

SEXUAL MINORITIES' UNCERTAINTY ABOUT THEIR ROMANTIC PARTNER'S
COMMUNICATION WITH THEIR FAMILY: A TEST OF THE THEORY OF MOTIVATED
INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

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The United States no longer has laws restricting marriages of sexual minority (SM) citizens; however, cultural norms enforced by everyday communication encourage SMs to present their relationships differently to friends and family (Gattamorta & Quidley-Rodriguez, 2018). Across sexual identities, how romantic partners communicate about the relational information they share with those important to them impacts how they cooperatively integrate one another into their lives. The main goal of this study was to utilize the theory of motivated information management (TMIM) to examine SM information management behaviors in response to uncertainty regarding the information their partner has shared with their family about the status of their relationship. The results indicated that efficacy and information seeking about this topic directly predict an individual's perceptions of relational closeness and satisfaction with their partner, though the indirect effects of uncertainty discrepancy proposed by the TMIM were not significant. Implications and limitations are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

The romantic and family relationships of individuals who identify as a sexual minority (SM) face communicative challenges more frequently than their heterosexual counterparts. Some of the difficulties SMs face include having to legitimize their relationships (Koenig Kellas & Suter, 2012; Michael & Baker, 2019), navigate difficult conversations about family planning (Harrigan et al., 2017, Pralat, 2021), and manage sexual identity information in the face of emotional and psychological adversity (Gutterman, 2019; Yap et al., 2020). Although these examples are not an exhaustive list of SM couples' adversities, they highlight the need for SM romantic partners to talk about the information they share about their relationship with family, friends, and other people in their lives. Across various sexual identities, how romantic partners communicate about the relational information they share with others impacts how they cooperatively integrate one another into their lives.

The salience of these conversations could become increasingly crucial for SMs who have not yet disclosed their sexual identity to others, have disapproving families, and/or are uncertain if their partner has disclosed information about their relationship. Researchers have reported that 83% of SMs worldwide conceal their sexual identity from all or most people in their lives because of cultural stigmas and national laws related to their identity (Pachankis & Bränström, 2019). The United States no longer has laws restricting marriages of SM citizens; however, cultural norms enforced by everyday communication often encourage SMs to present themselves and their relationships differently to friends and family (Gattamorta & Quidley-Rodriguez, 2018). Suppression of identity does not come without consequence. Researchers have found that when individuals perceive a gap between their perceived self, their relationships, and how they enact their identity, they experience higher depressive symptoms, lower self-esteem, and poorer mental health (Decker & Schrod, 2022; Jung & Hecht, 2008). Logically, this discordance in

identity expression could lead to SMs sharing different information about their relationship with various individuals and create an atmosphere where uncertainty grows.

Scholars investigating the role of communication in SMs' information management often do not fully consider SMs' perspectives and disproportionately emphasize the rhetoric of "coming out." Recent studies of SM information management highlighted parents' experiences in response to their child disclosing that they identify as a sexual minority; specifically, they have focused on their reactions (Bergen et al., 2020; Chrisler, 2017), retrospective storytelling (Butauski & Horstman, 2020), and perceptions of being socially supported (Saltzburg, 2009). Alternatively, when parents have not been the target population, it has been children with SM parents (Breshears & Braithwaite, 2014). When the study population included SMs, most of the research involved coming out messages (Haxhe et al., 2018; Manning, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2019). Pralat (2021) departed from this line of inquiry to investigate how SM couples manage information regarding their desire to have children; however, they still used the rhetoric of "coming out." Researchers have found that the disclosure of sexual identity correlates with workplace satisfaction (Prati & Pietrantonio, 2014), stress-related growth (Solomon et al., 2015), depressive symptoms, and self-esteem (Li & Samp, 2019). Though important, an individual's sexual identity likely influences other instances of information management within SM relationships, including how parents, other family members, and SM children deal with more than the initial disclosure of the SM's sexual identity (Flockhart, 2019).

What is evident from previous research thus far is that SMs face a disproportionate challenge of managing information about their romantic relationships, as cultural prescriptions of idealized relationship types marginalize their sexual identities and encourage them to remain unseen. On a relational level, how SMs manage information about their relationship can implicate the relationship's future, including levels of commitment, partners' expectations for the

trajectory of their relationship, and perceptions of relational well-being, closeness, and satisfaction (to name a few). On an individual level, if conversations between partners go poorly, the relationship may become more tenuous; they each may experience heightened stress and relational uncertainty and perceive diminished social support from their partner. Consequently, the primary purpose of this study was to examine how SMs manage uncertainty discrepancies (i.e., differences between how much they know and how much they want to know) regarding information their partner has shared with their partner's family-of-origin about the status of their relationship. To accomplish this, I used the theory of motivated information management (TMIM), a framework for understanding how individuals interpret, evaluate, and make decisions regarding uncertainty in different communicative contexts. In what follows, I reviewed the TMIM and advanced a series of predictions that tie SMs' uncertainty discrepancies to relational outcomes vis-a-vis their interpretation of negative emotions, outcome expectancies, assessments of efficacy, and information management behaviors.

THE THEORY OF MOTIVATED INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

Afifi and Weiner (2004) proposed the TMIM to address several issues with uncertainty reduction theory (Berger & Calabrese, 1975), including scope conditions, the complexity of uncertainty as a motivational force, the role of efficacy, and the interactive nature of information management. Specifically, the TMIM focuses on uncertainty and information management within dyadic interpersonal contexts, includes emotional reactions as a motivating force, and conceptualizes personal and target-oriented assessments of efficacy. Extant scholarship using the TMIM has expanded its empirical scope to include interpersonal, family, and health communication contexts.

Recent applications of the TMIM within the domain of interpersonal communication have investigated the decision-making process of uncertainty management within the context of end-of-life preferences (Rafferty et al., 2015), histories of past relationships (Lancaster et al., 2016), sexual preferences (Kuang & Gettings, 2020), responses to adverse life experiences and post-traumatic growth (Tian et al., 2016), and the loss of loved ones (Droser, 2020). When scholars have applied the TMIM to the context of family communication, the inquiry has focused on uncertainty management between adult children and their parents; however, the focus has mainly been on the adult child's uncertainty about their parents' relationship (Afifi & Afifi, 2009; Crowley & High, 2018; Mikucki-Enyart et al., 2018). The TMIM has been used to explore uncertainty management within interpersonal and family relationships, yet most of the theory's application has been within the context of health communication. Specifically, previous research has explored information seeking regarding safe sex practices (Afifi & Weiner, 2006; Hovick, 2014; Kosenko, 2011; Wong, 2014), cancer and social ties (Lewis & Martinez, 2014), and family health history (Rauscher & Hesse, 2014). Across contexts, the TMIM has proven to be

informative of how individuals engage in information management behaviors that influence perceptions of uncertainty, as well as outcomes of uncertainty management.

There are many instances in which individuals perceive uncertainty within their romantic and family relationships. The TMIM assesses the interpretation of a knowledge gap, evaluates potential outcomes and efficacy, and proposes likely information management behaviors individuals enact to reduce uncertainty. In this study, my goal was to investigate how romantic partners respond to uncertainty regarding shared information about their relationship with their families of origin, as well as how this process may predict their relational closeness and satisfaction with their partner. Thus, the following sections expanded upon the three sequential and distinct phases that Afifi and Weiner (2004) theorized as comprising the information management process: the interpretation, evaluation, and decision-making phases.

Interpretation Phase

Afifi and Weiner (2004) begin their theory with the *interpretation phase*, which includes the initial interpretation of uncertainty and the emotional response that coincides with this realization. Following Brashers (2001), they propose that *uncertainty* typically occurs "when details of the situation are ambiguous, complex, unpredictable, or probabilistic; when information is unavailable or inconsistent; and when people feel insecure in their own state of knowledge or the state of knowledge in general" (p. 478). Afifi and Weiner (2004) conceptualize *uncertainty discrepancy* as a disparity between an individual's actual level of uncertainty and their desired level; it represents the difference between how much an individual knows about a given topic and how much they want to know about the topic. It is essential to note that individuals may seek to increase or decrease this discrepancy depending upon their attributions for, and emotional reactions to, their uncertainty.

