ABSTRACT

Information-Seeking Strategies for Receiving Consent: Applying the Theory of
Motivated Information Management to Sexual Relationships Between College Students

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Drawing from the Theory of Motivated Information Management (TMIM), this thesis applies the process of information seeking to consent utilization during casual sexual encounters between college students. The goal of this study is to (1) test the applicability of the TMIM model to communication during hookups, (2) gain insight into how partners communicate their sexual desires, and (3) identify external consent factors that would affect the TMIM model in this instance. Participants ($N = 495$) answered questions about their most recent sexual encounter, who their partner was during that encounter, and the ways they understood their partner's desire. Multiple linear regression results demonstrate the applicability of TMIM in explaining how external consent factors—gender, relationship history, and sexual behavior—predict communication about sexual desire during hookups. Data indicate significant results for every relationship in the TMIM model, as well the relationship between information management strategies and this study's identified consent factors. Implications are discussed in the context of consent education for college students.

Information-Seeking Strategies for Providing Consent: Applying the Theory of Motivated
Information Management to Sexual Relationships Between College Students

by

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A Thesis

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Attending college is a significant life event for many as they transition into emerging adulthood. During this transitionary period, individuals engage in conversations with peers, are exposed to the culture of their institution, and participate in new experiences with others. For students, this occurs while they are also facing pressure to adhere to social scripts of behavior. Social scripts dictate expectations of how people should act in certain scenarios and are created by cultural acceptance of norms and reinforced by popular media (Simon & Gagnon, 1986). Sexual scripts are dominated by gender-normative ideas that reinforce heterosexual expectations of behavior (Garcia et al., 2012). For example, within a heterosexual marriage, sexual scripts would expect the husband to work while the wife stays home to raise children (Garcia et al., 2012; Simon & Gagnon, 1986). One common social expectation circulated in popular media about college students is that they are sexually active (Garcia et al., 2012). Thus, students who have not previously engaged in sexual activity may feel pressured to do so. According to the American College Health Association (2019), sexual activity includes participation in oral, vaginal, or anal sex. However, others include kissing and groping as sexual activities (Longenbach, 2020). On average, 70-80% of college students are sexually active (American College Health Association, 2019; Longenbach, 2020; Siegel et al., 1999), and of those students, student health professionals estimate that 20-30% will experience their first sexual interaction during college (Acosta, 2020), which aligns with

research indicating that approximately 45% of teenagers in the United States have not had sex before they turn 18 (CDC, 2019). As such, many students will undergo a process of active learning while they engage in sexual activity with others for the first time.

Engaging in new sexual experiences with others allows students to learn more about themselves and build relationships with others (Patrick et al., 2007; Patrick & Lee, 2010; Wetherill et al., 2010), but it does not come without cost. There is a crisis of sexual violence in higher education that undergirds college hookup culture that must be addressed. Over one in five women will be assaulted during their undergraduate career, and of those students, four out of five of them do not report the crime (Cantor et al., 2020; Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network, 2021). Many factors contribute to this crisis, such as sexual scripts that permeate college student's social spheres, which place men as the presumed initiators of sexual activity and women as the submissive receivers of such advances (Garcia et al., 2012; Jozkowski et al., 2017). However, obtaining 'consent' is often isolated as the way to prevent unwanted sexual experiences during interpersonal encounters (Marcantonio et al., 2018). If many students are experiencing sex for the first time in college, and the sexual education students received prior to coming to college is vastly different based off of school and geography (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2020), it may not yet be clear how to communicate consent. In an effort to try and remedy this knowledge gap, colleges and universities often try to offer consent training or requiring students to sign-off that they understand the Title IX policy (Beres et al., 2019). However, previous research has found that consent education trainings are largely ineffective in teaching students consent in a way that is appropriate to their actual sexual encounters (Beres et al., 2019) These trainings

are ineffective because they often rely on the 'miscommunication hypothesis,' or the idea that sexual violence is the result of a misunderstanding between partners of what the other wants (Beres, 2010). However, the miscommunication hypothesis has been disproven (Beres, 2010, 2014; Beres et al., 2019). In fact, individuals are able to understand a partner's willingness to participate in sexual activity even if they cannot articulate the concept of consent (Beres, 2014; Beres et al., 2019). Given this gap, how do students know when their partner is interested in engaging in sexual activity? How do students prefer to communicate to a sexual partner their own interest? Drawing from Afifi and Weiner's (2004) Theory of Motivated Information Management (TMIM), this study examines the communicative behaviors students use to provide consent during hookups to better understand how college students communicate during sex—particularly, how communicative behaviors changes based on gender, relationship history with a partner, and the sexual activity in question.

       According to TMIM, when a difference exists between how much information someone knows about a particular subject, such as casual sex, and how much they want to know, Afifi and Weiner (2004) argue that a process of information-seeking occurs to mitigate this difference, which they define as the "uncertainty discrepancy" (p. 174). Once someone becomes aware of an uncertainty discrepancy, TMIM provides a model describing the process individuals use to decide how to obtain and manage new information about that subject (Afifi & Weiner, 2004). This study assumes that for college students, engaging in hookup culture is a communicative process whereby individuals must seek information in order to understand their partner's interest in casual sexual activities. This study fills a gap in existing TMIM literature by applying the theory

to communication between partners *during* sexual activity as opposed to conversations between partners *about* sexual activity or other sexual uncertainties. By doing so, this study seeks to illuminate how college students enact information management strategies during their sexual interactions, an area of TMIM research which has not yet been explored. To this end, I first describe TMIM as well as its applications to close relationships, followed by literature on the sexual behavior of college students. A broader understanding of the behaviors college students use to reduce uncertainty about their partner's interest in sexual activity, understood as consent, will assist colleges and universities in providing more appropriate sexual health information to students, in turn promoting practices of safe sex on campus.
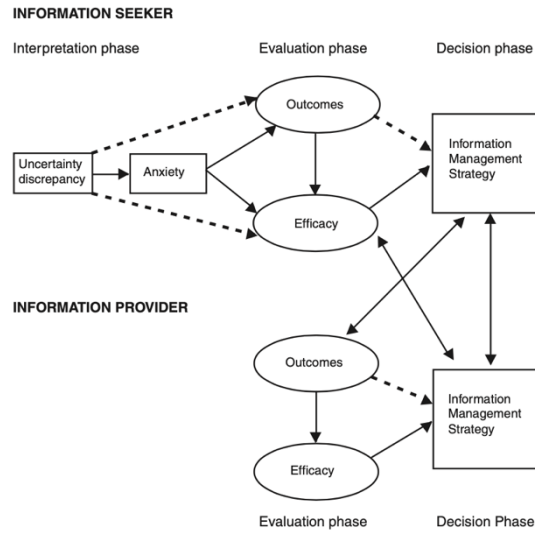
CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

While individuals may have their own meaning about what constitutes a hookup, this study draws from existing literature to define a *hookup* as a short-term, uncommitted sexual encounters, where physical interaction is typical, but may or may not involve sexual intercourse (Garcia et al., 2012; Weitbrecht & Whitton, 2017). 'Hookup' is often used interchangeably with 'casual sex,' and may be more colloquially known as a 'one-night stand.' Hooking up is sometimes distinguished from the concept of 'friends with benefits' and 'booty calls' because the latter often have a determined a sexual arrangement. However, this paper will include those relationships under the label of 'hooking up,' as extended hookup partners—or friends with benefits—are still part of a broader college hookup culture (Garcia et al., 2012; Jozkowski et al., 2017). Here, 'hookup' will be understood as a casual, sexual encounter with a person whom you are not in a romantic relationship with. Considering that this study seeks to capture how relationship history influences how partners interact with one another during hookups, the scope of this study also includes sexual activity between individuals in committed relationships, even if that activity is not always colloquially referred to as a hookup. While sexual intercourse is common during a hookup (Garcia et al., 2012; Marcantonio et al., 2018), this study utilizes a definition that does not require sexual intercourse, nor view penetration as a requirement for intercourse, so as not to reinforce cis-heterosexuality as the condition for a 'standard' sexual encounter (Pham, 2016).

College hookup culture is the way individuals engage in an environment that facilitates hooking up with others. Oftentimes, hookup culture allows college students to explore their sexuality, meet new people, and fluctuate in social status based on who they hook up with, how many people they hook up with, and other's perceptions of those actions. As participation in college hookup research has increased, researchers have begun to describe the process by which students enter hookup culture and what factors predict sexual activity (Fielder et al., 2013; Fielder & Carey, 2010; Zaleski & Schiaffino, 2000). For example, high religiosity has been found to be associated with a decreased likelihood for sexual activity (Zaleski & Schiaffino, 2000), but engaging in sexual activity before college has been found to be a consistent predictor for participation in hookups during college (Fielder & Carey, 2010). Evolutionary psychologists argue that as people enter the period of emerging adulthood (ages 18-25), evolutionary and social forces converge to encourage them to begin engaging in casual sex (Garcia et al., 2012). This study adopts an evolutionary approach to sexual activity because it recognizes that both biological differences and social forces influence someone's behavior. In context of hooking up with others, the way people engage in sex is partially determined by people's biological characteristics, but their participation is also determined in part by social scripts that they have internalized in order to adhere norms of behavior. A central feature of this process whereby individuals make sense of themselves, their sexual activity, and their relationship to others is uncertainty. To better understand how uncertainty motivates communicative behaviors, such as giving consent and gaining knowledge about their sexual partner's desires, this study draws from the theoretical relationships outlined in the Theory of Motivated Information Management (Afifi & Weiner, 2004).

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Theory of Motivated Information Management

Afifi and Weiner (2004) developed the Theory of Motivated Information Management (TMIM) to describe the process individuals undergo when there is a gap in the amount of knowledge they have about a subject and how much they would like to know (see Figure 2.1). The theory posits that this gap in knowledge, also called the *uncertainty discrepancy*, catalyzes a process of information seeking whereby individuals move through three phases: the interpretation phase, evaluation phase, and decision phase. In the original 2004 model, Afifi and Weiner argue that a mismatch in knowledge produces uncertainty-related anxiety, which occurs in the interpretation phase. People become aware of their knowledge gap, and as such, experience some degree of anxiety about resolving it. For example, someone may want to know if they are pregnant. Their uncertainty discrepancy may be dependent on if they are taking birth control, used condoms, and how long it has been since they missed their last period. Subsequently, the degree of anxiety produced would differ by how much knowledge they have about their potential pregnancy. Afifi and Weiner (2004) articulate this initial step as the interpretation phase—where a person becomes aware of a gap in knowledge that they have, and the extent of the anxiety they have is determined by the extent of their perceived knowledge gap.

INFORMATION SEEKER

Interpretation phase   Evaluation phase   Decision phase

Outcomes

Uncertainty discrepancy   Anxiety   Information Management Strategy

Efficacy

INFORMATION PROVIDER

Outcomes

Information Management Strategy

Efficacy

Evaluation phase   Decision Phase

Note. The dashed paths reflect paths that are partly mediated by other variables with which the relevant variable has associations. The figure is intended as a visual simplication of the general theoretical framework.

Figure 2.1. Proposed Theory of Motivated Information Management (Afifi and Weiner, 2004).

The second phase in the TMIM model is the evaluation phase, which is concerned with how individuals perceive themselves as able to reduce anxiety related to their information search. In this phase, uncertainty-related anxiety produces an individual's outcome assessments and efficacy assessments, which then determine the information management strategy the information seeker undergoes in the decision phase. Outcome assessments include outcome expectancies, outcome importance, and outcome probability. Outcome expectancies ask what the costs and benefits are of an individual's search—both the process of the search and the result of the search. Outcome importance is the importance of the outcome of information seeking for an individual's self or their relationship, and outcome probability is the perceived likelihood that an individual's search will result in expected outcomes (Afifi & Weiner, 2004). To continue the pregnancy example, outcome expectancies could involve fear of stigma when taking a

pregnancy test if someone does not wish to have a child at that time and the result is positive, as well as the benefit of peace of mind that confirms if they are pregnant or not. If having a baby is a goal of this individual and their romantic partner, the outcome importance would be very high, just as if the couple is concerned about their ability to support a child. Outcome probability would ask if based on their actions, how likely is their information search to lead to the costs and benefits of outcome expectancies? The likelihood of seeking information is, in part, a function of the weighted averages of outcome assessments (Afifi & Weiner, 2004).

The likelihood of seeking information is also, in part, a function of the weighted averages of efficacy assessments, which include coping efficacy, communication efficacy, and target efficacy. Coping efficacy is the degree an individual thinks they have the emotional and physical resources, such as network support, to handle the process of information-seeking and the result of that process. If someone does not have a strong support system, a lack of network support may discourage them from actively seeking information, because they may not be able to emotionally cope with the response (Afifi & Weiner, 2004). In our example of pregnancy uncertainty, an individual may be so overwhelmed by this possibility that they choose not to take a pregnancy test because they would rather not be aware of the answer. Communication efficacy is an individual's perception that they possess the skills to successfully complete the information management process (Afifi & Weiner, 2004). A person's communication efficacy may change based on social skills, physical access to resource, or even language barriers(Afifi & Weiner, 2004). Finally, TMIM involves two individuals, the information seeker (person looking for information) and the information provider (the person providing

knowledge to the information seeker), also known as the target. As such, the concept of target efficacy is the information seeker's perceptions of the target's ability to communicate the knowledge they are looking for, and how honest that source will be when providing information (Afifi & Weiner, 2004). In the pregnancy example, someone may be deciding between taking a pregnancy test, talking to their partner, or booking an appointment with an OB/GYN. In this case, the target efficacy assessment would probably lead that person to visiting an OB/GYN because medical professionals are likely to have the most thorough knowledge about pregnancy, leading to a high perception of target ability. Additionally, because OB/GYN's are also trained to communicate with patients and cannot be dishonest to someone about their pregnancy status, it is likely the perceived target's honesty is also very high.

