relationship satisfaction or sexual satisfaction, as they are conceptually different constructs, all critical to the health and satisfaction of intimate relationships (Byers, 2005).

Using the findings from Studies 1a and 1b, I adapted the Brown and Weigel model to integrate these advancements in a conceptualization of sexual communication and related

variables (See Figure 13). The most notable proposed change is the addition of individual

factors, resulting in four broad constructs: relationship context, individual factors, sexual

communication, and sexual satisfaction. I will test this proposed model in Studies 2a and 2b.

Given the results of Studies 1a and 1b, I decided to consider sexual satisfaction as the outcome

variable most related to sexual communication. Relationship satisfaction was suggested by

Brown and Weigel (2018) to be part of the relationship context construct in the model, though I

tested it as an outcome in Studies 1a and 1b. The findings for sexual satisfaction and relationship

satisfaction were similar. As such, conceptually, I decided to follow the direction from Brown

and Weigel (2018) and include relationship satisfaction as a predictor variable in the model.

Using sexual satisfaction as the outcome indicator for the model also aligns with previous work

suggesting that sexual satisfaction is particularly important to sexual wellbeing. Sexual

satisfaction within a dyad is particularly in monogamous relationships, the most common type of

intimate relationship, where it is often expected that all partnered sexual needs are met by their

partner (Fallis et al., 2016). It will be important to then expand the model beyond that proposed

by Brown and Weigel (2018) to consider outcome variables that would be more closely linked to

sexual communication, including perceived and actual partner understanding of communicated

sexual topics.

Figure 13

Study 1 Process Model of Sexual Communication
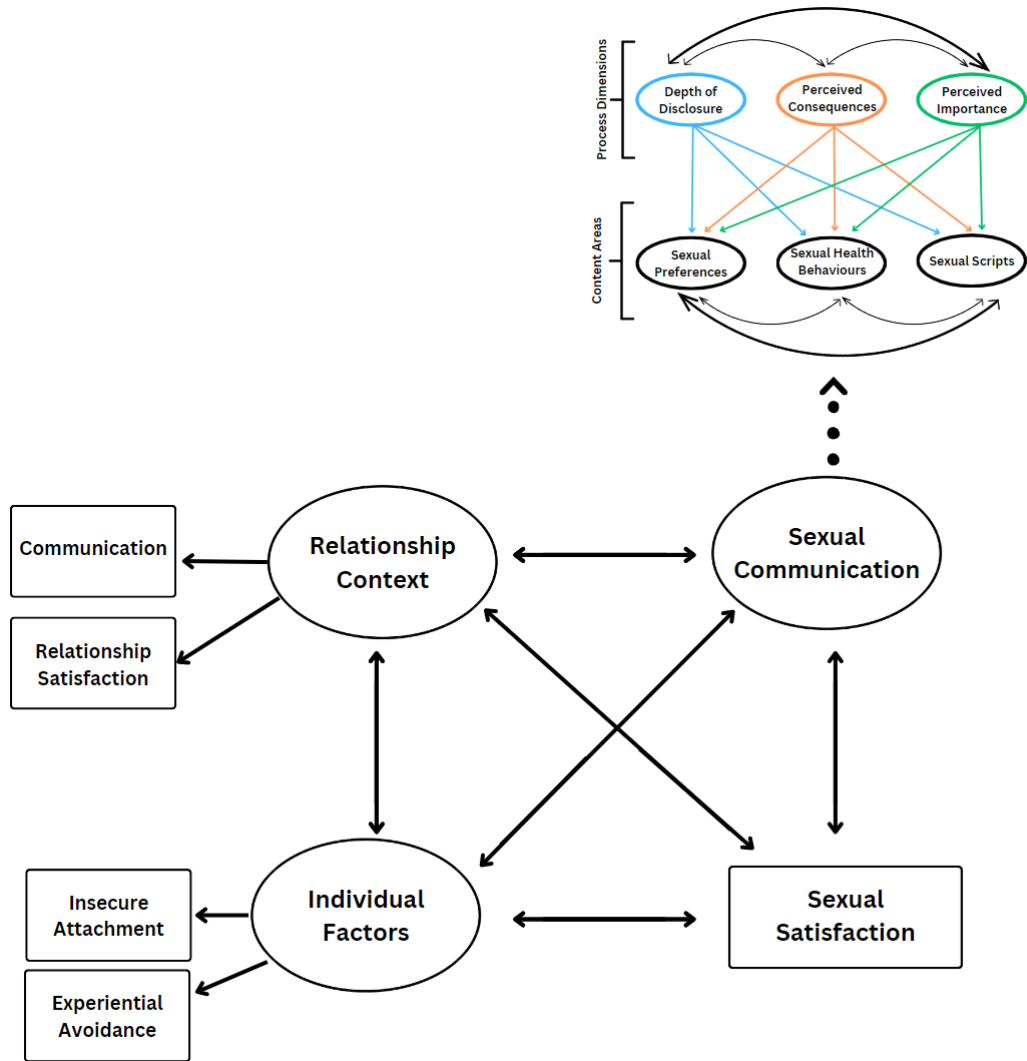
Note. The sexual communication construct includes only the content areas measured by the SDS, and, as such, sexual consent was omitted.

The third research goal was to investigate how our modified measure of sexual communication relates to theoretically relevant variables. Overall, the measure of individual factors was important to sexual communication variables. The process dimensions of the SDS related more strongly and more consistently to sexual and relationship satisfaction compared to

the content areas. Specifically, the process dimensions also added unique variance above and beyond each other, further supporting that they capture distinct underlying processes of sexual communication.

In terms of the content areas, *disclosure about sexual preferences* was the strongest and most consistent predictor variable of sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction. Sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction are often used as indicators of sexual wellbeing in relationships (e.g., Byers, 2005), which I employed in these studies, though the other content areas may be more related to other outcome variables that were not measured. For example, the *disclosure about sexual health* subscale may be a stronger predictor of an outcome variable such as contraceptive use decisions. It is conceivable that different topics are more relevant at different stages of relationship length. Most participants in both studies were in established committed relationships with one person exclusively (Study 1a n = 132; 75.00%; Study 1b n = 241; 77.20%) and for approximately ten years (Study 1a 10.38 years, SD = 8.60 years; Study 1b 10.61 years, SD = 10.00 years). When initially negotiating a sexual repertoire with a new partner, the other two content areas may be considered more important to mitigate risk behaviours in the relationship (e.g., disclosing sexual history) and establish behaviours to the script, particularly considering these were also primarily monogamous relationships. It is possible that factors relating to personal pleasure are more ongoing topics that remain important as relationships progress. A longitudinal analysis of the relevance of different content areas at various developmental points in the relationship, particularly capturing the beginning of relationships, would clarify which content topics are particularly important at different stages of the relationship. It may also be interesting to see which content areas become particularly important after certain relationship milestones. For example, during the perinatal period (Tavares et al.,

2023), menopause (Thornton et al., 2015), times of relationship instability (Wasson & Muise, 2022), and after notable life events such as a serious health diagnosis (McInnis & Pukall, 2022).

Clinical Implications

In terms of clinical recommendations for all the findings of these studies, the results support that sexual communication is of vital importance to intimate relationships and adds some specificity to our understanding of this construct. The studies support that the measured process dimensions of sexual communication are distinct. As such, it is important for clinicians to ask about different aspects of the process of sexual communication beyond asking about sexual communication broadly. For individuals with specific concerns about sexual communication these findings also help clinicians understand the factors that are important to the process. For example, if an individual is unsatisfied with their sexual communication their clinician can invite reflection on many aspects of the communication process, such as exploring the barriers they perceive to communicating sexual preferences, perceived consequences to disclosure, and the importance of a sexual topic to themselves and to their relationship. By examining many aspects of the process, together with the individual, clinicians will be able to pinpoint specific problem areas and work to determine appropriate strategies to address them instead of identifying sexual communication as a broader problem area with similarly broad strategies. For example, avoidantly attached individuals engaged in more self-disclosure after positive relationship experiences that were developed to address their unique barriers to engaging in intimate relationships (Stanton et al., 2017). A similarly targeted treatment approach could be developed and tested for sexual self-disclosure.

The support for the multidimensional nature of sexual self-disclosure also has clinical implications. These findings show that beyond the different topics that can be discussed under

the umbrella of sexual communication, there also needs to be attention to the processes by which individuals discuss sexual communication. Couples and individual therapists need to think about various process dimensions of sexual communication to adequately identify the exact area in the process where the individual is experiencing concern. Since the components of the SDS as well as the other two sexual communication measures all emerged as distinct predictors for sexual and relationship satisfaction, aspects of sexual communication need to be incorporated into clinical practice in an intentional way that acknowledges the unique role that each dimension contributes to the overall process of communication. For example, if an individual is preoccupied with the potential consequences of disclosure there may be value in discussing this more explicitly and directly to examine their beliefs about communication (e.g., through cognitive restructuring). However, if they are not fully engaging in disclosure because they do not believe sexual communication is important in a relationship then some psychoeducation regarding the importance of communicating about sexual topics may be helpful.

Studies 1a and 1b Limitations and Future Directions

I discuss the general limitations and future directions of all the studies in the Overall Limitations and Future Directions section. Though the SDS captures many topics related to sexual communication, one important content area that it does not thoroughly cover is the communication of sexual consent, which I initially included in the content areas I expected to be important to sexual communication (See Figure 3). It will be important for researchers who are specifically interested in measuring consent to choose other measures (e.g., Sexual Consent Scale-Revised; (Humphreys & Brousseau, 2010). It would also be advisable to test whether items relating to sexual consent can be added to the SDS, as I hypothesize that they would relate

to the *disclosure about sexual health* content area items given the overlap between consent communication and sexual health outcomes (Marcantonio et al., 2020).

Though the results from the EFA supported a three-factor structure, I have concerns about the items in the third extracted factor and subsequent subscale, *Disclosure of Sexual Behaviours*. The way they are written makes it unclear what the individual should consider when answering their questions (e.g., own sexual preferences, the role of that behaviour within the intimate relationship). For example, all the items for this factor just stated behaviours (e.g., oral sex; anal sex), though if the questions were written differently in terms of the individual's sexual preferences (e.g., *"what I would like to receive in terms of oral sex"*), then it would conceptually make sense for these factors to load onto either *disclosure about sexual preferences* or *sexual health.* Some of the inconsistent EFA results do support the lack of conceptual clarity of the third factor. For example, oral sex loaded strongly onto the *disclosure about sexual preferences* content area though I hypothesize that is because oral sex is a widely accepted pleasurable activity that is integrated into most sexual repertoires. I suggest that these items be reworded or removed from the SDS in future revisions. For example, *"The degree to which I want to incorporate oral sex into our sexual relationship"* is a more clearly written item that is likely to relate more strongly to items such as *"sexual preferences (e.g., techniques I find or would find pleasurable"* in the *disclosure about sexual preferences* subscale. I hypothesize that if the items were rewritten in this way, there would be a two-factor solution for the distinct patterns in the items.

My initial hypotheses about the relationships between and across the process dimensions and content areas were supported by the findings in these two studies (See Figure 3). The sexual topics that emerged are consistent with my hypotheses. These findings support that researchers

can make thoughtful decisions about what process of sexual communication and what content areas align best with their research questions and study hypotheses. However, it is critical that researchers clearly state the processes and content areas that were measured and align their conclusions and implications with those methodological restrictions instead of broadly drawing conclusions about the entire process of sexual communication.

Conclusions

Despite the limitations of this study, the findings of these studies yield important information about sexual communication. The lack of conceptual clarity in the measurement of sexual communication has introduced possible difficulty in the interpretation and generalization of research findings. The findings support that various content and process dimensions are distinct yet conceptually linked constructs that should be clearly identified. To model this practice, the findings of the current study are based on information about specific content area subscales (e.g., sexual preferences, sexual health disclosure, sexual behaviours) and process dimensions (e.g., barriers to communication, depth of communication, perceived consequences, and perceived importance) of sexual communication. These findings contribute to the refinement of our understanding of the various content and processes involved in sexual communication. They also provide an excellent foundation to explore further proposed changes to Brown and Weigel's (2018) model in Studies 2a and 2b. It is clear that sexual communication is a complex process that requires a more diligent and refined implementation of this construct in research and clinical intervention.

Study 2a Introduction

Discussing sexual topics with intimate partners, such as sexual preferences (Brown & Weigel, 2018), sexual consent (Humphreys, 2007), and sexual health (Noar et al., 2006), is vital to promoting sexual and relationship satisfaction (Byers & Demmons, 1999; Rehman et al., 2011). These communication behaviours are all comprised within the construct of sexual communication. Through open sexual communication, partners create mutually pleasurable sexual repertoires, develop relational safety, and establish boundaries around their sexual preferences (Coffelt & Hess, 2014; MacNeil & Byers, 2005, 2009). When sexual communication is open and frequent, there are corresponding increases in sexual wellbeing; conversely, when sexual communication is avoided in a relationship, there are notable negative impacts on sexual wellbeing (MacNeil & Byers, 2009). Specifically, sexual communication is an integral component of overall sexual health (Sheeran et al., 1999) as it is the mechanism through which individuals share sexual health history, communicate contraception preferences, if applicable, and negotiate the use of barrier methods to prevent sexually transmitted infections and blood-borne infections (STBBIs; Widman et al., 2013). Sexual communication is also the process by which individuals communicate boundaries and negotiate sexual aspects of their relationship (Harris et al., 2014). The risks of not engaging in sexual communication, therefore, have notable implications for personal health and safety as well as relationship and sexual satisfaction.

Overall Research Goals

Despite this overwhelming support for the importance of sexual communication, there is limited information about what motivates someone to engage in or avoid sexual communication. As a result, existing models of sexual communication (e.g., Brown & Weigel, 2018) have not included motivations as part of the process of communicating about sexual topics. Existing

behavioural models on other topics, such as determining health-related behaviours, have established that motivations are an integral aspect of the process (e.g., Fisher et al., 2003). The purpose of the current research is to address these limitations by refining and updating Brown and Weigel (2018)'s model of sexual satisfaction with two primary research goals. First, to determine the role of motivations for engaging in or avoiding disclosure, if any, in the process of sexual communication. Second, to use the participants' descriptions of the process of sexual communication to create an adapted version of the model developed by Brown and Weigel (2018) and test the associations between the model constructs.

Motivations for Sexual Communication

To successfully understand someone's thoughts and actions, it is important to understand their motives, desires, and goals (Molden et al., 2008). There are many complex and interconnected considerations that individuals evaluate prior to communicating and these considerations contribute to their decision to engage in a specific conversation (i.e., motivations; Caughlin, 2010; Hullman et al., 2022). Individuals are motivated to act in ways that bring them closer to fulfilling their basic needs, among which are sexual and relational needs, often conceptualized as being related to advancement or safety (Molden & Winterheld, 2013). To understand how motivations for sexual communication differ between sexual and nonsexual needs, it is first important to understand the inherent similarities and differences between sexual and nonsexual communication.

Communicating about sexual topics and nonsexual communication have many similarities, and both are strongly related to sexual and relationship satisfaction (Byers & Demmons, 1999). All communication involves willingness, vulnerability, and necessary communication skills to engage in an interpersonal exchange, which is influenced by a variety of

individual (Givertz & Safford, 2011; McNeil et al., 2018) and interpersonal (Mark & Jozkowski, 2013) factors. Due to the interpersonal nature of communication, there is inherent uncertainty because the responses and contributions of the other person are beyond the individual's control and successful discourse depends on understanding and coordination between all individuals (De Freitas et al., 2019).

There are also inherent similarities between nonsexual and sexual self-disclosure (i.e., the process and content of sharing thoughts and feelings (Derlega et al., 2008). Though self-disclosure can occur either voluntarily or involuntarily (e.g., through body language), I will focus on deliberate self-disclosure. Both sexual and nonsexual self-disclosure are multidimensional interpersonal processes that occur between two or more people in which an individual (i.e., "discloser") communicates information about the self to another individual (i.e., "disclosure recipient" (Derlega et al., 2008). Both the content and process of the communication vary depending on the nature of the relationship (Brown & Weigel, 2018; Derlega et al., 2008). They also both facilitate the development of relationships, particularly the level of closeness or intimacy attained within a relationship (Derlega et al., 2008; Rehman et al., 2017).

Despite the similarity, there are also important distinctions between communicating about sexual topics compared to nonsexual topics. Sexual communication is avoided more than nonsexual communication for many reasons. There are additional complexities specific to communicating sexual topics, including the increased vulnerability and potential threat to identity that naturally accompany these highly personal topics and opinions (Rehman et al., 2019). Furthermore, individuals report greater anxiety before engaging in sexual disclosure, as compared to nonsexual disclosure (Rehman et al., 2017). Sexual communication is also uniquely associated with outcomes such as relationship and sexual satisfaction (Rehman et al., 2013) such

that communicating about sexual topics is related to greater sexual satisfaction in long-term relationships, even above and beyond the effects of nonsexual disclosure (MacNeil & Byers, 2009; Mark & Jozkowski, 2013).

It is important to understand what people consider before engaging in sexual self-disclosure to an intimate partner (i.e., motivations) and the associated barriers to sexual communication. Because of the differences between sexual and nonsexual communication, it is important to determine whether there are also different motivations for engaging in sexual communication. Those findings would contribute to the understanding of the full process of sexual communication instead of only examining an outcome of sexual communication, such as the depth of disclosure. Understanding more of the process of sexual communication would have important implications for research (e.g., construct refinement and clarity) as well as clinical practice (e.., understanding common reasons for engaging or not engaging in sexual communication). However, there has been a dearth of studies exploring the motivations for sexual communication.

Though Brown and Weigel (2018) discuss the components in their model as factors that contribute to individuals deciding whether or not to engage in sexual communication, which I consider akin to behavioural motivations, they do not directly incorporate motivations into their model. Motivations for engaging in activity have been studied and strongly linked to why people have sex (Meston & Buss, 2007) and even why people engage in specific sexual behaviours, such as kissing (Thompson et al., 2019). In their work, Meston and Buss (2007) made notable advances in expanding the understanding of motivations individuals have for engaging in sexual activity that move beyond assuming primarily evolutionary-based motivations. They identified four broad reasons for engaging in sexual activity: physical (e.g., pleasure), goal attainment (e.g.,

social status), emotional (e.g., love), and reasons related to insecurity (e.g., self-esteem boost; Meston & Buss, 2007). While these contributions help solidify both the complexity and importance of motivations to engage in sexual activity, there has been a dearth of research exploring the role and motivations for engaging in sexual communication. Using the information from studies such as Brown and Weigel (2018), which identified complex reasons for engaging or not engaging in disclosure, I also wanted to explore the type, role, and importance of motivations for sexual communication.

Hullman, Brown, and Weigel (2022) are some of the few researchers to examine motivations for sexual communication. Specifically, they examined the goals people have for engaging in sexual self-disclosure. They found that participants were more likely to engage in sexual disclosure when they had a greater desire or sense of importance for communicating a specific sexual topic to a partner. Alternatively, when participants had conversation goals related to the social perception of their disclosure and wanting to maintain social appropriateness, they reported being less likely to engage in sexual self-disclosure. The researchers also identified important individual factors, notably anxiety and disclosure efficacy, which mediated the relationship between conversational goals and the likelihood of disclosure.

Motivational Framework

There are several motivational frameworks that have been previously applied to the study of intimate relationships. Two of the most common are 1) approach or avoidance of social goals and 2) anxious and avoidant attachment orientations. The approach or avoidance framework describes people as motivated to approach pleasurable experiences and avoid painful or undesirable experiences (Atkinson, 1957; Bernecker et al., 2019). In terms of intimate relationships, examples of approach-oriented goals include sexual satisfaction and avoidance-

oriented goals focus on avoiding outcomes such as relationship conflict. Anxious and avoidant attachments have also been identified as factors that impact an individual's motivation to engage in behaviours (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2013). These orientations are commonly thought to be based on early childhood experiences of how consistently available and responsive caregivers were in meeting the individual's needs (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2020). If caregivers were consistent and predictable, individuals are more likely to have secure attachment and be more readily able to form secure connections as adults; however, if caregivers were unavailable (i.e., avoidant) or inconsistently responsive (i.e., anxious), an individual is more likely to develop insecure attachment and have difficulty engaging in close relationships (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2013, 2020). The insecure attachment orientations impact motivations for engaging in behaviours. For example, someone with anxious attachment is more likely to engage in behaviours to achieve certainty of their partner's affection to assuage their fear of rejection, while someone with avoidant attachment may be motivated to avoid behaviours that foster intimacy and work to create distance and autonomy from their intimate partners (Mikulincer & Nachshon, 1991). These are just two of the many motivational frameworks that have been applied to the study of sexuality.

Proposed Conceptual Model

I wanted to continue the work of Studies 1a and 1b to build on the foundational work done by Brown and Weigel (2018). The multidimensional theoretical model of sexual communication proposed in this research includes and extends the findings of Brown and Weigel (2018) in an ongoing, iterative manner. The findings of Study 1a and 1b supported three conceptually related though distinct process dimensions of sexual self-disclosure (i.e., perceived consequences, perceived importance, and depth of disclosure). They also supported the relevance

of individual factors to sexual communication. These two changes were integrated into the foundational Brown and Weigel (2018) model to create the *Study 1 Process Model of Sexual Communication* (See Figure 13). The four key components of the proposed conceptual process model are relationship context, individual factors, sexual communication, and sexual satisfaction. Sexual satisfaction is the outcome variable of sexual communication. At this stage, the model depicts correlational relationships between factors. After integrating the findings of Studies 2a and 2b, I will suggest a more precise model that betters captures my estimates of how the factors relate to one another. With the multitude of self-report questionnaire measures available for a variety of these constructs, multiple variables could be considered as indicators of each of these constructs. I will discuss each of the predictor constructs below:

Figure 13

Study 1 Process Model of Sexual Communication
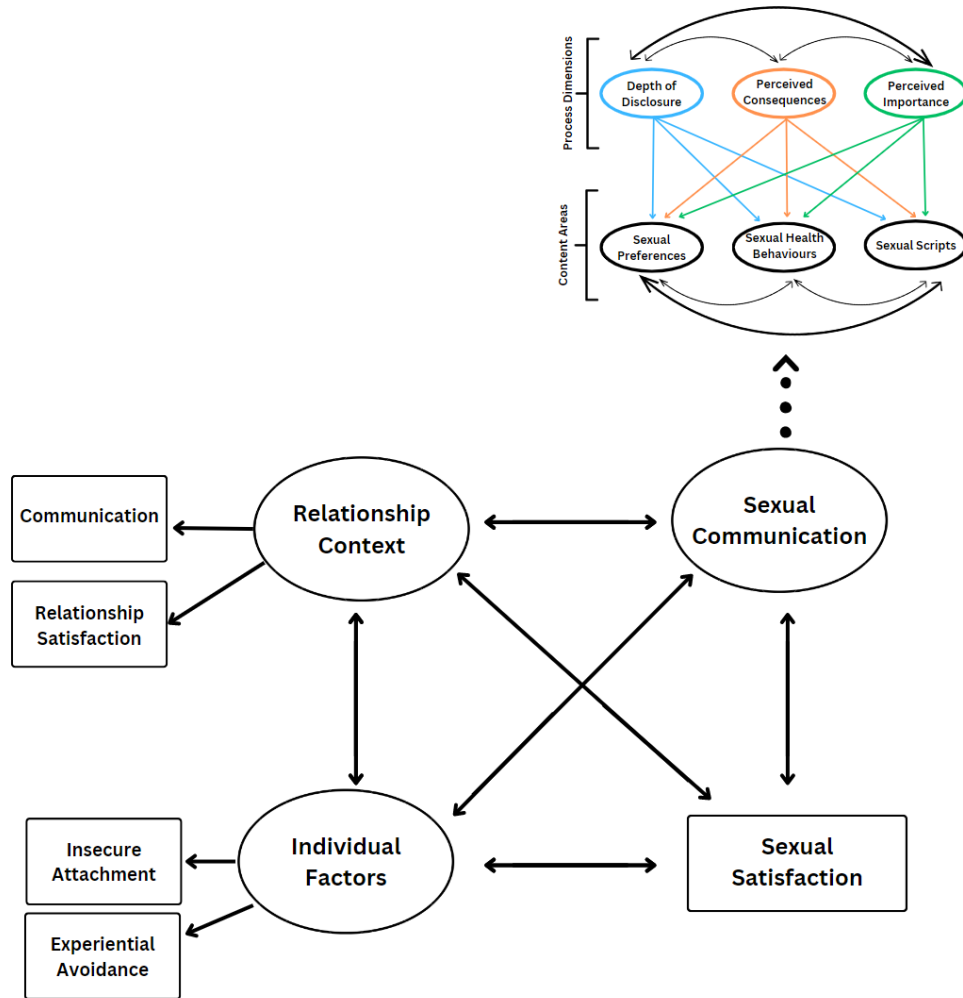
Note. Adapted from the Brown and Weigel (2018) model based on findings in Studies 1a and 1b.