Afifi and Weiner (2004) posit that uncertainty discrepancies lead to emotional responses, the strength of which determines whether the individual will evaluate the situation further and take action to manage their uncertainty. The more intense the emotional response, the more likely they will attend to the discrepancy (Afifi & Weiner, 2004). They propose that uncertainty discrepancies elicit anxiety, motivating individuals to enact information-management behaviors; and a recent meta-analysis of the TMIM supported this tenet (Kuang & Wilson, 2021). However, since its inception, Afifi and Morse (2009) have updated the theory to reflect the idea that uncertainty discrepancies may elicit positive and negative emotions other than anxiety. Afifi and Weiner (2004) also posit that negatively valenced emotional responses affect the information management strategies used by the individual, both directly and indirectly.

Within the context of this study, a SM may have a negatively valenced emotional response to the perception of an uncertainty discrepancy regarding how their partner has presented their relationship to their family-of-origin. For instance, bisexual and lesbian women have reported feelings of shame, guilt, and regret when retrospectively narrating their decision to disclose their sexual identity to their husbands and children before and after terminating their marriages (Gutterman, 2019). The retrospective accounts of these women indicated the emotions that are likely to be elicited when determining how to respond to the uncertainty of knowing whether one's partner has disclosed their sexual identity and relational status to their partner's family. In addition, previous research has supported the proposition that uncertainty discrepancies positively correlate with negative emotions (Drosser, 2020; Fowler & Afifi, 2011; Lancaster et al., 2016; Rafferty et al., 2015; Tian et al., 2020). Thus, I proposed my first hypothesis:

H₁: Sexual minorities' uncertainty discrepancy regarding information their partner has shared about their relationship to their family-of-origin positively predicts their negative emotional responses to the discrepancy.

Evaluation Phase

The second phase of the TMIM, the *evaluation phase*, encapsulates an individual's evaluation of the potential outcomes of seeking information from their relational (or conversational) partner about the topic, as well as assessments of their coping, communication, and target efficacies related to conducting an information search. Afifi and Weiner (2004) theorize that the strength of emotions felt from an uncertainty discrepancy motivates the evaluation of potential outcomes of an information search. They conceptualize this cost and benefit evaluation of possible outcomes as *outcome expectancies*; specifically, an individual will evaluate all potentially positive and negative prospects of engaging in uncertainty reduction behaviors. The expectations generated from this process then influence how the individual assesses efficacy regarding their potential enactment of these behaviors.

Afifi and Weiner (2004) propose that individuals assess their ability to effectively enact management behaviors by looking at their perceived ability to communicate and cope, while also evaluating whether their intended target can provide honest responses and truthful information that would alter their levels of uncertainty. Within the TMIM, they conceptualize *efficacy* as an individual's perception of their own and the target's ability to successfully enact a behavior or produce an intended outcome (Afifi & Weiner, 2004; Bandura, 1997). Whereas *communication efficacy* refers to "individuals' perception that they possess the skills to complete the communication tasks involved in the information-management process" (Afifi & Weiner, 2004, p. 178), *coping efficacy* refers to the internal belief that the information manager has the emotional, instrumental, and network support necessary to handle the management strategy they

intend to use (Afifi & Weiner, 2004). The final assessment that composes the evaluation phase moves away from self-appraisals and looks to the intended target of the potential information search. Specifically, Afifi and Weiner (2004) propose the concept of *target efficacy* to capture the information manager's assessment of the target's ability and willingness to provide information that would change their own levels of uncertainty.

The TMIM proposes that the strength of the emotions felt during the interpretation phase motivates individuals to evaluate potential outcomes and efficacy (Afifi & Weiner, 2004). Previous tests of the TMIM indicated that negative emotional responses positively predicted pessimistic assessments of expected outcomes (Kuang & Wilson, 2021; Lancaster et al., 2016; Rafferty et al., 2015; Tian et al., 2016) and inversely predicted perceptions of efficacy (Kuang & Wilson, 2021; Lancaster et al., 2016; Tian et al., 2016). Thus, if a SM has a negative emotional response to an uncertainty discrepancy regarding how much information their partner has shared about their relationship to their partner's family-of-origin, they are likely to expect more negative than positive outcomes of an information search and may not perceive themselves or their partner to be as efficacious in talking about, and coping with, the uncertainty. Thus, I advanced a second hypothesis:

H₂: SMs' negative emotional responses to an uncertainty discrepancy regarding information their partner has shared about their relationship with their family-of-origin is negatively associated with outcome expectancies (*H_{2a}*) and efficacy assessments (*H_{2b}*) (i.e., communication, coping, and target).

Afifi and Weiner (2004) assert one final relationship within the evaluation phase of the TMIM. Specifically, they propose that the valence of outcome expectancies directly influences how individuals assess communication, coping, and target efficacy. If a SM perceives that their information search will end with a more favorable result, they will be more likely to view

themselves and their partner as having the necessary communication and coping skills to resolve the issue at hand. Previous tests of the TMIM have supported this relationship across different contexts and types of interpersonal relationships (Drosser, 2020; Kuang & Wilson, 2021; Lancaster et al., 2016; Rafferty et al., 2015; Rauscher & Hesse; 2014; Tian et al., 2016). Hence, I advanced a third hypothesis:

H₃: SMs' outcome expectancies positively predict their efficacy assessments.

Decision Phase

The final phase of the TMIM addresses the communicative behavior enacted after the individual interprets an uncertainty discrepancy and completes the evaluation phase. Afifi and Weiner (2004) labeled this the *decision phase*. They propose three information management strategies employed by sufficiently motivated individuals: seeking relevant information, avoiding relevant information, and/or cognitive reappraisal of the situation. *Seeking relevant information* composes three tactics: (a) passive strategies, which include observation of the information provider; (b) active strategies, which include behaviors such as asking a third-party about the information provider; and (c) interactive strategies, which involve communicating directly with the target. However, when individuals assess potentially unsuccessful outcomes of seeking additional information (i.e., they experience negative outcome expectancies), they may have the motivation to seek information but instead decide to actively avoid it.

Afifi and Weiner (2004) further indicate that, depending upon how information managers experience and respond to uncertainty discrepancies, they may actively and passively *avoid relevant information*. Active avoidance strategies include maintaining distance from relevant information by staying away from situations where the topic may come up or turning down the chance to gain knowledge; in contrast, passive avoidance strategies include *laissez-faire* approaches. In these cases, the individual resolves the issue organically without purposeful

action. For instance, a SM who is uncertain about what their partner has shared about their relationship might let the case unfold naturally without actively pursuing or avoiding information.

Finally, Afifi and Weiner (2004) identify cognitive reappraisal as a third form of information management that moves responses to uncertainty discrepancies beyond the realm of information-seeking. *Cognitive reappraisal* involves cognitively restructuring interpretations of an individual's emotions caused by uncertainty discrepancies. The reappraisal may take the form of a change in the importance of the issue or a change to the desired level of uncertainty (Afifi & Weiner, 2004). Kuang and Wilson's (2021) meta-analysis of TMIM research indicated that most investigations focused on the management strategies of seeking and avoiding information, whereas assessments of cognitive reappraisals often were excluded (Kuang & Wilson, 2021). Cognitive reappraisals are no less relevant theoretically than information seeking and avoidance; however, this strategy functions as an intrapersonal change of an individual's appraisal of uncertainty and does not require interaction with a conversational partner to change levels of uncertainty. Given the topic under investigation in the present study, as well as the belief that SMs would be more likely to approach or avoid their partner for information that is potentially face-threatening than to re-assess how they think about it, I excluded cognitive reappraisal from the current investigation and focused only on information seeking and avoidance.

