

Sexual Possible Selves in Emerging Adulthood

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to explore sexual-focused possible selves and strategies in a sample of undergraduate students at a large southeastern university. Sexual possible selves (SPS) address individualized expectations and fears regarding sex, along with the associated behavioral strategies used to attain or avoid these expected or feared selves. To date, there are no studies that examine the SPS of emerging adults. This study aims to fill this gap by examining the content of first year students' SPS and behavioral strategies, and by considering whether SPS vary by sex, romantic relationship (RR) status, and indicators of socioeconomic status. SPS questionnaires were collected from 282 first year students at the University of Tennessee. A content analysis of the participants' responses indicated significance of goals related to abstinence, interpersonal relationships, physical/sexual health, experimentation, reputation, risky behaviors, and rape/assault. Results further revealed that remaining abstinent was a salient focus of expected SPS, as was expected interpersonal relationship strategies, and feared physical/health SPS and strategies. Additionally, chi-square tests indicated significant associations between SPS and the participants' sex, RR status, and RR type for the categories related to abstinence, physical/sexual health, interpersonal relationships, experimentation, reputation, and rape/assault. Findings from this study have implications for understanding sex and relationship differences among emerging adults, as well as implications for sexual education programs and possible selves-based interventions prior to entering college.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Extensive demographic shifts over the past half-century, including an increase in the number of young people who pursue higher education, have caused scholars to reexamine developmental markers from the late teens into the mid to late twenties (Arnett, 2000; Rindfuss, 1991). This developmental period, referred to as emerging adulthood, is characterized by intense exploration of possible life directions, along with the deferment of adult behaviors. This period has created a new type of young adult engaged in intensive exploration, experimentation, and transition. In particular, the late teens and 20s have been conceptualized as a transitional period during which many young people are exploring different facets of their identities such as occupation, romantic relationships, and sexuality. According to Arnett (2000, 2005), the peak in risky sexual behavior in the late teens and early 20s coincides with the normative processes of role expansion and experimentation that occur in young adulthood. In particular, these individuals often base many of their sexual decisions on what they perceive as the sexual expectations of this transitional life period (Lewis, Lee, Patrick, & Fosso, 2007; Stinson, 2010). Sexual expectations, or broad perceptions of normative sexual behaviors, can be influenced by both perceived peer behaviors and perceptions of the sexual culture within college settings. To integrate themselves within the social hierarchy, many individuals explore and engage in perceived “normative behaviors” to fit in (Lewis et al., 2007; Stinson, 2010). Further, such exploration increases individuals’ susceptibility to engaging in high-risk behaviors that may have negative consequences (Byno, Mullis, & Mullis, 2009). The Center for Disease Control [CDC] indicates that 15 to 24 year olds account for nearly half of all new sexually transmitted infections

(STIs) and a disproportionate number of unintended pregnancies (Martinez, Copen, & Abma, 2011). Despite the potential risk associated with exploration, sexual experimentation may be beneficial as it allows emerging adults to gain experience prior to committing to the enduring responsibilities that are normative in adulthood (Lam & Lefkowitz, 2013). Whether positive or negative, the opportunities for exploration within the emerging adulthood period could potentially establish patterns of health-related behaviors for years to come (Olmstead, Roberson, Pasley, & Fincham, 2013).

Transitions into new life periods are often accompanied by individuals setting new developmentally-appropriate goals, expectations, and behaviors. Individuals often think deeply about their futures, posing questions such as: Who or what would I like to become? What behaviors would I like to avoid? Or what do I want to accomplish within this transitional life frame? These nature and implications of concept of questions have been explored through the concept of “possible selves.” Markus and Nurius (1986) defined possible selves as “the ideal selves that we would very much like to become; they are also the selves we could become, and the selves we are afraid of becoming” (p. 954). These authors suggest that individuals have both expected or ideal possible selves for their future, as well as feared or avoided potential possible selves. An individual’s multiple possible selves can be viewed as the cognitive manifestation of aspirations, motivations, goals, fears, and threats (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Possible selves also provide simulated actions and behavioral strategies for organizing, forming, reaching, and avoiding these future oriented selves (Cross & Markus, 1991; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Yang & Noels, 2013). Possible selves are thought to bridge past experiences with current behaviors and developmental milestones, and can support future goals by providing developmental paths for change over time (Yang & Noels, 2013).

Previous research has found that possible selves are associated with future behaviors and outcomes (Oyserman & James, 2009). More specifically, possible selves paired with relevant strategies expressed by the individual have been shown to influence how one behaves in transitional periods, including during the time period Arnett (2000) defined as emerging adulthood (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Oyserman & James, 2009). Given the relevance of possible selves for understanding behavior during transitional periods, this framework may help to shed new light on sexuality and sexual risk taking during emerging adulthood. Despite the potential utility of the model, previous research has yet to explore the content of this population's future perceptions of their sexual selves. With this in mind, this thesis will examine the role of "sexual possible selves" in first semester college freshmen.

This thesis will begin by discussing the sexual expectation literature, as it examines the relationship of sexual expectations with the engagement in sexual behaviors, followed by an overview of gaps within this literature. Next, a closer examination of the applicability of possible selves will be addressed, including a discussion of possible selves content and the inclusion of behavioral strategies. Specifically, this thesis will discuss the lack of attention that has been given to sexual possible selves and articulate the necessity of exploring this domain by exploring three research questions: What is the content of first year college students' expected and feared sexual possible selves? What is the content of first year college students' expected and feared sexual possible selves strategies? Do sexual possible selves and strategies vary by demographic factors? These questions examine the content and salience of these possible selves, as well as the implications of these future-oriented visions of the self might have on well-being. Lastly, the importance of studying sexual possible selves within the emerging adult period will be emphasized followed by an overview of the current study.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

The identification of the life course period known as emerging adulthood was influenced by extensive demographic shifts in Westernized countries, and is considered to be a period of intense self-exploration, involving experimentation, transitions, and expansion of an individual's self (Arnett, 2000). Specifically, over the past half-century, scholars have indicated an increase in the attainment of higher education within populations residing in industrialized countries. For many in pursuit of higher education, college is a period of relative freedom and independence from previously restrictive rules or standards. In particular, college-attending emerging adults typically enjoy more freedom to try different lifestyles and make mistakes than do their non-college-attending counterparts (Lam & Lefkowitz, 2013). During this period, emerging adults are free from adult roles and norms and often explore their identities, including sexuality, while deferring decisions with long-term implications.

For many young people, this is a time to explore and expand their sexual belief systems. Although certain types of sexual explorations increase individuals' susceptibility to engaging in high-risk behaviors that can create negative consequences (Byno et al., 2009), other research has indicated that experimentation may be beneficial, as it allows emerging adults to gain a range of experience prior to committing to the enduring responsibilities that are normative in adulthood (Lam & Lefkowitz, 2013). As part of sexual exploration and experience processes, many individuals feel pressured to engage in what they perceive to be normative college student behavior. Previous literature has indicated that often these sexual perceptions, or sexual

expectations, are viewed as negative behaviors that the individual does not expect or wish to participate (Cohen & Shotland, 1996; Lambert, Kahn, & Apple, 2003; Stinson, 2010). However, many individuals perceive social or relationship pressure to participate in behaviors that may increase the risk for consequences, such as hooking up while intoxicated or sexual intercourse with acquaintances, regardless of their comfort level (Bogle, 2008; Stinson, 2010). Additionally, research has shown the importance of addressing the relationship between an individual's personal goals and their participation in high-risk behaviors (Cohen & Shotland, 1996; Lewis, Lee, Patrick, & Fosso, 2007; Oyserman & Markus, 1990b). Individuals who indicate personal goals that are contrasting to perceived social norms may be able to avoid high-risk behavior (Cohen & Shotland, 1996). Emphasis is placed on the importance of the construct of an individual's possible selves, along with associated behavioral strategies. Personal goals that are proximal in nature and focus on a person's image of him or herself have widely been referred to as an individual's possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986).

Despite the indicated importance of expectations, the construct of possible selves has not been adapted to address an individual's sexual expectations or goals. The purpose of this review is to introduce and emphasize the construct and content of sexual possible selves among an emerging adult population. This review will begin by addressing the construct of sexual expectations, as it explores expectations around sexuality and engagement in sexual behaviors. Specifically, information regarding sexual expectations and relationship initiation, sexual expectations during the transition to college, sexual expectations among the "hookup" culture in college students, and gender variability are points of focus in the sections that follow. Reviewing the literature on sexual expectations provides background information about the content of future oriented expectations of sexuality. Next, this review will articulate the

differences between sexual expectations and possible selves with a focus on how an emerging adult's sexual expectations differ from their sexual possible selves. Sexual possible selves will then be used to discuss gaps in the sexual behavior literature to which the construct of sexual expectation does not attend.

Building on the dimension of sexual expectations, the construct of possible selves is then discussed. To begin, a summary of the possible selves literature that focuses on the content of an individual's possible selves will be provided. Further, previous findings of possible selves in relation to behavioral outcomes will be discussed throughout the possible selves review. These findings will include delinquency and academic achievement among adolescent and young adult populations, along with the relationship between sexual orientation, possible selves, and well-being. Lastly, the applicability and importance of studying possible selves within the emerging adult period will be discussed.

Sexual expectations

A growing body of literature related to college-student sexuality emphasizes the importance of “sexexpectations” or sexual expectations. Sexual expectations have been defined as sexual beliefs or behaviors that an individual expects to occur (Stinson, 2010). These expectations focus on either present behaviors or norms or may encompass future expectations. For example, individuals who are not sexually active may indicate that they expect college to be a time to engage in sexual behaviors, along with a time for the initiation of sexual intercourse in relationships (Cohen & Shotland, 1996; Stinson, 2010). Sexual expectations are often broader expectations derived from the perceptions of others' sexual behavior. For instance, adolescents often assume that college students are heavily involved in the college hookup culture, indicating that hooking up is normative for this time period (Bogle, 2008; Stinson, 2010). Lastly, sexual

expectations can encompass expectations regarding the initiation of sexual activities within relationships and with others (i.e., how quickly peers are initiating sex within relationships). The sexual expectations literature, along with previous examples, illustrates the idea that the focus of many individuals' sexual expectations is on the perceptions of peer behavior and its implications for sexual engagement (Bogle, 2008; Cohen & Shotland, 1996; Lewis, et al., 2007; Stinson, 2010). Further, sexual expectations are not perceived as an individual focus (i.e., the individual's expectations of themselves), but instead typically encompass broader populations, including college students.

There is also evidence that the majority of the sexual expectations literature has focused on expectations about sexual initiation, including first date sexual expectations (Emmers-Sommer et al., 2010; Mongeau & Carey, 1996; Mongeau, Morr Serewicz, & Therrien, 2004; Morr & Mongeau, 2004), sexual expectations within relationships (Aubrey, Harrison, Kramer, Yellin, 2003; Cohen & Shotland, 1996; Knox & Wilson, 1981; Morgan & Zurbriggen, 2007), and sexual expectations during transitional periods such as emerging adulthood (Lambert et al., 2003; Lewis et al., 2007; Stinson, 2010). From these foci, an overall theme of sexual expectation literature is that expectations are influenced by gender, alcohol consumption, and perceptions of peer behaviors.

To begin, literature has indicated that an individual's expectations vary greatly between emerging adult men and women (Cohen & Shotland, 1996; Knox & Wilson, 1981; Lewis et al., 2007; Mongeau et al., 2004). For example, men and women have reported different responses regarding sexual initiation, sexuality within relationships, and hooking up behaviors in college with men reporting expectations around earlier sexual intercourse in relationships and hookup behaviors than women (Cohen & Shotland, 1996; Morr & Mongeau, 2004; Stinson, 2010).

Further, first date sexual expectations have been positively associated with alcohol consumption (Mongeau & Johnson, 1995; Morr & Mongeau, 2004). For example, the drinking of alcohol has been associated with expectations of the engagement in sexual behaviors on a first date (Morr & Mongeau, 2004). Lastly, sexual expectations about peer behaviors have been associated with one's own sexual behavior (Lambert et al., 2003; Lewis et al., 2007). Specifically, perceptions of peer engagement in behaviors that may increase health risk, including not consistently using contraceptives, can influence individuals' engagement in high-risk behaviors (Lewis et al., 2007). Overall, multiple factors have been associated with the development of emerging adults' sexual expectations, including first date sexual expectations.

The navigation of sexual engagement on first dates has been a prominent topic within the sexual expectations literature. Sexual engagement on first dates can range from hand-holding to sexual intercourse, and is often linked with the sexual expectations of the date (Emmers-Sommer et al., 2010). Specifically, sexual expectations within first date scripts appear to vary greatly by gender (Emmers-Sommer et al., 2010; Mongeau et al., 2004; Morr Serewicz & Gale, 2008), initiator of the date (Emmers-Sommer et al., 2010; Morr & Mongeau, 2004), and alcohol use (Mongeau & Johnson, 1995; Morr & Mongeau, 2004).

A recent study by Emmers-Sommer and colleagues (2010) investigated sexual expectations on first dates by examining their relationship with who initiated the date, who paid, the location of the date, and gender variability. A sample of 442 undergraduate students (43.2% women) was collected from a large southwestern university with the majority of students reporting that they were not in a relationship or only casually dating ($n = 215$). Data was collected through an online anonymous survey with sexual expectations being measured through the Sexual Expectations Scale (McCabe & Collins, 1984). The Sexual Expectations Scale

indicated the expectation of a particular sexual activity being initiated, with 1 being representative of sexual activity not occurring and 7 indicating that sexual engagement will occur. Results supported their hypothesis that men ($M = 2.85$) hold significantly higher expectations of the engagement in sexual behaviors on a first date than women ($M = 2.33$). Specifically, men hold higher sexual expectations when the man initiated the date, paid for the date, and if the date occurred at an apartment rather than a public location (Emmers-Sommer et al., 2010). In contrast, women held higher sexual expectations if the date was paid for both the man and woman while occurring at an apartment rather than a public location. These findings indicate that navigation of sexual expectations are an important part of first dates and vary greatly by gender.

Similar to first date expectations, the beginning of intimate relationships involves the negotiation of rules, resources, and behaviors. Negotiations typically encompass the initiation of physical or sexual intimacy; however, studies show that men and women vary in their acceptance of and reasoning for sexual activity (Cohen & Shotland, 1996; Knox & Wilson, 1981). One negotiation within relationships involves expectations about the initiation of sexual intercourse. Often sexual expectations in relationships can be challenging as partners may have different expectations of when sexual activity should occur. In particular, the expectations of sexual initiation within relationships appear to vary greatly within heterosexual couples (Cohen & Shotland, 1996; Knox & Wilson, 1981). This type of discrepancy can create pressure and unwanted advances, which may lead to engagement in sexual behaviors prior to reaching a comfort level within the relationship.

Examining this concept in more detail, Cohen and Shotland (1996) investigated individuals' expectations regarding the initiation of sexual intercourse in different relationship

types. The primary purpose of their study was to examine when partners within a relationship first expect sexual intercourse to occur and how these compared to their actual experiences. Expectations were collected via questionnaires from 242 heterosexual introductory psychology university students (57.0% women). The primary finding of this study supported the idea that, in general, men ($M = 10.11$, $SD = 6.37$ dates) and women ($M = 17.73$, $SD = 11.91$ dates) tend to report different sexual expectations regarding the initiation of sexual intercourse (Cohen & Shotland, 1996). The authors further compared the personal expectations of the participants to their expectations regarding the average man and woman, and found that men and women reported their personal initiation of sexual activity would occur later than the average woman ($M = 11.95$ dates) and man ($M = 4.03$ dates). Their findings showed that sexual expectations vary by gender.

