

**COMFORT COMMUNICATING CONSTRUCTS ON RELATIONSHIP
AND SEXUAL SATISFACTION**

by

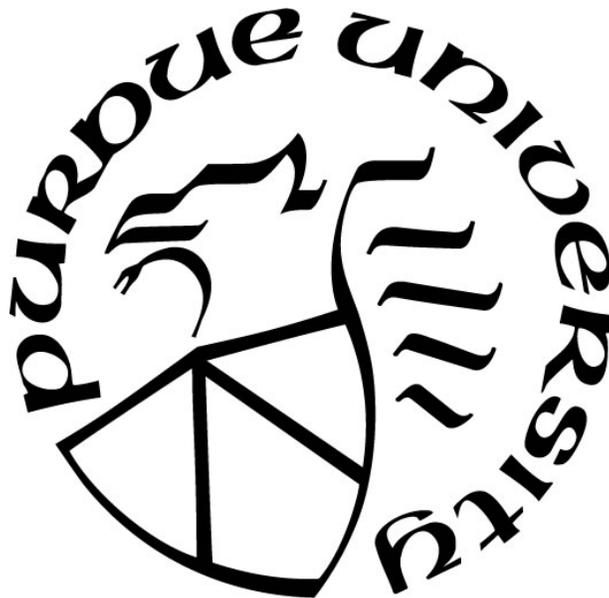
Kristina Fairbanks

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Purdue University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the degree of

Master of Science



Department of Child Development and Family Studies

Hammond, Indiana

May 2020

THE PURDUE UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL
STATEMENT OF COMMITTEE APPROVAL

Dr. David P. Nalbone, Chair

Department of Behavioral Sciences

Dr. Christopher K. Belous

Department of Behavioral Sciences

Dr. Catherine M. Gillotti

Department of Communication and Creative Arts

Approved by:

Dr. Megan J. Murphy

*This thesis is dedicated to my self-doubt and insecurities:
Screw you, I did it.*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I have to express my gratitude to each and every committee member of mine: Dave, Chris, and Cathy. To say I would not be here without you, is an obvious understatement. I began this journey with not the slightest inkling on how to do this thing called a thesis. You were patient with me, broke things down for me, and truly guided me through this process! Thank you for sticking by me through all of the changes and scares this last semester delivered. I am forever thankful to each of you.

I am appreciative to have such an amazing cohort filled with the most caring women. These individuals are so intelligent, and without them knowing it pushed me to be better. Looking back, I realize how crucial it was to have this support system during the creation of the thesis. They were the only ones who truly understood what it felt like to be in the process. With all the changes, worry, and self-doubt, these ladies got it. Having their validation and reassurance saved me in some of the lowest points. Especially Lexie, Briana, and Sierra, who heard it all from me, thank you ladies.

Additionally, I would like to thank my assistantship boss, Emily Hixon. I worked for Emily this past year and she became an unanticipated support system that delivered a sense of clarity for me. Every single Wednesday after my thesis class, she would always check in with me about how my progress is going. When I was supposed to be working on something related to my assistantship, she sat down with me, listened to my worries, and even allowed time for me to work on my thesis while at work. Her outside knowledge and consistent genuine care for my project meant more than she'll ever know.

Lastly, I want to thank my family and significant other. There were times when I had convinced myself I was not good enough to do this and that I was not going to graduate. Shoutout to my mom who endured the days and nights where I was angry, annoyed, or sad, and may have taken it out on her (I'm sorry mom!). Even with my attitude, my mom was always the first one willing to help. My partner gave up his free time on multiple occasions to read and reread my project and help implement improvements. Thank you, I love you all.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	7
LIST OF FIGURES	8
ABSTRACT	9
CHAPTER 1. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM.....	10
CHAPTER 2. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROBLEM.....	12
Theory	12
Self-monitoring.....	14
Self-disclosure	15
Topic Difficulty	17
Processes of Communication.....	18
Method of Communication.	19
Couple Satisfaction	20
Sexual Satisfaction.....	21
Culture	22
Gende	23
The Present Study	24
Hypotheses.....	24
CHAPTER 3: METHOD	27
Participants and Procedure	27
Materials	30
Self-monitoring	30
Comfort.	31
Communication	31
Couple Satisfaction	31
Sexual Satisfaction	32
Demographics.....	32
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS	35
Data Screening.....	35
Test of Hypotheses	37

Hypothesis Outcomes.....	40
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION.....	44
Self-monitoring and Method of Communication	44
Comfort Disclosing to Communication Processes	45
Overall Satisfaction	46
Limitations.....	46
Clinical and Theoretical Implications.....	47
Conclusion.....	48
REFERENCES	50
APPENDIX.....	54

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Demographics	28
Table 2. Political Demographics.....	30
Table 3. Correlation Model Variables.....	36
Table 4. Descriptive Statistics.....	37

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Structural Equation Model.....	34
Figure 2. Results of Structural Equation Model.....	39

ABSTRACT

Research shows the significance that communication patterns, beliefs, and behaviors hold within a multitude of relationship types. Unfortunately, the same research also shows that effective or positive communication is still not occurring as often as we think. Communicative interaction breaks down, fails, or is utilized negatively more often when emotionally charged topics are at the forefront of the conversation, most often due to reported personal discomfort. This negative interaction, and the subsequent breakdown in communication, can foster a snowball effect – decreasing relationship and sexual satisfaction. This study was aimed to discover how perceived comfort levels contributes to the lack of communication of certain topics and how it is affecting relationship and sexual satisfaction. The type of communicative process that occurs will affect the sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction. Through an online survey, participants anonymously responded to statements related to these concepts in order to test relationships. Overall, it was found that respondents' participation in self-monitoring, as well as what method of communication they use, strongly influenced their comfort disclosing on different topics. Their comfort did not have significant influence on their then communication process. It was also found that communication processes influence couple's relationship and sexual satisfaction. These results urge marriage and family therapists to update their clinical toolboxes and add self-monitoring to their conceptualization when working with couples.

Key words: communication, self-monitor, sexual satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, comfort

CHAPTER 1. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

I started the therapy session just like I do all of my intakes – “So, what is bringing you and your partner in to therapy today?” Shockingly, the couple responded with “We are having a problem communicating...yeah, I’d say communication is our number one issue.” This is the most common reason that couples say they need therapy. This may seem like an easy fix (“Ok, talk more. That’ll be \$100, please.”), however it is not. Our society and culture has very clearly developed specific rules for talking with others. Why are some topics “off limits?”. As a society, we have constructed what is and what is not appropriate, and what is permissible for discussion, we have determined to whom we can talk to about certain topics, and we have even specified when is the correct time to talk about certain topics. For example, a common piece of advice often given to single individuals is that they should refrain from talking about religion, finances, children, or politics on a first date. The question remains, however – *why?*

Communication is the basis of our interpersonal lives, the lungs of a relationship so to speak, and without it we would struggle to survive. When enough avoidance or neglect of certain topics occur, it creates a blockage in the lungs. Topic avoidance contributes to relational dissatisfaction through perceptual and interpersonal processes (Caughlin & Golish, 2002). This blockage makes the relationship hard to breathe, and without this necessity of oxygen, the relationship cannot grow. Communication is important as it allows us to share our interest and concerns, to support each other; to organize our lives and make decisions; and to work together.

Although we know the significant benefits behind communication, there are still current societal limitations surrounding certain topics and rules in place that restrict the act of communicating. Society has provided us with particular communication scripts, that includes rules of who, what, and when items are to be discussed. These restrictions also influences our design in how we then go about following these scripts. Are we genuine or putting up a more anticipated desirable façade? Relationship scripts, a subset of relationship schemas, are cognitive structures that contain information regarding the key events that take place in a romantic relationship, as well as the order in which those events typically occur (Holmberg & Mackenzie, 2002). Individuals might follow scripts regarding the progression of the relationship, the timeline, or the development of the relationship. The problem is that these scripts are regarded as consensually shared, culture-specific notions of normative relationship development.

One's reality, which has been programed for them, transpires through the prism of norms governing the relationship within which the communicative act takes place. Although a particular topic may be important to individuals, society implies that there is a certain set of guidelines in order for them to receive that information. Such guidelines are when one is able to initiate the conversation and how extensive or in depth one is able to go in the conversation, which contributes to how one then monitors or adjusts to successfully match those guidelines. Gergen (2015) states that we do not have to necessarily abide by such societal rules or norms, but at the same time we almost must in order to be understood by one another. It is when one breaks these rules that it is seen as abnormal. These limits are damaging because they delay and inhibit all of the individual benefits and potential relationship enhancement that communication creates.

Every strong relationship is a result of a never-ending conversation between partners (Gottman, Gottman, Abrams, & Abrams, 2019). Here we can reveal what barriers exist that inhibit individual's from obtaining this never-ending conversation. Existing research does not provide a clear understanding of the antecedents and consequences of declaring a topic off limits for further discussion (Roloff & Ifert, 1998). Learning of the barriers that precede potential difficult topics and the communication process that proceeds, will help clinicians to implement the never-ending conversation, enhancing client's sexual and relationship satisfaction.

CHAPTER 2. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROBLEM

We know the value that communication brings; however, a problem exists due to current, continuous suppression of authenticity with certain topics. We often think a happy relationship is the result of having a lot of things in common, but it comes from learning of our differences and how to support each other's needs (Gottman, et al., 2019), and how do couples accomplish this but through communication. Individuals engaging in open communication whenever possible rather than conforming to the societal scripts may produce optimal outcomes. Communicating about avoided topics provide opportunities to promote affiliation, to bolster satisfaction, and enhance togetherness between partners (Roloff & Johnson, 2001).

Theory

Social Penetration Theory, along with the assistance of the Presentation of Self, drives this proposal to expose the foundational value communication has in relationships. A theory of communication is to be included for understanding communication processes.

Communication occurs when one person produces a set of words, phrases, actions, nonverbals, and more as a public representation of their thoughts and another person constructs a mental representation based on these utterances. When participating in this interaction, persons fill in missing information when needed from our own pre-existing knowledge, also known as discourses. Features of the context must also be considered, including the beliefs, wants, and social relations of the participants.

Irwin Altman and Dalmis Taylor created Social Penetration Theory, which will contribute to the theoretical fundamentals of this proposal. Social Penetration theory describes the process of developing deeper intimacy with another person through mutual self-disclosure and other forms of vulnerability (Taylor & Altman, 1975). The act of self-disclosure and sharing is dependent on multiple factors. Factors beginning with individuals themselves and what their personality structure looks like. If you have ever seen the movie Shrek, it may serve you as beneficial reference. Think back to the part of the movie where Shrek was utilizing an onion in an attempt to explain to Donkey that ogres consist of layers. Altman and Taylor had a similar mind frame when it pertained to an individual's personality structure; layers. Personality

structure consists of onion-like layers of beliefs and feelings about the self, others, and the world around us. The deeper layers prove to be more vulnerable, guarded, and central to self-image. Social Penetration Theory stipulates that the most successful way to reach the inner most layer of one's onion is through self-disclosure. For this proposal, self-disclosure will be defined as *the voluntary sharing of personal preferences and feelings with another person* (Laurenceau, Barrett, & Pietromonaco, 1998). It is an overarching conclusion that the self-disclosure closest to the core of one's onion exists as the most difficult to share. Whether in friendships or relationships, Altman and Taylor identify that the closest to the core or the depth of self-disclosure is the degree of intimacy.