The culmination of the TMIM occurs when the interpretation and evaluation phases lead to information management behaviors that individuals enact to manage their uncertainty (Afifi & Weiner, 2004). Specifically, Afifi and Weiner (2004) suggest that emotional responses, outcome expectancies, and efficacy assessments predict how individuals seek and avoid information. Although the TMIM proposes that negative emotions (including anxiety) may have direct and indirect associations with information management strategies via outcome expectancies and

efficacy, the precise direction and strength of the associations may vary as a function of the topic and context under consideration. For instance, Kuang and Wilson's (2021) meta-analysis found a positive correlation between anxiety and direct information seeking, although the effect size was small and was likely influenced by the fact that emotions other than anxiety were unaccounted for. In contrast, previous tests of the TMIM have provided mixed support for the direct connection between negative emotions and information management behaviors. When investigating adult children's caregiving discussions about their elderly parents, Fowler and Afifi (2011) found that including this direct relationship when testing feelings other than anxiety improved model fit for the TMIM. When studying individuals' uncertainty discrepancies about their romantic partner's relational history, however, Lancaster and colleagues (2016) found that excluding the direct path from negative emotions to information management improved model fit. Other scholars have found nonsignificant associations between negative emotions and information seeking (Rauscher & Hesse, 2014) but significant associations between negative emotions and information avoidance (Rafferty, 2015). Given inconsistent findings across a variety of topical and relational contexts, I proposed the following research question:

RQ₁: How, if at all, do negative emotions experienced by SMs in response to their uncertainty discrepancies about the information their partner has shared with their family about their relationship predict their indirect and direct information seeking (*RQ_{1a}*) and information avoidance (*RQ_{1b}*)?

Contrary to the mixed evidence regarding the direct effect of negative emotions on information management strategies within the TMIM, there is substantial evidence to suggest that efficacy assessments typically predict how individuals manage information in response to uncertainty (Kuang & Wilson, 2021). The effects between outcome expectancies and how individuals manage information vary across conversational and relational contexts. For instance,

Tian and colleagues (2016) found that positive outcome expectancies positively predicted emerging adults' information seeking from their parents after an adverse life event. However, other studies have found that this association is nonsignificant when studying uncertainty regarding end-of-life care and grief due to losing a family member (Drosser, 2020; Rafferty et al., 2015). Kuang and Wilson's (2021) meta-analysis also indicated that this relationship is nonsignificant when only accounting for direct information seeking as an information management strategy. Thus, I asked a second research question:

RQ₂: How, if at all, do outcome expectancies experienced by SMs relate to indirect and direct information seeking (*RQ_{2a}*) and information avoidance (*RQ_{2b}*) about how much their romantic partner has shared about their relationship with their family of origin?

In contrast to the mixed findings between outcome expectancies and information management behaviors, the associations among efficacy assessments (i.e., communication, coping, and target) and said behaviors have been more reliable (Kuang & Wilson, 2021). Previous tests of the TMIM have found that increased perceptions of efficacy positively predict information seeking (Drosser, 2020; Tian et al., 2016; Rauscher & Hesse, 2014; Wong, 2014) and negatively predict information avoidance (Afifi & Afifi, 2009; Lancaster et al., 2016). Therefore, I reasoned that SMs who view themselves and their partners as capable of handling a conversation about their uncertainty would be more likely to seek information about what their partner has shared, but less likely to avoid information about what their partner has disclosed. Thus, I advanced a fourth hypothesis:

H₄: SMs' assessments of efficacy (i.e., communication, coping, and target) will be positively related to indirect and direct information seeking (*H_{4a}*), but negatively related to information avoidance (*H_{4b}*), about what their romantic partner has shared about their relationship with their family of origin.

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES AND RELATIONAL OUTCOMES

Berger and Calabrese (1975) focused on the role of uncertainty and communication within developing relationships when they proposed uncertainty reduction theory, the basic premise of which is that individuals want to reduce the uncertainty they have about their conversational partner when making new acquaintances. One way of reducing this uncertainty is simply by asking their partner questions with the intention that they will disclose information that will reduce their uncertainty. However, social penetration theory (Altman & Taylor, 1973) argues that disclosing sensitive information becomes more appropriate as the relationship grows in intimacy. Thus, if individuals interpret uncertainty regarding a sensitive topic, they may adjust their information-seeking strategy depending upon the perceived comfort they share with their relational partner.

The strategies used to reduce uncertainty do not come without consequence. For instance, Dillow and colleagues (2009) found that when individuals avoided conversational topics with their partner because of awkwardness, they were more likely to report diminished feelings of closeness within the relationship. They found the same effect for closeness when the individual perceived that their partner could not or would not respond appropriately to their request for information. If topic avoidance is inversely associated with closeness between romantic partners, then it stands to reason that it would also be inversely related to relational satisfaction. Indeed, previous scholarship has found that topic avoidance is negatively associated with relational satisfaction (Dillow et al., 2009; Donovan-Kicken & Caughlin, 2010; Mikucki-Enyart & Caughlin, 2018).

SMs experiencing uncertainty about the information their partner has shared with their partner's family may experience a decline in relational satisfaction if they are inclined to avoid specific topics of conversation. For instance, Mikucki-Enyart and colleagues (2015) found that

marital satisfaction decreased, in part, because spouses were unsure how much their in-laws knew about the nature of their marital relationship. Other studies of topic avoidance in romantic relationships have found that individuals who avoid discussing the current state of their relationship and/or relational concerns experience diminished relational satisfaction (Dailey & Palomares, 2004; Sargent, 2009).

Previous tests of the TMIM have found that efficacy functions as a mediator between relational quality and topic avoidance, indicating that relational quality affects an individual's chosen information management strategy (Rafferty et al., 2015). However, it stands to reason that the information management strategy chosen by a SM to reduce uncertainty may also shape how they perceive the current state of their relationship. Drawing from the literature above, individuals who engage in information seeking may be more likely to perceive more positive outcomes of conducting an information search from their partner and to assess themselves as having the ability to handle conversational engagement with their partner. This, in turn, may indicate that a level of comfort with the relationship and a desire to maintain satisfaction by actively working to reduce their uncertainty discrepancies. Conversely, individuals who avoid information are likely to perceive more negative outcomes of discussing the topic with their partner and to assess themselves as being less successful with, and less able to cope with, such conversations. This, in turn, suggests that SMs who avoid information about what their partner has shared with their partner's family about their relationship should report less closeness and satisfaction in their romantic relationship. To test this reasoning, I proposed two additional hypotheses:

H₅: The likelihood that SMs will seek information about what their romantic partner has shared about their relationship with their family of origin will positively predict their relational closeness (*H_{5a}*) and satisfaction (*H_{5b}*) with their romantic partner.

H₆: The likelihood that SMs will avoid information about what their romantic partner has shared about their relationship with their family of origin will negatively predict their relational closeness (H_{6a}) and satisfaction (H_{6b}) with their romantic partner.

Finally, the TMIM advances a serial mediation model that ties an uncertainty discrepancy to the information management strategies of the information seeker via the seeker's negative emotions, outcome expectancies, and efficacy assessments. Thus, the model implies several indirect associations among its constructs. For instance, Lancaster and colleagues (2016) found indirect effects between negative emotions and information management behaviors (i.e., information seeking and avoidance) via outcome and efficacy assessments. Hence, SMs experiencing negative emotions regarding an uncertainty discrepancy may avoid relevant information because they perceive more negative outcomes of an information search and view themselves as not having the ability to engage their romantic partner in conversations about the topic successfully.

Likewise, Afifi and Weiner (2004) theorize that outcome expectancies are indirectly associated with information management behaviors via assessments of efficacy, and indeed, empirical evidence has supported their reasoning (e.g., Drosser, 2020; Rafferty, 2015; Rauscher & Hesse, 2014; Tian et al., 2016). If SMs expect a positive result of their information search, they will also perceive themselves as more efficacious and use a more direct communication strategy with their partner to reduce their uncertainty.