Relationship Context

The context of the relationship in which sexual communication occurs has important implications for sexual communication behaviours (Mark & Jozkowski, 2013; Merwin & Rosen, 2020). When the context of the relationship is open, supportive, and conducive to vulnerable conversations, there is a higher likelihood of sexual disclosure (Brown & Weigel, 2018).

Individual Factors

Individual factors emerged as an important aspect of the sexual communication process in Studies 1a and 1b. Individuals with higher insecure attachment and experiential avoidance had poorer sexual communication. This finding is also consistent with previous research, particularly regarding avoidantly attached individuals having poorer sexual communication (McNeil et al., 2018).

Process and Content of Sexual Communication

I conceptualize sexual communication as a multidimensional construct with (at minimum) the two overarching dimensions of *content* and *process* (Brown & Weigel, 2018; Mallory, 2022)**.** The *content* relates to what is being discussed. Sexual self-disclosure is an integral component of the content of sexual communication and involves sharing sexual preferences (e.g., sexual likes, dislikes, and enjoyable behaviours in which one would like to engage; Brown & Weigel, 2018; Rehman et al., 2011a) as well as discussions of sexual health and sexual behaviours (supported in Studies 1a and 1b). In addition to the content of sexual communication, or "what" is being discussed, the process of communication, or "how" communication occurs, is of vital importance. While the content of sexual communication is perhaps more intuitive, the process, or the "how" of communication, is more complex and also less defined in the extant literature.

This is the first time, to my knowledge, that all constructs outlined in the *Study 1 Process Model of Sexual Communication* are being measured in the same study (i.e., relationship context, individual factors, multidimensional sexual communication, and sexual satisfaction), which will enhance the understanding of how these constructs relate to one another. I chose to use a qualitative approach to hear participants' own descriptions of their process for sexual self-disclosure. Specifically, I assessed what helps them decide to share their sexual likes, dislikes,

and fantasies. I thought this approach would provide important insight into the links that participants perceive between these constructs. Since most research on sexual communication has been quantitative, qualitative data will add depth to our understanding of these processes.

Overview of Studies 2a and 2b

In Study 2a, I developed a coding structure using an inductive approach to understand the motivational themes that participants described for sexual communication. I then used that understanding of those themes to add motivations to the Brown and Weigel (2018) model of sexual communication. In Study 2b, I replicated and expanded those findings to test the additions I made to the Brown and Weigel (2018) model based on Study 2a qualitative findings. I first wanted to replicate the qualitative coding structure to support its validity. I then analyzed individual relationships between the model constructs across multiple research questions.

Study 2a Research Goals

I had two research goals for Study 2a. The first was to understand the participants' common themes in their motivations for disclosing sexual preferences using coded open-ended responses. By including a first-voice narrative, these results will help fill the gap in research surrounding motivations for sexual communication using the participants' perspectives. As I employed an inductive (i.e., exploratory) coding process, I did not have specific *a priori* hypotheses about the themes of the qualitative responses (e.g., McGrath & Johnson, 2003). Despite my review of the application of motivational frameworks to the study of sexuality, together with the coding team we prioritized identifying emergent themes from the participants' responses. The second research goal was to conceptually incorporate the findings into the contextual model developed by Brown and Weigel (2018).

Study 2a Method

Study 2a Participants

The data for Study 2a were collected as part of Study 1a (described earlier). Thus, the recruitment methods, participant sample size, and data integrity checks were all the same. The final sample collected from the United States using Amazon Mechanical Turk Prime consisted of 132 participants. Full participant demographic information is outlined in Table 1.

Study 2a Measures

Background Questionnaire

This questionnaire was designed to gather background information specific to the current study. It included questions about the participants' demographic information (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity, education and employment history) and the history of their current relationship (e.g., type of relationship, relationship length).

Reasons for Sexual Disclosure

I developed a qualitative measure to assess participants' reasons for disclosing sexual preferences. The measure was comprised of three questions. I provided the following instructions before asking the specific questions: People tend to vary in terms of what they like sexually and what they do not like sexually, and the extent to which they share these likes and dislikes with their partner.

They were then asked three open-response questions about what helped them decide whether to disclose (a) sexual likes (i.e., *"Thinking back to your current and past relationships, what has helped you decide whether to share your sexual likes ("turn-ons") with a partner?"*), (b) sexual dislikes (i.e., *"Thinking back to your current and past relationships, what has helped you decide whether to share your sexual dislikes ("turn-offs") with a partner?"*), and (c) sexual

fantasies (i.e., *"Thinking back to your current and past relationships, what has helped you decide whether to share a sexual fantasy with a partner?"*) to an intimate partner. I provided participants with the following introduction before the sexual fantasy question to define sexual fantasies:

> Most people have at least one, often multiple, sexual fantasies. These are thoughts or actions that we might have done before, wish to do in the future, or enjoy getting sexually aroused thinking about but may not intend to do. Similar to sexual likes and dislikes, people vary in the extent to which they share sexual fantasies with their partners.

Study 2a Procedure

As the data were collected as part of Study 1a (described earlier), I followed the same procedures.

Study 2a Statistical Analyses

To identify themes in the open-ended responses, I used an inductive coding approach that is based on Hseih and Shannon (2005)'s framework for content analysis. The goal of the coding process was to produce a meaningful coding structure that represented the concepts and themes that emerged in the data. I worked with a three-person coding team comprised of my supervisor and a trained research assistant. I employed an inductive coding process due to the exploratory nature of these data. I first read all the responses to gauge data quality and to examine the data for duplicate responses. Some responses were not detailed enough to include in the analysis (e.g., *"always tell the truth"*) or did not directly answer the target questions, such as describing the content of specific sexual likes, dislikes, and fantasies (e.g., *"In a past moment, I had oral sex with my partner"*). After careful consideration and after discussions with the research team, we excluded 35 participants from the qualitative analysis due to not having enough information

related to sexual communication to code. One participant did not respond to the qualitative questions. As previously noted, I excluded 19 participants whom I identified as duplicate responders based on identical answers to qualitative responses. Due to the exploratory nature of this study, I also assessed the qualitative responses of participants who had been screened out of the study for fast responding and missed attention checks. I consider qualitative coding to have assessments of the data quality incorporated into the process itself, which are appropriate to employ with qualitative methodologies. A total of 62% of the responses ($n = 82$) were deemed viable.

The inductive coding process involved three rounds of coding, discussing, and refining the themes identified using a team-based approach. I led the process and have training and experience conducting qualitative methodologies (Wasson et al., 2020, 2022). The responses of the three open-ended questions were first coded separately. The coding team collaboratively decided that it was best to code one dominant code across all three responses instead of assigning separate codes for each response. The first rationale for this decision was that most participants discussed similar themes throughout their responses or referenced a previously written response (e.g., *"like I said…"* and *"same as above…"*), indicating there were likely higher-level concepts that participants perceived to be relevant for sharing sexual likes, dislikes, and fantasies. The second was that because of these underlying similarities we could capture a broader range of understanding of each participant's experience with disclosing sexual preferences by combining the open-ended responses, most of which were quite short and seemed to represent parts of ideas as opposed to fully formed responses. As such, we assigned each participant one code, indicating the dominant theme they discussed across their three responses.

I first read through all the responses and generated a comprehensive list of all identified emergent themes ($n = 46$). The second coder, a trained research assistant, then reviewed this list of themes to gauge its comprehensiveness and added two additional themes. I then met with my supervisor to discuss the list of themes. Together we refined the preliminary list of 48 themes to develop an initial coding structure which contained 31 themes, which was the result of collapsing categories based on the agreed conceptual overlap as well as coding disagreements. To test the effectiveness and comprehensiveness of the first coding structure, the second coder and I used this structure to independently and separately code the same 50 responses. The team then met again and discussed the disagreements in coding ($n = 20$) until we reached a consensus. We decided that the 31 identified themes were still appropriate. Given the high number of disagreements, I created a refined coding structure with clearer definitions of the codes to facilitate more clarity and concision in the coding process. We coded an additional 50 responses independently and agreed the coding themes were comprehensive and the descriptions were clear. The team then met again to compare the codes and discuss any coding disagreements until reaching a consensus ($n = 12$). I refined the coding structure and collapsed conceptually similar codes into more comprehensive categories. This restructuring resulted in a 12-item coding theme, described below. The research assistant and I coded 15 responses together and concluded the coding structure was parsimonious and comprehensive. We then used this 12-item structure to code 50 responses independently. Afterwards, we met to compare our coding and, having reasonable agreement, coded the remaining responses independently. Along with the second coder, we then coded all responses with good interrater reliability (Cohen's kappa = .83). We met to discuss all disagreements until we reached a consensus.

The final coding structure included 12 codes (See Figure 14) and related to two aspects of the participants' responses. First, participants described the focus of their considerations for disclosure, which were divided into three categories: self, partner, and relationship. Second, they described one of two types of motivations: whether they were focused on the presence or absence of a) a positive outcome that was related to growth and advancement or b) a negative outcome that was related to safety and security.

Figure 14

Inductive Coding Model
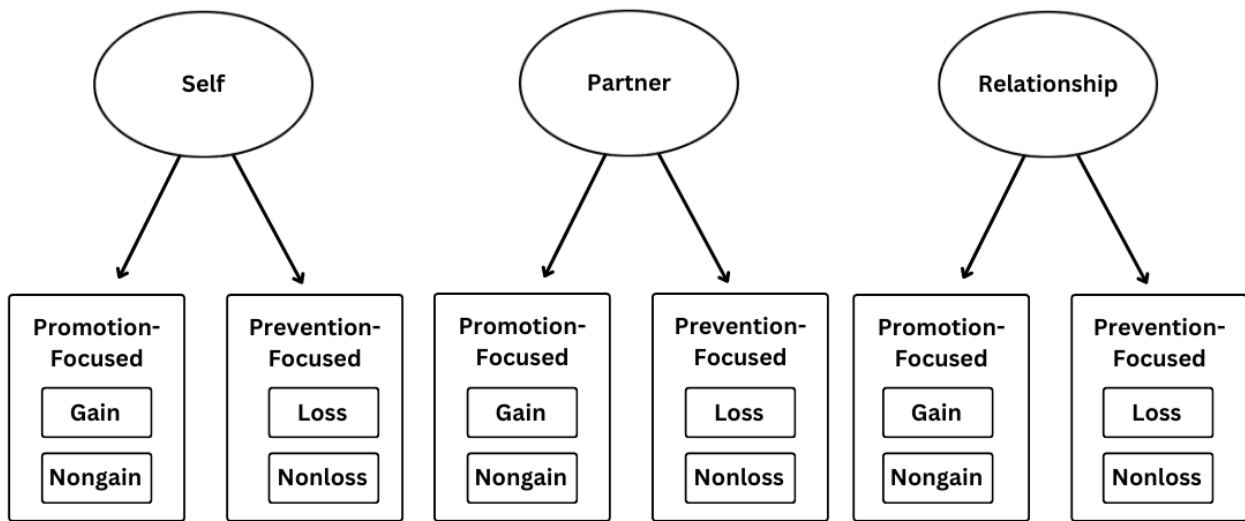
Note. The emergent codes were classified and described using the terminology from the RFT.

Study 2a Results

After coding the responses, I researched motivational frameworks to determine whether the emergent themes aligned with any existing frameworks. The inductively coded results aligned with the Regulatory Focus Theory (Higgins, 1997) and I adopted the terminology of that framework retroactively to describe the emergent themes. When participants were focused on achieving positive outcomes (i.e., promotion-focused), they described favourable responses when they achieved those outcomes (i.e., gain) and perceived it as a missed opportunity when they were not able to achieve the positive outcome (i.e., nongain). Participants described distress when they were focused on safety-related motivations (i.e., prevention-focused) and a negative outcome occurred (i.e., loss) and positive affect (e.g., relief) when they avoided a negative outcome. Participant responses tended to focus more frequently on anticipated gains and anticipated losses rather than non-gains or nonlosses. However, including all four components in the coding structure led to the most comprehensive model of the inductive themes. In addition to the motivational focus, participants' responses focused on whether their motivations were internally (i.e., self) or externally focused (i.e., partner and relationship), yielding six coding categories (i.e., self-promotion; partner-promotion; relationship-promotion; self-prevention; partner-prevention; relationship-prevention) which each had two subthemes, gain and nongain for promotion-focused and loss and nonloss for prevention-focused motivations. In addition to the RFT motivational themes, participants also discussed the process of communication more generally with regard to what they consider before engaging in disclosure (i.e., motivations) and how disclosure impacts their relationships. These findings were the basis of the proposed changes to the Brown and Weigel (2018) model. I discuss both the emergent motivational themes and discussions of the process of communication in the following two sections.

Emergent RFT Motivational Themes

Overall, promotion-focused themes emerged when participants discussed a sensitivity to, awareness of, or focus on a positive outcome that they had achieved or wanted to achieve. When they were focused on a gain, this theme was discussed positively as something desirable that elicited emotions such as happiness and satisfaction. When they were focused on a nongain, they discussed feelings of dejection and disappointment that the positive outcome was not achieved, and they perceived a missed opportunity. Prevention-focused themes emerged when participants also discussed motivations for disclosure centred on a sensitivity to, awareness of, or focus on a negative or undesired outcome happening, often related to a threat to their security or stability. The motivations, reasons, or considerations for disclosure were most often focused on a negative outcome that occurred (i.e., loss) though sometimes talked about favourable outcomes resulting when the perceived negative outcome was avoided (i.e., nonloss). I will further explain the specific themes in each category. Due to the similarities between gain and nongain as well as loss and nonloss themes, I will discuss them together in six sections related to the motivation and focus of the response (self promotion-focused, self prevention-focused, partner promotion-focused, partner prevention-focused, relationship promotion-focused, and relationship prevention-focused). The frequencies of each code are listed in Table 13, and I include the frequencies of occurrence of each theme as the dominant code in each section below.

Self Promotion-Focused

Gain-focused examples include wanting their own sexual satisfaction (e.g., *"That I wanted it to be a good experience each time for me. So I decided to talk to her in the beginning"* and *"I would share my fantasies... This is a great way to become closer and get what you want from the sexual experience"*) and valued being an open partner (e.g., *"My general philosophy in*

relationships is to be honest… Truth is more intimate to me than anything else."). Nongain

examples emerged in the participant responses, though they were not identified as the dominant

theme for any participants. The responses primarily focused on not achieving their own sexual

pleasure or other positive outcomes for themselves (e.g., *"There is no use in doing something*

that doesn't bring pleasure."). This theme was the dominant theme of 12 participants.

Self Prevention-Focused

There were many common loss examples in participants' responses, including avoiding a

threat to themselves and avoiding experiencing negative emotions. First, participants described

fearing judgement or another self-related threat from disclosing their sexual preferences (e.g., *"I*

dont want them thinking I am "weird" ") leading them to develop strategies such as waiting for

their partner to disclose their preferences first (e.g., *"So instead of bringing it up, I waited until*

they brought up the subject of fantasies and got to hear theirs first" and *"I always let them take*

the lead before revealing too much"). Participants also described only being motivated to engage

in disclosure if it was affecting their sexual satisfaction, motivated by avoiding that negative

outcome (e.g., *"I would talk about that only if I wasn't being satisfied"*). Most nonloss themes

focused on how feeling comfortable and safe with a partner helped the participant feel more

confident about avoiding any self-threat, such as judgement (e.g., *"What's helped me decide*

whether to share… is when I know that there won't be any judgement and that I can talk to him

and be completely open with him"). This theme was the dominant theme of 23 participants.

Partner Promotion-Focused

Participants described orienting to positive outcomes and feeling motivated because of

their partners' behaviours and responsiveness. For example, people described how helpful it was

when their partner was accepting and encouraging in nonsexual communication (e.g., *"the*

openness of my partner is key. She is able to talk freely, so it is easier for me to share my likes with her" and *"We were friends at first and we know about our relationships too. So it was easy for us to explore our sexual encounters and we utilized those opportunities to explore everything sexually"*). They also reported specific behaviours by their partner, including modelling sexual self-disclosure (e.g., *"I want to share to him because he was open up with his past experience that make me feel to share my fantasy too"*), encouraging responses after previous disclosures (e.g., *"After I told him first about how I feel about our sex life, he took it so positively and that encouraged me to be more open with him"*), and directly asking about their sexual preferences (e.g., *"I don't really go out of my way to share them, but I'd answer if they asked"*). Nongain examples emerged in the participant responses, though they were not identified as the dominant theme for any participants. The responses primarily focused on evaluating partner openness and responsiveness to determine whether their positive outcomes were able to be achieved (e.g., *"If they seemed open to it, some people are open to find out what pleases you and others aren't, if I got the vibe that they weren't open to it I wouldn't speak up"*). This theme was the dominant theme of 17 participants.

Partner Prevention-Focused

Many of the loss-focused partner concerns centred on avoiding negative outcomes related to their partner's anticipated reactions to the disclosure, either based on the reactions of past partners or their current partner that motivated them to avoid disclosure. Participants described non-loss situations of avoiding disclosure that were not directly related to previous negative responses to disclosure but to general expectations that their partner would react negatively (e.g., *"the only time I do not easily tell people what I do not like is if I think they will really react badly or negatively"*). Specifically, participants described being concerned about negative reactions

100

such as eliciting shame or guilt (e.g., *"If I felt like the person who I was talking to was not going to get upset or feel badly about it"*), poor self-esteem (e.g., *"He would feel insecure if I brought anything like this up"* and *"Making your partner feel insecure isn't ever a good thing"*), and anger or frustration (e.g., *"I do not share this with my partner because he would get angry and accuse me of comparing him to past relationships… He would also be upset because he thinks he does not satisfy me"*). Participants also described not wanting to express sexual likes, dislikes, or fantasies that contrast those of their partner (e.g., *"I will wait until I understand [partner's turn ons] before I start telling them about my turn offs. I don't want to jump into my turn offs only to find out that they contradict with my partner's turn ons"*), in an attempt to prevent any ruptures to their interactions with their partner. This theme was the dominant theme of nine participants.

Relationship Promotion-Focused

Participants described orienting to positive outcomes and feeling motivated to engage in disclosure to cause positive consequences to their relationship. For example, people described disclosure as critical for the wellbeing of their relationship (e.g., *"I believe in full honesty and openness, and good communication. If I want a successful relationship, I can't hold things back"*). They also referenced other ways that they were motivated to disclose to gain positive outcomes for their relationship, including building a mutually pleasurable sexual repertoire (e.g., *"I wanted to experience a sense of completeness in my relationship especially my sexual life, that drove me to open up to my partner"*), building intimacy within the relationship (e.g., *"It's a great way to find out what you both want, and what the boundaries are in your relationship. Without these conversations, you won't know"*), and deepening the romantic connection (e.g., "*I think I most wonderful way to stay tune with your partner…make strong bonds with my partner"*). Nongain examples were primarily focused on determining reasons that positive outcomes such as

a mutually satisfying sexual repertoire were not being achieved (e.g., *"to determine the underlying reasons you… aren't enjoying sex together"*). This theme was the dominant theme of 17 participants.

Relationship Prevention-Focused

This theme was the least frequently discussed and emerged only in the participant responses but was not identified as the dominant theme for any participants. Participants described being concerned about avoiding the negative consequences they perceived from not disclosing, so they shared sexual preferences with their partner to avoid those negative consequences to their relationship (e.g., *"If I do not share them it would drive us far apart"*).

Discussions of Context and Process of Sexual Communication

The second goal of this study was to incorporate the motivations into the Brown and Weigel (2018) model of sexual communication. First, it is necessary to consider how the described motivations and emergent themes align with the model. Participants mentioned all the aspects of the model (i.e., relationship context, disclosure content, and sexual satisfaction) in their responses. They also frequently discussed relevant individual factors that affected their motivations and the overall process of sexual communication. I will discuss how participants described each of the areas of the model.

Relationship Context

Participants discussed all the aspects of the relationship context included in the Brown and Weigel (2018) model and explained how it impacts what they consider before disclosure. First, they described that the *responsiveness* from their partners could increase (e.g., positive and encouraging, modelling disclosure) or decrease (e.g., history of negative responses to sexual preferences by current or past partners) their likelihood of disclosure. Second, participants

described that their level of general *uncertainty* in the relationship or their partner's level of interest in them was a barrier to communicating sexual preferences because they perceived negative consequences from disclosure more likely (i.e., threat). Third, participants discussed both their own and their partner's *communication abilities*. The quality of communication in their relationship would impact their disclosure behaviours, either by increasing the likelihood if the communication was good or decreasing the likelihood if the communication was poor. Fourth, participants described that their *overall satisfaction* in the relationship did contribute to their motivations to discuss sexual topics, but relationship satisfaction was also described as an outcome after disclosure if there was positive responsiveness and desirable changes in the sexual relationship (i.e., sexual satisfaction). Overall, the qualitative results support all aspects of the relationship context proposed in the Brown and Weigel (2018) model.

Disclosure Content and Process

In terms of the disclosure content, most participants described sexual preferences. However, this is not surprising since I designed the questions specifically to ask participants to share their experiences of sexual self-disclosure. Participants readily shared experiences of sexual likes, sexual dislikes, and sexual fantasies. The participants also described communicating sexual health disclosure (i.e., risk) and specific sexual behaviours within the relationship. Some also discussed engaging in disclosure to achieve and maintain sexual consent, a hypothesized content area not included in the Brown and Weigel (2018) model.

Participants also consistently mentioned two aspects of the process of sexual self-disclosure. They frequently discussed the perceived consequences of disclosure to themselves, their partner, or their relationship that affected whether they decided to disclose a specific sexual topic. If the perceived consequences from an actual or anticipated disclosure were positive, they

103

described being more likely to disclose; however, they were less likely or perceived more barriers to communication when the perceived consequences were negative. They also discussed the relative importance of a topic to themselves, their partner, or their relationship. For example, they described being more motivated to disclose something that was perceived as extremely negative or an important sexual preference that would improve intimacy, but if something was less important, they described sometimes opting not to disclose because it was not worth engaging in sexual communication due to the possible consequences (e.g., personal vulnerability, upsetting their partner). As such, participants described the perceived consequences and perceived importance of a sexual topic as aspects of their decision-making process prior to disclosure. The sequential links in these aspects of the process of disclosure are not captured in the Brown and Weigel (2018) model, particularly with the differentiation of the process dimensions of sexual communication.

The process of communication that participants described involved four separate components. They consider their motivations for disclosure, the process of disclosure (i.e., how), the content they wish to discuss, and their depth of disclosure with an intimate partner. Depending on their decision-making process, their motivations, and other contextual factors such as the quality of the relationship and their own individual factors, the process of sexual communication either leads them to engage or avoid sexual disclosure.

Sexual Satisfaction

Participants frequently mentioned their own sexual satisfaction, their partner's sexual satisfaction, and the quality of their overall sexual relationship as important outcomes of motivating them to engage in sexual self-disclosure.

Individual Factors

Many participants described personal/individual factors that either facilitated sexual communication or made it more difficult. Helpful individual factors described include self-confidence and communication self-efficacy. Individual factors that they described as barriers that made it less likely for them to disclose include fear of judgment or rejection, avoiding emotional or intimate expression to their partner, and other avoidance behaviours (e.g., waiting until their partner brought up discussing sexual communication). Notably, participants also described how engaging in communication can also impact how much these individual factors impact future disclosure. For example, they described that their helpful factors are amplified after a successful disclosure encounter but minimized after an unsuccessful disclosure encounter. Similarly, factors that acted as barriers decreased after a successful disclosure encounter and increased after an unsuccessful disclosure encounter.

Considered together, the qualitative descriptions of the participants' perceptions of what motivates them to disclose sexual topics help to elucidate how motivations for sexual communication can be conceptually incorporated into Brown and Weigel (2018)'s model (See Figure 15).