Lastly, a branch of the sexual expectations literature focuses on the development of expectations and behaviors across transitional time periods. Sexuality does not occur within one developmental period, but rather is established over time and transitions. In particular, navigating sexuality is an important part of adolescent development that progresses throughout the period of emerging adulthood (Bogle, 2008; Olmstead et al., 2013; Stinson, 2010). A large proportion of the sexual expectations literature has focused on individuals' perceptions of social or peer norms of the participation in sexual behavior. This appears to be particularly true among the emerging adult population of older adolescents who are transitioning into the first year of college. Research has indicated a trend in older adolescents' having already established preconceived expectations of college sexuality prior to beginning their first year (Olmstead et al., 2013; Stinson, 2010), and these preconceived ideas of sexuality are heavily influenced by

perceived social norms. Ultimately, these preconceptions may influence personal sexual expectations and goals (Lewis et al., 2007).

Young adults have been shown to overestimate others' comfort with sexual initiation and casual sex behavior (Cohen & Shotland, 1996; Lambert et al., 2003; Lewis et al., 2007; Stinson, 2010). A majority of young adults rated themselves as having greater discomfort with hooking up than what they perceived their peers may be doing (Lewis et al., 2007). These young adults reported that the perceived social norms were greater than their own levels of comfort with sexual behaviors. Few students indicated that they would have sex in a situation lacking emotional attraction; however they believed that the average student would (Cohen & Shotland, 1996). Due to these misconceptions, many emerging adults may enter college with unhealthy or dysfunctional goals related to their own sexuality.

In particular, these sexual expectations have been linked with the participation in "hook up" behavior. Hooking up is a potentially risky phenomenon that appears to be salient within emerging adulthood (Bogle, 2008; Owen, Rhoades, Stanley, & Fincham, 2010) and on college campuses (Garcia, Reiber, Massey, & Meriwether, 2012). This construct is thought to begin in adolescence and continues during college, but appears to fade upon graduation of college (Bogle, 2008; Stinson, 2010). However, many scholars believe that the occurrence of hook up behavior is influenced by perceived social or peer norms (Barriger & Velez-Blasini, 2013; Bogle, 2008; Lewis et al., 2007; Stinson, 2010). Though hook up behavior can be seen as positive experience for some individuals, as it allows for the expansion and experimentation of sexual behaviors prior to the commitment of adult roles, it often encourages behaviors that may increase health risks.

Lewis, Lee, Patrick, and Fosso (2007) examined perceptions of “risky” sexual behavior norms among college students, and its relationship with their own sexual behavior. Gender specific norms included both same-sex perceptions (i.e., same sex peers) and opposite-sex perceptions (i.e., opposite sex peers; Lewis et al., 2007). Data was collected from 687 college students ($M = 18.53$ years, 61.7% Caucasian) who were involved in a longitudinal intervention that began during their transition to college. Risky sexual behaviors were measured by three survey questions including number of sexual partners, frequency of casual sexual intercourse, and frequency of alcohol-related risky sexual behaviors. They hypothesized that participants would expect that men and women would engage in more risky sexual behavior than their actual participation in these high-risk behaviors. Findings supported these hypotheses, as men and women expected that others were participating in more risky sexual behavior than their actual participation in all three areas. Findings also indicated a gender effect: women had greater misperceptions regarding the sexual behaviors of men than men did about other men’s behaviors. Further, the authors hypothesized that whereas same-sex perceptions of risky sexual behavior would be associated with personal engagement in risky sexual behaviors, opposite-sex perceptions would not be related to personal engagement in risky sexual behaviors. Results were that the individual’s perceived frequency of casual sexual intercourse of the typical same-sex individual was positively associated with the individual’s participation in casual sexual intercourse. This study extended the literature regarding perceptions of peer behavior within the sexual expectation construct.

Overall, sexual expectations during developmental transitions appears to be an influential predictor of sexual behaviors for many emerging adults; however, the sexual expectations literature addresses broad perceptions of peer norms and behaviors, but does not examine

individual sexual expectations for themselves. Further, sexual expectations do not encompass individuals' specific feared goals that they hope to avoid. Lastly, sexual expectations do not provide specific behavioral strategies or pathways as to why this relationship occurs. These limitations have created gaps within the sexuality literature that the construct of possible selves may help to address.

Possible Selves As A Supplement to Sexual Expectations

Possible selves address goals that an individual expects to achieve or hopes to avoid becoming within the proximal future (Markus & Nurius, 1986). An individual's multiple possible selves can be viewed as the cognitive manifestation of aspirations, motivations, goals, fears, and threats (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Possible selves are individualized in nature, capture feared expectations, and allow individuals to articulate specific behavioral strategies to achieving these expectations (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Markus and Nurius (1986) suggest that an individual has both expected or ideal possible selves for their future, along with feared or avoided potential possible selves. Possible selves also provide simulated actions and behavioral strategies for organizing, forming, reaching, and avoiding these future oriented selves (Cross & Markus, 1991; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Yang & Noels, 2013). Although the sexual expectations literature appears to encompass many aspects of sexuality among adolescents and emerging adults, the inclusion of information regarding an individual's expected and feared possible selves would expand the body of sexuality literature in three ways.

First, the construct of possible selves focuses on the internalized expectations of future selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986). In contrast, the sex expectations literature emphasizes broader conceptions of peer or social norms. This appears to be particularly true regarding sexual expectations. These broad expectations or perceptions tend to be focused outward on the sexual

norms and sexual behaviors within social communities and encompass how perceived social pressure may influence behaviors (Bogle, 2008; Barriger & Velez-Blasini, 2013; Stinson, 2010). Though these expectations have been linked with the participation in sexual behaviors that may increase exposure to health risks (Lewis et al., 2007), possible selves would expand the sexual expectations literature by allowing for a more specialized view of future expectations for an individual. Additionally, possible selves can guide and regulate behavior as it provides a roadmap from present goals to future behaviors (Oyserman, Bybee, Terry, & Hart-Johnson, 2004). This specialized view may allow for an extensive investigation into the relationship between expectations and participation in sexual behavior.

Additionally, whereas sexual expectations literature focuses solely on the individual's expectations around societal norms, possible selves provide a complimentary perspective of an individual's feared possible selves, or possible selves they hope to avoid. Feared selves are based on personal experience, and some authors have indicated that being grounded in personal experience means they are more effective at predicting appropriate developmental life states (Hoyle & Sherrill, 2006). Additionally, previous studies have shown that by including the feared possible selves, there is the possibility of achieving balance within the individual's possible selves. Balance is achieved when an individual lists both an expected goal in conjunction with a hoped to be avoided goal of the same content (Oyserman & Markus, 1990b). Balance within possible selves has been associated with more consistent goal attainment and behavioral outcomes (Oyserman & Markus, 1990b). In other words, by including a feared possible self, research is able to further examine how one's expectations are related to engagement in specific behaviors.

Lastly, possible selves includes associated behavioral strategies within the expressed goals. These strategies have been shown to be indicators of actual participation or achievement of the expected and feared goals. As previously mentioned, an individual's sexual expectations of peers may be influential regarding their own sexual behaviors; however, this construct may have difficulty with explanations as to *why* this relationship exists. The behavioral strategies of possible selves may further explain this relationship. Behavioral strategies can help an individual reach an expected self or goal, or help an individual avoid a particular feared self or goal (Oyserman, Bybee, & Terry, 2006). Strategies can act as roadmaps or motivational factors to goal achievement. For example, if an individual expresses a goal of maintaining abstinence throughout their college experience, an associated strategy provides a plan or pathway for the individual to maintain their abstinence.

Possible Selves within The Developmental Literature

Individuals can possess multiple expected and feared possible selves, and often have possible selves that change and develop as they reach developmental transitions (Oyserman & James, 2009). As an individual develops, their possible selves also develop in domains relevant to their life stage, or tasks, and are typically linked with their social roles and identities (Cross & Markus, 1994; Oyserman & James, 2009). For example, a possible self that might be reported by an adolescent may focus on academic goals, whereas a possible self for a middle aged individual would likely be more family related. An individual's possible selves bridge past experiences with current behaviors and developmental milestones. A number of self-regulatory models have suggested positive and negative consequences of possible selves, with possible selves motivating current action (Oyserman et al., 2006). Further, possible selves act as a personal striving or plan that focuses the individual's attention on maintaining a goal. Oyserman

and Markus (1990a) suggested that possible selves can be “viewed as motivational resources that provide individuals with some control over their own behavior” (p. 113). Goal-focused individuals are more consistent in ignoring conflicting information that may impede goal attainment (Oyserman et al., 2004). Possible selves may be seen as reference points upon which more general self-impressions and evaluations are formed. Possible selves also function to generate feelings of competence, self-efficacy, and control (Knox, Funk, Elliott, & Bush, 2000). With higher competence and self-efficacy, an individual may resist engaging in perceived normative risk behaviors.

Possible selves content. Early possible selves studies focused on examining the content of an individual’s expected and feared possible selves (Oyserman & Fryberg, 2006). Cross and Markus (1991) emphasized the importance of studying the content of individual’s possible selves as they act as motivators for behavior and are instrumental in affirming of the “now” self. One contribution of this literature is articulating common expected and feared future oriented goals within specified populations. Previous possible selves studies showed that possible selves content typically reflects developmentally and contextually salient projects and challenges for the individual (Oyserman & James, 2009).

One extensive study on the content of possible selves was conducted by Cross and Markus (1991), who examined the nature of possible selves across various ages over the lifespan. They asserted that exploring possible selves across the lifespan can show ways in which possible selves are used instrumentally to produce or guide one’s development. Their sample consisted of both first year psychology students ($n = 50$) and volunteers from the surrounding community ($n = 123$), with ages ranging from 19-86. Questionnaires were used to collect participant’s hoped for selves, feared selves, and actions they were engaging to achieve these selves. These variables

were collected via open-ended questions asking participants to list all the hoped-for possible selves they could imagine. Participants were then told to think of the two most important hoped-for possible selves of their life, and then to list any actions they were taking to achieve these goals. Questions were then repeated for feared possible selves.

Respondents were organized into four groups by age, with 18-24 being young adulthood ($n = 69$), 25-39 being maturity ($n = 43$), 40-59 being middle age ($n = 30$), and 60 and over being old age ($n = 31$). Results were that groups differed on the most salient hoped-for selves and feared selves. Specifically, family related possible selves (e.g., marrying the right person) were most prominent among the young adulthood group, followed by occupation (e.g., to have some sort of job that I truly enjoy). Overall, the young adults indicated that the major concern of this period was embracing the social roles and relationships that indicated being a young adult.

The feared possible selves reported by participants were different between groups; however, the most salient feared self for all four groups was physical related. Despite this similarity, the physical possible selves differed between groups, with young adults focused more on weight issues (e.g., being fat). Lastly, young adults had the greatest variability within their feared selves compared to other groups, as well as the greatest focus on occupation and education related fears. Participants then indicated whether they were taking actions within the last month to achieve or avoid these goals. Findings were that the young adult group listed significantly fewer actions or strategies ($M = 1.94$) than maturing adults ($M = 2.42$) and old age adults ($M = 2.50$). Overall, this study provided a fundamental understanding of salient possible selves across the lifespan, along with providing rich information on the content of hoped-for and feared possible selves. As possible selves provide insight into developmentally-relevant goals,

this study provided specific examples of goals or expectations that are important during each developmental period, which may lead to better educational programs for each life stage.

More recent research has expanded the possible selves content of the Cross and Markus (1991) article by examining the possible selves of young adolescents. Shepard and Marshall (1999) collected data from 42 young adolescents between the ages of 11 and 13 to examine the appropriateness of the possible selves measure for this population. In particular, the authors focused their research questions on the hoped-for and feared possible selves among this population, which categories and themes from the possible selves are prevalent within this age group, and if there were gender differences in the possible selves descriptions. Overall, they found that participants reported more hopeful future oriented possible selves ($M = 5.36$, $SD = 1.81$) than feared possible selves ($M = 3.83$, $SD = 1.29$). These findings were consistent with Cross and Markus (1999).

The categories that emerged from the participant's possible selves were education/training, health, ideals, leisure, lifestyle, meaningful work, mortality, occupation, possessions, relationships, and safety (Shepard & Marshall, 1999). Participants most frequently mentioned occupation hoped-for possible selves. In contrast, safety was the most frequently mentioned feared possible self. Safety possible selves included getting injured in a leisure activity, being sexually abused, or being kidnapped. The author's also found that relationship feared selves was prevalent and included relationships with family and friends. The prominence of these possible selves in young adolescence indicates a need for future focus and research on occupation, safety, and interpersonal relationships within this population.

With older adolescents beginning the transition to young adulthood, the content of possible selves is important to understand their future goals and fears. Knox, Funk, Elliott, and

Bush (2000) examined the content of adolescents' possible selves. In particular, they studied differences between men and women's hoped-for and feared selves. Their sample included 212 high school students with a mean age of 16.4 years. Findings were that men and women generated significantly different patterns of both hoped-for and expected possible selves. The possible selves categories that were most prevalent for men included occupation and relationship/interpersonal relationship selves, whereas women were more focused on relationship/interpersonal relationship selves and less on occupation. In regards to feared possible selves, men more often reported concerns regarding physical illness or death, whereas women reported greater concerns regarding the loss of an interpersonal relationship.

Oyserman and Markus (1990a) also examined the content of possible selves among an older adolescent population. The authors tested a relationship between adolescents' possible selves and delinquent behavior. Possible selves were collected from a sample of 238 adolescents between the ages of 13 and 16. This sample included four subsample populations, distinguished by their delinquency. The public school sample was the least delinquent population and training school was the most delinquent. Oyserman and Markus (1990a) hypothesized that "the youth who varied in the severity of their delinquent behavior can be distinguished by the configuration of their possible selves with the most delinquent youth displaying the least balance between their expected and feared possible selves" (p. 113). The content of the possible selves was first identified, with trends compared between the four subsamples. Adolescents who identified as being the least delinquent were found to focus more on expected and feared achievement related goals, particularly their academic achievement. In contrast, the higher delinquency subsamples reported more negative expected possible selves, such as "not becoming a junkie or depressed" (Oyserman & Markus, 1990a, p. 122). Further, the majority of the most delinquent population

listed “being a criminal—thief, murderer” as their most prominent feared possible selves (Oyserman & Markus, 1990a, p. 122).

Although the examination of possible selves in relation to sexual expectation and fears has yet to occur, King and Smith (2004) examined the relationship between sexual orientation possible selves and subjective well-being and personality development. Specifically, they examined the relationship between how participants thought and elaborated on possible identities affected their subjective well-being. It was expected that goals emerging from one’s gay identity would contribute to their well-being. King and Smith (2004) implied that gay individuals who expressed more straight possible identities may have lower well-being or life satisfaction. Findings were that higher salience of gay possible identities was positively associated with well-being, life satisfaction, being more out of the closet, sexual well-being, and less distress over time. As sexuality and sexual orientation have been found to influence engagement in sexual behaviors, this study supports the need for more extensive explorations of sexual possible selves.