Certain observations about the communicative process of what may contribute to one's comfort communicating topics have been made. Researcher Arthur Vanlear analyzed the content of conversations in developing relationships and discovered that 14% of talk revealed nothing about the speaker, 65% dwelled on public items, 19% shared semiprivate details, and only 2% disclosed intimate confidences (Vanlear, 1987). These results reinforce the point from Social Penetration Theory that revealing is rapid at the start but slows down quickly as the tightly wrapped inner layers of the onion are reached. This is also consistent with the constructionism of refraining from anything deeper than surface level until a certain "acceptable" point. The myth of instant intimacy is reinforced by societal norms determining that telling too much too fast is a negative thing to do. As relationships stall the intimate exchange of our thoughts and feelings, they ultimately delay the relationship of becoming more important, more meaningful, and more enduring.

Social Penetration Theory also observes that a relationship must use it or lose it, meaning that the couple must be active to maintain their communication skill. It is determined that the relationship will deteriorate if individuals begin to close off their intimate layers that they once opened. In support of this observation, self-disclosure can be seen as more of a continuous process throughout the relationship, rather than an exchange that happens one time. Altman and Taylor include an additional aspect contributing to one's comfort sharing on charged topics; reward-cost outcomes. Evidence found has suggested that shifting patterns of interpersonal rewards and costs produced exaggerated effects on self-disclosure processes (Taylor & Altman, 1975). The reasoning as to why one may or may not feel comfortable disclosing is because the benefits of doing so may not outweigh the downfalls or possible consequences.

Self-monitoring

One factor that should be taken into consideration when contemplating self-disclosure is our tendency to monitor ourselves. Self-monitoring is defined as the extent to which individuals monitor and adjust their behavior for appropriateness, based upon how it is perceived by others in social situations (Snyder, 1974). Whether it is what we say or how we say it, an image is being presented to the receiving party. Some people may be more active or conscious in their presentation of themselves. Research using Snyder's (1974) Self-Monitoring Scale indicates that high self-monitors "literally act like different persons in different situations and with different people", whereas low self-monitors have "unified, consistent sense of self from circumstance to circumstance" (Snyder, 1995, p. 37). There are some individual differences that exist that would classify high or low self-monitors. High self-monitors are sensitive to social cues and are social adept because they are attentive to how others perceive them and strive to ensure that their behavior will be favorably received (Parks-Leduc, Pattie Pargas, & Eliason, 2014). In contrast, low self-monitors behave in a fashion that is authentic, regardless of appropriateness (Parks-Leduc, et al., 2014).

There is some confusion that exists in the literature around self-monitoring. Some claim that self-monitoring is a personality trait, or that self-monitoring is a particular skill that is related to their personality, or that there is a motivation behind it related to one's values. Recent research has begun claiming more of a combination of these two factors; however, there is not one consistent measure that has generalization.

Norris and Zweigenhaft (1999) found that there is a tendency for individuals who have similar self-monitoring scores to pair up romantically. This may indicate that self-monitoring may partially depend on the recipient of that disclosure. As a result, individuals may react differently or engage in a different amount of self-monitoring based on what their partner is giving. It has also been discovered that high self-monitors tend to be involved in less committed romantic relationships, whereas low self-monitors tend to be involved in more committed romantic relationship (Norris & Zweighenhaft, 1999).

Self-monitoring can interfere throughout the different stages of a relationship. This behavior can influence the relationship initiation, whether the relationship is maintained, and how or why the relationship ends. Existing research has found that high self-monitoring individuals are

adept at initiating romantic relationships, but less skilled or motivated to maintain them (Snyder & Simpson, 1984).

With self-monitoring being such an influential factor that contributes throughout relationships, it deserves attention from Marriage and Family therapists. It is up to clinicians to include this variable in their considerations when working with couples. Individuals who are more skilled at controlling and regulating their expressive behavior should also be more adept at feigning actions and emotions they do not necessarily feel (Leck & Simpson, 1999). This finding reveals challenges for all parties involved. Whether it is the significant other or the clinician working with them, there is a task to hopefully decipher if the self-monitor is being authentic or engaging in a pretend presentation.

Self-disclosure

Communication consists of self-disclosure, which is a significant portion of everyday speech. There are many opinions regarding proper self-disclosure, such as when to engage in it and how much to engage in. There are negative messages surrounding talking too much about oneself and there are negative messages around being quiet or reserved. So how does one decide? In initial meetings we hope to make a good first impression or to get off on the right foot. Goffman states that individuals project an image of themselves; that once proposed, is committed for the duration of the encounter (Goffman, 1972). Recall the longevity that self-monitoring can obtain. Now whether this presentation of the individual is genuine or not, is something that will be confirmed or discredited throughout interactions. Goffman points out that attunement is not usually a true consensus in which everyone expressed their honest feelings and agrees with one another in an open and candid manner. Individuals are expected to suppress their real feelings and project an attitude to the performance that they imagine that the others will find acceptable (Goffman, 1972). This juggling act of appropriate or successful self-disclosure is known as impression management. Individuals are continually obligated to manage the impression they are making on others. Whether it is not talking too much, being polite, what one chooses to wear, demonstrating one's knowledge, making a joke, and so on, we are taking preventative practices to display a good image of ourselves to others. It is not until an acceptable time has gone by, that we allow for someone to see us backstage. The backstage regions are revealed when we are not showered, not polished, with our flaws out, and ultimately not

participating in impression management. This proposal aims to discover how relevant and impactful these impression managements are on one's self disclosure and comfort doing so in and throughout relationships.

Goffman's theoretical focus is complementary that of Marriage and Family Therapy's Social Construction theory. Goffman identifies the ritualized nature of social interaction, the way in which the societal scripts of social encounters become routine, repetitive, and unconscious (Goffman, 1972). For example, the ritual and programmed exchange of, "Hi, how are you?" "Fine, how are you?", that stands for a solidified social interaction in passing. These routines exist in the development and management of relationships.

Self-disclosure can be viewed as an ability one may or may not partake in. Researchers have determined that self-disclosure, about one's personal background and feelings is positively correlated with the success of friendship, dating, and marital relationships; however, there should still be given more attention when looking at the development of intimate relationships (Tamir & Mitchell, 2012). Tamir and Mitchell (2012) found that disclosing information about oneself is a rewarding experience in which a sense of pleasure is activated in the brain, as it would from receiving money, eating food, or having sex. On the other hand, too much self-disclosure could be counterproductive. It may embarrass or hurt, may lead to rejection, may reduce one's autonomy, and may produce loss of control (Forgas, 2011). Are these reasons prominent enough that they inhibit individuals from self-disclosing all together? It is a question that must be looked at not only at beginning stages of a relationship, but also throughout the duration of a relationship. Jourard, a professional psychotherapist, commented that "husbands and wives are strangers to one another", suggesting that self-disclosure can diminish or stop in relationships (Jourard, 1971, p.4). Jourard's (1971) insights that the process of self-disclosure is critical to the development of close, confiding relationships and is associated with marital adjustment.

There is an overall consensus that communication is beneficial; however, communication is a complex vessel that obtains many everchanging factors and features and cannot stop being researched. Firstly, there are multiple definitions and multiple ways to self-disclose. For example, some identify deliberate or intentional disclosure, while accidental or unavoidable disclosure exist as well. In the Marriage and Family therapy literature, communication is almost always studied in conjunction with something else. Whether it is aligned with chronic illness, military spouses, or an additional specific factor, it is almost impossible to discover

communication in its earliest individualistic forms. A main example of this is the non-existent factor of self-monitoring in the Marriage and Family therapy field. There is also an exceptional focus on communication in specifically marital satisfaction, rather than just relationships in general. There is a common research paradigm for studying *how* couples communicate, usually while in conflict. Again, not looking at the existing factors that exist before the conflict or refraining from expecting that certain topics are automatically associated with conflict. Ultimately, in the work of Marriage and Family Therapy there is a lack of research recognition of self-monitoring towards comfort surrounding socially constructed charged topics and just how that impacts their sexual and romantic satisfaction.

Topic Difficulty

There has been an implicit assumption that what topics couples choose to discuss have minimal influence on their communication behavior, and that *how* the communication transpires is more influential. Whether it is the use of harsh start-ups, I-statements, criticism or defensiveness, clinicians have been informed on these communication behaviors to address and implement with clients in their communication cycle. Looking at the topics behind these behaviors has crucial importance because variance in the topics selected by couples could bear on the overall validity of the standard communication procedure (Sanford, 2003).

Explicitly declaring a topic taboo can be disadvantageous. By placing a topic off limits, individuals are openly acknowledging that there is an issue around which they disagree and that they are unwilling to resolve (Roloff & Ifert, 1998). Previous research has found that conflict over topics such as infidelity, personal insults, and showing affection is more predictive of global marital distress than conflict over other topics (Kurdek, 1994). Gottman and colleagues posed eight different topics of conversation that are important for couples to discuss. The eight “conversations for a lifetime of love” include trust and commitment, conflict, sex and intimacy, work and money, family, fun and adventure, growth and spirituality, and dreams (Gottman, et al., 2019). Gottman reiterates the point that was made earlier that conversations, particularly on these topics, are crucial to have multiple times throughout one’s relationship. The conversations need to occur to reinvigorate the connection and passion that first brought the couple together, but that may have become routine.

It has recently been stressed by marital researchers to take into account the distal influences on communication behavior. A distal influence occurs when a global variable pertaining to the couple's relationship as a whole has a generalized influence on communication behavior across several contexts or situations (Sanford, 2003). This would fit society indicating that some topics should be more hushed, and why individuals refrain from speaking about and initiating such conversations. Sanford (2003) discovered that overall marital satisfaction led distressed couples to discuss more difficult topics and satisfied couples to discuss easier topics. Although here this proposal hypothesizes different particular correlations, it does agree with Sanford's study that overall topic difficulty will have a direct influence on communication behavior.

The present study aimed to make known whether different topics deliver comfort or discomfort to individuals and relationships. Having the ability to identify specific topics can help clinicians to normalize the discussion of such things, creating more areas of comfort for the couple. A step beyond this is for clinicians and their clients to discover unique ways to enhance intimacy through these positive conversations, ultimately strengthening their relationship and sexual satisfaction.

Processes of Communication

There is very little research that discusses how the topic of conversation relates to couple satisfaction or sexual satisfaction as mitigated by personal comfort. What does their communicative process look like when discussing an identified charged topic? One major study looked at language style matching (LSM) and the association of interaction quality and partner behavior (Bowen, Winczewski, & Collins, 2017). Language style matching can consist of both verbal and nonverbal mimicry. An example of nonverbal mimicry may be matching the other's gaze or facial expressions, whereas verbal mimicry expands to their use of function words. Since language provides a concrete structural framework within which to organize thoughts and feelings, convergence in the use of function words is thought to reflect communicators' shared cognitive representations of whatever they are discussing (Niederhoffer & Pennebaker, 2002). LSM can be examined uniquely in interactions between individuals who have existing relationships with one another. It can also be observed between strangers. Through time one can learn and adapt to a partner's LSM. Strangers who exhibit higher LSM in interaction may be

motivated to reach jointly satisfying outcomes (Bowen et al., 2017). This exposure suggests a better explanation for individuals' engaging in conversations regarding emotional constructs at earlier times; rather than conforming to society's declaration that it is just too soon to speak on certain topics. If individuals have the opportunity to reach a mutually satisfying outcome through dialogue, why delay that?