Figure 15

Process Model of Sexual Communication
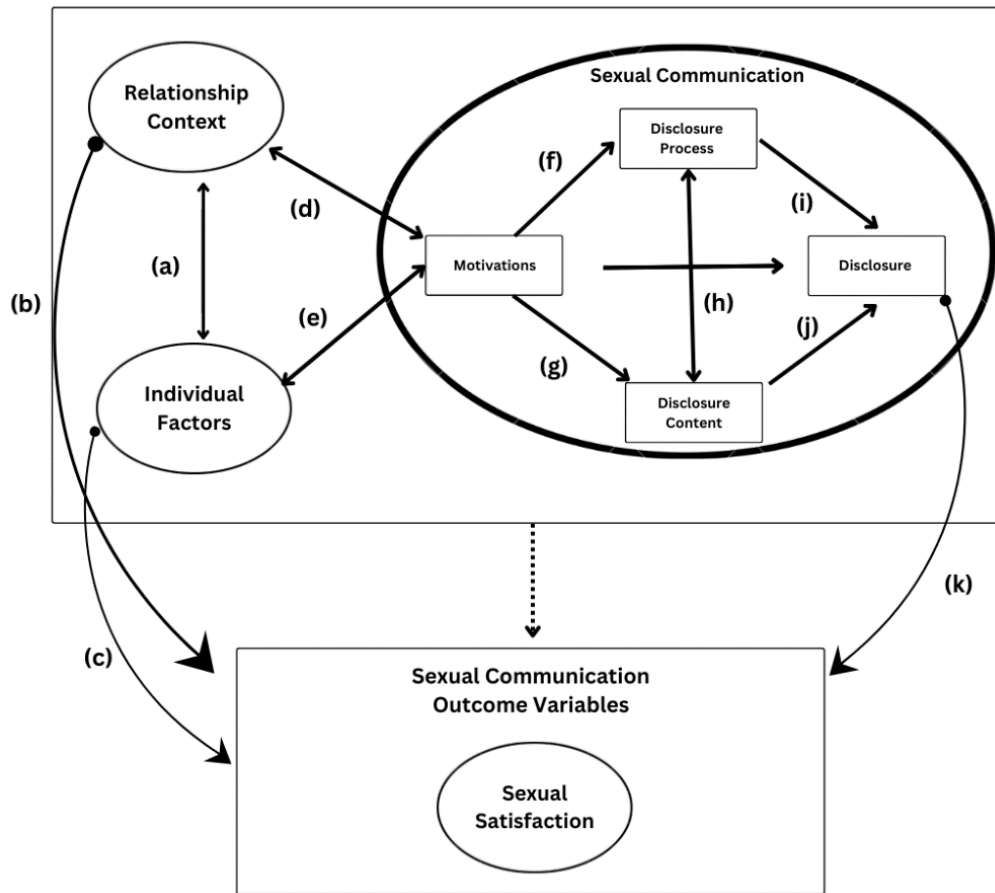
I made two suggested conceptual changes to the model in addition to the changes I made

in Studies 1a and 1b. First, participants described that their motivational considerations for

sexual communication included how important a topic was to them as well as the consequences

they perceived the disclosure to have (i.e., "disclosure process"). Participants also described that

the content of the disclosure was important to their decision (i.e., "disclosure content"). As such,

the motivations for sexual communication were described as a vital aspect of the communication

process that could impact whether someone engaged in sexual communication (i.e., depth of

disclosure as the "disclosure outcome"). This four-component process of communication was

incorporated into the model.

Second, participants described that individual factors influence whether they engage in sexual communication. Specifically, participants mentioned things that were helpful (e.g., confidence) or were barriers (e.g., anxiety, self-doubt) to communication. Additionally, participants also described a bidirectional relationship between individual factors and disclosure behaviours. For example, they described negative interactions that caused them to distrust intimate partners, making them less likely to disclose, and positive interactions increased their confidence and comfort within relationships, making them more likely to disclose. As such, these were kept in the model with a bidirectional relationship to the process of communication. Participants also described that the individual factors could have direct relationships on both their relationship context and sexual satisfaction. Finally, participants described that their relationship context could impact their sexual satisfaction and that their sexual satisfaction, in turn, affected their relationship context. These bidirectional relationships were also incorporated into the model.

Study 2a Discussion

The first goal of this study was to understand the motivational themes for sexual communication described by participants. The qualitative coding of the open-ended participant responses yielded a rich understanding of the motivations that participants described for engaging or not engaging in sexual communication. The emergent themes aligned with the Regulator Focus Theory (RFT), which has been successfully applied to many different contexts since its creation by Higgins (1997). The promotion-focused themes captured participant motivations that were focused on growth and advancement-related motivations, while the prevention-focused themes described motivations that were focused on safety and security, consistent with the theory (Molden & Winterheld, 2013).

This theory describes two different modes of goal pursuit depending on whether someone is focused on advancement (promotion-focused) or safety (prevention-focused) concerns, both of which are considered distinct goal pursuits (Molden et al., 2008). Promotion-focused goals involve people focusing on achievement and working towards achieving positive outcomes (i.e., gains) while avoiding the absence of those positive outcomes (i.e., nongains, missed opportunities; Molden et al., 2008). Prevention-focused goals have a focus on achieving safety and security and work to protect themselves against negative outcomes (i.e., nonloss, safety from threat) to avoid the negative outcome occurring (i.e., loss; Molden et al., 2008). Continued exposure to situations that foster or encourage a particular goal pursuit can lead to an individual being predominantly promotion-focused or prevention-focused in their motivations (Molden & Winterheld, 2013).

The RFT has been previous applied to the study of intimate relationships (Hui & Molden, 2014). I consider the RFT to be a compelling motivational framework for expanding the field of

sexual communication by understanding how needs for safety and growth are involved in decisions to disclose or avoid sexual communication. For example, someone who is promotion-focused may perceive a mutually pleasurable sexual repertoire as a positive outcome that they are motivated to achieve and would consider it a missed opportunity if the positive outcome was not achieved. Someone who is prevention-focused may be strongly focused on the potential threat caused by the perceived consequences of sexual communication, especially threat to self (Rehman et al., 2019), and would be motivated to engage in behaviours to avoid the feared negative outcome. In these examples, one might assume that the first individual would be more driven to disclose their sexual preferences while the second individual would be motivated not to disclose sexual preference and avoid the potential threat to self.

Though the RFT has conceptual similarities to both the approach and avoidance and attachment theories, it is a distinct motivational framework. Approach and avoidance motivations are similar to promotion and prevention motivations, respectively. However, this theory only captures motivations to achieve positive outcomes and avoid negative outcomes (Atkinson, 1957). It is not equivalent to the RFT framework's focus on whether the desired and undesired outcomes are based on growth-oriented (i.e., promotion) or security-oriented (i.e., prevention) goals (Molden & Winterheld, 2013). Attachment theory also has similarities to the RFT though they differ in their descriptions of when motivations are learned. The former indicates that these motivations arise during childhood due to the consistency of support they received from caregivers (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2020; Molden & Winterheld, 2013). The latter suggests that the motivations develop over time based on the patterns of support that an individual receives that predisposes them to be oriented towards growth-related or security-related motivations (Molden & Winterheld, 2013). Someone with a strong promotion or prevention orientation can

109

have any attachment orientation (Molden & Winterheld, 2013). Based on these theoretical distinctions between approach-avoidance, attachment theory, and the RFT, there is support for the RFT as a distinct motivational framework.

The RFT themes were not equally discussed by participants, and some themes did not emerge in the dominant codes assigned to the participants. For example, when talking about the impact of sexual communication on their relationship, they much more frequently discussed growth-oriented motivations compared to security-orientation motivations. When discussing motivations related to their partner, they more often discussed growth-oriented motivations. When discussing motivations related to the self, they discussed both motivations more evenly. These frequencies could speak to what is relatively more important (i.e., growth or security) when an individual is using one focus of motivation (e.g., self) compared to another (e.g., partner). Due to the quality of the data and the smaller sample size, these data need to be replicated and expanded before drawing further conclusions about how the focus of the motivation affects the disclosure process.

Overall, participants' responses aligned with the findings from Studies 1a and 1b, which focused on the measurement of sexual communication. In the first program of research, I used a multidimensional self-report questionnaire to assess sexual communication, the adapted Sexual Disclosure Scales (SDS) measure (Brown & Weigel, 2018), which aligned best with my conceptualization of this construct. In their qualitative responses, participants mentioned all the processes of sexual communication measured in the questionnaire (i.e., perceived consequences, perceived importance, and depth of disclosure) as well as the three content areas subscales that were identified using Exploratory Factor Analysis (i.e., sexual preferences, sexual health disclosure, and sexual behaviours). They also discussed the importance of sexual communication

as the process by which they can achieve and maintain sexual consent, which suggests that this is also an important content area of sexual communication, though it is not measured by the SDS.

In conclusion, this study contributed to the understanding of the role of motivations in the process of sexual communication. These findings were incorporated into conceptual changes to the Brown and Weigel (2018) model, which I intend to test in Study 2b.

Study 2b Introduction

The foundational findings of Study 2a allowed me to adapt the original Process Model of Sexual Communication developed by Brown and Weigel (2018), the Process Model of Sexual Communication (PMSC; Figure 15). The outcome variable in the model uses Brown and Weigel (2018)'s conceptualization of sexual satisfaction as the outcome of sexual communication, though there are many other possible outcome variables, such as actual and perceived partner understanding of own sexual preferences. The overall goal of Study 2b was to further validate the key associations in the PMSC using data from an independent sample. If all the constructs in the proposed model have meaningful associations, this information will support further use and testing of the model.

Process Model Construct Operationalization

The proposed model included the same four constructs as Study 2a: relationship context, individual factors, sexual communication, and sexual satisfaction. As previously noted, many variables could be selected as indicators of each of these constructs. For the current program of research, I am using dyadic communication and relationship satisfaction as indicators of relationship context, insecure attachment and experiential avoidance as individual factors, and measures of sexual self-disclosure and barriers to sexual communication as indicators of overall sexual communication. I do not purport to have assessed all process variables exhaustively in the current study. Rather, I hope that if the data from the current study support the proposed model, this model will serve as the foundation for: 1) testing the relevance of additional process features, 2) identifying additional content, and 3) determining which process variables may be particularly important for certain types of content. I will discuss the measurement of each construct included in the PMSC in more depth.

Relationship Context

The context of the relationship in which sexual communication occurs has important implications for sexual communication behaviours (Mark & Jozkowski, 2013; Merwin & Rosen, 2020). In Study 2a, participants described a mutually satisfying sexual relationship as an important motivator for engaging in sexual communication. I tested relationship satisfaction along with sexual satisfaction as possible outcome variables though the predictors related to them both similarly in most models. As such, I chose to include relationship satisfaction in the model as a measure of the relationship context, consistent with previous work (Brown & Weigel, 2018; Mark & Jozkowski, 2013).

Individual Factors

In Study 2a, participants described avoiding sexual communication because it brought up or they anticipated that it would bring up uncomfortable emotions. Individual factors also emerged as an important aspect of the sexual communication process in Studies 1a and 1b. Specifically, I found that avoidant attachment and experiential avoidance negatively affected sexual communication. Though other individual factors likely also impact sexual communication and were even described by participants in their Study 2a qualitative responses, I will again focus on these individual factors to test the proposed PMSC.

Process and Content of Sexual Communication

I included two scales that measured four aspects of the process of communication. I assessed the perceived consequences, perceived importance, and perceived depth of disclosure using the *Sexual Disclosure Scales* (SDS; Brown & Weigel, 2018). The *Barriers to Communication Questionnaire* (BCQ) measures perceived barriers to communicating sexual likes and sexual dislikes (Rehman et al., 2019). Though correlated, all these measures of the

process of communication were distinct in Studies 1a and 1b. I chose to include both measures of sexual communication; combined, these assess four aspects of the communication process: perceived consequences, perceived importance, barriers to disclosure, and depth of disclosure. I consider this approach to represent many of the process components of sexual communication, though I acknowledge that it is not a comprehensive coverage of all aspects of sexual communication.

To measure motivational orientation, in addition to the open-response questions, I also included the Regulatory Focus Questionnaire (RFQ), a questionnaire measure of Regulatory Focus Theory (RFT) promotion and prevention-focused motivations (Higgins et al., 2001). Though this questionnaire measures general motivations and is not a sex-specific measure, I included it as an indicator of the participants' overall predominant motivational approach, consistent with previous research that suggests an individual can become chronically aligned with a particular goal pursuit based on previous experiences (Molden & Winterheld, 2013).

The RFT describes two modes of goal pursuit: promotion-focused goals (i.e., working towards achieving positive outcomes, gains, and avoiding the absence of the outcomes, nongains) and prevention-focused goals (i.e., achieving safety and security and protecting against negative outcomes, nonloss, and avoiding the presence of negative outcomes, loss; Molden et al., 2008). To illustrate the concepts of gain, non-gain, loss, and non-loss, consider the following example. Priya has identified patterns in the type of people she chooses on online dating apps and has noticed that her constant failure to establish genuine romantic connections with people might be because of the type of people with whom she chooses to connect. She appreciates that when people have flexible schedules to accommodate her limited availability, that often means that her dates do not have the same investment in their careers. Though these differences have

caused problems for her in the past, she finds it comforting to know that someone will be able to accommodate her schedule. She is now faced with a decision to go on a date with one of two people. Person A is between jobs, kind, and seems eager to work around her schedule and has many qualities that remind Priya of people she has dated in the past. Person B is driven and has achieved a lot of career advancement; they are interesting, engaging, and have a lot in common with Priya and she is highly attracted and interested in pursuing a relationship with them, though she worries that their competing schedules may make dates difficult to coordinate. If Priya was most concerned with advancement (i.e., promotion), she may choose to date Person B (i.e., gain) and consider not going on the date as a missed opportunity, which she could find disappointing (i.e., nongain). If Priya was most concerned with achieving safety and security (i.e., prevention), she may choose to date Person A due to the familiarity (i.e., nonloss), which would prevent the potential discomfort from trying something new (i.e., loss). Ultimately, the RFT describes how goals for behaviour, whether promotion or prevention-focused, are pleasurable when achieved and inherently motivating for individuals (Molden & Winterheld, 2013).

Study 2b Research Questions

The first research question (RQ) is to determine if the Study 2a coding structure successfully replicates in Study 2b or if modifications need to be made to the coding structure (RQ1). I hypothesized that the coding structure would replicate (H1). The other research questions were designed as a series of analyses to test the components of the PMSC. I will describe each research goal and describe which relationships in the model each is designed to test (See Figure 15). The second research question was to determine if individual factors and relationship context factors are both important in predicting sexual satisfaction (RQ2; relationships a, b, c). I hypothesized that they would both account for unique variance in sexual

115

satisfaction (H2). Third, I wanted to determine if individual factors and relationship context factors are both important in predicting motivations (RQ3; relationships d, e). I hypothesized that all factors would predict the prevention and promotion motivations (H3). Fourth, I wanted to assess whether Regulatory Focus Theory (RFT) motivations predict sexual communication (RQ4; relationships f, g). I hypothesized that the motivations would account for significant variance in the process and content components of sexual communication (H4). Fifth, I also wanted to determine if individual factors and relationship context factors are both important in predicting depth of disclosure (RQ5). I hypothesized that all measured factors would account for significant variance in depth of disclosure (H5). Sixth, I wanted to determine if all four process aspects of sexual communication included in the model are important in predicting sexual satisfaction (RQ6; relationships h, i, j, k). I hypothesized that all the measured components of sexual communication would account for unique variance in sexual satisfaction (H6).

Study 2b Method

Study 2b Participants

The data for Study 2b were collected as part of Study 1b (described earlier). Thus, the recruitment methods, participant sample size, and data integrity checks were all the same. The final sample collected from the United States and Canada using Prolific consisted of 241 participants. Full participant demographic information is outlined in Table 1.

Study 2b Measures

Participants completed the same background questionnaire and qualitative questions as Study 2a. The following self-report questionnaires were added to test the relationships between constructs in the PMSC. The descriptive statistics and internal consistency scores for all measures used in both Study 2a and Study 2b are listed in Table 14. All self-report measures had acceptable reliability, as measured by Cronbach's alpha, most had good reliability ($\alpha s \geq .86$) though one scale (RFQ prevention dimension) had only acceptable reliability of .70.

Relationship Context

Relationship Satisfaction. Relationship satisfaction was measured with the 4-item Couples Satisfaction Index (CSI-4; Funk & Rogge, 2007), which examines the happiness (i.e., "Please indicate the degree of happiness, all things considered, of your relationship"), comfort (i.e., "I have a warm and comfortable relationship with my partner"), reward (i.e., "How rewarding is your relationship with your partner?"), and satisfaction (i.e., "In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?") on a 6-point scale from "not at all true" to "completely true," with higher total scores indicating more relationship satisfaction. The scale's internal consistency was good in the current study ($\alpha = .89$).

117

Dyadic Communication. I used the Dyadic Communication Scale (DCS), which assesses a broad range of components related to the interpersonal process of communicating with an intimate partner. The DCS includes similar items to the Dyadic Sexual Communication Scale developed by Catania and colleagues (1989) though the items relate to nonsexual dyadic communication. This measure was validated as a one-dimensional scale and includes items related to the effectiveness of communication (e.g., "my partner and I never seem to resolve our disagreements"; reverse scored), partner responsiveness (e.g., "my partner rarely responds when I want to talk"; reverse scored), avoidance of communication (e.g., "some matters are too upsetting to discuss with my partner"; reverse scored), emotions evoked (e.g., "I seldom feel embarrassed when talking with my partner"), and the satisfaction with communication (e.g., "talking together is a satisfying experience for both of us"). Participants rated how much they agreed or disagreed with each statement using a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (disagree strongly) to 6 (agree strongly) on 13 items (e.g., "I have little difficulty in telling my partner what I will or won't do" and "Talking together is a satisfying experience for both of us"). Higher total scores indicate better perceived dyadic communication. The scale's internal consistency was good in the current study ($\alpha = .87$).

Individual Factors

Attachment. I used the nine-item Experiences in Close Relationships - Relationship Structures (ECR-RS) to measure attachment insecurity along the two measured dimensions of avoidant attachment (e.g., "I'm afraid that my partner may abandon me") and anxious attachment (e.g., "I don't feel comfortable opening up to my partner") on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) (Fraley et al., 2011). Higher average scores on both

dimensions indicate responses consistent with more insecure attachment. The internal consistencies for both avoidant (α = .81) and anxious (α = .94) attachment were acceptable.

Experiential Avoidance. I used the Acceptance and Action Questionnaire (AAQ-2) to assess participants' experiential avoidance and psychological inflexibility (Bond et al., 2011). The scale asked participants to rate the seven items on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never true) to 7 (always true), with higher total scores indicating more experiential avoidance and psychological inflexibility (e.g., "I worry about not being able to control my worries and feelings"). The scale's internal consistency was excellent in the current study (α = .92).

Sexual Communication

Sexual Self-Disclosure. To assess sexual self-disclosure, participants completed the adapted Sexual Disclosure Scales (SDS), originally developed by Brown and Weigel (2018). The scale measures three process dimensions of sexual self-disclosure: perceived consequences, perceived importance, and depth of disclosure. Each of the dimensions used the same list of 17 sexual topics that are frequently discussed with a sexual partner (e.g., "oral sex"; "my sexual satisfaction"; "sexual problems or difficulties I might have").

I made two notable changes to this measure in Studies 1a and 1b. First, I added a process dimension of sexual communication. This scale was originally developed to measure two dimensions of sexual self-disclosure, 1) the perceived consequence of disclosing that to an intimate partner and 2) the actual level of depth in which they had disclosed that item in a current relationship. I added a third dimension that was designed to capture the perceived importance of each item. Second, I changed the item list after an Exploratory Factor Analysis. The final items list contained 17 items (with two of the original items removed and one added item). For details of these changes, refer to Study 1b.

The question for the *perceived consequences of disclosure* scale was, "Please select the response that best reflects what you believe would happen if you were to talk to your partner about each of the following topics." The 5-point Likert scale for this dimension ranged from 1 (negative relationship effect) to 3 (no relationship effect) and 5 (positive relationship effect), with higher total scores indicating greater perceived positive consequences of disclosure. The internal consistency for the perceived consequences scale was excellent ($\alpha = .91$).

The question for the *perceived importance of disclosure* scale was, "How important do you think it is to disclose this to your current primary romantic partner?" The 5-point Likert scale for this dimension ranged from 1 (I do not think this is important to discuss with my partner) to 5 (I think this is very important to discuss with my partner), with higher total scores indicating greater perceived importance of the item within the context of disclosing to an intimate partner. The internal consistency for the perceived importance scale was excellent ($\alpha = .90$).

The question for the *depth of disclosure* scale was, "Please select the response that best reflects what you have actually disclosed to your current primary romantic partner." The depth of disclosure 5-point Likert scale ranged from 1 (I have avoided talking to my partner about this topic) to 5 (I have talked openly and completely to my partner about this topic), with higher total scores indicating greater depth of disclosure with their partners across the presented sexual topics. The internal consistency for the depth of disclosure scale was good ($\alpha = .88$).

Barriers to Sexual Communication. I used the Barriers to Communication Questionnaire (BCQ; Rehman et al., 2019) to assess participants' perceptions of barriers to communicating sexual likes and sexual dislikes. The instructions prompt participants to think about a sexual like and then, in a separate scale, a sexual dislike and consider the extent to which they believe the 20 items would apply to their discussion on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from

120

1 (not at all true) to 5 (very true). Items include "the discussion will embarrass my partner," "the discussion will make me feel that I am not normal," and "the discussion will reveal core differences between us." Barriers to communicating sexual likes and sexual dislikes are scored separately . Higher total scores indicate more perceived barriers to sexual communication. The internal consistency for both scales was excellent in the current study (αs = .97).

Prevention and Promotion Motivations. Participants' motivations were assessed using the Regulatory Focus Questionnaire (RFQ; Higgins et al., 2001). The 11-item questionnaire includes dimensions of promotion (growth and advancement-related motivations) and prevention (safety and security-related motivations). Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never or seldom) to 3 (sometimes) and 5 (very often), with higher average scores indicating stronger motivations in that dimension. I included this scale in Study 2b to have a quantitative measure of the qualitative themes that emerged in Study 2a that described the RFT framework. The internal consistency for the prevention dimension was acceptable (α = .70) and promotion dimension was good (α = .82).

Sexual Satisfaction

The 5-item Global Measure of Sexual Satisfaction (GMSEX; Lawrance & Byers, 1998) examined sexual satisfaction by asking participants to answer "How would you describe your sexual relationship with your partner?" using five 7-point bipolar scales answering the question: good-bad, pleasant-unpleasant, positive-negative, satisfying-unsatisfying, valuable-worthless. The items are summed with total scores ranging from 7 to 35, with higher scores indicating great sexual satisfaction. The scale's internal consistency was excellent in the current study (α = .97).

Study 2b Procedure

The data were collected as part of Study 1b and the procedures were all the same.

Study 2b Statistical Analyses

Study 2b Research Question 1

      I used qualitative coding of the open-response questions to determine if the Study 2a coding structure replicates with these new data. All participants responded to each question. The purpose of these analyses was to determine if the 12-item coding structure developed in Study 2a was replicable. As we were using an existing coding structure, we only performed one full round of coding. The three-person coding team comprised of myself, my supervisor, and the same trained research assistant as Study 2a. The research assistant and I each coded the same 40 responses. We then met as a team and agreed that the coding structure was still appropriate for these new data without any erroneous responses (i.e., ones that could not be coded with the existing coding structure). We also noted that the qualitative responses for this study were much more detailed compared to those for Study 2a. A total of 83% of the responses ($n = 227$) were deemed viable. The added details allowed for more variation in the understanding of what participants considered to be most important in disclosing likes, dislikes, and fantasies and how they differed from each other. Specifically, the more complex responses allowed us to make two notable changes to the way we coded the data. First, we decided to code each of the three sections separately, as well as assign a dominant code to capture the overarching theme that emerged across the three questions. The resulting coding process meant that we assigned four separate codes to each participant: (a) likes (Cohen's kappa = .96), (b) dislikes (Cohen's kappa = .91), (c) fantasies (Cohen's kappa = .93), and (d) overarching dominant theme (Cohen's kappa = .96). Any disagreements were discussed as a coding team to reach a consensus. Second, we were able to identify two higher-order themes (i.e., broad theoretical concepts) that participants described regardless of their motivation orientation (i.e., promotion or prevention-focused) as

relevant to the process of sexual communication more broadly. These additional coded responses are included in the description of the findings below.

The research assistant and I then coded all the participants' responses. We were not able to code some responses because they did not directly answer the question we were asking. For instance, some participants just responded by saying that they *do* or *do not* share with their partner and provided no additional explanation (e.g., *"I just instinctively share"*), or shared the content or nature of their sexual preference instead of explaining reasons for disclosure (e.g., *"good scent, no lighting"* and *"no shower, too much smooching"*), or by reporting that they do not know their own preferences (e.g., *"I don't know. I never thought about it"*), or by stating that they do not believe that aspect of their sexuality is important (e.g., *"I'm not into that stuff. I don't sit around thinking about sex and forming fantasies. I live in reality"*). In total, there were responses in each category that were not codable: overall dominant theme ($n = 16$), sexual likes ($n = 22$), sexual dislikes ($n = 19$), and sexual fantasies ($n = 34$). Compared to sexual likes and sexual dislikes, which only a few participants reported not having, relatively more participants described not having sexual fantasies. Only the dominant themes were included in the mixed methods analyses (i.e., RQ3).