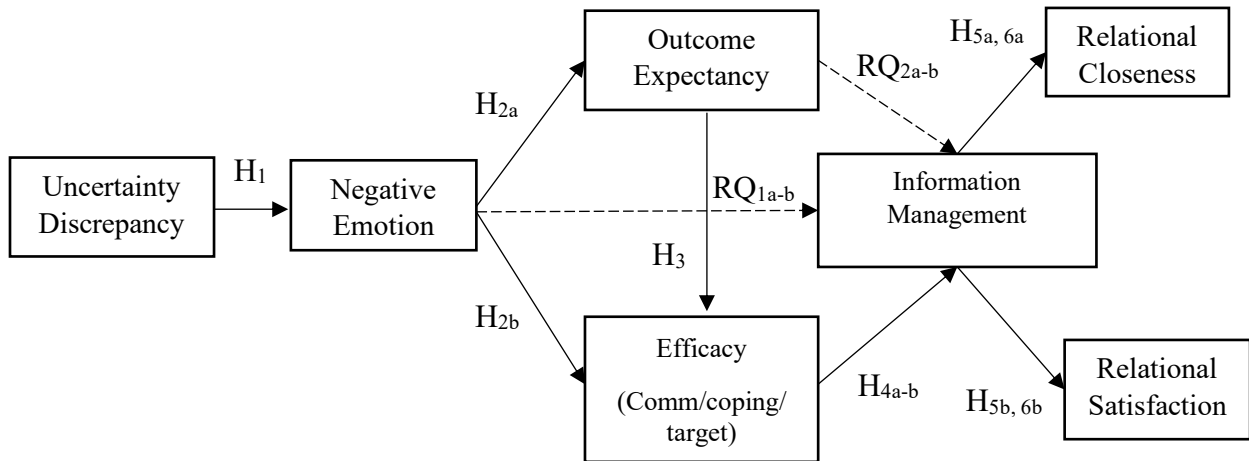
Of course, if the information management strategies of seeking and avoiding information are associated with SMs' relational closeness and satisfaction, then it stands to reason that SMs' uncertainty discrepancy about the information their partner has shared with their family about their romantic relationship should have indirect associations with closeness and satisfaction via

the motivated information management process specified within the TMIM. Thus, I advanced a final hypothesis (see Figure 1):

H₇: SMs' negative emotions, outcome expectancies, efficacy assessments, and information management strategies function as serial mediators of their uncertainty discrepancies regarding what their partner has shared about their relationship with their partner's family and their relational closeness and satisfaction with their romantic partner.

Figure 1

A Serial Mediation Model Depicting Sexual Minorities' Motivated Information Management with their Romantic Partner about Information the Partner has Shared with their Family of Origin



Note. Although not depicted here, H_7 tested the indirect effects of uncertainty discrepancy on relational closeness and satisfaction via the mediated paths implied by the model.

METHODS

Participants

To participate in this study, individuals needed to be over 18, self-identify as a sexual minority, and have a monogamous relationship. It was not a requirement that both individuals in the relationship identify as a sexual minority because individuals that identify as bisexual, pansexual, or do not experience sexual attraction may be in a relationship with someone who identifies as heterosexual. Given the ambiguity that relational structure could introduce when surveying polyamorous individuals, I decided to restrict participation to those who self-reported being in a monogamous (or monogamous and open) relationship. Individuals in polyamorous relationships experience similar uncertainties within their relationships; however, the measures used in this study may not accommodate the nuances of their relational experience and would increase measurement error.

The sample included 111 SMs ranging in age from 18 to 59 years ($M = 28.8$, $SD = 10.4$). Most participants in the sample identified as White ($n = 94$; 84.7%), although 4.5% ($n = 5$) identified as Asian/Asian American, 4.5% ($n = 5$) identified as multiethnic, 2.7% ($n = 3$) identified as Black/African American, 2.7% ($n = 3$) identified as Latinx, and 0.9% ($n = 1$) identified as American Indian/Alaska Native. Participants reported their gender identity as being cisgender female ($n = 49$; 44.1%), cisgender male ($n = 44$; 39.6%), non-binary ($n = 11$; 9.9%), female to male transgender ($n = 4$; 3.6%), and other ($n = 3$; 2.7%). Regarding sexual orientation, the sample consisted of individuals who identified as bisexual ($n = 56$; 50.5%), gay ($n = 18$; 16.2%), asexual ($n = 10$; 9.0%), queer ($n = 10$; 9.0%), lesbian ($n = 8$; 7.32%), pansexual ($n = 7$; 6.3%), fluid ($n = 1$; 0.9%), and other ($n = 1$; 0.9%).

Participants also reported on their partner's demographics. Partners ranged in age from 18 to 59 years ($M = 29.2$, $SD = 10.6$) and most were described as White ($n = 87$, 78.4%), although 9.0% ($n = 9$) were described as Latinx, 4.5% ($n = 5$) as Black/African American, 3.6% ($n = 4$) as Asian/Asian American, 3.6% ($n = 4$) as multiethnic, and 0.9% ($n = 1$) was described as American Indian/Alaskan Native. Participants reported their partner's gender identity as being cisgender male ($n = 51$; 45.9%), cisgender female ($n = 44$; 39.6%), non-binary ($n = 7$; 6.3%), female to male transgender ($n = 4$; 3.6%), and male to female transgender ($n = 2$; 1.8%), with two choosing not to report (1.8%) and one reporting other (0.9%). Regarding their partner's sexual orientation, participants reported their partner as identifying as straight ($n = 40$; 36.0%), bisexual ($n = 25$; 22.5%), gay ($n = 18$; 16.2%), pansexual ($n = 11$; 9.9%), lesbian ($n = 9$; 8.1%), queer ($n = 4$; 3.6%), asexual ($n = 2$; 1.8%), fluid ($n = 1$; 0.9%), or other ($n = 1$; 0.9%).

When asked to classify the status of their romantic relationship, the most common response was "married" ($n = 42$, 37.8%), followed by "in love and have discussed marriage" ($n = 21$, 18.9%), "in love" ($n = 14$, 12.6%), "emotional attachment but not in love" ($n = 9$, 8.1%), "in love and would like to marry but have never discussed marriage" ($n = 8$, 7.2%), "romantic potential" ($n = 8$, 7.2%), "engaged to be married" ($n = 5$, 4.5%), "some emotional attachment" ($n = 3$, 2.7%), and "casual dating but little emotional attachment" ($n = 1$, 0.9%).

Procedures

Upon securing IRB approval, participants completed an online questionnaire using Qualtrics software. The questionnaire began with a preface to the consent form that introduced me as a sexual minority to build trust with participants. For recruitment, I used snowball sampling techniques. The survey link and recruitment materials were first shared on social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Reddit) specific to groups dedicated to SM populations. In addition, participants were recruited from an introductory communication

course at a private university in the southern United States. Participants received minimal extra credit for completing the survey (less than 2%), which took approximately 20 minutes to complete.

Measures

Uncertainty Discrepancy

Uncertainty discrepancies were operationalized using Afifi and Weiner's (2006) instrument. I created an index to assess the degree to which participants felt that their actual level of uncertainty differed from their desired level regarding the information their partners have disclosed to their families about their relationship. The index was calculated by subtracting participants' responses to "How much information do you know about what your partner tells their family about your relationship?" (1 = *Nothing* to 7 = *Everything*) from their response to "How much information do you want to know about what your partner tells their family about your relationship?" (1 = *Nothing* to 7 = *Everything*).

Negative Emotional Responses

Assessment of negative emotional responses began with asking participants to consider the gap between how much they already know and how much they would like to know regarding the information their partner has disclosed to their family about their relationship. Participants then rated the strength of their emotional response to this gap using a 7-point frequency scale (1 = *Not at all* to 7 = *Very much*). Negative emotions included worried, sad, nervous, scared, anxious, disappointed, distressed, frustrated, upset, and angry (Afifi & Afifi, 2009; Fowler & Afifi, 2011). Previous research has demonstrated the reliability and validity of this measure (e.g., Tian et al., 2016, $\alpha = .94$). In this study, the negative emotions measure produced excellent internal reliability ($\omega = .94$ [95% CI: .90, .96]).

Outcome Expectancies

Afifi and Afifi's (2009) three-item measure of outcome expectancies assessed participants' expectations about the outcomes of their information search with their partner. Participants responded to items using seven options that ranged from (1) *A lot more negative than positives* to (7) *A lot more positives than negatives* (e.g., "Talking to my partner directly about the information they share about our relationship with their family would produce...", "Asking my partner what they think about sharing information about our relationship with their family would produce...", and "Approaching my partner to ask about their beliefs on sharing information about our relationship with their family would produce..."). Previous research has demonstrated the reliability and validity of this measure (e.g., Tian et al., 2016; $\alpha = .94$). In this study, the measure produced excellent internal reliability ($\omega = .90$ [95% CI: .86, .94]).

Efficacy Assessments

I used Afifi and Afifi's (2009) measures to assess efficacy. All three measures use 7-point Likert scales ranging from (1) *Strongly disagree* to (7) *Strongly agree*. First, three items assessed *communication efficacy* ($\omega = .92$ [95% CI: .87, .96]) or the participant's assessment of their ability to navigate conversations with their partner about their uncertainty (e.g., "I am able to approach my partner to talk about what information they have shared about our relationship with their family"). Four items assessed *coping efficacy* ($\omega = .84$ [95% CI: .76, .90]) or the participant's perception of their ability to cope with the results of engaging in conversation about their uncertainty (e.g., "I can handle whatever I would find out about the information my partner has shared about me with their family"). *Target efficacy* ($\omega = .95$ [95% CI: .92, .97]) included four items that assessed perceptions of their partner's honesty and ability to address their questions (e.g., "My partner would be completely honest about the information they have shared about our relationship with their family").