Possible selves and strategies. An important and influential component of the possible selves construct consists of a possible self’s associated behavioral strategy. Scholars have argued that the possible self can act as a plan and improve self-regulation (Oyserman et al. 2001; Oyserman et al., 2004). Although previous possible selves studies show there is an association between goals and behavioral outcomes (Oyserman & Markus, 1990a), many studies indicate that the inclusion of behavioral strategies may be a better indicator of outcomes (Oyserman & Markus, 1990b; Oyserman et al., 2004; Oyserman, Johnson, & James, 2011). Data trends suggest the more self-directed goals that include specific strategies, the greater likely plans will be carried out and goals will be attained (Oyserman et al., 2004).

Oyserman, Bybee, Terry, and Hart-Johnson (2004) sought to further examine the influence of possible selves' strategies as a self-regulating function within an academic setting. The authors predicted that only academic possible selves that were connected with specific behavioral strategies would promote self-regulation over time and act as guides for self-improvement. General, vague possible selves without behavioral strategies would not guide self-regulation, as they do not provide a clear road map. Oyserman and colleagues (2004) predicted that adolescents whose academic possible selves provide a better, more precise road map for guiding behavior (self-regulation) would be more successful in school. Possible selves data were collected from 160 8th graders from three inner city schools for low-income families. The majority of the sample reported as African American or Hispanic (second largest population). This population was chosen as the focus sample because these youth must discover ways to achieve in an academic setting regardless of heavy exposure to risk factors related to race and socioeconomic status. The student's self-regulatory academic possible selves, or possible selves with an associated behavioral strategy, were the independent variable within the study. Academic behaviors were collected by teacher ratings of student behaviors, in conjunction with student records. Measures included positive affect towards school, participation in class, time spent doing homework, archival grade point average, and referral to remedial summer school. These measures served as the dependent or outcome variables, and the measures were collected in fall and spring semesters. Self-regulation measured through collection of the student's expected and feared goals for the upcoming year, and indications of any strategies that the students had for working towards these goals.

Results were that there were significant associations between self-regulatory academic possible selves and academic outcomes. Specifically, they found that students who expressed

higher levels of academic goals and strategies participated more in class, spent more time doing homework, obtained higher grade point averages, and were less likely to be referred for remedial summer school (Oyserman et al., 2004). Further, students who had balanced academic related possible selves were more likely to report more time spent on homework than the average student. Overall, Oyserman and colleagues (2004) found that students with self-regulatory possible selves were more likely to have positive academic outcomes within the year.

Lastly, possible selves have been found to vary by demographic characteristics. For example, a study by Cross and Markus (1991) found that an individual's possible selves vary by relationship status. Specifically, young adults reported more goals toward getting married and starting a family than middle-aged adults. Further, possible selves have been shown to vary by socioeconomic status (SES) in adolescence (Oyserman et al., 2011). One explanation for this could be that high SES parents may provide opportunities for achievement, or act as a model of attaining these future oriented selves. Oyserman and colleagues (2011) discussed how adolescents from lower social standing reported similar academic related selves compared to those of higher SES; however, lower SES adolescents reported fewer strategies to achieving these academic selves. Gender also predicted possible selves among young adolescents, as it was believed that men and women would report different developmentally appropriate expectations and fears (Shepard & Marshall, 1999). This demographic variability emphasizes the need for examining the association between demographic characteristics and sexual possible selves among emerging adults.

Summary

An individual's sexuality, including the negotiation of sexual behaviors, is a salient construct within the transitional period of emerging adulthood. The sexual expectations

literature has addressed many behavioral expectations, including expectations about sexual initiation within a relationship, expectations during transitional periods, and expectations regarding hookup behaviors. Specifically, studies within the sexual expectations literature have focused on individual's perceptions of peer sexual engagement. Overall, these studies indicated a discrepancy between the perceived expectations of sexual behaviors in college students and actual engagement in these behaviors (Lambert et al., 2003; Stinson, 2010). Further, the majority of the sexual expectations literature has found variance between men and women's expectations with sexual initiation and hookup behaviors (Cohen & Shotland, 1996; Knox & Wilson, 1981; Lewis et al., 2007).

Although the sexual expectations literature has important implications for sexual behaviors, the inclusion of a possible selves measure would help to expand these findings. Possible selves can enhance this literature by capturing more specific and individual goals, by the inclusion of feared or hope to be avoided goals, and by the inclusion of behavioral strategies. Possible selves' expected and feared goals allow for an individual to indicate more specific goals or expectations regarding engagement in behavior. This literature has allowed researchers to study the content of individual's expressed goals, along with finding salient developmental trends within populations (Cross & Markus, 1991; Knox et al., 2000; Oyserman & Markus, 1990a; Shepard & Marshall, 1999). The inclusion of behavioral strategies within the possible selves literature indicated a higher achievement of adolescent's expressed goals compared to adolescents with goals but not a strategy (Oyserman et al., 2004). Despite findings regarding the relationship between expectations or goals with sexuality, the construct of possible selves has not examined sexual behaviors. Therefore, the construct of sexual possible selves this thesis will

expand the sexual behaviors literature by studying the content of possible selves and address demographic trends.

Current Study

An individual's future oriented goals and strategies have been found to be associated with participation in specific positive and negative behaviors (Oyserman & Markus, 1990a; Oyserman & Markus, 1990b; Oyserman et al., 2004; Oyserman et al., 2011). The current study extends this literature by applying the construct of possible selves to emerging adult's sexuality.

Specifically, this study has adapted the possible selves measure to address sexual possible selves among first semester college freshmen. For the purpose of this study, sexual possible selves will be the adaptation of an individual's possible selves, whereas expected possible selves will be termed expected sexual possible selves. Feared possible selves, or sexual selves-to-be-avoided, will be equivalent to feared sexual possible selves. To my knowledge, sexual possible selves has not been measured within any population; therefore, the primary focus of this study is to describe the content of sexual possible selves among a sample of college freshmen. Further, this study will examine the strategies associated with the stated sexual possible selves by describing the content and the relationship with sexual behavioral outcomes. Lastly, with significant gender and demographic differences within sexual expectation and possible selves literatures, the data will also examine between-group variation based on sex, relationship status, and socioeconomic demographics. The study is guided by three research questions:

Research Question 1: What is the content of first semester college students' expected and feared sexual possible selves?

Research Question 2: What is the content of first semester college students' expected and feared sexual possible selves strategies?

Research Question 3: Do sexual possible selves and strategies vary based on sex, relationship status, or socioeconomic demographics?

Chapter 3

Methods

Recruitment and Procedure

Participants were drawn from an extensive study at a large Southeastern university. The study focused on first year students' expectations about relationships, sex, and alcohol and was approved by the University's institutional review board (IRB). Individuals were invited to participate if they were registered as a part- or full-time university student, enrolled as freshmen, and were between the ages of 18 to 25. Data was collected in the first 3 weeks of the first semester (i.e., fall semester). Using three specific recruitment techniques, individuals were recruited from three separate pools of participants.

First year studies and communications studies pools. The first group of participants ($n = 180$) was collected from two recruitment pools including from First Year Studies (FYS) courses, along with the communication studies research pool and at the university. FYS courses are once weekly seminars offered to participants each semester of their freshman year. Graduate and undergraduate research assistants attended these first year seminars with recruitment scripts and sign up sheets. A description of the study along with inclusion/exclusion criteria was discussed with the students. A contact sheet was passed around to interested individuals allowing them to provide their name and contact information. A link to the survey was then emailed to those who provided their contact information. Participants provided consent online prior to beginning the survey. The survey took approximately 30-45 minutes to complete and individuals could discontinue participation at any time. Compensation for completed participation for participants in the FYS pool included an opportunity to be entered to win one of 100 \$15 gift cards to varying restaurants and stores (i.e., Starbucks, iTunes, etc.) Participants

recruited from the communications studies pool self-selected into the study. Participants received partial course credit for study participation. Individuals self-selected into the study by reading a description of the study and its inclusion and exclusion criteria posted within the research pool online portal, and then were provided a link to access the informed consent form and online survey.

Sex on campus seminar. The second group of participants ($n = 102$) was collected from a quasi-experimental study on the sexual health of first year students. This study included treatment and control groups from a Sex on Campus seminar study, and was created to help measure how a first year seminar on sexual health would affect students' sexual perceptions and behaviors. Participants in the treatment group ($n = 49$) were from three first year studies seminars titled "Sex on Campus." The students were introduced to the study on the first day of class, where the PI excused himself from the course and allowed a research assistant to provide a description and sign up sheet for the study. Students chose to either participate in the survey for class credit or given the option to turn in a time equivalent self-reflective assignment for class credit. The control group ($n = 53$) was collected using a similar recruitment technique utilized during the general FYS seminars previously mentioned. Again, surveys lasted approximately 30-45 minutes with the option to discontinue participation at any time. Each participant who completed the survey received compensation of a \$15 gift card to varying restaurants and stores (i.e., Starbucks, iTunes, etc.) or course credit.

Data from the three pools of participants was collected via an online survey. The survey contained questions about demographic characteristics, sexuality specific measures, and open-ended questions about attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and expectations about relationships, sex, and

alcohol use. Questions relevant to the examination of sexual possible selves were used for analyses.

Sample

The original sample consisted of 289 students; however, seven participants did not fall within the inclusion criteria (they were under 18 or over the age of 25) and were therefore excluded from the study. The majority were women ($n = 185$, 65.6%) and White, non-Hispanic ($n = 229$, 81.2%). Other race/ethnicities within the sample included African American ($n = 39$; 13.8%), Latino/a ($n = 7$; 2.5%), Asian American ($n = 2$; 0.7%), and other ($n = 5$; 1.8%). Other race/ethnicities provided by the participants included, “bi-racial”, “Italian”, and “British/American.” Further, the majority indicated their sexual orientation was heterosexual (i.e., attracted to individuals of the opposite sex; $n = 262$, 92.9%). Additional sexual orientations included gay/lesbian (i.e., attracted to individuals of the same sex; $n = 3$; 1.1%), bisexual (i.e., attracted to individuals of either sex; $n = 7$; 2.5%), or other sexual orientations (e.g., “asexual”, “unknown”, “pansexual”, “demisexual”, or “questioning”; $n = 10$; 3.5%). Lastly, the majority (69.5%) of the sample indicated a religious affiliation of Christianity with 14.2% indicating that they were non-religious. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 25, with a mean age as 18.25 years ($SD = .72$). Sample descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1.

Measures

Demographic characteristics. Demographic data was collected from the participants within the online survey. Relevant measures for this survey included questions pertaining to sex, relationship status, and parental income as an indicator of socioeconomic status.

Sex. Participants were asked to indicate their sex as either men (1), women (2), or provided the opportunity to list “other”. All of the participants indicated that their sex was either male ($n = 97$, 34.4%) or female ($n = 185$, 65.6%).

Relationship status and type. Relationship status was used to categorize if the participant was currently in a romantic relationship by providing a dichotomous option of yes ($n = 120$; 42.6%; coded as 1) or no ($n = 162$; 57.4%; coded as 2). Additionally, the individuals were asked: “If you are currently in a romantic relationship, which statement best describes your relationship?” Answer options included: “I am not currently in a romantic relationship” ($n = 146$; 51.8%), “We hook up occasionally” ($n = 7$; 2.4%), “Friends with benefits” ($n = 10$; 3.5%), “Dating, non-exclusively (we date other people too)” ($n = 2$; 0.7%), “Talking” ($n = 11$; 3.9%), “Dating exclusively” ($n = 95$; 33.7%), or “Engaged” ($n = 1$; 0.4%). Ten participants did not report relationship status (3.5%). For the purpose of this study, responses were recoded into three categories: no relationship ($n = 146$), non-exclusive relationship ($n = 31$), and exclusive relationship ($n = 96$). The category of non-exclusive relationship included “We hook up occasionally”, “Friends with benefits”, “Dating, non-exclusively” and “Talking”, as these relationship types indicate a lack of defined commitment within the relationship. The category of exclusive relationship included “Dating exclusively” and “Engaged”, as these relationship categories typically indicate monogamy and commitment.

Combined parental income. Combined parental income was used as an indicator of SES. This measure was provided in ranges, and the variables were selected by the individual with the following response options: Less than \$24,999 ($n = 24$; 8.5%); \$25,000-\$49,000 ($n = 42$; 14.9%); \$50,000-\$74,999 ($n = 32$; 11.3%); \$75,000-\$99,999 ($n = 38$; 13.5%); \$100,000-\$124,999 ($n = 49$; 17.4%); \$125,000-\$149,999 ($n = 22$; 7.8%); \$150,000-\$199,999 ($n = 17$;

6.0%); or more than \$200,000 ($n = 42$; 14.9%). Six participants did not respond to this item (2.1%). Categories were not combined due to a relatively equal number of participants per income category. Median parental income fell within the category of \$100,000-\$124,999.

Sexual possible selves. First year students' sexual possible selves (SPS) and strategies were collected through the adaptation of the standard open-ended format of the possible self and strategy measure (see Oyserman et al., 2004). Originally, this measure was designed to assess an individual's overall possible selves by asking the individual to list expected and feared goals for the upcoming year. This questionnaire is divided into two parts, and begins by asking the participants to imagine who they would like to be in the future (i.e., expected possible selves). Participants are then asked to write what they expect to become and what they expect to be doing next year (Oyserman et al., 2004). Participants then indicate whether or not they are doing something to achieve these possible selves, and to list any specific strategies they are using. The second part of this measure assesses feared possible selves by asking participants to think of concerns or images of what they hoped to avoid within the upcoming year (i.e. what they do not want to do or want to avoid being). Participants are then asked to list selves that they would like to avoid becoming in the upcoming year and to indicate what strategies they are using to avoid these feared selves (Oyserman et al., 2004).

The current study adapted Oyserman and colleagues' (2004) measure to focus specifically on sex and sexuality by rewording the prompts. Specifically, expected SPS were collected from participants by providing the following:

Who will you be next year? Each of us has some image or picture of what we will be like and what we want to avoid being like in the future. Think about next year -- imagine what

you expect to occur regarding your sexuality and sexual practices. In the lines below, write what you expect your freshman year will be like when addressing sex.

A prompt was then given to the participants that stated: “Regarding sex, this year I am expecting...” followed by providing the individual with four options to list expected sexual selves. Participants responses ranged from 0 to 6 expected sexual selves ($M = 2.42$; $SD = 1.37$). Similarly, feared SPS were collected by providing the following:

In addition to expectations and expected goals, we all have images or pictures of what we don't want to be like regarding our sexuality; what we don't want to do or want to avoid being. First, think a minute about ways you would not like to be your freshman year -- things you are concerned about or want to avoid being like. Write those concerns or sexual selves to-be-avoided in the lines below.

Participants were then asked: “Regarding sex, this year I hope to avoid...” and allowed four options to list feared sexual selves (range = 0-5; $M = 2.04$; $SD = 1.36$).

Sexual possible selves strategies. In addition to a participant's SPS, strategies that the participant was using to reach or avoid these future selves were collected. Strategies of possible selves have been associated with behavioral outcomes and are considered influential in an individual's future self-regulation (Oyserman et al., 2001; Oyserman et al., 2004). Specifically, previous possible selves studies indicated that behavioral strategies that relate to the accompanying future self are associated with future goal attainment (Oyserman et al., 2004). Expected SPS strategies were collected by asking the following:

In the space next to each expectation, mark NO (X) if you are not currently doing something about that expectation and mark YES (X) if you are currently doing something to get to that expectation. For each expectation that you marked YES, use the space to the

right to write what you are doing this year to attain that goal. Use the first space for the first expectation, the second space for the second expectation and so on.