Another study depicted the amount of communication in a slightly different way, looking at the occurrence of negative communication with disengagement. For this proposal, disengaged communication can be considered to occur in situations when one is interacting with their romantic partner. The study's results indicated that people may disengage because of aversive or disappointing interactions with their partner and because they expect or perceive those interactions to go poorly (Barry, Barden, & Dubac, 2019). For one to anticipate a negative outcome exposes the previous failing attempts that have taken place for one to expect that poor outcome once again. The correlational findings were that disengaged couple communication is associated with individuals' own and their partners' greater negative communication (Barry, Barden, & Dubac, 2019). It is to be seen from this study that what communication is happening from consistent disengaged individuals, will be predominantly negative. However, more positive and emotionally active dyads, have been identified as disengaging only "a little bit" during disagreement (Barry, et al., 2014). It was anticipated that lower disengagement or more positive communication processes will deliver higher relationship and sexual satisfaction.

Method of Communication.

Due to the technological advances that have a direct effect on how people communicate with the world around them, it is important to acknowledge if or how technology plays a role in one's comfort discussing certain topics, and if said technologies have an influence on the success of that relationship's dialogue. The research is ever changing as technology changes and enhances how our world operates. There have been benefits and downfalls when examining technology and its functions, especially pertaining to communication. Computer mediated communication places greater emphasis on more controllable verbal and linguistic cues in the absence of many nonverbal communication cues. This phenomenon leads to online self-presentation that is "more selective, malleable, and subject to self-censorship than if it were in a face-to-face interaction" (Walther, 1996, p.26). Using technology to communicate gives users more time to consciously construct their message, which may increase people's chances to

present their message or present themselves in a more deliberate and controlled way. The anonymity of computer mediated communication is thought to accelerate intimacy as users engage in more intimate questions and at a deeper level of self-disclosure than face-to-face interactants (Tidwell & Walther, 2002). One may argue that these enhancements should bolster communication through technology; however, this channel of communication provides some apprehension as well. Self-disclosure online can be less honest due to an increased amount of opportunities for identity manipulation (Gibbs, Ellison, & Heino, 2006), in turn derailing the process of maintaining that relationship. Method of communication may moderate individual's comfort when disclosing or discussing certain topics.

I foresee communication being used to build a more satisfying relationship, and that being more satisfied in a relationship may prompt the dyad members to communicate more with each other, demonstrating a reciprocal pattern.

Couple Satisfaction

Marriage and family therapists agree that couple consensus is vital to successful communication. In the overall field of study, many interventions and treatment programs have been developed to provide a basis for effective communication strategies for couples to partake in, with corresponding outcome studies showing that these programs are helpful and increase overall relationship satisfaction. Communication is a key not only to building, but to maintaining and nourishing relationships. No matter how well partners know and love each other, they cannot read their partner's mind. It is through communication that one can avoid misunderstandings that may cause hurt, anger, resentment, or confusion.

Researchers revealed that in conflict discussions, couples who were higher in LSM had disclosers who felt less positive emotion during their conversation and felt less supported and cared for (Bowen et al., 2017). This result shows that being higher in LSM may not necessarily relate to positive interactivity nor positive outcomes. In conflict, LSM may reflect a shared combative attitude, such as a shared motivation to defend or promote one's own position (Bowen et al., 2017). Experiencing these reactions, individuals are not hearing their partner, nor are they processing what they are attempting to share. Without these components couples may not reach a satisfactory resolution. Research has found that individuals who are less satisfied in their

relationship do tend to disengage with their partners more (Slotter & Luchies, 2014), ultimately suggesting that a genuine, true resolution deems impossible.

Successful communication has been discovered to have long-term effects in relationships. Romantic partners who communicate effectively with one another have relationships that are more satisfying, committed, and emotionally intimate (Eldridge & Christiansen, 2002). Specifically, increasing communication about the couple's sexual satisfaction, home life, and vacations had enhanced satisfaction of both members of the dyad (Richmond, 1995). This result reveals that having those conversations that contained possible discomfort, was a positive experience for the couple that delivered optimal results. Additionally, restricting conversational topics can produce less desirable results. Having to remove topics from the table could make a partner reluctant to express other irritations or concerns (Roloff & Ifert, 1998), making a more limited opportunity to experience that emotional intimacy.

Intimacy has been a well-known component when working with couples, whether it was an area of achievement or an area that is lacking. With this proposal I am looking at intimacy associated with communication. It has been found that where intimacies are exchanged, it is a means of deepening and developing a relationship (Collins & Miller, 1994). Intimacy can produce reciprocal intimacy, which then can produce reciprocal progress in the relationship (Forgas, 2011).

Although censorious conversations are not highly anticipated by most couples, I want to expose that having the conversation, even with discomfort, is better off for one's couple satisfaction than remaining silent. Furthermore, then having the conversation may foster an increase in comfort surrounding future conversations of various topics.

Sexual Satisfaction

Therapists and sexologists have discovered that discussing one's sexual preferences is advantageous to relationships, increasing sexual satisfaction and reducing sexual problems (Tang, Bensman, & Hatfield, 2013). Researchers have also found that to foster a satisfying sexual relationship, communication (in general), and sexual communication between partners (in particular) are essential (Tang et al., 2013). Thus, communication needs to prevail throughout relationships, not just as a onetime occurrence.

Intimacy can be seen as a common element that has contributed to the couple's sexual satisfaction through its use in self-disclosure and dialogue. Research has consistently shown that communication is an important factor, as it can facilitate or impede intimacy in romantic relationships. Partners are more likely to feel intimate with each other when they both can discuss their vulnerabilities and mutually validate each other's self-disclosure (Laurenceau, et al., 1998). In one study, husbands' and wives' emotional intimacy and sexual satisfaction were found to play an intervening role in the association between communication and relationship satisfaction. Spouses were more likely to feel emotionally and sexually intimate with their partners when they perceived that their partners' communication style was more positive - in turn, their increased intimacy also increased their relationship satisfaction (Yoo, Bartle-Haring, Day, & Gangamma, 2013).

A consensus discovery is that communication has been found to be one of the best predictors of both husbands' and wives' sexual satisfaction (Larson, Anderson, Holman, and Niemann, 2008). Yet, overall findings show that individuals in marriage disclose little sexual information with their partners (Coffelt & Hess, 2014), showing that sex is considered difficult to discuss even within marriage. I would like to see if this finding is consistent within individuals and other relationships that are not married. Would these findings be consistent in a relationship that is in its early development? I also am intrigued to hopefully discover as to why individuals are not engaging in more communication pertaining to sex knowing the beneficial outcomes of doing so. Since it is a prominent finding amongst unified couples, it enforced my anticipation that the degree of comfort along with the type of communication will influence one's sexual satisfaction.

Culture

Cultural differences exist pertaining to communication around emotionally charged topics. Culture is necessary to examine due to its effect on all aspects of life. It is consensually acknowledged as having a role in people's cognitions, emotions, motivations, behaviors, and lifestyles. Differences from historical, political, and environmental backgrounds reveal the dimensions of individualistic versus collectivistic cultures (Gudykunst, Ting-Toomey, & Chua, 1988). Individualism is oriented around the self, and being more concerned with personal achievement. Collectivism is oriented around the success of the group, and maintaining the

group's harmony; by doing so, there is no room for the individual's needs or fostering uniqueness. Due to the operating differences between the different cultures, it is anticipated that culture also affects communication styles. Researchers discovered members of an individualistic society are more prone to talk than are members of a collectivist society (Gudykunst et al., 1988). Specifically, in American, individualistic societies, there is engagement in low-context communication, which emphasizes openness, and which requires people to share their personal information with others (Gudykunst et al., 1988). In a collectivist culture, researchers determined there was more of a high-context communication. Members in collectivist societies may fear imposing on others or hurting others by their self-disclosures (Tang et al., 2013).

Gender and Communication.

There are gender differences that exist in the arena of communication. When husbands communicated more negatively with their wives, both husbands and wives were more disengaged during couple communication (Barry, et al., 2019). Gender differences were also found in regard to topic selection and satisfaction. Increasing communication about religion, work, and friends or relatives is additionally satisfying for females (Richmond, 1995).

In most cultures, society expects women to be sexually naïve and permissive. These traditional gender roles around sexual behavior inhibit and discourage a woman's ability to effectively talk about sex. Parker and Ivanov's (2012) study of young adult women found that women were not comfortable communicating about sex despite being sexually active. Another study found that a majority of women in the study were uncomfortable talking about sex in general and experienced fear of judgement for communicating desire about sexual behavior (Montemurro, Bartasavich, and Wintermute, 2014). Contradicting these findings, it has also been identified that women generally disclose more than do men. When woman made self-disclosures about particularly their sexual likes and dislikes, they experienced more emotional intimacy (Coffelt & Hess, 2014). This must reveal that those women participants consider the topic of sexual likes and dislikes as one of inner layer.

It is not certain that this general difference holds true in the specific case of sexual self-disclosure. The double standard highlights the acceptance for men to talk about and to engage in sexual activities, versus the shame and judgement associated when women do the same.

The Present Study

This proposal was executed in hopes to challenge societal communication scripts and to reveal the benefits of doing so. Thanks to previous research, we know communication is helpful and beneficial; however, further depth is lacking. Here we are putting a light on the actions that happen before the communication transpires, such as what method are they choosing to use, as well as are they engaging in any amount of self-monitoring. These factors may then influence the comfort and communication that follows. In exception to the focus on sexual communication, there is no research looking at all of the other topics that have been determined to be off limits. Maybe they would not be categorized as such if it was more accepting to discuss such things. There is a pre-determined expectation that a conversation surrounding one of these topics will ultimately result in conflict and not satisfaction. Could having these conversations sooner in a relationship buffer dissatisfaction and conflict? Another unique contribution this proposal aims to accomplish is the discovery of demographics and cultural differences that predict comfort when communicating emotionally charged topics. Overall, I am interested in talking about the things that people and society do not want to talk about and hopefully revealing the benefits in relationships of doing so.

Hypotheses.

Based on the literature reviewed above, I tested the following hypotheses as seen in figure 1:

RQ 1.) *In relationships, will face-to-face communication or communication through a device affect their self-monitoring?*

H1. Self-monitoring & method of communication will be positively correlated.

RQ 2.) *Will participating in self-monitoring predict how comfortable individuals feel disclosing on different topics with their partner?*

H2. Self-monitoring will positively predict comfort self-disclosing on relationship topics.

H3. Self-monitoring will positively predict comfort self-disclosing on general topics.

H4. Self-monitoring will positively predict comfort self-disclosing on sexual topics.

RQ 3.) *Does communicating face-to-face or through a device influence if one feels more comfortable to self-disclose with their partner?*

H5. Method of communication will predict comfortability self-disclosing on relational topics.

H6. Method of communication will predict comfortability self-disclosing on general topics.

H7. Method of communication will predict comfortability self-disclosing on sexual topics.

RQ 4.) *If one is comfortable self-disclosing about different topics, will that influence how their communication process transpires?*

H8. Comfortable relationship self-disclosure will positively predict overall positive communication interaction.

H9. Comfortable relationship self-disclosure will negatively predict communication demand/withdraw behavior.

H10. Comfortable general self-disclosure will positively predict overall positive interaction.

H11. Comfortable general self-disclosure will negatively predict communication demand/withdraw behavior.

H12. Comfortable sexual self-disclosure will positively predict overall positive interaction.

H13. Comfortable sexual self-disclosure will negatively predict communication demand/withdraw behavior.