Information Management Strategies

To assess participants' information management strategies to reduce uncertainty, I adapted 15 items from previous TMIM research (Afifi & Afifi, 2009; Afifi et al., 2004; Afifi & Weiner, 2004) to measure direct information seeking, indirect information seeking, and information avoidance. Participants read a prompt encouraging them to reflect upon the state of their relationship and how much information their partner's family knew about it. They then responded to a series of questions regarding the likelihood that they would enact a particular information management strategy (e.g., "How likely are you to ask your partner about what they think about this issue?" and "How likely are you to observe your partner's behavior to get more information about what they think about this issue?"). Responses were solicited using a 7-point Likert-type scale that ranged from (1) *Very unlikely* to (7) *Very likely*. Previous research has demonstrated the reliability and validity of this measure (Tian et al., 2016). In this study, the direct information seeking (four items, $\omega = .89$ [95% CI: .84, .93]) and indirect information seeking measures (six items, $\omega = .85$ [95% CI: .78, .90]) produced good internal reliability, whereas the information avoidance scale (three items, $\omega = .69$ [95% CI: .54, .80]) produced acceptable reliability.

Relational Closeness

Participants' reports of relational closeness with their partner were measured using an adapted version of Buchanan and colleagues' (1991) relational closeness scale. The scale consisted of 10 items (e.g., "How close do you feel to your partner?") and responses were solicited using a 7-point interval scale that ranged from 1 (*Not at all*) to 7 (*Very Much*). Previous research has demonstrated the reliability and validity of the relational closeness measure (e.g., O'Mara & Schrod, 2017, $\alpha = .93$). After dropping one reverse-coded item, in this study, the scale produced good internal reliability ($\omega = .84$ [95% CI: .78, .89]).

Relational Satisfaction

Huston et al.'s (1986) Marital Opinion Questionnaire (MOQ) was adapted to measure participants' satisfaction with their partners. Adjustments to the original 11-item scale included referring to the participants' romantic partner as the referent instead of a marital partner. Directions instructed participants to reflect on the last month of their relationship and report their satisfaction using 10 semantic-differential items on a 7-point scale (e.g., "interesting-boring," "worthwhile-useless"). An additional item assessed global satisfaction using responses that ranged from 1 (*completely dissatisfied*) to 7 (*completely satisfied*). Previous research has demonstrated the reliability and validity of the relational satisfaction measure (e.g., Schrodtt & Afifi, 2007, $\alpha = .95$), and in this study, the adapted measure produced excellent internal reliability ($\omega = .94$ [95% CI: .92, .96]).

Data Analysis

Preliminary analyses included a series of independent sample t-tests, one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs), and Pearson correlations to determine (a) if control variables were needed in tests of the hypothesized model, and (b) if bivariate associations provided preliminary support for $H_1 - H_6$. I then tested my hypothesized model using two sets of custom, serial mediation path models in PROCESS (ver. 3.2) (Hayes, 2018). Specifically, to simplify the analysis, I combined all three forms of efficacy to form a composite efficacy measure. I then ran two sets of three custom models a piece for relational closeness and satisfaction as separate dependent variables, with each of the two custom models including a different information management response (i.e., individual models for direct information seeking, indirect information seeking, and information avoidance, respectively, to reduce multicollinearity in tests of direct and indirect effects). Finally, to test H_7 in all six models, indirect effects were estimated using bias-corrected confidence intervals based on 10,000 bootstrapped samples.

RESULTS

Preliminary Analyses

Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and Pearson's product-moment correlations for all variables, are reported in Table 1.

Table 1*Descriptive Statistics for Key Variables*

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. UD	.08	1.62	-										
2. NEG	1.75	1.05	.22*	-									
3. OE	5.37	1.5	-.01	-.23*	-								
4. Comm Eff	4.45	.72	-.24*	-.42**	.50**	-							
5. Coping Eff	5.27	.77	-.17	-.58**	.28**	.51**	-						
6. Target Eff	4.39	.80	-.18	-.25**	.34**	.58**	.41**	-					
7. Direct IS	4.02	1.55	.01	.002	.23*	.28**	.11	.21*	-				
8. Indirect IS	4.02	1.47	.25**	.33**	-.08	-.06	-.25**	.02	.53**	-			
9. Info Avoidance	2.48	1.28	.03	.39**	-.40**	-.41**	-.48**	-.41**	-.20*	.19*	-		
10. Closeness	4.21	.63	-.13	-.29**	.37**	.56**	.36**	.65**	.39**	.16	-.46**	-	
11. Satisfaction	5.53	1.21	-.17	-.23*	.25**	.39**	.24*	.30**	.21*	.15	-.22*	.56**	-

Note: UD = uncertainty discrepancy. NEG = negative emotions. OE = outcome assessment. Eff = efficacy. IS = information seeking.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

To determine whether the multivariate model depicted in Figure 1 needed to control for relational status, the relational status item was recoded into three categories comprising relationships in which participants were dating but were not in love ($n = 21$), were in love but were not yet engaged to be married ($n = 43$) or were engaged/married ($n = 47$). A series of one-way ANOVAs revealed significant differences in uncertainty discrepancy, negative emotions, outcome expectancies, efficacy, information avoidance, relational closeness, and relational satisfaction. Post hoc comparisons using Bonferroni adjustments revealed that for uncertainty discrepancy, negative emotions, efficacy, and satisfaction, the significant differences emerged between those participants who were dating but not in love and those who were engaged/married. For closeness, however, the former reported less closeness than those who were in love but not yet engaged and those who were engaged/married. Table 2 reports the mean differences in each variable based on relational status. Thus, relational status was entered as a control variable when testing the serial mediation model depicted in Figure 1 (i.e., H_7).

Table 2

Mean Differences in Motivated Information Management, Relational Closeness, and Satisfaction Based on Relational Status

Variable	Status	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i> (2, 108)	<i>p</i>	η^2
1. UD	Dating ¹	.90 _a	1.87	3.64	.030	.06
	In Love ²	-.02	1.42			
	Married ³	-.19 _a	1.58			
2. Negative Emotions	Dating	2.31 _b	1.39	6.73	.002	.11
	In Love	1.89	1.03			
	Married	1.39 _b	.75			
3. Outcome Expectancy	Dating	4.84	1.36	3.07	.050	.05
	In Love	5.24	1.50			
	Married	5.72	1.37			
4. Efficacy	Dating	4.32 _c	.61	7.30	.001	.12
	In Love	4.67	.57			
	Married	4.91 _c	.61			
5. Direct IS	Dating	3.75	1.19	.89	.413	<i>ns</i>
	In Love	3.91	1.53			
	Married	4.24	1.70			
6. Indirect IS	Dating	4.38	1.30	1.34	.266	<i>ns</i>
	In Love	4.11	1.49			
	Married	3.78	1.50			
7. Information Avoidance	Dating	3.11	1.15	3.25	.043	.06
	In Love	2.34	1.26			
	Married	2.33	1.30			
8. Closeness	Dating	3.88 _{de}	.70	3.87	.024	.07
	In Love	4.29 _d	.55			
	Married	4.29 _e	.62			
9. Satisfaction	Dating	4.97 _f	1.40	3.24	.043	.06
	In Love	5.55	1.21			
	Married	5.76 _f	1.06			

Note. UD = uncertainty discrepancy. IS = information seeking. Means with similar subscripts are significantly different at $p < .05$ using Bonferroni follow-up comparisons.

¹ $n = 21$. ² $n = 43$. ³ $n = 47$.

Primary Analysis

At the bivariate level of analysis, the results mostly supported the first six hypotheses (see Table 1). SMs' uncertainty discrepancy is positively associated with their negative emotions related to the discrepancy, providing support for H_1 . SMs' negative emotions about their uncertainty discrepancy are inversely associated with their outcome expectancies, as well as their communication efficacy, coping efficacy, and target efficacy, thus supporting H_2 . SMs' outcome expectancies are positively associated with their assessments of communication efficacy, coping efficacy, and target efficacy (H_3 supported). The results indicated that negative emotions are not significantly associated with direct information seeking but are positively associated with indirect information seeking and information avoidance, addressing RQ₁. Answering RQ₂, outcome expectancies are positively associated with direct information seeking and inversely associated with information avoidance, but they are not associated significantly with indirect information seeking.