The final phase of the TMIM model is the decision phase, which is where the individual decides which strategy to pursue to resolve an uncertainty discrepancy. This is called the information seeker's information management strategy. Individuals may seek relevant information, avoid relevant information, or undergo cognitive reappraisal to manage information (Afifi & Weiner, 2004). When individuals are seeking relevant information, they observe the target without intrusion during passive strategies, manipulate the environment to learn more from or about the target during active strategies, and directly interact with the target of information in interactive strategies (Afifi & Weiner, 2004). When individuals are avoiding relevant information, they can do so actively, which occurs when a reduction of anxiety would be *more* harmful, or passively, and let events unfold naturally. During cognitive reappraisal, individuals make psychological readjustments that change the need for information in the first place. For

example, someone who undergoes cognitive reappraisal may convince themselves that their uncertainty discrepancy is no longer important in order to remedy their uncertainty-related anxiety. In the case of pregnancy uncertainty, this would involve someone convincing themselves that knowing if they are pregnant is unimportant, and as such, resolve their anxiety by simply allowing events to unfold. Information providers also go through the evaluation phase and the decision phase, making assessments about their ability to relay information, the information seeker's ability to cope with information, and what strategy would be best to give knowledge to the information seeker (Afifi & Weiner, 2004).

While the first iteration TMIM argues that knowledge discrepancies produced anxiety, research attempting to apply TMIM to different scenarios found that 'anxiety' was not nuanced enough to capture feelings related to uncertainty (Afifi & Weiner, 2006). As such, the updated model of TMIM expands 'anxiety' to 'emotion,' proposing that the emotional response from an uncertainty discrepancy is specific to emotional appraisals of that person, and influences outcome assessments and efficacy assessments, as well as the information management strategy both directly and indirectly. Think again of the pregnancy example—uncertainty about pregnancy can certainty produce anxiety, but it can also produce excitement or hope. This modification to the model allows for TMIM to capture information management strategies that are not only the result of negative emotions (Afifi & Morse, 2009).

TMIM and Close Relationships

The Theory of Motivated Information Management has been applied to a variety of interpersonal dyads, one of which is close relationships (Kuang & Wilson, 2020). One

study utilized a two-wave, cross-lagged, panel-design in order to investigate the impact of relationship uncertainty, broadly defined, on a romantic partnership (Jang & Tian, 2012). To do so, the researchers sent two surveys to a group of students one week apart. In both surveys, participants were asked to recall an event that caused uncertainty with a romantic partner, describe the event in detail, and then fill out measures to capture TMIM variables. The researchers found that information-seeking and efficacy assessments influence each other cyclically, but were unable to determine a causal relationship between the two (Jang & Tian, 2012). The cyclical relationship between efficacy assessments and information-seeking indicates that over the course of repeated interactions with another person, efficacy assessments change as information seeking strategies produce different results that impact a romantic relationship. This is important because it alludes to the contextual, evolving nature of information seeking—one which is dependent on your relationship with another person and your prior communication patterns with this person. Lancaster and colleagues' (2016) research also provides support for the claim that efficacy assessments act as a mediator to negative emotions related to anxiety and information management strategies. The researchers found that efficacy mediated associations between anger and all three information management strategies in the context of information seeking about a partner's previous relationships (Lancaster et al., 2016). As this study seeks to apply TMIM to sexual activities, efficacy assessments are likely to be dependent upon whether (a) the people engaging in the sexual activity have a noncommittal platonic relationship, (b) a long-term romantic partnership, or (c) the individuals are regular sexual partners. Currently, there are no TMIM studies that investigate the same uncertainty-producing event among different relationships between

the information provider and the information seeker. However, if efficacy assessments and information management strategies inform one another, and efficacy assessments depend on the information seeker's interpretation of the target, then it is reasonable to assume that information management strategies will change with different relationship arrangements (such romantic partners as compared to friends).

Research has also utilized TMIM to better understand partnership sexual satisfaction (Kuang & Gettings, 2020a, 2020b). For example, in Kuang and Getting's (2020a) research, when individuals were unsure about their partner's sexual satisfaction, those individuals experienced a range of emotions, not just anxiety. While some individuals experienced anxiety, others were excited about the opportunity to engage in conversations with their partners (Kuang & Gettings, 2020a). Additionally, Kuang and Gettings (2020b) research on marital partners demonstrated the role situational context— for example, whether couples were experiencing uncertainty related to retirement or sexual satisfaction—moderates the relationship between efficacy assessments and information management strategies (Kuang & Gettings, 2020b). Accordingly, if sexual satisfaction moderates the relationship between efficacy assessments and information management strategies, consent behaviors as information management strategies may also be impacted by context and efficacy, given the assumption that an increase in sexual desire/want (consent) would also increase sexual satisfaction. To date, no study has employed TMIM to investigate information management strategies of consent behaviors during hookups. This thesis addresses this gap and advances understanding of the ways different partnership dynamics during hookups produce uncertainty and influences information management behaviors.

TMIM and Sexual Health

In addition to literature that applies TMIM to close relationships, research has also utilized TMIM to investigate behaviors individuals use when experiencing sexual health uncertainty, predominantly related to the status of sexually transmitted infections (STI's) (Afifi & Weiner, 2006; Chang, 2014; Dillow & Labelle, 2014; Jeon, 2014; McManus, 2020). Using the original model of information management, Afifi and Weiner (2006) found that anxiety did not adequately capture the emotions related to STI disclosure. In response to this shortcoming, Dillow and Labelle (2014) utilized an expanded Theory of Information Management model (Afifi & Morse, 2009), and asked participants to rate 12 negative emotions related to uncertainty, rather than just asking about anxiety. This method was based on Fowler and Afifi's (2011) application of the expanded TMIM theory to discussions surrounding caregiving between parents and children. Similarly, Dillow and Labelle (2014) found that utilizing this revised TMIM model better allowed them to capture a range of emotions related to STI status. Dillow and Labelle (2014) investigated both cognitive and emotional factors of discussions of getting tested for STI's between partners, and argue that there is a reciprocal nature between the role of the information provider and the information seeker when both partners experience uncertainty about the other. Assuming that the reciprocal nature of information management will also apply to consent behaviors during sexual activity, this study will explore whether an individual's information management strategy changes when they are in the role of the information seeker (receiving consent from their partner) and information provider (giving consent to their partner).

Research applying TMIM to questions of sexual health has also investigated the ways that individuals seek information from someone outside of their romantic relationship, such as a close friend (Chang, 2014) or an online support groups (Jeon, 2014). Chang (2014) investigated how students in Singapore seek information about abortion, HIV/AIDS, unwanted pregnancy, and other STI's from their peers. This study did not find a direct effect of outcome expectancy on information seeking, but proposed that perceived vulnerability— 'face threats'—would be a valuable consideration to the TMIM model. In the context of sexual activity, perceived vulnerability may increase when individuals are hooking up for the first time due to fear of negative reactions from their sexual partner. However, perceived vulnerability is likely to decrease when individuals have preestablished trust with the target of information, such as when they are hooking up with close friends or romantic partners. McManus (2020) researched how college students act in the role of the information provider when friends are experiencing sexual health uncertainty. McManus (2020) found that while students often do their best to provide support to their friends, they often lack the objective sexual health knowledge that would allow them to do so in a way that is best for their wellbeing. For example, a friend may be able to provide support and comfort, but may not recommend STI testing after unprotected sex. McManus (2020) found that sexual expertise moderated the relationship between communication efficacy and information providing behaviors, in this case, determining what kind of support a friend would provide in the case of sexual health uncertainty (such as blame support or problem-solving support). Accordingly, students with insufficient sexual health knowledge could actually *increase* sexual health problems for friends (McManus, 2020). While this study is not focused on STI testing or

disclosure, consent is understood as part of sexual health knowledge and education students may have received about interpersonal relationships and safe sex.

The present study seeks to utilize the existing sexual health knowledge of individuals to better understand how students interpret their partner's actions during sexual activity to indicate consent. There is a sexual assault crisis on college campuses, in part caused by students reliance on their subjective knowledge during interpersonal interactions. If this is the case, there is a need to address gaps in information students have about sexual activity to make sure that their knowledge does not cause more harm. Rather than rely on understandings of consent as dictated by current policy, this study will utilize TMIM as a framework to better conceptualize not just consent giving, but consent *receiving* behaviors by college students. As such, this study will fill a gap in literature by addressing not just how consent is given by students, but also how consent is understood by their sexual partners.

<div align="center">

College Hookup Culture

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Previous research has found that college students engage in sexual behavior to meet different personal goals (Lindgren et al., 2009; Patrick et al., 2007) and that beginning college is an important transitionary life event for developing sexuality (Patrick & Lee, 2010; Wetherill et al., 2010). Patrick and colleagues (2007) investigated motivations for engaging in sexual activity for college students. The researchers found that self-focused reasons were more likely to motivate men to engage in hookups, whereas women were more motivated by partner-focused reasons (Patrick et al., 2007). While men and women both agree that college allows the freedom to pursue sexual goals, self-focused reasons for hooking up involve casual sex goals, while partner-focused

reasons are aligned with finding a committed relationship partner (Lindgren et al., 2009). From a sexual health perspective, differing goals and motivations also exist for college students who are sexually experienced and have never had sex before. Patrick and Lee (2019) found that but after the six-month transition to college, those who had sex after never having sex before had indistinguishable motivations—such as using hooking up as a coping mechanism or to improve overall wellbeing—from students who came to college sexually experienced. Patrick and Lee's (2019) findings support the idea that an educational intervention on consent during the transitionary periods to college, especially for those who are sexually inexperienced, is important, because social pressure may force these students to conform to hookup culture at an accelerated rate.

Research on college hookup behaviors often describes the process by which students enter hookup culture and what factors predict sexual activity (Fielder et al., 2013; Fielder & Carey, 2010; Lindgren et al., 2009; Patrick & Lee, 2010; Zaleski & Schiaffino, 2000). While some argue that evolutionary psychology best explains the desire to participate in short-term sexual encounters (Garcia et al., 2012), this study utilizes TMIM to justify a communication-studies based approach to hookup culture because consent is fundamentally a communication-based practice. As individuals engage in sexual activity, they are constantly interpreting both verbal and nonverbal cues from their partner, as well as providing those cues to their partner in order to communicate about the progression of sexual behavior. By focusing on the communicative aspect of consent, research can better understand discrepancies between message intent and message received. As such, communicating with others *about* hookups and *during* hookups allows for college students to reduce their uncertainty, and subsequent stress,

about how one is *supposed* to engage in casual sex with others. Subsequently, participating in hookups can be understood as an *information-seeking* behavior by which one can reduce uncertainty. I argue that information seeking is not neutral, and instead postulate that information-seeking behaviors should be understood as *reinforced* information seeking because confirmation bias dictates that people will behave in ways that reinforce their personal epistemologies. Conformation bias in consent behaviors has been demonstrated before in research on rape myths (Forrest-Redfern, 2020; Lofgreen et al., 2021; Martinez et al., 2018; Muehlenhard et al., 2016). For example, men who have a higher endorsement of rape myths are more likely to misinterpret their sexual partner's desire and conflate that desire for consent (Lofgreen et al., 2021; Muehlenhard et al., 2016). In this case, participant's subjective knowledge about sexual activity, or their adherence to rape myths, influences their information management behaviors by dictating how they choose to interpret (or misinterpret) cues from their sexual partners.

In addition to TMIM, previous research has used possible selves theory (Markus & Nurius, 1986) to describe how sexual selves are developed during the transition to college (Anders & Olmstead, 2019) as well as the communication theory of identity (Hecht, 1993) to understand how sexual health is an intergroup process by which social membership is required to be included, oftentimes excluding women of color and gender minorities (Rubinsky & Cooke-Jackson, 2018). Understanding sexual heath as an intergroup process supports the argument that the social scripts of emerging adults influence their involvement in hookup culture, considering that social scripts are (re)created between individuals from similar backgrounds, such as those who identify as religious. Religion has also been found to be an important factor in predicting if emerging

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adults will engage in sexual behaviors and penetrative sex (Fielder et al., 2013; Fielder & Carey, 2010). While high religiosity is associated with less sexual activity, high religiosity does not protect against unsafe sex (Zaleski & Schiaffino, 2000), highlighting the importance of educational intervention for those who are sexually inexperienced or who have been taught to be abstinent until marriage.

