“It's More Important That I Serve Someone Else's Needs. Or That I Just Don't Become the Problem”: Emerging Adult Women on Sexual Communication

by

Megan Jacobs Farnworth

A Thesis Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

Approved April 2019 by the
Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Vincent Waldron, Chair
Brian Feinstein
Lindsey Meân

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

May 2019

ABSTRACT

Sexual satisfaction has been positively linked to both individual and relational wellbeing (Christopher & Sprecher, 2000; Davison, Bell, LaChina, Holden, & Davis, 2009). Further, sexual communication has demonstrated positive impacts on sexual satisfaction (Byers, 2005); yet, research by MacNeil and Byers (2009) found that most people in romantic relationships do not share their sexual preferences with their partner. According to Tolman (2002), women seem to be especially reluctant to communicate sexually, due to the particular societal restrictions placed on expressions of female sexuality and desire. This study aims to understand how emerging adult women communicate with their sexual partners in order to increase pleasure, what barriers exist to sexual communication for these women, and how gendered social norms are expressed in the process. Based on interviews with 19 women between the ages of 20-29, the findings of this study suggest that emerging women often place more weight on social expectations of appropriate female sexual expression than relational context when choosing whether or not and/or how to sexually self-disclose. Further, the women in this study were at varying stages of renegotiating their internalization of the prioritization of male sexual pleasure over female pleasure.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

CHAPTER

1 LITERATURE REVIEW....................1

Overview....................1

The Importance of Communication and Sexual Satisfaction....................2

Sexuality in Emerging Adulthood....................7

Gendered Norms....................9

Theoretical Connections....................13

The Present Study....................19

2 METHODS....................20

Sampling Procedure....................21

Participants....................21

Data Collection Procedures....................22

Data Analysis Procedures....................25

3 FINDINGS....................26

Research Question 1....................26

Broaching the Subject Ahead of Encounter....................27

Preference for Disclosing Sexual Likes....................29

Research Question 2....................30

Fear of Judgment....................30

Lack of Intimacy....................32

CHAPTER Page

Preserving Harmony....................33
Research Question 3....................36
Expecting Male Partner to Lead....................36
Boundaries of Appropriate Sexual Expression....................37
The Prioritization of Male Pleasure....................38
4 DISCUSSION....................40
Reliance of Social Context....................41
The Interplay of Powerful and Marginalized Discourses....................42
Limitations and Opportunity for Future Study....................44
5 REFERENCES....................45

Literature Review

Developing a healthy and satisfying relationship with one's own sexuality is paramount to overall well-being. In fact, according to Miller and Simon (1980), one of the primary developmental goals of adolescence includes becoming a self-motivated sexual actor. As adolescents move into emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000), clarifying identity becomes the principal developmental task. During this formative period, young adults engage in a variety of experimental behaviors in order to better understand who they are and what they like (Ravert, 2009; Halpern & Kaestle, 2014). It would make sense, then, that at the same time that 18-29-year-olds are developing their sense of self, they are also honing in on their own sexuality and discovering what contributes to their own sexual satisfaction. In fact, research by Kaestle and Allen (2011) found that managing the tension between the stigma and pleasure of masturbation is an important developmental process in emerging adulthood. It is important for young adults to cultivate positive relationships with sex, both as a solo and partnered act, as this is shown to impact individual and relational health throughout the lifespan.

Although research on sexual communication — and specifically communication about sexual pleasure — is relatively new, multiple studies have demonstrated the positive impact that sexual communication has on sexual satisfaction. Yet, when surveying 104 heterosexual couples, MacNeil and Byers (2009) found that most people do not engage in conversations about sexual pleasure with their intimate partners. Poor sexual communication has multiple negative implications, which will be discussed later in this review.

Sex clearly represents a taboo topic of conversation, culturally and interpersonally. Deborah Tolman's (2002) interviews with 31 adolescent girls added new insights into what makes this topic so challenging, especially for young women. Many of the girls interviewed by Tolman were eager to be given the opportunity to speak openly about their experiences with sex, and yet, struggled to imagine themselves as active participants in sexual encounters. In fact, when the girls spoke of their own desire, it was often while referencing the danger of being labeled a desiring girl, otherwise known as a slut. Cultural narratives and gendered social norms about what constitutes proper sexual behavior are incredibly restrictive of female sexuality at any age. Tolman's work illustrates how loud these cultural voices are in both private conversations and internal ideas of the self.

While engaging in communication regarding sexual pleasure has been demonstrated to be difficult for most people, young women seem to face unique obstacles in this already taboo terrain. This review will begin with a look at the current research in sexual communication, proceed with a synthesis of relevant insights from research on sexuality in emerging adulthood, examine studies that have addressed gender roles in sex, and end with an analysis of potentially useful theoretical lenses in addressing the question of how emerging adult women engage in sexual communication and what the perceived barriers are in this process.

The Importance of Communication and Satisfaction

Sexual satisfaction, defined as "an affective response arising from one's subjective evaluation of the positive and negative dimensions associated with one's sexual relationship" (Lawrance & Byers, 1995, p. 514), has consistently been shown to

be positively linked to both individual and relational well-being and stability (Christopher & Sprecher, 2000; Davison, Bell, LaChina, Holden, & Davis, 2009; Apt, Hurlbert, Pierce, & White, 1996). In fact, in his *Call to Action to Promote Sexual Health and Responsible Sexual Behavior*, Surgeon General David Satcher argued that sexual health is more than simply the absence of physical illness, but also includes "the ability of individuals to integrate their sexuality into their lives, derive pleasure from it, and reproduce if they so choose" (United States Public Health Service Office, 2001). Yet for many years, a "pleasure deficit" (Higgins & Hirsch, 2007) has existed in much academic research, where sex as a pleasurable experience has been largely ignored.

Originally, the pleasure deficit referred to a gap in public health research; however, the chasm in knowledge about pleasure and sexual satisfaction is not specific to any singular field. For many years, communication scholars have addressed sexuality in the context of romantic relationships, but few studies explicitly focused on communication between sexual partners (Winkler, 2018). Recently, however, researchers have undertaken the task of closing this gap. Sexual communication has been found to be of vital importance in fostering sexual satisfaction (MacNeil & Byers, 2009; Byers, 2005; Byers & Demmons, 1999), while avoidance of the topic is negatively related to sexual satisfaction (Theiss & Estlein, 2014). After comparing survey responses from 312 college students (173 female, 139 male) about relational communication satisfaction, sexual communication satisfaction, and relationship development phase, Wheeless, Wheeless, & Baus (1984) identified four components of sexual communication satisfaction: satisfaction with communication about sexual activity, communication about satisfying sexual behaviors, satisfaction with what is communicated by specific sexual behaviors,

and willingness to communicate with one's partner about sex. However, much of the recent research on sexual communication has focused on sexual self-disclosure, or "the degree to which an individual shares his or her sexual likes and dislikes with his or her intimate partner" (Byers & Rehman, 2014).

Research by MacNeil and Byers (1997; 2005; 2009) has found that sexual self-disclosure may operate through two pathways: an expressive pathway and an instrumental pathway. The expressive pathway posits that both sexual and non-sexual self-disclosure help to build intimacy in the relationship, which in turn increases sexual satisfaction. In the instrumental pathway, sexual self-disclosure works to inform one's partner of sexual likes and dislikes and obtain more of what one likes sexually, while obtaining less of what one does not want sexually. Studies have shown that partners often differ in sexual preferences (Miller & Byers, 2004; McCarthy & Bodner, 2005), and, therefore, negotiation through sexual self-disclosure is crucial to increasing sexual satisfaction in both men and women. Those who report more sexual self-disclosure report fewer sexual concerns and problems (MacNeil & Byers, 1997) and better understanding of a partner's preferences reduces sexual costs (what one finds sexually displeasing, while increasing sexual rewards (what one finds sexually pleasing) (Byers, 2011). In a study of 152 heterosexual couples, ranging in duration of relationship from 6 months to 50 years, Miller and Byers (2004) found that people often rely on cultural, gendered stereotypes to inform their understanding of their partner's preferences, as opposed to either explicit or implicit information offered by their partner. Within this study, the researchers discovered that both men's and women's ideal duration of foreplay was longer than their actual duration of foreplay as a result of partners relying on faulty

sexual stereotypes instead of information directly from their significant other. Therefore, if an individual's ideal sexual script does not match their gendered sexual script, communication is even more crucial to avoiding misperception and creating a more fulfilling sexual experience.

Similarly, in examining questionnaire responses from 53 women and 34 men (average age = 39 years, average length of relationship = 13 years), MacNeil and Byers (1997) found that sexual self-disclosure and non-sexual self-disclosure were both important to sexual satisfaction, as non-sexual self-disclosure builds relational intimacy which has been linked to sexual satisfaction. This finding supports the idea that sexual communication may operate through both the instrumental pathway (obtaining more of what one likes) and the expressive pathway (increasing intimacy, and therefore, sexual satisfaction). Despite evidence that sexual self-disclosure increases sexual satisfaction in addition to communication about non-sexual topics, MacNeil and Byers (2009) have found that most people in romantic relationships do not share their sexual preferences with their partner. However, men who did sexually self-disclose often chose to do so verbally, while women often relied on nonverbal communication. On average, the participants in this study understood only 62% of their partner's sexual likes and 26% of their partner's sexual dislikes.

Byers (2011) has suggested that poor communication in sexual relationships can lead not only to lower sexual satisfaction, but also to possible sexual coercion, in which "an individual uses verbal pressure or physical force to engage in sexual activity" (p. 23). Tolman and Porche's (2000) findings demonstrate how the socialization of young women may make them more susceptible to sexual coercion. In developing their Adolescent

Femininity Ideology Scale (AFIS), the researchers identified two facets of femininity ideology that young women contend with that may influence their susceptibility to sexual coercion: presenting an inauthentic self and self-objectification. The first facet refers to the idea that being feminine is often equated with keeping peace in relationships, often at the sacrifice of voicing one's own true thoughts and feelings. Self-objectification, on the other hand, describes the phenomenon in which young women learn to "look and evaluate, rather than to feel and experience, their bodies" (Tolman & Porche, p. 366). The internalization of either or both of these norms place women in a unique vulnerability to engaging in unwanted sexual behavior.