The participants were then provided four options to list strategies they were using to obtain these future oriented sexual selves. Strategies ranged from 0 to 8 ($M = 1.69$; $SD = 1.47$).

Additionally, associated feared SPS strategies were collected by asking the following:

In the space next to each concern or to-be-avoided self, mark NO (X) if you are not currently working on avoiding that concern or to-be-avoided self and mark YES (X) if you are currently doing something so this will not happen this year. For each sexual concern or to-be-avoided sexual self that you marked YES, use the space at the end of each line to write what you are doing this year to reduce the chances that this will describe you during your freshman year. Use the first space for the first concern, the second space for the second concern and so on.

Participants were then provided four options to list the strategies they were using to obtain these feared sexual selves (range = 0-6; $M = 1.82$; $SD = 1.50$).

SPS categories and coding. Due to the adaptation of the original possible selves measure, new possible selves categories were created for the purpose of coding the content of SPS and strategies. Prior to coding, participant's responses were carefully studied and noted to examine the content for reoccurring themes. From these themes, keywords were created and used as the base for the new coding categories. Following this step, categories were then presented to a research group consisting of a faculty member, three graduate students, and one undergraduate research assistant. Two sets of categories were created for this SPS data, with one set for expected SPS and strategies, and one set for feared SPS and strategies. The following categories were used to code participants' expected selves:

1. *Abstinence*: expressions of abstinence or celibacy for their upcoming year, includes references to “waiting until marriage to have sex.”
2. *Interpersonal relationships*: Involves relationships with significant others including mentions of monogamy within a relationship, goals related to starting or ending a relationship, and relationships with friends and family.
3. *Physical/sexual health*: goals related to health aspects such as contraceptive use, STIs, pregnancy, getting tested, or physical aspects such as body related goals.
4. *Experiment/explore*: goals related to expanding their sexual experiences within the upcoming year, including mentions of experimentation, furthering sexual experiences, exploring sexuality, to lose virginity, or mentioning a goal for number of partners.
5. *Negatively worded*: goals that are worded in a negative manner or suggest an expected negative outcome such as risk behaviors, including not getting pregnant or getting someone else pregnant, not getting an STI, not remaining monogamous, or involvement in other risk behaviors.
6. *Unclear/no expectations*: goals related to the participant not having an expectation for the upcoming year, including “no expectations”, “don’t know what to expect”, or “not sure.”

The following categories were used to code the feared selves:

1. *Abstinence*: fears of not remaining abstinent within the upcoming year, including mentions of hoping to avoid losing their virginity, avoiding pressure and temptations, or fears related to moving too quickly sexually.

2. *Interpersonal relationships*: Involves relationships with significant others, friends and family, and fears related to relationships, including mentions of cheating within a relationship, fears related to starting or ending a relationship, and fears of “heartbreak.”
3. *Physical/sexual health*: fears related to sexual health such as STIs, pregnancy, getting tested, or physical aspects such as body related fears.
4. *Reputation*: fears related to getting an unfavorable reputation within the community, including fears related to being known as a “slut”, earning a bad reputation, or being known as easy around campus.
5. *Risky behaviors*: fears that may include negative behaviors or risk behaviors, including not using contraception, sex with risky partners, illegal behaviors, or drugs or alcohol
6. *Rape/assault related*: fears related to being raped, being forced to do sexual activities without consent, forced fondling, or being date raped.
7. *Unclear/no fears*: related to the participant not having any fears for the upcoming year, including “no fears”, “don’t know what to expect”, or “not sure.”

Examples of responses within the six categories of expected SPS and seven categories of feared SPS are presented in Table 2. Similar to the original measure by Oyserman and colleagues (2004), categories for behavioral strategies were the same as the associated SPS (i.e., expected SPS strategies as abstinence, interpersonal relationship, and so forth). Examples of the six categories of expected SPS strategies and seven categories of feared SPS strategies are presented in Table 3.

Coding of the SPS responses was performed by the first author of this thesis in conjunction with an approved graduate student from the author's research lab. First, coding of the expected sexual selves was performed together until initial reliability of at least 80% was met (initial reliability = 95%). Following initial reliability, one randomly selected case out of every 10 was coded by both raters to ensure continued agreement (i.e., 1 participant from 1-10, 1 from 11-20, etc.). The agreement rate for the remaining expected codes was 81%. Additionally, coding of the associated expected strategies was performed following meeting the initial reliability at 98%. Reliability for the remaining expected SPS strategies remained consistently high at 94%. Next, coding of the feared sexual selves was performed in the same manner as expected sexual selves (initial reliability = 100%). The agreement rate for the additional feared codes remained high at 97% inter-coder reliability. Lastly, coding of the associated strategies was performed following meeting the initial reliability at 100%. The agreement rate for the remaining feared SPS strategies remained consistently high at 98%. Overall, inter-coder reliability was 91%, and any disagreements were discussed between coders until agreement was reached and used for future coding.

Analyses

Considering the novelty of assessing individuals' sexual possible selves (SPS), the main goal of this project was to describe the content of first semester student's SPS and associated behavioral strategies. This goal was achieved by conducting frequency examinations of SPS and strategies. Further, the salience scores of the SPS categories were addressed to examine what sexual expectations and fears were most prominent. Lastly, the variability of the SPS and strategies by demographic variables was examined.

Content of SPS and strategies. These research questions focus on the content of first year student's SPS and strategies. The examination for these questions was conducted by first providing specific examples of SPS from each category, along with the associated frequencies of these categories in this first year sample. These specific examples provided insight into the emphasis and structure of the participants' selves. Furthermore, the examination of the associated behavioral strategies for content and frequency provided insight into what categories of SPS may be more attainable for first year college students, as strategies have been associated with goal attainment and behavioral outcomes among adolescents (Oyserman & Markus, 1990a; Oyserman et al., 2011).

In addition to frequency comparisons, salience scores were used to examine the prevalence of expected and feared SPS within the sample. Following the work of Oyserman, Johnson, and James (2011), salience scores were created for each SPS to provide an in-depth perspective of what SPS are most often expressed for each individual. For example, if a participant listed four expected SPS, and three of the four were about abstinence, the participant would have an abstinence salience score of 75%. These scores are beneficial as they provide insight into the salience of each individual's goals. Further, the mean scores of salience variables provide broad description of what SPS categories are most commonly expressed. Salience scores for expected SPS are presented in Table 4 and for feared SPS are presented in Table 5. These scores were not created for SPS strategies, as the focus for strategies is the content of the categories and whether particular SPS are less likely to have associated strategies. Instead, descriptives for expected SPS strategies are presented in Table 6 and for feared SPS strategies in Table 7. Following the examination of the different SPS and strategy categories, it was determined that the category of unclear/no fears and strategies would not be included in this

examination as few participants reported this category ($M = .069$, $SD = .269$; $M = .008$, $SD = .126$, respectively).

Demographic variability in content of SPS and strategies. To explore whether SPS varied by demographics, a final set of analyses was conducted. Specifically, both sexual expectations and possible selves literature have been shown to vary by gender, which indicated a need to examine this within the SPS of this sample. Originally, individuals' SPS were indicated on a continuous scale, where a zero was indicative of no SPS for that category and any numbers above zero represented the number of times that category was expressed. For example, an individual may report four expected SPS, where one was abstinence related, two were physical/sexual health related, and one was negatively worded, thus the participants coding would have a one for abstinence, two for physical/sexual health, one for negatively worded category, and zeros for all other categories. This coding provided opportunities for comparisons between categories for the sample; however, this coding resulted in a preponderance of zeros. Further examination of the data indicated non-normality of sample responses. Due to this non-normal distribution, the SPS data was coded into dichotomous variables for each category, with a zero representing no expressed SPS and a one representing that the participant expressed at least one SPS in that category. A chi-square test for association was used to examine the mean differences between the SPS of men ($n = 97$) and women ($n = 185$) for each category of SPS and associated strategies. For the purpose of this analysis, sex served as the independent variable and SPS and strategies served as the dependent variable.

To examine whether this variation applies to SPS among emerging adults, group differences between relationship status and SPS were examined. First, this was assessed using a chi-square test to examine differences between those who indicated yes to being in a relationship

($n = 120$) and those who indicated no ($n = 162$) on their expressions of SPS. This test was then used to examine associations between romantic relationship status and the associated behavioral strategies. Additionally, a chi square test was conducted to examine significant associations between the three different types of relationships. Relationship types included not currently in a romantic relationship ($n = 146$), non-exclusive romantic relationship ($n = 31$), and exclusive romantic relationship ($n = 96$). Possible group differences were thought to vary on the expression of interpersonal relationships expected and feared SPS with those in exclusive relationships indicating more goals, and participants in non-exclusive relationships expressing more explore/experiment goals. This test was then used to examine the association between romantic relationship type and expressed behavioral strategies.

Last, due to the findings by Oyserman and colleagues (2011) indicating the variability of possible selves by SES, the association of SPS and the varying levels of SES within this study was explored. SES was indicated by the combined parental income of the first year students, as parental income has been shown to be a consistent indicator of social standing in the communities (Oyserman et al., 2011). Parental income was assessed within six categories, with answers ranging from less than \$24,999 ($n = 24$) to more than \$200,000 ($n = 42$). A chi-square test for association was conducted to examine the association between SES and expected SPS, feared SPS, and behavioral strategies.

Chapter 4

Results

Content of SPS and Strategies

Overall, first year students' SPS encompassed various aspects of sexuality for the upcoming year. The participants' total number of expressed SPS ranged from 0-6 for expected selves and 0-5 for feared selves. Overall, 97.6% of the sample listed at least one expected SPS. Of those who listed an expected SPS, 30.4% listed one self, 27.6% listed two selves, 7.2% listed three selves, 28.8% listed four selves, 2.4% listed five selves, and 1.2% listed six selves. In contrast, 89.5% of the sample listed at least one feared SPS. Of those listed, 33.2% listed only one self, 23.5% listed two selves, 7.7% listed three selves, 24.7% listed four selves, and 0.4% listed five feared selves. Comparisons between expected and feared SPS indicated that the participants reported slightly more expected SPS ($M = 2.42$, $SD = 1.37$) than feared SPS ($M = 2.04$, $SD = 1.36$).

The content of the first year student's SPS indicated variations in the sexual goals and fears of emerging adults. Overall, participants provided a variety of different responses. First year students' responses of expected SPS ranged in specificity from simple, straightforward answers such as "to remain abstinent" to more complex responses such as "to maintain complete disclosure regarding my levels of comfort with new sexual acts." Specifically, examples of abstinence related goals included, "staying a virgin", "remaining abstinent", or "to avoid it until I am married." Second, SPS related to interpersonal relationships included, "to get in a committed relationship", "to remain monogamous", or "to continuing having sex with my boyfriend and remaining monogamous." Interpersonal relationship SPS included goals related to friends and family such as, "to help my friends make good choices" or "to not let sex get in the way of my

family.” Third, physical/sexual health related goals included examples such as “to always have safe sex”, “to get on birth control if I start having sex”, or “to always carry a condom.” Fourth, examples of explore/experiment SPS included “to experiment during college”, “to explore my sexuality including hooking up with both men and women”, or “to try new sexual positions and partners.” Fifth, SPS that were expressed in a negative manner or related to risk behaviors were coded into a negatively worded category, and include examples such as, “not hooking up with random partners”, “not having drunk sex”, or “being pressured into it [sex] or being distracted by it.” Last, unclear/no expectations included explicit statements of “I am not sure what to expect” or “I don’t expect anything.”

In contrast, responses for feared SPS appeared to be more direct, with many participants stating that they hoped to avoid “STIs” or “being raped.” Overall, the majority of participants expressed feared or hope to be avoided selves within each SPS category. First, abstinence related fears, or fears related to the individual not remaining celibate, included, “sex”, “having sex”, or “being pressured into having sex.” Second, examples of interpersonal relationship related fears included, “broken heart”, “having sex with someone I am not in a relationship with or cheating on my girlfriend”, or “beginning a new relationship.” Third, physical/sexual health related fears included expressions such as, “getting an STI”, “getting pregnant”, or “sleeping with a diseased partner.” Fourth, examples of reputation related SPS included fears around other’s perception of them including fears of, “judgment”, “being known as a slut around campus”, or “being called a prude.” Fifth, “risky” behaviors SPS involved fears of engaging in risky behaviors or expressions of risky behavior engagement by the individual, and examples included, “having a one night stand”, “alcohol induced sex”, or “engaging in hook ups that go

too far.” Last, examples of rape/assault related SPS included, “being raped”, “forced fondling”, or “situations where I could be date raped.”

Frequency comparisons were examined for participants who expressed at least one goal within each category of expected and feared SPS. For expected SPS, the most frequently expressed category was abstinence related goals, with 43.2% of the sample expressing at least one goal (range = 0-4). In contrast, unclear/no expectations were the least expressed SPS within this sample, with only 13.6% stating at least one unclear/no expectation related self (range = 0-4). Findings for feared SPS indicated that physical/sexual health related fears were the most expressed SPS, with 49.8% of the sample listing at least one fear (range = 0-4). In contrast, reputation related fears were the least expressed SPS, with 6.5% listing at least one goal (range = 0-2).

Salience of expected SPS. To provide a more in-depth examination of what SPS are the most prominent for first year college students, salience variables of the participants’ responses were created. These salience scores are provided in Table 4. These variables provide percentage values of each category within the expected and feared SPS. When considering the six categories of expected SPS, abstinence related goals were the most salient with a mean abstinence related salience score of 29.7%. Participants’ abstinence related salience scores ranged from 0 to 100% of their SPS. The category of explore/experiment was the second most salient SPS with a mean of 22.0% and a range of 0 to 100% explore/experiment responses. In contrast, the least salient category appeared to be physical/sexual health related SPS as responses ranged from 0 to 67% salience with a mean of 5.9% per individual. These findings indicated that no participants reported only physical/sexual health related SPS.

Salience of feared SPS. Second, salience scores were created for the feared. The means were then examined to determine what categories were the most salient. These scores are presented in Table 5. Of the six categories of feared SPS, findings were that physical/sexual health related fears were the most salient SPS with an average of 34.2% of feared SPS as physical/sexual health ($M = .345$, $SD = .408$). Participants' physical/sexual health salience scores ranged from 0 to 100% of their SPS. The second most salient category was that of risky behavior fears ($M = .222$, $SD = .338$) with 22.2% of all feared SPS being risky behavior related and a range of 0 to 100% risky behavior responses. In contrast, the least salient SPS of this sample appeared to be reputation related ($M = .027$, $SD = .128$) indicating that the average participant would list this SPS 2.8% of all SPS.