Consent

If sexual experience mitigates the ability for emerging adults to reduce uncertainty for their peers in sexual situations (McManus, 2020) and is a predictor for increased participation in hookup culture in college (Fielder et al., 2013; Fielder & Carey, 2010; Patrick et al., 2007; Zaleski & Schiaffino, 2000), it would be reasonable to assume that sexual experience also modifies how individuals prefer to enact consent during their interpersonal interactions. While this specific phenomena has not yet been researched in short-term hookup encounters, sexual precedence theory has been used to study how increased sexual experience modifies how long-term partners utilize consent (Beres, 2014; Willis & Jozkowski, 2019). As sexual experience with a long-term partner increases, communication about consent decreases, until reaching an inflection point. At that inflection point, communication about consent increases as partners feel more comfortable expressing their interests towards sexual activity more clearly (Willis & Jozkowski, 2019). Some couples in long-term relationships do not view consent as applicable in their relationships, as enough contextual clues have developed between partners to be intuitively aware of the other person's sexual desires (Beres, 2014). Beres (2014) refers to this as *tacit knowledge*, where consent is no longer explicitly asked for, but partners are able to 'just know' if their partner is interested. As such, people who are

in long term relationships may not have as much uncertainty towards sexual behavior, and as such, may not feel the need to pursue an active information seeking strategy.

Arguing that one is able to rely solely on intuition to interpret consent is a dangerous facilitation of sexual violence. Hence, I argue that these contextual clues are still part of consent, as many individuals prefer to consent nonverbally. According to attachment theory, anxiously attached women are more likely to consent to unwanted sex (Impett & Peplau, 2002), indicating that individuals may not feel the same ability to communicate consent effectively. Additionally, previous research on college hookups finds that consent is gendered (Jozkowski et al., 2017), which results in men and women having disjunctive views on consent. As such, communication surrounding consent is oftentimes impacted by misconceptions or incorrect assumptions by both partners (Jozkowski et al., 2018). If we presume heterosexual relationships, and men and women interpret contextual clues differently to indicate consent, many people may be presuming consent when it actually does not exist. Previous research has found significant differences in how men and women prefer to both give and receive consent as well (Jozkowski et al., 2017, 2018). Women are more likely than men to engage in passive behaviors towards consent, as well as have more intense emotions associated with sexual experiences, and subsequently, consent (Jozkowski & Peterson, 2014). Currently, a difference in male and female preferences towards information management has not been applied in a sexual health context. This study will treat gender as a variable that influences uncertainty-related emotions towards sexual behaviors, and subsequently, influence information management strategies.

When participating in sexual activity, the way individuals feel about consent may be different than how they demonstrate consent to their partner. Additional research on consent during hookups shows that there is a difference between internal consent (feelings associated with consent) and external consent (indications of consent to others) and that both forms of consent are modified by alcohol and length of time with a partner (Jozkowski & Peterson, 2014; Jozkowski & Wiersma, 2015; Marcantonio et al., 2018). For example, when developing the External Consent Scale (ECS), Jozkowski and colleagues (2014) found that there were five major themes associated with external consent—direct nonverbal behaviors, passive behaviors, initiator behaviors, behaviors that verged on pressuring a partner, and signals that did not indicate consent (non-response signals). The researchers found that women were more likely to utilize passive behaviors and non-response behaviors than men, and found that women's internalized feelings towards consent were more complex than men's (Jozkowski et al., 2014).

Gender differences present in consent behaviors may be explained by the sexual double standard, which encourages sexual engagement for men, but penalizes women for doing so (Jozkowski et al., 2017). For example, the sexual double standard, (Jozkowski et al., 2017; Weitbrecht & Whitton, 2020), may explain previous research that found that when consenting during sex, a serious dating partner increases positive internal consent feelings and interest for penetrative sex for women (Marcantonio et al., 2018). The influence of the sexual double standard is present in these findings by engaging in sex with a serious partner, the stigma of 'promiscuity,' or the idea that women are somehow lesser for engaging uncommitted sex, is not applicable. In line with this argument is Marcantonio and colleague's (2018) finding that the most common ideal hookup outcome

for women is a serious dating relationship, while men are more likely to want their hookup partner to remain as nothing more than a casual sexual encounter (Weitbrecht & Whitton, 2017). As such, there are differences in how people not just feel about consent, but utilize consent, when they are in a long-term partnership as opposed to with an uncommitted sexual partner (Jozkowski & Wiersma, 2015) However, because men and women have been found to desire different outcomes from a hookup, there is an increased chance for women who hookup with men to experience negative emotions if sexual activity does not lead to a committed relationship (Weitbrecht & Whitton, 2020). Different desires for hookup outcomes alludes to the idea of outcome assessments, where individuals take into account their future relationship desires with this partner as a potential outcome to their sexual interaction.

This study addresses a gap in the literature in three ways. First, this study focuses primarily on information seeking behaviors (consent *receiving*), which is understudied in the literature. Given that men and women prefer to give consent to their partners differently, then it is important to understand how men and women prefer to interpret consent from their partners. Additionally, the results from this study may help generate educational interventions designed to help partners communicate consent. Second, this research captures the dual nature of consent, from both a consent giving and receiving perspective. As such, the results may offer insight regarding whether individuals utilize the same behaviors when both giving and receiving consent. Utilizing TMIM to better understand consent behaviors as information managing strategies makes space for the communicative and reciprocal existence of consent. There is not just one target of information, but rather, both partners will at times exist as both the information seeker

and the target of information. When both partners are understood as both givers and receivers of consent, we can theorize consent as more than just an event, but an extended interpersonal process by which a variety of contextual factors influence what is, and is not, seen as acceptable.

Finally, this study provides a novel insight to test the application of TMIM to sexual interactions and uncertainty about a partner's desire. Because the relationship dynamics in this study are not limited to current romantic partners, this study is able to test the application of relationship status to information management behaviors, and specifically, understand how that relationship history may influence a person's efficacy assessments.

Based on the review of literature, the following hypotheses and research questions are offered and summarized below in Figure 2.2:

H1:   Uncertainty about a partner's desire to participate in sexual activity is negatively related to internal consent (IC) emotions, such that higher levels of uncertainty lead to less IC emotions.

H2:   Greater IC emotions predict (a) positive outcome assessments and (b) positive efficacy assessments for the information seeker.

H3:   Positive outcome assessments predict increased communication efficacy and target efficacy.

H4:   Increased communication efficacy and target efficacy are associated with a greater degree of both active and passive information management strategies when communicating desire during sexual activity.

H5:   Increased intimacy of sexual behaviors (ex: from kissing to oral sex) are associated with an increased uncertainty discrepancy.

H6:   Gender influences the degree to which emotions related to uncertainty about a sexual partner's desire (the factors on the Internal Consent Scale) are felt, such that women experience IC emotions to a lesser degree than men.

H7:   Information-seekers who had their most recent sexual experience with a long-term romantic partner and/or frequent hookup partner will have higher efficacy

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assessments than those whose most recent sexual experience was with a stranger and/or was engaging in casual sex with them for the first time.

H8:   Sexual behavior, gender, and relationship history predict the usage of information seeking behaviors.

RQ1:   Does the frequency of External Consent behaviors change when people are in the position of the information provider than when they are the information seeker?
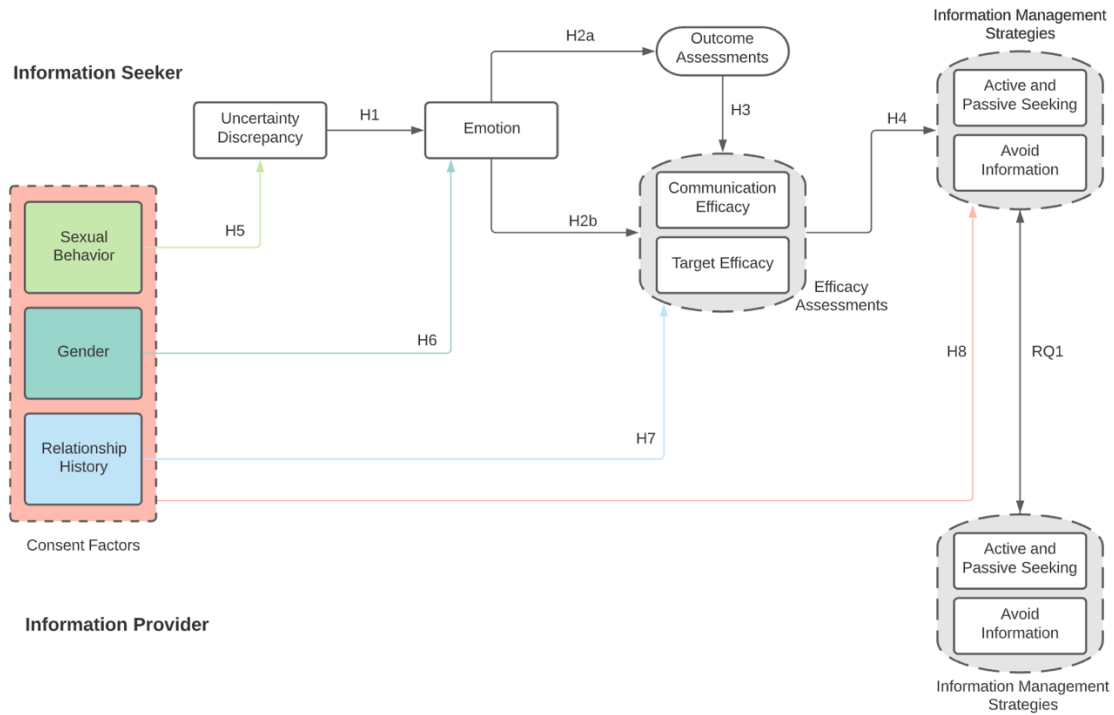

Figure 2.2. Summary of research questions and hypothesis.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to apply the Theory of Motivated Information Management (TMIM) to the interpersonal communication of college students during casual sex. Through testing the applicability of TMIM's model to college hookups, the goal of this study is to gain insight towards how college students manage information about their partner's desire towards sexual activity.

Data Collection

Participants were recruited to complete a Qualtrics survey through various convenience sampling techniques from November 2021 through January 2022. First, the survey link was distributed through the researcher's own personal social media accounts on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. The link was shared by many of her peers to reach a larger audience. Second, the survey was shared on the website of a professional organization for sexual science scholars as well as through a popular listserv for communication scholars. Finally, a number of communication professors at the researcher's institution shared the survey link with their students. Some professors offered the survey as an opportunity for extra credit to their students, which was provided to students without the researcher's involvement.

Participants were asked to complete a ten-minute survey about their most recent sexual activity during hookups, broadly defined to include kissing, oral sex, and penetrative sex. Sexual activity was broadly defined in order to capture a greater number

of participants. To meet the selection criteria, participants must have engaged in sexual activity (as defined above) in the last six months, be over the age of 18, and currently enrolled in a college or university program. Questions asked about participant's relationship to their most recent sexual partner, as well as communication behaviors during their most recent hookup. While the purpose of this survey was to better understand consent communication between college students, the word 'consent' was not used directly, but instead replaced with descriptions such as "how did you know your partner was interested in sexual activity" or "how did you know your partner wanted to engage in sexual activity?" Previous research has found this tactic useful (Edwards et al., 2014). When behavioral descriptions of consent are used, men are more likely to self-report coercive behaviors, and more women will disclose feelings related to nonconsensual events (Edwards et al., 2014). This research was approved by the Institutional Review Board of Baylor University.

Participants who completed less than 60% of the survey were removed from the sample, resulting in a sample size for this study of 495. Due to the method of convenience sampling done by the researcher, participants (N = 495) where overwhelmingly white (n = 360, 72.7%), currently attend college in Texas (n = 406, 86.4%), and identified as Christian (n = 314, 63.4%), which reflects the majority of student body at the researcher's institution. In some cases, this may influence the generalizability of the results. For example, 48.5% of participants described themselves as either "very" (n = 143, 32.1%) or "extremely" (n = 73, 14.7%) religious. In response to the question "At what age did you first engage in oral sex or intercourse," one participant responded "Never. It is immoral to have sex before marriage. Hebrews 13:4." The

majority of participants who have engaged in oral sex or intercourse first did so at age 17 (*n* = 76, 15.4%) or age 18 (*n* = 84, 17.0%). The mean age participants first engaged in oral sex or intercourse was 17.01.

The age of participants ranged from 18 (*n* = 99, 20.8%) to 46 (*n* = 1, 0.2%), and participants attend school in 24 different states. One participant attends school outside of the United States. The participant sample included 174 men (35.8%), 294 women (60.5%) and 15 non-binary people (3.1%). The gender of the participant's sexual partners included 276 men (59.5%), 174 women (37.5), and 8 non-binary people (1.7%). Given the gender breakdown of participants and their sexual partners, it may be reasonable to assume that the majority of responses are in the context of heterosexual relationships. While the majority of respondents indicated their race as white, 163 participants indicated their race as either Black or African American (*n* = 29, 5.9%), Asian or Pacific Islander (*n* = 65, 13.1%), Native American or First People (*n* = 9, 1.8%), Middle Eastern (*n* = 8, 1.6%), or mixed race (*n* = 52, 10.5%). If participants indicated that their most recent sexual partner was not a stranger (*n* = 435, 94.2%), participants were asked if they had engaged in sexual activity with that partner before, the nature of their relationship, how long they have been hooking up, and how often (See Table 3.1). See Table 3.1 for more detailed information on participant's sexual history.