Study 2b Research Questions 2-6

To address each of these goals, I employed quantitative analyses. Specifically, many were answered using bivariate regression and multiple regression approaches with the questionnaire data (RQs 2, 4, 5). I also used a one-way analysis of variance to test the difference between coded variable groups for RQ4. I used logistic regression and multiple regression for RQ3, using both the qualitative coded responses and the RFQ as outcome variables. Finally, I used hierarchical multiple regression to test RQ6.

Study 2b Results

Study 2b Research Question 1 Results

The frequencies of all qualitative coded responses are listed in Table 15. There was

considerable variability in how frequently each of the 12 coding categories was discussed.

Similar to Study 2a, themes emerged across the 12 coding categories; however, with the

increased level of detail in the qualitative responses for Study 2b, we also identified higher-order

themes that participants described were important to their sexual communication. These themes

were observed across self, partner, and relationship-focused responses and also across responses

that were prevention and promotion-focused. The additional themes fell into two categories,

either relating to the *Process of Disclosure* or the *Status of the Relationship*. I will first describe

the emergent broader theoretical constructs before describing the RFT themes (i.e., self vs. other

focus and prevention vs. promotion focus).

Broad Theoretical Concepts

Process of Disclosure. The most common theme that participants discussed was

generally feeling comfortable in their relationship and with their partner (e.g., *"how comfortable*

I am in the relationship"). Participants described that their level of comfort also impacted how

their perception of the threat related to sexual disclosure. For example, as their comfort

increased, they perceived sexual disclosure to be safer with respect to their own self (e.g., *"When*

you feel comfortable with your partner, you expect no judgment from them, so you can share all

your thoughts"), their partner (e.g., *"If they are not comfortable it would be harder to bring up*

the topic"), and their relationship (e.g., *"how comfortable I felt with the person and if I felt that*

telling them my sexual likes would make a positive impact on our relationship").

Participants also frequently discussed feeling more at ease disclosing preferences when

their partners disclosed first (e.g., *"I also think it helps if they share first, as it helps me feel at*

ease and more comfortable sharing my own desires and turn ons"), even if they were previously apprehensive about disclosure (e.g., "*If my partner shared a fantasy with me first then I may share one with them if heavily prompted. Like if they keep asking. I will not openly share*"). Some participants discussed initiating conversations about their preferences so their partner would feel more comfortable disclosing theirs (e.g., *"I decided to share my turn-ons in order to have her more comfortable with sharing hers… by sharing mine first, I hoped (and succeeded) that it would make her comfortable to share hers"*).

Participants also discussed the purpose of the disclosure. They described that avoiding pain or discomfort was a strong motivator for disclosure (e.g., *"If it causes pain or physical discomfort, I share this feedback right away. Otherwise, I might share it after sex when it won't be embarrassing for my partner"*). Disclosing for the purpose of achieving sexual pleasure or enhancing sexual intimacy was less frequently mentioned (e.g., *"I would only share a fantasy if it… would lead to greater intimacy with my partner"*).

Participants also described differences in their experiences of disclosing sexual likes compared to sexual dislikes. Most participants described seeing sexual likes and dislikes as more important and necessary to disclose in a relationship, with sexual fantasies serving other functions such as rekindling a sexual relationship (e.g., *"If I feel like the sexual intimacy isn't there then that's when I offer one of my fantasies so that we can spice it up a bit"*). However, some participants discussed fantasies as a primary aspect of relationships related to self-expression and sexual desire (e.g., *"Being open and honest with a partner about one's sexual fantasies can help partners better understand each other's desires and potentially enhance their sexual experiences together"*). When comparing sexual likes and dislikes, participants often described one as more important or necessary to discuss with their partner. When dislikes were

125

prioritized by the participant, they discussed the importance of setting boundaries within a relationship and avoiding discomfort (e.g., *"I'm more willing to set boundaries regarding what I don't like because I don't want to do anything that would harm my perception of the relationship"*). When likes were more important to the participant, they discussed the impact on their pleasure and described that sharing is essential for building a mutually pleasurable sexual script with their partner. Most participants described the consequences of not disclosing sexual likes as less severe than not disclosing sexual dislikes (e.g., *"This is also important, but the worst that happens if you don't share [a sexual like] is that you won't likely experience what you like"*) and a few found disclosing likes more difficult (e.g., *"I would have to feel more comfortable with my partner before disclosing some turn-ons. I think of my turn-ons as being more personal, so I would have to feel safe enough to do so"*), though others described disclosing dislikes as more challenging (e.g., *"Sharing my turn-offs with a partner involves me trusting the partner more than sharing my turn-ons. That trust must be developed over time"*). Some participants also described sexual likes and sexual dislikes as equally important, though this happened a lot less frequently (e.g., *"Sharing sexual likes is equally important [to dislikes] to improve your relationship"*).

Status of the Relationship. Participants discussed themes related to the status of their relationship itself. First, participants discussed the impact of the duration of their relationship on disclosure. Notably, some participants discussed that it was easier to disclose sexual preferences at the beginning of their relationship (e.g., *"I think that these very natural early encounters help to create a foundation where we can openly talk about developing our sex life in the future, sharing our fantasies, and expressing our desires to try new things or techniques"*) and that they perceived there to be less risk to the disclosure (e.g*., "I also find it easier to share early in a*

126

relationship, maybe I feel there is less at stake then… less to lose earlier in a relationship"),
though more people discussed that it was easier to discuss preferences with a longer-term
relationship partner (e.g., *"It is much easier because we have known each other for so long now.*
So time and experiences and openness with one another helps a lot").

Relatedly, participants discussed the anticipated duration and level of commitment for the
relationship factored into their decision to disclose their sexual preferences. Some participants
described that it was easier for them to engage in disclosure in casual relationships (e.g., *"I have*
always felt more liberated in casual relationships. I struggle with the fear of judgement when in
serious relationships"). Most participants who discussed this theme, however, described that they
feel more investment in a longer-term relationship that motivates them to disclose (e.g., "*If you*
are in a committed relationship this is important to share… but [I] have not shared it with casual
relationships or one-night stand as I am not close and comfortable enough with the person to
share this") or that they selectively disclose depending on the type of relationship (e.g., "*When I*
was in a more [casual] relationship I did not disclose…"[taboo]" turn ons I had as I did not feel
safe sharing them nor did I want to engage with that turn on with that particular partner").

Regulatory Focus Themes

The emergent 12-code coding structure created in Study 2a was successfully replicated in
that the codes reached saturation using the coding structure, despite varied frequencies in the
codes with some sections having very few occurrences. Participants described their motivations
for disclosure in terms of whether they were considering the self, their partner, or their
relationship for both promotion (i.e., gain and nongain) and prevention (loss and nonloss)
motivations. The ways in which participants described their motivations within each code (i.e.,
theme) were similar to those outlined in Study 2a, though the considerably more detailed

responses provided even more support for the constructs and directionality of associations in the proposed PMSC. Due to the similarities between gain and nongain as well as loss and nonloss themes, I will again discuss them together in six sections related to the motivation and focus of the response (self promotion-focused, self prevention-focused, partner promotion-focused, partner prevention-focused, relationship promotion-focused, and relationship prevention-focused). I will note what similarities there are compared to the Study 2a results and then describe the differences that emerged within each section more thoroughly. I include the frequencies for the occurrence of each theme as the dominant code.

Self Promotion-Focused. The themes for both gain (e.g., wanting their own sexual satisfaction, being an open partner) and nongain (e.g., not achieving own sexual pleasure) self-promotion motivations were similar to those in Study 2a. This theme was the dominant theme of 42 participants.

Self Prevention-Focused. The themes were similar to those in Study 2a. Self-prevention loss-focused motivations commonly involved avoiding a perceived threat to themselves (e.g., feared judgment) or avoiding negative emotional experiences (e.g., embarrassment). Participants, again, described strategies such as waiting for their partner to engage in disclosure first or only disclosing when there was a notable consequence to not disclosing (e.g., extremely affecting intimacy). The nonloss themes also focused on avoiding disclosure to avoid the perceived threats to self, judgments, and negative emotional experiences. This theme was the dominant theme for 61 participants.

Partner Promotion-Focused. The themes for both gain (e.g., partner behaviours encouraging nonsexual communication, modelling sexual communication, asking direct questions) and nongain (e.g., wanting to disclose but their partner's unresponsiveness or lack of

openness to hearing sexual preferences causing disappointment) partner-promotion motivations were similar to those in Study 2a. This theme was the dominant theme of 27 participants.

The more detailed responses in Study 2b allowed for further understanding of the process by which their partner affected their motivations. For example, one participant described how these components were helpful for her to disclosure her sexual preferences to her partner:

My husband shared his personal sexual turn-offs with me first and asked me if I was feeling ok hearing all the detail. I really appreciated his approach and I shared my turn-offs shortly after. Just the fact that he opened up to me first really made me comfortable.

Partner Prevention-Focused. The themes for both loss and nonloss mostly centered around avoiding disclosure in an attempt to avoid a negative outburst from their partner (e.g., defensiveness) or causing a negative emotional response in their partner (e.g., shame, guilt). This theme was the dominant theme of 33 participants.

Relationship Promotion-Focused. The themes for both gain and nongain were similar to those in Study 2a and related to describing disclosure as necessary to develop closeness, intimacy, and mutually pleasurable sexual repertoires, which was described as positive if achieved (i.e., gain) and disappointing if not achieved (i.e., nongain). This theme was the dominant theme of 63 participants.

Relationship Prevention-Focused. Similar to Study 2a, this theme was also the least frequently discussed, though this dataset allowed for some important clarification in understanding the loss and security-focused prevention motivations that participants perceived regarding their relationship. Participants mostly discussed positive impacts of disclosure on their relationship (i.e., promotion-focused). When they described prevention-focused motivations, their responses were often centred on what appeared like a cost-benefit analysis of the disclosure

itself that they perceived to be heavily weighted on the costs of the relationship because of the nature of what they would be disclosing and with little to no gain. For example, one participant wrote the following:

> We understand that [disclosing sexual fantasies] is a very normal thing for people to have but have never seen or felt the need to share these thing in much detail as we feel there is always the chance for this to cause discomfort or hurt to the other with no real gain.

Other participants also described the perceived negative consequences of disclosure (e.g., *"If society views the fantasy as more extreme it will affect whether I share or not, especially if it has the potential to threaten our marriage"*), some because of previous experiences (e.g., *"In past relationships I have found that not speaking about turn offs has led to catastrophic endings of those relationships"*). A few participants mentioned that their concerns were specifically related to sexual desires that they felt their partner could not meet or would not be open to exploring, such as sexual activities involving people other than their partner (e.g., *"I never really have because they are thoughts or images that I wouldn't act on or involve other people do it wouldn't do much good to share those and it doesn't hurt anyone not to"*). There are also nonloss themes discussed, including avoiding a conflict or potential mismatch in desires or expectations from not disclosing (e.g., *"...it was very easy to be open because there was relief that there wouldn't be much conflict between us on that topic"*). This theme was the dominant theme of only two participants.

Study 2b Research Question 2 Results

To answer the second research question, I examined the associations between relationship context factors, individual factors, and sexual satisfaction. I first examined the bivariate correlations and they were all significantly correlated to each other ($ps < .01$; See Table 16).

130

Sexual satisfaction was positively correlated with the relationship context variables (i.e., DCS, CSI-4) and negatively associated with the measured individual factors (i.e., ECR-RS, AAQ-2). The individual factors were positively correlated with each other, as were the relationship context factors.

I then conducted a simultaneous multiple regression analysis with the individual and relationship context factors entered as predictors to determine if they both uniquely contribute to predicting sexual satisfaction (See Table 17, model 19). The model accounted for 50% of the variance in sexual satisfaction, and there was weak evidence that one individual factor (i.e., avoidant attachment $b = -0.61$, $p = .076$) and strong evidence that both relationship context factors (i.e., CSI-4 $b = 0.75$, $p < .001$; DCS $b = 0.13$, $p < .001$) were meaningful predictors in the model.

Study 2b Research Question 3 Results

To determine if both the individual factors and relationship context factors are important in predicting motivations, I assessed both the coded variables and the RFQ as outcome variables.

I created two binary outcome variables to test the coded motivations based on the two distinct themes identified in the coding structure: 1) promotion or prevention focused-motivations and 2) self or other-focused (i.e., partner, relationship) motivations. I then conducted four logistic regression models using these binary variables as outcomes to determine if both individual (i.e., attachment insecurity and experiential avoidance) and relationship context (i.e., relationship satisfaction, dyadic communication) factors were important predictors for the RFT motivations (See Table 18). The first model (model 20) examined whether attachment insecurity and experiential avoidance predicted promotion-focused motivations (versus prevention-focused) for disclosing sexual preferences. This model explained ~9% of the variation in outcomes and

131

provided a significantly better fit than an intercept-only model ($p = .001$). Approximately 61% of decisions were accurately classified. Controlling for anxious attachment and experiential avoidance, each unit increased in avoidant attachment was associated with a decrease of 0.45 in the odds of having a promotion-focused motivation ($p < .001$), meaning that individuals high in attachment avoidance were more likely to have prevention-focused motivations. Holding other variables constant, anxious attachment and experiential avoidance were not reliably associated with promotion-focused motivations. In the second model (model 21), which examined self or other-focused motivations as the outcome variable, none of the individual factors reliably predicted self-focused motivations, and the model did not provide a significantly better fit than an intercept-only model.

In the third model (model 22), the analysis examined whether relationship satisfaction and dyadic communication predicted promotion-focused motivations for disclosing sexual preferences. This model explained ~6% of the variance in outcomes and provided a significantly better fit than an intercept-only model ($p = .006$). Approximately 62% of decisions were accurately classified. Controlling for relationship satisfaction, there was weak evidence that each unit increased in dyadic communication was associated with an increase of 1.03 in the odds of having a promotion-focused motivation ($p = .057$). Controlling for dyadic communication, relationship satisfaction was not reliably associated with promotion-focused motivations. In the fourth model (model 23), neither relationship context factor reliably predicted self-focused motivations, and the model did not provide a significantly better fit than an intercept-only model.

To conceptually replicate the first and third logistic regression models (models 2 and 4), I conducted multiple regression analyses using the RFQ as the outcome variables. I could not replicate the second and fourth models (models 3 and 5) as I did not include a quantitative

measure of the focus of the motivations for sexual self-disclosure in this study. I first conducted

two hierarchical multiple regressions to simultaneously test the individual factors (entered in step

1) and relationship context factors (entered in step 2), but the models were not significant for

either promotion-focused ($p = .763$) or prevention-focused ($p = .801$). As an exploratory set of

analyses, I tested the effects across four separate multiple regression analyses to test whether

there were separate effects that were being cancelled out due to the overlap between these

constructs (See Table 19, models 24-27). There were some significant effects in the separate

analyses. When predicting promotion-focused motivations in separate models, the individual

factors accounted for 33%, and the relationship context factors accounted for 9% of the total

variance ($ps < .001$). Higher experiential avoidance predicted less promotion-focused motivations

($b = -0.03, p < .001$) while controlling for the effects of insecure attachment. Higher dyadic

communication predicted more promotion-focused motivations ($b = 0.01, p = .007$) above and

beyond relationship satisfaction. When predicting prevention-focused motivations in separate

models, the individual factors were not reliable predictors, and there was weak evidence that

relationship context factors accounted for 2% of the total variance ($p = .054$), with weak evidence

for dyadic communication as a predictor variable ($b = 0.01, p = .059$).

Study 2b Research Question 4 Results

I first used a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to determine if there were group

differences in depth of disclosure based on the dominant themes. Due to variation in frequencies

between the 12 levels of coding, I decided to conduct the analysis using only the general

promotion and prevention-focused themes instead of breaking it down by gain, nongain, loss,

and nonloss (resulting in six levels of coding). Additionally, there were only two responses for

relationship-prevention motivations, so I omitted that level of coding from this analysis. The

133

resulting one-way ANOVA had one categorical predictor with five levels (self promotion, self prevention, partner promotion, partner prevention, relationship promotion) predicting depth of disclosure (See Figure 16 and Table 20). There was a significant main effect of motivation category by depth of disclosure, $F(4, 220) = 6.28$, $p = .008$. I used a Brown-Forsythe correction ($p < .001$) to account for the heterogeneity in the variance between the groups, as indicated by a significant Levene's test based on the mean, $F(4, 220) = 3.52$, $p = .008$. Using Games-Howell post hoc tests, there were some significant mean differences. Specifically, those with relationship promotion-focused motivations reported higher depth of disclosure than both partner prevention-focused motivations ($p = .005$) and self prevention-focused motivations ($p < .001$).

Figure 16

One-way ANOVA with Five-Level RFT Coded Variable Predicting Depth of Disclosure
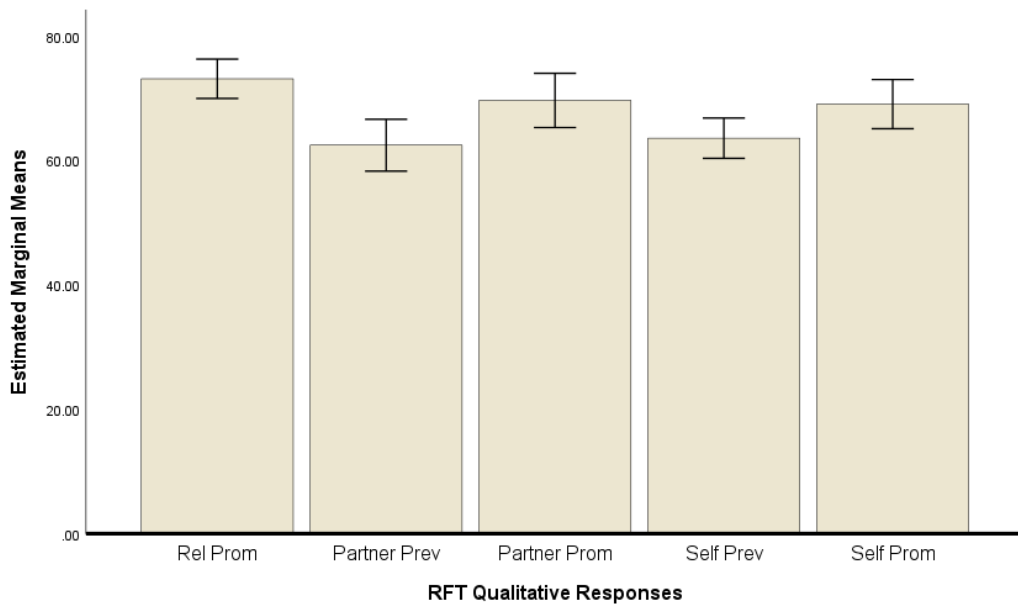
Note. Error bars represent +/- 1 standard deviation of restricted error. The analysis was based on dominant RFT codes predicting depth of disclosure. Rel Prom = Relationship-focused promotion motivations. Partner Prev = Partner=focused prevention motivations. Partner Prom = Partner-focused promotion motivations. Self Prev = Self-focused prevention motivations. Self Prom =

Self-focused promotion motivations. Relationship-prevention motivations were not included in the analysis due to its low frequency ($n = 2$).

In separate multiple regression models, I then examined whether the promotion and prevention dimensions of the RFQ predicted each of the four dimensions (models 28-31) and each of the three content areas of sexual communication (models 32-34; See Table 21). Promotion-focused motivations negatively predicted one dimension, BCQ sexual dislikes ($b = -4.10$, $p = .016$), though prevention-focused motivations did not predict any of the dimensions. In terms of the content areas, promotion-focused motivations positively predicted the sexual preference content area ($b = 3.75$, $p = .006$); however, prevention-focused motivations did not predict any of the content areas.

Study 2b Research Question 5 Results

I conducted a simultaneous multiple regression analysis with the individual and relationship context factors entered as predictors to determine if they both uniquely contribute to predicting depth of disclosure (See Table 22, model 35). The model accounted for 19% of the variance in depth of disclosure, and one individual factor (i.e., avoidant attachment $b = -2.00$, $p = .019$) and one relationship context factor (i.e., DCS $b = 0.41$, $p < .001$) were significant predictors.

Study 2b Research Question 6 Results

To examine the simultaneous relationships of all the hypothesized components of sexual communication when predicting sexual satisfaction, I conducted a hierarchical multiple regression analysis with sexual satisfaction as the outcome variable (See Table 23). I entered the sets of variables based on their hypothesized order within the PMSC. Since all of the SDS scales use the same items, I wanted to limit the collinearity in the model by only including the most

strongly related content area, sexual preferences (as evident by correlational relationships and findings in Study 1b). The multicollinearity, as measured by the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), ranged from 1.06 to 5.58, which is high though not indicative of serious concern according to many guidelines for multicollinearity (e.g., Vittingoff et al., 2005). In Step 1, I entered the RFQ dimensions (i.e., Promotion-Focused and Prevention-Focused), and the model accounted for 7% of the variance ($p < .001$). In Step 2, I entered the content area factor (i.e., *disclosure about sexual preferences*), and there was a significant model improvement, accounting for 33% additional variance ($p < .001$). In step 3, I entered the dimensions of sexual communication (i.e., BCQ Sexual Likes and Sexual Dislikes, SDS Perceived Consequences, SDS Perceived Importance), which significantly improved the model fit, accounting for an additional 6% of the variance ($p < .001$). Finally, I entered depth of disclosure into the model, resulting in a significant improvement to the model fit, accounting for 1% more of the variance. In total, the final model accounted for 47% of the variance.

Study 2b Discussion

The Study 2b findings largely supported the research questions and corresponding hypotheses.

The 12-theme RFT coding structure developed in Study 2a again captured the themes of the participant responses. The quality of the responses was notably better compared to Study 2a (i.e., more detailed explanations, clearer responses). With this additional information, I was also able to extend these findings by assigning codes for each of the three questions as well as the dominant theme, which allowed us to identify thematic similarities and differences in how participants described considerations for disclosing sexual likes, sexual dislikes, and sexual fantasies. Similar to Study 2a, the promotion-focused themes captured motivations that were focused on growth and advancement-related motivations, while the prevention-focused themes described motivations that were focused on safety and security, consistent with the RFT (Molden & Winterheld, 2013). The themes were, again, not equally discussed by participants though in different relative frequencies than Study 2a. Participants again discussed relationship growth-oriented motivations much more frequently than security-orientation motivations. The distributions for partner-oriented motivations were discussed in almost equal frequency, though in Study 2a participants discussed a higher relative frequency of growth-oriented motivations. When discussing motivations related to the self, they discussed more prevention-focused motivations instead of a more equal disbursement. With the variability in the relative frequency of the codes, these findings do not fully clarify what motivation type is more common and, perhaps, impactful when considering the focus of an individual's motivations (i.e., self, partner, relationship). Future research will need to build on these initial findings to clarify if and how the

137

RFT motivations change depending on who the individual is considering when deciding whether or not to engage in sexual communication.

In addition to replicating the emergent RFT themes, I also identified two overarching themes in the qualitative responses relating to the *Process of Disclosure* and the *Status of the Relationship*. These additional themes captured broader aspects of sexual communication that participants described as integral components of the disclosure process. These themes aligned closely with the PMSC and supported the role of individual as well as relationship context factors. The qualitative descriptions of the process of sexual communication also allowed me to more broadly examine the key associations between constructs to support the PMSC developed in Study 2a. The other research questions built on the qualitative findings related to the model to examine associations between constructs in the PMSC (RQ2-6). I will discuss the findings in terms of how they relate to "setting the stage" for sexual communication (Brown & Weigel, 2018 p. 203) through individual factors and relationship context factors. I will then discuss the process of sexual communication, including motivations for engaging or not engaging in sexual communication and the outcomes of sexual communication.

Setting the Stage: Individual and Relationship Context Factors

Individual factors and relationship context factors individually accounted for variance in sexual satisfaction (RQ2), RFT motivations (RQ3), and depth of disclosure (RQ5). Consistent with previous work, aspects of the individual and the relationship were important predictors of relationship and sexual wellbeing (MacNeil & Byers, 2009; McNeil et al., 2018). The individual and relationship context factors did not always account for variance above and beyond the effects of other variables, though they accounted for significant variance in separate models (e.g., RQ3). For example, relationship context factors accounted for more variance in models tested for RQ2

and RQ3, though both significantly contributed to models in RQ5. Though I expected all measured individual and relationship context factors would account for unique variance in the tested models, in many models only one of the factors was significant. These findings could be the result of the conceptually similar variables causing overlapping effects between the conceptually linked individual and relationship context factors. As such, future research needs to examine which components of the model are most relevant to sexual communication.