Compliance with unwanted sexual encounters is not exclusive to women, however. When studying 258 undergraduate students, Katz and Schneider (2015) discovered that men and women comply with unwanted sex in similar proportions, but women are significantly more likely to perform unwanted oral sex with a casual partner. The authors posited that these findings support "the conceptualization that compliance with casual oral sex may be driven by gendered societal norms and sexual scripts in which both partners prioritize male desire and pleasure" (p. 458). Kaestle's (2009) results indicated that a substantial amount of young adult romantic relationships include sexual insistence after initial refusal and disliked sexual acts, with one out of 10 participants reporting experience with sexual insistence. Although both men and women reported experience with sexual insistence, 81% of the respondents who had engaged in a disliked sexual activity even once were female, demonstrating that women are at greater risk of taking part in unwanted sexual behavior. In unpacking these results, the author argued that young adults would greatly benefit from education on hearing and accepting partner

refusals, as well as guidance on how to voice their own sexual preferences. Taken together, these studies seem to suggest that the avoidance of sexual communication may often result in a reliance on stereotypical, gendered sexual scripts, which may lead to dissatisfying or even unwanted sexual encounters for men and women. Yet, emerging adults continue to model their sexual behavior on traditional gendered sexual scripts (Sakaluk, Todd, Milhausen, Lachowsky, & Undergraduate Research Group in Sexuality, 2014).

Sexuality in Emerging Adulthood

The term "emerging adulthood," coined by Jeffrey Arnett (2000), has come to describe the period of life between ages 18-29. During this time, young adults are no longer considered adolescents, but also do not have the financial and educational foundations necessary to be wholly independent adults (Arnett, 2011). According to Arnett (2004), this period of life is defined by five features: identity exploration, instability, self-focus, a feeling of being in-between, and numerous possibilities. Although the majority of emerging adults hope to get married eventually, the main focus of development during this stage of life is on clarifying identity (Arnett & Tanner, 2011; Halpern & Kaestle, 2014). In fact, many emerging adults believe that they *should* experience multiple love relationships before pursuing marriage, and that only experiencing one romantic relationship in life is unhealthy (Arnett, 2004). Sexuality, then, is particularly significant during emerging adulthood, as people in this developmental stage work to clarify and understand who they are and what they want (Halpern & Kaestle, 2014). Tanner (2006) theorized that emerging adulthood is a period of recentering, which happens in three stages. In Stage 1, the individual is still embedded

in and dependent on their family of origin. During Stage 2, the young adult's focus shifts to education, work, and intimate relationships that are exploratory in nature. Toward the end of this developmental period, Stage 3 occurs, in which long-term commitments are made to career development, romantic relationships, and possibly, child-rearing. Developing a satisfying relationship with one's sexuality during this time can be a critical step in cultivating a lifelong positive sexual identity. According to Levin, Ward, and Neilson (2012), "early messages received about sexuality may have salient effects on the sexual behaviors of adolescents and emerging adults... which may in turn shape experiences and attitudes for a lifetime" (p. 487). Emerging adulthood, then, is a critical juncture where young people develop sexual ideas and habits which will likely persist throughout the duration of their life.

This period of exploration and engaging in new experiences is important for young adults, as illustrated by a study conducted by Russell Ravert (2009), in which 76% of the 248 emerging adult participants reported engaging in at least one kind of experimental behavior, such as alcohol/drug use or casual sexual relationships, because they believed they would not be able to do so later in life. The theme of experimentation also carries over to the sexual behavior of young adults. Most emerging adults in the United States today are sexually active and are more likely than previous generations to cohabit before marriage and engage in casual sex (Halpern & Kaestle, 2014). A recent estimate from the national Add Health sample suggested that 71% of adults between the ages of 24 and 32 have engaged in at least one "hook-up," or a sexual encounter with a partner on only one occasion (Goldberg, Hussey, & Halpern, 2012). Halpern and Kaestle (2014) posit that having multiple sexual partners and experimenting with both different-

sex and same-sex partners is common at this stage of life for both men and women, although women may be subjected to more critical judgment than men for engaging in casual sexual encounters.

Thus far, little research has been done to integrate the concept of intersecting identities into understandings of sexuality in emerging adulthood (Halpern & Kaestle, 2014). Gender, ethnicity, and social class (Tolman, 2002), as well as religion (Arhold, Farmer, Trapnell, & Meston, 2011) have demonstrated individual effects on sexuality, but research has yet to tackle the issue of how these competing identities intersect to affect attitudes toward and engagement in sexual behavior. Further, much of the existing literature looks exclusively at heterosexual individuals and relationships. There are numerous possibilities for future studies to examine how various components of an individual's identity are expressed, rejected, or negotiated through sexual behavior.

Gendered Norms

The sexual double standard (SDS) is a pervasive term in both the academic and non-academic lexicons. SDS refers to the phenomenon by which men are praised for engaging in sexual behavior, while women are derogated for participating in identical sexual behaviors (Marks & Fraley, 2005). Although much anecdotal evidence exists to support the existence of the SDS, empirical research has resulted in conflicting findings. To test how sexist attitudes influence an individual's adoption or rejection of the SDS, Zaikman and Marks (2014) had 232 emerging adult participants (151 female, 81 male) complete the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI, which measures attitudes toward women) and the Ambivalence toward Men Inventory (AMI, measuring attitudes toward men). Participants then responded to 36 evaluative statements about a target person based

on their gender and number of sexual partners. After the researchers compared participants' scores on both the ASI and AMI with their responses to the evaluative statements, they found that participants who held traditional views of gender roles were more likely to propagate the sexual double standard. However, Marks and Fraley (2006) argue that the perpetuation of the idea of the SDS may be the result of confirmation bias, where events that confirm the existence of the SDS tend to be more memorable for people, while events that contradict it are either ignored or forgotten. For example, a woman may remember a singular event in which she felt judged more harshly for exhibiting her sexuality more openly due to that event aligning with her perception of social norms, while forgetting multiple instances where she may not have been socially reprimanded.

Many previous studies of the SDS were based on participant evaluations of hypothetical people. However, in a recent study by Marks, Young, and Zaikman (2019), 4,455 participants were asked to evaluate a randomly assigned male or female acquaintance based on knowledge of their sexual history. In this study, women were found to be evaluated more negatively as their number of sexual partners increased, whereas evaluations of men were not dependent on their number of sexual partners. Closeness of the relationship between the participant and target acquaintance had no moderating effect. These data strongly supports the existence of the SDS.

Outside of empirical findings, women frequently report experiencing the effects of a SDS. Hamilton and Armstrong (2009) conducted a longitudinal ethnographic and interview study with 53 unmarried women, 46 of whom were interviewed. Almost all of the women in this study spoke of the SDS as being unavoidable, and even restricted their

own sexual behavior for fear of reputational repercussions. One participant recounted her experience as being called a “slut” two years after the incident, detailing the level of humiliation the single word inflicted upon her. These women also felt they had to contend with the “relationship imperative” (p. 599), having to justify their choice to remain single, feeling like others expected them to desire a relationship more than anything else. Bogle (2008) reported similar discoveries. Through interviews with 76 (34 men, 42 women) participants, Bogle also reported on the existence of the SDS. For some of the female participants, romantic relationships became more desirable because they were a safe space to engage in sex without fear of receiving a negative label. Tolman’s (2002) interviews with teenage girls also demonstrated that engaging in sexual activities is socially safer for women in monogamous romantic relationships.

Historically, female sexuality has been subjected to strict social (and even medical) control; appropriate sexual expression for women resided within strict confines. In the nineteenth century, the term nymphomania developed as medical diagnosis used to describe women who had “too much coitus (either wanting it or having it), too much desire, and too much masturbation” (Groneman, 1994, p. 340). During this time period, behaviors such as adultery, flirting, or even having more sexual desire than one’s husband could be considered “symptoms” of nymphomania (Groneman, 1994). According to Groneman, the archetype of the “nymphomaniac” has persisted far beyond the end of the 19th century, and is embedded in modern movies, music, and contemporary “locker room talk” (p. 337). The rigid boundaries of appropriate expression of female sexuality have endured. Today, women are still expected to be the gatekeepers of sexual activity, referring to their passive role as “one who sets limits on a man’s sexual

advances" (Fagen & Anderson, 2012, p. 262). At the same time, women are expected to act as caretakers responsible for fulfilling the needs of their partners (Halpern & Kaestle, 2014). In a survey of 4,469 young adults aged 18-26, Kaestle (2009) found that women were significantly more likely than men to report having repeatedly engaged in sexual activities they disliked. Further, women who had a partner who insisted on sex reported engaging repeatedly in disliked sexual activities and were significantly more likely to report repeated disliked vaginal intercourse.

After interviewing 31 teenage girls about their experiences with their own sexual desire, Tolman (2002) reported that many of the girls reported faking sexual pleasure in order to please their boyfriends. Many of these young girls also described past sexual experiences with the familiar "it just happened" (Plummer, 1995) narrative. Tolman (2002) argues that this is a direct result of society's destruction of girls' sexual subjectivity, or "a person's experience of herself as a sexual being, who feels entitled to sexual pleasure and sexual safety, who makes active sexual choices, and who has an identity as a sexual being" (p. 5-6), through the cultural narrative that girls crave romance, but not sex. Kaestle (2009) and Tolman's (2002) findings are similar to those of Wolf (1997) who described the paradox of female sexuality: women are expected to be sexual, but only in a way that caters to male desire.