Table 3.1

Sexual History with Hookup Partners

Demographic Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Hookup with partner before (*n* = 447)		
No	133	29.8
Yes	314	70.2
Most recent hookup partner (*n* = 462)		
Stranger	27	5.8
Recognized but didn't really know	7	1.5
Close Friend	47	10.2
Casual acquaintance	50	10.8
Previous romantic partner	51	11.0
Regular booty call / friend with benefits	41	8.9
Committed romantic partner	239	51.7
Duration of sexual activity (*n* = 453)		
Not applicable	95	21.0
Less than one week	30	6.6
About one month	49	10.8
1-3 months	53	11.7
3-6 months	59	13.0
Less than 1 year	50	11.0
1+ years	105	23.2
5+ years	12	2.6
Frequency of sexual activity (*n* = 408)		
A few times a year	85	20.0
Once a month	46	11.3
2-3 times a month	71	17.4
Once a week	72	17.6
2-3 times a week	104	25.5
About every day	30	7.4

Measures

Sexual Behavior

To measure sexual behavior, this study adopted the list of sexual behaviors from

the National Study of Sexual Health and Behavior (Herbenick et al., 2019; Marcantonio

et al., 2018). The list was modified slightly to use more inclusive language. Participants

were asked to select all the sexual activities they engaged in during their most recent

hookup from a list of behaviors, beginning with "kissing" and ending with "penetrative

intercourse." The behaviors listed in order were "kissing," "touched my partner's genitals," "partner touched my genitals," "performed oral sex," "received oral sex," "vaginal penetrative intercourse," and "anal penetrative intercourse." The number of items selected by participants were used to create a sexual behavior score. For example, if only "kissing" was selected, the sexual behavior score was 1. If a participant selected "partner touched my genitals," "performed oral sex," and "vaginal penetrative intercourse," the sexual behavior score was 3. This method was used because while it is possible that a participant may have only selected "vaginal penetrative intercourse" and received a score of 1, it is unlikely. Sexual hierarchy theory (Marcantonio et al., 2018) understands that sexual actions are likely to occur in an 'order' of increasing intimacy with partners. As such, the creation of sexual behavior score serves two functions. First, this grouping better captures the compounding nature of consent. It is unlikely that participants were able to isolate how consent occurred specifically from one action to another, so this method treated a sexual interaction as one event where consent and trust builds between partners as the duration of the activity increases. Second, this method groups participants by behaviors that are most likely to have the most uncertainty, and as such, will hopefully be able to better capture how TMIM applies to casual sex. Kissing is a low-risk activity as compared to penetrative intercourse, so uncertainty related to either behavior is likely to produce different intensities of emotions felt as a result of that uncertainty. The range of the sexual behavior score was 0-7 ($M = 3.14$, $SD = 2.24$). The sexual behavior score breakdown for this study is below in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2

Sexual Behavior Score

Sexual behavior score* (n = 495)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
0	46	9.3
1	152	30.7
2	31	6.3
3	37	7.5
4	45	9.1
5	67	13.5
6	107	21.6
7	10	2.0

based on sum of behaviors: kissing, touched my partner's genitals, partner touched my genitals, performed oral sex, received oral sex, vaginal penetrative intercourse, and anal penetrative intercourse

Relationship History

Relationship history is concerned with the nature of sexual relationship between partners, including the social relationship between partners and if they have engaged in sexual activity before. If they have, relationship history asks how long that sexual activity has been occurring and how frequently it does. The purpose of asking about the social relationship between partners and prior sexual activity is to split participants in a way that can capture if there is the existence of the precedence assumption. The precedence assumption articulates that individuals who have engaged in sexual activity before with a partner will assume that those behaviors are acceptable to engage in with that partner in the future, decreasing the perceived necessity for explicit consent (Beres, 2014; Willis & Jozkowski, 2019).

Relationship partner. Participants were asked to select the item that best described their relationship with their most recent sexual partner, ranging from "stranger" to "committed romantic partner." The complete list of relationships can be seen above in

Table 3.2. Participants were asked if they had engaged in sexual activity with their most

recent partner beforehand, 133 (29.8%) of whom said no, and 314 (70.2%) said yes. This

measure was quantified whereby "stranger" = 1, "someone you recognized but didn't

really know" = 2, through "committed romantic partner" = 7.

Sexual duration and frequency. If participants selected any social relationship

other than "stranger," they were asked about prior sexual activity with that partner.

Participants were given a list of options ranging from "Not applicable" to "5+ years" to

answer how long they have been engaging in sexual activity with their most recent

partner. Next, participants were asked how often they engage in sexual activity with their

most recent partner, ranging from "A few times a year" to "About every day." The

frequencies and full list of items for both of these questions is available in Table 3.2.

Sexual duration was quantified where "Not applicable" = 0, "Less than one week = 1"

through "5+ years" = 7 so that the longer the duration of sexual activity, the higher the

value assigned to the response. Sexual frequency was quantified such that "A few times a

year" = 1, "Once a month" = 2, through "About every day" = 6 so that the more frequent

the sexual activity, the higher the value assigned to that response.

Uncertainty Discrepancy

Uncertainty discrepancy was measured using a six-item scale created by the

researcher to measure participant's certainty that their partner was interested in sexual

activity. Three sets of two items measured participant's sureness, confidence, and amount

of information about their partner's desires. For the first item, participants were asked to

think about their most recent hookup and answer "How sure were you that your partner

was willing to engage in sexual activity" on a 5-point Likert scale from "not at all" to "extremely." The second item then asked participants, "How sure did you want to be that your partner was willing to engage in sexual activity?" To calculate the uncertainty discrepancy, the score for the first item for each set (how sure/confident *were you*) was subtracted from the second item for each set (how sure/confident did you *want to be*). The three differences were then added to create the final uncertainty discrepancy for each participant, a process that has been used in previous research studying the Theory of Motivated Information Management (Dillow & Labelle, 2014; McManus, 2020). For this study, the range of uncertainty discrepancy was from -6 to 9 ($M = .338$, $SD = 1.50$). With this scale, it is possible for scores to range from -12 to 12.

Emotion

The Internal Consent Scale (ICS) is a five-factor, 25-item scale developed by Jozkowski and colleagues (2014) designed to capture event-level internal feelings about willingness to engage in a sexual activity. The ICS has a previous Cronbach α of 0.95, with all of the factors having an α score of above 0.9 (Jozkowski et al., 2014). The ICS is operationalized on a scale from 1-4 where 1 = "disagree" and 4 = "agree" and participants are asked to indicate the extent to which they felt certain emotions during an event. Only four possible are responses are provided, forcing participants to select from "disagree," "slightly disagree," "agree," and "strongly agree." A "neutral" option is intentionally not provided in order to prevent participants from giving neutral answers towards emotions they may not want to acknowledge (Jozkowski et al., 2014; Marcantonio et al., 2018). The five factors of the ICS, with examples of the items in those factors, are Physical Response (rapid heartbeat, flushed), Safety/Comfort (secure,

respected, comfortable), Arousal (turned on, interested), Consent/Want (agreed to, desired), and Readiness (sure, willing).

This study utilized a 19-item version of the ICS to capture uncertainty-related emotions. Items that related to physical indicators were removed as not to conflate physical responses, which do not necessarily indicate consent, with emotions towards sex. Some examples of items removed are "rapid heartbeat," "erect," and "vaginally lubricated." In this study, the 19-item ICS achieved a strong Cronbach α of .943 ($M =$ 70.04, $SD = 8.138$).

Outcome Assessments

Outcome expectancy for the information seeker was based off of Dillow and Labelle's (2014) study, which used a six-item scale to assess the extent to which information seekers believed searching for information about their partner's sexual desire was going to produce positive outcomes for the future. Examples of items in this study's scale are "I felt as though asking my partner if they were interested in sexual activity would produce positive outcomes for the sexual interaction," "I felt as though asking my partner if they were interested in sexual activity would produce negative outcomes for the sexual interaction," and "I felt as though telling my partner I was interested in sexual activity would produce beneficial outcomes for the sexual interaction." Participants responded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Three of the items were reverse-coded (negative, unbeneficial, and harmful) to create a scale that aligned with the prompts of positive, beneficial, and helpful outcomes for the future. In this study, the outcome assessment scale had a Cronbach α of .827, ($M = 23.50$, $SD = 4.93$).

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Efficacy Assessments

Efficacy assessments are comprised of communication efficacy (one's assessments of their ability to convey information to their partner) and target efficacy (the perceived ability and honesty of the source of information to convey meaning). Target ability and target honesty are subcategories of target efficacy, and target efficacy is a subcategory of efficacy assessments in addition to communication efficacy. The efficacy assessment scale in this study accounts for all of these subcategories.

Communication efficacy. This scale consisted of four items, including, "How comfortable were you talking to your partner about their interest in sexual activity" and "How effective do you think you were in talking to them?" Participants answered these items on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "not at all" to "extremely." The higher the communication efficacy score, the greater participants felt they were able to convey meaning to their partner. This scale achieved a Cronbach α of .929, ($M = 17.13$, $SD = 3.47$) with a possible range of 4-20.

Target efficacy. Three items were used to assess target efficacy, utilizing two items for target ability and one item for target honesty. The items were "How well do you think your partner was able to communicate their interest in sexual activity to you," "How good of a job did your partner do at expressing their feelings towards sexual activity," and "How honest do you feel they were being with you about their willingness to have sex?" Participants answered these items just like they did the communication efficacy items, on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "not at all" to "extremely." For this

scale, the third item was removed in order to improve the Cronbach α from .872 to .900

(*M* = 8.65, *SD* = 1.74).

Efficacy assessments. The efficacy assessment scale was comprised of the items

from the final communication efficacy and target efficacy scales. The efficacy assessment

scale achieved a Cronbach α of .933 (*M* = 25.78, *SD* = 4.88).

Information Management Strategies

The External Consent Scale (ECS) was developed at the same time as the

ICS. Like the ICS, the ECS is a five-factor, 18-item event-level measure to assess the

verbal and behavioral indicators that people used to externally express their willingness

to engage in sexual activity (Jozkowski et al., 2014). The ECS is operationalized on a

scale from 1-4 where 1 = "disagree" and 4 = "agree." Participants were asked to indicate

the extent to which they relate to the actions listed by the items. This scale has previously

achieved a Cronbach α of .84 (Jozkowski et al., 2014). Like the ICS scale, a "neutral"

option is intentionally not presented to participants such that they are unable to ignore

actions that may be uncomfortable acknowledging (Jozkowski et al., 2014; Marcantonio

et al., 2018). The five factors, with some examples of the items in those factors, are

Direct Nonverbal Behaviors (I increased physical contact between myself and my

partner, I removed mine and/or my partner's clothing), Passive Behaviors (I did not resist

my partner's attempts for sexual activity, I did not say no or push my partner away),

Communication/Initiator Behavior (I initiated sexual behavior and checked to see if it

was reciprocated), Borderline Pressure (I took my partner somewhere private, I shut or

closed the door), and No Response Signals (It just happened, I did not say anything). In

this study, the ECS was used for both information seeking and information providing behaviors for the same participant. The goal of utilizing the same scale for both measures is to understand whether behaviors an individual used to indicate consent vary from the signals that are interpreted from their partner.

Information seeking. To measure information seeking behavior, the ECS's wording was modified to be in the context of understanding a sexual partner's communication. For example, "I increased physical contact between myself and my partner" became "They increased physical contact between themselves and me," and "I shut or closed door" became "They shut or closed door." Participants were asked, "During your most recent hookup, which of these methods did your partner use to communicate their desire about sexual activity to you?" Participants were then provided the items in the ECS scale and asked to select all that applied. The items in the Direct Nonverbal Behaviors and Communication/Initiator Behaviors factors were understood as active information seeking. Passive information seeking included the items in Passive Behavior and Borderline Pressure factors. No Response Signal items were understood as avoiding relevant information as an information management strategy. After removing the No Response Signal items to improve internal reliability ("It just happened," "They did not say anything," "They did not do anything"), the information seeking scale achieved a Cronbach α of .895 ($M = 7.42$, $SD = 4.53$). It is interesting in this case that the removing the "No Response Signal" items collectively improved the scale's internal reliability. Given that these items describe behaviors where relevant information is avoided, it seems likely that participants would be reluctant to indicate if their partner did *not* communicate consent. By asking for behaviors that partners utilized, the survey may

have prompted a response bias in order to increase participant's feelings that their most recent hookup was consensual.

Information providing. Participants were asked to reflect on their own communication during their most recent hookup. They were asked "During your most recent hookup, which of these methods did you use to communicate your desire about sexual activity to your partner?" Participants were then provided the items of the ECS scale in their original wording, and instructed to select all that apply. Like the information receiving scale, internal reliability for the information providing scale improved with the removal of the "No Response Signal" items. After removing these items, the information providing scale achieved a Cronbach α of .896 ($M = 6.90$, $SD = 4.47$).