Sexual Communication: Motivations, Process, and Outcomes

Both the qualitative (discussed previously) and quantitative results support the importance of motivations for engaging in sexual communication. The quantitative results supported that those with relationship promotion-focused motivations had higher depth of disclosure than both partner and self prevention-focused motivations. This finding suggests that growth-oriented motivations to use sexual communication to improve their relationship were most impactful to depth of disclosure, and if replicated, future work could investigate why such motivations are particularly instrumental in facilitating more in-depth conversations between partners.

Since future research will most likely use questionnaire-based measures as opposed to coding qualitative responses, I wanted to test RQ3 using both the qualitative codes and the RFQ questionnaire to determine if both are addressing the same underlying construct. Since different patterns of results emerged between the two types of measurement, the findings suggest they are not. As the RFQ does not have item-level content specific to motivations for sexual communication and the qualitative coding captures responses of that nature, it could indicate that there are inherent differences in the motivations for communicating sexual topics, which would align with the previous work that supports the differences between sexual and nonsexual

communication (Roels et al., 2022). Additionally, there have been noted inconsistencies in the measurement of RFT promotion and prevention-motivations using self-report questionnaire methods. Specifically, there are inconsistencies in the way RFT motivations are measured in questionnaires. Previous researchers have suggested that these constructs involve too much nuance and require a high capacity for self-reflection, which may introduce difficulties in reliably and validly measuring these motivations using questionnaire methods (Summerville & Roese, 2008). As such, the associations between motivational orientations should be measured using more robust methodologies, such as interview-based approaches and a domain-specific measure of the RFT that examines motivations specifically for sexual communication.

I also examined how the sexual communication processes related to 1) each other to predict the depth of disclosure and 2) how the entire process of sexual communication predicted sexual satisfaction. I conceptualized depth of disclosure as the outcome of the process of sexual communication and sexual satisfaction as the overall outcome indicator of sexual communication. Promotion-focused motivations predicted aspects of both the process and content of sexual communication though prevention-focused motivations did not predict either. This finding may support that growth and achievement-oriented motivations are more important to the process of sexual communication. However, these results should be considered cautiously given the unreliable pattern of findings for the prevention-focused motivations and the lower reliability of this measure in the current study. Finally, all aspects of sexual communication included in the PMSC accounted for unique variance in sexual satisfaction. This finding supports the importance of a multidimensional conceptualization and measurement of sexual communication. It also highlights the importance of sexual communication to sexual satisfaction.

Study 2 General Discussion

Sexual communication is vital to intimate relationships (Byers & Demmons, 1999; Rehman et al., 2011). Safe and mutually pleasurable sexual repertoires are built by sharing sexual preferences, sexual health history, personal boundaries, and establishing sexual consent (MacNeil & Byers, 2005, 2009). Despite its importance, there has been considerable inconsistency in how sexual communication is measured, and I purport that part of this inconsistency is due to much of the work on sexual communication being atheoretical in nature. I developed this program of research to address this gap in the literature by refining a model of sexual communication to guide future research as well as clinical practice. I used qualitative responses to understand how participants describe what they consider before engaging or not engaging in sexual communication, the components of sexual communication, and the outcomes of sexual communication. Using this information, I created the four-construct Process Model of Sexual Communication (PMSC) in Study 2a and tested the associations within the model, particularly above and beyond the effects of other variables, in Study 2b.

The first overall goal was to determine the importance and role of motivations in participants' decisions for engaging or not engaging in disclosure. Participants described the complexity of their decision-making process for sexual disclosure, noting the important consequences they perceived that could happen to themselves, their partner, or their relationship. Participants described motivations that were focused on achieving either growth and advancement (i.e., promotion) or safety and security (i.e., prevention) that were vital to their decision to engage in sexual communication. Due to the associations between motivations and the other constructs, I integrated motivations into the sexual communication process section of the PMSC.

The second overall goal was to create an adapted version of the Brown and Weigel (2018) model of sexual communication and test the associations predicted by the model. The findings supported that all four constructs included in the model had valid and consistent associations with each other. In many instances, though not all, these associations remained significant above and beyond the effects of other factors. There were also some overlapping effects within the constructs, which I expect is due to the similarities between the included individual and relationship context variables. The constructs in this model align with existing models, such as the Information-Motivation-Behavioral Skills (IMB) Model developed by Fisher and colleagues (Fisher et al., 2003), which highlights the importance of information, motivation, and behaviours to determine health-related outcomes, providing additional conceptual support for the constructs included in the PMSC.

I wanted to create a usable framework to help elucidate what constructs are integral to the process of sexual communication. This type of model has implications for research and clinical practice. I chose sexual satisfaction as the outcome variable of the PMSC for the current studies. This decision was chosen based on Brown and Weigel (2018)'s model though future research should explore how this model applies to other outcomes, particularly ones more closely related to sexual communication. An example would be exploring how individual factors, relationship context factors, and the process of sexual communication relate to actual and perceived partner understanding of their own sexual preferences. Outcome variables more closely related to sexual communication would facilitate a greater understanding of the more immediate results of the process of communicating sexual topics.

In future research, this model can be used to determine what variables are important to measure when developing research projects involving sexual communication. There is notable

inconsistency in the measurement of sexual communication, especially using self-report questionnaire methods. The PMSC provides a usable framework for researchers to guide their understanding of what constructs that are important to consider when assessing sexual communication. By measuring all four constructs, researchers will be able to understand not only how different dimensions of sexual communication are interconnected but also be able to consider the findings related to sexual communication within the context of the individual and relationship factors. I selected only a few relevant variables in this study as I was limited by the scope of a questionnaire-based study (i.e., cumbersome, repetitive topics and survey length). In Study 2b, avoidant attachment (individual factor) and dyadic communication (relationship factor) were consistently either the only significant or biggest effects in multiple models. The former aligns with previous work supporting the impact of avoidant insecure attachment to sexual communication (McNeil et al., 2018). Dyadic communication accounted for variance above and beyond relationship satisfaction, supporting the importance of the quality of dyadic communication within the relationship. The importance of the quality of the dyadic communication has been previously supported in research, though typically is not measured simultaneously as a predictor with relationship satisfaction instead and is used instead as a predictor of sexual or relationship satisfaction, commonly used outcome variables in sexuality research (e.g., Mark & Jozkowski, 2013). These findings, if replicated, support dyadic communication as integral to predicting relationship wellbeing.

Using this framework, future research can build on these findings to assess different individual and relationship context factors. For example, one variable that was included in the original Brown and Weigel (2018) model was perceived partner responsiveness as a measure of the relationship context. Though I did not measure this construct using a questionnaire,

143

participants described the importance of partner responsiveness to their decision to engage in sexual communication in their qualitative responses. Previous research also supports that individuals are more willing to share sexual and relational needs and engage in vulnerable conversations when they perceive greater partner responsiveness (Derlega et al., 2008; Reis et al., 2004). It will be important measure of perceived partner responsiveness in future research to understand if it relates to the model in similar or stronger ways than relationship satisfaction and dyadic communication as measures of the relationship context. Ultimately, determining the individual and relationship factors that account for the most unique variance in the model will facilitate concision in the future measurement of sexual communication and related variables.

In terms of clinical practice, it is important for clinicians to understand sexual communication difficulties within the broader individual and relationship context. For example, barring the presence of communication difficulties, if an individual does not know how to talk about their sexual preferences to an intimate partner, it would be helpful to understand how their own qualities (individual factors), the context of their relationship, or both are posing barriers to engaging in sexual communication and to use those as the target for intervention. Specifically, if someone is avoidantly attached and fears the intimacy and vulnerability that is required for sexual communication, the therapeutic approach to addressing those barriers would be different than an individual who has a partner who is unreceptive to hearing their sexual preferences. Additionally, if someone reports difficulties with sexual satisfaction, the results support that the clinician should ask about the context of their sexual communication as well as relevant individual and relationship factors. Finally, the RFT emerged as an appropriate motivational framework for explaining participants' reasons for engaging or not engaging in sexual communication and could be integrated by clinicians as a framework for examining motivations

related to intimate behaviours such as sexual communication. However, future research could determine which, if either, specific motivations are the most important to address in clinical intervention, given that the quantitative findings supported the relevance of mostly the promotion-focused motivations, but the qualitative findings supported the relevance of both motivations. Prevention-focused motivations were not a consistent predictor across the different models, though I was unable to determine if that was due to it not being a domain-specific measure, the lower reliability, or if they are less related to the process of sexual communication.

Studies 2a and 2b Limitations and Future Directions

I discuss the general limitations and future directions of all the studies in the Overall Limitations and Future Directions section. There are important ways that people communicate sexual topics not only over the course of their relationship but also during sexual activity when they often communicate both verbally and nonverbally (Santos-Iglesias & Byers, 2020; Séguin, 2022). It is important to understand how the constructs of the model apply to sexual communication during sexual activity and how that is similar or different to all other sexual communication. Several participants mentioned in their qualitative responses that they considered the setting as part of their decision-making process for whether to engage in sexual communication. For example, they described that some topics were better to discuss during sexual activity while others were better discussed outside of sexual activity. No clear patterns in the themes emerged in terms of which topics were best discussed in which contexts. Future research should investigate whether people prefer to discuss specific topics or have different thresholds for disclosure depending on the setting of the disclosure. Sexual communication can occur differently during sexual activity, such as using nonverbal cues to indicate pleasure (Séguin, 2022). Future research is needed to understand how the constructs of the PMSC apply

145

to the different settings in which sexual communication occurs. The findings could be used to understand how the PMSC applies to different settings in which sexual communication occurs. Daily diary studies, particularly with all individuals in a relationship, would facilitate understanding the reciprocal and long-term influences partners would have on each other's communication across multiple settings. It would also allow researchers to capture communication during sexual activity perhaps more accurately than participants relying on retroactive self-report.

Overall Limitations and Future Directions

The findings of both studies support the multidimensional nature of sexual communication and the PMSC that explains how the components of sexual communication relate to both each other and other theoretically relevant variables. There are many important limitations to note as well as suggestions for expanding these findings, eight of which I will discuss in more detail.

First, these results examined just one individual's perspective, though it is important to examine how the communication processes of all individuals in a relationship affect each other. There are previous findings using dyadic approaches that contribute to the understanding of how one's own communication behaviours affect those of an intimate partner (e.g., MacNeil & Byers, 2005). Dyadic analyses would allow further insight into how responsiveness and perceived partner openness impact the process of communication. Especially for factors that measure dyadic processes (e.g., depth of disclosure, perceived partner responsiveness), it would be helpful to have responses from all individuals in a relationship to better understand the interpersonal nature of the process of sexual communication.

Second, sexual communication is a dynamic process that unfolds throughout relationships (Byers, 2005), though with these cross-sectional studies, I was unable to investigate how the process of sexual communication changes over time. Future longitudinal studies will be necessary to determine how the constructs in the model work together at different stages of a relationship, such as the beginning of a relationship, during long-term relationships, and during notable life changes (e.g., transition to parenthood). All these areas have unique impacts on the dynamics of an intimate relationship. At the early stages of a relationship, when a couple's sexual scripts have not yet been developed, and partners have not yet developed stable expectations of each other's behaviours, there may be greater variability across couples in terms of perceived consequences of disclosure (Derlega et al., 2008). In contrast, in long-term relationships, individuals have established scripts and patterns of behaviour in their relationship; in such contexts, the purpose of the communication may shift to maintaining rather than establishing intimacy (Mallory et al., 2019). I did not examine if and how these relationships between constructs varied by the length of the relationship. I wanted to first develop the PMSC that can inform future work before testing how aspects of either the relationship or the individual affected the process of communication. Finally, during notable life events such as the transition to parenthood, there are notable disruptions to the existing relationship dynamics and intimacy, such as the transition to parenthood, when individuals can experience increased sexual distress and decreased relational and sexual satisfaction (Tavares et al., 2023). To address these expected changes in the model over the course of a relationship, multiple types of longitudinal approaches could be employed. This approach could be implemented observationally (e.g., lab-based observation of sexual communication), through self-report (e.g., daily diary studies), or ideally using a combined approach to capture both observed and perceived aspects of sexual

communication. To understand how self-report measures compare to methods such as direct observation, future studies should include multiple methods of measuring sexual communication in the same study. It would also be valuable to include participants who are entering a relationship or a notable life transition and follow them for multiple years to understand how the overall process of sexual communication changes. This type of exploration would also facilitate establishing a causal relationship between expected predictor and outcome constructs in the PMSC.

Third, the findings from the present studies suggest that individuals with avoidant attachment have poorer sexual communication and poorer sexual wellbeing. This finding is consistent with previous research (McNeil et al., 2018). Individuals with avoidant attachment tend to perceive intimacy and emotional expression as threatening (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2013), factors which are highly related to sexual communication (Mikulincer & Nachshon, 1991; Rehman et al., 2019). Through the specific exploration of the mechanisms and barriers faced by individuals with avoidant attachment, it will be important to expand these findings to understand the specific ways in which sexual communication may feel difficult and not worth the perceived consequences to themselves, their partner, or their relationship. Such findings could be used to determine how to support these individuals to overcome their barriers to having fulfilling and safe sexual relationships. When individuals avoid situations because they anticipate they could be upsetting or elicit negative emotions, it can negatively impact their overall wellbeing and is even associated with greater symptom severity in individuals with depression and anxiety (Kahn & Garrison, 2009; Spinhoven et al., 2014). Actively engaging in behavioural experiences that individuals have been avoiding is a common target of several therapeutic approaches, such as exposure therapy, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, and Emotion-Focused Therapy

(Chawla & Ostafin, 2007). Building on these existing clinical approaches, clinicians can target specific barriers related to factors such as avoidant attachment and experiential avoidance so that individuals can better engage in sexual communication.

Insecure attachment and experiential avoidance were my main factors of interest in these studies, though there are many other theoretically relevant factors that should be examined. For example, perfectionism is an individual factor that has previously been linked to sexual functioning (Habke et al., 1999). Previous work has shown that higher levels of perfectionism predict higher levels of sexual problems, sexual anxiety, and lower sexual optimism (Stoeber et al., 2013), all of which could impact someone's willingness to engage in sexual communication. Given the impact of individual factors, it will also be important to measure them simultaneously in order to understand which factors have the biggest impact on sexual communication. These findings could then inform a higher degree of specificity in the identification and treatment of individual factors that are affecting sexual communication.

Fourth, to test the associations between the separate constructs in the model, I conducted many different separate analyses. Though this exploratory approach fit my research goals, conducting multiple analyses can increase error (i.e., the likelihood of false positives in the results). As such, these findings need to be replicated using different statistical techniques. Specifically, it will be important to move beyond testing the individual associations between constructs in the model to testing the entire model. These analyses would allow a better understanding of whether the directionality described by participants in the qualitative data can be replicated statistically (e.g., using path analyses). A more concise analytic approach would also have less chance of having inflated error due to the multiple analyses. The directionality of the effects could also be better assessed using statistical approaches that examined the entire

model as opposed to the separate associations between constructs. In these findings, the overlapping effects in the model suggest that though each construct has relevance to the overall model, it may not be necessary to measure each construct in multiple ways.

Fifth, I did not explore whether the effects of Study 2b differed by participant gender, sexual identity, or culture. My rationale was similar to why I did not explore differences by relationship length. At this step in the development of the PMSC, I wanted to focus on understanding the broad underlying associations between and within the constructs of the model. The decision related to gender was also supported by the foundational work by Brown and Weigel (2018), who did not find gender differences in their model. However, previous work on sexual communication has identified notable gender differences (e.g., Rehman et al., 2011). There are also cultural differences in the topics and gendered expectations for who communicates and initiates sex within a relationship. Exploring cultural differences in how the PMSC applies to individuals from different cultures would also be an important future consideration.

Sixth, I considered the depth of disclosure to be the outcome of sexual communication. However, there are many ways that someone can communicate their sexual preferences, including deliberate (e.g., verbal communication, nonverbal communication) and nondeliberate (e.g., intimate responses during sex, orgasm) communication (Babin, 2013). Depth of disclosure, though a well-supported indicator of sexual communication (e.g., Brown & Weigel, 2018), is both verbal and deliberate. It will be important for future studies to examine multiple ways in which people engage in sexual communication, which may also be successfully assessed using observational methods. Along with measuring direct and verbal communication indicators, such as depth of disclosure, in future work, it will be important to capture what compensatory

150

strategies individuals employ if they have difficulty engaging in sexual communication. For example, exploring whether they use indirect methods of communication, such as watching an erotic movie with a partner in an attempt to open a conversation about a specific sexual preference.

Seventh, I did not include a measure of the frequency and type of sexual behaviour, though there is ample existing evidence for how sexual behaviour affects the overall sexual and relational functioning within a relationship. For example, a dyadic study found that approach-oriented motivations for engaging in sexual behaviour were associated with sexual behaviour and the individual's own as well as their partner's sexual satisfaction (Jodouin et al., 2019). Future research should include a measure of sexual behaviour frequency, type, and quality to understand if this model of sexual communication differs depending on sexual behaviour.

Eighth, it will be important to study other clinically relevant factors related to the effectiveness of an individual's ability to communicate and receive information from others. Those with communication difficulties may experience higher anxiety and, subsequently, avoid sexual communication more than those without these difficulties. It will be important to identify specific strategies for clinical populations with communication difficulties, such as autistic individuals, who may have difficulty with social perception, interpreting verbal and nonverbal sexual cues, and communicating their own sexual wants and needs (Yew et al., 2021).

Conclusions

Despite the limitations of this study, these findings contribute valuable information to understanding the construct of sexual communication, specifically, how four theoretically related constructs relate to the overall process and context of sexual communication: individual factors, relationship context, sexual communication, and sexual satisfaction. Building on the findings of

Studies 1a and 1b, they also provide additional support for the importance of conceptualizing and measuring sexual communication as a multidimensional construct that includes motivations for engaging in disclosure, the content of the disclosure, the process by which it occurs, and whether disclosure occurs. In particular, these studies elucidate the role and type of motivations that informed participants' decisions to engage in sexual communication. It is clear that sexual communication is a complex process that requires a more rigorous and refined implementation of this construct in research and clinical intervention.

References

Allen, J. L. (2023). "It made me feel comfortable talking about sex…": A qualitative content analysis of parent-child communications about sexual behavior with gay men. *Journal of Evidence-Based Social Work (United States)*, *20*(2), 224–240. https://doi.org/10.1080/26408066.2022.2156830

Amidu, N., Owiredu, W. K. B. A., Woode, E., Addai-Mensah, O., Gyasi-Sarpong, K. C., & Alhassan, A. (2010). Prevalence of male sexual dysfunction among Ghanaian populace: Myth or reality. *International Journal of Impotence Research, 22*(6), 337–342. https://doi.org/10.1038/ijir.2010.24

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. *Journal of Sex Research, 48*(4), 381–391. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2010.482215

Atkinson, J. W. (1957). Motivational determinants of risk-taking behavior. *Psychological Review, 64*, 359–372.

Babin, E. A. (2013). An examination of predictors of nonverbal and verbal communication of pleasure during sex and sexual satisfaction. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 30*(3), 270–292. https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407512454523

Bennett-Brown, M., & Denes, A. (2022). Testing the Communication During Sexual Activity Model: An examination of the associations among personality characteristics, sexual communication, and sexual and relationship satisfaction. *Communication Research, 50*(1), 106-127. https://doi.org/10.1177/00936502221124390

Bernecker, K., Ghassemi, M., & Brandstätter, V. (2019). Approach and avoidance relationship goals and couples' nonverbal communication during conflict. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 49*(3), 622–636. https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2379

Bowlby, J. (1982). *Attachment and loss* (2nd ed.). Basic Books.

Brown, R. D., & Weigel, D. J. (2018). Exploring a contextual model of sexual self-disclosure and

sexual satisfaction. *Journal of Sex Research*, *55*(2), 202–213.

https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2017.1295299

Buluş, M., Atan, A., & Sarıkaya, H. E. (2017). Effective communication skills: A new conceptual

framework and scale development study. *International Online Journal of Educational Sciences*,

9(2). https://doi.org/10.15345/iojes.2017.02.020

Byers, E. S. (2005). Relationship satisfaction and sexual satisfaction: A longitudinal study of

individuals in long-term relationships. *The Journal of Sex Research*, *42*(2), 113–118.

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, 52*(1), 20–28.

https://doi.org/10.1037/a0022048

Byers, S. E., & Demmons, S. (1999). Sexual satisfaction and sexual self-disclosure within dating

relationships. *The Journal of Sex Research*, *36*(2), 180–189.

Catania, J. A., Dolcini, M. M., Coates, T. J., Kegeles, S. M., Greenblatt, R. M., Puckett, S., Corman,

M., & Miller, J. (1989). Predictors of condom use and multiple partnered sex among sexually-

active adolescent women: Implications for aids-related health interventions. *The Journal of Sex

Research*, *26*(4), 514–524. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224498909551532

Chawla, N., & Ostafin, B. (2007). Experiential avoidance as a functional dimensional approach to

psychopathology: An empirical review. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 63*(9), 871-890.

https://doi.org/10.1002/jclp.20400

Chen, C., Hewitt, P. L., & Flett, G. L. (2015). Preoccupied attachment, need to belong, shame, and

interpersonal perfectionism: An investigation of the Perfectionism Social Disconnection Model.

Personality and Individual Differences, *76*, 177–182. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2014.12.001

Coffelt, T. A., & Hess, J. A. (2014). Sexual disclosures: Connections to relational satisfaction and

closeness. *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy*, *40*(6), 577–591.

https://doi.org/10.1080/0092623X.2013.811449

Cohen, J., and Cohen, P. (1975). *Applied multiple regression/correlation analysis for the behavioral*

sciences. Hillside, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Cupach, W. R., & Metts, S. (1991). Sexuality and communication in close relationships. In K.

McKinney & S. Sprecher (Eds.), *Sexuality in close relationships* (pp. 93–110). Lawrence

Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

De Freitas, J., Thomas, K., DeScioli, P., & Pinker, S. (2019). Common knowledge, coordination, and

strategic mentalizing in human social life. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of*

the United States of America, 116(28), 13751–13758. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1905518116

Derlega, V. J., Winstead, B. A., & Greene, K. (2008). Self-disclosure and starting a close relationship.

In S. Sprecher, A. Wenzel, & J. Harvey (Eds.), *Handbook of relationship initiation* (pp. 153–

174). Psychology Press.

Denes, A., Crowley, J. P., & Bennett, M. (2020). Between the sheets: Investigating young adults'

communication during sexual activity. *Personal Relationships*, *27*(2), 484–501.

https://doi.org/10.1111/pere.12324

Edwards, J., Rehman, U. S., & Byers, E. S. (2022). Perceived barriers and rewards to sexual consent

communication: A qualitative analysis. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, *39*(8),

2408–2434. https://doi.org/10.1177/02654075221080744

Fallis, E. E., Rehman, U. S., Woody, E. Z., & Purdon, C. (2016). The longitudinal association of

    relationship satisfaction and sexual satisfaction in long-term relationships. *Journal of Family*

    Psychology, 30(7), 822–831. https://doi.org/10.1037/fam0000205

Fisher, W. A., Fisher, J. D., & Harman, J. (2003). The information-motivation-behavioraI skills

    model: A general social psychological approach to understanding and promoting health behavior.

    In J. Suls & K. A. Wallston (Eds.), *Social psychological foundations of health and illness* (pp.

    82–106). Blackwell Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470753552.ch4

Fraley, R. C., Heffernan, M. E., Vicary, A. M., & Brumbaugh, C. C. (2011). The Experiences in Close

    Relationships-Relationship Structures Questionnaire: A method for assessing attachment

    orientations across relationships. *Psychological Assessment, 23*(3), 615–625.

    https://doi.org/10.1037/a0022898

Givertz, M., & Safford, S. (2011). Longitudinal impact of communication patterns on romantic

    attachment and symptoms of depression. *Current Psychology, 30*(2), 148–172.

    https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-011-9106-1

Habke, A. M., Hewitt, P. L., & Flett, G. L. (1999). Perfectionism and sexual satisfaction in intimate

    relationships. *Journal of Psychopathology and Behavioral Assessment, 21*(4), 307–322.

    https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1022168715349

Harris, S., Monahan, J. L., & Hovick, S. R. (2014). Communicating new sexual desires and the

    factors that influence message directness. *Sexual and Relationship Therapy*, *29*(4), 405–423.

    https://doi.org/10.1080/14681994.2014.954992

Hess, J. A., & Coffelt, T. A. (2012). Verbal communication about sex in marriage: Patterns of

    language use and its connection with relational outcomes. *Journal of Sex Research*, *49*(6), 603–

    612. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2011.619282

Higgins, E. T. (1997). Beyond pleasure and pain. *American Psychologist, 52*, 1280–1300.