RQ 5.) *If one feels more comfortable choosing to self-disclose about different topics, will it enhance their couple or sexual satisfaction?*

H14. Comfortable relationship self-disclosure will positively predict positive couple satisfaction.

H15. Comfortable sexual self-disclosure will positively predict sexual satisfaction.

RQ 6.) *Does the communication process between the couple influence their couple or sexual satisfaction?*

H16. Overall positive interaction will positively predict couple satisfaction.

H17. Overall positive interaction will positively predict sexual satisfaction.

H18. Communication demand/withdraw behavior will negatively predict couple satisfaction.

H19. Communication demand/withdraw behavior will negatively predict sexual satisfaction.

RQ 7.) *Will a couple's satisfaction have a relationship with their sexual satisfaction?*

H20. Couple satisfaction and sexual satisfaction will be positively correlated.

CHAPTER 3: METHOD

Participants and Procedure

This study consisted of men and women over the age of 17. Prior to the recruitment of participants, the Purdue University Institutional Review Board approved the study and the measures required to complete it. Participants were recruited via Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk.com). After going on the MTurk website, the participants clicked on a link to take them to the anonymous survey. The purpose of the study as well as the researcher's information was provided to the participants, followed by an informed consent for them to accept. Participant confidentiality was ensured, with none of the questions asking personally identifying information. The survey was posted on MTurk.com by David Nalbone. Those who were over the age of 17 and who were interested in taking this study were able to complete the survey with a \$0.50 incentive, which was received by participants who met the inclusion criteria after completion.

According to a power analysis, at least 250 participants were needed for the statistical analysis of structural equation modeling, and so was the participant goal for this study (Wolf, Harrington, Clark, & Miller, 2013).

Exclusionary criteria included if participants did not consent to take the survey or reported their age as under 18 years old; such individuals were then directed to the end of the survey and were dropped from analysis.

Table 1. outlines the details of participant characteristics. Overall, participants' ages ranged from 20 years to 72 years, with a mean age of 34.83 and a standard deviation of 10.87. Majority of participants were White (63.7%) and men (64.7%); however, 15.3% reported as Black/African American and 13.2% as Latin(x). The sample was well educated with a majority of respondents (52.2%) having at least a Bachelor's degree. In terms of religion, Catholic (32.3%) affiliation was prominent of participants. Regarding participant's relationship status with current partner, most (52.2%) of participants were married, 37.3% in a dating relationship, and 8.1% are engaged. Participant's length of relationship ranged from 1 month to 588 months.

Table 1. Demographics

Participant Demographics (N = 295)

	<i>n</i>	%
Gender Identity		
Male	191	64.7%
Female	104	35.3%
Sexual Orientation		
Heterosexual	222	75.3%
Homosexual	15	5.1%
Bisexual	54	18.3%
Pansexual	3	1.0%
Prefer not to answer	1	.3%
Ethnicity		
Black/African American	45	15.5%
Asian	15	5.2%
Latin(x)	39	13.4%
White	188	64.8%
Native American	2	0.7%
Other	1	0.3%
Relationship Status		
In a dating relationship	110	38.2%
Engaged	24	8.3%
Married	154	53.5%
Education Level		
GED	2	0.7%
High school graduate	21	7.1%
Some college but no degree	40	13.6%
Associate degree	26	8.8%
Bachelor's degree	154	52.2%

Table 1. continued

Master's degree	48	16.3%
Professional degree	3	1.0%
Doctorate degree	1	0.3%
Religious Affiliation		
Catholic	95	32.2%
Christian	82	27.8%
Protestant	18	6.1%
Mormon	1	0.3%
Jewish	2	0.7%
Muslim	3	1.0%
Buddhist	3	1.0%
Atheist	45	15.3%
Unaffiliated	31	10.5%
Other	15	5.1%

Table 2 references participant's political ideologies and affiliations, as well as their perception of partner's ideology and affiliation and their parent's. Democratic political affiliation was the most prominent throughout participants (44.8%), their partners (47.4%), and their parents (46.9%). Interestingly political orientation among participants was predominately liberal, while their parents (29.7%) reported to be more conservative.

Table 2. Political Demographics

Political Orientation and Affiliation of Participants, their Partner, and their Parents

	Participant		Partner		Parent	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Affiliation						
Republican	91	31.4%	86	29.6%	104	36.1%
Democrat	130	44.8%	138	47.4%	135	46.9%
Independent	64	22.1%	58	19.9%	35	12.2%
Other	5	1.7%	5	1.7%	14	4.9%
I don't know			4	1.4%		
Orientation						
Liberal	104	35.7%	87	30.3%	79	27.6%
Progressive	51	17.5%	49	17.1%	27	9.4%
Moderate	74	25.4%	66	23%	75	26.2%
Conservative	62	21.3%	77	26.8%	85	29.7%
I don't know			8	2.8%	20	7%

Materials

Appendix A includes a complete listing of all materials used in the scale as presented to participants. This includes the informed consent document, screening questions, demographic questionnaire, and all scaled and questionnaires used to gather data for analysis.

Self-monitoring. The Revised Self-Monitoring Scale, developed by Lennox and Wolfe (1983), is a 13-item instrument which taps two styles of self-monitoring behavior: Ability to Modify Self-Presentation (Items 1, 3, 7, 9, 10,12, and 13) and Sensitivity to the Expressive Behavior of Others (Items 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, and 11). An example question of the Ability to Modify Self subscale is, “In social situations, I have the ability to alter my behavior if I feel that something else is called for”. An example question of the Sensitivity to the Expressive Behaviors of Others is, “I am often able to read people’s true emotions correctly through their eyes”. Items 9 and 12 are reversed to avoid response sets. Participants responded using a 6-point Likert scale,

anchored from 0 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*). Scores are computed by averaging all items together and the higher numbered score indicates the more self-monitoring behaviors they participate in. The scale's Cronbach's alpha is 0.88.

Comfort. To measure individual's level of comfort I created a matrix table utilizing a Likert scale for each emotionally charged construct. The scale is on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*extremely comfortable*) to 5 (*extremely uncomfortable*). The higher the number represents the higher level of comfort. An example of a question on this scale is; "How comfortable are you discussing (emotionally charged construct)?" The different items that were assessed for comfort were organized into relational, general, and sexual categories. The higher computed total scores indicate greater feelings discomfort discussing topics. The scale's Cronbach's alpha is 0.91.

Communication Process. Christensen and Heavy (1990) developed a condensed version of the Communication Patterns Questionnaire, the CPQ-Short Form (CPQ-SF). The CPQ-SF is an 11-item self-assessment of spouses' perceptions of marital communicative interactions. Each item is rated on a nine-point Likert scale. The Likert scale ranges from 1 (*very unlikely*) to 9 (*very likely*). The scale asks spouses to identify their typical communication patterns when an issue or problem arises, as well as the communication pattern during the discussion of the issue or problem. An example of a question during the time period of when an issue arises is "How likely is it that both spouses try to discuss the problem?" An example of a question during the time of the discussion regarding the issue is "How likely is it that both spouses blame, accuse, or criticize each other?" This study used two of the CPQ's subscales: total demand/withdraw and overall positive interaction. There are particular questions designed to fit into each subscale. The subscale associated questions will be added together to get a separate total for each subscale. For example, the sum from questions A2, B4, B6 will reveal the positive interaction total. The subscale totals are computed by averaging the designated questions and the higher numbered score determines the higher overall positive interaction, and the more severe demand/withdraw communication behaviors are occurring. The scale's Cronbach's alpha is 0.82. This proposal uses the operational definition of communication process as the effective or ineffective communicative behavior exchanged between partners.

Couple Satisfaction. The Couple Satisfaction Inventory (CSI-16) (Funk & Rogge, 2007) is a 16-item measure of relationship satisfaction. Each item is rated on a five-point Likert scale.

The Likert scales range from *not at all* (0) to *completely* (5). An example question is “I have a warm and comfortable relationship with my partner”. It suitable for use with any individuals who are in an intimate relationship such as married couples, cohabiting couples, engaged couples, or dating couples. To score the CSI-16 is to simply sum the responses across all of the items. Scores can range from 0 to 81. Higher scores indicate higher or more relationship satisfaction. Scores falling below 51.5 suggest notable relationship dissatisfaction. The average reliability of the CSI was moderately high with an average Cronbach’s alpha of 0.96.

Sexual Satisfaction. The New Sexual Satisfaction Scale (NSSS) (Štulhofer, Buško, & Brouillard, 2010). The NSSS is a 20 item, multidimensional, composite measure of sexual satisfaction. The development of the scale was based on a five-dimension conceptual model that emphasized the importance of multiple domains of sexual behavior including sexual sensations, sexual awareness and focus, sexual exchange, emotional closeness, and sexual activity. Respondents rate their satisfaction on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “not at all satisfied (1) to extremely satisfied” (5). Total scores are computed by averaging all items and the higher the total number determines more sexual satisfaction. The survey operates in a 2-dimension structure: ego focused and partner focused. An example of this dimension structure is the assessment of “The quality of my orgasms” as well as the assessment of “My partner’s ability to orgasm”. It is suggested that the NSSS may be a useful tool for assessing sexual satisfaction regardless of a person's gender, sexual orientation, and relationship status. The NSSS was shown to be significantly, and positively, associated with a global measure of life satisfaction. The scale’s Cronbach’s alpha is 0.97.

Demographics. The participants were asked to identify their gender, race or ethnicity, sexual orientation, relationship status, length of relationship, education, religion, and political affiliation and orientation of themselves, partner, and parents.

Figure 1 shows how these variables interact with one another through a structural equation model. Self-monitoring and method of communication begin the model as exogenous variables. From there, they move into the level of comfort self-disclosing, which is represented as the three different topic categories: relationship, general, and sexual. Proceeding level of comfort self-disclosing is the variable of communication processes which can be seen as the subscales of overall positive communicative interaction and demand/withdraw communicative behavior. The final destination of the model is couple satisfaction and sexual satisfaction. The

endogenous variables include level of comfort self-disclosing, communication processes, and couple and sexual satisfaction.