Data Analysis

The purpose of this study is to test the applicability of the Theory of Motivated Management model (Afifi & Weiner, 2004) to college student's sexual interaction, and through doing so, gain insight about consent behaviors in the context of information management strategies. To begin, bivariate correlations were calculated for the variables in this study to determine if there were existing relationships present in this sample that reflected relationships in the TMIM model. Additionally, this provided initial insight into the relationships between consent factors and the original variables in the TMIM model (See Table 3.3). As Table 3.3 demonstrates, there are significant relationships at the .01 level between almost every variable included in this study. The only two exceptions to this are between information seeking and hookup partner (0.91), whose relationship was insignificant, and between information seeking and information providing (.103*), whose

relationship was significant at the .05 level. These initial correlations are promising for the applicability of the TMIM model, as well as the relevance of the consent factors identified to this process.

Table 3.3

Table of Correlations for Main Variables

Variable	n	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Hookup Partner	462	5.53	1.862	--										
2. Previous Hookup	447	1.70	.458	.414**	--									
3. Hookup Duration	453	3.28	2.297	.410**	.689**	--								
4. Hookup Frequency	408	3.38	1.633	.380**	.462**	.295**	--							
5. Uncertainty	435	.3379	1.500	-.276**	-.195**	-.142**	-.132**	--						
6. Emotions	374	70.04	8.138	.280**	.201**	.229**	.226**	-.198**	--					
7. Efficacy Assessments	420	25.78	4.884	.300**	.376**	.407**	.311**	-.215**	.636**	--				
8. Communication Efficacy	422	17.13	3.471	.289**	.358**	.396**	.302**	-.195**	.604**	.969**	--			
9. Target Efficacy	442	8.65	1.741	.244**	.359**	.333**	.269**	-.219**	.558**	.870**	.722**	--		
10. Information Seeking	495	7.42	4.528	.091	.438**	.393**	.304**	-.124**	.194**	.275**	.249**	.276**	--	
11. Information Providing	495	6.40	4.469	.103*	.411**	.360**	.288**	-.108**	.260**	.290**	.285**	.226**	.839**	--

* indicates significance at the .05 level, ** indicates significance at the .01 level

To test the applicability of the Theory of Motivated Information Management model to hookups, several linear regressions were run. The relationship between uncertainty discrepancy and emotions (H1) was statistically significant (R^2 = .039, $F(1, 362)$ = 14.74, β = - .198, p < .001). A β value of -.198 indicates that as uncertainty increases, emotions felt as according to the Internal Consent Scale decrease. Given that the ICS scale measures the presence of positive emotions (such as safety, comfort, and readiness), this supports H1 insofar as when uncertainty increases, the existence of positive emotions decreases, or, negative emotions related to the uncertainty discrepancy increase.

Hypothesis 2 examined the presence of positive emotions on ICS on both outcome assessments and efficacy assessments, and states that an increase in positive emotions on the ICS predicts both (a) positive outcome assessments and (b) positive efficacy assessments. Both linear regressions were significant, supporting H2, and indicating that an increase in positive ICS emotions predicts (a) increased outcome assessments (R^2 = .077, $F(1, 248)$ = 20.78, β = .036, p < .001) and (b) increased efficacy assessments (R^2 = .402, $F(1, 359)$ = 243.40, β = .636, p < .001). ICS emotions account for 7.4% of the variance in outcome assessments (R = .278) and 40.2% of the variance in efficacy assessments (R = .636).

To test the relationship between outcome assessment and efficacy assessments (H3), two linear regressions were run. Increased outcome assessments significantly predicted increased target efficacy (R^2 = .144, $F(1, 281)$ = 47.28, β = .380, p < .001) and communication efficacy (R^2 = .145, $F(1, 270)$ = 45.63 β = .380, p < .001). A third linear

regression was run to understand the impact of outcome assessments on efficacy assessments altogether (the scale containing the items from both target efficacy and communication efficacy), which was also significant ($R^2 = .165$, $F(1, 269) = 53.15$ $\beta = .406$, $p < .001$), supported H3's argument that positive outcome assessments predict positive efficacy assessments.

The final path of the original of the TMIM model is the effect that efficacy assessments have on information-seeking behaviors. It was hypothesized that increased communication efficacy and target efficacy are associated with a greater degree of both active and passive information seeking strategies when communicating desire during sexual activity (H4). To test this hypothesis, a liner regression was conducted with the complete information-seeking scale (i.e., the items on the External Consent Scale) as the dependent variable and efficacy assessments as the independent variable. The result was statistically significant, ($R^2 = .075$, $F(1, 418) = 34.07$ $\beta = .275$, $p < .001$), supporting H4 and indicating that efficacy assessments account for 7.5% of the variance in information-management strategies when information seeking during hookups.

Hypotheses 1 thru 4 test paths in the TMIM model in the context of college hookups. Given that every pathway produced significant results, applying TMIM to casual sex appears to accurately capture participant's behavior when seeking information about their partner's desire for sexual activity. The next set of hypothesis tests the external consent factors—gender, relationship history, and sexual behavior—that were indicated to influence the TMIM model in the context of causal sexual activity between college students.

For H5, a linear regression was run with sexual behaviors as the independent variable and uncertainty discrepancy as the dependent variable. The result was significant, $R^2 = .023$, $F(1,433) = 10.258$ $\beta = -.152$, $p = .001$). This result supports the *opposite* of what was hypothesized, and indicates that as the intimacy of sexual behavior increases, the degree of the uncertainty discrepancy decreases. This finding may indicate the existence of the precedence assumption, or indicate student's ability to understand when their partners are consenting.

Hypothesis 6 states that gender influences the degree to which emotions related to uncertainty about a sexual partner's desire (the factors on the Internal Consent Scale) are felt. To test this hypothesis, a liner regression was run with gender as the independent variable and emotions as the dependent variable, yielding a significant result ($R^2 = .012$, $F(1,370) = 4.35$ $\beta = -.108$, $p = 0.38$). Gender is quantified so that 1 = "male," 2 = "female," and 3 = "nonbinary," so a negative β value indicates that as participants move 'away' from maleness, there is a decrease in the presence of positive internal consent emotions. This is not to say that nonbinary people are 'less' male, but rather, by departing from cisgender heterosexuality through trans identity, nonbinary people do not adhere as strictly to socialized gender roles of 'male' and 'female.' As such, the 15 nonbinary participants are coded as '3' to acknowledge the additional considerations trans people must make when engaging in casual sex that may impact the TMIM model. Specifically, outcome assessments may be more negative for trans participants because there is a risk of backlash that comes with disclosure of trans identity during sex if sexual partners are transphobic (Nemoto et al., 2011). The fear of potential negative outcomes associated to disclosure of trans identity also may preemptively increase uncertainty for trans

participants and lead to decreased experience of emotions on the ICS scale, such as "safety" or "comfort."

In the original TMIM model, emotions are dependent on the uncertainty discrepancy, so another linear regression was run whereby uncertainty and gender were the independent variables with internal consent as the dependent variable. This regression was a better fit to explain variance in emotions, producing a significant result ($R^2 = .043$, $F(2,359) = 9.184$, $p < .001$). A regression equation of ICS Emotions = 72.94 - .097(Gender) - .188 (Uncertainty Discrepancy) indicates that the uncertainty discrepancy is a stronger predictor of emotions ($\beta = -.188$) than gender ($\beta = -.087$), although both regressions testing gender's impact on emotions were significant.

To test H7, two linear regressions were conducted. H7 states that (a) information-seekers who had their most recent sexual experience with a long-term romantic partner and/or frequent hookup partner will have higher efficacy assessments than those whose most recent sexual experience was with a stranger and/or (b) was engaging in casual sex with them for the first time. For the first linear regression, efficacy assessments was dependent variable and relationship history (hookup partner, prior hookup, hookup duration, and hookup frequency) was the independent variable, yielding a significant result ($R^2 = .224$, $F(4,372) = 28.209$, $p < .001$). The β values for each relationship history variable are $\beta = .110$ (hookup partner), $\beta = .117$ (prior hookup), $\beta = .258$ (hookup duration), $\beta = .141$ (hookup frequency). Prior hookup is coded whereby 1 = "no" and 2 = "yes," so a β value of .117 indicates that if people have engaged in sexual activity with their partner before, efficacy assessments increase. Of the relationship history variables, hookup duration—how long someone has been engaging in sexual activity with their

most recent partner—was the strongest indicator of positive efficacy assessments. A positive β value for every relationship history variable supports H7 whereby as intimacy, length of sexual activity, and relational closeness increase with a sexual partner, so do efficacy assessments.

In order to understand relationship history in the context of the full TMIM model, a third liner regression was run that included all of the variables hypothesized to predict efficacy assessments as the independent variables—hookup partner, previous hookup, hookup duration, hookup frequency, emotions, and outcome assessments. This regression was significant and accounted for 52% of the variance in efficacy assessments ($R^2 = .522$, $F(6,209 = 40.065, p < .001)$. The β-values for this regression were .043(Hookup Partner), .155(Prior Hookup), .147(Hookup Duration), .065(Hookup Frequency, .490(Emotions), and .154(Outcome Assessments). This regression improved the prediction for efficacy assessments, indicating that emotions ($\beta = .490$) were the strongest predictor of efficacy assessments.

The final hypothesis (H8) argues that all three external consent variables impact the information management strategy used by the information seeker when determining their partner's sexual desire. First, a linear regression was run with all of the consent factors as the dependent variables. The consent factors include relationship history (hookup partner, prior hookup, hookup duration, and hookup frequency), gender, and sexual behavior. For this regression, the independent variable was the External Consent Scale to see how consent factors predicted information seeking as a whole. The result was significant, ($R^2 = .403$, $F(6,392) = 45.766, p < .001$), and indicates that the consent

factors identified account for 40% of the variance ($R = .642$) in information-seeking strategies, supporting H8.

To see if the consent factors were a better predictor of active or passive information seeking strategies, two linear regressions were run with the same dependent variables. The independent variable in the second linear regression was active information seeking, which includes the Direct Nonverbal and Communicator/Initiator behaviors on the ECS scale. The result was also significant, ($R^2 = .283$, $F(6,392) = 27.171$, $p < .001$). For the third linear regression, the independent variable was passive information seeking, which includes the Passive Behavior and Borderline Pressure items in the ECS scale. This result was also significant, yielding a result of ($R^2 = .417$, $F(6,392) = 48.526$, $p < .001$). Comparatively, the consent factors better predicted variance in passive information seeking (about 42%, $R = .653$) than in active information seeking (about 28%, $R = .542$). In every regression, sexual behavior was the strongest predictor of the independent variable. Below, Table 3.4 provides the β values for the three regressions ran to test H8 for easier comparison.

Table 3.4

β Values for H8 Regressions

Independent Variable	ECS Scale (all information seeking)	Active Information Seeking	Passive Information Seeking
Hookup Partner	-.006	.013	-.023
Prior Hookup	.030	.039	.017
Hookup Duration	.009	-.009	.027
Hookup Frequency	.146	.129	.142
Gender	.030	.040	.015
Sexual Behavior	.566	.469	.583

Interestingly, increasing commitment in hookup partner *increases* active information seeking (β = .013) but *decreases* passive information seeking (β = -.023), which indicates that partners who are in committed romantic relationships or are regular hookup partner are more likely to directly communicated sexual desire than strangers who are hooking up. Additionally, the amount of time partners have been engaging in sexual activity *decreases* the use of active information seeking behaviors (β = -.009), but *increases* the use of passive information seeking (β = .027). However, across every regression, the frequency of which partners engage in sexual activity is the strongest predictor among the relationship history variables. To synthesize the results of the hypothesis, Figure 3.1 provides the hypothesized model with R values, R^2 values, and significance levels (** indicating significance at the p < .001 level). Note, Figure 3.1 is not showing the path regression weights of the model as a whole, as such results would require structural equation modeling, which was beyond the scope of this project and the hypotheses asked.
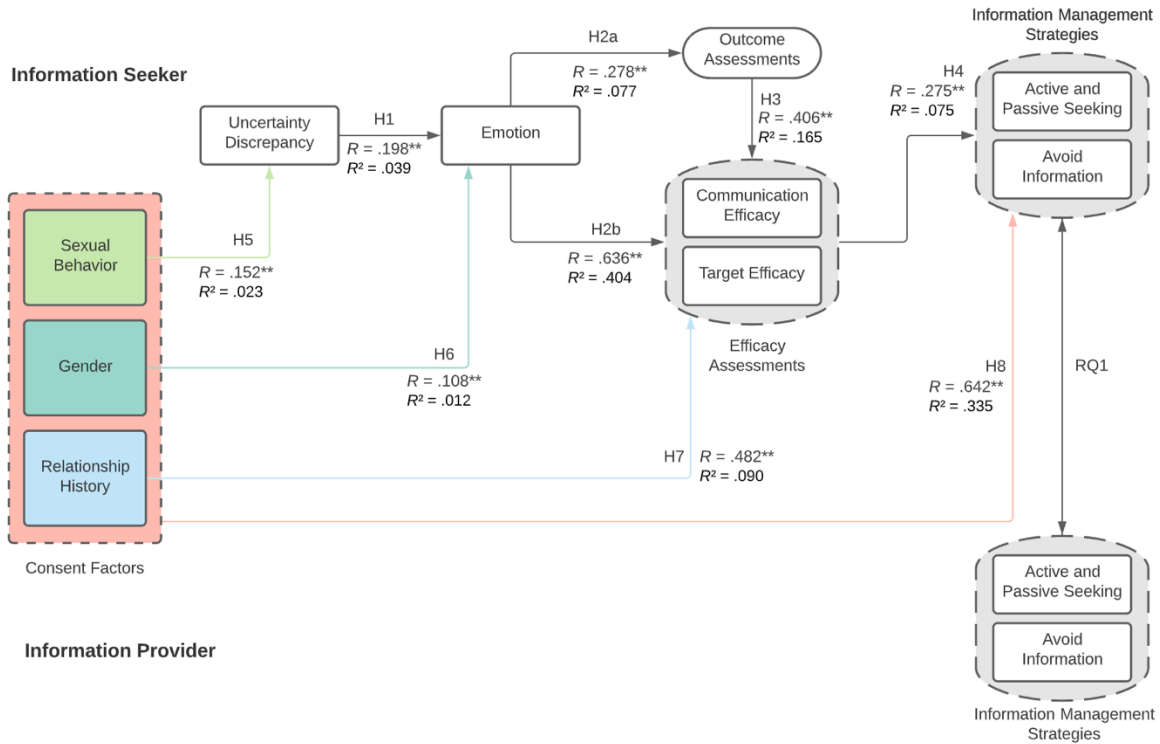
Figure 3.1. Summary of results of hypothesis.