Higgins, E. T., Friedman, R. S., Harlow, R. E., Idson, L. C., Ayduk, O. N., & Taylor, A. (2001).
Achievement orientations from subjective histories of success: Promotion pride versus
prevention pride. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 31*(1), 3–23.
https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.27

Hui, C. M., & Molden, D. C. (2014). Maintaining commitment in the presence of alternative
opportunities: The role of motivations for prevention or promotion. *Social Cognition, 32*(6),
571–584. https://doi.org/10.1521/soco.2014.32.6.571

Hullman, G. A., Weigel, D. J., & Brown, R. D. (2022). How conversational goals predict sexual self-
disclosure decisions. *Journal of Sex Research*. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2022.2035310

Humphreys, T. (2007). Perceptions of sexual consent: The impact of relationship history and gender.
Journal of Sex Research, *44*(4), 307–315. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224490701586706

Humphreys, T. P., & Brousseau, M. M. (2010). The sexual consent scale-revised: Development,
reliability, and preliminary validity. *Journal of Sex Research*, *47*(5), 420–428.
https://doi.org/10.1080/00224490903151358

Jodouin, J. F., Bergeron, S., Desjardins, F., & Janssen, E. (2019). Sexual behavior mediates the
relationship between sexual approach motives and sexual outcomes: A dyadic daily diary study.
Archives of Sexual Behavior, 48(3), 831–842. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-018-1259-7

Justo-Núñez, M., Morris, L., & Berry, K. (2022). Self-report measures of secure attachment in
adulthood: A systematic review. *Clinical Psychology and Psychotherapy, 29*(6), 1812–1842.
John Wiley and Sons Ltd. https://doi.org/10.1002/cpp.2756

Kahn, J. H., & Garrison, A. M. (2009). Emotional self-disclosure and emotional avoidance: Relations

    with symptoms of depression and anxiety. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 56*(4), 573–584.

    https://doi.org/10.1037/a0016574

Kelly, M. P., Strassberg, D. S., & Turner, C. M. (2004). Communication and associated relationship

    issues in female anorgasmia. *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy, 30*(4), 263–276.

    https://doi.org/10.1080/00926230490422403

Kline, R. B. (2005). *Principles and practices of structural equation modeling* (2nd ed.). New

    York, NY: Guilford Press.

Lawrance K., Byers E. S. (1998). Interpersonal exchange model of sexual satisfaction questionnaire.

    In Davis C., Yarber W. L., Bauserman R., Schreer G., Davis S. (Eds.), *Handbook of sexuality-*

    related measures (pp. 514–519). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

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. https://doi.org/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.

    https://doi.org/10.1080/00224490802398399

Mallory, A. B. (2022). Dimensions of couples' sexual communication, relationship satisfaction, and

    sexual satisfaction: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Family Psychology*, *36*(3), 358–371.

    https://doi.org/10.1037/fam0000946.supp

Mallory, A. B., Stanton, A. M., & Handy, A. B. (2019). Couples' sexual communication and

    dimensions of sexual function: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Sex Research*, *56*(7), 882–898.

    https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2019.1568375

Marcantonio, T. L., Willis, M., & Jozkowski, K. N. (2020). Women's sexual consent: Potential

implications for sexual satisfaction. *Current Sexual Health Reports*, *12*(3), 120–126.

https://doi.org/10.1007/s11930-020-00267-3

Mark, K. P., & Jozkowski, K. N. (2013). The mediating role of sexual and nonsexual communication

between relationship and sexual satisfaction in a sample of college-age heterosexual couples.

Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy, 39(5), 410–427.

https://doi.org/10.1080/0092623X.2011.644652

Mark, K. P., & Lasslo, J. A. (2018). Maintaining sexual desire in long-term relationships: A systematic

review and conceptual model. *Journal of Sex Research, 55*(4-5), 563-581.

https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2018.1437592

McGrath, J. E., & Johnson, B. A. (2003). Methodology makes meaning: How both qualitative and

quantitative paradigms shape evidence. In P. M. Camic, J. E. Rhodes, & L. Yardley (Eds),

Qualitative research in psychology: Expanding perspectives in methodology and design (pp. 31-

48). The American Psychological Association.

McInnis, M. K., & Pukall, C. F. (2022). Sexual script flexibility after a prostate cancer diagnosis:

Implications for sexual satisfaction. *Journal of Psychosocial Oncology, 41*(3), 267-276.

https://doi.org/10.1080/07347332.2022.2102958

McNeil, J., Rehman, U. S., & Fallis, E. (2018). The influence of attachment styles on sexual

communication behavior. *Journal of Sex Research, 55*(2), 191–201.

https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2017.1318817

Merwin, K. E., & Rosen, N. O. (2020). Perceived partner responsiveness moderates the associations

between sexual talk and sexual and relationship well-being in individuals in long-term

relationships. *Journal of Sex Research*, *57*(3), 351–364.

https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2019.1610151

Meston, C. M., & Buss, D. M. (2007). Why humans have sex. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 36*(4), 477–507. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-007-9175-2

Metts, S., & Cupach, W. R. (1989). The role of communication in human sexuality. In K. McKinney & S. Sprecher (Eds.), *Human sexuality: The societal and interpersonal context* (pp. 139–161). Ablex Publishing.

Milhausen, R. R., Sakaluk, J. K., Fisher, T. D., Davis, C. M., & Yarber, W. L. (2020). *Handbook of sexuality-related measures* (4th ed)*. Taylor & Francis Group.

https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315183169

Mikulincer, M., & Nachshon, O. (1991). Attachment styles and patterns of self-disclosure. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 61*(2), 321-331. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.61.2.321

Mikulincer, M., & Shaver, P. R. (2003). The attachment behavioral system in adulthood: Activation, psychodynamics, and interpersonal processes. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, *35*, 53–152. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601(03)01002-5

Mikulincer, M., & Shaver, P. R. (2007). Boosting attachment security to promote mental health, prosocial values, and inter-group tolerance. *Psychological Inquiry*, *18*(3), 139–156. https://doi.org/10.1080/10478400701512646

Mikulincer, M., & Shaver, P. R. (2013). The role of attachment security in adolescent and adult close relationships. In Simpson, J. A., & Campbell, L. *The Oxford Handbook of Close Relationships,* (pp. 66-89). Oxford University Press.

https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195398694.001.0001

Mikulincer, M., & Shaver, P. R. (2018). A behavioral systems approach to romantic love relationships: Attachment, caregiving, and sex. In Sternberg, R. J., & Sternberg, K *The New Psychology of Love, Second edition* (pp. 259–279). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108658225.014

Mikulincer, M., & Shaver, P. R. (2020). Attachment Theory. In Corr, P. K., & Matthews, G *The Cambridge handbook of personality psychology* (pp. 208–220). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108264822.020

Molden, D. C., Lee, A. Y., & Higgins, E. T. (2008). Motivations for promotion and prevention. In J. Y. Shah & W. L. Gardner (Eds), *Handbook of motivation science* (pp. 169–187). The Guilford Press.

Molden, D. C., & Winterheld, H. A. (2013). Motivations for promotion or prevention in close relationships. In J. A. Simpson & L. Campbell (Eds) *The Oxford handbook of close relationships* (pp. 321–347). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195398694.001.0001

Moazami, S., Ashley, M., Czechowski, K., Courtice, E. L., & Shaughnessy, K. (2023). The Sexual Communication Scale (SeCS). *Journal of Sex Research*, *60*(1), 71–90. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2022.2129558

Murray, S. H., Milhausen, R. R., & Sutherland, O. (2014). A qualitative comparison of young women's maintained versus decreased sexual desire in longer-term relationships. *Women and Therapy, 37*(3–4), 319–341. https://doi.org/10.1080/02703149.2014.897559

Noar, S., 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. https://doi.org/10.1080/10810730600671862

Peer, E., Rothschild, D., Gordon, A., Evernden, Z., & Damer, E. (2022). Data quality of platforms and

    panels for online behavioral research. *Behavior Research Methods, 54*(4), 1643–1662.

    https://doi.org/10.3758/s13428-021-01694-3

Rehman, U. S., Balan, D., Sutherland, S., & McNeil, J. (2019). Understanding barriers to sexual

    communication. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, *36*(9), 2605–2623.

    https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407518794900

Rehman, U., Fallis, E., & Byers, E. S. (2013). Sexual satisfaction in heterosexual women. In D.

    Cataneda (Eds). *An essential handbook of women's sexuality* (pp. 25-45). Westport, CN: Praeger.

Rehman, U. S., Janssen, E., Newhouse, S., Heiman, J., Holtzworth-Munroe, A., Fallis, E., & Rafaeli,

    E. (2011). Marital satisfaction and communication behaviors during sexual and nonsexual

    conflict discussions in newlywed couples: A pilot study. *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy*,

    37(2), 94–103. https://doi.org/10.1080/0092623X.2011.547352

Rehman, U. S., Lizdek, I., Fallis, E. E., Sutherland, S., & Goodnight, J. A. (2017). How is sexual

    communication different from nonsexual communication? A moment-by-moment analysis of

    discussions between romantic partners. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, *46*(8), 2339–2352.

    https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-017-1006-5

Rehman, U. S., Rellini, A. H., & Fallis, E. (2011). The importance of sexual self-disclosure to sexual

    satisfaction and functioning in committed relationships. *Journal of Sexual Medicine*, *8*(11),

    3108–3115. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1743-6109.2011.02439.x

Reis, H. T., Clark, M. S., & Holmes, J. G. (2004). Perceived partner responsiveness as an organizing

    construct in the study of intimacy and closeness. In D. J. Mashek & A. P. Aron (Eds.), *Handbook

    of closeness and intimacy* (pp. 201–225). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.

Roels, R., Rehman, U. S., Goodnight, J. A., & Janssen, E. (2022). Couple communication behaviors during sexual and nonsexual discussions and their association with relationship satisfaction. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 51*(3), 1541-1557. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-021-02204-4

Rosen, N. O., Bergeron, S., Sadikaj, G., Glowacka, M., Baxter, M. Lou, & Delisle, I. (2014). Relationship satisfaction moderates the associations between male partner responses and depression in women with vulvodynia: A dyadic daily experience study. *Pain, 155*(7), 1374–1383. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pain.2014.04.017

Ross, A. S., Hinshaw, A. B., & Murdock, N. L. (2016). Integrating the relational matrix: Attachment style, differentiation of self, triangulation, and experiential avoidance. *Contemporary Family Therapy*, *38*(4), 400–411. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10591-016-9395-5

Rubinsky, V. (2022). Sex Talk: The effects of sexual self-disclosure and identity gaps on sexual and relational outcomes in diverse relationships. *Sexuality and Culture*, *26*(4), 1452–1476. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-022-09953-x

Sakaluk, J. K., & Short, S. D. (2017). A methodological review of exploratory factor analysis in sexuality research: Used practices, best practices, and data analysis resources. *Journal of Sex Research, 54*(1), 1–9. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2015.1137538

Sandberg, J. G., Bradford, A. B., & Brown, A. P. (2017). Differentiating between attachment styles and behaviors and their association with marital quality. *Family Process*, *56*(2), 518–531. https://doi.org/10.1111/famp.12186

Santos-Iglesias, P., & Byers, E. S. (2020). Development and initial validation of the verbal and nonverbal sexual communication questionnaire in Canada and Spain. *Sexual and Relationship Therapy*, *35*(1), 60–76. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681994.2018.1442569

Séguin, L. J. (2022). "I've learned to convert my sensations into sounds": Understanding during-sex

    sexual communication. *Journal of Sex Research*.

    https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2022.2134284

Sheeran, P., Abraham, C., & Orbell, S. (1999). Psychosocial correlates of heterosexual condom use: A

    meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin, 125*(1), 90-132. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-

    2909.125.1.90

Smith, K. B., & Pukall, C. F. (2014). Sexual function, relationship adjustment, and the relational

    impact of pain in male partners of women with provoked vulvar pain. *Journal of Sexual*

    Medicine, 11(5), 1283–1293. https://doi.org/10.1111/jsm.12484

Snell, W. E., Belk Sharyn S, Papini, D. R., & Clark, S. (1989). Development and validation of the

    Sexual Self-Disclosure Scale. *Annals of Sex Research*, *2*, 307–334.

Spinhoven, P., Drost, J., De Rooij, M., Van Hemert, A. M., & Penninx, B. W. (2014). A longitudinal

    study of experiential avoidance in emotional disorders. *Behavior Therapy, 45*(6), 840-850.

    https://doi.org/10.1016/j.beth.2014.07.001

Stanton, S. C. E., Campbell, L., & Pink, J. C. (2017). Benefits of positive relationship experiences for

    avoidantly attached individuals. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *113*(4), 568–588.

    https://doi.org/10.1037/pspi0000098

Stoeber, J., Harvey, L. N., Almeida, I., & Lyons, E. (2013). Multidimensional sexual perfectionism.

    Archives of Sexual Behavior, 42(8), 1593–1604. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-013-0135-8

Summerville, A., & Roese, N. J. (2008). Self-report measures of individual differences in regulatory

    focus: A cautionary note. *Journal of Research in Personality, 42*(1), 247–254.

    https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrp.2007.05.005

Tabachnick, B. G., & Fidell, L. S. (2013). *Using multivariate statistics* (6th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.

Tavares, I. M., Rosen, N. O., Heiman, J. R., & Nobre, P. J. (2023). Longitudinal associations between relational and sexual well-being in couples transitioning to parenthood. *Family Process*. https://doi.org/10.1111/famp.12859

Theiss, J. A., & Estlein, R. (2014). Antecedents and consequences of the perceived threat of sexual communication: A test of the relational turbulence model. *Western Journal of Communication, 78*(4), 404–425. https://doi.org/10.1080/10570314.2013.845794

Thompson, A. E., Anisimowicz, Y., & Kulibert, D. (2019). A kiss is worth a thousand words: The development and validation of a scale measuring motives for romantic kissing. *Sexual and Relationship Therapy, 34*(1), 54–74. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681994.2017.1386299

Thornton, K., Chervenak, J., & Neal-Perry, G. (2015). Menopause and sexuality. In *Endocrinology and Metabolism Clinics of North America, 44*(3), 649-661. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecl.2015.05.009

Wasson, K. S., Gallagher, A., Ronis, S. T., Miller, D. A. A., & Tilleczek, K. C. (2022). Youths' perceived impact of invalidation and validation on their mental health treatment journeys. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research, 49*(3), 476–489. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10488-021-01177-9

Wasson, K. S., & Muise, M. D. (2022). "I wish there was a guide": Navigating changes to intimate relationship scripts during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. *Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality, 31*(2), 268–279. https://doi.org/10.3138/cjhs.2022-0016

Wasson, K. S., O'Sullivan, L. F., Thompson, A. E., & Fortenberry, J. D. (2020). First, best, forbidden

and worst: Memorable experiences of intimate kisses among heterosexual and sexual minority

U.S. adults. *Journal of Relationships Research, 11*(e11), 1-11. https://doi.org/10.1017/jrr.2020.7

Vittinghoff, E., Glidden, D. V., Shiboski, S. C., & McCulloch, C. E. (2005). *Regression methods in

biostatistics: Linear, logistic, survival, and repeated measures models.* Springer Publishing Co.

Widman, L., Golin, C. E., & Noar, S. M. (2013). When do condom use intentions lead to actions?

Examining the role of sexual communication on safer sexual behavior among people living with

HIV. *Journal of Health Psychology*, *18*(4), 507–517. https://doi.org/10.1177/1359105312446769

Yew, R. Y., Samuel, P., Hooley, M., Mesibov, G. B., & Stokes, M. A. (2021). A systematic review of

romantic relationship initiation and maintenance factors in autism. *Personal Relationships*,

28(4), 777–802. https://doi.org/10.1111/pere.12397

Appendix A: Supplementary Tables

Table 1

Participant Demographic Information

Demographic Category	Studies 1a/2a *n* (% total)	Studies 1b/2b *n* (% total)
Gender		
Men	48 (35.8)	108 (44.8)
Women	83 (62.9)	127 (52.7)
Nonbinary	1 (0.7)	6 (2.5)
Ethnicity		
White or Caucasian	106 (80.3)	168 (69.7)
Multiracial	9 (6.7)	17 (7.1)
Black or African American	8 (6.0)	8 (3.3)
Hispanic or Latino	6 (4.5)	12 (5.0)
South Asian	1 (0.7)	4 (1.7)
East Asian	0	19 (7.9)
Other Asian origins	1 (0.7)	4 (1.7)
Indigenous or Alaska Native	0	3 (1.2)
Sexual Identity		
Heterosexual	106 (80.3)	182 (75.5)
Bisexual	18 (13.4)	24 (10.0)
Asexual	2 (1.5)	5 (2.1)
Gay	2 (1.5)	9 (3.7)
Lesbian	2 (1.5)	5 (2.1)
Pansexual	2 (1.5)	10 (4.1)
Queer	0	2 (0.4)
Employment Status		
Working full time	109 (82.6)	137 (56.8)
Working part time	8 (6.1)	42 (17.4)
Retired	6 (4.5)	11 (4.6)
Unemployed	7 (5.3)	47 (19.5)
Temporary/seasonal worker, not working	2 (1.5)	4 (1.7)
Annual Household Income		
Less than $4,999	4 (3.0)	7 (2.9)
$5000-$19,999	7 (5.3)	15 (6.2)
$20,000-$39,999	29 (22.0)	45 (18.7)
$40,000-$59,999	39 (29.5)	37 (15.4)
$60,000-$79,999	26 (19.7)	27 (11.2)
$80,000-$99,999	18 (13.6)	35 (14.5)
More than $100,000	9 (6.8)	75 (31.1)
Relationship Status		
In a committed relationship with one person exclusively	99 (75.0)	186 (77.2)
In a committed relationship and also in a relationship with someone else	17 (12.7)	8 (3.3)
Dating one person exclusively	9 (6.7)	39 (16.2)
In a new/casual relationship with one person exclusively	3 (2.2)	3 (1.2)
Dating more than one person	2 (1.5)	39 (16.2)
In an open relationship	2 (1.5)	5 (2.1)

Note. Studies 1a/2a *n* = 132, 1b/2b *n* = 241. Nonbinary represents a category of genders including nonbinary (including nonbinary and trans*), agender, gender neutral, and genderqueer. These categories, including trans*, were included as separate options in a multiple-response option question, including an open-response option. Participants who indicated they were a transman or transwoman (*n* = 3) were included in the respective men and women categories. One participant in Study 1b indicated they preferred not to disclosure their sexual identity. Annual household income values are based on amounts before taxes.

Table 2

Study 1a and 1b Descriptive Statistics and Internal Consistency for Self-Report Measures

Measured Construct	Study 1a				Study 1b			
	Mean *(SD)*	Skewness Statistic *(SE)*	Kurtosis Statistic *(SE)*	α	Mean *(SD)*	Skewness Statistic *(SE)*	Kurtosis Statistic *(SE)*	α
Sexual Disclosure Scales (SDS)								
Perceived Consequences	69.32 (11.89)	-0.09 (.21)	-0.87 (.42)	.91	72.57 (13.03)	-0.34 (.16)	-0.27 (.31)	.91
Depth of Disclosure	68.63 (13.60)	-0.42 (.21)	0.00 (.42)	.91	75.18 (14.53)	-0.87 (.16)	0.57 (.31)	.91
Perceived Importance	69.69 (12.56)	-0.16 (.21)	-0.90 (.42)	.90	77.83 (11.83)	-0.77 (.16)	0.39 (.31)	.87
Subscale 1	-	-	-	-	87.13 (14.11)	-0.79 (.16)	0.01 (.31)	.94
Subscale 2	-	-	-	-	69.03 (12.72)	-0.40 (.16)	-0.07 (.31)	.89
Subscale 3	-	-	-	-	43.28 (10.62)	-0.56 (.16)	-0.19 (.31)	.90
Barriers to Sexual Likes	45.83 (21.42)	0.31 (.21)	-1.13 (.42)	.97	31.38 (14.76)	1.63 (.16)	2.24 (.31)	.96
Barriers to Sexual Dislikes	46.99 (21.54)	0.25 (.21)	-1.09 (.42)	.97	37.12 (17.69)	0.98 (.16)	0.06 (.31)	.96
CSI-4	15.12 (3.98)	-0.69 (.21)	0.25 (.42)	.89	15.65 (4.32)	-1.12 (.16)	1.17 (.31)	.94
GMSEX	27.85 (7.06)	-0.95 (.21)	0.14 (.42)	.97	28.07 (6.74)	-1.08 (.16)	0.53 (.31)	.96
ECR-RS								
Avoidant Attachment	3.04 (1.91)	0.42 (.21)	-1.21 (.42)	.81	1.94 (1.13)	1.33 (.16)	1.05 (.31)	.86
Anxious Attachment	2.31 (1.18)	0.43 (.21)	-0.86 (.42)	.94	2.37 (1.64)	1.31 (.16)	0.91 (.31)	.91
AAQ-2	-	-	-	-	23.88 (9.89)	0.04 (.16)	-0.78 (.31)	.92

Note. Study 1a *n* = 132 (with the exception of depth of disclosure scale, where *n* = 131). Study 1b *n* = 241. *α = Cronbach's alpha.* Subscale 1 = Disclosure about Sexual Preferences Content Area. Subscale 2 = Disclosure about Sexual Health. Subscale 3 = Disclosure about Sexual Behaviours. CSI-4 = Couples Satisfaction Index. GMSEX = Global Measure of Sexual Satisfaction. ECR-RS = Experiences in Close Relationships – Relationship Structures. AAQ-2 = The Acceptance and Action Questionnaire. The Content Areas of the SDS (Factors 1-3) and the AAQ-2 were only included in Study 1b. The reliability for the SDS content area subscales were created by analyzing the items that were assigned to each factor.

Table 3

Study 1a and 1b Self-Report Measures Pearson's Zero-Order Correlations

Measured Construct						Correlations							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Sexual Disclosure Scales													
1. Perceived Consequences	–	.72**	.68**	.85**	.81**	.70**	-.45**	-.44**	.44**	.57**	-.43**	-.16*	-.04
2. Depth of Disclosure	.83**	–	.84**	.82**	.78**	.83**	-.41**	-.42**	.29**	.51**	-.33**	-.10	-.04
3. Perceived Importance	.85**	.90**	–	.76**	.76**	.82**	-.34**	-.26**	.13*	.37**	-.22**	.02	.11
4. Subscale 1	-	-	-	–	.66**	.67**	-.44**	-.45**	.41**	.61**	-.41**	-.15*	-.08
5. Subscale 2	-	-	-	-	–	.64**	-.38**	-.35**	.30**	.43**	-.34**	-.12	-.04
6. Subscale 3	-	-	-	-	-	–	-.34**	-.30**	.17**	.39**	-.21**	-.01	.08
7. BCQ Likes	-.27**	-.35**	-.32**	-	-	-	–	.60**	-.30**	-.41**	.32**	.35**	.20**
8. BCQ Dislikes	-.31**	-.35**	-.33**	-	-	-	.91**	–	-.41**	-.42**	.47**	.42**	.31**
9. CSI-4	.50**	.42**	.39**	-	-	-	-.19*	-.17*	–	.68**	-.54**	-.43**	-.31**
10. GMSEX	.53**	.45**	.42**	-	-	-	-.24**	-.21*	.61**	–	-.47**	-.31**	-.18**
ECR-RS													
11. Avoidant Attachment	-.33**	-.33**	-.36**	-	-	-	.62**	.60**	-.24**	-.28**	–	.35**	.28**
12. Anxious Attachment	-.12	-.14	-.10	-	-	-	.70**	.68**	-.16	-.07	.61**	–	.59**
13. AAQ-2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	–

Note. Study 1a *n* = 132 (lower left section of the table). Study 1b *n* = 241 (upper right section of the table). Subscale 1 = Disclosure about Sexual Preferences (SDS), Subscale Factor 2 = Disclosure about Sexual Health (SDS), and Subscale 3 = Disclosure about Sexual Behaviours (SDS) are correlations between subscales, created by summing the items that load onto the factors. BCQ Likes = Barriers to Communication scale, likes. BCQ Dislikes = Barriers to Communication scale, dislikes. CSI-4 = Couples Satisfaction Index. GMSEX = Global Measure of Sexual Satisfaction. ECR-RS = Experiences in Close Relationships – Relationship Structures. AAQ-2 = Acceptance and Action Questionnaire.
*p < .05, ** p < .01.