As noted in Table 1, communication and target efficacies are positively associated with direct information seeking and unassociated with indirect information seeking, but negatively associated with information avoidance. However, coping efficacy is unassociated with direct information seeking but negatively associated with indirect information seeking and information avoidance. Thus, H_{4a} was partially supported but H_{4b} was fully supported. Direct information seeking is positively associated with both relational closeness and satisfaction, whereas indirect information seeking is not significantly associated with either relational outcome. Thus, H_5 was partially supported. The results revealed that information avoidance is inversely associated with both relational closeness and satisfaction, and thus, H_6 was supported.

Model Testing for Relational Closeness

The first serial mediation model, using direct information seeking as the information management response, produced a significant, multiple correlation coefficient, $R = .69$, $F(6, 104) = 15.61$, $p < .001$, accounting for 47.4% of the shared variance in relational closeness. After controlling for relational status, efficacy ($b = .57$, $SE = .09$, $t = 6.01$, $p < .001$) and direct information seeking ($b = .10$, $SE = .03$, $t = 3.23$, $p < .01$) emerged as the only significant predictors in the model. Bootstrapping analyses revealed no significant indirect effects.

Likewise, the second model, using indirect information seeking as the information management response also produced a significant, multiple correlation coefficient, $R = .69$, $F(6, 104) = 15.96$, $p < .001$, accounting for 47.9% of the shared variance in relational closeness. Again, efficacy ($b = .56$, $SE = .09$, $t = 6.41$, $p < .001$) and indirect information seeking ($b = .11$, $SE = .03$, $t = 3.41$, $p < .001$) emerged as the only significant predictors in the model, and there were no significant indirect effects.

The final model, using information avoidance as the information management response, produced a significant multiple correlation coefficient, $R = .66$, $F(6, 104) = 13.58$, $p < .001$, accounting for 43.9% of the shared variance in relational closeness. Unlike the information-seeking models above, only efficacy ($b = .56$, $SE = .10$, $t = 5.53$, $p < .001$) emerged as a significant predictor in the model, though again, none of the indirect effects were significant. Consequently, H_{7a} was not supported.

Model Testing for Relational Satisfaction

The second set of serial mediation models tested for relational satisfaction, one for each information management response while controlling for relational status. Again, the results for satisfaction mirrored those obtained for closeness. The first model, using direct information

seeking, produced a significant, multiple correlation coefficient, $R = .42$, $F(6, 104) = 3.75$, $p < .001$, accounting for 17.8% of the shared variance in relational satisfaction. Efficacy ($b = .46$, $SE = .23$, $t = 1.99$, $p < .05$) emerged as the only significant predictor in the model, with none of the indirect effects emerging as statistically significant.

The second model, using indirect information seeking, also produced a significant, multiple correlation coefficient, $R = .48$, $F(6, 104) = 5.06$, $p < .001$, accounting for 22.6% of the shared variance in relational satisfaction. Efficacy ($b = .45$, $SE = .22$, $t = 2.04$, $p < .05$) and indirect information seeking ($b = .22$, $SE = .08$, $t = 2.89$, $p < .01$) emerged as the only significant predictors in the model, though again, none of the indirect effects were statistically significant.

The final model, using information avoidance as the information management response, produced a significant, multiple correlation coefficient, $R = .41$, $F(6, 104) = 3.40$, $p < .001$, accounting for 16.4% of the shared variance in relational satisfaction. Like the direct information seeking model, efficacy ($b = .51$, $SE = .24$, $t = 2.11$, $p < .05$) emerged as the only significant predictor in the model, with none of the indirect effects emerging as statistically significant; hence, the results did not support H_{7b} .

DISCUSSION

The primary goal of this study was to examine the relational effects that uncertainty management behaviors have within the context of SM romantic relationships. Specifically, I wanted to explore SM information management behaviors in response to uncertainty regarding the information their partner has shared with their family about the status of their relationship, as well as how these behaviors relate to perceptions of relational closeness and satisfaction. Overall, the results supported the theoretical line of reasoning advanced by the TMIM, although the nonsignificant indirect effects of uncertainty discrepancy and negative emotions on closeness and satisfaction represent notable exceptions. Nevertheless, the results of this study provide important implications for each phase of the TMIM model.

The first implication that emerged from this study pertains to the negative emotions experienced by SMs within the interpretation phase. Consistent with the TMIM, I found that when SMs experienced negative emotional reactions to uncertainty regarding the information their partner has shared with their family about their relationship, they were more likely to engage in indirect information-seeking behaviors or information avoidance. However, negative emotions did not significantly relate to direct information-seeking. It is logical that SMs that face uncertainty regarding what others know about the current state of their relationship experience some level of discomfort in the form of negative emotions. In SM romantic relationships, direct conversations about the information that their families know about the status of their relationship may pose a personal or relational face threat. On the individual level, SMs who have not yet openly disclosed their sexual identity to many people in their life may experience a threat to their perceived level of autonomy. This threat to their individual face results in the experience of negative emotions if they are uncertain whether their partner has revealed information to their

family about their relationship. In an early stage of their partnership, SMs may perceive that directly seeking this information is a premature attempt to define what they mean to one another, posing a threat to relational face. Thus, SMs experiencing a negative emotional response to the uncertainty regarding what their partner has told their family about their relationship may expect better outcomes of their information search by using indirect information seeking or avoidance strategies.

The original TMIM (Afifi & Weiner, 2004) did not propose a direct relationship between negative emotions and information management strategies; however, through a recent meta-analysis of the TMIM literature, Kuang and Wilson (2021) found that the model implied by the theory gained explanatory power when including the direct relationship between negative emotions and information-seeking. Moreover, their results indicated that the direct relationship between negative emotions and information management behaviors could benefit by taking an alternative approach to analyzing information management behaviors. Scholars working within the confines of the TMIM generally analyze information management behaviors based on whether the individual is seeking or avoiding information (Afifi & Afifi, 2009; Afifi & Weiner, 2004). In this study, I assessed the distinction between direct vs. indirect information management, which may provide a possible explanation for the inconsistency of previous findings.

The second set of implications pertains to the evaluation phase of the model, specifically, outcome expectancies and the relationship between efficacy evaluations and perceptions of relational closeness and satisfaction. In line with the TMIM, outcome expectancies positively predicted SMs' efficacy evaluations, direct information seeking, and relational outcomes. Conversely, after controlling for relational status, outcome expectancies were no longer related

to direct information management or relational outcomes. One plausible explanation for this finding is that the sample included relationship types that varied widely in levels of commitment, at least in terms of how participants described the status of their partnership. The sample included couples that ranged from casually dating to already married. When SM couples start to discuss marriage, it is quite likely they have already had conversations with their partner about what relational information they will share with their future in-laws. Thus, their expectations regarding the outcome of an information search could be less relevant in the information-seeking process when compared to others in less committed relationships. Overall, these results indicate that the expected outcomes that SMs experienced within this context only contributed to their evaluations of their ability to communicate with their partner effectively.

Although I did not find significant indirect effects to support the serial mediation model specified by the TMIM, the results did indicate that SMs' perceptions of efficacy significantly predict relational closeness and relational satisfaction (to a lesser degree). The composite efficacy measure (communication, coping, and target) was the only variable to routinely predict relational closeness and satisfaction when controlling for relationship type. Interestingly, these results extend previous scholarship investigating the role of relational quality in the information management process. Rafferty and colleagues (2015) found that efficacy evaluations mediated the relationship between relational quality and topic avoidance when seeking information about their spouse's end-of-life preferences. Together, these results indicate that an individual's assessment of efficacy could directly contribute to perceptions of relational quality and mediate the influence relational quality has on the avoidance of relevant information. Thus, future research should further explore the nuanced relationship between efficacy evaluations and relational outcomes.