Finally, RQ1 asked if the frequencies of External Consent behaviors change when people are in the position of the information-provider or when they are the information seeker. Below, Figure 3.2 provides a frequency chart of the External Consent Behaviors for information-seekers (They did x...) and information providers (I did x...) with the pronoun modifiers removed for clarity. "Difference" indicates the number of information-providers who selected a behavior, subtracted from the number of information seekers. For example, for "Increase physical contact," 396 participants indicated that their partner increased physical contact, and 337 participants indicated that they increased physical contact to communicate sexual desire. Subtracting 337 from 396 yields a difference of 59. Thinner bars indicate that the behavior was used more

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frequently by information providers than information seekers (which is also indicated by differences that are negative). For example, 209 information seekers and 273 information providers selected "did not resist attempts for sexual activity," which yields a difference of -64.

The three behaviors with the biggest difference in frequencies were "Shut or closed door" (98), "Go somewhere private" (72), and "Initiated sexual behavior and checked for reciprocation" (64). It is likely that this difference reflects gendered sexual scripts that would be reflected in the demographics of this study. If (1) the majority of participants are women, and (2) the population can be inferred to largely reflect heterosexual relationships, information-seeking behavior of "Shut or closed door" reflects a woman interpreting her male partner as shutting the door or taking her somewhere private. However, Figure 3.2 also indicates that there were four behaviors that were more frequently used by information-providers than information-seekers in this study, which were "Did not say no or push away" (difference of -43), "Did not resist attempts for sexual activity" (difference of -64), "Let sexual activity progress to the point of intercourse" (difference of -17), and "Did not say anything" (difference of -6). If we continue the assumptions from above, women, when communicating sexual desire to their partner, are more likely to participate passively, and perhaps non-consensually, when they do not say no.
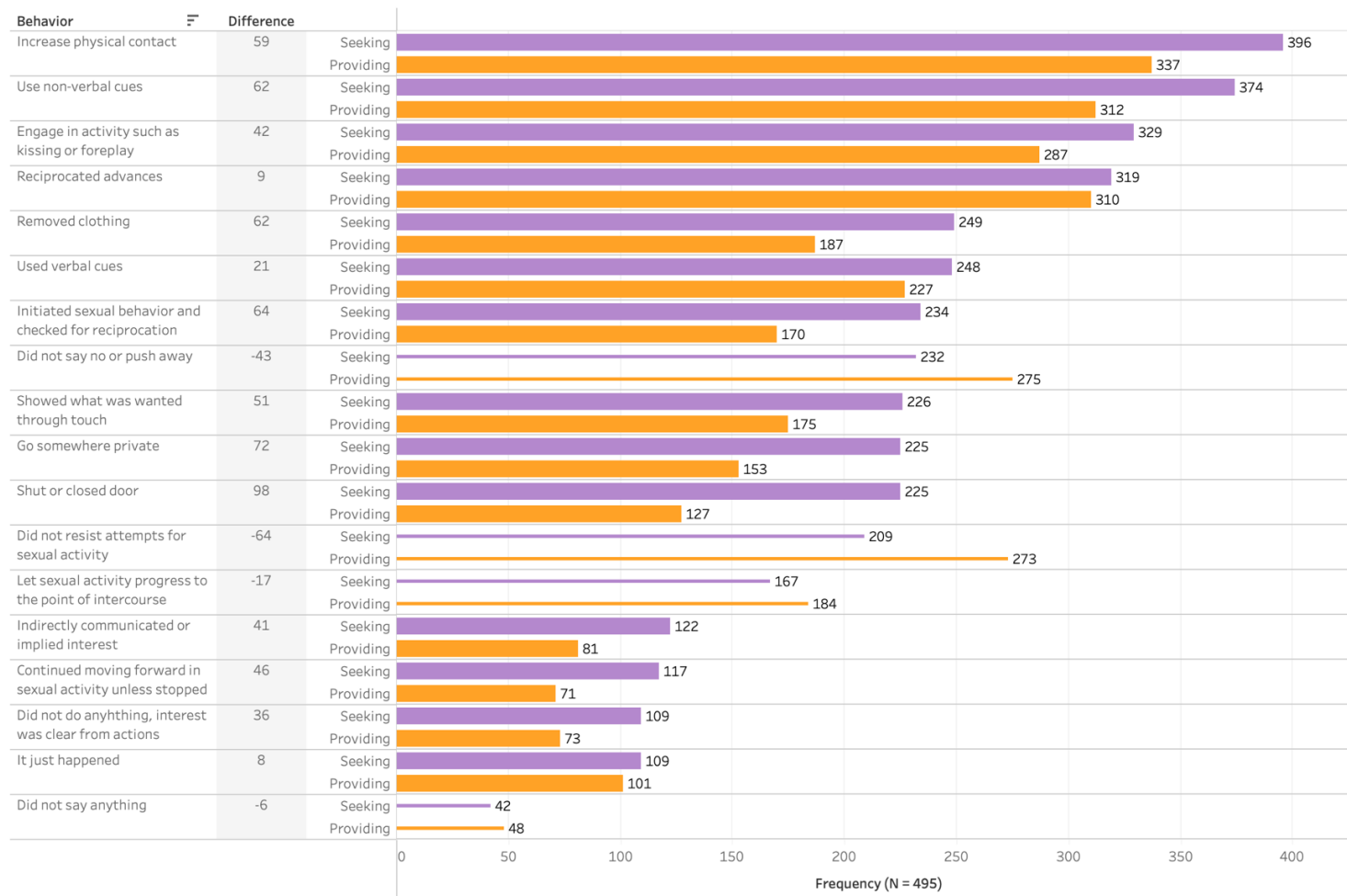
Behavior	Difference		
Increase physical contact	59	Seeking	396
		Providing	337
Use non-verbal cues	62	Seeking	374
		Providing	312
Engage in activity such as kissing or foreplay	42	Seeking	329
		Providing	287
Reciprocated advances	9	Seeking	319
		Providing	310
Removed clothing	62	Seeking	249
		Providing	187
Used verbal cues	21	Seeking	248
		Providing	227
Initiated sexual behavior and checked for reciprocation	64	Seeking	234
		Providing	170
Did not say no or push away	-43	Seeking	232
		Providing	275
Showed what was wanted through touch	51	Seeking	226
		Providing	175
Go somewhere private	72	Seeking	225
		Providing	153
Shut or closed door	98	Seeking	225
		Providing	127
Did not resist attempts for sexual activity	-64	Seeking	209
		Providing	273
Let sexual activity progress to the point of intercourse	-17	Seeking	167
		Providing	184
Indirectly communicated or implied interest	41	Seeking	122
		Providing	81
Continued moving forward in sexual activity unless stopped	46	Seeking	117
		Providing	71
Did not do anyhthing, interest was clear from actions	36	Seeking	109
		Providing	73
It just happened	8	Seeking	109
		Providing	101
Did not say anything	-6	Seeking	42
		Providing	48

Frequency (N = 495)

Figure 3.2. Frequency of information-seeking and information-providing behaviors.

CHAPTER FOUR

Discussion

Summary of Findings

The goal of this study was to understand how college students understand their partner's sexual desire during hookups. Drawing from the Theory of Motivated Information Management (Afifi & Morse, 2009; Afifi & Weiner, 2004), which explains how individuals remedy uncertainty discrepancies through information acquisition. This study (1) expanded the validity of TMIM's model to conversations during sexual encounters, and (2) provided insight into factors that contribute to consent between college hookup partners, as well as the specific behaviors that individuals prefer to give and receive consent. In terms of the expanded applicability of the TMIM model, results showed that uncertainty related to a partner's sexual desire, combined with emotions felt as a result of uncertainty and perceived communicative ability, does predict the extent to which someone seeks information about their partner's interest in sexual activity. Additionally, this study provides insight into consent factors between college hookup partners, specifically—gender, relationship history, and sexual behavior —significantly predict information management strategies about sexual desire. As such, this study supports the integration of social science research on sexuality and close relationships with theoretical models in communication studies. This is done through the novel approach of utilizing the ECS and ICS scales created for use in public health research (Jozkowski et al., 2014) and applied to the constructs within the Theory of Motivated

Information Management (Afifi & Weiner, 2004). Taken together, these results study add to our current understanding of external factors that affect emotions, efficacy assessments, and information management during casual sex.

Theoretical Implications

The results support and extend Afifi and Weiner's (2004) TMIM, which then informs both communication scholars and sexual health educators. Previous literature using the Theory of Motivated Information Management has understood participants in the context of either the information seeker (Chang, 2014; Fowler & Afifi, 2011; Jang & Tian, 2012; Jeon, 2014; Kuang & Gettings, 2020b; Lancaster et al., 2016) or the information provider (McManus, 2020). This study adds theoretical depth to TMIM by arguing that during interpersonal interactions, individuals are not always in static positions whereby they exist as either the information provider or the information seeker.

Dillow and Labelle (2014) have previously problematized the static relationship of information seeker and provider in the context of STI testing behaviors. For example, one person who asks a partner about STI testing as the information seeker can be subject to a "reciprocal information search" where that same person becomes the information provider (Dillow & Labelle, 2014, p. 680). Dillow and Labelle (2014) found that the TMIM model was applicable to the roles of both information seeker and information provider, but did not articulate the differences in behaviors of individuals when they occupy either role. I argue that the idea of a reciprocal information search is also present during consensual behaviors throughout hookups where individuals are in flux, constantly moving between the position of the information provider and seeker. It would be naïve to theorize sexual consent whereby one sole person is the arbiter of consent.

Rather, consensual sex requires that both participants are able to express, understand, and respect the desire of the other. As such, this study captured hookup experiences where participants were both the information seeker and provider during the encounter.

Thus far, little research using TMIM has examined gender as a variable within the information management model. However, Gibbs (2011) used gender as a control in the TMIM model, and found that gender significantly predicted self-disclosure in online dating, whereby women were less likely to self-disclose than men. Additionally, Fowler and Afifi (2011) proposed that in the context of children discussing caregiving with aging parents, that future research should consider the gender of the parent to see if the role as father or mother would influence information-seeking from children.

The present study demonstrates the impact of possible gendered power dynamics during sexual interactions. Results point to gendered scripts (Garcia et al., 2012; Pham, 2016; Simon & Gagnon, 1986) where expectations of who is 'supposed' to be information seeker or provider inform interactions. For example, men are scripted as the initiators of sexual activity (Garcia et al., 2012), and as such, would be expected to be the information seeker during hookups. Similarly, the data revealed that women are *less* likely to experience positive emotions due to sexual uncertainty, and men may be *more* likely to interpret a lack of response, or absence of a "no," from women as consent. Bearing in mind the high victimization rates of undergraduate women during sex (Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network, 2021a), these results point to a disconnect between who is presumed to be in the role of information seeking during hookups (men), and their ability to obtain that information from their partners. In other words, who is 'seen' or believed to be the arbiter of information and who has the ability to ask for the information

they need, may be the result of gendered power dynamics. Understanding how power dynamics influence the way information is exchanged is a valuable addition to the TMIM model.

Previous research has also proposed the necessity for an addition to the TMIM model that acknowledges how someone's perceived vulnerability in a situation impacts their ability to seek and receive information. For example, study by Chang (2014) using the TMIM proposed the integration of 'face threats' to the TMIM model to recognize the someone's perceived potential backlash in the case of STI testing and unwanted pregnancies. I argue that in this study, face threats pose a more serious risk to trans individuals than cis members during hookups. The data supported this argument, as a departure from cisness, specifically cis maleness, decreased the presence of positive emotions as related to uncertainty. Historically, the trans panic defense has been used as a legal tactic to excuse assault against trans and gender non-conforming individuals, rooted in homophobia and transphobia (Holden, 2019; The LGBTQ+ Bar, 2021). Compared to cisgender individuals, trans individuals are over four times more likely to experience "violent victimization, including rape, sexual assault, and aggravated or simple assault" (UCLA School of Law, 2021, para.1). This is one example of the way power implicates interpersonal experiences that, I argue, cannot be adequately captured by efficacy assessments alone in the current TMIM model.