Table 4

Study 1a RQ2 Bivariate and Multiple Regression Coefficients Assessing the Impact of SDS Process Dimensions on Sexual and

Relationship Satisfaction

Model	Predictors	B	SE	β	t	p	95% CI	VIF	R^2	adj. R^2	F
1a	(Intercept)	11.28	3.16		3.57	<.001	[5.03, 17.53]	-	.18	.17	$F(1, 130) = 23.38$,
	Importance	0.24	0.05	.42	5.33	<.001	[0.15, 0.33]	-			p <.001
1b	(Intercept)	1.97	0.17		11.88	<.001	[0.15, 0.33]	-	.29	.27	$F(3, 127) = 17.00$,
	X_1	0.33	0.09	.56	3.80	<.001	[0.16, 0.51]	3.87			p <.001
	X_2	0.08	0.09	.16	0.90	.368	[-0.10, 0.26]	5.47			
	X_3	-0.11	0.11	-.19	-1.02	.309	[-0.32, 0.10]	6.24			
2a	(Intercept)	6.59	1.82		3.63	<.001	[3.00, 10.19]	-	.15	.14	$F(1, 130) = 22.77$,
	Importance	0.12	0.03	.39	4.77	<.001	[0.72, 0.17]	-			p <.001
2b	(Intercept)	4.09	1.83		2.23	.027	[0.46, 7.71]	-	.26	.24	$F(3, 127) = 14.87$,
	X_1	0.19	0.05	.56	3.72	<.001	[0.09, 0.29]	3.87			p <.001
	X_2	0.06	0.05	.21	1.19	.236	[-0.04, 0.17]	5.47			
	X_3	-0.09	0.06	-.28	-1.47	.145	[-0.21, 0.03]	6.24			

Note. Models 1a and 2a n = 132. Models 1b and 2b n = 131. Outcome variable for models 1a and 1b = sexual satisfaction. Outcome variable for models 2a and 2b = relationship satisfaction. Importance = Perceived importance dimension of the SDS. X1 = Perceived Consequences of Disclosure (SDS). X_2 = Depth of Disclosure (SDS). = X_3 = Perceived Importance (SDS). VIF = Variance Inflation Factor.

Table 5

Study 1b RQ1 Item Level Descriptive Statistics for the Three Process Dimensions of the Sexual Disclosure Scales

SDS Item	Perceived Consequences			Depth of Disclosure			Perceived Importance		
	Mean *(SD)*	Skewness Statistic *(SE)*	Kurtosis Statistic *(SE)*	Mean *(SD)*	Skewness Statistic *(SE)*	Kurtosis Statistic *(SE)*	Mean *(SD)*	Skewness Statistic *(SE)*	Kurtosis Statistic *(SE)*
1. What I enjoy most about sex	4.36 (0.84)	-1.19 (.16)	0.82 (.31)	4.19 (1.00)	-1.39 (.16)	1.61 (.31)	4.44 (0.84)	-1.68 (.16)	2.98 (.31)
2. Sexual preferences (e.g., techniques or behaviours I find or would find pleasurable)	4.33 (0.90)	-1.15 (.16)	0.46 (.31)	4.20 (1.00)	-1.24 (.16)	0.98 (.31)	4.47 (0.82)	-1.61 (.16)	2.25 (.31)
3. Use of safe sex practices	3.95 (1.01)	-0.33 (.16)	-0.83 (.31)	4.41 (1.00)	-1.78 (.16)	2.57 (.31)	4.28 (1.18)	-1.60 (.16)	1.56 (.31)
4. My sexual satisfaction	4.00 (1.13)	-1.08 (.16)	0.36 (.31)	4.01 (1.22)	-1.14 (.16)	0.27 (.31)	4.45 (0.79)	-1.44 (.16)	1.83 (.31)
5. The extent to which I believe sex is an important part of a relationship	4.12 (0.98)	-1.00 (.16)	0.45 (.31)	4.17 (1.07)	-1.39 (.16)	1.44 (.31)	4.45 (0.77)	-1.36 (.16)	1.57 (.31)
6. My views on the role of sex in the relationship	4.02 (1.01)	-0.74 (.16)	-0.27 (.31)	4.08 (1.08)	-1.11 (.16)	0.60 (.31)	4.36 (0.86)	-1.54 (.16)	2.65 (.31)
7. My personal views on sexual morality	3.74 (1.03)	-0.37 (.16)	-0.35 (.31)	3.97 (1.20)	-1.04 (.16)	0.23 (.31)	4.06 (1.13)	-1.10 (.16)	0.46 (.31)
8. Oral sex	4.11 (1.01)	-0.91 (.16)	0.16 (.31)	4.31 (1.04)	-1.53 (.16)	1.61 (.31)	4.26 (1.01)	-1.46 (.16)	1.83 (.31)
9. My concerns about preventing sexually transmitted infections (STIs/STDs)	3.88 (1.04)	-0.47 (.16)	-0.35 (.31)	4.17 (1.18)	-1.40 (.16)	1.02 (.31)	4.40 (1.12)	-2.00 (.16)	3.05 (.31)
10. My sexual thoughts or fantasies	3.84 (1.13)	-0.84 (.16)	0.02 (.31)	3.47 (1.36)	-0.49 (.16)	-0.98 (.31)	3.81 (1.17)	-0.80 (.16)	-0.21 (.31)
11. My sexual health history	3.85 (1.06)	-0.48 (.16)	-0.43 (.31)	4.29 (1.05)	-1.53 (.16)	1.67 (.31)	4.36 (1.04)	-1.80 (.16)	2.61 (.31)
12. My views concerning relationship exclusivity (e.g., …)	3.75 (1.37)	-0.72 (.16)	-0.72 (.31)	4.21 (1.33)	-1.54 (.16)	0.97 (.31)	4.38 (1.22)	-1.93 (.16)	2.41 (.31)
13. What about sex makes me anxious	3.87 (1.02)	-0.55 (.16)	-0.21 (.31)	3.76 (1.21)	-0.81 (.16)	-0.16 (.31)	4.20 (1.06)	-1.32 (.16)	1.20 (.31)
14. Masturbation	3.46 (1.19)	-0.31 (.16)	-0.55 (.31)	3.47 (1.51)	-0.52 (.16)	-1.17 (.31)	3.29 (1.44)	-0.32 (.16)	-1.21 (.31)
15. Sexual problems or difficulties I might have	3.80 (1.04)	-0.54 (.16)	-0.24 (.31)	3.89 (1.16)	-0.97 (.16)	0.22 (.31)	4.36 (0.88)	-1.40 (.16)	1.69 (.31)
16. Pornography	3.13 (1.11)	0.03 (.16)	-0.44 (.31)	3.39 (1.47)	-0.39 (.16)	-1.24 (.31)	3.23 (1.34)	-0.29 (.16)	-0.99 (.31)
17. Anal sex	3.39 (1.25)	-0.32 (.16)	-0.60 (.31)	3.77 (1.50)	-0.85 (.16)	-0.79 (.31)	3.46 (1.47)	-0.54 (.16)	-1.06 (.31)
18. My past sexual experiences	3.02 (1.20)	0.00 (.16)	-0.67 (.31)	3.41 (1.41)	-0.43 (.16)	-1.10 (.31)	3.16 (1.43)	-0.22 (.16)	-1.25 (.31)
19. What I dislike sexually (e.g., 'turn offs')	3.95 (1.10)	-0.81 (.16)	-0.19 (.31)	4.01 (1.15)	-1.03 (.16)	0.18 (.31)	4.41 (0.91)	-1.72 (.16)	2.73 (.31)

Note. n = 241. The range for all values spanned the entire Likert response options (1-5), or a range of 4.

Table 6

Study 1b RQ1 Inter-Item Correlations Based on Principal Component Analysis for Perceived Consequences SDS Dimension

SDS Items	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
SDS Item 1. What I enjoy most about sex	–																		
SDS Item 2. Sexual preferences (e.g., techniques or behaviours I find or would find pleasurable)	.66	–																	
SDS Item 3. Use of safe sex practices	.43	.33	–																
SDS Item 4. My sexual satisfaction	.54	.50	.38	–															
SDS Item 5. The extent to which I believe sex is an important part of a relationship	.52	.61	.32	.55	–														
SDS Item 6. My views on the role of sex in the relationship	.46	.55	.39	.58	.62	–													
SDS Item 7. My personal views on sexual morality	.46	.38	.33	.30	.33	.46	–												
SDS Item 8. Oral sex	.53	.54	.34	.45	.48	.50	.40	–											
SDS Item 9. My concerns about preventing sexually transmitted infections (STIs/STDs)	.29	.25	.45	.25	.32	.35	.42	.29	–										
SDS Item 10. My sexual thoughts or fantasies	.53	.47	.26	.51	.47	.49	.44	.56	.30	–									
SDS Item 11. My sexual health history	.45	.35	.43	.35	.34	.34	.47	.31	.45	.36	–								
SDS Item 12. My views concerning relationship exclusivity (e.g., whether or not I or my partner may engage in sexual activity with others)	.30	.33	.33	.37	.28	.24	.30	.31	.34	.40	.25	–							
SDS Item 13. What about sex makes me anxious	.42	.34	.37	.49	.34	.45	.35	.38	.33	.49	.44	.25	–						
SDS Item 14. Masturbation	.38	.38	.36	.31	.34	.34	.38	.50	.30	.50	.35	.32	.45	–					
SDS Item 15. Sexual problems or difficulties I might have	.40	.42	.43	.45	.42	.49	.33	.46	.44	.39	.45	.27	.57	.47	–				
SDS Item 16. Pornography	.24	.23	.27	.28	.20	.24	.26	.36	.17	.35	.31	.22	.35	.53	.31	–			
SDS Item 17. Anal sex	.32	.32	.25	.24	.19	.23	.23	.37	.23	.42	.35	.39	.39	.51	.29	.44	–		
SDS Item 18. My past sexual experiences	.26	.15	.26	.28	.17	.33	.27	.28	.29	.30	.34	.24	.29	.34	.33	.35	.33	–	
SDS Item 19. What I dislike sexually (e.g., 'turn offs')	.53	.50	.36	.51	.48	.51	.38	.50	.40	.57	.39	.33	.54	.49	.60	.34	.35	.33	–

Note. n = 241. The oblimin rotation factor correlation matrix demonstrated that the factors were strongly correlated with each other; Subscale 1 was correlated with Subscale 2 (.50) and Subscale 3 (.61), and Subscales 2 and 3 were also correlated (.54). Each number equates to the corresponding item of the SDS (e.g., 1 = Item 1).

Table 7

Study 1b RQ1 Inter-Item Correlations Based on Principal Component Analysis for Depth of Disclosure SDS Dimension

SDS Items	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
SDS Item 1. What I enjoy most about sex	–																		
SDS Item 2. Sexual preferences (e.g., techniques or behaviours I find or would find pleasurable)	.71	–																	
SDS Item 3. Use of safe sex practices	.34	.23	–																
SDS Item 4. My sexual satisfaction	.65	.64	.32	–															
SDS Item 5. The extent to which I believe sex is an important part of a relationship	.56	.54	.29	.58	–														
SDS Item 6. My views on the role of sex in the relationship	.59	.53	.34	.56	.63	–													
SDS Item 7. My personal views on sexual morality	.44	.44	.21	.36	.39	.46	–												
SDS Item 8. Oral sex	.48	.39	.30	.51	.42	.36	.28	–											
SDS Item 9. My concerns about preventing sexually transmitted infections (STIs/STDs)	.25	.27	.46	.27	.24	.28	.41	.23	–										
SDS Item 10. My sexual thoughts or fantasies	.54	.52	.21	.54	.43	.45	.42	.45	.29	–									
SDS Item 11. My sexual health history	.32	.28	.43	.28	.36	.31	.41	.23	.46	.23	–								
SDS Item 12. My views concerning relationship exclusivity (e.g., whether or not I or my partner may engage in sexual activity with others)	.20	.25	.24	.30	.23	.28	.40	.29	.47	.26	.29	–							
SDS Item 13. What about sex makes me anxious	.42	.40	.42	.46	.42	.42	.43	.38	.41	.46	.35	.33	–						
SDS Item 14. Masturbation	.44	.38	.26	.35	.35	.36	.34	.37	.26	.51	.34	.23	.48	–					
SDS Item 15. Sexual problems or difficulties I might have	.28	.32	.30	.35	.35	.33	.39	.29	.45	.38	.38	.31	.55	.37	–				
SDS Item 16. Pornography	.42	.36	.23	.35	.39	.38	.39	.35	.34	.47	.32	.28	.38	.60	37	–			
SDS Item 17. Anal sex	.34	.36	.33	.33	.29	.27	.31	.36	.35	.35	.41	.36	.38	.53	.39	.49	–		
SDS Item 18. My past sexual experiences	.17	.12	.13	.19	.24	.19	.31	.16	.26	.21	.40	.32	.31	.30	.31	.28	.28	–	
SDS Item 19. What I dislike sexually (e.g., 'turn offs')	.48	.44	.31	.48	.46	.48	.34	.46	.36	.51	.26	.34	.56	.45	.50	.40	.34	.21	–

Note. $n = 241$. The oblimin rotation factor correlation matrix demonstrated that the factors were strongly correlated with each other; Subscale 1 was correlated with Subscale 2 (.52) and Subscale 3 (.54), and Subscales 2 and 3 were also correlated (.53). Each number equates to the corresponding item of the SDS (e.g., 1 = Item 1).

Table 8

Study 1b RQ1 Inter-Item Correlations Based on Principal Component Analysis for Perceived Importance SDS Dimension

SDS Items	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
SDS Item 1. What I enjoy most about sex	–																		
SDS Item 2. Sexual preferences (e.g., techniques or behaviours I find or would find pleasurable)	.60	–																	
SDS Item 3. Use of safe sex practices	.24	.23	–																
SDS Item 4. My sexual satisfaction	.58	.43	.27	–															
SDS Item 5. The extent to which I believe sex is an important part of a relationship	.39	.41	.27	.35	–														
SDS Item 6. My views on the role of sex in the relationship	.49	.45	.38	.41	.52	–													
SDS Item 7. My personal views on sexual morality	.30	.34	.20	.20	.25	.36	–												
SDS Item 8. Oral sex	.41	.41	.32	.35	.28	.39	.27	–											
SDS Item 9. My concerns about preventing sexually transmitted infections (STIs/STDs)	.14	.18	.44	.15	.12	.11	.18	.25	–										
SDS Item 10. My sexual thoughts or fantasies	.43	.38	.08	.48	.27	.26	.21	.39	.21	–									
SDS Item 11. My sexual health history	.31	.27	.29	.25	.15	.24	.11	.28	.32	.27	–								
SDS Item 12. My views concerning relationship exclusivity (e.g., whether or not I or my partner may engage in sexual activity with others)	.24	.29	.31	.27	.27	.21	.26	.35	.34	.29	.34	–							
SDS Item 13. What about sex makes me anxious	.27	.30	.39	.36	.16	.22	.27	.21	.23	.19	.27	.31	–						
SDS Item 14. Masturbation	.30	.35	.22	.22	.25	.33	.34	.30	.23	.37	.23	.21	.26	–					
SDS Item 15. Sexual problems or difficulties I might have	.38	.33	.28	.38	.33	.32	.24	.27	.31	.28	.30	.45	.36	.37	–				
SDS Item 16. Pornography	.27	.25	.22	.16	.30	.34	.30	.33	.24	.31	.17	.27	.16	.56	.34	–			
SDS Item 17. Anal sex	.27	.33	.29	.22	.22	.27	.20	.37	.25	.25	.32	.42	.29	.40	.38	.42	–		
SDS Item 18. My past sexual experiences	.24	.25	.18	.21	.20	.26	.21	.17	.11	.30	.31	.23	.14	.40	.26	.31	.35	–	
SDS Item 19. What I dislike sexually (e.g., 'turn offs')	.38	.40	.39	.42	.30	.37	.26	.44	.38	.38	.43	.38	.46	.38	.30	.53	.32	.23	–

Note. n = 241. The oblimin rotation factor correlation matrix demonstrated that the factors were strongly correlated with each other; Subscale 1 was correlated with Subscale 2 (.47) and Subscale 3 (.54), and Subscales 2 and 3 were also correlated (.52). Each number equates to the corresponding item of the SDS (e.g., 1 = Item 1).

Table 9

Study 1b RQ1 Factor Loadings and Commonalities Based on Maximum Likelihood Factor Analyses with Direct Oblimin Rotation for 19-Item SDS for All Three Dimensions

SDS Items	Subscale 1			Subscale 2			Subscale 3		
	Cons	Dept	Impo	Cons	Dept	Impo	Cons	Dept	Impo
SDS Item 1. What I enjoy most about sex	.70	.86	.84						
SDS Item 2. Sexual preferences (e.g., techniques or behaviours I find or would find pleasurable)	.83	.82	.64						
SDS Item 4. My sexual satisfaction	.64	.82	.70						
SDS Item 5. The extent to which I believe sex is an important part of a relationship	.79	.69	.45						
SDS Item 6. My views on the role of sex in the relationship	.69	.68	.54						
SDS Item 10. My sexual thoughts or fantasies	.49	.50	.41				.38		
SDS Item 19. What I dislike sexually (e.g., 'turn offs')	.41	.40	.63						
SDS Item 3. Use of safe sex practices				.55	.48	.54			
SDS Item 9. My concerns about preventing sexually transmitted infections (STIs/STDs)				.75	.81	.64			
SDS Item 11. My sexual health history				.58	.56	.46			
SDS Item 12. My views concerning relationship exclusivity (e.g., whether or not I or my partner may engage in sexual activity with others)				.25	.59	.64			
SDS Item 15. Sexual problems or difficulties I might have				.49	.54	.47			
SDS Item 18. My past sexual experiences				.34	.40				.41
SDS Item 8. Oral sex	.55	.46	.32				.32		
SDS Item 14. Masturbation							.68	.89	.74
SDS Item 16. Pornography							.66	.55	.75
SDS Item 17. Anal sex				.34	.40				.41
*SDS Item 7. My personal views on sexual morality		.30		.67	.40				.29
**SDS Item 13. What about sex makes me anxious				.36	.41	.46			

Table 10

Study 1b RQ1 Descriptive Statistics for the Average Score of the Three Content Areas of the Sexual Disclosure Scales

SDS Content Area	Number of Items	Mean *(SD)*	Skewness Statistic *(SE)*	Kurtosis Statistic *(SE)*
Subscale 1: Sexual Preferences	7	87.13 (14.11)	-0.79 (.16)	0.01 (.31)
Subscale 2: Sexual Health	6	69.03 (12.72)	-0.40 (.16)	-0.67 (.31)
Subscale 3: Sexual Behaviours	4	43.28 (10.62)	-0.56 (.16)	-0.19 (.31)

Note. *n* = 241.

Table 11

Study 1b RQ2 Hierarchical Regression Analyses Examining the Relative Contribution of Content Areas (models 3 and 4) and Process Dimensions (models 5 and 6) of the SDS on Relationship and Sexual Satisfaction

		Step 1			Step 2			Step 3		
Model	SDS Component Predictors	B	(SE)	β	B	(SE)	β	B	(SE)	β
3	Subscale 1	0.29***	0.03	.61	0.27***	0.03	.57	0.29***	0.04	.60
	Subscale 2				0.03	0.04	.06	0.04	0.04	.08
	Subscale 3							-0.04	0.05	-.06
	R^2 Cumulative		.37			.37			.38	
	F Change		$F(1, 239) = 140.97^{***}$			$F(1, 238) = 0.77$			$F(1, 237) = 0.69$	
4	Subscale 1	0.13***	0.02	.41	0.11***	0.02	.37	0.15***	0.03	.47
	Subscale 2				0.02	0.03	.06	0.05	0.03	.15
	Subscale 3							-0.10**	0.03	-.24
	R^2 Cumulative		.17			.17			.20	
	F Change		$F(1, 239) = 47.81^{***}$			$F(1, 238) = 0.64$			$F(1, 237) = 8.49^{**}$	
5	Perceived Consequences	0.30***	0.03	.57	0.22***	0.04	.42	0.25***	0.04	.48
	Depth of Disclosure				0.10**	0.04	.22	0.22***	0.05	.47
	Perceived Importance							-0.20***	0.06	-.35
	R^2 Cumulative		.33			.35			.38	
	F Change		$F(1, 239) = 116.08^{***}$			$F(1, 238) = 8.29^{**}$			$F(1, 237) = 13.26^{***}$	
6	Perceived Consequences	0.15***	0.02	.44	0.16***	0.03	.48	0.19***	0.03	.58
	Depth of Disclosure				-0.02	0.03	-.06	0.10**	0.03	.33
	Perceived Importance							-0.20***	0.04	-.54
	R^2 Cumulative		.20			.20			.28	
	F Change		$F(1, 239) = 57.86^{***}$			$F(1, 238) = 0.49$			$F(1, 237) = 26.74^{***}$	

Note. $n = 241$. The outcome variable for models 3 and 5 was sexual satisfaction. The outcome variable for models 4 and 6 was relationship satisfaction. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Table 12

Study 1b RQ4 Moderation Analyses Examining the Interaction between the AAQ-2 and SDS

Content Areas and Process Dimensions in Predicting Sexual and Relationship Satisfaction

Model		B	(SE)	t	p	95% CI
7	Sexual Satisfaction					
	Intercept	28.12	.34	82.66	< .001	[27.79, 28.79]
	SDS Subscale 1	0.29	.02	11.96	< .001	[0.24, 0.34]
	AAQ-2	-0.10	.03	-2.78	.006	[-0.16, -0.03]
	Interaction SDS Subscale 1 * AAQ-2	0.005	.003	1.84	.067	[-0.003, 0.01]
	R^2 Model = .04, p < .001					
	R^2 Change = .01, p < .067					
8	Relationship Satisfaction					
	Intercept	15.70	.24	65.18	< .001	[15.22, 16.17]
	SDS Subscale 1	0.12	.02	7.12	< .001	[0.09, 0.16]
	AAQ-2	-0.13	.03	-5.29	< .001	[-0.18, -0.08]
	Interaction SDS Subscale 1 * AAQ-2	0.004	.002	2.41	.017	[0.001, 0.01]
	R^2 Model = .27, p < .001					
	R^2 Change = .01, p < .017					
9	Sexual Satisfaction					
	Intercept	28.09	.39	72.62	< .001	[27.33, 28.85]
	SDS Subscale 2	0.23	.03	7.41	< .001	[0.17, 0.29]
	AAQ-2	-0.11	.04	-2.87	.004	[-0.19, -0.04]
	Interaction SDS Subscale 2 * AAQ-2	0.003	.003	1.00	.320	[-0.003, 0.01]
	R^2 Model = .21, p < .001					
	R^2 Change = .003, p = .320					
10	Relationship Satisfaction					
	Intercept	15.67	.25	62.26	< .001	[15.17, 16.16]
	SDS Subscale 2	0.10	.02	4.98	< .001	[0.06, 0.14]
	AAQ-2	-0.14	.03	-5.29	< .001	[-0.19, -0.08]
	Interaction SDS Subscale 2 * AAQ-2	0.003	.002	1.73	.084	[-0.004, 0.01]
	R^2 Model = .19, p < .001					
	R^2 Change = .01, p < .084					

Model		B	(SE)	t	p	95% CI
11	Sexual Satisfaction					
	Intercept	28.02	.39	71.71	$< .001$	[27.25, 28.79]
	SDS Subscale 3	0.26	.03	7.09	$< .001$	[0.19, 0.34]
	AAQ-2	-0.15	.04	-3.79	$< .001$	[-0.23, -0.07]
	Interaction SDS Subscale 3 * AAQ-2	0.01	.004	1.74	.083	[-0.001, 0.01]
	R^2 Model = .21, $p < .001$					
	R^2 Change = .01, $p = .083$					
12	Relationship Satisfaction					
	Intercept	15.61	.26	60.26	$< .001$	[15.10, 16.12]
	SDS Subscale 3	0.08	.02	3.36	$< .001$	[0.03, 0.13]
	AAQ-2	-0.15	.03	-5.67	$< .001$	[-0.20, -0.10]
	Interaction SDS Subscale 3 * AAQ-2	0.01	.003	2.01	.045	[0.001, 0.01]
	R^2 Model = .15, $p < .001$					
	R^2 Change = .01, $p < .045$					
13	Sexual Satisfaction					
	Intercept	28.09	.35	80.15	$< .001$	[27.40, 28.78]
	Consequences	0.29	.03	10.88	$< .001$	[0.24, 0.35]
	AAQ-2	-0.11	.04	-3.19	.002	[-0.18, -0.04]
	Interaction Consequences * AAQ-2	0.004	.003	1.41	.159	[-0.00, 0.01]
	R^2 Model = .36, $p < .001$					
	R^2 Change = .01, $p = .159$					
14	Relationship Satisfaction					
	Intercept	15.67	.23	67.08	$< .001$	[15.21, 16.13]
	Consequences	0.14	.02	7.99	$< .001$	[0.11, 0.18]
	AAQ-2	-0.14	.02	-5.81	$< .001$	[-0.19, -0.10]
	Interaction Consequences * AAQ-2	0.005	.002	2.69	.008	[0.001, 0.01]
	R^2 Model = .31, $p < .001$					
	R^2 Change = .02, $p < .008$					
15	Sexual Satisfaction					
	Intercept	28.10	.37	76.79	$< .001$	[27.38, 28.83]
	Depth	0.24	.03	9.39	$< .001$	[0.18, 0.29]
	AAQ-2	-0.11	.04	-2.92	.004	[-0.18, -0.04]
	Interaction Depth * AAQ-2	0.005	.003	1.90	.059	[-0.0002, 0.01]
	R^2 Model = .30, $p < .001$					
	R^2 Change = .01, $p = .059$					

Model		B	(SE)	t	p	95% CI
16	Relationship Satisfaction					
	Intercept	15.67	.25	62.10	< .001	[15.18, 16.17]
	Depth	0.08	.01	4.77	< .001	[0.05, 0.12]
	AAQ-2	-0.13	.03	-5.21	< .001	[-0.18, -0.08]
	Interaction Depth * AAQ-2	0.004	.002	2.14	.033	[0.0003, 0.01]
	R^2 Model = .19, $p < .001$					
	R^2 Change = .02, $p < .033$					
17	Sexual Satisfaction					
	Intercept	28.01	.39	70.96	< .001	[27.24, 28.79]
	Importance	0.23	.03	6.84	< .001	[0.17, 0.30]
	AAQ-2	-0.16	.04	-3.88	< .001	[-0.24, -0.08]
	Interaction Importance * AAQ-2	0.005	.003	1.54	.126	[-0.001, 0.01]
	R^2 Model = .19, $p < .001$					
	R^2 Change = .01, $p = .126$					
18	Relationship Satisfaction					
	Intercept	15.61	.26	59.60	< .001	[15.10, 16.13]
	Importance	0.07	.02	2.95	.004	[0.02, 0.11]
	AAQ-2	-0.15	.03	-5.59	< .001	[-0.20, -0.10]
	Interaction Importance * AAQ-2	0.003	.002	1.53	.127	[-0.001, 0.01]
	R^2 Model = .13, $p < .001$					
	R^2 Change = .01, $p < .127$					

Note. $n = 241$. The outcome variable for models 7, 9, 11, 13, 15, 17 = sexual satisfaction. The outcome variable for models 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18 = relationship satisfaction. R^2 Change = Effect of the moderation beyond the main effects. R^2 Model = amount of variance that the total moderation model accounts for, including the interaction term. Consequences = Perceived Consequences of Disclosure (SDS). Depth = Depth of Disclosure (SDS). Importance = Perceived Importance of Disclosure (SDS).