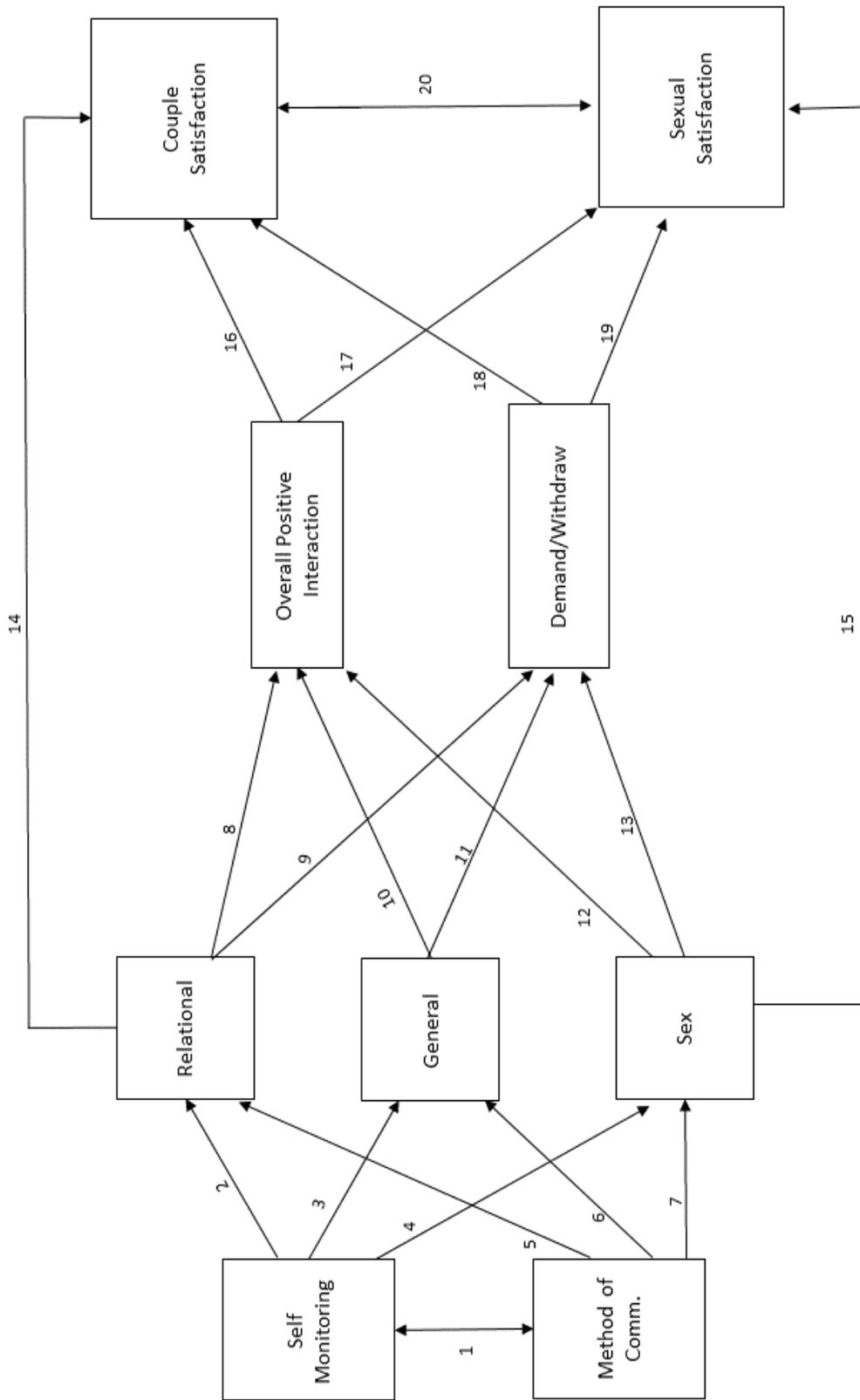


Figure 1. Structural Equation Model

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Data Screening

Prior to running the analysis to test the hypotheses, scale and sub-scale scores were computed, via standard procedures as noted in chapter 3. The key variables were tested for skewness and kurtosis, and analysis revealed self-monitoring total, self-monitoring subscale of sensitivity to others, Communication Patterns Questionnaire (CPQ) overall total, Couples Satisfaction Index (CSI) total, New Sexual Satisfaction Scale (NSSS) ego centered subscale, NSSS partner focused subscale, and NSSS total to be negatively skewed.

To correct this, I performed the reflect and square root transformation for negative skew as recommended by Tabachnik and Fidell (2007). Self-monitoring subscale of sensitivity to others had a skewness of -4, but after transformation was -0.04. The total of self-monitoring scale had a skewness of -4.06, but after transformation was 0.05. The communication patterns questionnaire subscale of overall positive interaction had a skewness of -6.27, but after transformation was 1.55. The total of the couple satisfaction index had a skewness of -7.04, but after transformation was 1.21. The subscale of ego focused from the NSSS had a skewness of -4.73, but after transformation was -0.50. The subscale of partner focused from the NSSS had a skewness of -3.62, but after transformation was -1.52. The total of the NSSS had a skewness of -4.12, but after transformation was -1.55. These transformations produced a normal (non-skewed) distribution for each transformed variable.

I then checked for missing data and examined for missing at random or systematic missing data to determine the best method for mitigation. A total of 301 individuals accessed the survey, 1 person did not provide their age and was then excluded from further analysis as there was no guarantee they were of age when completing the survey. Then the data were examined for the total number of cases with missing data, and a visual examination determined that no cases were systematically missing, and there were less than 5 instances per variable of missing-at-random data. This resulted in $n = 300$ after missing data analysis.

Examinations for linearity and homoscedasticity among the variables was conducted by visually examining a scatterplot, which indicated that all pairs of variables were linear and that the homoscedasticity assumption was met. I checked for multivariate normality using Mahalanobis distance and detected 5 multivariate outliers ($p < .001$) with a value greater than the critical value (29.59). All participants above the critical value were excluded from further

analysis, resulting in a final sample of 295 participants. Finally, I tested for the absence of multicollinearity by running correlations among all variables to be used in the analytical model. Multicollinearity as determined by a correlation coefficient greater than 0.9 is generally considered unacceptable. There were no correlations among the variables greater than .9 so multicollinearity assumptions were negated (see table 3).

Table 3. Correlation Model Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Self Monitoring	--							
2. Method	.56*	--						
3. Relationship	.63*	.53*	--					
4. Sex	.43*	.29*	.57*	--				
5. General	.60*	.58*	.83*	.55*	--			
6. CPQ Demand-Withdraw	.25*	.21*	.13*	.18*	.08*	--		
7. CPQ Positive Intentions	.58*	.50*	.61*	.42*	.60*	.19*	--	
8. NSSS Total	.55*	.50*	.56*	.40*	.55*	-.05	.62*	--
9. CSI Total	.21*	.24*	.25*	.14*	.21*	.52*	-.27	.52*

Note. *. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level. These numbers are based off of the transformed variables.

Some responses for length of relationships were recoded to be consistently presented in months. If a participant indicated a number of years as length of relationship (“2 years”), I multiplied the number of years by 12, indicative of 12 months in 1 year, to determine the new length of relationship in months (“24”).

Scales were also examined for analytical fitness. Table 3 describes all psychometrics of scales used in this study. In sum, all scales showed evidence of reliability by having a Cronbach’s alpha above 0.70 and all of the means and standard deviations were within a reasonable range of published norms.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive Statistics of Variables and Scales Used (N=295)

Scale	α	M	SD
Self-Monitor Ability to Modify Self	.73	22.99	5.23
Self-Monitor Sensitivity to Others	.87	20.88	5.63
Self-Monitor Total	.88	43.88	10.16
Communication Patterns Positive Interaction	.82	15.14	4.38
Communication Patterns Demand/Withdraw	.89	22.08	9.32
Couple Satisfaction Index Total	.95	59.69	17.08
Sexual Satisfaction Ego Focused	.94	37.04	10.17
Sexual Satisfaction Partner Focused	.93	32.54	8.98
New Sexual Satisfaction Scale Total	.96	73.43	19.73

Test of Hypotheses

IBM SPSS and STATA IC-16 (STATA Corp, 2019) were used to test the hypotheses. A structural equation model was estimated to explore the relationship of comfort discussing topics among relationship and sexual satisfaction, as influenced by method of communication and self-monitoring. Level of comfort exists as a latent variable constructed with data examining the topic of discussion and collapsing participant's overall ratings of comfort in that area into group characterized by topic. Level of comfort in the three areas of relationship topics, general life topics (including charged topics such as religion and politics), and sex were also a direct predictor of sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction. The communication process between the couple is an additional covariate along with couple satisfaction and sexual satisfaction.

The structural equation model showed evidence of appropriate fit, $\chi^2(13, N = 295) = 108.31$, $p > .05$, $CFI = .921$, and $SRMR = .08$. Figure 2 shows the final structural equation model with coefficient weights on relationship lines, significant paths ($p < .001$) are indicated with an asterisk.

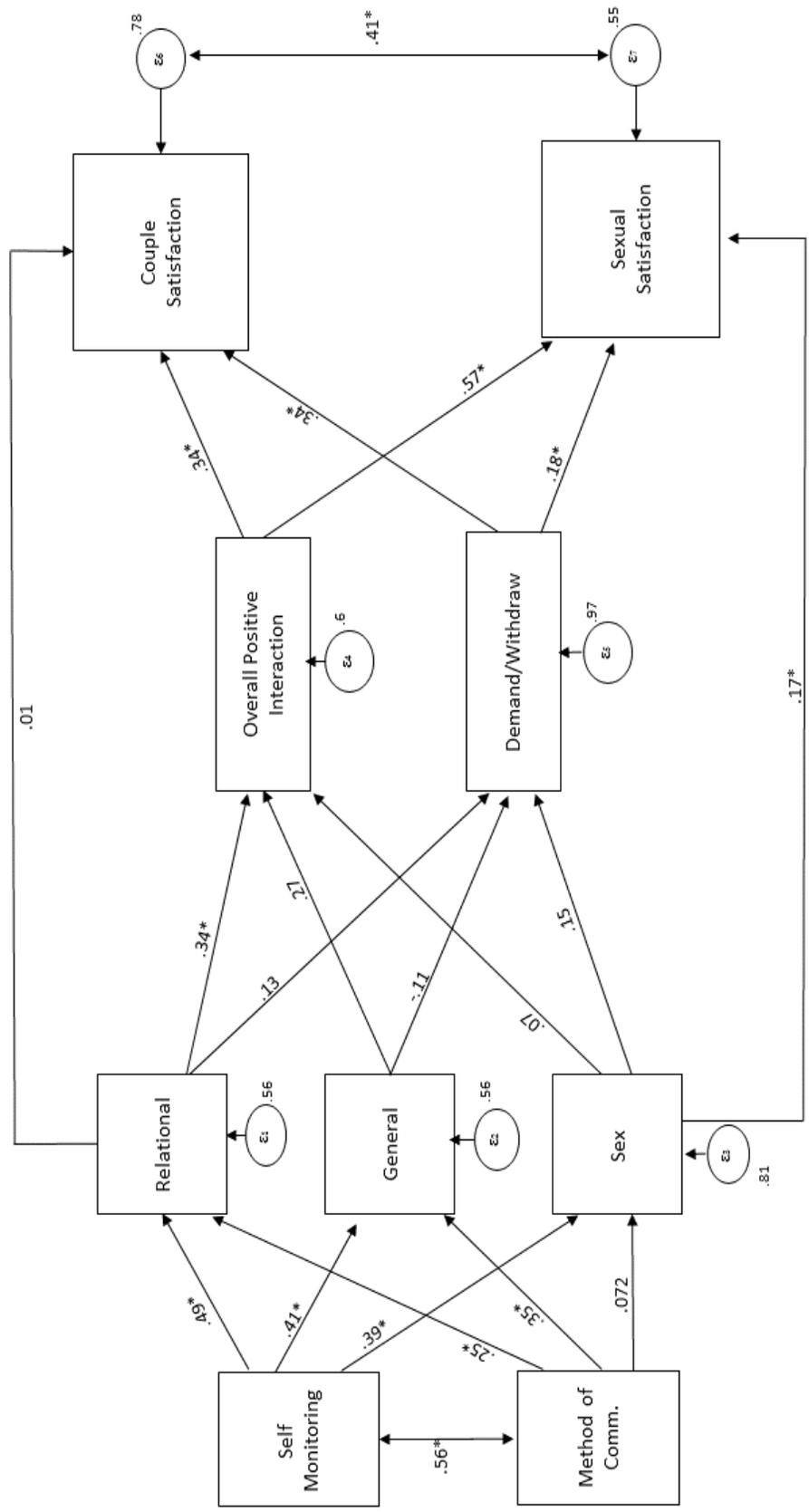


Figure 2. Results of Structural Equation Model

Note: All indicates the relationship within overall analysis. A number with * indicates a significant relationship at $p < .001$.