Behavioral strategies have been associated with the attainment of possible self related goals (Oyserman & Markus, 1990a, Oyserman et al., 2004). Due to this association, strategies related to what participants were doing to reach their SPS were collected (see Table 2 for examples). The behavioral strategies of this sample were diverse in nature, ranging from broad to very specific strategies. The strategies also varied in number, with some participants listing more than one strategy per SPS whereas others listed only one or none. The expected behavioral strategies for this sample ranged from 0-8 ($M = 1.70$, $SD = 1.47$). Feared strategies ranged from 0-6 with a mean number of strategies listed at 1.82 ($SD = 1.50$). Feared strategies were reported more than expected strategies. Overall, 77.7% of participants listed at least one behavioral strategy for expected SPS with 29.9% listing one strategy, 24.3% listing two strategies, 9.2% listing three strategies, 10.0% listing four strategies, and 4.4% listing five or more strategies. Regarding feared SPS strategies, 78.5% of the sample listed at least one associated strategy.

Specifically, 28.3% listed one strategy, 20.2% listed two strategies, 11.7% listed 3 strategies, 13.8% listed four strategies, and 4.4% listed five or more strategies.

Consistent with Oyserman and colleagues (2004), the behavioral strategies were coded into the same categories as the SPS, with expected strategies consisting of five categories and feared strategies consisting of six. Expected strategies included abstinence related strategies such as “not having sex”, “practicing abstinence”, or “not allowing myself to be involved in situations where sex could occur.” Second, examples of interpersonal relationship strategies included, “not flirting with anyone but my boyfriend”, “only having guys as friends”, or “continuing to enjoy sex with my partner.” Third, the category of physical/sexual health related strategies included “using a condom every time I have sex”, “getting tested on a monthly basis”, or “not having sex with dirty partners.” Fourth, strategies around exploring/experimenting included, “meeting as many people as I can so I can have sex”, “researching different positions to use”, or “having sex with both men and women so I can explore my sexuality.” Last, examples of strategies related to negatively worded SPS included, “going to parties and getting drunk”, “being aware of who I am with”, or “hooking up with a bunch of girls at parties.”

In addition to expected strategies, behavioral strategies associated with feared SPS allow the person to actively work against becoming this hoped to be avoided self (Oyserman et al., 2004). These strategies were analyzed into six categories equivalent to the feared SPS. First, examples of strategies related to avoiding engagement in sex and maintaining abstinence included, “not having sex”, “just not doing it with anyone”, or “not hanging out with boys so I am not tempted to have sex.” Second, interpersonal strategies included statements of “not going to parties and getting drunk so that I don’t jeopardize my relationship”, “I am committed as of now and not interested in others”, or “not breaking up with my boyfriend.” Third, strategies

related to physical/sexual health related fears included, “birth control”, “If I have sex with someone, I question their sexual history and make them get checked”, or “being smart about who I engage in sex with.” Fourth, examples of reputation related strategies included, “not talking about my sexuality to others”, “not having sex with people at parties who know each other”, or “staying focused on school instead.” Fifth, strategies related to avoiding risky behaviors included statements of, “being mindful of my actions”, “having a friend who is watching out for me”, or “even if I want someone or find them extremely attractive, I am reminding myself that I can’t go with my first instinct and that I must think before acting.” Last, examples of strategies around avoiding rape included, “not wandering alone at night along with I bought a can of mace”, “carefully selecting the people with whom I surround myself”, or “learning what to do.”

In addition to the previously listed content, frequencies of each category were examined for participants who listed at least one strategy within each category. Findings indicated that interpersonal relationship strategies for expected SPS was the most frequently expressed strategy with 36.7% of the sample listing at least one strategy. In contrast, unclear/no expectation strategies were the least expressed with 2.0% reporting a strategy related to unclear/no expectations about their sexuality. Regarding participants’ strategies associated with feared SPS, findings were that physical/sexual health related strategies were the most common with 31.2% listing at least one strategy. Strategies associated with reputation feared selves were the least common with 2.4% reporting at least one strategy.

Demographic Variability In Content of SPS and Strategies

Sex. Consistent with previous studies (Cohen & Shotland, 1996; Knox & Wilson, 1981), an examination of how SPS varies by sex was conducted. Each category of SPS was examined using a chi-square test for association to examine differences between men and women and

participants who listed a SPS in each category. Significant differences were found for several categories and are presented in Tables 8-11.

Expected SPS. Expected SPS varied by sex within several categories. First, there was a statistically significant association between sex and the expression of abstinence related SPS, $\chi^2(1) = 9.310, p < .05$, with a positive correlation $\phi = 0.193, p = .002$. Specifically, a larger percentage of women (50.0%) reported abstinence related goals than men (29.8%). Second, findings indicated that there was a significant association between sex and the expression of physical/sexual health related SPS, $\chi^2(1) = 4.363, p < .05$, with a positive correlation $\phi = 0.132, p = .037$. Specific sex differences for this category were that a larger percentage of women (19.9%) reported physical/sexual health goals than men (9.5%). Third, there was a significant association between sex and the reporting of explore/experiment related SPS, $\chi^2(1) = 11.780, p < .001$, with a negative correlation $\phi = -0.217, p < .001$. These findings indicated that a greater percentage of men (52.4%) reported explore/experiment goals than women (30.1%). Last, there was a significant association between sex and negatively worded SPS, $\chi^2(1) = 9.293, p = .002$, with a positive correlation $\phi = 0.193, p = .002$. A larger percentage of women expressed negatively worded SPS (30.7%) than men (13.1%).

Feared SPS. Only two categories within the sample's feared SPS differed by sex. First, there was a significant association between sex and reputation related SPS, $\chi^2(1) = 5.737, p < .05$, with a positive correlation $\phi = 0.152, p = .017$. Specifically, a larger percentage of women reported reputation related fears (9.1%) than men (1.2%). Also, a statistically significant association was found between sex and rape/assault related SPS, $\chi^2(1) = 8.527, p < .05$, with a positive correlation $\phi = 0.186, p = .003$. A larger percentage of women reported fears related to rape/assault (16.5%) than men.

Expected strategies. The associated behavioral strategies of SPS may varied by sex. A chi-square test for association was conducted to examine between-sex variability. To begin, this analysis was conducted for each category of the associated strategies of expected SPS. Findings were that several categories varied by sex. First, there was an association between sex and the frequency of abstinence related strategies, $\chi^2(1) = 10.466, p = .001$, with a positive correlation $\phi = 0.204, p = .001$. Specifically, a larger percentage of those who expressed abstinence related strategies for expected SPS were women (36.1%) than men (16.5%). Second, an association between sex and interpersonal relationship related strategies for expected SPS, $\chi^2(1) = 6.422, p = .011$, with a positive correlation $\phi = 0.160, p = .011$. Of those who reported interpersonal relationship strategies, women reported significantly more strategies (42.2%) than men (25.9%). Third, there was a significant association between sex and explore/experiment related strategies for expected SPS, $\chi^2(1) = 14.731, p < .001$, with a negative correlation $\phi = -0.242, p < .001$. Findings were that a greater percentage of men (32.9%) than women listed at least one explore/experiment related strategy. Only 12.7% of the women in the sample listed at least one strategy. Lastly, an association was found between sex and the frequency of negatively worded strategies, $\chi^2(1) = 4.284, p = .039$, with a positive correlation $\phi = 0.131, p = .039$. A larger percentage of women listed negatively worded strategies (21.1%) than men (10.6%).

Feared strategies. Similarly to feared SPS, only one category of feared SPS strategies was statistically significant based on sex. An association was found between sex and the number of rape/assault related strategies, $\chi^2(1) = 6.873, p = .009$, with a positive correlation $\phi = 0.167, p = .011$. Of those individuals who expressed at least one strategy, women listed a greater frequency (14.6%) of rape/assault related strategies for feared SPS than men (3.6%).

Romantic relationship status. Sexual expectations and goals can vary by an individual's relationship status, whereas those who are in a romantic relationship (RR) may report more expectations or goals related to interpersonal relationships than those who identify as not currently being in a RR (Cross & Markus, 1991). Due to this possibility, a chi-square test for association was conducted on the dichotomous variable of either being in a romantic relationship or not being in a romantic relationship and SPS and strategies. For the purpose of this thesis, those who identified as being in a RR were coded as 1 and those who were not were coded as 2. Individuals who reported zero SPS or strategies were coded as 0, and those who listed one or more SPS or strategies were coded as 1. Findings are presented in Tables 12-14.

Expected and feared SPS. A chi-square test for association was conducted using RR status and expected SPS. Findings were that two categories were statistically significant. First, there was a significant association between RR and abstinence related SPS, $\chi^2(1) = 6.960, p = .008$, with a positive correlation $\phi = 0.167, p = .008$. Those not in a RR and listed at least one abstinence related goal were a significantly larger percentage of the sample (50.3%) than those who identified as being in a RR (33.6%). Of those who not in a RR, there was almost an equal number of those who did not report any abstinence related goals (50.3%) versus those who listed one or more goals (49.7%). Second, there was a significant association between RR and expressed interpersonal relationship SPS, $\chi^2(1) = 4.953, p = .026$, with a negative correlation $\phi = -0.141, p = .026$. More interpersonal relationship goals were listed by those in a RR (46.7%) than those who were not (32.9%); however, of those in a RR, a greater percentage did not report interpersonal relationship related SPS (53.3%) than those who listed one or more (46.7%). Following the examination of expected SPS and RR, a chi-square test for association was

conducted for feared SPS; however, there were no significant associations between RR and feared SPS categories.

Expected strategies. A chi-square test for association was conducted for expected and feared SPS behavioral strategies. Findings were that several statistically significant associations existed within the expected SPS strategy categories. First, there was a significant association between RR and abstinence related strategies, $\chi^2(1) = 12.333, p < .001$, with a positive correlation $\phi = 0.222, p < .001$. Those who identify as currently not being involved in a RR expressed a significantly greater percentage of strategies related to abstinence SPS (38.2%); however, this subsample had a larger percentage of participants not list abstinence related strategies (61.8%). Second, a significant association was found between RR and interpersonal relationship related strategies, $\chi^2(1) = 24.747, p < .001$, with a negative correlation $\phi = -0.314, p < .001$. A greater percentage of the participants in a RR (54.2%) listed at least one interpersonal relationship strategy than those not in a RR (23.6%). Overall, all categories had expected counts greater than five.

Feared strategies. A chi-square test for association was conducted to examine the relationship between feared SPS strategies and RR status. Despite the lack of significant association for feared SPS, there were two categories with significant associations between strategies and RR. First, a significant association was found between RR and interpersonal relationship strategies for feared SPS, $\chi^2(1) = 9.166, p = .002$, with a negative correlation $\phi = -0.193, p = .002$. A greater percentage of individuals who listed one or more strategies related to interpersonal relationships SPS were in a RR (28.8%) than not in a RR (13.3%). Lastly, a significant association was found between RR and physical/sexual health strategies, $\chi^2(1) =$

10.378, $p = .001$, with a negative correlation $\phi = -0.205$, $p = .001$. A greater percentage of those in a RR (42.3%) listed feared physical/sexual health strategies than those not in a RR (23.1%).

Romantic relationship type. The exclusivity of romantic relationships for emerging adults may influence the type of sexual goals or expectations for college students. To explore this relationship, a chi-square test for association was conducted to examine the association between SPS and strategies with the RR types of “not currently in a RR”, “non-exclusive RR” and “exclusive RR.” A chi-square test was conducted separately for both expected and feared SPS, along with separate tests for expected and feared SPS strategies. Results are presented in Tables 15-17.

Expected and feared SPS. Expected SPS was found to vary by RR type within two categories. First, there was a statistically significant association between RR type and interpersonal relationship SPS, $\chi^2(2) = 8.340$, $p = .015$. Specifically, participants who were in an exclusive RR (50.6%) listed a significantly greater percentage of interpersonal relationship related SPS than those not in a RR (32.6%) and those in a non-exclusive RR (28.6%). Second, there was a statistically significant association between RR type and physical/sexual health related SPS, $\chi^2(2) = 6.138$, $p = .048$. One cell count had an expected count less than five for this category, therefore an exact significance was provided for this association. Findings were that those who were in a non-exclusive RR listed the most physical/sexual health related SPS (32.1%). Lastly, it was determined there were no statistically significant associations between feared SPS and RR type.

Expected and feared strategies. A chi-square test for association was conducted to examine the association between RR type and SPS behavioral strategies. This test was first conducted for expected SPS and findings were that two categories had significant associations.

First, there was a statistically significant association between RR type and abstinence related SPS strategies, $\chi^2(2) = 10.526, p = .005$. Specifically, participants not in a RR expressed a larger percentage of abstinence related strategies (36.9%) than non-exclusive RR (32.1%) and exclusive RR types (16.5%). Second, there was a statistically significant association between RR type and interpersonal relationship related SPS strategies, $\chi^2(2) = 22.282, p < .001$. A greater percentage of those in an exclusive relationship listed more behavioral strategies related to their interpersonal relationship SPS (56.5%) than those who were not in a RR (25.4%) and those in a non-exclusive RR (28.6%).

The chi-square test for association indicated two feared SPS strategy categories were associated with RR type. First, there was a statistically significant association between RR type and interpersonal relationship related SPS strategies, $\chi^2(2) = 17.418, p < .001$. A greater percentage of participants in an exclusive relationship listed more interpersonal relationship strategies (33.7%) than non-exclusive RR (3.7%) and no RR types (14.0%). Second, there was a statistically significant association between RR type and physical/sexual health related SPS strategies, $\chi^2(2) = 9.684, p = .008$. A greater percentage of participants in exclusive RRs listed more strategies related to physical/sexual health SPS (42.2%) than non-exclusive RR (37.0%) and no RR types (22.5%).

Combined parental income. A chi-square test for association was conducted to examine the relationship between expected SPS, feared SPS, and behavioral strategies with parental income. Findings were that no associations were found for any category of this variable.

Summary of Demographic Variability

The examination of first semester students' SPS and strategies and demographic characteristics revealed several significant associations. First, an association between expected SPS and sex indicated that a higher percentage of women reported abstinence SPS and strategies, interpersonal relationship strategies, physical/sexual health SPS, and negatively worded SPS and strategies than men. In contrast, a higher percentage of men reported explore/experiment SPS and strategies. Second, an association between feared SPS and sex indicated that a greater percentage of women listed fears related to reputation SPS and rape/assault SPS and strategies. Third, an association between expected SPS and RR status indicated that a higher percentage of those not in RR reported abstinence SPS and strategies. Those in RR reported a higher percentage of interpersonal relationship SPS and strategies, along with physical/sexual health strategies. Fourth, an association between feared SPS and RR status indicated that a greater percentage of those not in a RR listed more abstinence strategies, whereas those in a RR reported a greater percentage of strategies related to interpersonal relationship and physical/sexual health. Fifth, the examination of the association between RR type and expected SPS indicated that those in exclusive RR reported a larger percentage of interpersonal relationship SPS and strategies. In contrast, those in non-exclusive RR reported a larger percentage of physical/sexual health SPS, and those not in RR listed more strategies related to abstinence. Last, an association between RR type and feared strategies indicated that a larger percentage of those in an exclusive RR listed interpersonal relationship strategies and physical/sexual health strategies.