In fact, the relatively modern feminist pornography movement developed as a response to poor representation of marginalized populations and ignorance female desire within the mainstream porn industry (Taormino, 2013). Feminist pornography became a site of resistance, where women could take an active role in their own sexual desire and pleasure – whether as producers, actors, or consumers. Female pleasure and orgasm are

the central focus of this subgenre as opposed to existing as afterthoughts. As Taormino writes, feminist porn "seeks to unsettle conventional definitions of sex and expand the language of sex as an erotic activity, an expression of identity, a power exchange, a cultural commodity, and even a new politics" (n.p.). The understanding of sex as both an intimate, private activity and also a site where social norms are expressed, rejected, and/or negotiated may prove useful in investigating women's reasons for not engaging in sexual communication with their partners.

Women who internalize traditional ideas of femininity demonstrate decreased sexual self-efficacy (confidence and agency in sexual situations), sexual well-being, and sexual assertiveness (Tolman, 1999; Tolman, Impett, Tracy, & Michael, 2006; Tolman & Porche, 2000). Conversely, Schick, Zucker, and Bay-Cheng (2008) analyzed survey results from 424 female college students and found that women who identified more with feminist ideologies were more aware of their own sexual desire, were more sexually assertive, felt a greater sense of sexual self-efficacy, specifically in regard to condom use, and were more sexually satisfied. Women who subscribed more to feminist principles were also more likely to pursue sexual activity as a result of their own desire, rather than in response to outside motivations, such as appeasing their partner. Taken together, these findings suggest that women who identify with feminist ideologies may be more sexually self-efficacious.

Theoretical Connections

Although much of the work on sexual communication has been atheoretical (Byers & Rehman; Winkler, 2018), a number of existing interpersonal communication theories can be applied to this context of interaction. Given that gender clearly plays an

important role in sexual communication, it may be useful to apply the Silencing the Self theory (STS; Jack, 1991; 1999; 2011) to women's reports of their experiences with sexual self-disclosure. Through her research on women with depression, Dana Crowley Jack (1991; 1999; 2011) produced the STS, and later created the Silencing the Self Scale (STSS; Jack, 2011). In listening to her participants, Jack noticed an emerging pattern of attachment behaviors, such as self-sacrifice and self-silencing used by many of the interviewees. The women described feeling responsible for cultivating harmony in their relationships and felt as though expressing any negative emotions would inevitably lead to discord. Jack (2011) argues that these "cognitive schemas about how to create and maintain safe, intimate relationships lead women to put others' needs first and to silence certain feelings, thoughts, and actions" (p. 524-525). Silencing the self leads to loss of self-esteem, feelings of a "loss of self," and actually brings about the undesired result of disconnect between partners. Although Silencing the Self theory has not yet been explicitly applied to the context of sexual communication, it seems to mirror much of what the female interviewees in Tolman's (1999; 2002) work have offered about their experiences communicating with intimate partners, and therefore presents an opportunity for further examination.

It is important to note that follow-up studies testing the validity of the STSS have found that both men and women report engaging in self-silencing at comparable rates (Jack & Ali, 2010). However, the reasons for this kind of self-regulation often differ; women tend to use external standards for self-evaluation, such as others' expectations, while men tend to use internal standards like their own aspirations and self-image (Moretti, Rein, & Weibb, 1998; Lutz-Zois et al., 2013). Lutz-Zois et al. (2013) analyzed

data from 242 college students (140 females, 102 males) between the ages of 16 and 35 to determine whether differences in the motivation for self-silencing affected the emotional impact of such behavior. On three of the four subscales of STSS, high levels of self-silencing were correlated with higher levels of depression, anger, and relationship-related anxiety for both men and women. Interestingly, however, the fourth subscale (Care as Self-Sacrifice) was negatively related to depression in men, whereas it was positively related to negative affect among women. These findings suggest that putting another's needs over one's own has positive impacts for men, but negative impacts for women. Thus, when questioning women about their self-silencing behaviors, it is vital to tease out the motivation behind doing so and interrogating the emotional effects accordingly.

Sexual scripting theory (Simon & Gagnon, 1984) also has strong implications for sexual communication research. Coffelt and Hess (2015) used the Goals-Plans-Action theory (GPA; Dillard, 2008) as a framework for understanding how sexual scripts worked in heterosexual marriages through interviews with 12 married women and 13 married men. Sexual scripts, according to the researchers, "encompass a routinized sequence of verbal and nonverbal behaviors that unfold with movement toward the goal of sexual intercourse" (Coffelt & Hess, 2015, p. 222). The results of this study highlighted the fact that a traditional sexual script persists through dating relationships and into marriages, as a way for couples to alleviate uncertainty and to achieve the shared goal of sexual intercourse. The script followed a two-phase model: first, a priming message was used, most often by the husbands, to gauge their spouse's level of interest in sexual activity. This priming message was then followed by one of three synchronizing messages: 1) in-

synch messages (acceptance of the priming message, often with nonverbal behaviors), 2) token acceptance (compliance with sexual activity with low level of sexual desire), and 3) out-of-synch messages (rejection of the priming message). While some of the couples made slight alterations to the traditional sexual script, all couples were aware of it and used it as a comparison tool for their own sexual interactions.

Communication Privacy Management theory (CPM; Petronio, 2002) may also provide a new lens through which researchers can analyze the process of sexual self-disclosure. CPM holds that information is considered private when it holds a degree of vulnerability for the individual who "owns" it (Petronio, 2018, p. 88). When choosing whether or not to share private information and create a co-ownership relationship, the individual engages in a dialectical process, weighing the benefits and risks of disclosure. Disclosure presents various types of dilemmas. Of relevance to sexual communication is the interdependent dilemma (Petronio, 2018), where an individual must weigh what may be best for themselves against what may be best for the other person, or for the relationship with the other person. In choosing to sexually self-disclose, a person must weigh the importance of their own sexual satisfaction against their partner's as well as against the potential relational impacts.

Similar to CPM, the latest iteration of Relational Dialectics Theory (RDT 2.0; Baxter, 2011) provides a framework for understanding how an individual considers potential impacts when communicating. RDT 1.0 (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996) was originally developed by applying Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of dialogism (a rejection of monologue, in favor of adopting an awareness of multivocality, or the presence of multiple, often competing perspectives) to understanding how meaning is constructed

relationally through communication. RDT 2.0 also emphasizes the importance of dialogism in constructing meaning, while highlighting a discursive view of power, describing it as being constantly re-created, negotiated, or rejected through relational talk. The basic component of RDT is the utterance, which “is bounded by a change of speaking subjects; it is a turn at talk” (Baxter, 2011). Utterances are never present in isolation, however; as Baxter (2011) writes,

> the utterance is a profoundly intertextual social unit. Simply put, each individual utterance can be thought of as the site in the utterance chain where already uttered discourses voiced by others come together with discourses anticipated in others’ responses (p. 50).

The utterance chain is made up of four links: the distal already-spoken, the distal not-yet-spoken, the proximal already-spoken, and the proximal not-yet-spoken. Distal links refer to utterances within the broader culture. Social norms, or messages which already circulate within the societal context, would be considered distal already-spoken utterances. Distal not-yet-spoken, then, describes anticipated social responses. Proximal links are specific to the relationship in which an utterance is occurring; proximal already-spoken links are made up of all prior relational history and proximal not-yet-spokens are the anticipated responses from a distinct individual or relational unit (i.e. the family).

Relational Dialectics Theory 2.0 posits that every utterance is “laden with varying discourses of power” (Suter & Seurer, 2018, p. 247). Power is viewed as occurring in the struggle between centripetal and centrifugal discourses. Centripetal discourses are those that are considered natural and normal, conforming to social ideals. Conversely, centrifugal discourses represent discourses that are unnatural and considered deviant.

Centripetal discourses tend to hold more discursive power, because of the way that they are legitimized in the broader cultural context. However, these forces constantly compete within individual utterances resulting in interplay. RDT conceptualizes interplay as a continuum with four points. On the far left exists monologue, where only a single perspective is voiced. The second point is diachronic interplay, where discourses interplay across time. Next is synchronic interplay, meaning multiple discourses are in interplay at one time. Finally, on the left of the continuum, is transformative dialogue, where "new, emergent meaning-making" may occur (Suter & Seurer, p. 248). In transformative dialogue, the centripetal-centrifugal tension is overcome by the realignment of the discourses. Realignment can take one of two forms: hybridization or aesthetic moments. In hybridization, multiple discourses combine, while still being distinct from one another. Aesthetic moments occur when two or more discourses blend into one, culminating in a profound transformation of meaning.

RDT 2.0 offers a compelling perspective from which to analyze the process of sexual communication because of its dual focus on the private, interpersonal interaction and the public, social forces which surround each utterance. Because previous research has demonstrated how pervasive cultural norms and sexual scripts are, even within long-term intimate relationships, the unique balancing of proximal (relational) and distal (socio-cultural) influences within the theory seems appropriate for this kind of research. The theory's emphasis on the struggle between centriptal discourses (normalized ideas) versus centrifugal discourses (marginalized) is particularly relevant in understanding how women make meaning out of their sexual experiences, an aspect of the private sphere that has long been subject to rigid social controls. When applied to the context of sexual

communication, RDT 2.0 encourages researchers to listen for multiple, possibly competing voices expressed by participants; whether those voices are discourses of power or resistance, voices privileging the relationship, the individual, or even the broader culture.

The Present Study

As the literature has shown, one of the most important developmental tasks of emerging adulthood is clarifying one's identity. During this stage of life, young adults seek out as many new experiences as possible to help them determine who they are, what they believe in, and what they do or do not enjoy. In this context, then, cultivating a healthy and satisfying relationship with one's sexuality becomes especially significant. Furthermore, learning how to communicate effectively with sexual partners during this time could help to solidify positive lifelong habits, ensuring both safer and more pleasurable sex long-term. Existing research, however, has shown that most people avoid sexual communication, even in long-term partnerships.