Hypothesis Outcomes.

Research Question One: *In relationships, will face-to-face communication or communication through a device affect their self-monitoring?*

Hypothesis one (H1) stated that self-monitoring & method of communication will be positively correlated. H1 was demonstrated by a positive significant correlation relationship ($r = .56, p < .001$) between self-monitoring and method of communication, which indicates that self-monitoring does depend on how that disclosure is delivered (whether face-to-face or through a device). Thus, the first hypothesis was supported.

Research Question Two: *Will participating in self-monitoring predict how comfortable individuals feel disclosing on different topics with their partner?*

Hypothesis two (H2) stated that self-monitoring will positively predict comfort self-disclosing on relationship topics. H2 was significantly supported ($B = .49, p < .001$). Hypothesis three (H3) stated that self-monitoring will positively predict comfort self-disclosing on general topics. H3 was significantly supported ($B = .41, p < .001$). Hypothesis four (H4) stated that self-monitoring will positively predict comfort self-disclosing sexual related topics. H4 was significantly supported ($B = .39, p < .001$). Hypotheses 2-4 demonstrated that an individual's comfortability disclosing about relationship, general, and sexual topics will depend on their engagement of their self-monitoring. Hypotheses 2-4 demonstrated that when one self-monitors it will affect what they are comfortable disclosing to their partner. Thus, hypotheses 2-4 were supported.

Research Question Three: *Does communicating face-to-face or through a device influence if one feels more comfortable to self-disclose with their partner?*

Hypothesis five (H5) stated that method of communication will predict comfortability self-disclosing on relational topics. H5 was significantly supported ($B = .25, p < .001$), which indicates an individual's comfort disclosing about relationship topics will differ depending on whether they choose face-to-face delivery or through a device. Hypothesis six (H6) stated that method of communication will predict comfort self-disclosing about general topics. H6 was significantly supported ($B = .35, p < .001$), which indicates an individual's comfort disclosing about general topics will differ depending on whether they choose face-to-face delivery or

through a device. Hypothesis seven (H7) stated that method of communication will positively predict one's comfortability self-disclosing about sexual topics. H7 was not supported ($B = .07, p > .001$), which indicates that face-to-face communication or communication through a device did not influence an individual's comfortability to self-disclose about sexual topics to their partner. Thus, hypotheses 5 and 6 were supported, and hypothesis 7 was not supported.

Research Question Four: *If one is comfortable self-disclosing about different topics, will that influence their how their communication process transpires?*

Hypothesis eight (H8) stated that comfortable relationship self-disclosure will positively predict overall positive interaction. H8 was significantly supported ($B = .34, p < .001$), which indicates that individuals who are comfortable self-disclosing about relational topics will influence or contribute to their positive communicative interaction. Hypothesis nine (H9) stated that comfortable relationship self-disclosure will negatively predict communication demand/withdraw behavior. H9 was not supported ($B = .13, p > .001$), which indicates that one feeling comfortable self-disclosing about relational topics did not influence their communication demand/withdraw behaviors. Hypothesis ten (H10) stated that comfortable general self-disclosure will positively predict overall positive interaction. H10 was not supported ($B = .27, p > .001$), which indicates that feeling comfortable to self-disclose about general topics did not influence one's positive interaction in their communication process. Hypothesis eleven (H11) stated that comfortable general self-disclosure will negatively predict communication demand/withdraw behavior. H11 was not supported ($B = -0.11, p > .001$), which indicates that one feeling comfortable to self-disclose about general topics did not buffer their communication demand/withdraw behavior. Hypothesis twelve (H12) stated that comfortable sexual self-disclosure will positively predict overall positive interaction. H12 was not supported ($B = .34, p > .001$), which indicates that one feeling comfortable self-disclosing about sexual topics did not influence their overall positive communication interaction. Hypothesis thirteen (H13) stated that comfortable sexual self-disclosure will negatively predict communication demand/withdraw behavior. H13 was not supported ($B = .15, p > .001$), which indicates one feeling comfortable self-disclosing about sexual topics did not influence communication demand/withdraw behavior. Thus, hypothesis 8 was supported, and hypotheses 9-13 were not supported.

Research question Five: *If one feels more comfortable choosing to self-disclose about different topics, will it enhance their couple and/or sexual satisfaction?*

Hypothesis fourteen (H14) stated that comfortable relationship self-disclosure will positively predict positive couple satisfaction. H14 was not supported ($B = .34, p > .001$), which indicates that one feeling more comfortable to self-disclose about relationship topics did not influence their satisfaction in their relationship. Hypothesis fifteen (H15) stated that sexual self-disclosure will positively predict sexual satisfaction. H15 was significantly supported ($B = .17, p < .001$), which indicates that individuals feeling comfortable to self-disclose about sexual topics did directly influence their sexual satisfaction. Thus, hypothesis 14 was not supported, and hypothesis 15 was supported.

Research question Six: *Does the communication process between the couple influence their couple and/or sexual satisfaction?*

Hypothesis sixteen (H16) stated that overall positive interaction will positively predict couple satisfaction. H16 was significantly supported ($B = .34, p < .001$), which indicates that one's positive communication behavior did directly influence their couple satisfaction. Hypothesis seventeen (H17) stated that overall positive interaction will positively predict sexual satisfaction. H17 was significantly supported ($B = .57, p < .001$), which indicates that one's positive communication interaction did directly influence their sexual satisfaction. Hypothesis eighteen (H18) stated that communication demand/withdraw behavior will negatively predict couple satisfaction. H18 was significantly supported ($B = -0.34, p < .001$), which indicates that one's more negative communication behaviors (demand/withdraw) will influence their overall satisfaction being in that relationship. Hypothesis nineteen (H19) stated that communication demand/withdraw behavior will negatively predict sexual satisfaction. H19 was significantly supported ($B = -0.18, p < .001$), which indicates that one's more negative communication behavior (demand/withdraw) will influence their sexual satisfaction in that relationship. Thus, hypotheses 16-19 were supported.

Research question Seven: *Will a couple's satisfaction have a relationship with their sexual satisfaction?*

Hypothesis twenty (H20) stated that couple satisfaction and sexual satisfaction will be positively correlated. H20 was significantly supported ($r = .41, p < .001$), which indicates that there is an existing reciprocal relationship between couple satisfaction and sexual satisfaction.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore if people's self-disclosure on different topics would influence their communication process, which would then possibly enhance or diminish their couple or sexual satisfaction. The potential of individuals choosing to monitor themselves before or during their disclosure, was included to expose how that monitoring would alter outcomes. How one chooses to deliver the disclosure was also included in the study to reveal if differences exist when the act is through a technological device or done face-to-face. Previous research has not included these variables together to examine if and how they participate in couple's relationships.

Self-monitoring and Method of Communication

It was found that self-monitoring and method of communication had a significant reciprocal relationship. This demonstrates that if one participates in self-monitoring it can be dependent on if they are face-to-face or communicating through a device. Additionally, using a device to communicate or being face-to-face, can influence the participation to self-monitor. This is consistent with Walther's (1996) phenomenon of online self-presentation being more selective when individuals can intentionally alter their representation with the ease of computer mediated devices, whereas it may be more difficult to do so face-to-face.

Self-monitoring had considerable significance when looking at comfort disclosing about different topics to their romantic partner. This is a new discovery that has not been extensively looked at in existing marriage and family research. Self-monitoring contributed to comfort discussing about relationship, general, and sexual topics with one's partner. This result may be initiated by personal characteristics of the participants or intentional motivational behind the disclosure. Future research may consider this furtherly. It was found that the ability to modify ourselves, as well as being sensitive to others influenced feeling comfortable to speak on topics related to our romantic relationship. The findings surrounding self-monitoring compliment Social Constructionism Theory, suggesting that there may be a societal "right" amount of disclosure that exists, which influences one to feel more or less comfortable to speak on topics related to the romantic relationship.

Self-monitoring then led to significant positive communicative interaction, and from there increased couple satisfaction and sexual satisfaction was the overall outcome. It was also found that the ability to modify oneself and the ability to be sensitive to others, influenced feeling comfortable to discuss topics related to sex, which had a direct relationship with positive sexual satisfaction. This result revealed that although positive communication interaction was needed as a bridge from relationship disclosure to sexual satisfaction, communication processes was not needed for topics surrounding sex. This is an interesting finding as part of it relates to existing research where effective communication is directly needed for optimal overall satisfaction (Eldridge & Christiansen, 2002), but yet did not fall true for specifically communication involving sex.

Method of communication showed to be a consistent predictor to individual's comfort disclosing on different topics. Whether one uses face-to-face communication or a computer mediated device, it will affect how comfortable one feels disclosing about relationship and general topics. Interestingly, method of communication did not influence comfort disclosing about sex topics. This may demonstrate that despite the method of communication, people might just not be comfortable discussing sex or topics related to sex. This would also be consistent with existing research that has shown sex to be something that goes uncommunicated in relationships (Coffelt & Hess, 2014).

Comfort Disclosing to Communication Processes

It was predicted that if feeling more or less comfortable discussing a topic would influence how communication process transpired. When looking at participant's comfort disclosing on different topics, it appeared that their comfort did not influence their communication processes. Except for relationship topic disclosure, topic dependability did not affect whether the behavior in the conversation was positive nor negative. If one feels comfortable speaking about topics related to relationship, their dialogue can be more successful with overall positive interaction. This finding may reveal that how one communicates may be more influential than their comfortability about what they are talking about. Thanks to research from Eldridge and Christiansen (2002), we do know the importance of how communication

transpires, but such existing research has not looked at communication processes in conjunction with if the individual feels comfortable discussing the matter.

Overall Satisfaction

Communication processes was shown to directly contribute to couple satisfaction and sexual satisfaction. The present study revealed that when communication processes consisting of positive interactions with their partner, contributes to satisfaction in the relationship. This finding is consistent with existing research of romantic partners demonstrating that those who communicate effectively with one another have relationships that are more satisfying (Eldrige & Christiansen, 2002). It was also consistent in sexual measures and matched the existing finding of spouses being more likely to feel sexually intimate with their partners when they perceived that their partners' communication was more positive (Yoo, et al.,2013). The current study expanded on this research, where it was shown for not only spouses but with individuals who are engaged and individuals in a dating relationship. The present study's revelation holds true for less effective communication as well. Individuals engaging in demanding and withdrawing communicative behavior have lower couple satisfaction and sexual satisfaction in their relationship. These findings signify the importance that communication holds when looking at optimal outcomes for couples in their romantic relationship. It also demonstrates that negative communicative behavior can influence their negative couple satisfaction, as well as influence negative sexual satisfaction.

Limitations

There are several limitations that have presented themselves throughout this study. The sample itself did not prove to be very inclusive. The only options for gender that were included in the survey were male or female. This excluded individuals who identify as transgender, genderqueer, agender, or intersex. There was also lack of participants who identified as other than heterosexual. Future research may consider including all sexual orientations and gender identification in order to get a better representation of the LGBTQ+ community. Including a greater inclusion of participants may require a greater research into the differences with self-disclosure in each orientation. The sample of the study consisted of primarily White and college

educated participants. If the sample presented as more inclusive, there may have been a difference in responses, which could have developed different paths or different relationships in the model.

Further research dedicated to self-monitoring in most recent decades, with the new societal operations, such as social norms or beliefs that may influence behavior, would be very beneficial. By doing so we can learn what resides in individuals that contributes to their level of self-monitoring. However, with discrepancies in the self-monitoring assessments, it can be challenging to do so. Future research calls for an up to date consideration for personality, motivation, and individual's values in assessments in order to expand our understanding of how individual characteristics influence this monitoring behavior. Deepening research into the layers beneath self-monitoring can enhance understanding of the behavior.