The third and final implication of the current study falls into the domain of the decision phase and how information management behaviors relate to relational outcomes. I posited that the information management strategy a SM uses to reduce uncertainty should be associated with how they perceive the current state of the relationship. In support of this hypothesis, the results indicate that direct information management strategies are positively correlated with SMs' perceptions of relational closeness and satisfaction. This finding confirms previous theoretical reasoning and extends our knowledge of how SM uncertainty management behaviors contribute to their perceptions of their relationship status. As previously discussed, direct information seeking within this relational context could require SMs to define what their relationship means to one another, especially for SMs in less committed relationships or for those who have not publicly disclosed their sexual identity. In support of these results, social penetration theory proposes that relationships grow in intimacy through repetitive communicative disclosures of private or sensitive information (Altman & Taylor, 1973). Thus, it could be that directly interacting with their partner to change their level of uncertainty provides SMs the opportunity to build closeness and satisfaction within their relationship.

The TMIM proposes that individuals may seek to increase, decrease, or maintain the amount of uncertainty they experience (Afifi & Weiner, 2004). However, efforts to increase or maintain uncertainty within an interpersonal relationship may carry unintended consequences for relational quality. For instance, the results of this study indicate that information avoidance negatively predicts SMs' perceptions of relational closeness and satisfaction. Indeed, these findings support previous research on topic avoidance and extend knowledge regarding the relational consequences of avoiding information within SM relationships. Researchers have previously linked topic avoidance to diminished reports of closeness and satisfaction between

heterosexual romantic partners (Dailey & Palomares, 2004; Dillow et al., 2009; Donovan-Kicken & Caughlin, 2010; Mikucki-Enyart & Caughlin, 2018; Sargent, 2009). Where direct information seeking may provide SM partners the opportunity to build closeness and satisfaction mutually, information avoidance likely inhibits this process. SMs who avoid information regarding what their partner's family knows about their relationship may not provide their partner with the opportunity to help resolve their uncertainty. Thus, the negative emotions SMs experience in response to their uncertainty likely do not get resolved, which may in turn result in perceived distance from their partner and reduced satisfaction with their relationship.

Theoretical and Practical Applications

Overall, the results of this study provide both theoretical and practical insights for SMs as they manage the uncertainty of what information their partner has shared with their family about their relationship. Afifi and Weiner (2004) specify that the TMIM is limited in scope to dyadic instances of information management. The current study stayed within this purview; however, the information I asked participants to reflect upon belongs to the participant and their partner and each member of their partner's family. Previous scholarship using the TMIM has investigated the management of information that is perhaps more central to the information manager and their relational or conversation partner (e.g., Droser, 2020; Lancaster, 2016; Rafferty et al., 2015). That is, the present study focused on information that may have been exchanged between a romantic partner and their family, rather than on information between the two partners within the relationship itself. It could be that the TMIM best applies to the management of information that is directly relevant to the relationship between dyadic partners, rather than indirectly related to their relationship via the implications that the information has for the partners and others in their extended family and social networks. Indeed, although I was

unable to observe indirect effects implied by the TMIM model, it is difficult for me to know whether this was due to insufficient statistical power, the nature of the information being investigated, or both.

Practically speaking, the findings provide insight into how SM couples can effectively communicate and manage uncertainty regarding the information they share with their families about their relationship. They suggest that SM relational partners would most benefit from creating a trusting, communicative atmosphere within their relationship that allows each partner to build confidence in their ability to communicate and cope with conversations regarding uncertainty. SMs that intentionally focus on building communication, coping, and target efficacy within their relationship increase the likelihood that their partner will come to them to resolve any uncertainty they experience regarding what information they share about their relationship with their family. When deciding to share information about their romantic relationship with their family, SMs would benefit from first checking in with their partner about what information is okay to share. Implementing this practice into the relationship allows each partner to communicate privacy boundaries regarding the information they are comfortable with their partner's family knowing about their relationship.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Despite the contributions of this study, the results should be interpreted with caution given the inherent limitations of the sample size and research design. The current study may have had an insufficient sample given the unique topic and relational context under investigation. A smaller sample of participants may have reduced the statistical power needed to detect significant indirect effects in a complex, serial mediation model such as the one tested here. However, the results provided preliminary support for the idea that the information management

behaviors used within a romantic relationship are associated with SMs' perceptions of closeness to their partner and how satisfied they are in their relationship. In addition, the sample consisted of primarily cisgender white individuals and lacked gender and racial diversity. Intersectionality plays an essential role in the lived experience of SMs; therefore, the uncertainty and information management processes observed in this study may look different for transgender, black, indigenous, and other SMs of color. Future research would benefit from expanding inclusion criteria to include SMs and their heterosexual counterparts, while also sampling more diverse populations.

Further, this study's design limits the applicability of the current findings. First, I collected data from participants using a cross-sectional design, so I cannot make causal claims—SMs' perceptions of relational closeness and satisfaction are likely to ebb and flow over time and may precede rather than flow from communicative behaviors. Thus, future research can address this limitation by employing a longitudinal design that tracks changes in closeness and satisfaction due to uncertainty management over time. A second limitation of the research design involves the use of a single discrepancy index to assess uncertainty discrepancy. The two items I used to measure participants' uncertainty discrepancy explain whether an uncertainty discrepancy exists or not. However, they failed to capture a more detailed assessment of whether participants desired to increase or decrease their current knowledge level. Thus, we do not know whether the participants' information management behaviors intended to increase or decrease the amount of uncertainty they experienced. Future research should implement a full measure that includes three recoded and averaged items with the discrepancy index to determine whether the participant desires to decrease, maintain, or increase uncertainty (Afifi & Afifi, 2009).

These limitations notwithstanding, the current study is an essential step in better understanding uncertainty management within SM romantic relationships. However, future researchers have ample space to expand knowledge of other areas of uncertainty within this context. A notable portion of the participants in this study indicated that their romantic partner identified as heterosexual; thus, their sexual identity may be unknown to their partner or other external parties. Future researchers could further explore the relationship between identity and uncertainty management. Additionally, future researchers should explore uncertainty when SM couples open their relationship to new romantic or sexual partners. The inclusion criteria for the current study limited the analysis to SMs in monogamous or monogamous and open relationships; however, there are likely unique experiences of uncertainty when couples introduce new members to their romantic relationship.

Researchers estimate that 83% of SMs worldwide conceal their sexual identity from all or most people in their lives because of cultural norms or national laws (Pachankis & Bränström, 2019). Thus, SMs present themselves and their relationships differently to their friends and family (Gattamorta & Quidley-Rodriguez, 2018), fostering an environment for uncertainty to grow. The present study suggests that the repercussions of uncertainty and how SMs manage it within their romantic relationships do not end when a SM openly discloses their sexual identity. Rather, when facing uncertainty regarding the information that their partner has shared with their family about their relationship, SMs may benefit most by communicating in ways that build a sense of efficacy and foster an environment that encourages direct information seeking.

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APPENDIX

Survey Items

Screening Questions

- Which best describes your relationship type?
 - Monogamous
 - Monogamous and Open
 - Polyamorous
 - Single
- How would you best classify your current romantic relationship?
 - Romantic potential
 - Casual dating but little emotional attachment
 - Frequent dating but little emotional attachment
 - Some emotional attachment
 - Emotional attachment but not in love
 - In love
 - In love and would like to marry but have never discussed marriage
 - In love and have discussed marriage but have not made marriage plans
 - Engaged to be married
 - Spouse
- How frequently does your partner contact their family of origin (parents and siblings)?
 - Very frequently
 - Infrequently
 - Neither frequently nor infrequently
 - Frequently
 - Very frequently

Participant Demographics

- What is your age?
- Choose one or more races that you consider yourself to be
 - White
 - Black or African American
 - American Indian or Alaska Native
 - Asian
 - Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
 - Other
- What is your biological sex?
 - Male
 - Female
 - Intersex
 - Prefer not to say
- What is your gender identity?
 - Male
 - Female
 - Non-binary

- Male to Female Transgender
- Female to Male Transgender
- Prefer not to say
- Other
- How would you describe your sexual orientation?
 - Lesbian
 - Gay
 - Bisexual
 - Queer
 - Asexual
 - Pansexual
 - Fluid
 - Straight
 - Other
- Several statements are given below. Read and indicate your agreement with each item on a scale from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree
 - I am attracted to women
 - I am attracted to men
 - I am attracted to masculine individuals
 - I am attracted to feminine individuals
 - I am attracted to androgynous individuals
 - I am attracted to gender non-conforming individuals

Participant's Partner Demographics

- What is your partner's age?
- Choose one or more races that best describe your partner
 - White
 - Black or African American
 - American Indian or Alaska Native
 - Asian
 - Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
 - Other
- What is your partner's biological sex?
 - Male
 - Female
 - Intersex
 - Prefer not to say
- What is your partner's gender identity?
 - Male
 - Female
 - Non-binary
 - Male to Female Transgender
 - Female to Male Transgender
 - Prefer not to say
 - Other
- How would you describe your partner's sexual orientation?