Chapter 5

Discussion

Emerging adulthood is a time of exploration, transition, and expansion of an individual's self (Arnett, 2000). During this period, many look to the proximal future for goals and expectations, particularly those related to who they would like to become or hope to avoid becoming within their current developmental stage. Previous studies have indicated that these "possible selves" develop in domains related to one's current life stage or social roles (Cross & Markus, 1994; Oyserman & James, 2009). For example, expectations and goals regarding the individual's sexuality appear to be highly salient during emerging adulthood (Lambert et al., 2003; Lewis et al., 2007; Stinson, 2010), whereas sexuality may not be as salient during late adulthood. The sexual expectations in this period have been associated with engagement in specific sex behaviors, including sexual intercourse initiation and sexual behaviors on first dates (Cohen & Shotland, 1996; Emmers-Sommer et al., 2010). Due to the importance of sexuality during emerging adulthood, the study of possible selves and sexuality provides insight into expectations and fears of sex engagement for emerging adults, specifically upon the transition to the college sex culture. However, possible selves literature has yet to explore content and strategies related to sexuality, particularly among emerging adults where explorations of sexuality often occurs. Additionally, previous possible selves studies have yet to examine sex differences around sexual expectations and fears, despite the indication of sex variability. This thesis considered the role of first year students' sexual possible selves (SPS) in college by examining the content and frequencies of expected SPS, feared SPS, associated behavioral strategies, and the association with specific demographic characteristics.

As the examination of emerging adults' SPS has not been conducted, the main focus was on what the individuals within this sample indicated as their expected and feared SPS. To begin, key words or themes from participants' expected and feared SPS responses were used to develop several sexuality-based categories. The variability between the categories of expected and feared SPS indicated differences between what these emerging adults expect to occur and hope to avoid regarding sex. For example, no participants reported that they expected to be raped or have friends be raped in the coming year; however, this was a prominent fear for many of these same participants. As previous studies focused solely on the sexual norms and expectations of the college culture, there is less knowledge about relevant sexuality based fears for students. These fears may be influential to the engagement in or avoidance of specific sexual behaviors.

Recent possible selves studies emphasized the importance of the behavioral strategies associated with an individual's possible selves (Oyserman & Markus, 1990b; Oyserman et al., 2004; Oyserman et al., 2011). These strategies have been associated with possible selves attainment and positive future outcomes in the engagement of particular behavior (Oyserman & Markus, 1990b; Oyserman et al., 2011). Despite finding significant associations between expectations and sexual behaviors, the sexual expectation literature has overlooked why these behaviors occur. The examination of the behavioral strategies of SPS helps to connect the association between sexual expectations and behavioral outcomes by providing an understanding as to how these first year students attain these expectations and avoid their fears. Overall, strategies reported ranged from single statements (e.g., "no sex") to complex strategies (e.g., "I don't drink if I know my boyfriend is drinking as well or if I know I may do something to harm our trust in our relationship"). Strategies differed between expected SPS and feared SPS, with participants' reporting more direct behavioral strategies for avoiding a feared SPS. For example,

one participant stated that his or her behavioral strategy for expected interpersonal relationship SPS was, “to spend quality time with my significant other so that we don’t grow apart.” The same participant’s strategy for a feared interpersonal relationship SPS was to “not cheat.” The variability of these strategies are consistent with previous findings about the complexity of behavioral strategies (Oyserman et al., 2001; Oyserman et al., 2004).

In addition to examining the content of SPS and strategies, the examination of salience scores of the SPS categories and the frequencies of associated strategies showed that the significance of each category varied within the expected and feared SPS. Results were that abstinence based goals were the most salient. Whereas previous literature placed emphasis on sexual exploration and experimentation during college (Lewis et al., 2007; Stinson, 2010), these findings showed that remaining abstinent during the first year of college may be a more significant goal for this population. As the definition of sex was left to be interpreted by each participant, one explanation is that the individuals with abstinence related SPS might be focusing on avoiding sexual intercourse; however, these individuals may be willing to engage in other types of sexual behaviors considered normative during this period. For example, a college freshman may hope to remain abstinent from penile-vaginal intercourse, but continue experimenting with their sexuality by engaging in non-penetrative behaviors such as deep kissing or oral sex. This explanation is consistent with the category of exploration or experimentation (the second most salient).

Previous studies have shown that sexual exploration is a prominent expectation among college students (Lewis et al., 2007) as they are engaging in behaviors perceived as normative for their age. This sexual expectation often includes sexual intercourse (Cohen & Shotland, 1996; Lewis et al., 2007); however, the exploration of SPS showed that this expectation could be

more relevant for individuals when thinking about their college experience beyond freshman year. Instead, a more proximal goal for this sample is to remain abstinent while gathering more information about sex as they navigate the first year of college. Many of the men reported SPS goals related to exploring their sexuality by becoming knowledgeable about sex prior to engaging in sexual intercourse; however, only a small proportion of the men (16.5%) reported an associated behavioral strategy for achieving this exploration. This discrepancy indicates that while many men report that they expect to expand their sexuality during their first year of college, they may not have the strategies or action plan for achieving this goal.

The salience of abstinence related goals may be due to the demographic variability of the sample. When considering the association between sex and SPS, women were found to report more abstinence related SPS than men. This finding is consistent with previous studies regarding sexual initiation, where perceptions of women's engagement in sexual intercourse is believed to occur later than men (Cohen & Shotland, 1996; Knox & Wilson, 1981). Social norms for women often place emphasis on remaining a virgin until they become involved in a committed relationship (Bogle, 2008). In contrast, social norms for emerging adult men encourage sexual exploration and experimentation prior to committing to marriage or other adult roles (Bogle, 2008; Stinson, 2010). This expectation is shown in this study as men listed this category more often than women, suggesting that first year men may expect this exploration to occur in the upcoming year. A greater proportion of women may explain the abundance of abstinence related expectations rather than explore/experiment. Findings may have varied if there were an equal proportion of men and women. First year women listed significantly more strategies to maintaining abstinence during the upcoming year, as women reported close to 82% of all abstinence related strategies. Because behavioral strategies have been associated with goal

attainment in previous studies (Oyserman & Markus, 1990a), these findings suggest that women may have more strategies to maintaining sexual abstinence their first year of college. This association helps explain gender differences that women engage in sexual intercourse later than men (Cohen & Shotland, 1996).

Regarding feared SPS, physical/sexual health related fears was the most salient of any category, indicating an important emphasis on not getting pregnant and remaining STI free their first year of college. In society, sexual health related consequences of sex are often the most concrete for individuals, as they are physical symptoms or manifestations of the engagement in sexual behavior that led to health consequences (Martinez et al., 2011). Sexual education programs for adolescents will often focus on the physical consequences of STIs, as these are detrimental to an individual's health; however, there are still high levels of STIs among this population as more than half of all newly acquired STIs are among individuals falling within the emerging adult period (Martinez et al., 2011). Yet, a significant proportion of the participants reported a behavioral strategy to avoid unplanned pregnancies and STIs, as physical/sexual health related strategies was the most frequent category of feared SPS. Specifically, women reported significantly more physical/sexual health related strategies than men. This finding is consistent with previous contraceptive literature, which indicated that the use of contraceptive measures is positively associated with women's expectations about safe sex practices (Pleck, Sonenstein, & Ku, 1991), and these practices are often dependent on women's engagement in contraceptive use or other STI prevention methods. Findings from this study show a lack of variety in the action plans for engaging in safe sex for the upcoming year, as just three strategies emerged from first year students' SPS. The three physical/sexual health related strategies included variations of "using a condom", "practicing safe sex", or "not having sex with diseased

partners”. Although these strategies provide a basis for engagement in safer sex practices, “practicing safe sex” and “not having sex with diseased partners” may not provide actual behavioral plans for achieving safe sex. The lack of variety in safer sex strategies and the increase in health risk behaviors emphasizes the need for more detailed and varied physical/sexual health sexual education for many adolescents and emerging adults. For example, sexual education programs may benefit from utilizing possible selves-based interventions. Possible-selves based interventions have been shown to have positive effects on goal attainment by helping individuals articulate specific possible selves and strategies, along with promoting skills to effectively utilize these strategies (Oyserman, Terry, & Bybee, 2002). These interventions help the emerging adult conceptualize appropriate physical/sexual health SPS, then teach and encourage development of strategies to achieving these goals.

Lastly, the emergence of the reputation related SPS category is important as peer perceptions and societal norms have been associated with engagement in sexual behaviors in the sexual expectation literature (Cohen & Shotland, 1996; Knox & Wilson, 1981; Lambert et al., 2003; Lewis et al., 2007); however, this category was the least salient of the feared SPS in this sample. Whereas previous sexual expectation studies showed that many individuals’ expectations of the college sex culture are influenced by perceptions of peers’ sexuality (Lambert et al., 2003; Lewis et al., 2007), SPS suggest that individual’s goals and fears for themselves may be less influenced by peer behaviors. Instead, individualized expectations and fears are sculpted by one’s perceptions of sexually appropriate behaviors for one’s self. Reputation related strategies was the least reported category for feared SPS in this sample; however, 100% of the participants who reported a reputation related SPS also identified at least one associated strategy. Examination of these strategies provided awareness of actions the participants were taking to

avoid specific types of reputations, and the content of these reputation related strategies also provided insight into perceptions of what behaviors constitute being considered a “slut” or a “prude” by broad societal standards. Overall, these findings suggest that the sexual expectation literature has provided broad perceptions of what participants perceived as normative peer behaviors (Bogle, 2008; Stinson, 2010), whereas SPS provide individualized perceptions of participants' own behavior and the association of reputation related fears.

Further, negatively worded SPS were found to differ between men and women, as a greater proportion of women reported these type of SPS than men in this sample. Sex differences in the perceptions of sexual behaviors may help explain these findings. Perceptions of women's sexuality and men's sexuality have varied by societal norms, with many women being considered less valued for being as sexually experienced as men (Masters, Casey, Wells, & Morrison, 2013). As negatively worded SPS encompass possible selves reported in a negative manner, these findings imply that women may perceive their sexual behaviors or sexual goals for the upcoming year as negative. Women may have been taught that expressing their sexuality is taboo in society; therefore, the negatively worded phrasing of these expected SPS may be subconscious. Overall, these differences support the variability of abstinence related, physical/sexual health related, and negatively worded SPS.

In addition to negatively worded SPS, a greater proportion of first year women reported feared SPS related to their reputation and rape for the upcoming year. Regarding the category of rape/assault related SPS, it is important to note that a small percentage (12.1%) of the sample listed rape/assault related fears; however, of those who did indicate at least one rape/assault SPS, the majority were women (90.0%). These findings are consistent with commonly held understandings of the nature of rape on college campuses, as there are significantly more

reported rape cases among women (Greenfield, 2007). Many of the fears in this category included mentions of being date raped or forced to engage in sexual behaviors while drunk, and explicit mentions of being raped for women. These fears focused on sexual assault against the participant. In contrast, men who reported rape/assault related SPS identified fears of “being in a date rape situation due to drinking” or “getting into trouble”, which focused on the man being the perpetrator of sexual assault in situations where they did not know it was occurring (i.e., having sex with a partner who is intoxicated).

Further, there was a significant association between interpersonal relationship strategies and sex. Despite a lack of significance in the frequency of interpersonal relationship expected SPS, there appeared to be differences between men and women on strategies used to maintain sexuality within or begin new interpersonal relationships. More specifically, women often reported more than one interpersonal relationship strategy to attaining their SPS goal. For example, one participant listed two strategies of “not talking to boys” or “flirting with boys” within one strategy as a way to “remain faithful to my boyfriend”. Arnett (2000) emphasized the experimentation and exploration of relationships as a defining feature of emerging adulthood, so the non-significant findings from expected SPS are expected for this sample; however, by women reporting more strategies to maintaining these relationships, these SPS appear to be more attainable among this population.

It is important to note the lack of significance for physical/sexual health related strategies and sex. As expected SPS frequencies indicated that a greater proportion of women reported physical/sexual health related expectations, there was a lack of associated strategies to obtaining these goals. For example, women may be reporting more goals related to engaging in safe sex during the upcoming year, yet they do not have more strategies, such as getting on oral

contraceptives, to engage in these safer sex practices than their male counterparts. These findings indicate the importance of sexual education continuing to discuss the various types of contraceptive use in relation to safer sex practices, and providing greater knowledge about access to contraception. For example, Grose, Grabe, and Kohfeldt (2014) discussed not solely teaching women traditional sexual education, but also providing more comprehensive knowledge about contraceptive options and availability, while also addressing sociocultural norms that may be leading to women lacking appropriate physical/sexual health strategies. This type of education would be applicable for men also, as the likelihood of engaging in safe sex practices could increase with both partners being knowledgeable about contraceptives; therefore this comprehensive education would be beneficial for both men and women entering their first year of college.

Being involved in a romantic relationship (RR) can lead to different expectations and goals about sex. Often, individuals who are involved in RRs focus on interpersonal expectations and fears, including expectations for sexuality within a relationship. The sexual expectation literature has indicated that individuals in a RR will have discrepancies regarding sexually appropriate behaviors such as sexual initiation (Cohen & Shotland, 1996; Knox & Wilson, 1981). Studies emphasize the need to examine RR status and sexual expectations further. The association between SPS and RR status provides a deeper understanding of what categories are more important for those who are or are not currently involved in a RR. The association between RR type and sexuality in this sample was examined to further identify significant associations. Casual sex behaviors are prevalent among emerging adults, in particular college students, as they are deferring adult roles associated with relationships (Bogle, 2008). Casual sex includes non-exclusive relationships and non-committed such as “friends with benefits” or “hooking up”. As

these relationships are non-exclusive with a partner, relationship roles and rules may differ from those of exclusive relationships.

Findings were that there were differences based on RR status and type for this sample. To begin, there was a significant association between being involved in a RR and interpersonal related expectations. Participants who identified as being in an RR reported more expectations related to sex and fewer abstinence related expectations about interpersonal relationships than those not in a RR. In a study of possible selves across the lifespan, Cross and Markus (1991) found that interpersonal relationship possible selves occurred less among age periods with higher rates of committed relationships like marriage or long term partnerships. The highest rates of interpersonal relationship possible selves occurred among young adults (i.e., emerging adulthood) who had lower rates of romantic relationship involvement. Many of the expectations for these participants included goals of relationship attainment or initiation. The SPS of this sample contradict these findings, as participants in RRs reported more expectations about interpersonal relationships than those who are not in a RR. The development of the emerging adult period helps to explain this difference, as first year students may place less emphasis on relationship attainment as they are deferring adult roles of marriage and reproduction for later years. A lack of interpersonal relationship SPS from those not in a RR falls within this pattern of relationship deferment, as the participants were not focused on relationship goals.

A greater proportion of participants in exclusive RRs reported more goals or expectations about interpersonal relationships, along with associated strategies. This finding is consistent with previous studies on the differences between non-exclusive and exclusive RRs among college attending emerging adults. Students in non-exclusive relationships may be putting less emphasis on relationship goals because they have more ambiguous sex roles within the

relationship. For example, many interpersonal relationship related SPS involved reporting goals about being faithful or monogamous to their partner, which may not be as important or salient for an individual who is in a non-exclusive relationship.

Lastly, the category of physical/sexual health related expected SPS was associated with being in a non-exclusive RR. A greater proportion of participants in a non-exclusive relationship reported significantly more goals related to their sexual health for the upcoming year, including discussing condom use or having safe sex throughout the year. These types of goals may be more salient for non-exclusive RR participants as they have a greater possibility of being exposed to an STI if their partner is sexually involved with other people; however, there was not an association between RR type and physical/sexual health related strategies for expected SPS. This non-significance indicates that although non-exclusive RR participants are reporting a higher number of goals related to safe sex or contraceptive use, they do not have more strategies to attain these health related goals than those who are in exclusive relationships or those not currently in a relationship. As many sexual education programs focus on the navigation of traditional sex roles and sexuality for individuals only in committed intimate relationships (Grose, Grabe, & Kohfeldt, 2014), these findings suggest a need for addressing safer sex practices for those navigating the “hookup” culture on college campuses. These educational courses could help individuals with the navigation of sexual initiation and contraceptive use in non-conventional relationships, such as “friends with benefits” or “one night stands” by addressing how expectations and goals may be more ambiguous in these relationships and may lead to greater health risks if safer sex practices are not utilized. By education programs encouraging emerging adults to discuss boundaries and contraceptive use within the relationship, there may be less uncertainty for future sexual engagement.