A limitation did appear when conducting the structural equation model. The significant paths in the model were indicated at a $p < .001$ basis; however, power analysis is based on $p < .05$. In result, the criterion level most likely under-powered. It is also important to note that this study was completed on an online database where elements of diversity may not be fully represented. Participants would need to have access to the internet and would need to know about and understand how to use MTurk, which may exclude or limit certain populations from accessing this survey. MTurk may also be a contributing factor to the lack of inclusivity in the study's sample. Researchers have found a number of demographic differences between MTurk samples and the U.S. population-based samples. MTurk samples tend to have lower average incomes, higher average education levels, lower average ages, many more Democrats and liberals, and much smaller percentages of most non-White groups, especially Blacks (Huff & Tingley, 2015).

Clinical and Theoretical Implications

The present study revealed some implications and future directions for clinicians to consider. A potential implication is that self-monitoring scales have not been a common assessment used by Marriage and Family Therapists, if used at all. From this study it was discovered how impactful self-monitoring is when one decides to disclose to their partner. The act of monitoring ourselves is be a beneficial route for clinicians to explore in the theoretical

work. Is the client being honest about their disclosure or are they setting it up to be viewed as more desirable by their partner? Learning about why this tendency exists or where this need to monitor originated from may be an effective intervention in couples therapy. For example, mapping when and where these messages began. This suggestion fits appropriately with Social Constructionism Theory, such that clinicians can then process why the client may feel the need to monitor their selves and deconstruct those reasons. Doing so, also allows the clinician to model discussion around every topic in an accepting and normalized way. The self-monitoring scale may be a new assessment tool that clinicians can administer to couples. Another aspect of self-monitoring that should be considered is the possibility of reciprocal self-monitoring from all parties in the therapy room, clinician included. Remembering Snyder's identification of high self-monitors being less authentic or less consistent might play a role in therapist-client rapport. This phenomenon of the therapist self-monitoring can pose interesting dynamics in further research considerations.

An additional theoretical implication that clinicians should keep in mind comes from Jourard's existing conceptualization. When a couple has entered therapy is there connection between clients' need to consult with a therapist and their reluctance to be known by their partner (Jourard, 1971). It is informational when a client does not want or choose to self-disclose with their partner. Self-disclosing behavior might be a product of how one's childhood disclosures are met in family of origin (Jourad, 1971), some ignored, some rewarded, or some punished. These different responses can affect individual's system throughout their life and relationships. Knowing this information, clinicians may then able to create positive and rewarding self-disclosure from client to their partner, allowing reveals of their true self. Clients tend to associate these positive feelings with the person whom they are self-disclosing, which leads individuals to like those to whom they self-disclose. Highlighting Jourard's need for transparency to ultimately reach that inner most intimate, authentic layer.

Conclusion

The present study had a mix of results and levels of significance. A main takeaway from this study is the significance that self-monitoring and method of communication have in individuals' comfort discussing different topics. This particular finding demonstrates that

Marriage and Family clinicians should include self-monitoring factors into their conceptualization. Self-monitoring may be playing a larger role in and throughout relationships than is generally recognized. Feeling more comfortable discussing a certain topic was not found to influence participant's effective communication processes. This may demonstrate that one's rooted communication cycle is more consistent than anticipated, regardless of the topic at hand. A reinforced finding was the importance that negative or positive communication behavior does have an effect on couple and sexual satisfaction. Incorporating communication concepts into therapeutic settings prove to be useful to marriage and family therapists, and is thus encouraged.

REFERENCES

- Barry, R., Barden, E., & Dubac, C. (2019). Pulling Away: Links among disengaged couple communication, relationship distress, and depressive symptoms. *Journal of Family Psychology, 33*, 280-293.
- Bowen, J., Winczewski, L., & Collins, N. (2017). Language style matching in romantic partners' conflict and support interactions. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology, 36*, 263-286.
- Caughlin, J. P., & Golish, T. D. (2002). An analysis of the association between topic avoidance and dissatisfaction: Comparing perceptual and interpersonal explanations. *Communication Monographs, 69*, 275-295.
- Coffelt, T. A., & Hess, J. A. (2014). Sexual disclosures: connections to relational satisfaction and closeness. *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy, 40*, 577-591. doi: 10.1080/0092623X.2013.811449
- Collins, N. L., & Miller, L. C. (1994). Self-disclosure and liking: A meta-analytic review. *Psychological Bulletin, 116*, 457-475. doi:10.1037/0033-2909.116.3.457
- Cramer, K. A., & Gruman, J. A. (2002). The Lennox and Wolfe Revised Self-Monitoring Scale: Latent structure and gender invariance. *Journal of Personality and Individual Differences, 32*, 627-637. doi: 10.1016/S0191-8869(01)00065-4
- Eldridge, K. A., & Christiansen, A. (2002). Demand-withdraw communication during couple conflict: A review and analysis. In P. Noller & J. A. Feeney (Eds.), *Understanding marriage: Developments in the study of couple interaction* (pp. 289-322). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Funk, J.L., & Rogge, R.D. (2007). Testing the ruler with Item Response Theory: Increasing precision of measurement for relationship satisfaction with the Couples Satisfaction Index. *Journal of Family Psychology, 21*, 572-583
- Gottman, J. M., Gottman, J. S., Abrams, D., & Abrams, R. C. (2019). *Eight dates: essential conversations for a lifetime of love*. New York: Workman.
- Gergen, K. J. (2015). *An invitation to social construction* (3rd ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

- Gibbs, J., Ellison, N., & Heino, R. (2006). Self-presentation in online personals: The role of anticipated future interaction, self-disclosure, and perceived success in Internet dating. *Communication Research*, 33, 152–177. doi:10.1177/0093650205285368
- Griffin, E. A. (2009). *A first look at communication theory* (7th ed.). Boston: McGraw-Hill Higher Education.
- Gudykunst, W. B., Ting-Toomey, S., & Chua, E. (1988). *Culture and interpersonal communication*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Huff, C., & Tingley, D. (2015). “Who are these people?”. Evaluating the demographic characteristics and political preferences of MTurk survey respondents. *Research and Politics*, 2, 1-12.
- Holmberg, D., & Mackenzie, S. (2002). So far, So good: Scripts for romantic relationship development as predictors of relational well-being. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 19, 777-796. doi:10.1177/0265407502196003
- Kurdek, L. A. (1994). Areas of conflict for gay, lesbian, and heterosexual couples: What couples argue about influences relationship satisfaction. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 56, 923-934.
- Jourard, S. (1971). *Self-disclosure; an experimental analysis of the transparent self*. New York: Wiley-Interscience.
- Larson, J., Anderson, S., Holman, T., & Niemann B., (1998). A longitudinal study of the effects of premarital communication, relationship stability, and self-esteem on sexual satisfaction in the first year of marriage, *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy*, 24, 193-206, doi:10.1080/00926239808404933
- Laurenceau, J.-P., Barrett, L. F., & Pietromonaco, P. R. (1998). Intimacy as an interpersonal process: The importance of self-disclosure, partner disclosure, and perceived partner responsiveness in interpersonal exchanges. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 74, 1238–1251. doi:10.1037//0022-3514.74.5.1238
- Leck, K., & Simpson, J. (1999). Feigning Romantic Interest: The Role of Self-Monitoring. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 33, 69-91.
- Montemurro, B., Bartasavich, J., & Wintermute, L. (2014). Let’s (Not) talk about sex: The gender of sexual discourse. *Sexuality & Culture*, 19, pp.139. doi: 10.1007/s12119-014-9250-5

- Parker, K. A., & Ivanov, B. (2012). Why not communicate? Young women's reflections on their lack of communication with sexual partners regarding sex and contraception. *International Journal of Health, Wellness & Society*, 2, 93-109.
- Parks-Leduc, L., Pattie, M. W., Pargas, F., & Eliason, R. G. (2014). Self-monitoring as an aggregate construct: Relationships with personality and values. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 58, 3-8. doi: 10.1016/j.paid.2013.09.019
- Richmond, V. (1995). Amount of communication in marital dyads as a function of dyad and individual marital satisfaction. *Communication Research Reports*, 12, 152-159.
- Rigotti, E., & Rocci, A. (2006). Towards a definition of communication context. Foundations of an interdisciplinary approach to communication. *Studies in Communication Sciences*, 6, 155-180.
- Roloff, M. E., & Ifert, D. (1998). Antecedents and consequences of explicit agreements to declare a topic taboo in dating relationships. *Personal Relationships*, 5, 191-205.
- Roloff, M. E., & Johnson, D. I. (2001). Reintroducing taboo topics: Antecedents and consequences of putting topics back on the table. *Communication Studies*, 52, 37-50.
- Sanford, K. (2003). Problem-solving conversations in marriage: Does it matter what topics couples discuss? *Personal Relationships*, 10, 97-112.
- Snyder, M. (1995). Self-monitoring: Public appearances versus private reality. *The social psychologists: Research adventures* (pp. 35-50). New York: McGraw Hill.
- Tang, N., Bensman, L., & Hatfield, E. (2013). Culture and sexual self-disclosure in intimate relationships. *Interpersona: An International Journal on Personal Relationships*, 7, 227-245. doi: 10.5964/ijpr.v7i2.141
- Taylor, D. A., & Altman, I. (1975). Self-disclosure as a function of reward-cost outcomes. *Sociometry*, 38, 18-29. doi:10.2307/2786231
- Tidwell, L. C., & Walther, J. B. (2002). Computer-mediated communication effects on disclosure, impressions, and interpersonal evaluations: Getting to know one another a bit at a time. *Human Communication Research*, 28, 317-348.
- Štulhofer, A., Buško, V., & Brouillard, P. (2010). Development and bicultural validation of the New Sexual Satisfaction Scale. *Journal of Sex Research*, 47, 257-268. doi:10.1080/00224490903100561

- Tamir, D. I., & Mitchell, J. P. (2012). Disclosing information about the self is intrinsically rewarding. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, *109*, 8038-8043. doi:10.1073/pnas.1202129109
- Vanlear, C. A. (1987). The formation of social relationships: A longitudinal study of social penetration. *Human Communication Research*, *13*, 299-322. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2958.1987.tb00107.x
- Walther, J. B. (1996). Computer-mediated communication: Impersonal, interpersonal, and hyperpersonal interaction. *Communication Research*, *23*, 3-44.
- Yoo, H., Bartle-Haring, S., Day, R. D., & Gangamma, R. (2013). Couple communication, emotional and sexual intimacy, and relationship satisfaction. *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy*, *40*, 275–293. doi:10.1080/0092623x.2012.751072

APPENDIX

Questionnaire

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Level of Comfort Communicating Constructs on Relationship and Sexual Satisfaction

David P. Nalbone, Ph.D., Dept. of Behavioral Sciences, Purdue University Northwest

Tina Fairbanks, B.S., Marriage and Family Therapy Graduate Program, Purdue University Northwest

Key Information: Please take the time to review this information carefully. This is a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary which means that you may choose not to participate at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may ask questions of the researchers about the study whenever you would like. If you decide to take part in the study, you will be asked to sign this form, so be sure to understand what you will do and any possible risks or benefits.

Purpose of Research: You are being asked to participate in a study designed by Tina Fairbanks, Purdue University Northwest. We want to understand what you think about several current social and political issues.