- Lesbian
- Gay
- Bisexual
- Queer
- Asexual
- Pansexual
- Fluid
- Straight
- Other

Uncertainty Discrepancy

- Read each item and indicate the amount of information associated with each prompt. (1 = *Nothing* to 7 = *Everything*)
 - How much information do you know about what your partner tells their family about your relationship?
 - How much information do you want to know about what your partner tells their family about your relationship?
- Read each item and indicate your level of anxiety associated with each prompt. (1 = *Not at all anxious* to 7 = *Extremely Anxious*)
 - When you compare how much you want to know and how much you actually know about what your partner tells their family about your relationship, how anxious does it make you feel?
 - How anxious does it make you feel to think about how much/how little you know about what your partner tells their family about your relationship?
- Read each item and indicate the level of anxiety that is produced by the prompt. (1 = *Not at all anxiety producing* to 7 = *Extremely anxiety producing*)
 - The size of the similarity/difference between how much I know and how much I'd like to know about what my partner tells their family about our relationship is...

Negative emotional responses (Afifi & Afifi, 2009; Fowler & Afifi, 2011)

- Consider the difference between how much you know and do not know about the information your partner tells their family about your relationship. Then rate the degree to which you feel each of these emotions. (1 = *Not at all* to 7 = *Very much*)
 - Worried
 - Sad
 - Nervous
 - Scared
 - Anxious
 - Disappointed
 - Distressed
 - Frustrated
 - Upset
 - Anger

Outcome Expectancies (Afifi & Afifi, 2009)

- Please read each item and indicate the likely outcome of each prompt. (1 = *A lot more negatives than positives* to 7 = *A lot more positives than negatives*).
 - Talking to my partner directly about the information they share about our relationship to their family would produce...
 - Asking my partner what they think about sharing information about our relationship with their family would produce...
 - Approaching my partner to ask about their beliefs on sharing information about our relationship with their family would produce...

Efficacy Assessments (Afifi & Afifi, 2009)

- Communication Efficacy
 - Read each prompt and indicate the extent you agree with each statement. (1 = *Strongly disagree* to 7 = *Strongly agree*).
 - I can ask my partner what information they have shared about our relationship with their family
 - I could approach my partner to ask about their beliefs on sharing information about our relationship with their family
 - I can approach my partner to talk about what information they have shared about our relationship with their family
- Target Efficacy
 - Read each prompt and indicate the extent you agree with each statement. (1 = *Strongly disagree* to 7 = *Strongly agree*).
 - My partner would be completely honest about the information they have shared about our relationship with their family
 - My partner would give me truthful information about what they have shared about our relationship with their family
 - My partner would be completely forthcoming about the information they have shared about our relationship with their family
 - If approached, my partner would be upfront about the information they have shared about our relationship with their family.
- Coping Efficacy
 - Read each prompt and indicate the extent you agree with each statement. (1 = *Strongly disagree* to 7 = *Strongly agree*).
 - I feel confident that I could cope with whatever I discover about the information my partner has shared about me with their family
 - I couldn't deal with what I might find out about the information my partner has shared about me with their family
 - I can handle whatever I would find out about the information my partner has shared about me with their family
 - I would not be able to deal with what I might find related to the information my partner has shared about me with their family

Information Management Behaviors (Afifi & Afifi, 2009; Afifi & Weiner, 2004; Afifi et al., 2004)

- Think about the topic of who you and your partner are to each other, i.e., the state of your romantic relationship and how much your partner's family knows about your relationship. With this issue in mind, read each question below and indicate how likely you are to respond to this issue using the following scale: 1 (Very Unlikely) to 7 (Very Likely)
 - How likely are you to ask your partner about what they think about this issue?
 - How likely are you to avoid seeking information from your partner about this issue?
 - How likely are you to just sit back and see what happens with this issue?
 - How likely are you to approach your partner to ask about this issue?
 - How likely are you to hint at this issue to get more information from your partner?
 - How likely are you to talk to your partner about what they think about this issue?
 - How likely are you to talk around this issue with your partner to get more information?
 - How likely are you to just let this issue unfold naturally?
 - How likely are you to joke about this issue to get more information from your partner?
 - How likely are you to watch how your partner acts to get a better understanding of their thoughts on this issue?
 - How likely are you to observe your partner's behavior to get more information about what they think of this issue?
 - How likely are you to ignore information from your partner about this issue?
 - How likely are you to observe what your partner does to get more information about what they think of this issue?
 - How likely are you to do something about this issue?
 - How likely are you to go out of your way to avoid information about this issue?
 - How likely are you to simply change how you think about this issue instead of talking to your partner about it?
 - How likely are you to accept the circumstances surrounding this issue rather than trying to work things out?
 - How likely are you to think that this issue is no longer important?

Relational Satisfaction (Huston et al., 1986)

- We would like you to think about your relationship with your partner over the last month. Please select the number that most closely describes your feelings toward your partner over the last month. (Semantic scale with 1 being closest to the first emotion and 7 being closest to the second).
 - Miserable vs. Enjoyable
 - Hopeful vs. Discouraging
 - Free vs. Tied Down
 - Empty vs. Full
 - Interesting vs. Boring
 - Rewarding vs. Disappointing
 - Doesn't give me much chance vs. Brings out the best in me
 - Lonely vs. Friendly

- Hard vs. Easy
- Worthwhile vs. Useless
- All things considered, how satisfied have you been with your relationships with your partner the last month? (1 = *Very dissatisfied* to 7 = *Completely satisfied*)

Relational Closeness (Buchanan et al., 1991)

- We are interested in your level of closeness with your partner. Please read through all of the questions carefully and answer on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very).
 - How openly do you talk with your partner?
 - How careful do you feel you have to be about what you say to your partner?
 - How comfortable do you feel admitting doubts and fears to your partner?
 - How interested is your partner in talking to you when you want to talk?
 - How often does your partner express affection or liking for you?
 - How well does your partner know what you are really like?
 - How close do you feel to your partner?
 - How confident are you that your partner would help you if you had a problem?
 - If you needed money, how comfortable would you be asking your partner for it?
 - How interested is your partner in the things you do?

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EDUCATION

Texas Christian University | Master of Science in Communication Studies Fort Worth, TX
GPA: 3.50 August 2020-Present
Utah State University | Bachelor of Science in Communication Studies Logan, UT
Minor: Biology Communication Studies GPA: 3.71 May 2019

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Graduate Research Assistant Fort Worth, Texas
Texas Christian University August 2020 - Present

- Conducted solo-authored and co-authored organizational and interpersonal communication research.
- Utilized qualitative and quantitative research methods such as content analysis, thematic analysis, and surveys.
- Studied the experience of individuals onboarding to new positions remotely during the pandemic.

Graduate Teaching Assistant Fort Worth, Texas
Texas Christian University August 2020-Present

- Taught two courses of Communicating Effectively in Your Community each semester.
- Facilitated class meetings and discussions with 20 students per session online and in person.

Assistant Team Lead Logan, Utah
Conservice December 2018-August 2020

- Established a team culture that focuses on workplace engagement
- Conducted qualitative analysis of established processes to increase team efficiency

Group Quality Coach/Utility Processor Logan, Utah
Conservice August 2017-November 2018

- Assessed the knowledge and skill level of a team of 10-15 employees
- Coached employees one-on-one to increase employee competence

Conferences Attended

Utah Conference on Undergraduate Research February 2019

Empowering Teaching Excellence August 2018

Professional Affiliation

National Communication Association September 2018-Present

Volunteer Experience

LGBTQ SAVES Fort Worth, Texas August 2021 – December 2021

The Sunshine Terrace Foundation Logan, Utah January 2017-August 2020

Academic Papers

Markham, A. (2021). Qualitative analysis of affectionate advice seeking on Reddit. [Manuscript in preparation]. Department of Communication Studies, Texas Christian University.

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