While it is evident that both men and women tend to stay away from sexual communication, possibly to the detriment of their own sexual satisfaction, women seem to be in a particularly challenging predicament. Although empirical research has produced contradictory findings regarding the existence of a sexual double-standard, women consistently report feeling judged more harshly than men for engaging in multiple sexual encounters. The historical image of women as the "gatekeepers," or passive receivers of sexual activity, has persisted into the 21st century, perpetuating the myth that female sexual desire is either non-existent or a pathological condition. Even in mainstream pornography, the female orgasm seems to be an elusive concept, an added

bonus as opposed to an end-goal of sexual encounters. This distorted view of female pleasure, in conjunction with the way that women are socialized to silence their true feelings and desires in order to maintain harmony in relationships, makes communicating about sex and pleasure more difficult for women. For all of these reasons, it is especially important to understand how women navigate all of the unique barriers they face in communicating with their sexual partners. This study aims to answer three questions:

RQ 1: How do women communicate with sexual partners in order to increase their own sexual pleasure?

RQ 2: What are the barriers to engaging in sexual communication for emerging adult women?

RQ 3: How are gendered social norms expressed or negotiated in this process?

Methods

The present study is rooted in both the interpretive and critical paradigms. Within the interpretive paradigm, the researcher seeks to understand the participants' subjective views of reality (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), making it especially useful in answering RQ1. RQ2 and RQ3 are both situated within the critical paradigm, which:

> (a) centers issues of power, (b) presumes a bidirectional relationship between private interpersonal/familial relationships and the public sphere, (c) realizes the potential of research to critique/resist/transform the status quo in the service of social-justice ends, and (d) embodies author reflexivity in relation to the project (Suter, 2018)

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 19 women in an effort to understand their experiences with sexual communication as well as their own

interpretations of gendered sexual norms. Each interview was audio-recorded and then transcribed for analysis. Qualitative data analysis procedures were used to identify significant interpretive themes, which were illustrated with representative discourse examples. Procedures for this study were approved by the Arizona State University Internal Review Board.

Sampling Procedure

Participants were recruited through advertising the study on the researcher's personal social media accounts (Facebook, Instagram), as well as on private Facebook groups (such as Communication Graduate Students Connect and the Almost 30 Podcast Group), and snowball sampling. To qualify for the study, participants had to meet the following requirements: identify as a woman, be between the ages of 18-29, be sexually active. In the end, the most productive recruitment method was snowball sampling.

Participants

This study consisted of 19 women between the ages of 20 and 29. The average age of the women was 25.06 years. A majority (14) of the women described their ethnicity as white, 1 participant identified as black, 1 as Hispanic, 1 as South Asian, and 2 described themselves as mixed race. While most participants were born and raised in the United States, two of the women grew up in other countries, one in Western Europe and the other in South Asia. Fourteen of the women identified as heterosexual, while the remaining 5 participants described their sexual orientation as bisexual, pansexual, and/or queer. Seven of women had some college education, 5 held a bachelor's degree, 2 were currently pursuing a master's degree, 1 woman had graduated with a master's, 3 women were currently pursuing a doctoral degree, and 1 woman held a PhD. Thirteen

participants were in committed relationships at the time of their interview, while the remainder were single. Five women did not associate themselves with any faith system, five women identified as Christian, three were Agnostic, three described themselves as spiritual but not religious, and there was one participant each that identified as Athiest, Hindu, and Jewish.

Data Collection Procedures

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each of the participants. This format of interviewing was because of its inherent flexibility, which enabled the researcher to be more conversational and create a more comfortable environment for participants to share intimate stories (Merrigan & Huston, 2015). The semi-structured interview protocol also aided in keeping the conversation on track, without adhering to strict guidelines, and allowed for the use of probing questions for deeper understandings of each question. 11 of the interviews occurred face-to-face, while 8 of the interviews were conducted over the phone. Face-to-face interviews occurred at either an Arizona State University campus or the participant's home. Each interview was audio-recorded and then transcribed in full.

The semi-structured interview protocol began with questions about demographic characteristics (e.g. age, education), which aided in developing rapport with each interviewee. Participants were then asked open-ended questions regarding memorable messages about sex, sexuality, and/or pleasure that they received in their teenage years (approximately ages 11-17), such as "During this time, where did your information about sex come from?" and "What do you recall your parents telling you about sex? Did they say this explicitly or was it implied without direct conversation?" Each interviewee was

also asked to reflect on whether they thought gender affects the messaging an individual receives about sex, and if so, how. These questions allowed the researcher and the interviewee to discuss what messages were helpful/unhelpful in shaping the participant's current views of sex and sexuality, as well as understanding how prolific gendered messages of sex were in each participant's upbringing and how this socialization affected each participant's own views. Participants were then asked about their experiences with sexual communication, using a mix of open-ended and scale questions such as "On a scale of 1-10, with 1 being least comfortable and 10 being most comfortable, how comfortable do you feel communicating what you like sexually with your partner?" Probing questions were then used to encourage participants to verbally unpack their sensemaking process, and to understand the extent of their experiences with communication in sexual relationships. Participants were asked to reflect on current relationships (if currently engaging with a consistent partner), previous relationships, and any experiences with casual sexual partners and to describe whether their experiences with communicating differed between the different types of sexual relationship. The probing questions that followed each scale question often provoked "flickers of transformation" from the participants, where they went through moments of "self-questioning, talk repair, and transformation" (Tracy & Rivera, 2010, p. 14). When asked to elaborate on why they ranked their comfort level with the particular number that they chose, participants often provided contradictory answers, which caused them to further elaborate and occasionally change their original answer to a number that better matched what they were describing verbally.

As Way, Zwier, and Tracy (2015) write, “asking participants to articulate opinions they may have never before uttered can be a useful tool in terms of identifying the discourses that guide their thinking” (p. 724). In this way, probing questions allowed the interviewer to gain further insight into the possible multiple discourses that may have been present in each utterance. Many participants expressed in their interviews that this was the first time they had been invited to speak so directly and explicitly about this topic, which allowed them to reflect on matters which they had never fully considered. In later interviews, the use of mirroring, or repeating a participant’s words back to them (Way, Zwier, & Tracy, 2015), became a useful tool for encouraging further consideration on a given subject.

After each interview, the interview protocol was reviewed and underwent slight adjustments to improve the instrument each time. For example, after the first five interviews, the wording of each scale question was altered due to early participants expressing confusion and asking for clarification with each of these questions. After these questions were re-worded, participants seemed to better comprehend what was being asked. During the final three interviews, the researcher ended by asking participants to either agree or disagree with conclusions the researcher had drawn based on prior interviews, and information offered within the current interview. This allowed the researcher to confirm several of the emerging themes with participants themselves. Duration of each interview ranged between 27-48 minutes, with an average of 38 minutes. Early interviews were transcribed immediately, and initial coding took place as the interview process continued. This allowed for an iterative practice, where the

interview protocol and techniques could be modified to address areas of opportunity for further probing.

Data Analysis Procedures

All interviews were transcribed using Temi, an online transcription service, and then checked for accuracy by the researcher. This involved listening back to the original audio while editing each transcript to ensure that they matched. Initially, each interview was analyzed using thematic analysis to answer RQ1, which concerns how women communicate with their sexual partners to increase their own pleasure. Braun and Clark (2006) outline six steps which are necessary for thematic analysis. First, the researcher must become familiar with the data. Next, the researcher reads through the data, noting any salient themes or potential patterns within the dataset. In the third step, the researcher evaluates the emergent initial codes, looking for connections between each of the codes and generating potential themes. In the next step, themes are reviewed by the researcher to ensure that they accurately represent the data and that they are discrete from one another. The researcher then names the themes and provides definitions for each. Finally, the researcher pulls examples out of the data which help to illustrate each of the themes.

To answer RQ2 and RQ3, contrapuntal analysis (Baxter, 2011) was undertaken to "focus on the interplay of contrasting discourses" (p. 152) as well as to identify how both the relational context and social context either enabled or hindered the women's willingness to communicate with their sexual partners. A contrapuntal analysis begins using each of the steps of thematic analysis. Once themes have been generated, reviewed, named, and defined, the researcher looks for any competing themes (or discourses). To locate competing discourses, the researcher must look for three discourse markers:

negating, countering, and entertaining (Baxter, 2011, p. 166). Negating occurs when an alternative discourse is acknowledged, only to be rejected. Countering is when "some discursive position replaces or supplants an alternative discursive position that would normally have been expected in its place" (Baxter, p. 167). According to Baxter, countering can often be located by searching for words like "although, however, but, yet, nonetheless, even, only, just, [etc.]" (p. 167). Finally, entertaining indicates that a "given discursive position is but one possibility among several" (p. 168). Once competing discourses are located, the final step of contrapuntal analysis is identifying the interplay of competing discourses. Data analysis occurred at multiple points in the data collection process so that emerging themes could be verified with future participants.

Findings

RQ1: How do women communicate with sexual partners in order to increase their own sexual pleasure?

During the interviews, several women reflected on the fact that they do not have conversations about this topic with their intimate partners, and in fact actively avoid the subject. For those who had either participated in direct conversations or used indirect communicative tools like nonverbal cues, the recollections all echoed similar strategies used. Importantly, the following themes differ in what they specifically refer to. For instance, one theme centers around temporality, specifically at what point in time women choose to engage in this kind of communication. The other describes preference for content, or what is actually expressed to a partner. Each theme, though, provides insight into how women communicate with their sexual partners in pursuit of increasing their own pleasure.