Factors Influencing Consent During Sexual Interactions

This study isolated three factors — gender, relationship history, and sexual behavior — that would influence consent during sexual interactions. These variables were chosen in accordance with previous literature, which argues that gendered sexual

double standards (Jozkowski et al., 2017; Marcantonio et al., 2018; Weitbrecht & Whitton, 2020), the relationship between two partners (Beres, 2014; Jozkowski & Peterson, 2014; Jozkowski & Wiersma, 2015; Marcantonio et al., 2018; Willis & Jozkowski, 2019, 2019), and the sexual behaviors in question (Garcia et al., 2012; Marcantonio et al., 2018) all influence individual's feelings towards consent, utilization of consent behaviors, and perceived necessity of consent.

Gender. The sexual double standard encourages men's sexual activity while simultaneously punishing women if they are seen as 'too sexual' (Jozkowski et al., 2017). Gendered expectations of behavior determine interpersonal interactions through the creation of social norms that individuals feel compelled to adhere to. Given the sexual double standard, previous research has found that women experience emotions related to sexual activity more intensely than men (Jozkowski & Peterson, 2014). This study understood gender's influence on consent in accordance with the Internal Consent Scale (ICS) and it was found that women are less likely to experience emotions on the ICS during sexual experiences.

Because the ICS measures *positive* feelings towards internal consent, such as safety, comfort, control, and consent, results indicate that women, on average, feel *less* safe, comfortable, and in control, for example, than men during sexual experiences. Results from this study indicate that both the uncertainty discrepancy and gender of participants significantly predict internal consent emotions in the model. As such, this finding supports several claims offered within this study. First, the findings support arguments made in previous literature about the sexual double standard impacting the way men and women feel during sexual encounters. For example, Marcantonio and

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colleagues (2018) found that a serious dating partner *increases* positive internal consent emotions for women during sex. This is likely the case due to the sexual double-standard of being stigmatized for promiscuity when having sex with a stranger versus a committed partner. In addition to the sexual double standard, an individual's potential previous experience with unwanted sex would likely decrease feelings of safety, comfort, and control during hookups, furthering support as to why women would be less likely than men to have positive feelings of internal consent. Second, this finding validates the approach to this study of utilizing measures not previously used in communication literature (i.e., the Internal Consent Scale). Subsequently, hookups can be understood as not just casual sex between individuals, but also as a communicative event. Third, this finding supports the earlier argument made surrounding the addition of power dynamics to the TMIM model. While gender may not have been the *strongest* predictor of variables in the study, it significantly predicted emotions. Though this study did not capture power dynamics in the survey, a more careful consideration of gender during survey design can serve as a springboard (alongside other variables) to quantify power dynamics in the proposed model.

Relationship history. In this study, relationship history was comprised of data that asked what the social relationship an individual had with their most recent hookup partner, if they had hooked up before, and if so, how frequently, and for how long. These relationship variables were added to the TMIM model in accordance with previous literature on relationship history and consent. For example, sexual precedence theory, also known as the precedence assumption, understands that consent follows a parabolic

line such that as relationship history increases, communication about consent decreases until an inflection point at which communication then increases again (Beres, 2014; Willis & Jozkowski, 2019). Beres (2014) explains the decrease in communication as a result of increased reliance in tacit knowledge, which is when individuals no longer feel the need to ask for explicit consent, but are able to 'know' when their partners are interested in sexual activity.

In this study, the greatest predictor of information seeking behavior was the frequency at which partners hook up. Increased frequency in sexual activity predicted an increase in both active and passive information seeking. This finding indicates that individuals who hooked up with their partners more frequently understood a greater number of behaviors from their partners as indicators that they were interested in sexual activity than those who hooked up with partners less often. In other words, when the frequency of sexual activity increased, so did the number of behaviors interpreted as indicating sexual desire. Interestingly, if partners had hooked up before (even once) was a *greater* predictor of information-seeking than the relationship between hookup partners. For instance, if partners had hooked up before, there was a greater number of behaviors interpolated as consent. This finding does not necessarily disagree with the precedence assumption, which states that previous sexual activity is often interpreted as consent to engage in sexual activity in the future. Importantly, the precedence assumption's argument is in the context or verbal, explicit sexual communication. However, consent can be indicated both verbally and nonverbally, and verbal consent is only one item on the External Consent Scale used to capture information seeking. As such, this result indicates that after hooking up with someone, individuals may be better equipped to

understand their partner's indications of consent. Here, however, it is dangerous to conflate consent with interest in sexual activity. For example, if someone (let's call her Sarah) was brought to a private bedroom and the door was shut, she may be able to interpret from contextual clues that the person she is with (let's call him Harry) may be interested in sex. While Sarah is interested in hooking up, Harry may also just want some alone time with the Sarah—bringing her to his room means nothing more than a desire to hang out in private. As Sarah and Harry's their interaction develops, Sarah would ideally be able to identify a *multitude* of contextual variables on the ECS scale as opposed to just one behavior from Harry (such as "shut or closed door"). For example, if Harry begins to use verbal or physical cues such as moving closer or talking about getting a condom, Sarah may then begin to feel more confident that she is interpreting the situation as Harry's interest in sexual activity. As such, Sarah may feel more comfortable in expressing her interest in sex to Harry. As their interaction develops, both Sarah and Harry move between the position of the information provider and the information seeker, and after identifying one another's desire for sexual activity, can both then express consent to one another more clearly. If this sounds imperfect, that's because it is. Consent is messy and difficult to create universal practices for, yet, is crucial to obtain before engaging in sexual activity. Below, I will explain this argument more in context of practical implications for college students.

The relationship status of partners predicted information seeking in interesting ways. Depth of social relationship (committed partners) predicted an increase in active information seeking—a direct manipulation of one's environment to acquire knowledge to resolve the uncertainty discrepancy—a decrease in passive information seeking, and a

net decrease in overall information seeking. This finding more clearly supports the precedence assumption, where committed romantic partners appear to rely more on tacit knowledge to understand their partner's desire. This is not to say that tacit knowledge *should* become a substitution for consent, however. Arguments about tacit knowledge were appropriated to foster rape myths, such as the idea that relationship rape does not exist (Burt, 1980). In reality, individuals are more likely be sexually violated by an acquaintance or current romantic partner (Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network, 2021b). Tacit knowledge should not be utilized as an excuse for individuals to ignore consent with their partners, especially expressions of non-consent.

Sexual behavior. The sexual behaviors individuals were engaging in was the strongest external consent factor that predicted information seeking behaviors. This finding supports arguments made about the existence of a sexual hierarchy (Garcia et al., 2012; Marcantonio et al., 2018), whereas behaviors in intimacy increase, so does the need to obtain to consent. The significance of sexual behavior as a predictor makes sense especially given the sample of this study, as many participants who were more religious indicated that they were not engaging in sexual activity with their partners at all before marriage. This finding helps us to think of consent as a compounding experience, not as a singular yes/no event.

Practical Implications

Current sexual education for college students largely focuses on teaching affirmative consent to individuals by alluding to sexual activity, sometimes in patronizing ways. For example, a popular 'tea video' (Thames Valley Police, 2015) metaphorizes

consent as making someone a cup of tea—you would not put sugar in someone's tea if they told you they did not like sugar in their tea. There are a few problems with this approach to teaching sexual communication. First, metaphorizing consent nebulizes the concept to the point it is barely applicable to encounters students will find themselves in. Making a cup of tea is not the same as penetrative intercourse, and should not be treated as such. Second, as the tea video was directed by a police department, their teaching of sexual communication as a simple yes/no is a way to teach abusers the bare minimum they need to do to protect themselves from legal redress if they do harm onto others. Additionally, this approach tells survivors that formal complaints are the primary method by which to resolve interpersonal harm—a process which often does more harm than good, gaslights survivors, and re-victimizes them without repercussions for the abuser (Barnett, 2008; Brown, 2011; Burnett et al., 2009; Gash & Harding, 2018; Morales, 2021; Nash, 2009; Robert, 2021; Torrey, 1990). Though proposing changes to Title IX policy is outside the focus of this study, what this research highlights is the need better equip students to communicate interpersonally with one another during hookups.

However, how are we to textualize consent if people do not exist equitably in their ability to express their own desire? Recent scholarship on sexual agency argues that women, specifically women of color, are not provided neither the language nor support they need to feel confident in adequately expressing their sexual desire (Angel, 2021). Even if they do feel confident, however, women may feel pressured to either downplay their own desire, or pretend that it exists out of fear of backlash (Alptraum, 2018). Here, sexual consent education can be improved by focusing on training students how to communicate with one another. Violence prevention education should focus on how

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individuals can express that they are *not* interested in sexual activity, and how individuals can support their partners when they express their disinterest. For example, a workshop may include a module where one person practices phrases such as "that doesn't feel good," "I'm not interested right now," or "I'm not comfortable with that," and another person responds with messages such as "how can I make you feel more secure," "would you like to stop," or "what would you like to do instead." The miscommunication hypothesis, which argues that sexual violence is a result of miscommunication between partners, has already been disproven (Beres, 2010, 2014; Beres et al., 2019). Students are *more than capable* of understanding when their partners are not interested in sexual activity, and we should treat them as such.

Future Directions

Further research on sexual communication should utilize dyads to compare responses about information seeking and information providing. A direct comparison between partner's responses would allow for a clearer representation of where disconnects arise between someone's communication about consent, and their partner's interpretation. This research would also better inform sexual communication education by providing students tools to notice when they may be interpretating cues that do not exist. By reshaping the miscommunication hypothesis into the communication hypothesis, research can operate under the understanding that communicating with partners is a skill that is improved with practice like anything else.

As this sample primarily represented white heterosexual hookups, it is paramount that further research about sexual communication intentionally seeks to recruit sexual, gender, and racial minorities in research. If scripts of behavior are socially defined,

communication during queer or non-white hookups may be radically different than how affirmative consent outlines sexual interactions should occur, yet still be completely consensual. As such, intentional research is needed to develop sexual education curriculum of populations currently are not represented in this study.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, it is important for future research utilizing TMIM to investigate the role of power in information management strategies. How might a consideration of power dynamics enrich research about patient-provider interactions, advisor-advisee relationships, or parent-child conversations? By thinking about the different dynamics at play during uncertain, high-stakes interactions, research can apply similar takeaways from this study to other relationships and interactions. For example, the model below (Figure 4.1) offers a representation of an extended TMIM accounting for relational power dynamics.
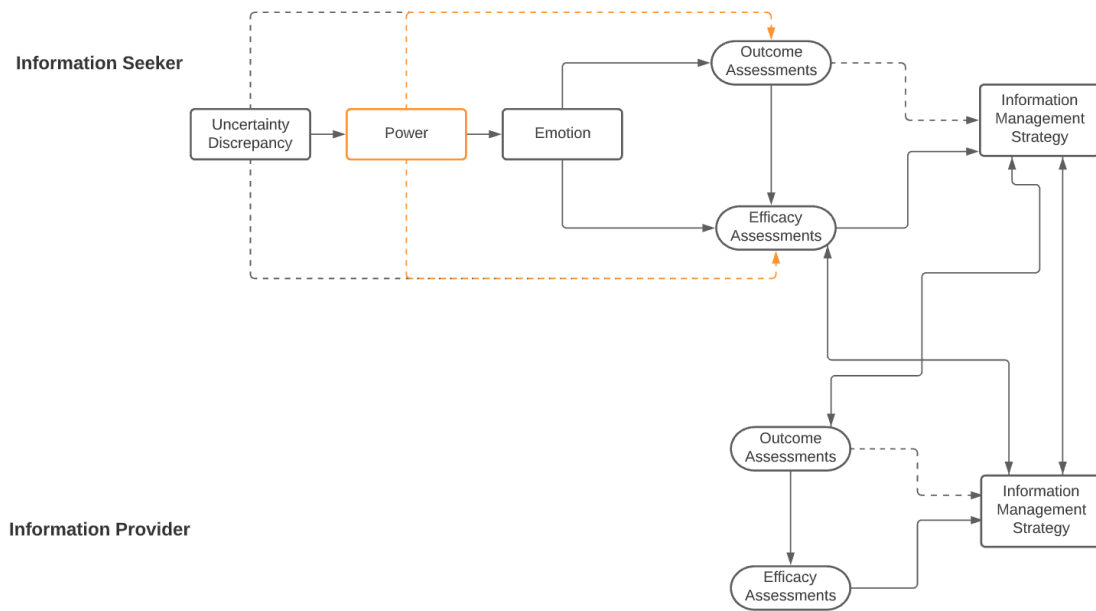
Figure 4.1. Perceived power dynamics in the Theory of Motivated Information Management.

In this model, power is added as a predictor in between uncertainty discrepancy and emotions. Placing 'power' in just one section of the model is difficult because systemic inequalities obviously implicate the entire information management process, such as what information is available to whom, and how. However, if we understand 'power' here more specifically as the power dynamics that exist between the information provider and the information seeker, then it makes sense that these dynamics would be at play *after* the information seeker notices a gap *in their own* knowledge (the uncertainty discrepancy). After noting a gap in one's own knowledge, power dynamics may impact emotions more directly because of possible anxiety or fear about what information is necessary. Consequently, power dynamics could influence outcome assessments because of possible perceived risk of information seeking. Likewise, power might influence efficacy

assessments if an information seeker presumes the information provider is going to be dishonest about a subject or unable to provide accurate information.