Table 13

Study 2a Coding Frequencies

Coding Themes	Total Frequency
Relationship: Prevention-Focused	0
Loss	0
Nonloss	0
Relationship: Promotion Focused	17
Gain	17
Nongain	0
Partner: Prevention-Focused	9
Loss	8
Nonloss	1
Partner: Promotion Focused	21
Gain	20
Nongain	1
Self: Prevention-Focused	23
Loss	20
Nonloss	3
Self: Promotion Focused	12
Gain	12
Nongain	0

Note. $n = 82$.

Table 14

Study 2b Descriptive Statistics and Internal Consistency for Self-Report Measures

Measured Construct	Mean *(SD)*	Skewness Statistic *(SE)*	Kurtosis Statistic *(SE)*	α
Sexual Disclosure Scales (SDS)				
Perceived Consequences	72.57 (13.03)	-0.34 (.16)	-0.27 (.31)	.91
Depth of Disclosure	75.18 (14.53)	-0.87 (.16)	0.57 (.31)	.90
Perceived Importance	77.83 (11.83)	-0.77 (.16)	0.39 (.31)	.88
Disclosure about Sexual Preferences	87.13 (14.11)	-0.79 (.16)	0.01 (.31)	.94
Disclosure about Sexual Health	69.03 (12.72)	-0.40 (.16)	-0.07 (.31)	.89
Disclosure about Sexual Behaviours	43.28 (10.62)	-0.56 (.16)	-0.19 (.31)	.90
DCS	60.61 (12.83)	-0.79 (.16)	0.26 (.31)	.90
Barriers to Sexual Likes	31.38 (14.76)	1.63 (.16)	2.24 (.31)	.96
Barriers to Sexual Dislikes	37.12 (17.69)	0.98 (.16)	0.06 (.31)	.96
CSI-4	15.65 (4.32)	-1.12 (.16)	1.17 (.31)	.94
GMSEX	28.07 (6.74)	-1.08 (.16)	0.53 (.31)	.96
ECR-RS				
Avoidant Attachment	1.94 (1.13)	1.33 (.16)	1.05 (.31)	.86
Anxious Attachment	2.37 (1.64)	1.31 (.16)	0.91 (.31)	.91
AAQ-2	23.88 (9.89)	0.04 (.16)	-0.78 (.31)	.92
RFQ				
Promotion Motivations	3.43 (0.68)	0.11 (.16)	-0.28 (.31)	.70
Prevention Motivations	3.29 (0.89)	-0.04 (.16)	-0.44 (.31)	.82

Note. Study 2b *n* = 241. α = *Cronbach's alpha.* Mean values were calculated based on total scores for all constructs except for ECR-RS and RFQ, where averaged scores were used. *Disclosure about Sexual Preferences* = Sexual Preferences Content Area Subscale. *Disclosure about Sexual Health* = Sexual Health Disclosure Content Area Subscale. *Disclosure about Sexual Behaviours* = Sexual Behaviours Content Area Subscale. DCS = Dyadic Communication Scale. CSI-4 = Couples Satisfaction Index. GMSEX = Global Measure of Sexual Satisfaction. ECR-RS = Experiences in Close Relationships – Relationship Structures. AAQ-2 = The Acceptance and Action Questionnaire. RFQ = Regulatory Focus Questionnaire.

Table 15

Study 2b Coding Frequencies

Coding Themes	Dominant Code Frequencies	Sexual Likes Frequencies	Sexual Dislikes Frequencies	Sexual Fantasies Frequencies
Relationship: Prev	2	1	1	4
Loss	1	0	0	2
Nonloss	1	1	1	2
Relationship: Prom	60	63	59	39
Gain	60	63	54	38
Nongain	0	0	5	1
Partner: Prev	35	31	40	33
Loss	21	15	26	20
Nonloss	14	16	14	13
Partner: Prom	32	39	21	51
Gain	32	39	18	48
Nongain	0	0	3	3
Self: Prev	59	41	47	55
Loss	40	25	27	40
Nonloss	19	16	20	15
Self: Prom	39	46	56	30
Gain	35	42	36	25
Nongain	4	4	20	5

Note. $n = 227$. Prev = Prevention Focused. Prom = Promotion Focused.

Table 16

Study 2b Self-Report Measures Pearson's Zero-Order Correlations

						Correlations										
Constructs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
SDS																
1. Perceived	–															
2. Depth	.72**	–														
3. Perceived	.68**	.84**	–													
4. *Disclosure about Sexual Preferences*	.85**	.82**	.76**	–												
5. *Disclosure about Sexual Health*	.81**	.78**	.76**	.66**	–											
6. *Disclosure about Sexual Behaviours*	.70**	.83**	.82**	.67**	.64**	–										
7. DCS	.49**	.39**	.22**	.48**	.37**	.27**	–									
8. BCQ Likes	-.45**	-.41**	-.34**	-.44**	-.38**	-.34**	-.49**	–								
9. BCQ Dislikes	-.44**	-.42**	-.26**	-.45**	-.35**	-.30**	-.59**	.60**	–							
10. CSI-4	.44**	.29**	.13*	.41**	.30**	.17**	.71**	-.30**	-.41**	–						
11. GMSEX	.57**	.51**	.37**	.61**	.43**	.39**	.61**	-.41**	-.42**	.68**	–					
ECR-RS																
12. Avoidant	-.43**	-.33**	-.22**	-.41**	-.34**	-.21**	-.58**	.32**	.47**	-.54**	-.47**	–				
13. Anxious	-.16*	-.10	.02	-.15*	-.12	-.01	-.57**	.35**	.42**	-.43**	-.31**	.35**	–			
14. AAQ-2	-.04	-.04	.11	-.08	-.04	.08	-.38**	.20**	.31**	-.31**	-.18**	.28**	.59**	–		
15. Promotion	.12	.15*	.08	.17**	.14-	.05	.30**	-.11	-.17**	.25**	.22**	-.22**	-.42**	-.56**	–	
16. Prevention	-.003	.06	.04	.002	.12	-.04	.15*	-.04	-.07	.10	-.08	-.13*	-.22**	-.21**	.21**	–

Note. Study 2b *n* = 241 (responses in upper right section of the table). SDS = Sexual Disclosure Scales. Consequences = Perceived Consequences of Disclosure (SDS). Depth = Depth of Disclosure (SDS). Importance = Perceived Importance of Disclosure (SDS). *Disclosure about Sexual Preferences* = Sexual Preferences Content Area Subscale (SDS). *Disclosure about Sexual Health* = Sexual

Health Disclosure Content Area Subscale (SDS). *Disclosure about Sexual Behaviours* = Sexual Behaviours Content Area Subscale (SDS). DCS = Dyadic Communication Scale. BCQ Likes = Barriers to Communication scale, sexual likes. BCQ Likes = Barriers to Communication scale, sexual dislikes. CSI-4 = Couples Satisfaction Index. GMSEX = Global Measure of Sexual Satisfaction. ECR-RS = Experiences in Close Relationships – Relationship Structures (Avoidant and Anxious dimensions). AAQ-2 = The Acceptance and Action Questionnaire. Promotion = Promotion dimension of the RFQ. Prevention = Prevention dimension of the RFQ. *p < .05, ** p < .01.

Table 17

Study 2b Multiple Regression Coefficients Assessing the Impact of Individual and Relationship Context Factors on Sexual Satisfaction

Model	Predictors	B	SE	β	t	p	95% CI	VIF
19	(Intercept)	7.92	2.83	-	2.80	.006	[2.35, 13.49]	-
	Avoidance	-0.61	0.34	-.10	-1.78	.076	[-1.29, .07]	1.58
	Anxiety	0.16	0.27	.04	0.60	.548	[-0.36, 0.68]	1.96
	Exp Avoidance	0.05	0.04	.07	1.28	.203	[-0.03, 0.13]	1.56
	Relat Satisfaction	0.75	0.11	.48	7.11	<.001	[0.54, 0.96]	2.14
	Dyadic Comm	0.13	0.04	.25	3.37	<.001	[0.06, 0.21]	2.65

$$R^2 = .50$$
$$F(5, 235) = 47.20, p < .001$$

Note. n = 241. Outcome variable = sexual satisfaction. VIF = Variance Inflation Factor. Avoidance = Avoidant attachment (ECR-RS). Anxiety = Anxiety attachment (ECR-RS). Exp Avoidance = Experience avoidance (AAQ-2). Relat Satisfaction = Relationship satisfaction (CSI-4). Dyadic Comm = Dyadic communication (DCS).

Table 18

Study 2b Logistic Regression Assessing the Association of Individual and Relationship Context Factors on RFT Motivations

Model	Predictors	B	SE	Wald χ^2	p	Exp(B)	95% CI
20	Avoidance	-0.45	0.14	11.24	<.001	0.64	[0.49, 0.83]
	Anxiety	-0.06	0.11	0.28	.596	0.94	[0.76, 1.17]
	Exp Avoidance	0.001	0.02	0.003	.003	.958	[0.97, 1.04]
	Constant	1.32	0.41	10.61	.001	3.74	
				$R^2 = .09$			
				$\chi2\ (3) = 15.80,\ p <.001$			
21	Avoidance	-0.10	0.13	0.57	.449	0.91	[0.71, 1.16]
	Anxiety	-0.02	0.11	0.04	.844	0.98	[0.80, 1.20]
	Exp Avoid	-0.02	0.02	1.29	.255	0.98	[0.95, 1.01]
	Constant	0.99	0.39	6.36	.012	2.69	
				$R^2 = .02$			
				$\chi2\ (3) = 3.86,\ p = .277$			
22	Relat Satisfaction	0.02	0.05	0.20	.656	1.02	[0.93, 1.12]
	Dyadic Comm	0.03	0.02	3.62	.057	1.03	[0.10, 1.06]
				$R^2 = .06$			
				$\chi2\ (3) = 10.17,\ p = .006$			
23	Relat Sat	-0.04	0.05	0.72	.396	0.96	[0.88, 1.05]
	Dyad Comm	0.02	0.02	2.20	.138	1.02	[0.99, 1.05]
				$R^2 = .01$			
				$\chi2\ (3) = 2.31,\ p = .315$			

Note. $n = 227$. Wald = Exp(B) = Odds ratio. $R^2 = $ *Nagelkerke R^2*. Wald $\chi^2 = $ Wald Chi-square. Models 20, 22 predicting promotion compared to prevention motivations. Models 21, 23 predicting self-focused compared to other-focused motivations. Avoidance = Avoidant attachment (ECR-RS). Anxiety = Anxiety attachment (ECR-RS). Exp Avoidance = Experience avoidance (AAQ-2). Relat Satisfaction = Relationship satisfaction (CSI-4). Dyadic Comm = Dyadic communication (DCS).

Table 19

Study 2b Multiple Regression Coefficients Assessing the Impact of Individual and Relationship Context Factors on RFT Motivations

Model	Predictors	B	SE	β	t	p	95% CI	VIF
24	(Intercept)	4.39	0.10	-	42.57	<.001	[4.19, 4.59]	-
	Avoidance	-0.26	0.03	-.04	-0.76	.447	[-0.09, 0.04]	1.15
	Anxiety	-0.05	0.03	-.11	-1.67	.096	[-0.10, 0.01]	1.64
	Exp Avoidance	-0.03	0.01	-.48	-7.29	<.001	[-0.04, -0.023]	1.56
				$R^2 = .33$				
				$F(3, 237) = 38.85, p <.001$				
25	(Intercept)	3.79	0.16	-	23.88	<.001	[3.48, 4.11]	-
	Avoidance	-0.04	0.05	-.05	-0.72	.470	[-0.14, 0.07]	1.15
	Anxiety	-0.07	0.04	-.13	-1.58	.116	[-0.16, 0.02]	1.64
	Exp Avoidance	-0.01	0.01	-.12	-1.57	.117	[-0.03, .003]	1.56
				$R^2 = .06$				
				$F(3, 237) = 5.07, p = .002$				
26	(Intercept)	2.46	0.21	-	12.00	<.001	[2.05, 2.86]	-
	Relat Satisfaction	0.01	0.01	.08	0.89	.373	[-0.15, 0.04]	2.03
	Dyadic Comm	0.01	0.01	.24	2.74	.007	[0.004, 0.02]	2.03
				$R^2 = .09$				
				$F(3, 238) = 11.94, p <.001$				
27	(Intercept)	2.65	0.28	-	9.59	<.001	[2.10, 3.19]	-
	Relat Satisfaction	-.01	0.02	-.03	-0.29	.774	[-0.04, 0.03]	2.03
	Dyadic Comm	0.01	0.01	.17	1.90	.059	[0.0005, 0.02]	2.03
				$R^2 = .02$				
				$F(3, 238) = 2.95, p = .054$				

Note. $n = 241$. Models 24 and 26 outcome variable = promotion-focused motivations (RFQ). Model 25 and 27 outcome variable = prevention-focused motivations (RFQ). VIF = Variance Inflation Factor. Avoidance = Avoidant attachment (ECR-RS). Anxiety =

Anxiety attachment (ECR-RS). Exp Avoidance = Experience avoidance (AAQ-2). Relat Satisfaction = Relationship satisfaction (CSI-4). Dyadic Comm = Dyadic communication (DCS).

Table 20

Study 2b Means and Standard Deviation Scores by Coding Level for Depth of Disclosure

	RFT Coding Groups				
	Rel Prom	Part Prev	Part Prom	Self Prev	Self Prom
Measure	*M* (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)
Depth of Disclosure	73.09 (10.07)	62.43 (15.41)	69.63 (11.17)	63.55 (14.73)	69.03 (10.34)

Note. Rel Prom, *n* = 61. Part Prev, *n* = 35. Part Prom, *n* = 32. Self Prev, *n* = 58. Self Prom, *n* = 39. Rel Prom = Relationship-focused promotion motivations. Partner Prev = Partner-focused prevention motivations. Partner Prom = Partner-focused promotion motivations. Self Prev = Self-focused prevention motivations. Self Prom = Self-focused promotion motivations. Relationship-prevention motivations were not included in the analysis due to its low frequency (*n* = 2).

Table 21

Study 2b Multiple Regression Coefficients Assessing the Impact of RFT Motivations on Dimensions and Content Areas of Sexual

Communication

Model	Predictors	*B*	*SE*	β	*t*	*p*	95% CI
28	(Intercept)	39.88	5.51	-	7.24	<.001	[29.03, 50.74]
	Promotion	-2.28	1.42	-.11	-1.60	.111	[-5.08, 0.53]
	Prevention	-0.21	1.09	-.01	-0.20	.845	[-2.37, 1.94]
				$R^2 = .01$			
				$F(2, 238) = 1.43, p = .243$			
29	(Intercept)	53.79	6.55	-	8.22	<.001	[40.89, 66.68]
	Promotion	-4.10	1.69	-.16	-2.43	.016	[-7.43, -0.78]
	Prevention	-0.79	1.30	-.04	-0.61	.544	[-3.35, 1.77]
				$R^2 = .03$			
				$F(2, 238) = 3.59, p = .029$			
30	(Intercept)	65.82	4.86	-	13.55	<.001	[56.25, 75.39]
	Promotion	2.37	1.25	.12	1.89	.060	[-0.01, 4.84]
	Prevention	-0.42	0.96	-.03	-0.43	.667	[-2.31, 1.48]
				$R^2 = .02$			
				$F(2, 238) = 1.79, p = .169$			
31	(Intercept)	72.43	4.43	-	16.36	<.001	[63.71, 81.16]
	Promotion	1.20	1.14	.07	1.06	.293	[-1.05, 3.45]
	Prevention	0.39	0.88	.03	0.44	.661	[-1.34, 2.12]
				$R^2 = .01$			
				$F(2, 238) = 0.78, p = .459$			

Model	Predictors	B	SE	β	t	p	95% CI
32	(Intercept)	76.13	5.21	-	14.60	<.001	[65.87, 86.40]
	Promotion	3.75	1.35	.18	2.79	.006	[1.10, 6.40]
	Prevention	-0.56	1.03	-.04	-0.54	.587	[-2.60, 1.47]
				$R^2 = .03$			
				$F(2, 238) = 3.88, p = .022$			
33	(Intercept)	57.04	4.71	-	12.11	<.001	[47.76, 66.32]
	Promotion	2.25	1.22	.12	1.86	.065	[-0.14, 4.65]
	Prevention	1.30	0.93	.09	1.39	.167	[-0.54, 3.14]
				$R^2 = .03$			
				$F(2, 238) = 3.55, p = .037$			
34	(Intercept)	42.15	3.98	-	10.60	<.001	[34.32, 50.00]
	Promotion	0.98	1.03	.06	0.96	.339	[-1.04, 3.00]
	Prevention	-0.68	0.79	-.06	-0.87	.387	[-2.24, 0.87]
				$R^2 = .03$			
				$F(2, 238) = 3.55, p = .029$			

Note. $n = 241$. The outcome variables for the models are as follows: Model 28 = Barriers to communicating sexual likes (BCQ); Model 29 = Barriers to communicating sexual dislikes (BCQ); Model 30 = Perceived consequences of disclosure (SDS); Model 31 = Perceived importance of disclosure (SDS); Model 32 = Disclosure about Sexual Preferences (SDS); Model 33 = Disclosure about Sexual Health (SDS); Model 34 = Disclosure about Sexual Behaviours (SDS). Variance Inflation Factor = 1.04. Promotion = Promotion-focused motivations (RFQ). Prevention = Prevention-focused motivations (RFQ).

Table 22

Study 2b Multiple Regression Coefficients Assessing the Impact of Individual and Relationship Context Factors on Depth of Disclosure

Model	Predictors	B	SE	β	t	p	95% CI	VIF
35	(Intercept)	43.52	6.93	-	6.28	<.001	[29.86, 57.18]	-
	Avoidance	-2.00	0.84	-.18	-2.37	.019	[-3.67, -0.34]	1.58
	Anxiety	1.11	0.65	.14	1.71	.089	[-0.12, 2.39]	1.96
	Exp Avoidance	0.07	0.10	.06	0.76	.449	[-0.12, 0.26]	1.56
	Relat Satisfaction	-0.09	0.26	-.03	-0.36	.722	[-0.60, 0.42]	2.14
	Dyadic Comm	0.41	0.10	.41	4.25	<.001	[0.22, 0.60]	2.65

$$R^2 = .19$$
$$F(5, 235) = 10.90, p < .001$$

Note. n = 241. Outcome variable = Depth of disclosure. VIF = Variance Inflation Factor. Avoidance = Avoidant attachment (ECR-RS). Anxiety = Anxiety attachment (ECR-RS). Exp Avoidance = Experience avoidance (AAQ-2). Relat Satisfaction = Relationship satisfaction (CSI-4). Dyadic Comm = Dyadic communication (DCS).

Table 23

Study 2b Hierarchical Regression Analysis Examining the Relative Contribution of Sexual

Communication on Sexual Satisfaction

Step	Predictors	*B*	*SE*	β	*t*	*p*	95% CI	VIF
1	Promotion	2.46	0.63	.25	3.89	<.001	[1.21, 3.70]	1.04
	Prevention	-1.03	0.49	-.14	-2.12	.035	[-1.98, -0.07]	1.04
				$R^2 = .33$				
				$F(2, 238) = 8.48, p <.001$				
2	Promotion	1.41	0.52	.14	2.73	.007	[0.39, 2.43]	1.08
	Prevention	-0.89	0.39	-.12	-2.23	.027	[-1.64, -0.10]	1.05
	Disclosure about Sexual Preferences	0.28	0.02	.58	11.40	<.001	[0.23, 0.33]	1.03
				$R^2_{\text{Change}} = .06$				
				$F_{\text{Change}}(1, 237) = 130.04, p <.001$				
3	Promotion	1.28	0.50	.13	2.56	.011	[0.30, 2.26]	1.09
	Prevention	-0.85	0.38	-.11	-2.25	.025	[-1.60, -0.11]	1.06
	Disclosure about Sexual Preferences	0.24	0.05	.51	4.74	<.001	[0.14, 0.34]	4.85
	Consequences	0.10	0.05	.17	1.83	.069	[-0.01, 0.21]	3.79
	Importance	-0.13	0.05	-.20	-2.67	.008	[-0.22, -0.03]	2.50
	Likes	-0.06	0.03	-.13	-2.00	.017	[-0.11, -0.001]	1.70
	Dislikes	-0.03	0.03	-.08	-1.18	.238	[-0.08, 0.02]	1.76
				$R^2_{\text{Change}} = .06$				
				$F_{\text{Change}}(4, 233) = 5.92, p <.001$				

Step	Predictors	B	SE	β	t	p	95% CI	VIF
4	Promotion	1.24	0.50	.13	2.50	.013	[0.26, 2.22]	1.09
	Prevention	-0.88	0.37	-.12	-2.36	.019	[-0.16, -0.15]	1.06
	Disclosure about Sexual Preferences	0.20	0.05	.41	3.63	<.001	[0.09, 0.30]	5.58
	Consequences	0.11	0.05	.18	1.96	.051	[0.0004, 0.21]	3.80
	Importance	-0.21	0.06	-.34	-3.53	.001	[-0.33, -0.09]	4.00
	Likes	-0.06	0.03	-.13	-2.00	.047	[-0.11, -0.001]	1.70
	Dislikes	-0.02	0.03	-.05	-0.74	.458	[-0.07, 0.03]	1.83
	Depth	0.13	0.06	.24	2.28	.023	[0.02, 0.24]	4.95

$$R^2{}_{Change} = .06$$
$$F_{Change}(1, 232) = 5.22, p = .023$$

Note. $n = 241$. Promotion = Promotion-focused motivations (RFQ). Prevention = Prevention-focused motivations (RFQ). *Disclosure about Sexual Preferences* = Sexual preferences content area (SDS). Consequences = Perceived consequences of disclosure (SDS). Importance = Perceived importance of disclosure (SDS). Likes = Barriers to disclosing sexual likes (BCQ). Dislikes = Barriers to disclosing sexual dislikes (BCQ). Depth = Depth of disclosure (SDS)