Broaching the Subject Ahead of Encounter

For many of the women, engaging in a direct conversation with their partners about their sexual preferences was a challenging process. Multiple participants expressed difficulty in finding the right time to initiate such a conversation. Others had discovered that the easiest time to initiate this conversation was before a sexual encounter, and preferably before the first encounter with a new partner. In fact, one woman reported asking each new potential sexual partner to write and exchange “want/will/won’t lists” with her before their first sexual experience together. As she explained, in their “want list,” each person writes the things that, in an ideal world, would happen in every sexual encounter. The “will list” details behaviors that the person is willing to engage in but are not necessary to their own sexual satisfaction. Finally, the “won’t list” is for any behaviors a person is not comfortable engaging in, even once. She further elaborated that she still gets anxious each time she asks a new partner to create and share a list with her, even though the process has made her sexual relationships more satisfying. As she explained,

> I've found that even though it can be awkward to have that conversation and even though people, especially people that I'm like, that I've had casual sex with are usually very surprised to be having that conversation. I have 100% of the time found that it's made sex better for both people. And I have also had people tell me like, “oh, it was a little weird to talk about, about, you know, what I liked and stuff. But then once we had sex it was, it was like I didn't have to bring it up or like stop or feel like I had to put up with something that I really wasn't feeling.” Um, so I think that it's been really helpful even though it can be unexpected [#009].

Later in the interview, she explained the importance of timing this interaction, stating that having the conversation ahead of the first interaction allows each person to be more upfront and less worried about hurting the other person’s feelings. Because items listed

on the “won’t list” are not specific to one partner, and the parties agree to these terms ahead of time, she explained that no one has to feel like they have been told they did something wrong. The items on each person’s “want list” also provide useful information about how their partner can make each experience more pleasurable, which alleviates much of the uncertainty in sex.

Another woman echoed the sentiment of wanting to avoid uncertainty, stating,

> Um, to me it was like part of being empowered about it was like not having unknowns. I feel like with the unknowns are really what leads to like uncomfortability when you're like, not sure what the expectation is or even what you're engaging in. Um, and I always like wanted to avoid that. I never wanted to feel uncomfortable when I was going to engage like that with someone. Yeah. So like clarifying that in the beginning, like that just opened it up for me, so I never had to really feel those that uncomfortable [#007].

In choosing to have a direct conversation ahead of the first sexual encounter with a new partner, participants described feeling like this process allowed them to reduce the uncertainty for both partners, negotiate specific pleasurable behaviors, and avoid hurting another person’s feelings.

For women who were already in monogamous relationships or consistent sexual partnerships, timing was still a critical component. Even if they had not had a direct conversation ahead of the very first encounter, timing conversations ahead of future encounters was an important consideration. For example, a conversation about likes and/or dislikes felt threatening if they chose to have it too quickly following a sexual encounter. Instead, women often chose to initiate a conversation immediately before a sexual interaction with their partners, in hopes that their partner would not perceive the communication as a critique of their former performance. One of the participants described how this method works for her:

> Uh, I mean, one thing that helps me kind of get like the specific pleasures that I like is just like kind of sending a text or snap or just something beforehand that says I really miss when you do this or I really miss this so that the next time [I] see them, we kind of skip straight to that part [#002].

Multiple women described engaging in this kind of "dirty talk" with their partners ahead of sexual encounters, as both a method of foreplay and a way of communicating their sexual likes. In this way, they felt like the conversation was less threatening, yet still informative.

Preference for Disclosing Sexual Likes

The majority of the interviewees held a preference for disclosing their sexual likes to their partners, as opposed to their sexual dislikes. When asked why it was more comfortable to tell her partner what she liked sexually than what she disliked, one woman explained,

> So, there's the aspect of, um, my, I don't want to hurt my partner feelings... Um, I feel like, the dislikes, like saying them has such long term impact like it if you don't say it correctly or if you say too much like it can affect your sexual relationship with that person forever... Um, and so I think that's what makes it uncomfortable now as I'm afraid about the long-term impact of letting someone know that I don't like a thing or that a thing isn't working [#010].

Often, women feared that disclosing their dislikes would create conflict in the relationship. Out of concern for their partner's feelings or ego, many women often found that expressing likes was easier and more comfortable. Many women also explained that communicating their likes was easier because they could use more indirect methods. For example, multiple participants relied on nonverbal methods of communication, such as moaning or touching their partner more with their hands, to show their partner that they like something. Participant #010 explained that by using nonverbal cues like this, she could "positively reinforce" behaviors she likes, and encourage her partners to do more of

those behaviors. To ensure her partner receives and understands these cues, she described being “extra enthusiastic when something feels extra good.”

While most of the women interviewed were more comfortable disclosing their likes, a few of the women expressed being much more comfortable in telling their partner what they do not like. Two reasons for this preference were commonly cited by the participants. For some, disclosing dislikes was more comfortable simply because they felt as though they should never have to feel discomfort during sex. As one interviewee explained, “because I feel that it's important to, uh, tell someone when they cross a line or when it is not pleasurable” [#011]. For others, communicating what they disliked was easier because they worried about how they might be judged if they expressed their likes. Participant #019 described this concern:

> Um, I guess I'm a little insecure about like what he's going to think about me if I like... If I like something. But I don't really want to worry about like if my partner thinks I’m... whatever. You know what I'm talking about? Like "why does she particularly like this one thing?"

The women who preferred disclosing their likes over dislikes also expressed similar worries about potential judgment, which was a frequent obstacle for women when choosing whether or not to sexually self-disclose at all.

RQ 2: What are the barriers to engaging in sexual communication for emerging adult women?

Fear of Judgment

For almost all of the women interviewed, fear of being judged negatively acted as a substantial barrier to engaging in conversations about sex with their partners. Whether with new partners or in long-term relationships, this concern was present in almost all of the women’s stories. When explaining why sexual self-disclosure was so challenging for

her, Participant #015 reflected, “Umm. I dunno. I guess I just leave a little room for like, are they going to judge me for what I like? Um, yeah. Which doesn't really make sense because I know he wouldn't.” Even women in long-term romantic relationships with partners who encouraged them to sexually self-disclose held a significant fear of being judged for their preferences. They worried that if they explicitly communicated their likes, they would be judged as slutty or deviant; and if they expressed their dislikes, they may be considered prudish or closed-minded.

While most women expressed fear of judgment from their partner, a few also mentioned a fear of judgment from themselves. If they were to verbalize their preferences, they worried about how that would impact their self-image. One woman stated, “It's judgment from myself. I know he wouldn't care or anything. He would, he wouldn't bat an eye, he would probably just laugh and be like ‘okay, why not?’ I think it's just internal judgment, like ‘no, that’s just weird’” [#004]. Similarly, Participant #016 described,

> It's more like, not really like embarrassment but maybe lingering, lingering, like embarrassment or shame. Even though I know with him, like he would never judge anything sexual that I think or say or, um, but I still feel like there's some holdover of like, oh, if there's like something weird that I see in porn, but I'm like into, it just seems like an awkward kind of thing to bring up. But every time I have with him, like it's never an issue. It's never like something that he doesn't want to talk about or like explore at least. So, um, yeah, it's, it's more of that feeling of kind of like, am I normal for like thinking this or if I were wanting this?

Many of the women in this study verbally rejected many of the societal ideals of appropriate female sexual behavior, but echoes of these expectations were reflected in the stories they told. Whether or not they believed in the validity of these expectations, they clearly struggled to release the sense of shame that is often associated with women who either engage in too much sexual activity or hold particular sexual preferences.

Lack of Intimacy

During the interviews, the women were asked to reflect on their experiences with current partners, previous partners, long-term partners, and casual partners and to identify how their experiences with sexual self-disclosure were different, if at all, across these categories. Almost all of the women described sexual communication as being easier and more comfortable with long-term romantic partners. When asked what makes engaging in sexual self-disclosure easier or more comfortable, Participant #015 answered "I think like the relationship, like more like trust or like the more experiences that we have." Other women confirmed that feeling a greater sense of intimacy in the relationship overall, allowed them to feel more comfortable expressing their sexual desire and preferences. This was not necessarily exclusive to long-term, monogamous partnerships. In fact, in some long-term relationships, where overall intimacy was lacking, sexual communication became even less comfortable for participants than if they had been with a casual partner. Participant #003 described a previous two-year relationship, where she became less and less comfortable sexually self-disclosing as the overall intimacy declined:

> I didn't because there was like a lot of brokenness in our relationship to where I was like, I'd rather have you want me as like who I am than just wanting sexual things because that's all he would talk about. And I'm like, no, like don't you see me as a person? And that's why it got to the point where I didn't even want to talk about it with him. I didn't want to do anything with him.

One participant saw intimacy as facilitating her comfort with the topic because it forced her to consider the longevity of the sexual relationship. When asked why it is easier for her to communicate sexually with her husband than with previous partners, she described

> Um, so I think like your, when you're with um, someone long term and if those conversations... You see, you're kind of in it for the outcome. If you are just kind

> of like having these, you know, few sexual encounters with someone in there that you may not be in a relationship with them, then that conversation to me, it doesn't have to be as long lasting because that relationship isn't as long lasting. Um, so I would say with your committed partner, um, they're, they have a little bit more impact [#007].

For this woman, and a few others in the study, feeling a greater sense of intimacy meant for her that the relationship was going to last longer, which meant that she needed to be honest about her sexual preferences in order to obtain more pleasurable sex. With previous partners, she described that if the sexual relationship was dissatisfying and the relationship lacked intimacy, she could walk away easily. In her marriage though, it's important for her to cultivate a satisfying sexual relationship because that is the only person she intends to be with for the duration of her life, and she wants to enjoy all aspects of her relationship with her partner.