As the study of SPS is novel to the possible selves and sexual expectation literatures, the findings of this thesis have been exploratory and investigative in nature. The focus was to examine the content of first year student's SPS and behavioral strategies, and addressing what sexuality category is most salient for this population. Future studies on the expression of SPS and the association with sexual practices may provide insight into the attainment or avoidance of these goals. For example, by examining whether individuals who reported saliency within physical/sexual health related expectations and strategies are engaging in consistent condom use would supplement the nature of SPS. Being able to express specific SPS, such as goals related to avoiding sexual situations that may increase exposure to health risks, could be related to whether or not an individual can achieve these sexuality related goals and expectations. Additionally, the examination of whether or not participants reported associated behavioral strategies and engagement in particular sexual behaviors may enhance sexual educational programs for adolescents and emerging adults. One way this could supplement sexual education programs would be through examining where the discrepancies between the SPS and achievement of these goals are occurring. An important relationship to examine in future studies includes the association between alcohol use and SPS, as alcohol use has been previously linked with earlier sexual expectations (Mongeau & Johnson, 1995; Morr & Mongeau, 2004), and engaging in sex that may increase exposure to health risks (Owen et al., 2010). For example, factors related to alcohol use and not engaging in safer sexual practices may be one of the reasons as to why the individual is not successfully avoiding physical/sexual health fears. By examining the relationship between the individual's alcohol use and whether or not they are actively engaging in safe sex, appropriate behavioral strategies may be taught to the individual and provide an appropriate action plan for goal achievement.

Second, future research on a non-heterosexual samples would supplement these findings, as gay and lesbian populations vary in their engagement of sexual behaviors compared to heterosexual populations (Oswalt & Wyatt, 2013). In particular, the exploration of sexuality has become more socially acceptable during college (Oswalt & Wyatt, 2013), as this is considered a time for experimentation, which may emphasize the category of explore/experiment related SPS. The examination of SPS for a non-heterosexual sample may supplement sexual education or LGBT programs on college campuses. For example, if individuals within this population indicate physical/sexual health related fears but lack the strategies to successfully avoid these fears, these programs could benefit from promoting strategies for practicing safer sex for these individuals.

Third, the possible selves literature has examined the concepts of balance between expected and feared possible selves, and plausibility between expectations and strategies (Oyserman & Markus, 1990b; Oyserman et al., 2004), as both concepts have been associated with goal attainment. The concept of balance between expected and feared possible selves involves an individual having both an expectation and fear of a possible self category (Oyserman et al., 2004). As this study focused on examining the content and demographic variability of SPS as a foundation for future studies, emphasis was not placed on examining the balance between expected SPS and feared SPS. Future SPS studies should examine this construct as it relates to goal attainment or avoidance of particular sexual expectations among emerging adults. Further, the concept of plausibility involves the expression of an associated behavioral strategy with an expected or feared possible self (Oyserman et al., 2004; Oyserman et al., 2006). Although this concept was addressed within the SPS examination, future research should focus on the association between plausibility and the achievement of participant goals.

Despite the sample size, some limitations are related to the demographic variability of the sample. The sample lacked variability in race/ethnicity, as the majority of participants indicating that they were White, non-Hispanic. Future research of SPS among first year college students should use a more racially diverse sample, as this would allow for greater generalizability of findings. Additionally, as the sample within this study was from a large southeastern university and the majority of the sample indicated that their religious affiliation was Christianity, findings may lack generalizability for regions with higher rates of non-religious populations. Future research on SPS in other regions within the nation or a sample from various universities around the nation may allow for more generalizability of the findings. Lastly, as previously indicated, future studies on SPS would also benefit from an equal sample of women and men, as this may provide a clearer understanding of SPS and strategies of men.

Lastly, as the possible selves literature has found differences among diverse SES populations (Oyserman et al., 2004; Oyserman et al., 2011), the lack of significant SPS variability in relation to SES may indicate a less relevance when examining sexuality. Another explanation could be due to the affluence of this sample. This association would benefit from further testing by applying the concept of SPS to a sample with a more diverse SES. Although income has often been used in research as an indicator of SES, this variable may be insufficient for this sample when addressing differences. Future research would benefit from using objective indicators of SES, such as parental occupation or education, or subjective indicators such as the participant's perception of social standing within the community (see Goodman et al., 2001) to examine this association and test for significance.

Conclusion

Recent shifts in demographic trends have led to the development of a new life course period of emerging adulthood, distinguished by the deferment of adult roles and opportunities for exploration and experimentation (Arnett, 2000). The exploration of sexuality and the attainment of sex related goals has become normative within college student populations (Stinson, 2010). As sexual norms change, so do the sexual expectations (Lambert et al., 2003; Lewis et al., 2007; Stinson, 2010). Sexual expectations focus on the broad perceptions of peer and societal behavior, whereas possible selves focuses on the individualized expectations and goals for the upcoming year. As no previous study has measured the proximal sexual goals and fears of any population, this thesis has applied the construct of possible selves to measure college students' sexual expectations and fears for their first year of college. Overall, findings have introduced the content of first year students' SPS and associated behavioral strategies, and provided information on how salient and variable these SPS are for this sample of emerging adults. Implications emphasize the benefit of exploring possible selves based interventions in colleges or other emerging adult settings. SPS based interventions would focus on helping adolescents and emerging adults establish appropriate SPS for the navigation of college culture. This intervention would include helping establish appropriate strategies to help achieve these goals, including maintaining abstinence or goals related to avoiding health and rape fears. These interventions would also provide opportunities for researchers to address the sexual expectations about the college sex culture for incoming students as a way avoid the misperceptions of peers and social norms at college. In summary, the focus of first year students' sexual expectations and fears has expanded upon previous sexual expectation and possible selves literature and emphasized a need for sexual based interventions among the emerging adult population.

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Appendix

Table 1.

Descriptives of sample

	N	%	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Demographics						
Female ^a	185	65.6				
White ^b	229	81.2				
Heterosexual ^c	262	92.9				
Christian	196	69.5				
Age in years			18.25	.728	18	25
Income			>\$100,000 (Median)		<\$24,999	>\$200,000
SPS						
Expected	250		2.41	1.37	.00	6.00
Feared	247		2.05	1.36	.00	5.00
Strategies						
Expected	251		1.70	1.47	.00	8.00
Feared	247		1.82	1.50	.00	6.00
RR status						
Yes	120	42.2				
No	162	57.8				
RR type						
No relationship	146	53.5				
Non-exclusive ^d	31	11.6				
Exclusive ^e	96	34.9				

^aSex was coded as 1=Men and 2=Women

^bRace was coded as 1=White (non-Hispanic), 2=African American, 3=Latino/a, 4=Asian American, and 5=Native American/American Indian

^cSexual orientation was coded as 1=heterosexual, 2=homosexual, and 3=bisexual

^dNon-exclusive RR includes the following categories: "Dating, non-exclusively", "Talking", "Friends with benefits" and "We hook up occasionally"

^eExclusive RR includes the following categories: "Dating exclusively", "Engaged", and "Married"

Table 2.

Sexual possible selves categories and examples

Expected SPS		Feared SPS	
<i>Categories</i>	<i>Examples</i>	<i>Categories</i>	<i>Examples</i>
Abstinence	“To be abstinent” “To be a virgin” “To not have sex with anyone”	Abstinence	“Having sex” “Situations where I feel pressure to have sex” “Sex”
Interpersonal Relationship	“To get a boyfriend” “To stay with my partner & only him.” “To have sex with my boyfriend and stay in a committed relationship with him”	Interpersonal Relationship	“Cheating on my boyfriend” “My friends being stupid with sex” “Going too far with my boyfriend”
Physical/Sexual Health Related	“To have safe sex” “To use condoms” “To get on birth control so I won’t get pregnant”	Physical/Sexual Health Related	“Getting an STI” “Not having safe sex this year” “Getting a disease this year”
Explore/Experiment	“To lose my virginity” “To learn a lot about sex” “To have at least 2 partners this year”	Reputation Related	“Being known as a prude” “Getting known as a slut” “People thinking I am gross”
Negatively Worded	“Not to get pregnant” “Not to have drunk sex” “To keep my legs closed”	Risky Behaviors	“Having drunk sex or drugs” “Uncomfortable situations or scary places” “Sex with a lot of people”
Unclear/No Expectations	“I am not sure” “I do not have any expectations for this year”	Rape/Assault Related	“Rape” “Being pressured or doing something I don’t want to do” “Date raped”

Table 3.

Sexual possible selves strategies categories and examples

Expected SPS strategies		Feared SPS strategies	
<i>Categories</i>	<i>Examples</i>	<i>Categories</i>	<i>Examples</i>
Abstinence	“Not having sex” “Not hiding my views on sex” “Praying about it when tempted”	Abstinence	“Not having sex” “Not getting in situations where sex could occur” “We just don’t do it”
Interpersonal Relationship	“Not looking at other guys” “Staying in a relationship” “Continuing to have sex with my partner”	Interpersonal Relationship	“I am faithful to my boyfriend” “Discussing sex with my girlfriend” “Letting people know my comfort level with sex”
Physical/Sexual Health Related	“Using a condom” “I go the OBGYN regularly” “Being tested for STIs before having sex”	Physical/Sexual Health Related	“Getting on birth control” “Not having unprotected sex” “Only having sex with my girlfriend”
Explore/Experiment	“Being outgoing and putting myself out there” “Go out on the weekends looking for hook ups”	Reputation Related	“Not having sex with multiple guys” “Not telling people my business” “Not sleeping around”
Negatively Worded	“I just won’t have sex with them” “Have a lot of sex and hook ups” “Parties and alcohol”	Risky Behaviors	“Avoiding alcohol and drugs” “Not putting myself in risky situations” “Being smart about my actions”
Unclear/No Expectations	“I am not sure” “I do not have any strategies for this year”	Rape/Assault Related	“Never walking alone” “Don’t get drunk where I can get taken advantage of” “Carrying mace”

*Table 4.**Salience scores for expected SPS categories*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Abstinence Possible Selves	250	.00	1.00	.2972	.4000
Interpersonal Possible Selves	250	.00	1.00	.1997	.3004
Physical/Sexual Health Possible Selves	250	.00	.67	.0594	.1455
Explore/Experiment Possible Selves	250	.00	1.00	.2204	.3350
Negatively Worded Possible Selves	250	.00	1.00	.1061	.2039
Unclear/No Expected Possible Selves	250	.00	1.00	.0931	.2651

Table 5.

Salience scores for feared SPS categories

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Abstinence Possible Selves	247	.00	1.00	.1735	.3517
Interpersonal Possible Selves	247	.00	1.00	.0536	.1807
Physical/Sexual Health Possible Selves	247	.00	1.00	.3447	.4079
Reputation Possible Selves	247	.00	1.00	.0273	.1276
Risky Behaviors Possible Selves	247	.00	1.00	.2226	.3375
Rape/Assault Related Possible Selves	247	.00	1.00	.0597	.1833

Table 6.

Descriptive statistics for expected SPS strategies categories

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Number of Expected Abstinence Strategies	251	.00	4.00	.4183	.7565
Number of Expected Interpersonal Strategies	251	.00	4.00	.5219	.8212
Number of Expected Physical/Sexual Health Strategies	251	.00	3.00	.2311	.5886
Number of Expected Explore/Experiment Strategies	251	.00	4.00	.2749	.6389
Number of Expected Negatively Worded Strategies	251	.00	4.00	.2191	.5402
Number of Unclear/No Expected Strategies	251	.00	4.00	.0319	.2810

Table 7.

Descriptive statistics for feared SPS strategies categories

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Number of Feared Abstinence Strategies	247	.00	4.00	.4413	.8809
Number of Feared Interpersonal Strategies	247	.00	3.00	.2591	.5753
Number of Feared Physical/Sexual Health Strategies	247	.00	4.00	.5385	.9656
Number of Feared Reputation Strategies	247	.00	2.00	.0243	.1543
Number of Risky Behaviors Strategies	247	.00	4.00	.3968	.7356
Number of Feared Rape/Assault Strategies	247	.00	2.00	.1538	.4862

Table 8.

Chi-square tests for association between expected SPS categories and sex

What is your sex?		Abstinence Possible Selves		Interpersonal Relationship Possible Selves		Physical/Sexual Health Possible Selves		Explore/ Experiment Possible Selves		Negatively Worded Possible Selves		Unclear/No Expectation Possible Selves	
		No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Men	Count	59 (70.2)	25 (29.8)	56 (66.7)	28 (33.3)	76 (90.5)	8 (9.5)	40 (47.6)	44 (52.4)	73 (86.9)	11 (13.1)	72 (85.7)	12 (14.3)
	Expected	47.7	36.3	51.4	32.6	70.2	13.8	52.4	31.6	63.2	20.8	72.6	11.4
Women	Count	83 (50.0)	83 (50.0)	97 (58.4)	69 (41.6)	133 (80.1)	33 (19.9)	116 (69.9)	50 (30.1)	115 (69.3)	51 (30.7)	144 (86.7)	22 (13.3)
	Expected	94.3	71.7	101.6	64.4	138.8	27.2	103.6	62.4	124.8	41.2	143.4	22.6
Total		142 (56.8)	108 (43.2)	153 (61.2)	97 (38.8)	209 (83.6)	41 (16.4)	156 (62.4)	94 (37.6)	188 (75.2)	62 (24.8)	216 (86.4)	34 (13.6)
Chi-square		9.310**		1.592		4.363*		11.780**		9.293**		.051	

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

Note: Numbers in parentheses represent frequency percentages of count cells

Table 9.

Chi-square tests for association between feared SPS categories and sex

What is your sex?		Abstinence Possible Selves		Interpersonal Relationship Possible Selves		Physical/Sexual Health Possible Selves		Reputation Possible Selves		Risky Behavior Possible Selves		Rape/Assault Related Possible Selves	
		No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Men	Count	69 (83.1)	14 (16.9)	77 (92.8)	6 (08.9)	38 (45.8)	45 (54.2)	82 (98.8)	1 (01.2)	52 (62.7)	31 (37.3)	80 (96.4)	3 (03.6)
	Expected	63.8	19.2	74.3	8.7	41.7	41.3	77.6	5.4	52.1	30.9	72.9	10.1
Women	Count	121 (73.8)	43 (26.2)	144 (87.8)	20 (12.2)	86 (52.4)	78 (47.6)	149 (90.9)	15 (09.1)	103 (62.8)	61 (37.2)	137 (83.5)	27 (16.5)
	Expected	126.2	37.8	146.7	17.3	82.3	81.7	153.4	10.6	102.9	61.1	144.1	19.9
Total		190 (76.9)	57 (23.1)	221 (89.5)	26 (10.5)	124 (50.2)	123 (49.8)	231 (93.5)	16 (06.5)	155 (62.8)	92 (37.2)	217 (87.9)	30 (12.1)
Chi-square		2.715		1.443		.977		5.737*		.001		8.527**	

*p < .05, **p < .01

Note: Numbers in parentheses represent frequency percentages of count cells

Table 10.