Specific Procedures to be Used: If you choose to participate, you acknowledge that you are between 18 and 64 years old, live in the US, and are a US citizen. You will be asked to complete a questionnaire asking about your views on social and political issues. You are free not to answer any particular questions if they make you feel uncomfortable, or to withdraw your participation at any time without penalty.

Duration of Participation: It should take approximately 20 minutes for you to complete the entire study. This survey has a number of questions embedded in it as validity checks to ensure

that you are not a robot and are in fact fully reading and answering each question. A unique combination of answers to those questions may result in your survey being rejected.

Risks to the Individual: Breach of confidentiality is a risk. To minimize this risk, only the researchers will access the data from this study, and no personally identifying information will be collected during the study. This study uses a specific set of criteria to determine fit with study variables. If you do not qualify with all of our criteria, you may be prohibited from completing the entirety of the study and be redirected to the end. The questions involved in this study are no greater risk than that found in everyday life.

Benefits to the Individual: You will not directly benefit from this study. You will have a chance to take part in research, and your participation thus may contribute to the scientific understanding of how people view social and political issues.

Compensation: You will receive compensation of less than \$1 for participating in this research project, so long as you meet the study inclusion criteria and you complete the appropriate verification question to ensure your active participation.

Confidentiality: There is no personally identifying information on this questionnaire; all responses will remain anonymous, and will be used only in combination with the responses of other participants in this and related studies. In addition, you may choose not to answer particular questions, or to withdraw your participation at any time, without penalty. All data gathered in this study will be stored separately from the consent form, and will be accessed only by the researchers. The data file will be used for preparation of research reports related to this study, and kept for a period of three years after publication of any articles related to this study. The

project's research records may be reviewed by departments at Purdue University responsible for regulatory and research oversight.

Voluntary Nature of Participation: You do not have to participate in this research project. If you agree to participate, you can withdraw your participation at any time without penalty.

Human Subject Statement: If you have any questions about this research project, you can contact Tina Fairbanks at kfairba@pnw.edu.

If you have concerns about the treatment of research participants, you can contact: Committee on the Use of Human Research Subjects at Purdue University Ernest C. Young Hall, Room 1032 155 S. Grant St., West Lafayette, IN, 47907-2114. The phone number for the Committee's secretary is (765) 494-5942. The email address is irb@purdue.edu.

Documentation of Informed Consent: I have had the opportunity to read this consent form and have the research study explained. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the research project and my questions have been answered. I am prepared to participate in the research project described above.

Qualtrics Survey

I certify that I am between 18 and 64 years old, and a U.S. citizen living in the U.S., and agree to participate in this study.

- Yes, I agree (1)
- No, I do not agree (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If RESEARCH PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM Level of Comfort Communicating Constructs on Relationship and... = No, I do not agree

Please indicate how well each statement describes your current behavior.

	Definitely true (18)	Probably true (19)	Neither true nor false (20)	Probably false (21)	Definitely false (22)
In social situations, I have the ability to alter my behavior if I feel that something else is called for (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am often able to correctly read people's true emotions through their eyes (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have the ability to control the way I come across to people, depending on the impression I want to give them (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In conversations, I am sensitive to even the slightest change in the facial expression of the person I am conversing with (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My power of intuition is quite good when it comes to understanding others (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can usually tell when others consider a joke in bad taste, even though they may laugh convincingly (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I feel that the image I am projecting isn't working, I can readily change to something that does (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can usually tell when I said something inappropriate by reading it in the listener's eyes (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have trouble changing my behavior to suit different people and different situations (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can adjust my behavior to meet the requirements of any situation I am in (10)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

If someone is lying to me, I usually know it at once from that person's manner or expression (11)

Even when it might be to my advantage, I have difficulty putting up a good front (12)

Once I know what the situation calls for, it's easy for me to regulate my actions accordingly (13)

Please rate your comfortability participating in each method of communication.

	Extremely comfortable (23)	Somewhat comfortable (24)	Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (25)	Somewhat uncomfortable (26)	Extremely uncomfortable (27)
Through some technology device (e.g. cellphone, text messaging) (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Face-to-face (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please rate your level of comfort or discomfort discussing the following topics with your partner.

	Extremely comfortable (1)	Somewhat comfortable (2)	Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)	Somewhat uncomfortable (4)	Extremely uncomfortable (5)
Politics (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Finances (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sexual fantasies (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sexual dissatisfaction (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Gender roles (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Family matters (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Personal insecurities (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Dreams/Hopes/Ambitions (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Relational Commitment (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Previous/Past relationships (10)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Drug & Alcohol use (11)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Religion (12)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please rate how likely you and your partner engage in each behavior *when the charged topic/issue arises*.

	Extremely likely (11)	Moderately likely (12)	Slightly likely (13)	Neither likely nor unlikely (14)	Slightly unlikely (15)	Moderately unlikely (16)	Extremely unlikely (17)
Both members avoid discussing the topic/issue (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Both members try to discuss the topic/issue (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I try to start a discussion while my partner tries to avoid a discussion (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My partner tries to start a discussion while I try to avoid a discussion (11)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please rate how likely you and your partner engage in each behavior *during a discussion of the charged topic/issue*.

	Extreme ly likely (18)	Moderate ly likely (19)	Slight ly likely (20)	Neither likely nor unlikely (21)	Slight ly unlik ely (22)	Moderate ly unlikely (23)	Extreme ly unlikely (24)
Both members express their feelings to each other (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Both members blame, accuse, and criticize each other (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Both members suggest possible solutions and compromises (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I pressure or demand while my partner withdraws, becomes silent, or refuses to discuss the matter further (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My partner pressures, nags, or demands while I withdraw, become silent, or refuse to discuss the matter further (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I criticize while my partner defends themselves (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My partner criticizes while I defend myself (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please indicate the degree of happiness, all things considered, of your relationship.

- Extremely unhappy (4)
- Fairly unhappy (5)
- A little unhappy (6)
- Happy (7)
- Very happy (8)
- Extremely happy (9)
- Perfect (10)

In general, how often do you think that things between you and your partner are going well?

- All the time (1)
- Most of the time (2)
- More often than not (3)
- Occasionally (4)
- Rarely (5)
- Never (6)

Please indicate how true each statement is in regards to your relationship.

	Not true at all (1)	A little true (2)	Somewhat true (3)	Mostly true (4)	Almost completely true (5)	Completely true (6)
Our relationship is strong (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>				
My relationship with my partner makes me happy (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>				
I have a warm and comfortable relationship with my partner (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>				
I really feel like part of a team with my partner (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>				

Please rate your response to the following statements regarding your relationship.

	Not at all (4)	A little (5)	Somewhat (6)	Mostly (7)	Almost Completely (8)	Completely (9)
How rewarding is your relationship with your partner? (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>				
How well does your partner meet your needs? (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>				
To what extent has your relationship met your original expectations? (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>				
In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship? (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>				

For each of the following items, select the answer that best describes *how you feel about your relationship*.

0 (0)

1 (1)

2 (2)

3 (3)

4 (4)

5 (5)

6 (6)

7 (7)

8 (8)

9 (9)

10 (10)

For each of the following items, select the answer that best describes *how you feel about your relationship*.

0 (0)

1 (1)

2 (2)

3 (3)

4 (4)

5 (5)

6 (6)

7 (7)

8 (8)

9 (9)

10 (10)

For each of the following items, select the answer that best describes *how you feel about your relationship*.

0 (0)

1 (1)

2 (2)

3 (3)

4 (4)

5 (5)

6 (6)

7 (7)

8 (8)

9 (9)

10 (10)

For each of the following items, select the answer that best describes *how you feel about your relationship*.

0 (0)

1 (1)

2 (2)

3 (3)

4 (4)

5 (5)

6 (6)

7 (7)

8 (8)

9 (9)

10 (10)

For each of the following items, select the answer that best describes *how you feel about your relationship*.

0 (0)

1 (1)

2 (2)

3 (3)

4 (4)

5 (5)

6 (6)

7 (7)

8 (8)

9 (9)

10 (10)

For each of the following items, select the answer that best describes *how you feel about your relationship*.

- 0 (0)
- 1 (1)
- 2 (2)
- 3 (3)
- 4 (4)
- 5 (5)
- 6 (6)
- 7 (7)
- 8 (8)
- 9 (9)
- 10 (10)

Thinking about your sex life during the last 6 months, please rate your satisfaction with the following aspects:

	Extremely satisfied (1)	Somewhat satisfied (2)	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (3)	Somewhat dissatisfied (4)	Extremely dissatisfied (5)
The intensity of my sexual arousal (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The quality of my orgasms (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My "letting go" and surrender to sexual pleasure during sex (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My focus/concentration during sexual activity (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The way I sexually react to my partner (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My body's sexual functioning (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My emotional opening up in sex (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My mood after sexual activity (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The frequency of my orgasms (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The pleasure I provide to my partner (10)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The balance between what I give and receive in sex (11)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My partner's emotional opening up during sex (12)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

My partner's initiation of sexual activity (13)	<input type="radio"/>				
My partner's ability to orgasm (14)	<input type="radio"/>				
My partner's surrender, "letting go" to sexual pleasure (15)	<input type="radio"/>				
The way my partner takes care of my sexual needs (16)	<input type="radio"/>				
My partner's sexual creativity (17)	<input type="radio"/>				
My partner's sexual availability (18)	<input type="radio"/>				
The variety of my sexual activities (19)	<input type="radio"/>				
The frequency of my sexual activity (20)	<input type="radio"/>				

How old are you?

What is your current gender identity?

- Male (1)
- Female (2)
- Other (3)
- I prefer not to answer (4)

How would you describe your sexual orientation?

- Heterosexual (1)
- Homosexual (2)
- Bisexual (3)
- Pansexual (4)
- Other (5)
- Prefer not to answer (6)

Which race do you most identify?

- Black or African American (1)
- Asian (2)
- Hispanic or Latino (10)
- White (3)
- Native American (5)
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (8)
- American Indian or Alaskan Native (9)
- Multiracial (6)
- Other (7)

What is your relationship status with your current partner?

- In a dating relationship (1)
- Engaged (2)
- Married (3)

What is the length of your current relationship, in total months (e.g. 5 years is 60 months)?

What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?

- Some school, no diploma (1)
- GED (2)
- High school graduate (3)
- Some college but no degree (4)
- Associate degree (5)
- Bachelor's degree (6)
- Master's degree (7)
- Professional degree (8)
- Doctorate degree (9)

What is your current political affiliation?

- Republican (1)
- Democrat (2)
- Independent (3)
- Other (4)

What is your partner's political affiliation?

- Republican (1)
- Democrat (2)
- Independent (3)
- Other (4)
- I do not know (5)

What is the political affiliation of your parents?

- Republican (1)
- Democrat (2)
- Independent (3)
- Other (4)

What is your current political orientation?

- Liberal (1)
- Progressive (2)
- Moderate (3)
- Conservative (4)

What is your partner's political orientation?

- Liberal (1)
- Progressive (2)
- Moderate (3)
- Conservative (4)
- I do not know (5)

What are your parent(s) political orientation?

- Liberal (1)
- Progressive (2)
- Moderate (3)
- Conservative (4)
- I do not know (5)

What is your current religious affiliation?

- Catholic (1)
- Christian (2)
- Protestant (3)
- Mormon (4)
- Jewish (5)
- Muslim (6)
- Hindu (7)
- Buddhist (8)
- Atheist (9)
- Unaffiliated (10)
- Other (11)