Preserving Harmony

The most frequently-reported barrier to sexual self-disclosure was the need to preserve harmony in the relationship. All 19 participants described this concern to varying degrees. As noted, the majority of women interviewed described feeling less comfortable disclosing what they dislike sexually, as opposed to what they like, out of fear of hurting their partner's feelings. Participant #008 demonstrated this when she explained,

> I can't say I'm completely comfortable and I wouldn't say that I'm completely assertive, but I am able to communicate what I want but just not perfectly. Let me put it that way. So, like I won't explicitly like say no, I don't want that. But I will say it in such a way where like I'm trying to care for the other person's feelings and try not to hurt them. Like maybe you could try this.

Other women sought to preserve harmony through protecting their partner's ego. When asked to rate her comfort disclosing her sexual dislikes with a partner on a scale of one to

ten, Participant #002 responded, “Oh God. Probably like a four because you just don't want to like decrease their masculinity in a way where it's like they might be super into it and you're just like, whoa buddy... No!” Many women felt as though it is really important for men to feel like they perform well in bed, and they did not want to threaten a partner’s self-image. In fact, one woman who has had both male and female partners explained that protecting their partner’s ego is a far lesser concern when the partner is female. She elaborated by saying,

> Oh, if I was bringing this up with a female partner, I don't think it would hurt her feelings because I think like, she kind of knows like, or um, you know, like understands that like people's bodies are different things like that. Um, they tend to be like less socialized to feel like their masculinity has been crushed. Whereas men like males and men, um, definitely like there's a worth attached to it. And so I never want to make them feel like, like I'm saying that they're less of a man or that less worthy or you know, anything like that [#009].

Several women described the need to preserve harmony as an issue that is not exclusive to their sexual relationship. These women explained that they find it difficult to articulate to others what they may want or even need, because they are so concerned with preserving harmony in their relationships. One participant traced this habit back to her early socialization:

> That link is kind of broken in my brain. Sometimes I can say what I want to do or don't want to do. But more often than not it happens to be like, I just, I can't articulate that. So yeah... I was entirely raised to keep it to myself, to keep the peace. And like [my] needs really aren't that important. It's more important that [I] serve someone else's needs. Or that [I] just don't become the problem. Entirely! Like my mother is like the most buttoned up, will never say what wants. I can't even get her to say what she wants for Christmas [#014].

Although each participant expressed it differently, and even felt the concern at varying levels, the need to preserve harmony in their sexual and romantic relationships was a priority for all of the women interviewed. Much of the time, the concern for harmony

came at the expense of being able to negotiate more pleasurable sexual experiences, as discussed by Participant #019:

> Um, and so yes, I mean I wasn't able to convey several things to partners because, um, I was giving more of an importance to the relationship and the longevity and, I wish that I had spoken up about, uh, some of the things that that made me really uncomfortable, I guess that would have fixed some patterns and probably would have made situations more pleasurable.

Each participant expressed that they felt as though there was a tension between expressing her individual sexual preferences and keeping peace within the relationship.

It is worth mentioning that many of the participants disclosed a past instance of unwanted sexual contact or sexual assault during their interview, even though this topic was not asked of them. For the women who disclosed this to the interviewer, it appeared that this was an important part of their sexual identity. Four of the women who revealed a prior sexual assault went on to explain that sexual self-disclosure became much more important to them after the unwanted sexual contact and that cultivating a more pleasurable sex life was markedly more important. For these women, the tension between preserving harmony in the relationship and seeking out their own pleasure was less conflicting. One of these women detailed why sexual communication and individual sexual satisfaction was so important to her:

> I'm a sexual assault survivor. Um, and that, um, I think, uh, after that, like it's, it's very traumatizing and everything, but I think it also made me feel like, mmm, like I was not going to do things like that... I guess it just made having good sex more important to me. Like it made it more like it made feeling good during sex, feeling like not just like physically good, but also feeling comfortable, feeling emotionally supported, feeling like saying no is an option, feeling all of those things. It kind of heightened the importance for me, um, because I was like, well, I don't, like, I was like, I already have this barrier that's keeping me from feeling good sometimes. So I'm like, I'm not going to like set any other barriers for myself, you know, if this is, if you know, feeling this discomfort from a bad experience is going to be a barrier that I can only work on so much, then I'm

> going to make sure that every other thing I'm going to set it up so that it's so that they are as little barriers as possible for me and for the other person [#009].

RQ3: How are gendered social norms expressed or negotiated in this process?

Early in the interviews, participants were asked questions about memorable messages they had received from parents, school, peers, and media about sex, sexuality, and/or pleasure, especially during their adolescence. Every woman articulated similar expectations that had been placed upon them, even beyond their adolescent years. The women were also asked to describe how they feel about those messages now, whether they agreed with them or not, and how (if at all) they inform their current view about sex and pleasure. Although most women reported disagreement with the societal ideals of what constitutes appropriate female sexual behavior, they often struggled to fully detach themselves from those expectations, as evidenced in the stories they told. In analyzing how gendered social norms appear in their private interactions with sexual partners, three central themes emerged.

Expecting the Male Partner to Lead

When asked what factors make engaging in sexual self-disclosure more comfortable, a large number of the women responded with some variation of "if he initiates it." Even one participant, who had earlier in the interview described herself as being extremely comfortable engaging in conversations about her sexual preferences, struggled to answer when asked "What inspires you to have that conversation if the other person does not bring it up?" After a pause, she answered: "Um, I mean I've never really like... hmm... brought it up..." [#002]. Other participants, who relayed stories of initiating these conversations, still said that it is more comfortable to discuss when their partner opens the conversation. However, women who engaged in sexual relationships with other

women did not have this caveat. Their comfort level did not increase or decrease based on who initiated the conversation if their partner was female. These same women though, when engaging with male partners, also described feeling more comfortable if the male partner initiated the conversation.

Boundaries of Appropriate Sexual Expression

As mentioned previously, many women had reservations about disclosing sexual preferences for fear that they might be judged negatively as a result. Whether or not they agreed with social norms around female sexuality, these norms had been internalized to some extent. For example, one woman explained that even in a recent relationship, she felt as though she was supposed to have sex with her boyfriend – not for her own pleasure, but because that was her duty as a girlfriend. When asked to elaborate, she said:

> I would say, um, sex then was still, I mean it was for pleasure too, but it was still a tool to stay close. And I was convinced that as long as this was happening, he would still love me back or there were nights where I would initiate it even though I didn't really want to, but I thought it's what I had to do. And that was my role [#017].

She further explained that women in relationships are expected to be enthusiastic receivers of their partner's sexual advances. At one point, she laughed, saying "you almost have to be ready at any moment for him to come home wanting sex, and you just have to be ready to rip off your own shirt!" [#017]. Other women expressed feeling a similar pressure, to keep their partners sexually satisfied without necessarily being the one to initiate sex. Many participants described feeling like being sexually active as a woman is okay, as long as sexual activity is occurring within romantic relationships. Participant [#013] echoed this expectation:

> I think that women, it's funny that you asked that just because I feel like even today, I was having a conversation with a friend and you know, I feel like

> sometimes we still get a little bit shy around talking about it. Um, unless it's like with the same partner, like if it's with a boyfriend, forever, it's not a big deal, but when it's like a new partner, I always felt a little uncomfortable telling like a friend about it when they ask. If that makes sense.

Women also described an early struggle between not wanting to be a prude, but also not wanting to be labeled a slut. Although no participant could articulate what the “right” amount of sex for a woman to engage in is, all of the participants had been told there was a “correct” amount. Participant #009 explained that in earlier years, she felt as though she was expected to be experienced enough sexually to where she was not awkward in bed, but also not so experienced that her partner would perceive her as a slut. Often these restrictive and ambiguous rules around female sexual behavior played a role in women’s ability to negotiate more pleasurable sexual experiences for themselves.

The Prioritization of Male Pleasure

One of the most frequently recurring themes identified in the interviews was the focus on male pleasure. While some participants were more aware of it than others, each woman described receiving the message that sex is about male pleasure exclusively. One woman recounted:

> I definitely felt like, um, this was something I was supposed to do in order to get guys to like me. And that was the ultimate goal, you know? Like it really like screwed up my thoughts and feelings towards that. I feel like I made a lot of bad decisions because I never had those conversations. And because it wasn't like a tool to connect with someone on a deeper level. Um, it was never about pleasure. It was always just about like doing the act to pleasure someone else or to make them like you. It wasn't ever about you and like your needs and your happiness. It was always about the other person [#014].

All of the women in this study described to some extent the societal message that the main goal of sexual intercourse is male pleasure. In discussing where that message came from, the women pointed to many different sources including high school sexual

education courses which defined the resolution of intercourse as male ejaculation, mainstream pornography which privileges male pleasure, and memorable conversations with parents and peers which seemed to imply that female sexual pleasure was not an essential component of sexual relationships. While all participants were aware of the overarching social message, not all of the women were conscious of how this shaped their comfort with sexual self-disclosure. Participant #001 had explained early in her interview that she was not completely satisfied with the amount of sex she has with her partner, adding that if it were up to her, they would be having sex more often. Later, when asked about her comfort level engaging in conversations about sexual preferences with her partner, she replied, "Um... I don't know if the comfort level has changed over time, but my effort has decreased a little bit because I think I've realized that he doesn't need as much as I was trying to give him." Although she would like to engage in sex more frequently with her partner, she has reduced her efforts to initiate sex or even conversations about sex to more evenly match her partner. She mentioned that her partner "doesn't need as much as [she] was trying to give him," but did not address the fact that she would like more than what her partner is giving her.

Some of the other women seemed more aware of how they had internalized the idea that male pleasure is the central focus of sex. Participant #017 discussed several times that she chose not to sexually self-disclose because she was more focused on pleasing her partner than obtaining a more pleasurable experience for herself. She reflected that this is an even greater challenge when she is engaging sexually with someone that she thinks highly of:

> Again, if I think they're, if I'm putting them on a pedestal and I think they're absolutely wonderful, I won't want to be vocal because I want it to be about

> them... I also think that ties into me not fully valuing myself in that aspect. Like I don't, I don't view myself as an equal in the bedroom.