Chi-square tests for association between expected SPS strategies and sex

What is your sex?	Abstinence Strategies		Interpersonal Relationship Strategies		Physical/Sexual Health Strategies		Explore/ Experiment Strategies		Negatively Worded Strategies		Unclear/No Expectation Strategies		
	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	
Men	Count	71 (83.5)	14 (16.5)	63 (74.1)	22 (25.9)	69 (81.2)	16 (18.8)	57 (67.1)	28 (32.9)	76 (89.4)	9 (10.6)	82 (96.5)	3 (03.5)
	Expected	59.9	25.1	53.8	31.2	71.1	13.9	68.4	16.6	70.1	14.9	83.3	1.7
Women	Count	106 (63.9)	60 (36.1)	96 (57.8)	70 (42.2)	141 (84.9)	25 (15.1)	145 (87.3)	21 (12.7)	131 (78.9)	35 (21.1)	164 (98.8)	2 (01.2)
	Expected	117.1	48.9	105.2	60.8	138.9	27.1	133.6	32.4	146.9	29.1	162.7	3.3
Total		177 (70.5)	74 (29.5)	159 (63.3)	92 (36.7)	210 (83.7)	41 (16.3)	202 (80.5)	49 (19.5)	207 (82.5)	44 (17.5)	246 (98.0)	5 (02.0)
Chi-square		10.466**		6.422*		.583		14.731***		4.284*		1.556	

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

Note: Numbers in parentheses represent frequency percentages of count cells

Table 11.

Chi-square tests for association between feared SPS strategies and sex

What is your sex?	Abstinence Strategies		Interpersonal Relationship Strategies		Physical/Sexual Health Strategies		Reputation Strategies		Risky Behaviors Strategies		Rape/Assault Related Strategies		
	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	
Men	Count	66 (79.5)	17 (20.5)	69 (83.1)	14 (16.9)	52 (62.7)	31 (37.3)	83 (100)	0 (00.0)	61 (73.5)	22 (26.5)	80 (96.4)	3 (03.6)
	Expected	60.1	22.9	66.5	16.5	57.1	25.9	81.0	2.0	59.8	23.2	73.9	9.1
Women	Count	113 (68.9)	51 (31.1)	129 (78.7)	35 (21.3)	118 (72.0)	46 (28.0)	158 (96.3)	6 (03.7)	117 (71.3)	47 (28.7)	140 (85.4)	24 (14.6)
	Expected	118.9	45.1	131.5	32.5	112.9	51.1	160.0	4.0	118.2	45.8	146.1	17.9
Total		179 (72.5)	68 (27.5)	198 (80.2)	49 (19.8)	170 (68.8)	77 (31.2)	241 (97.6)	6 (02.4)	178 (72.1)	69 (27.9)	220 (89.1)	27 (10.9)
Chi-square		3.113		.694		2.222		3.112		.127		6.873*	

*p < .05, **p < .01

Note: Numbers in parentheses represent frequency percentages of count cells

Table 12.

Chi-square tests for association between expected SPS categories and RR status

Are you currently in a romantic relationship?	Abstinence Possible Selves		Interpersonal Relationship Possible Selves		Physical/Sexual Health Possible Selves		Explore/ Experiment Possible Selves		Negatively Worded Possible Selves		Unclear/No Expectation Possible Selves		
	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	
Yes	Count	71 (66.4)	36 (33.6)	57 (53.3)	50 (46.7)	90 (84.1)	17 (15.9)	64 (59.8)	43 (40.2)	78 (72.9)	29 (27.1)	95 (88.8)	12 (11.2)
	Expected	60.8	46.2	65.5	41.5	89.5	17.5	66.8	40.2	80.5	26.5	92.4	14.6
No	Count	71 (49.7)	72 (50.3)	96 (67.1)	47 (32.9)	119 (83.2)	24 (16.8)	92 (64.3)	51 (35.7)	110 (76.9)	33 (23.1)	121 (84.6)	22 (15.4)
	Expected	81.2	61.8	87.5	55.5	119.5	23.5	89.2	53.8	107.5	35.5	123.6	19.4
Total		142 (56.8)	108 (43.2)	153 (61.2)	97 (38.8)	209 (83.6)	41 (16.4)	156 (62.4)	94 (37.6)	188 (75.2)	62 (24.8)	216 (86.4)	34 (13.6)
Chi-square		6.960**		4.953*		.036		.534		.532		.906	

*p < .05, **p < .01

Note: Numbers in parentheses represent frequency percentages of count cells

Table 13.

Chi-square tests for association between expected SPS strategies and RR status

Are you currently in a romantic relationship?	Abstinence Strategies		Interpersonal Relationship Strategies		Physical/Sexual Health Strategies		Explore/Experiment Strategies		Negatively Worded Strategies		Unclear/No Expectation Strategies		
	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	
Yes	Count	88 (82.2)	19 (17.8)	49 (45.8)	58 (54.2)	84 (78.5)	23 (21.5)	87 (81.3)	20 (18.7)	90 (84.1)	17 (15.9)	107 (100.0)	0 (00.0)
	Expected	75.5	31.5	67.8	39.2	89.5	17.5	86.1	20.9	88.2	18.8	104.9	2.1
No	Count	89 (61.8)	55 (38.2)	110 (76.4)	34 (23.6)	126 (87.5)	18 (12.5)	115 (79.9)	29 (20.1)	117 (81.3)	27 (18.8)	139 (96.5)	5 (03.5)
	Expected	101.5	42.5	91.2	52.8	120.5	23.5	115.9	28.1	118.8	25.2	141.1	2.9
Total		177 (70.5)	74 (29.5)	159 (63.3)	92 (36.7)	210 (83.7)	41 (16.3)	202 (80.5)	49 (19.5)	207 (82.5)	44 (17.5)	246 (98.0)	5 (02.0)
Chi-square		12.333***		24.747***		3.635		.082		.348		3.791	

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

Note: Numbers in parentheses represent frequency percentages of count cells

Table 14.

Chi-square tests for association between feared SPS strategies and RR status

Are you currently in a romantic relationship?	Abstinence Strategies		Interpersonal Relationship Strategies		Physical/Sexual Health Strategies		Reputation Strategies		Risky Behaviors Strategies		Rape/Assault Related Strategies		
	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	
Yes	Count	82 (78.8)	22 (21.2)	74 (71.2)	30 (28.8)	60 (57.7)	44 (42.3)	103 (99.0)	1 (01.0)	76 (73.1)	28 (26.9)	89 (85.6)	15 (14.4)
	Expected	75.4	28.6	83.4	20.6	71.6	32.4	101.5	2.5	74.9	29.1	92.6	11.4
No	Count	97 (67.8)	46 (32.2)	124 (86.7)	19 (13.3)	110 (76.9)	33 (23.1)	138 (96.5)	5 (03.5)	102 (71.3)	41 (28.7)	131 (91.6)	12 (08.4)
	Expected	103.6	39.4	114.6	28.4	98.4	44.6	139.5	3.5	103.1	39.9	127.4	15.6
Total		179 (72.5)	68 (27.5)	198 (80.2)	49 (19.8)	170 (68.8)	77 (31.2)	241 (97.6)	6 (2.4)	178 (72.1)	69 (27.9)	220 (89.1)	27 (10.9)
Chi-square		3.661		9.166**		10.378**		1.632		.091		2.250	

*p < .05, **p < .01

Note: Numbers in parentheses represent frequency percentages of count cells

Table 15.

Chi-square tests for association between expected SPS categories and RR type

If you are currently in a RR, which statement best describes your relationship?		Abstinence Possible Selves		Interpersonal Relationship Possible Selves		Physical/Sexual Health Possible Selves		Explore/Experiment Possible Selves		Negatively Worded Possible Selves		Unclear/No Expectation Possible Selves	
		No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
No RR	Count	66 (51.2)	63 (48.8)	87 (67.4)	42 (32.6)	110 (85.3)	19 (14.7)	82 (63.6)	47 (36.4)	101 (78.3)	28 (21.7)	108 (83.7)	21 (16.3)
	Expected	73.0	56.0	79.4	49.6	108.2	20.8	80.5	48.5	96.5	32.5	110.9	18.1
	Residual	-1.8	1.8	2.0	-2.0	.6	-.6	.5	-.5	1.3	-1.3	-1.1	1.1
Non-Exclusive RR	Count	17 (60.7)	11 (39.3)	20 (71.4)	8 (28.6)	19 (67.9)	9 (32.1)	12 (42.9)	16 (57.1)	20 (71.4)	8 (28.6)	22 (78.6)	6 (21.4)
	Expected	15.9	12.1	17.2	10.8	23.5	4.5	17.5	10.5	20.9	7.1	24.1	3.9
	Residual	.5	-.5	1.1	-1.1	-2.5	2.5	-2.3	2.3	-.4	.4	-1.2	1.2
Exclusive RR	Count	54 (63.5)	31 (36.5)	42 (49.4)	43 (50.6)	74 (87.1)	11 (12.9)	57 (67.1)	28 (32.9)	60 (70.6)	25 (29.4)	78 (91.8)	7 (8.2)
	Expected	48.1	36.9	52.3	32.7	71.3	13.7	53.0	32.0	63.6	21.4	73.1	11.9
	Residual	1.6	-1.6	-2.9	2.9	1.0	-1.0	1.1	-1.1	-1.1	1.1	1.9	-1.9
Total		137 (56.6)	105 (43.4)	149 (61.6)	93 (38.4)	203 (83.9)	39 (16.1)	151 (62.4)	91 (37.6)	181 (74.8)	61 (25.2)	208 (86.0)	34 (14.0)
Chi-square		3.407		8.340*		6.138*		5.419		1.804		4.173	

*p < .05, **p < .01

Note: Numbers in parentheses represent frequency percentages of count cells

Table 16.

Chi-square tests for association between expected SPS strategies and RR type

If you are currently in a RR, which statement best describes your relationship?		Abstinence Strategies		Interpersonal Relationship Strategies		Physical/Sexual Health Strategies		Explore/ Experiment Strategies		Negatively Worded Strategies		Unclear/No Expectation Strategies	
		No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
No RR	Count	82 (63.1)	48 (36.9)	97 (74.6)	33 (25.4)	114 (87.7)	16 (12.3)	106 (81.8)	24 (18.5)	105 (80.8)	25 (19.2)	125 (96.2)	5 (03.8)
	Expected	92.0	38.0	82.4	47.6	109.1	20.9	105.4	24.6	107.0	23.0	127.3	2.7
	Residual	-2.8	2.8	3.9	-3.9	1.7	-1.7	.2	-.2	-.7	.7	-2.1	2.1
Non-Exclusive RR	Count	19 (67.9)	9 (32.1)	20 (71.4)	8 (28.6)	23 (82.1)	5 (17.9)	22 (78.6)	6 (21.4)	22 (78.6)	6 (21.4)	28 (100.0)	0 (00.0)
	Expected	19.8	8.2	17.7	10.3	23.5	4.5	22.7	5.3	23.0	5.0	27.4	0.6
	Residual	-.4	.4	.9	-.9	-.3	.3	-.4	.4	-.6	.6	.8	-.8
Exclusive RR	Count	71 (83.5)	14 (16.5)	37 (43.5)	48 (56.5)	67 (78.8)	18 (21.2)	69 (81.2)	16 (18.8)	73 (85.9)	12 (14.1)	85 (100.0)	0 (00.0)
	Expected	60.2	24.8	53.9	31.1	71.4	13.6	68.9	16.1	70.0	15.0	83.3	1.7
	Residual	3.2	-3.2	-4.7	4.7	-1.6	1.6	-.0	.0	1.1	-1.1	1.7	-1.7
Total		172 (70.8)	71 (29.2)	154 (63.4)	89 (36.6)	204 (84.0)	39 (16.0)	197 (81.1)	46 (18.9)	200 (82.3)	43 (17.7)	238 (97.9)	5 (02.1)
Chi-square		10.526**		22.282***		3.077		.133		1.225		4.437	

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

Note: Numbers in parentheses represent frequency percentages of count cells

Table 17.

Chi-square tests for association between feared SPS strategies and RR type

If you are currently in a RR, which statement best describes your relationship?		Abstinence Strategies		Interpersonal Relationship Strategies		Physical/Sexual Health Strategies		Reputation Strategies		Risky Behaviors Strategies		Rape/Assault Related Strategies	
		No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
No RR	Count	84 (65.1)	45 (34.9)	111 (86.0)	18 (14.0)	100 (77.5)	29 (22.5)	124 (96.1)	5 (03.2)	95 (73.6)	34 (26.4)	118 (91.5)	11 (08.5)
	Expected	92.8	36.2	103.6	25.4	89.1	39.9	125.8	3.9	92.8	36.2	115.0	14.0
	Residual	-2.6	2.6	2.4	-2.4	3.1	-3.1	-1.5	1.5	.6	-.6	1.3	-1.3
Non-Exclusive RR	Count	21 (77.8)	6 (22.2)	26 (96.3)	1 (03.7)	17 (63.0)	10 (37.0)	27 (100.0)	0 (00.0)	18 (66.7)	9 (33.3)	22 (81.5)	5 (18.5)
	Expected	19.4	7.6	21.7	5.3	18.6	8.4	26.3	.7	19.4	7.6	24.1	2.9
	Residual	.7	-.7	2.2	-2.2	-.7	.7	.9	-.9	-.7	.7	-1.4	1.4
Exclusive RR	Count	67 (80.7)	16 (19.3)	55 (66.3)	28 (33.7)	48 (57.8)	35 (42.2)	82 (98.8)	1 (01.2)	59 (71.1)	24 (28.9)	73 (88.0)	10 (12.0)
	Expected	59.7	23.3	66.7	16.3	57.3	25.7	80.9	2.1	59.7	23.3	74.0	9.0
	Residual	2.2	-2.2	-4.0	4.0	-2.7	2.7	.9	-.9	-.2	.2	-.4	.4
Total		172 (72.0)	67 (28.0)	192 (80.3)	47 (19.7)	165 (69.0)	74 (31.0)	233 (97.5)	6 (02.5)	172 (72.0)	67 (28.0)	213 (89.1)	26 (10.9)
Chi-square		6.607*		17.418***		9.684**		2.256		.588		2.478	

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

Note: Numbers in parentheses represent frequency percentages of count cells

Vita

Kristin Anders graduated in 2007 from Science Hill High School in Johnson City, Tennessee. She received her Bachelors of Art in 2011 from the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, Tennessee with a major in Psychology and minor in Child and Family Studies. Kristin entered as a Master's student in the Department of Child and Family Studies (CFS) at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville in August 2012, where she accepted a graduate student research assistantship. Her research interests include development in adolescence and emerging adulthood, human sexuality, and risk taking behaviors. As a graduate student she worked on several research teams, including the research team that collected the data used in this Master of Thesis project. As a Master's student, Kristin has served as the Graduate Student Senate Representative for the CFS department, Vice President of the CFS Graduate Student Organization, and Scheduling Committee Chair for the 38th annual Quint State Symposium. She has also helped mentor undergraduate students with research involvement and future academic plans. Kristin's graduation date is set for August 2014.