For example, a child may realize early in life that they are queer, but they are not sure how their parents will react. That child would be uncertain of parent's acceptance, and subsequently undergo a process of information management to try and resolve that uncertainty. In this example, parents hold power over their children financially, emotionally, provide basic needs, and access to the world. In the case that parents react poorly, that child is at risk of losing their safety net. As such, emotions such as anxiety, would be greatly increased as a result of the parent-child power dynamic. Because of the perceived risk of queer disclosure, such as being kicked out of the house, outcome assessments would be more negative for a child disclosing to a parent than a child disclosing to a peer, where the risk may be loss of a friend or bullying. Negative efficacy assessments would also be greater because perceived target ability and target honesty would decrease in the case that a child anticipates backlash from their parents. As such, power dynamics that exist between a parent and child may fundamentally alter the information management process as compared to that disclosure to a peer.

The aforementioned example illuminates how power implicates outcome assessments and efficacy assessments alongside the uncertainty discrepancy, such as how honest someone thinks a source of information may be. Regardless, even if the placement of power in the TMIM model is imperfect, the importance of power dynamics when managing information between two people is a valuable research inquiry. For example, how do individuals protect others who are not in power from backlash when they are information seeking? More importantly, how are we to ensure that disenfranchised

individuals receive accurate information despite unequal power dynamics? In the case of the example above, this protection may look like teachers, peers, or counselors preemptively providing children with access to queer support networks and ensuring that they have the financial and emotional support before disclosing to parents. It may also include comprehensive gender and sexuality education to children, as well as giving queer children time to rehearse practice disclosing so that they can improve their own efficacy assessments. Practically, power dynamics can be applied not just to parent-child relationships, but to any other instances such as mentor-mentee, doctor-provider, and employer-employee relationships.

Limitations

This study provided insight into how students seek information during sexual interactions. However, a limitation of this study is that it was only able to capture when students seek information, not when they avoid information during hookups. Items such as "I did not say anything" from the nonresponse factor of the ECS scale were removed to improve internal reliability, so further research is needed about why students may *avoid* to seek information during casual sex.

Additionally, the sample within this study limits the generalizability to college hookup culture writ large. Data reflects a population that is white, straight, and on average, identifies as 'very,' or 'extremely' religious. As such, interpretations of results should consider that about half of participants were in committed romantic relationships, and many have not had penetrative sex before. A more diverse sample would allow for greater explanatory power from the data.

Finally, this study did not specifically ask individuals about nonconsensual encounters they may have had, nor how they expressed unwillingness for sex to their partners. Only asking participants how they recognized their partner was *interested*, not if they were *disinterested* in sex allows the data to paint a positive picture of hookups where individuals are searching for that information. Research should be conducted asking students to indicate behaviors that indicate partners disinterest in order to capture a fuller picture of communication during hookups.

Conclusion

Hooking up is a fundamentally communicative event. Understanding a partner's interest in sexual desire is a complicated process that requires an individual to interpret contextual variables, understand their partner's behaviors, and communicate their own desire. During hookups, individuals are in flux—shifting between the position of the information provider and the information seeker in an attempt to better understand how to move forward sexually with their partners. As such, sexual partners are constantly managing information, a process by which, in the case of this study, is explained both by the Theory of Motivated Information Management and external consent factors. Student's behaviors to reduce uncertainty are a function of TMIM constructs (uncertainty, emotions, and communication assessments), as well as external factors such as gender, relationship status, and the sexual behaviors they are engaging in. This study supports the idea of casual sexual encounters as communicative events rather than just a physical encounter between two people. Furthermore, this study tests and extends the use of TMIM in attempts to better understand sexual encounters among college students. The findings from this study hopes to spur improved sexual assault prevention education for

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college students by empowering individuals in their ability to communicate with one another.

APPENDIX

Survey

Relationship History

Items were created by author.

During your most recent hookup, who was your hookup partner? (Select the answer that best describes your relationship with them.)
- Committed romantic partner
- Regular booty call/hookup partner/friends with benefits
- Previous romantic partner
- Close friend
- Casual acquaintance
- Someone you recognize but didn't really know
- Stranger

Have you ever engaged in sexual activity with that partner before?
- Yes
- No

How long have you been engaging in sexual activity with that person? Choose the answer with the longest length of time applicable with whom you had your most recent hookup?
- Less than one week
- About one month
- 1-3 months
- 3- 6 months
- Less than 1 year
- 1+ year
- 5+ years
- Not applicable

How often do you engage in sexual activity with your most recent hookup partner?
- About every day
- 2-3 times a week
- Once a week
- 2-3 times a month
- Once a month
- A few times a year

Sexual Behavior

Items were taken from the National Study of Sexual Health and Behavior (Herbenick et al., 2019; Marcantonio et al., 2018).

During your most recent hookup, which of the following behaviors occurred? Check all that apply.
- o Kissing
- o Touched my partner's genitals
- o Partner touched my genitals
- o Performed oral sex
- o Received oral sex
- o Vaginal penetrative intercourse
- o Anal penetrative intercourse

Uncertainty Discrepancy

Items were created by author, based on previous research studying the Theory of Motivated Information Management (Dillow & Labelle, 2014; McManus, 2020).

Answer the questions in the context of your most recent hookup. Indicate your response on the scale from 1-5, where 1 = not at all and 5 = extremely.

1 = not at all, 2 = slightly, 3 = sufficiently, 4 = very, 5 = extremely

	Score from 1-5
1. How comfortable were you before hooking up with your partner?	
2. How comfortable would you have liked to be before hooking up with your partner?	
3. How sure were you that your partner was willing to engage in sexual activity?	
4. How sure did you want to be that your partner was willing to engage in sexual activity?	
5. How confident were you that your partner was interested in hooking up?	
6. How confident do you like to be about your partner's interest in hooking up?	

Outcome Assessments
Items were based off of Dillow and Labelle's (2014) study.
Read the following statements about your most recent hookup and indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with them. 1 = Strongly disagree and 5 = Strongly agree.

1 = strongly disagree, 2 = somewhat disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = somewhat agree, 5 = strongly agree

	Score from 1-5
1. I felt as though asking my partner if they were interested in sexual activity would produce positive outcomes for the sexual interaction.	
2. I felt as though asking my partner if they were interested in sexual activity would produce negative outcomes for the sexual interaction.	
3. I felt as though telling my partner I was interested in sexual activity would produce beneficial outcomes for the sexual interaction.	
4. I felt as though telling my partner I was interested in sexual activity would produce unbeneficial outcomes for the sexual interaction.	
5. I felt as though communicating with my partner about their sexual interest would produce helpful outcomes for the future.	
6. I felt as though communicating with my partner about their sexual interest would produce harmful outcomes for the future.	

Information Seeking

The following items were reworded from (Jozkowski et al., 2014) External Consent Scale. Follow-up questions are from the author.

During your most recent hookup, which of these methods did your partner use to communicate their desire about sexual activity to you? Select all that apply.

Direct Nonverbal Behaviors	
1. They increased physical contact between themselves and me	
2. They used non-verbal cues such as body language, signals, flirting	
3. They took me somewhere private	
4. They shut or closed the door	
5. They removed their and/or my clothing	

Passive Behaviors	
6. They engaged in some level of sexual activity such as kissing or "foreplay"	
7. They touched me, showed me what they wanted	
8. They initiated sexual behavior and checked to see if it was reciprocated	
9. They used verbal cues such as communicating their interest in sexual behavior or asking if I wanted to have sex with them	

Communication/Initiator Behaviors	
10. They indirectly communicated/implied their interest in sex (i.e. talked about getting a condom or sex toy	
11. They just kept moving forward in sexual behaviors/actions unless I stopped them	
12. They did not resist my attempts for sexual activity	

Borderline Pressure	
13. They did not say no or push me away	
14. They let the sexual activity progress to the point of intercourse	
15. They reciprocated my advances	

No Response Signals	
16. It just happened	
17. They did not say anything	
18. They did not do anything; it was clear from their actions or from looking at them that they were willing to engage in sexual activity/sexual intercourse	

Did your partner use any other methods to communicate with you that were not listed in the previous list? This includes indicating to you that they were uninterested in a certain activity.
- Yes
- No
- Unsure

If you responded yes or unsure, please explain what other method(s) your partner used to communicate with you: _____

Target Efficacy

Items were created by author.

Answer the questions in the context of your most recent hookup. Indicate your response on the scale from 1-5, where 1 = not at all and 5 = extremely.

1 = not at all, 2 = slightly, 3 = sufficiently, 4 = very, 5 = extremely

	Score from 1-5
1. How well do you think your partner was able to communicate their interest in sexual activity to you?	
2. How good of a job did your partner do at expressing their feelings towards sexual activity?	
3. How honest do you feel they were being with you about their willingness to have sex?	

Information Providing

The following items were taken from Jozkowski et al. (2014) External Consent Scale. Follow-up questions are from the author.

During your most recent hookup, which of these methods did your partner use to communicate their desire about sexual activity to you? Select all that apply.

Direct Nonverbal Behaviors	
1. I increased physical contact between myself and my partner	
2. I used non-verbal cues such as body language, signals, flirting	
3. I took them somewhere private	
4. I shut or closed the door	
5. I removed my and/or their clothing	

Passive Behaviors	
6. I engaged in some level of sexual activity such as kissing or "foreplay"	
7. I touched them, showed them what I wanted	
8. I initiated sexual behavior and checked to see if it was reciprocated	
9. I used verbal cues such as communicating their interest in sexual behavior or asking if they wanted to have sex with me	

Communication/Initiator Behaviors	
10. I indirectly communicated/implied my interest in sex (i.e. talked about getting a condom or sex toy	
11. I just kept moving forward in sexual behaviors/actions unless they stopped me	
12. I did not resist their attempts for sexual activity	

Borderline Pressure	
13. I did not say no or push me away	
14. I let the sexual activity progress to the point of intercourse	
15. I reciprocated their advances	
No Response Signals	
16. It just happened	

17. I did not say anything	
18. I did not do anything; it was clear from my actions or from looking at me that I was willing to engage in sexual activity/sexual intercourse	

Did you use any other methods to communicate with your partner that were not listed in the previous list? This includes indicating that you were uninterested in a certain activity.
- Yes
- No
- Unsure

If you responded yes or unsure, please explain what other method(s) you used to communicate with your partner: _____

Communication Efficacy

Items were created by author.

Answer the questions in the context of your most recent hookup. Indicate your response on the scale from 1-5, where 1 = not at all and 5 = extremely.

1 = not at all, 2 = slightly, 3 = sufficiently, 4 = very, 5 = extremely

	Score from 1-5
1. How comfortable were you talking to your partner about their interest in sexual activity?	
2. How effective do you think you were in talking to them?	
3. How confident are you that your partner understood what sexual activities you were asking them to do?	
4. How confident are you that your partner understood what you were telling them you would like to do?	

Emotions

The following items were selected from Jozkowski et al. (2014) Internal Consent Scale.

Answer the questions in the context of your most recent hookup. Indicate your response on the scale from 1-4, where 1 = disagree and 4 = agree

1 = disagree, 2 = slightly disagree, 3 = slightly agree, 4 = agree

Physical Response	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree
1. Eager				

	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree
2. Lustful				

Safety/Comfort	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree
3. Secure				
4. Protected				
5. Safe				
6. Respected				
7. Certain				
8. Comfortable				
9. In Control				

Arousal	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree
10. Interested				

Consent/Want	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree
11. Agreed to				
12. Wanted				
13. Desired				
14. Consented				
15. Consented to				

Readiness	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree
16. Ready				
17. Sure				
18. Willing				
19. Aware of my surroundings				

Demographic Information

What is your age? _____

What is your class year?
- First year
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior
- Graduate Student
- Recently Graduated

What is your gender?
- Male
- Female
- Non-binary

- Prefer to self-disclose: _____

What is your partner's gender?
- Male
- Female
- Non-binary
- Prefer to self-disclose: _____

Do you identify as transgender?
- Yes
- No
- Unsure

What is your race? You may select more than one.
- Black / African American
- Asian / Pacific Islander
- Native American / First People
- Middle Eastern
- White
- Mixed Race / Other: _____

Including your most recent hookup partner, how many sexual partners have you had that you engaged in oral sex or intercourse with? Select the answer that best applies.
- N/A
- 1
- Less than 5
- 5-10
- 10-15
- 15-20
- 20+

At what age did you first engage in oral sex or intercourse? _____

What is your religious affiliation? You may select more than one.
- Christianity
- Catholicism
- Judaism
- Buddhism
- Hinduism
- Islam
- Atheism
- Agnostic
- N/A
- Other: _____

What is your religiosity? 1 = not at all and 5 = extremely.

     I am _____ religious.

Are you affiliated with Greek life at your institution?

- Yes
- No
- Not yet, but I would like to be

In which state do you currently attend college? (dropdown)

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