When asked what she meant by equal, she explained that she did not value her own sexual pleasure as much as her partner's but is currently trying to change that mindset. Other participants also described actively unlearning the idea that male sexual pleasure is more important than female sexual pleasure:

> Because it was a lot of unlearning. Um, mostly on the scare tactics that this isn't a bad thing and you kind of have to, I like to call it Catholic guilt, because I feel like even though I'm not practicing anymore, it's like the guilt is still theoretically there that I'm like owed pleasure and I am allowed to be sexually active and it is like within my own agency and right. So just kind of like getting rid of the guilt [#008].

Learning to value their own sexual pleasure as highly as their male counterpart's was a challenging process for many of the interviewees. One woman reported that it took her several years of consciously retraining herself to value her own sexual pleasure. She's the only participant who described feeling fully comfortable with sexual self-disclosure, both in disclosing her likes and her dislikes. When asked why she is so comfortable now, she responded:

> So, for me, because I see sex as something that's like supposed to be mutually beneficial, mutually pleasurable for all parties involved, it makes it easier to talk about those kinds of things. Just because like you want your partner to be happy. And at the same time, you also want, your partner also wants you to be happy [#006].

Discussion

Each of the participants had much to say about their experiences with sexual communication as well as the barriers they face in engaging in communication within this particular context, and reflected meaningfully on the early messages they had received about sex, sexuality, and pleasure. All of the women discussed their awareness of a

sexual double standard, where their sexual conduct may be judged more harshly because of their gender. Although each woman responded in her way to societal pressure, all of the participants described the same rigid boundaries of what is considered appropriate female sexual behavior: women should respond enthusiastically to a partner's advances, but not seek out sex themselves; they should be sexually active, but not have too many sexual partners; and they should only engage in sexual activity within the confines of a monogamous romantic relationship. The women also described the expectation of being knowledgeable and skillful in the bedroom, but not overly so. As one woman explained:

> So, I definitely felt this pressure that you weren't supposed to like have too much experience and you weren't supposed to, you know, have too much sex. But I also felt like when you actually had sex, you had to, like, you couldn't mess up, you know, or like you couldn't be awkward or you couldn't be unsure of yourself. Um, and like you kind of had to like be this sort of like, like both of these things at the same time. Like if you were completely inexperienced and had no idea what you were doing, then it was like embarrassing. And then, but if you like had a lot of experience or felt really confident in like the experience that you had had, it was like you were slutty [#009].

Whether or not they agreed with the expectations placed upon them, all of the women were acutely aware of the implicit rules prescribed to them. In some cases, these norms impacted how the women chose to engage in sexual communication with their intimate partners.

Reliance on Social Context

Taken together, the findings from RQ2 suggest that women often rely on social norms or distal-already-spoken discourses when considering whether or not to sexually self-disclose. Although only two of the 19 women had experienced a negative reaction from a partner after disclosing, most of the women interviewed often censored their sexual communication out of fear of judgment or the desire to preserve harmony in the

relationship. In fact, most women reported past and present partners' reactions to sexual self-disclosures as being overwhelmingly positive. Yet, these relational-specific, proximal-already-spoken discourses tended to hold less weight than the distal-already-spoken discourses. Interestingly, however, greater overall intimacy in relationships seemed to lessen the value placed on broader cultural discourses, although not entirely. This suggests that when choosing whether or not to sexually self-disclose, women more heavily consider the distal discourses; however, positive proximal discourses may encourage greater sexual-self disclosure from women.

These findings seem to support the idea that women regulate their behavior according to what they believe others expect from them (Jack, 2011; Moretti, Rein, Wiebe, 1998). However, the present study suggests that women may attempt to adhere to expectations from a generalized other more than those from specific relational partner.

The Interplay of Powerful and Marginalized Discourses

When listening to the women detail their experiences with sexual self-disclosure, and the barriers associated, the contrast between discourses of power (centripetal) and marginalized discourses (centrifugal) is stark (Baxter, 2011, p.121). Each woman eloquently articulated the centripetal messages around prioritizing male sexual pleasure and enacting appropriate female sexual behavior that they had been socialized into throughout their lifetime. These stories closely mirrored those told by the adolescent girls interviewed by Tolman (2002), who also expressed feeling as though sex was for male pleasure, not their own. However, in listening to the participants in this study unpack their sensemaking processes around sexual communication, it is clear that most of the women are in the process of renegotiating their internalization of the prevailing cultural

messages. In this way, they are attempting to displace the centripetal discourse of male pleasure being the central focus of sex, and instead center a centrifugal discourse which puts their own sexual pleasure on equal ground. However, the interplay between centripetal and centrifugal discourses was not one of full displacement for most of the women. Often, their reliance on distal-already-spoken discourses as a decision-making factor for whether to engage in sexual self-disclosure results in their self-talk being dialogically contractive (Baxter, p. 170), which perpetuates the power of centripetal discourses. To be clear, the women who engaged in dialogically contractive talk usually entertained the notion that male pleasure may not have to be the sole focus of sexual interactions. It was clear to them that society expected male pleasure to be prioritized, but they also knew that they wanted their sexual experiences to be pleasurable on their end as well. Yet, dialogically contractive talk did not result in full displacement of the dominant discourse (prioritizing male pleasure). Instead, the interplay between centripetal and centrifugal discourses in these interviews was closer to dissociation from the dominant cultural message, without a replacement discourse to take its place.

Other women engaged in dialogically expansive talk, meaning they recognized the broader cultural narrative which prioritizes male sexual pleasure, but they were naturalizing (Baxter, 2011, p. 171) the prioritization of female pleasure instead. These women spoke of their sexual desire and pleasure as natural, even as they recognized that this idea as not widely accepted in the broader cultural discourse. In these interviews, the interplay of the competing discourses was one of displacement – where women set aside the prioritization of male pleasure and replaced it with a discourse in which their own sexual pleasure was of highest importance.

The findings of this study demonstrate the importance of recognizing and changing broader cultural narratives around sex and pleasure. All of the women interviewed described in great detail all of the cultural pressures they face as sexually-active women, even if they thought these pressures were outdated, invalid, and/or unfair. As the results from RQ2 seem to demonstrate, women rely heavily on social norms and distal discourses to inform their sexual communication habits. While proximal discourses and positive relational context can mitigate this to an extent, women still feel a great sense of pressure to conform to social expectations – even within intimate spaces. As such, it is important that centrifugal discourses which place female sexual pleasure as equally important to male sexual pleasure begin to circulate more and further displace the current centripetal discourse.

Limitations and Opportunity for Future Study

One of the limitations of this study was the small sample size and the representativeness of the sample. This sample was more highly educated than the overall population and lacked racial diversity. It is also important to note that women who volunteered for this study may already be more comfortable with discussing sex and/or pleasure in general, than women who did not participate. Further, more research would benefit from comparing heterosexual women's experiences with sexual communication against bisexual, pansexual, and/or homosexual women's experiences, as the findings from this study suggest there may be important differences between these groups. These findings require further study with diverse populations to better understand women's experiences with sexual communication.

REFERENCES

Apt, C., Hurlbert, D. F., Pierce, A. F., & White, L. C. (1996). Relationship satisfaction, sexual characteristics and the psychosocial well-being of women. *Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality, 5*, 195–210.

Ahrold, T. K., Farmer, M., Trapnell, P. D., & Meston, C. M. (2011). The relationship among sexual attitudes, sexual fantasy, and religiosity. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 40*, 619–630. doi:10.1007/s10508-010-9621-4

Arnett, J. J. (2000). Emerging adulthood: A theory of development from the late teens through the twenties. *American Psychologist, 55*, 469–480. doi:10.1037/0003-066X.55.5.469

Arnett, J. J. (2004). *Emerging adulthood: The winding road from the late teens through the twenties*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Arnett, J. J. (2011). *Debating emerging adulthood: Stage or process*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. doi:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199757176.001.0001

Arnett, J. J., & Tanner, J. (2011). In defense of emerging adulthood as a life stage: Rejoinder to Kloep's and Hendry's Chapters 4 and 5. In J. J. Arnett (Ed.), *Debating emerging adulthood: Stage or process* (pp. 121–134). New York, NY: Oxford University Press. doi:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199757176.003.0007

Baxter, L. A. (2011). *Voicing relationships: A dialogic perspective*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Baxter, L. A., & Montgomery, B. M. (1996). *Relating: Dialogues and dialectics.* New York, NY: Guilford.

Bogle, K. A. (2008). *Hooking up: Sex, dating, and relationships on campus*. New York, NY: New York University Press.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*, 77–101.

Baxter, L. A. (2011). Voicing Relationships: A Dialogic Perspective (p. 187). SAGE Publications. Kindle Edition.

Byers, E. S. (2005). Relationship satisfaction and sexual satisfaction: A longitudinal study of individuals in long-term relationships. *Journal of Sex Research, 42*, 113-118. doi: 10.1080/00224490509552264

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. doi:10.1037/a0022048

Byers, E. S., & Demmons, S. (1999). Sexual satisfaction and sexual self-disclosure within dating relationships. *Journal of Sex Research, 36*, 180-189. doi: 10.1080/00224499909551983

Byers, E. S., & Rehman, U. S. (2014). Sexual well-being. In Tolman, D. L., & Diamond, L. M. (Eds.), *APA Handbook of Sexuality and Psychology* (Vol. 1) (pp. 487-522). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Christopher, F. S., & Sprecher, S. (2000). Sexuality in marriage, dating, and other relationships: A decade review. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 62*, 999–1017. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2000.00999.x

Coffelt, T. A., & Hess, J. A. (2015). Sexual goals-plans-actions: Toward a sexual script in marriage. *Communication Quarterly, 63*, 221-238. doi: 10.1080/01463373.2015.1012216

Davison, S. L., Bell, R. J., LaChina, M., Holden, S. L., & Davis, S. R. (2009). The relationship between self- reported sexual satisfaction and general well-being in women. *Journal of Sexual Medicine, 6*, 2690–2697. doi:10.1111/j.1743-6109.2009.01406.x

Dillard, J. P. (2008). Goals-plans-action theory of message production. In L. A. Baxter, & D. O. Braithwaite (Eds.), *Engaging theories in interpersonal communication: Multiple perspectives* (pp. 65–76). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Fagen, J. L., & Anderson, P. B. (2012). Constructing masculinity in response to women's sexual advances. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, *41*(1), 261–270. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-011-9851-0

Goldberg, S., Hussey, J., & Halpern, C. T. (2012). *Adolescent predictors of lifetime hook-up occurrence among U.S. young adults*. Manuscript submitted for publication.

Groneman, C. (1994). Nymphomania: The historical construction of female sexuality. *Signs, 19*(2), 337-67. doi:10.1086/494887

Halpern, C. T., & Kaestle, C. E. (2014). Sexuality in emerging adulthood. In Tolman, D. L., & Diamond, L. M. (Eds.), *APA Handbook of Sexuality and Psychology* (Vol. 1) (pp. 487-522). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Hamilton, L., & Armstrong, E. A. (2009). Gendered sexuality in young adulthood: Double binds and flawed options. *Gender and Society, 23*, 589–616. doi:10.1177/0891243209345829

hooks, b. (2000). *Feminist theory: From margin to center*. Boston: South End.

Jack, D. C., & Ali, A. (2010). Introduction: Culture, self-silencing, and depression: A contextual-relational perspective. In D. C. Jack & A. Ali (Eds.), *Silencing the self across cultures: Gender and depression in a social world* (pp. 3–19). New York, NY: Oxford Press.

Jack, D. C. (1991). *Silencing the self: Women and depression*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Jack, D. C. (1999). Silencing the self: Inner dialogues and outer realities. In T. E. Joiner & J. C. Coyne (Eds.), *The interactional nature of depression: Advances in interpersonal approaches* (pp. 221–246). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. doi: 10.1037/10311-008

Jack, D. C. (2011). Reflections on the silencing the self scale and its origins. *Pyschology of Women Quarterly, 35*(3), 523-529. doi:10.1177/0361684311414824

Kaestle, C. E. (2009). Sexual insistence and disliked sexual activities in young adulthood: Differences by gender and relationship characteristics. *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health, 41*, 33–39. doi:10.1363/4103309

Kaestle, C. E., & Allen, K. R. (2011). The role of masturbation in healthy sexual development: Perceptions of young adults. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 40*, 983–994. doi:10.1007/s10508-010-9722-0

Katz, J., & Schneider, M. (2015). (Hetero)sexual compliance with unwanted casual sex: Associations with feelings about first sex and sexual self-perceptions. *Sex Roles, 72*(9-10), 451-461. doi:10.1007/s11199-015-0467-z

Kvale S., Brinkmann S. (2009*). InterViews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Lawrance, K., & Byers, E. S. (1995). Sexual satisfaction in long-term heterosexual relationship: The interpersonal exchange model of sexual satisfaction. *Personal Relationships, 2*, 267–285. doi:10.1111/j.1475-6811.1995.tb00092.x

Levin, D. S., Ward, L. M., & Neilson, E. C. (2012). Formative sexual communications, sexual agency and coercion, and youth sexual health. *Social Service Review, 86*(3), 487-516. doi:10.1086/667785

Lutz-Zois, C., Dixon, L., Smidt, A., Goodnight, J., Gordon, C., & Ridings, L. (2013). An examination of gender differences in the construct validity of the silencing the self scale. *Personality and Individual Differences, 55*(1), 35-40. doi:10.1016/j.paid.2013.01.012

MacNeil, S., & Byers, E. S. (1997). The relationships between sexual problems, communication and sexual satisfaction. *Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality, 6*, 277–283.

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*, 169–181. doi:10.1177/ 0265407505050942

MacNeil, S., & Byers, E. S. (2009). Role of sexual self-disclosure in the sexual satisfaction of long-term heterosexual couples. *Journal of Sex Research, 46*, 3-14. doi:10.1080/00224490802398399

Marks, M., & Fraley, R. (2006). Confirmation bias and the sexual double standard. *Sex Roles, 54*(1), 19-26. doi:10.1007/s11199-006-8866-9

Marks, M. J., Young, T. M., & Zaikman, Y. (2019). The sexual double standard in the real world. *Social Psychology, 50*(2), 67-79. doi:10.1027/1864-9335/a000362

McCarthy, B. W., & Bodner, L. E. (2005). The equity model of sexuality: Navigating and negotiating the similarities and differences between men and women in sexual behaviour, roles and values. *Sexuality and Relationship Therapy, 20*, 225–235. doi:10.1080/14681990500113229

Miller, S. A., & Byers, E. S. (2004). Actual and desired duration of foreplay and intercourse: Discordance and misperceptions within heterosexual couples. *Journal of Sex Research, 41*, 301–309.

Miller, P. Y., & Simon, W. (1980). The development of sexuality in adolescence. In J. Adelson (ed.), *Handbook of Adolescent Sexuality* (pp. 383-407). New York: John Wiley and Sons.

Moretti, M. M., Rein, A. S., & Wiebe, V. J. (1998). Relational self-regulation: Gender differences in risk for dysphoria. *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science/Revue canadienne des sciences du comportement, 30*, 243–252. http://dx.doi.org/ 10.1037/h0087067.

Petronio, S. (2002). *Boundaries of privacy:Dialectics of disclosure.* Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Petronio, S. (2018). Communication privacy management theory: Understanding families. In D. O. Braithwaite, E. A. Suter, & K. Floyd (Eds.), *Engaging Theories in Family Communication* (2nd ed.) (pp. 87-97). New York: Routledge.

Plummer, K. (1995). *Telling sexual stories.* London, UK: Routledge.

Ravert, R. D. (2009). “You’re only young once:” Things college students report doing now before it is too late. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 24*(3), 376–396. https://doi.org/10.1177/0743558409334254

Sakaluk, J. K., Todd, L. M., Milhausen, R., Lachowsky, N. J., & Undergraduate Research Group, i. S. (2014). Dominant heterosexual sexual scripts in emerging adulthood: Conceptualization and measurement. *Journal of Sex Research, 51*(5), 516-531. doi:10.1080/00224499.2012.745473

Schick, V. R., Zucker, A. N., & Bay-Cheng, L. Y. (2008). Safer, better sex through feminism: The role of feminist ideology in women’s sexual well-being. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 32*, 225–232. doi:10.1111/j.1471-6402.2008.00431.x

Suter, E. A. (2018). The promise of contrapuntal and intersectional methods for advancing critical interpersonal and family communication research. *Communication Monographs, 85*(1), 123-139. doi:10.1080/03637751.2017.1375131

Suter, E. A., & Seurer, L. M. (2018). Relational dialectics theory: Realizing the dialogic potential of family communication. In D. O. Braithwaite, E. A. Suter, & K. Floyd (Eds.), *Engaging theories in family communication* (pp. 324-336). New York, NY: Routledge.

Tanner, J. L. (2006). Recentering during emerging adulthood. In J. J. Arnett & J. L. Tanner (Eds.), *Emerging adults in America:Coming of age in the 21st century* (pp. 21–55). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. doi:10.1037/11381-002

Taormino, T. (2013). *The feminist porn book: The politics of producing pleasure*. New York, NY: The Feminist Press at CUNY. Retrieved from http://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=597976&site=ehost-live

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*, 404–425. doi:10.1080/10570314.2013.845794

Tolman, D. L. (1999). Femininity as a barrier to positive sexual health for adolescent girls. *Journal of the American Medical Women’s Association, 54*, 133–138.

Tolman, D. L. (2002). *Dilemmas of desire: Teenage girls talk about sexuality*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Tolman, D. L., Impett, E. A., Tracy, A. J., & Michael, A. (2006). Looking good, sounding good: Femininity ideology and adolescent girls’ mental health.

Psychology of Women Quarterly, 30, 85–95. doi:10.1111/j.1471-6402.2006.00265.x

Tolman, D. L., & Porche, M. V. (2000). The Adolescent Femininity Ideology Scale: Development and validation of a new measure for girls. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 24*, 365–376. doi:10.1111/j.1471-6402.2000.tb00219.x

Tracy, S. J., & Rivera, K. D. (2010). Endorsing equity and applauding stay-at-home moms: How male voices on worklife reveal aversive sexism and flickers of transformation. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 24, 13-43. doi:10.1177/0893318909352248

United States Public Health Service Office. (2001). *The surgeon general's call to action to promote sexual health and responsible sexual behavior*. Rockville, MD: Office of the Surgeon General.

Way, A. K., Zwier, R. K., & Tracy, S. J. (2015). Dialogic interviewing and flickers of transformation: An examination and delineation of interactional strategies that promote participant self-reflexivity. *Qualitative Inquiry, 21*(8), 720-731. doi:10.1177/1077841456686

Wheeless, L. R., Wheeless, V. E., & Baus, R. (1984). Sexual communication, communication satisfaction, and solidarity in the developmental stages of intimate relationships. *Western Journal of Communication, 48*, 217-230. doi:10.1080/10570318409374158

Winkler, K. L. (2018, November). *A review of the current state of sexual communication research*. Interpersonal Communication Division. National Communication Association 104th Annual Convention. Salt Lake City, Utah.

Wolf, N. (1997). *Promiscuities: The secret struggle for womanhood.* New York: Random House.

Zaikman, Y., & Marks, M. (2014). Ambivalent sexism and the sexual double standard. Sex Roles, 71(9), 333-344. doi:10.1007/s11199-014-0417-1